

Factors that Reflect the Preferred Fashion Styles of Japanese and American University Students

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Abstract

Fashion styles that university students choose reflect their country's culture and the time period. While Japanese students have a tendency to choose styles that are similar to others, American students' style is more varied as a result of the country's diversity.

In our study, we asked the following questions: How do Japanese and American University students use their style to represent their identity? How influential are trendsetters' roles in Japanese and American fashion consumerism? We conducted a survey of 200 Japanese and American university students. Our results show that that American students prefer the fit of clothing to be comfortable. On the other hand, Japanese students have a tendency to express their ideas and individuality through the design and color of clothing. Furthermore, we discovered that Japanese students' style appears to be decided on during high school and college; however, personal style is established in middle school and high school for American students. Also, because fashion strongly reflects the influence of media, the fashion that trendsetters wear influences the year's trends in Japan, while in America, trendsetters through media have almost no influence. Nonetheless, it was clear that in Japan, trendsetters' influence in fashion through media is reflected strongly.

Introduction

University students' fashion reflects their personal identity and preferences, as well as their country's culture and trends. In this study, we will pursue which factors Japanese and American students use in selecting their fashion style. Additionally, we will investigate how media wins the hearts and minds of the students and influences their fashion.

1. Significance of the Study

While we were studying abroad, we realized that American people's style is individualistic and that Japanese people have a tendency to dress the same as those around them.

The reason why we wanted to do this research subject is because we wanted to know the differences between American and Japanese fashion, and also what influences each.

2. Research Questions

1. How do Japanese and American university students use their style to represent their identity?
2. How influential are trendsetters' role in Japanese and American fashion consumerism?

3. Research Background

3.1 History of Fashion in America: World War I

According to Pendergast (2003), when the first World War ended, rationing of clothing fabric also ended in the United States, which led to clothing styles becoming more elaborate. Yet, the occurrence of the Great Depression in the 1930's caused a decrease of income, a lower expenditure for clothing, and more people to wear the same clothing. In other words, compared to the 1920's, people in the 1930's did not have much flexibility with their money due to the Great Depression and trendy clothes were limited to those who had some freedom with their money.

3.2 History of Fashion in America: World War II

In the 1950's, people began to get bored with wearing the same clothing and began to wear expensive clothes again. Restrictions on clothes by war became a style with no individuality, people made a new style to express their personality.

In the 1950's, people were tired of clothing restrictions and once again went back to

luxurious clothing . Clothing restrictions due to the war led to styles with no individuality and as a result, people created new styles that expressed their individuality (Pendergast, 2003).

3.3 History of Fashion in America: New Style

A new style came to be born in the 1970s, as a style revolution was started by young people who were tired of similar styles. Rock bands and underground cultures created a new trend, the followers adopted that style, and designers imitated their new style and sold it marketed them to the masses (Pendergast, 2003).

3.4 History of Fashion in Japan: World War I

According to Monden (2014), around the year 1920, overseas fashion began to influence Japanese trends as Japanese men and women began to adopt European styles at different rates.

3.5 History of Fashion in Japan: World War II

Nickerson writes, “in the 1940’s, Japan’s first fashion designer emerged while individual women shaped their world through their consumption practices” (2011). It was in this time that Japanese clothing changed from an understated style as women's clothes became more and more free and men’s clothes became professional and comfortable.

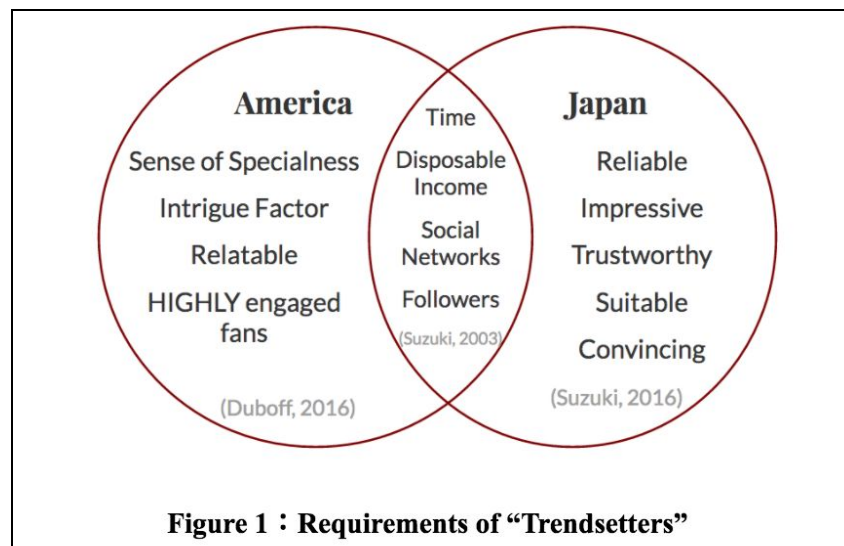
3.6 History of Fashion in Japan: New Style

The economic bubble economy began in the 1980s, and people began to spend more money on fashion. However, due to the collapse of the bubble in the 1990s, the unemployment rate became

higher and because students also came to have no allowance, they stopped spending much money on clothing (Suzuki & Best, 2003). Despite the economic downturn, students were interested in methods in how to not spend money on clothing, and according to Matsushita (2009), "Fast fashion" became to get low-cost clothes at high quality.

3.7 Requirements of “Trendsetters”

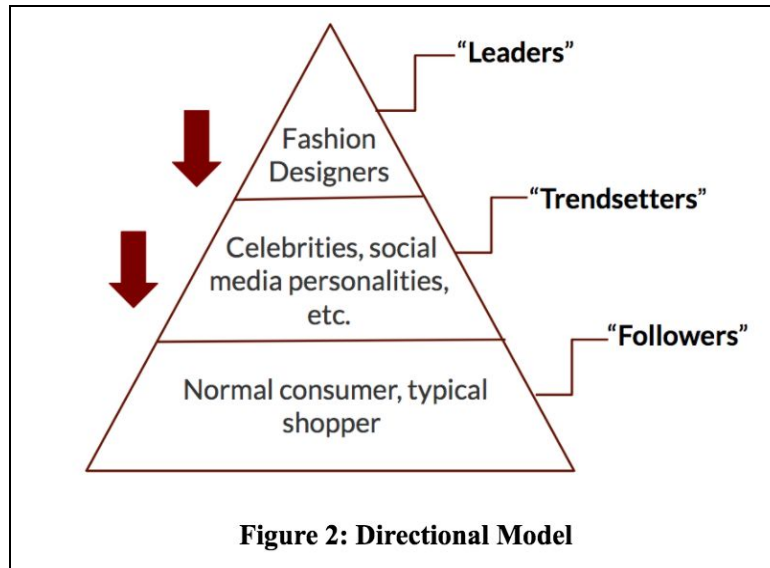
As you can see from Figure 1, the role of trendsetters, which is key to fashion trends, is different from that between the United States and Japan. In any case, the world of fashion must always change, and trendsetters play an important role to sell new products (Goldsmith, Flynn & Clark, 2012).



3.8 Trend Creation Process

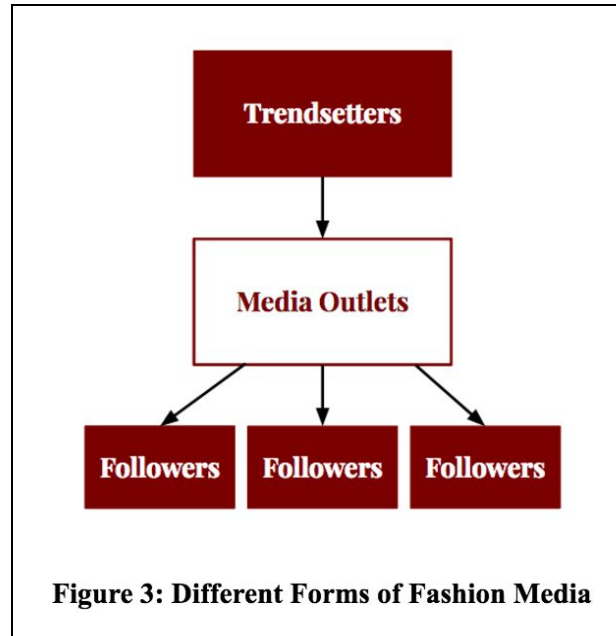
As to how fashion trends are created, according to Suzuki (2003) there are two trend models in fashion. The first is “Directional Model”, which means that the trend gradually spreads

as shown in Figure 1. The second is “Selectional Model” in which only one out of many trends is chosen. For example, out of 5 stars that represent trends, only choosing one of those stars.



3.9 Different Forms of Fashion Media

Figure 3 shows how trendsetters affect consumers through media. Information on media trendsetter's actions and fashion reports attracts the attention of followers. Also, it is said that both in Japan and America, fashion magazines, fashion displayed in-store, friends, and television influence women the most (Kawabata & Rabolt, 1999). Moreover, because Japanese magazines often include photos of normal young girls, they are the most trustworthy source of fashion information (Suzuki & Best, 2003).



3.10 America: Fashion and Identity Correlation

As for how the United States their identity in fashion, briefly summarize its correlation results in three ways. A person with high materialistic tendencies, that is, those who spend more money on clothes is not very satisfied with life, and those who do not spend too much money on clothes like casual style (Goldsmith, Flynn & Clark, 2012; Kawabata & Rabolt, 1999). The third is a person who chooses a free style regardless of their social rank (Crane, 2009). Products represent a person's social standing and identity (Goldsmith, Flynn & Clark, 2012).

3.11 Japan: Fashion and Identity Correlation

According to Nishida (2015), in the case of Japan, fashion preferences changes depending on the following six personalities. The six personalities are as follows:

1. “Highly assertive people” who prefer individualistic fashion items, “highly individualistic

people” who like to be noticed.

2. “Highly individualistic people” who like to be noticed.
3. “Highly imitative people” who like having their fashion imitated by their friends and vice versa.
4. “Highly competitive people” who feel that they can become more charming through adopting trends.
5. The minority who want to hide their own identity by having the same style as those around them.
6. The majority who pursue an attractive self that is different or more attractive than others, while still having a similar style as them

It is in these ways that the fashion they choose varies by personality.

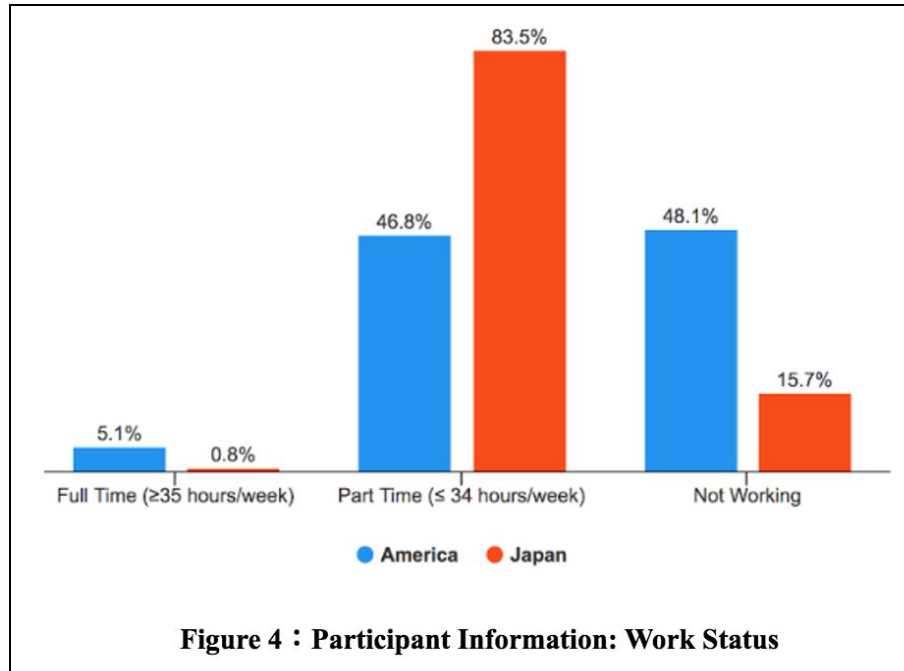
4. The Study

4.1 Participant Demographics

Our study had 200 participants in total, 121 of whom were Japanese university students and the 79 who were American university students. Ninety percent of the surveyors were between the ages of 17 and 24. If you look at Figure 4, you can see that over 80% of Japanese students are working, compared to just 50% of American students who are working.

4.2 Survey Method

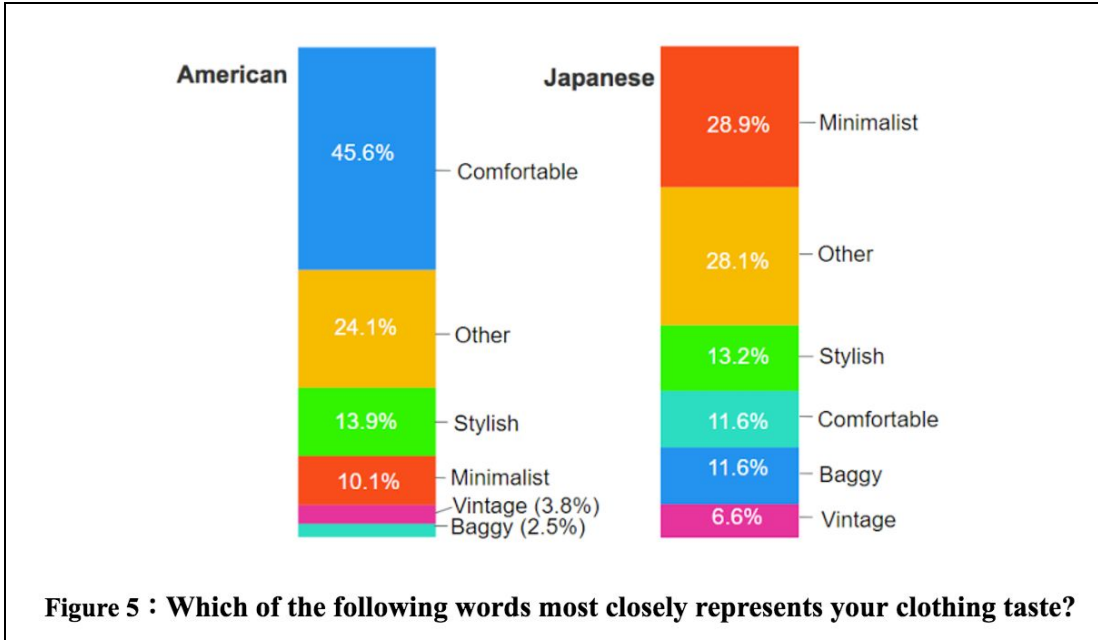
We created a Japanese and English survey and gathered data through online.



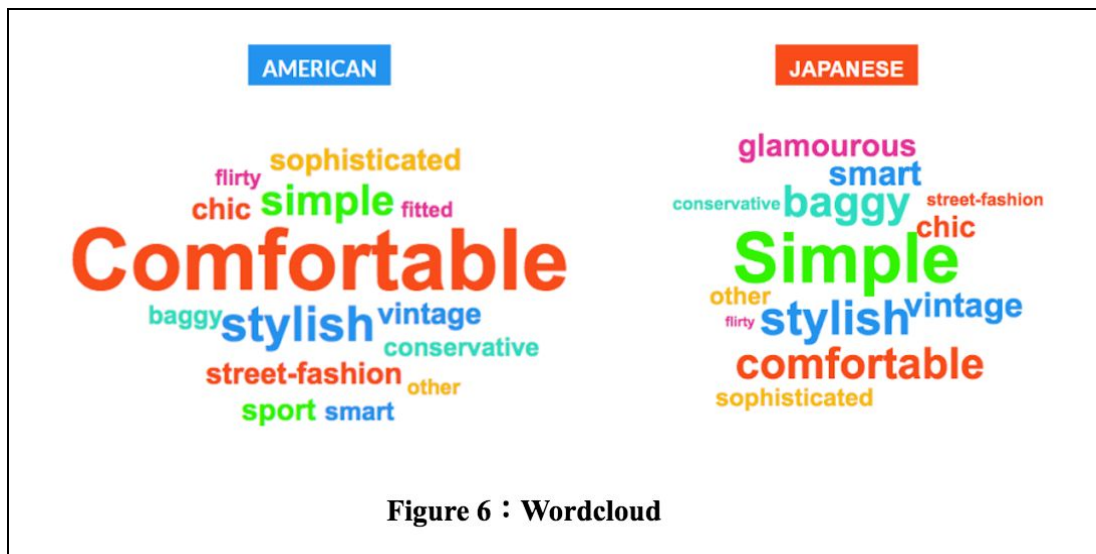
Results

5.1 Research Question 1: How do Japanese and American university students use their style to represent their identity?

When asking the question, “Which of the following words most closely represents your clothing taste?” about half of the students in the United States (Figure 5) seem to prefer comfortable clothes. Japanese students on the other hand chose simple and stylish as their top choice.



Then, when you look at the word cloud from Figure 6, you can see the difference between fashion style preferred by both countries.



As you can see in Figure 7, regarding the question “what image do you want to project for these clothing occasions?” in the given situations, fashion was not that different in both countries. The only difference is that when you hanging out with friends, Americans chose "comfortable" and Japanese people selected "friendly.”

<i>Occasion</i>	<i>American</i>		<i>Japanese</i>	
Work	Confident	48%	Confident	39%
Date	Feminine	33%	Feminine	53%
School club activity	Comfortable	43%	Comfortable	47%
Family dinner	Comfortable	54%	Comfortable	70%
School/classes	Comfortable	59%	Comfortable	41%
Hanging out w/ friends	Comfortable	46%	Friendly	45%


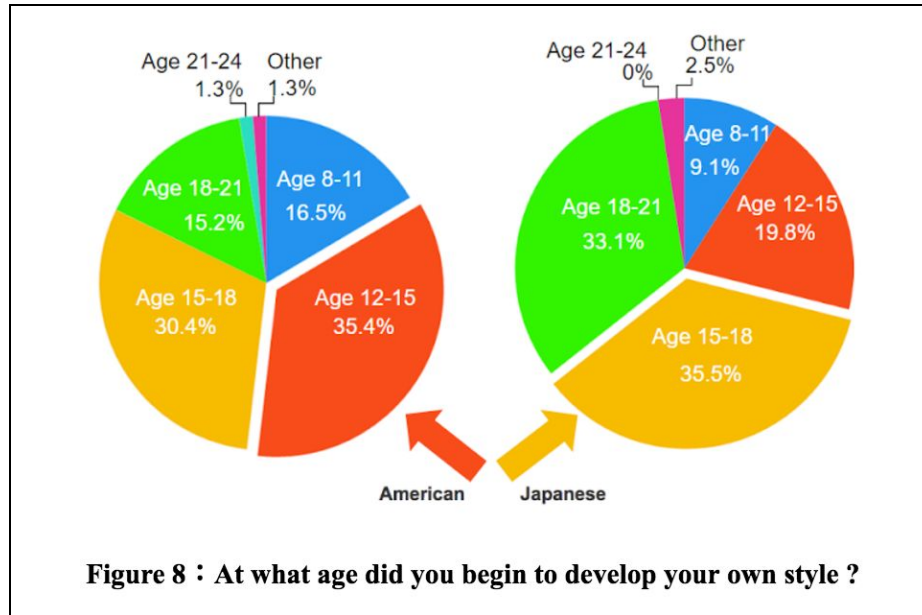
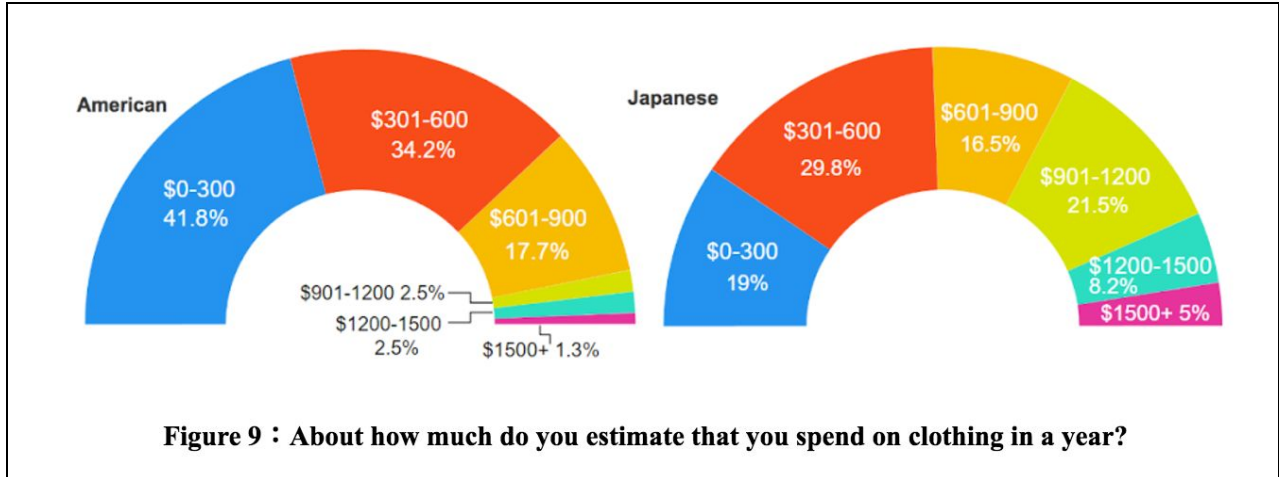

This is the ONLY difference

Figure 7 : What image do you want to project with your clothing for these occasions?

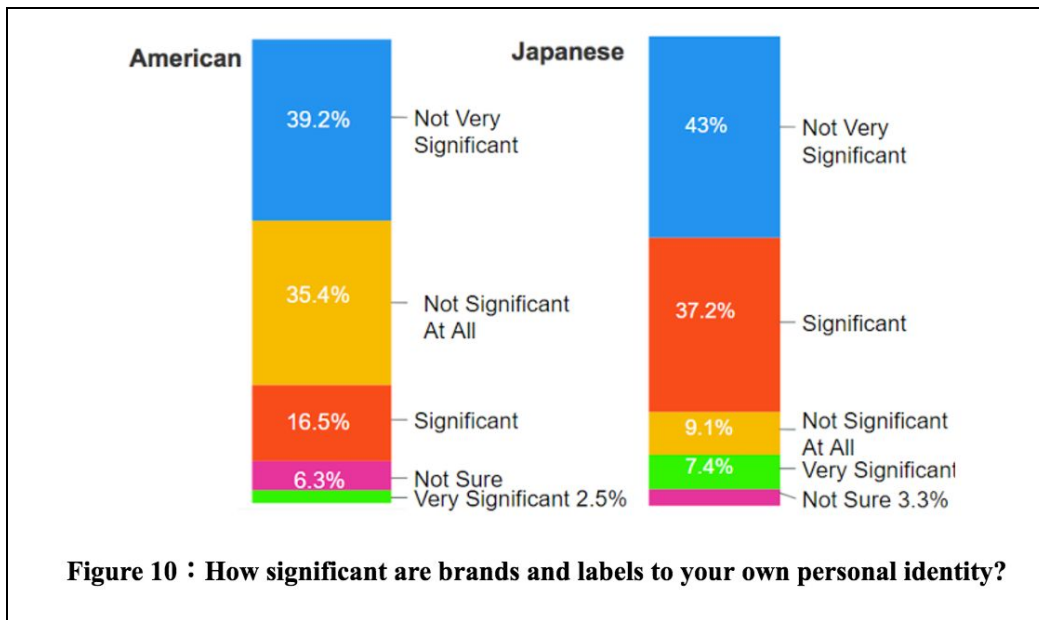
Next, when asked “at what age did you begin to develop your own style?” most American respondents developed their style in middle and high school, and Japanese people stated that they developed their style in high school and college (Figure 8). Compared to Japanese students, American students developed their style earlier. Furthermore, there were no Japanese people who developed their style in primary school.



For the question “about how much do you estimate you spend on clothing in one year?” the majority of Japanese people indicated that they spend more money than Americans. yielded some surprising results, showing that a large number of Japanese students spend much more than American students. As can be seen from Figure 9, the amount of American students who spend \$900-\$1200 is extremely low at 2%, while the amount of Japanese students is about 20% more than Americans at 21%.

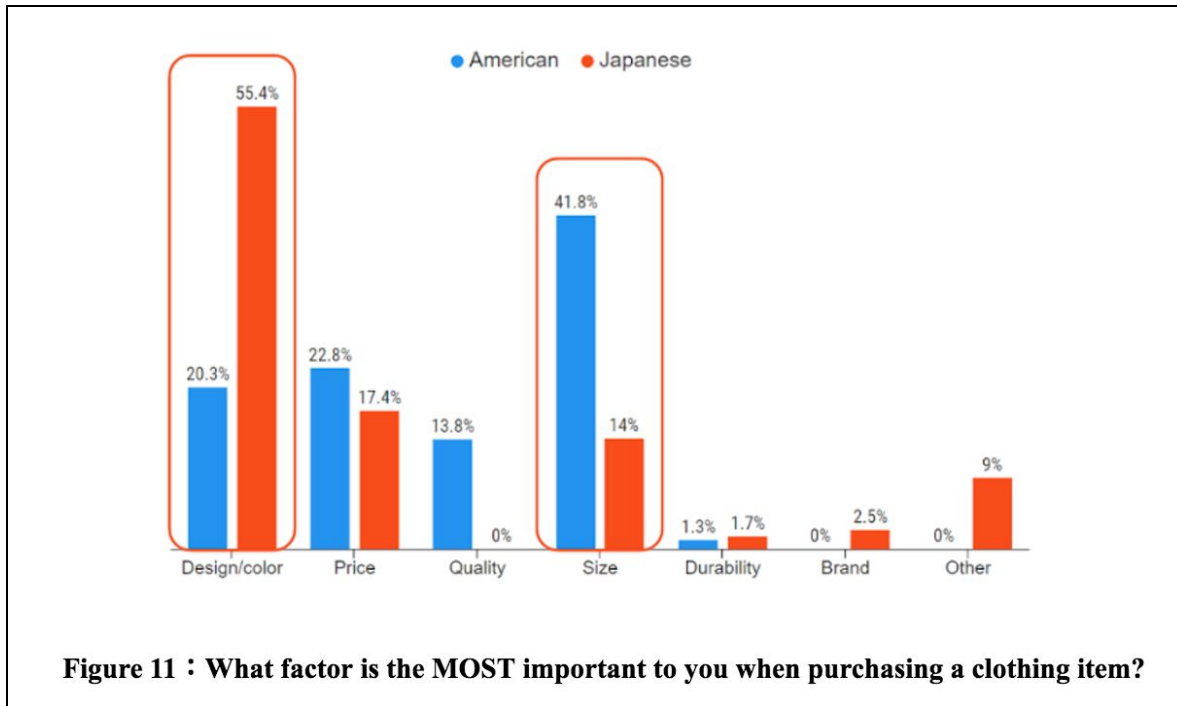


Regarding the question, “ How significant are brands and labels to your own personal identity?” Japanese and American students both responded that brands are not that significant, while less than 10% of respondents stated that it was very significant to them (Figure 10).



Next, when asking the question, “What factor is the most important to you when purchasing a clothing item?” the majority of American students answered that “size” is the most

important. Japanese students who chose “design/color” as the most important were twice that of American students.

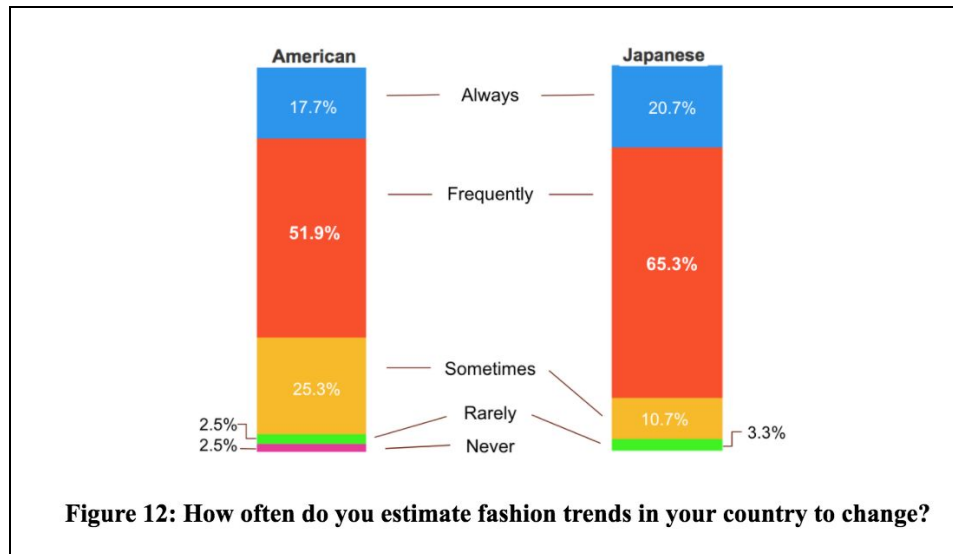


5.2 Summary of Research Question 1 Results

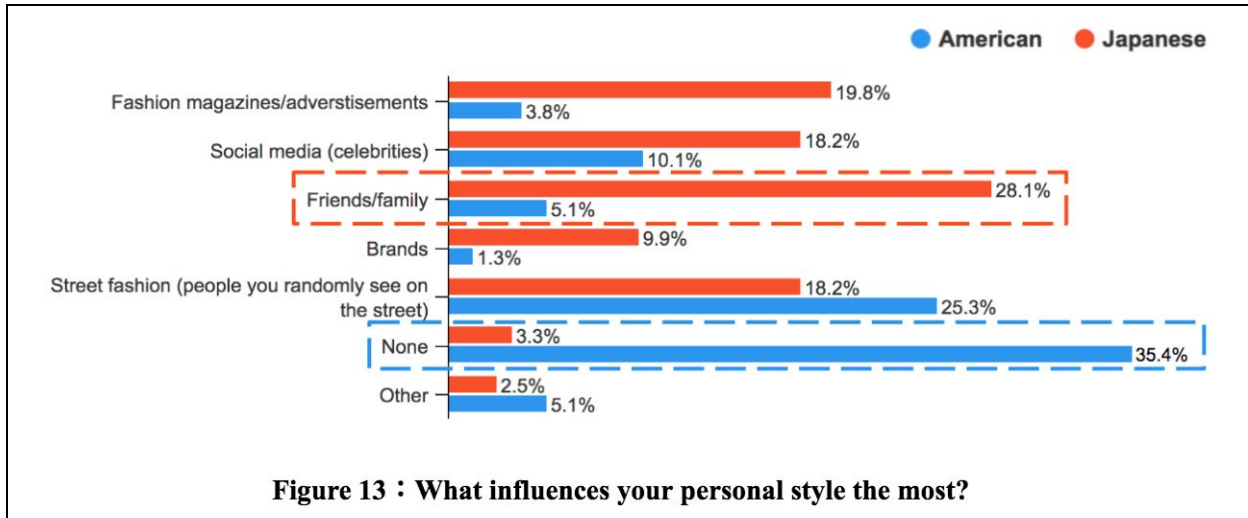
Compared to American students, there are many Japanese students working part-time and who spend more money on clothing. Also, compared to Japanese students’ preference of design, Americans prefer clothing that is comfortable and desire clothing that is practical. Also, in order to form a fashion identity, Americans said that the brand is not very important, and about 40% of Japanese college students stated it is important. University students in Japan found their style in high school and university, and for the Americans it was slightly earlier as it was found to be formed in middle school and high school.

5.3 Research Question 2: How influential are trendsetters' role in Japanese and American fashion consumerism?

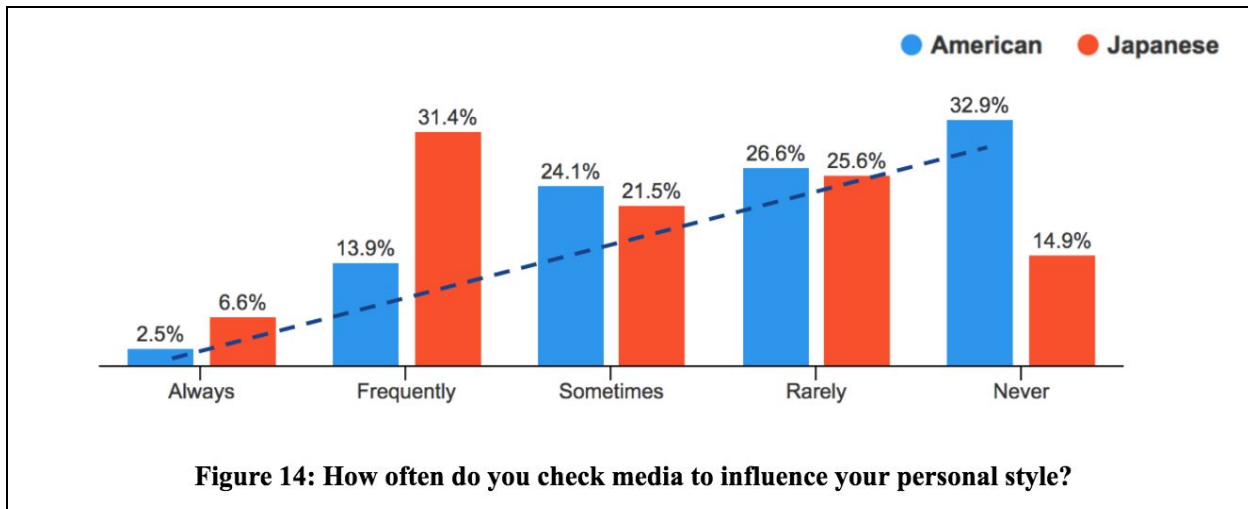
In response to the question, “How often do you estimate fashion trends in your country to change?” both American and Japanese university students answered that clothing trends change. Japanese university students who think that trends “always/frequently” change were approximately 85%. However, American university students who believed that were 70% (Fig. 12).



As for the question "What influences your personal style the most?" American students whose response was that they are not influenced by anything were the most, while it is clear that Japanese students receive influence from friends, family, and media (Fig. 13). Also, Japanese students are influenced by fashion magazines and advertisements, social media, and street fashion as well.

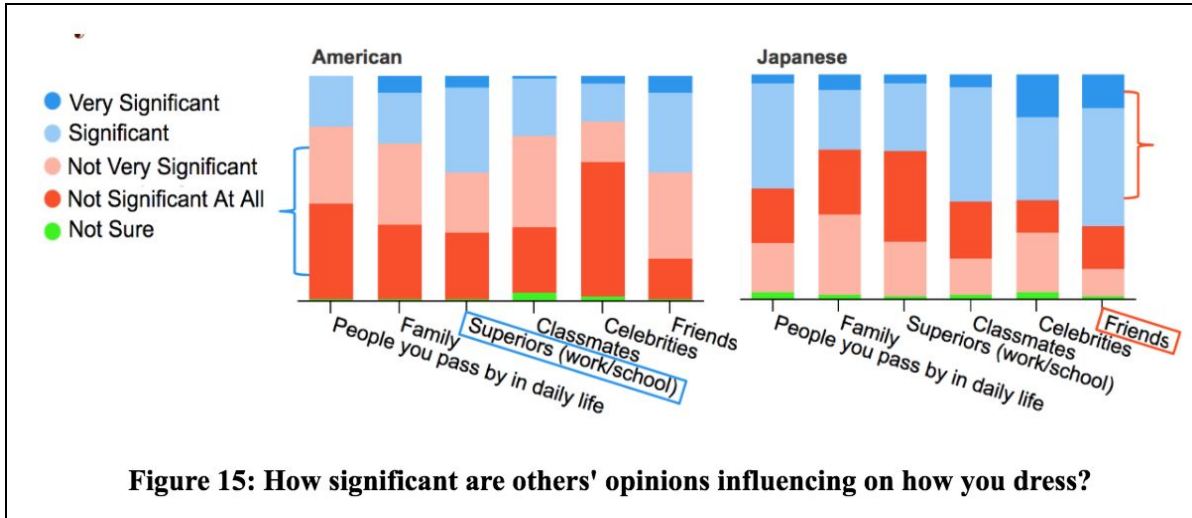


In regards to the question “how often do you check media to influence your personal style?” 60% of Japanese students are influenced by media. In contrast, 60% of American students are not affected (Fig. 14)



Next, regarding the question “how significant are others’ influencing how you dress” according to Figure 15, it is understood that Japanese students are perceived as influenced by

others more than American students. Also, about 55% of Japanese say that celebrities are influencing their style, while more than 60% of Americans say there is no effect.



The most popular female Instagrammers in America and Japan are according to Figure 16. In response to the question “who do you think is the trendiest female?” Japanese people chose an Instagrammer popular in the United States, and Americans chose an Instagrammer popular in Japan.



Then, the most popular male Instagrammers in America and Japan are according to Figure 17. In response to the question “who do you think is the trendiest male?” Japanese people chose an Instagrammer popular in Japan, and Americans chose an Instagrammer popular in the United States.

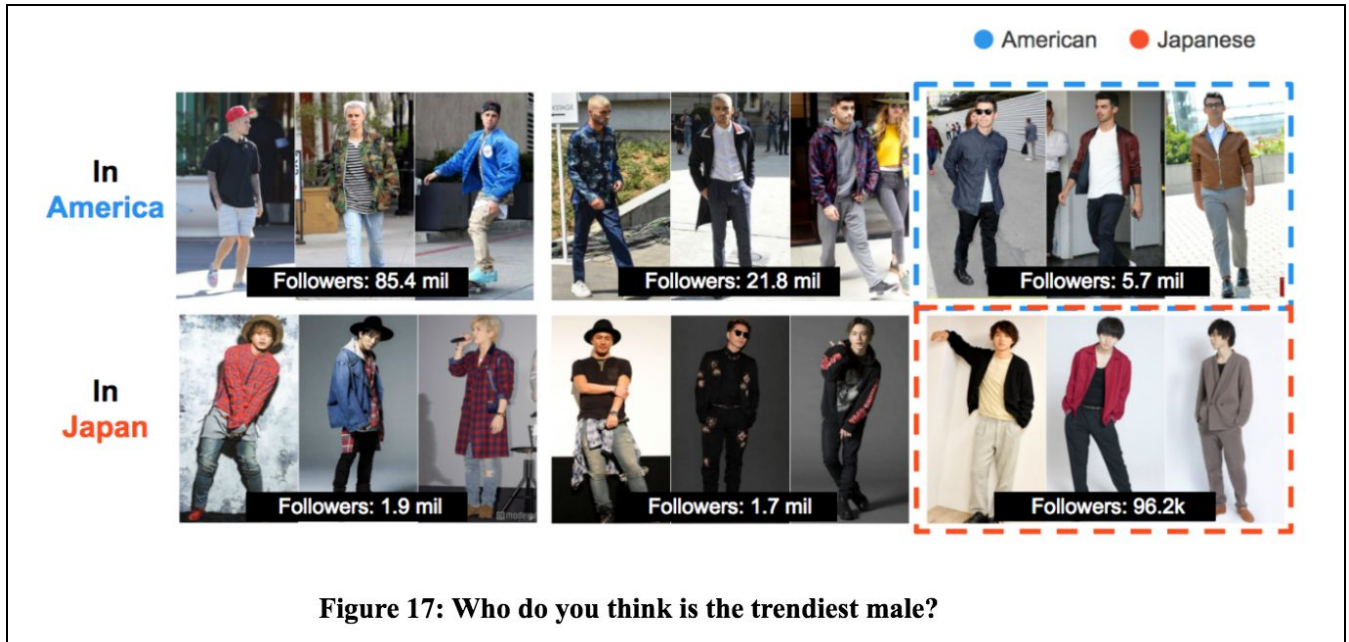


Figure 17: Who do you think is the trendiest male?

In regards to the question “what characteristic do you think is most necessary for individuals to become trendsetters?” it was clear that the characteristics are roughly the same for both American and Japanese university students (Fig. 18).

	<i>American</i>	<i>Japanese</i>
Individual Sense of Style	1st (55.7%)	1st (47.1%)
Relatable Personality	2nd (13.9%)	2nd (23.1%)
Dispensable Income	3rd (11.4%)	3rd (14.9%)
Fan Engagement	3rd (11.4%)	4th (6.6%)
Sincerity	5th (3.8%)	4th (6.6%)

Figure 18: What characteristic do you think is most necessary for individuals to become "trendsetters"?

In other words, according to Fig. 19, for American university students, the individuals who have a personal style and are relatable are a Japanese female and American male. In the case of Japanese university students, they are an American female and Japanese male.



5.4 Summary of Research Question 2 Results

Although the characteristics of the preferred trendsetters are the same in America and Japan, trendsetters influence fashion in Japan while Americans tend to not be influenced by anyone. So, it can be said that there is not much trendsetters' influence in American fashion.

5. Conclusion and Consideration

Students in Japan and the United States have different criteria for selecting fashion. The country's culture and media's structure is involved in that criterion. In general, Japanese students tend to focus on design. Also, they have part-time jobs and use that money on fashion. However,

American students spend part time salary on tuition, food expenses, car maintenance fees, etc. They do not spend much money on clothes and prefer items that are practical instead. Also, American students do not spend as much money on brand products etc. as Japanese students do. This is because human relationships in the Japanese society are different from the United States. Since population density is high in Japan, we think that Japanese people place importance in being in harmony with those around them.

In addition, because Japanese people wear uniforms until the end of highschool, their personal style is not developed until after they enter university. From this it is understood that the style that reflects personal taste also reflects Japan's culture. In Japan, television audience ratings are high and it is said that the Japanese are more susceptible to trends than in the United States. The influence of trendsetters through media tends to immediately reflect on fashion in Japan. In the case of the United States, because it is a society with a diverse culture and views, it can be said that they respect individual style.

6. Limitations of the Study and Future Studies

First, because we had significantly more female respondents, we think that next time we would like to increase the number of male respondents. Also, we would like to ask questions regarding why the respondents chose the Instagrammer that they chose, and whether or not they were familiar with them.

7. Acknowledgment

Finally, we are thankful to the professors who kindly guided us and the friends and family who supported us.

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