

Jasmine Wei

Professor Irem Cansu Yildiz

Intro to Design Studies

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Position Paper - Why is Muji so successful?

Remembering black Friday, people lining up overnight, rushing, squeezing, and pushing, or even getting injured to get the best deals. Yes, we are in a world of overly massive overconsumption. We are all told that to keep the economy running in good condition; we spend more! Everything from kitchenware pots to daily makeup products screams only one thing, consume! We are in a world and time of people can't stop to buy, buy, buy. Sellers competing for the lowest price, lowest cost, even make the products purposely easy to break, which is called "the planned obsolescence," rising the cost to fix them, to force consumers to spend more and buy new ones. Do we want to spend less yet buying low-quality products, or do we want to pay a bit more and get something that will last for a much longer time, and be more sustainable and responsible to our mother earth? Also, there are luxury brands that sell low quality or standard products but with a logo on it with unfair pricing, are we buying the product itself, or are we buying the fame of the brand? There are many problems that question the consumer and sellers habit that I always wonder.

However, there is something that might have been a clear stream from all these terrible messes of horrible consumer and seller consumption patterns. "MUJI" a Japanese retail company that has spread internationally which sells a wide variety of

products from household furniture to stationeries or even snacks, and all other consumer goods. The concept of Muji focuses on two stances: no brand (which is Mujirushi in Japanese) and quality goods (Ryohin), Mujirushi Ryohin - MUJI. MUJI was conceived as a critique of this prevailing condition, with the purpose of restoring a vision of products that are useful for the customer and maintain an ideal of the proper balance between living and the objects that make it possible.¹

"What's unique about Muji is people don't go there with a specific item in their mind. I don't think that there are many other brands like that."² Rather than selling a specific product, Muji is promoting a lifestyle that lays behind all of their products. MUJI eliminates the unnecessary decorations, strip down any extras that are unrelated to the function, using raw materials that best present the nature of the product. For example the use of MUJI's paper, they eliminate the process of bleaching, which is unnecessary and harmful to the environment, the papers are used for packaging, labels, etc.... MUJI's ideas come from them asking themselves: "What is the best from an end users' perspective?" They achieved that without using any elaborate designs or materials, they can still produce products that are even more user- friendly, and true to customer needs. Although the design and the looks of the goods might seem to be simple and mundane, the ornamentation is within the products which are to emphasize the intrinsic appeal of the goods, just like their emptied notebook, with no design on the cover. To Muji, "emptiness" is not boring, it represents creative opportunity, the beauty

¹ Muji. MUJI Online - Welcome to the MUJI Online Store. Accessed February 17, 2019. <https://www.muji.eu/pages/about.asp?PT=29>.

² Gibson, Eleanor, and Eleanor Gibson. "Muji Is Not Just about Minimalism and Simplicity, Says Art Director Kenya Hara." Dezeen. December 15, 2017. Accessed February 17, 2019. <https://www.dezeen.com/2017/12/13/kenya-hara-exclusive-interview-muji-us-expansion-brand-aesthetic/>.

of the concept is that you can decide how to use them. Just like a table called “low table” instead of “coffee table.” “Emptiness is not only nothing; it’s a creative receptacle for many images. An empty vessel represents the endless possibility to be filled, which becomes very rich, I think. Its great capacity of getting everything is richness.” Said Kenya Hara who is the art director of MUJI.

MUJI also value the sustainability of its products, unlike a lot of cheap options out there that are going to break easily, MUJI is durable yet with considerably affordable pricing. Another design in MUJI is their pen, people in the united states tend to buy a pack of pens, so when one runs out of ink, we get another one. But at MUJI, they designed pens that when the ink runs out, you can get refills of the ink, instead of buying a whole new pen, so the outer part of the pen isn’t wasted, also there are many color options for ink, so you can even change colors within one pen case of use. The sustainability that was considered is also a key; especially we are at the time that global warming and recycling is such a big issue. The design of reusing products is a game changer.

When it comes to packaging, MUJI seeks not to adorn the products, but to highlight and emphasize the nature of the products. Thus, all MUJI products appear on store shelves in simple packaging bearing only product-related information and a price tag. On their products, there is nothing with a single logo on them. So you won’t see something like a supreme logo t-shirt that costs hundreds of dollars.

MUJI, a company that embodies Japanese culture has been expanding internationally, and nonetheless, the United States, too. But the consumer habits of Americans and Japanese are indifferent. Japanese view products and see the

functional design first, and then they look at the aesthetic design part later on. But oppositely, Americans tend to look at the aesthetics first and then approach the function. So how MUJI survives in an American consumerist society where people tend to like buying cheaper options that break easily is a key, too. MUJI approached by pushing the materials and emphasize the ease of use, rather than highlighting their design philosophy. They want to illustrate convenience and fitting products to the ways that people use them. And getting accepted first, and the philosophy we merge in accordingly. MUJI also pays attention to every single store's environment; they pay attention to listening to the customers and the staff. They know that every neighborhood is different, and the groups of people that live there bring a different kind of product needs. The top selling products of every store are pretty much the same, but the second or third differ even from Soho to Williamsburg. ³

The design of MUJI's products, understand the basic needs of users and create the easiest and comfortable way for using, it establishes the purest form for users to experience the process of using. This is way different from products nowadays that are trying to look fantastic and compete with each other. So MUJI products are not about buying a good looking simplistic aesthetic, but you're buying into a way of living, a philosophy. It is also a place in this crazy shopping world that design still holds a position, not branding. You're purely buying the design, not the logo.

³ Price, Will. "MUJI, the IKEA of Japan, Sets Its Sights on America." Gear Patrol. June 23, 2018. Accessed February 18, 2019. <https://gearpatrol.com/2018/06/22/muji-in-america/>.