



Understanding of the feeling of “kawaii” and its real-world applications

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Abstract

Kawaii is a word frequently encountered in Japan and a defining characteristic of Japanese pop culture. While “kawaii” is often explained by cultural theories emphasizing Japan’s uniqueness, we approached it from psychological and behavioral scientific perspectives. We have treated “kawaii” as an emotion and conducted research accordingly. We argue that the feeling of “kawaii” is positive and is accompanied by social approach motivation. Although this emotion has a biological basis independent of culture, Japanese society has long appreciated it, allowing the “kawaii” culture to develop before the rest of the world.

such as the excessive emphasis on visual cuteness due to social media influence, child abuse, and pet abandonment. To promote the positive aspects of the “kawaii” emotion, such as tenderness and care, it is important to understand the psychological mechanisms behind perceiving and feeling “kawaii.” Rather than simply consuming “kawaii,” taking the time to savor it helps us to control impulsivity and experience a gentle joy. Based on this idea, we are developing and promoting a meditation (mental training) method that utilizes the feeling of “kawaii.”

Background & Results

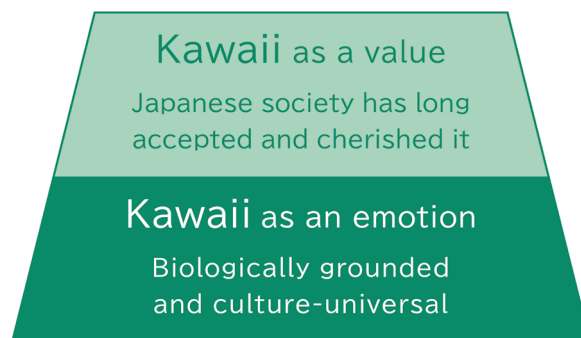
We have studied the nature and mechanisms of “kawaii” by combining experimental psychological methods with survey methods such as questionnaires and interviews. The following insights have emerged from the data.

(1) The most noticeable human reaction to seeing something kawaii/cute is smiling. This reaction occurs not only when seeing babies or young animals, but also when viewing kawaii/cute things like designs or clothing. (2) Cute things make people want to gaze at them for a long time and get closer to them. (3) When looking at infant faces, thinking about their cuteness elicits a stronger smile response than thinking about their objective beauty. (4) Viewing photos of cute animals causes the body to lean forward. (5) The Japanese “kawaii” and similar concepts in other languages share a common semantic structure. Japanese “kawaii,” English “cute,” and Hebrew ‘hamud’ all carry connotations of “good,” “childish,” “feminine,” “emotional,” and “approachable.” (6) Both men and women tend to find human babies increasingly kawaii/cute as they age. This trend is consistently observed in Japan, the United States, and Israel. (7) The uniqueness of the Japanese term “kawaii” lies in its broader range of application compared to other languages. This is because Japanese “kawaii” is used both to describe an object’s attributes and to express the speaker’s affective evaluation of the object. (8) When two individuals appear to be touching or interacting with each other, they are perceived as cuter than when only one individual is present. (9) Whether one finds a child cute depends not only on their appearance, but also on what one learns about their personality. Information about a negative personality reduces perceived cuteness.

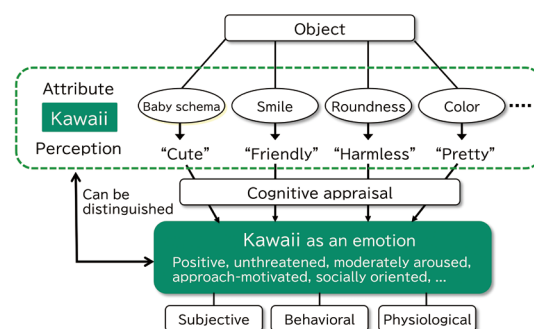
Significance of the research and Future perspective

As the “kawaii” boom in Japan has subsided, people have begun to recognize the personal significance of “kawaii” that resonates with their tastes. However, related social problems still exist,

Two-layer model of kawaii



Kawaii has two meanings



Social innovation

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Keyword kawaii, kansei, psychology, experiment, survey