

Master's Thesis

Attracting International Tourists through Mascot Awareness

by

VAN GINHOVEN Sam Roger

51217617

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Advisor

YOTSUMOTO Yukio

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Certification Page

I, VAN GINHOVEN Sam Roger (Student ID 51217617) hereby declare that the contents of this Master's Thesis are original and true, and have not been submitted at any other university or educational institution for the award of degree or diploma.

All the information derived from other published or unpublished sources has been cited and acknowledged appropriately.

VAN GINHOVEN, Sam Roger

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Table of Contents

Abstract	9
Chapter 1 Introduction	11
1.1 Research Background.....	11
1.2 Research Objectives	11
1.3 Research Questions	12
1.4 Significance.....	12
1.5 <i>Kyara</i> (Character) History.....	13
1.6 Types of <i>Kyara</i> in Japan.....	14
1.6.1 Commercial Characters.....	15
1.6.2 Promotional Characters.....	16
1.6.3 Unofficial Characters	16
1.6.4 Gotouchi-kyara	18
1.6.5 Yuru-kyara	19
1.7 The Kumamon Project	21
1.7.1 Kumamon's Image, Character, and Name	22
Chapter 2 Literature Review	25
2.1 Anthropomorphism	25
2.2 Mascot Awareness.....	26
2.3 The Tourist Gaze.....	28
2.3.1 Museum Gazes.....	31

2.4	City Branding	33
2.5	Museum Destinations	34
2.5.1	Visitor Movement Patterns	35
Chapter 3 Methodology		39
3.1	Qualitative Data Gathering.....	39
3.2	Data Collection Parameters	40
3.3	Analytical Approach	41
3.4	Sampling Design	42
3.5	Data Sources.....	43
3.6	Mascot Selection Guide Map	44
Chapter 4 Analysis		49
4.1	Who is Kumamon?.....	50
4.2	Kumamoto’s City Branding Approach Analysis	51
4.2.1	Kumamon Travel Branded Brochures	52
4.2.2	Consumer Purchasing Behavior Analysis.....	53
4.3	Kumamon’s Communications Analysis.....	55
4.3.1	Kumamon’s Handlers (Interpreters)	56
4.3.2	Kuma- “ <i>Mons</i> ”	58
4.4	Kumamon Square	59
4.4.1	Observational Analysis of Kumamon Square Layout and Patterns.....	62
4.4.2	Kumamon Square Visitor Movement Patterns	64

4.4.3	The Kumamon Statue	66
4.4.4	Kumamon Sales Manager Office	67
4.4.5	Kumamon's Motorbike	69
4.4.6	The Interaction Space (Attraction Stage).....	70
4.4.7	The Gift Shop.....	73
4.4.8	The Snack Stand	74
4.4.9	Kumamon Square Analysis Conclusion	76
4.5	Tourist Interview Analysis for September and December (2018)	77
4.5.1	Tourists' Descriptions and Perceptions of Kumamon	78
4.5.2	Why Tourists Came to Kumamoto Analysis	79
4.5.3	Tour Guide Interview Analysis.....	80
4.5.4	Staff Interview Analysis	82
4.5.5	Interviewee Analysis of Kumamon Awareness outside Japan	85
4.5.6	Interview Limitations.....	88
4.6	Conclusion.....	89
Chapter 5	91
5.1	Discussion and Findings.....	91
5.2	Recommendations and Implications	93
5.2.1	Mascot Handlers	94
5.2.2	Mascot Personalities	94
5.2.3	Mascot Museums	95

5.2.4	Future Research Questions	95
5.3	Research Limitations.....	96
5.4	Conclusion.....	97
	References	101
	Appendix A	108
	Appendix B	108

List of Figures

Figure 1-1 Chōjū-Giga Scroll, Source: Kosanji (2019)	13
Figure 1-2 Domo Character, Source: DOMO! WORLD DOMO PEDIA- NHK WORLD (2019).....	13
Figure 1-3 Hello Kitty in mascot form, Source: Hello Kitty Sanrio Puroland (2019).....	14
Figure 1-4 Character model, Source: Author (2019)	15
Figure 1-5 Shinjo-kun and Chiitan mascots, Source: Chiitan (2019)	17
Figure 1-6 Hello Kitty charm, Source: Kanpai (2011)	18
Figure 1-7 Bunkakki character, Source: Kenmin Cultural Festival Hiroshima (2018)	19
Figure 1-8 Hikonyan mascot, Source: Hikone City (2019)	20
Figure 1-9 Kumamon Surprise logo, Source: Kumamoto Prefectural Government (2018)	22
Figure 1-10 Kumamoto Prefecture (2018) “Kumamon sitting”	24
Figure 2-1 Movement Patterns, Source: Bitgood (2006).....	37
Figure 3-1 Mascot Selection Guide Map, Author (2019)	46
Figure 4-1 Kumamoto Prefectural brochures, Source: Kumamoto Prefecture (2018)	52
Figure 4-2 Kumamon and Handler, Source: Author (2018)	56
Figure 4-3 Source: Yuru Chara® Grand Prix Executive Committee (2019).....	57
Figure 4-4 Kumamon gestures, Source: Author (2018).....	58
Figure 4-5 Kumamon Square map, Source: Kumamon Square (2018)	60
Figure 4-6 Kumamon Square blog time schedule, Source: Kumamon Square (2018).....	61
Figure 4-7 Kumamon Square Floor Map, Source: Kumamon Square (2018)	63
Figure 4-8 Kumamon Square Movement Patterns Source: Kumamon Square (2018); Author Edit (2019)	64
Figure 4-9 Kumamon statue, Source: Author (2018)	66
Figure 4-10 Tetoria Build exit way, Source: Author (2018)	67

Figure 4-11 Kumamon Square path, Source: Author (2018).....	68
Figure 4-12 Kumamon’s desk, Source: Author (2018)	69
Figure 4-13 Kumamon’s motorbike, Source: Author (2018)	69
Figure 4-14 Kumamon Square (Attraction Stage), Source: Author (2018).....	70
Figure 4-15 Kumamon performing with his handler, Source: Author (2018).....	71
Figure 4-16 Kumamon posing for audience members, Source: Author (2018)	72
Figure 4-17 Kumamon Square Snack Stand, Source: Author (2018).....	73
Figure 4-18 Kumamon exclusive merchandise, Source: Author (2018)	73
Figure 4-19 Kumamon Square Snack Stand staff, Source: Author (2018).....	75
Figure 4-20 Kumamon and Kumamon Square staff, Source: Author (2018).....	75
Figure 4-21 Foreign guests by country pie charts, Source: Kumamoto Government, Tourism Products Division (2018); Author’s translation (2019)	80
Figure 4-22 Outside Kumamon Square, Source: Author (2018)	82
Figure 4-23 Number of foreign guest bar graph, Source: Kumamoto Government, Tourism Products Division. (2018). Author’s translation (2019)	84
Figure 4-24 Kumamon and Hero, Source: Kaohsiung City Government (2015)	85
Figure 4-25 Kumamon emoji, Source: Kumamon Funny Expressions (2013)	86

List of Tables

Table 4-1 Tourists interview summary table, Source: Author (2018)	77
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Abstract

In recent years, Japanese mascots called, “*yuru-kyara*” have gained a significant international following through social media and public relations initiatives. This publicity has led to an increase in inbound tourism to the destinations where these mascots originate. However, current research fails to recognize the underlying factors that bring international tourists to see mascots. For this research, the author attempted to understand what factors made a mascot popular abroad; why visitors decided to visit the mascot’s origins; and why were visitors attracted to that mascot.

To understand why visitors came to Japan to see mascots, the author centered the study on the famous mascot, “Kumamon” from Kumamoto Prefecture. In the methodology section, Kumamon was chosen against other mascots based on the Mascot Selection Guide Map, which addresses if a mascot is successful or not. To obtain research data, onsite observations and interviews were conducted with international tourists in Kumamoto City.

Three major findings to this study contributed to the advancement of *kyara* research. First, the “mascot gaze”, a new idea based on a combination of Urry’s tourist gaze, mascot awareness, and the analysis of Kumamon phenomenon, was found to be effective in attracting outside attention to its localities and goods. Second, the researcher analyzed how Kumamoto City applied Kumamon in its “mascot museum” called Kumamon Square. It is a free museum that acts as a major tourist destination to educate and provide face-to-face interactions between visitors and Kumamon. The final contribution was to the understanding of Kumamoto’s strategy of employing “mascot handlers” who interpret Kumamon’s messages to tourists and fans.

In summary, Kumamoto’s strategy of implementing Kumamon has led to two new areas of study. First, “mascot museums” act as major tourist destinations to educate visitors on

localities and goods. Second, there are “mascot handlers” who interpret and protect the image of the mascot and its message to the audience. By investigating into these areas further, it should be possible for other prefectures to implement and mimic Kumamoto’s success.

Keywords: *Yuru-kyara*, Anthropomorphism, Mascot Awareness, Tourist Gaze, Mascot Gaze, City Branding, Museums Destinations

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The aesthetic of cute in Japanese culture originates from a long-time fascination with characters possessing human traits, referred to as anthropomorphism. This practice of assigning human qualities to animals has created a positive phenomenon known as *kyara* in modern Japanese culture that has evolved in the form of *yuru-kyara*. By inheriting the traits of cuteness and zoomorphism, characters have developed into physical beings for commercial and promotional success. As representatives of businesses, regions, and organizations, *yuru-kyara* have emerged to highlight local goods and attractions around Japan, and now globally through their popularity with consumers.

1.2 Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to explain the role of local mascots in tourism branding abroad. Regional mascots are a relatively new subject even though they have been around since the early 2000s. Their initial market roles were limited in scale and popularity. However, with the rise of famous mascots that are attractive, outgoing, and informative, it is important to understand their function beyond the domestic market. This research focuses on Kumamon and his role in attracting visitors to Kumamoto.

Research objectives:

- To learn how mascot awareness abroad attracts inbound tourist to Kumamoto Prefecture
- To explore what makes a mascot museum a unique destination experience for visitors and how they learn benefit from its exhibits

- To find out how mascots handlers' function and their importance in interpreting and spreading brand awareness in coordination with mascots

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does mascot awareness abroad attract visitors to the destination where the mascot is from?
2. Why are international visitors satisfied with Kumamon Square?
 - a. How are destination's museum exhibits unique?
 - b. What patterns do visitors follow to utilize the exhibits?
3. What are mascot handlers?
 - a. How do handlers interpret Kumamon's actions to spread brand awareness?
 - b. What are the multiple personalities of mascots?

1.4 Significance

This research is important in informing prefectures on the importance of a well implemented mascot to increase tourism awareness and of prefectural product branding. *Yuru-kyara* branding and awareness are tied together with all stakeholders and regional attractions and goods. Mascots that are poorly designed and who do not work well with residents and audiences become unpopular, and these mascots fail to gain attention to their localities and goods. However, mascots that are well designed and thought out will achieve a positive relationship with their stakeholders and region through creative marketing strategies. These mascots will go on to be popular with locals and international tourists. This study is significant in that it investigates why international tourists come to Japan to see mascots and the benefits they receive from them. Mascots, more importantly, who have a positive impact on their fans, are more likely to gain loyal followers who return and consume prefectural products while spreading the brand awareness, goods and attractions to others.

1.5 *Kyara* (Character) History

Characters in Japan are classified with the aesthetic of *kawaii* or “cute,” which were characterized by post-war Japanese pop-culture as childish, vulnerable, innocent and sweet that is associated with young girls (Chang, 2017). The history of *kawaii* characters comes from ancient scrolls known as *Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga* (Frolicking Animals and People) that were designed with rabbits, birds, monkeys and toads (Figure 1-1). These scrolls are credited as National Treasures because



Figure 1-1 *Chōjū-Giga* Scroll, Source: Kosanji (2019)

they are recognized as some of the oldest forms of manga and animation in Japan (*Chōjū-Giga*, 2015). The tradition of worshipping these *youkai* (monsters) characters and *netsuke* (small items) brought about the positive reception of anthropomorphized characters into Japanese culture (Chang, 2017).

Kyara defined as “character” is ambiguous for everyday zoomorphic creatures (Miller, 2010; Occhi, 2012). *Kyara* are nonhumans who are not dependent on *anime* or *manga*, but they are a representative of specific organizations, companies, localities, goods, and brands (Occhi, 2012). For example, Domo who premiered as the first mascot for NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in 1998 would go on to be a hit success and be nominated as an official NHK ambassador in May 2014 (Figure 1-2). Domo’s name is an adverb that is used in Japanese phrases



Figure 1-2 Domo Character, Source: DOMO! WORLD DOMO PEDIA- NHK WORLD (2019)

as *domo arigato* (thank you) and *domo sumimasen* (excuse me) (NHK WORLD JAPAN, 2019). *Kyara*, such as Domo, are world celebrities with their own personality, name, and backstory. They are anthropomorphic in nature and may possess some animal traits. The job of *kyara* is to act as animated social representatives and to endorse activities associated with capitalism, local identity, and civil society (Occhi, 2012).

With the inherited aesthetic of *kawaii*, the first *kyara* were portrayed as child-like, insecure, mute, and “non-sexual” (Kinsella 1995, 226), for example, Hello Kitty (Figure 1-3). *Kyara* distinguish themselves by their physical traits and background - origins, attributes and name (Occhi, 2012). When *kyara* are commercially successful, they have the power to heal (*iyashi*) and be enjoyable (*tanoshimeru*) (Kondo, 2006, 6; Occhi, 2012). This claim is supported by the Bandai Character Research Laboratory who conducted a survey in 2004 asking 210 Japanese about the



Figure 1-3 Hello Kitty in mascot form, Source: Hello Kitty Sanrio Puroland (2019)

psychological benefits of *kyara*. There were seven attributes that contributed to the healing effect- “protection; escape from reality; regression; self-realization; hope for transformation; health and activity, and mood changing” (Aihara, 2007, p.27-28, 39-41; Occhi, 2012).

The historical context of *kyara* is necessary for regions and agencies to understand the foundation which *yuru-kyara* are formed on. *Kyara* are not only *kawaii*, but they possess human qualities that make them appealing and relatable to viewers. These traits are essential in the quest for mascot awareness. Once awareness is achieved locally, it will spread globally to attract new customers and attention to the places where these *kyara* originated from.

1.6 Types of *Kyara* in Japan

In Japan, characters are divided into two categories- commercial characters and promotional characters. To better understand the purposes of these characters, we need to look at the differences and overlapping effects of each character type (Figure 1-4, p.15). For instances, commercial characters are company representatives and are used for generating profit; however, they can function as local representatives when fused with regional goods and products. Promotional characters, on the other hand, do not adhere to strict copyright

policies and were originally developed by a local agency for use free from licensing issues. Before promotional characters were developed, commercial characters occupied the regional marketing space. Next, we will examine the major differences between characters and the migration from commercial use to royalty-free.

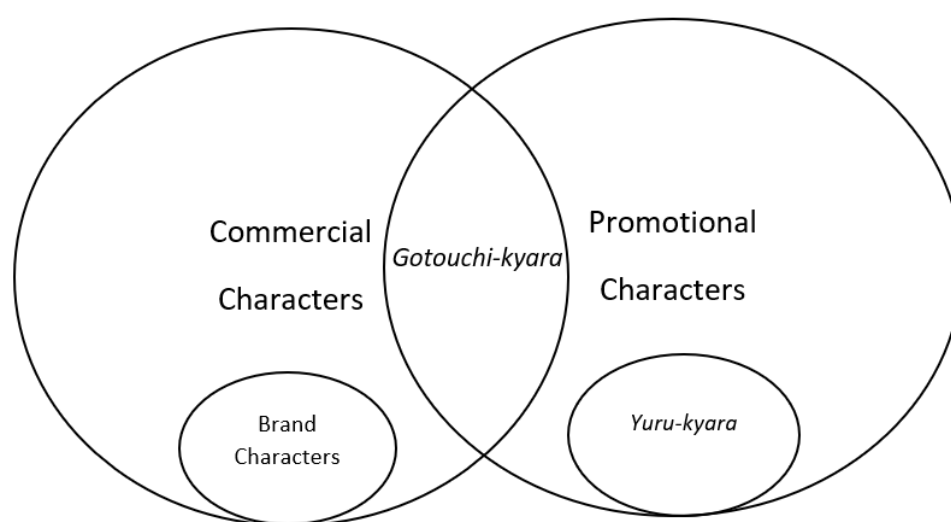


Figure 1-4 Character model, Source: Author (2019)

1.6.1 Commercial Characters

The first category of character focuses on commercial use. There are several types of commercial use characters- brand, cartoon and anime, and comic strip, manga and other illustrated/game characters. Brand characters are different from *yuru-kyara* because brand characters are created for profit and have strict copyright agreements for use. The most iconic of these commercial characters is Hello Kitty. Even though she is usually pictured in a two-dimensional form, she does appear in *kigurumi* (costumes) form at theme parks (Sanrio Puro Land) and promotional events to promote Sanrio products. In *kigurumi* form, she is personified with human characteristics and given a pseudo human life. Personification is deeply rooted in Japanese culture as *akogare*, “desire for one’s ideals and fantasies” (Chang, 2017). This is an important characteristic when examining the different elements of

promotional mascots which encompass miscellaneous, regional (*gotouchi-kyara*), and loose (*yuru-kyara*) characters (Chang, 2017).

1.6.2 Promotional Characters

The second category of character focuses on promotional purposes. Unlike commercial characters who have strict copyright usages and policies, promotional characters are designated for promoting regional events, communities, businesses, and local goods. Even though they are not designed to initially promote commercial products, once they become famous enough, it is possible to turn them into products that generate revenue for regions, communities, and businesses. There are two types of characters- *gotouchi-kyara* and *yuru-kyara* (Chang, 2017).

1.6.3 Unofficial Characters

The mascot, Shinjo-kun, won the 2016 *Yuru-kyara* Grand Prix title for Susaki City in Kochi Prefecture. He is a charming brown otter with a ramen bowl on his head (Figure 1-5, p.17). In 2018, the prefecture decided to create an honorary mascot based on a real-life river otter who is an ambassador for the city (Nakamura, 2019). On social media, Shinjo-kun has amassed over 110 thousand Twitter followers, but falls far behind the newest unofficial mascot who has over 2.4 million followers between two accounts (Chiitan, 2018; ちいたん☆. 2018.).

The new honorary tourism mascot goes by the name of Chiitan, and is described as a “0-year-old fairy baby” according to her official Twitter profile (Chiitan, 2018). She also exhibits the same physical features as Shinjo-kun; however, her skin tone is lighter with a pink turtle on her head (Figure 1-5).



Figure 1-5 Shinjo-kun and Chiitan mascots, Source: Chiitan (2019)

Since her debut as the city's unofficial mascot, she became a viral media sensation for her over-the-top violent stunts that have become undoubtedly popular with viewers. However, her wild antics led to contract revocation by the city who does not approve of her outrageous character anymore, as mascots are supposed to behave themselves and promote localities and goods (Ives, 2019). The action comes from the city's residents who have filed hundreds of complaints regarding her behavior (Le Blanc & Masami, 2019).

Chiitan is a viral sensation like another unofficial mascot- Funassyi, a witty yellow pear, who became famous in 2011 from Funabashi City in Chiba Prefecture. Funassyi, a genderless pear, was similarly viral for his athleticism and ability to speak without the need of an assistant (About Funassyi, 2019; Adel Stein, 2015.). Funassyi, like Chiitan, suffered from the same rejection situation because of wild antics through unsanctioned comedic performances not approved by the city (Vincent, 2015). Although these *yuru-kyara* are representing cities and regions, they are not officially recognized because of their viral actions which make them famous. They are perceived as a nuisance by local governments and residents. The fame of unofficial mascots is attributed to comedic success rather than strategic planning by local cities and governments.

1.6.4 Gotouchi-kyara

Gotouchi-kyara are regional characters who symbolize local towns, cities, regions, and prefectures. They were used before *yuru-kyara* creations existed. The term *gotouchi* means “local(ized)” and refers to the area from which they originated from. These “local characters” are regarded as the precedents of *yuru-kyara* because they gained popularity before. The purpose of localized characters is to



Figure 1-6 Hello Kitty charm, Source: Kanpai (2011)

attract visitors by promoting local culture, history, and products. *Gotouchi-kyara* usually appear on local merchandise while holding special items or objects that represent the area. *Gotouchi-kyara* are not necessarily original creations, though. Many are represented by commercial characters category (Figure 1-4, p.15; Chang, 2017). Mainstream brand characters like Hello Kitty are found acting as ambassadors to sell souvenirs for tourists of specific destinations such as the *Kinkakuji* (the Golden Pavilion Temple) in Kyoto (Figure 1-6). Furthermore, “*gotouchi* characters are not necessarily *Yuru-Chara*, especially if they are already famous characters like Hello Kitty or Mickey Mouse, but *Yuru-Chara* are essentially *gotouchi* characters in nature (Chang, 2017).” This statement explains that *yuru-kyara* became part of the *gotouchi* promotional category as they were originally made locally by the towns, regions, businesses, agencies and so on; however, *gotouchi-kyara* are not exempt from commercial characters in the *gotouchi* category. Now, local regions, businesses, and agencies are more likely to create their own unique localized characters known as *yuru-kyara* to avoid the strict licensing control fee involved with commercial characters. For example, Kumamoto Prefecture’s mascot, Kumamon, utilizes the royalty-free strategy to allow for everyone to utilize the character’s image and spread the awareness of Kumamon. Sanrio allows for licensing of Hello Kitty; however, it comes at a cost for producers and consumers because Sanrio controls the license. The company can increase the products price to enhance the value

of Hello Kitty, which enables Sanrio to take power over companies it licenses to (Isomura, et al., 2015).

1.6.5 Yuru-kyara

The term *yuru-kyara* was first coined by the art critic Jun Miura in 1999 (Chang, 2017). *Yuru* coming from *yurui* meaning “loose” or “wobbly” and *kyara* meaning “character.” *Yuru-kyara* are mascots that come alive in *kigurumi* costume form (*kiru* “to wear” *nuigurumi* “stuffed animal”) to represent places, events, regions, and goods (Occhi, 2012; SAZAC, 2019).

“Characters designed for PR of local governing bodies, events, and local goods, especially when in *kigurumi* form. They have the Japanese trait of *fanshii* (fancy) and at first glance one can understand the strong message they communicate about a local specialty or characteristic... when they are made into *kigurumi* they often have a sense of instability that makes them all the more lovable, and one’s heart feels healed [*iyasarete*] just by looking at them.”

(MIURA 2004, 2-3; Occhi, 2012 translation)

Unlike typical mainstream “*kyara*”, for example, Domo and Hello Kitty who are used to sell products and promote business, *yuru-kyara* are unique creations that are closely tied with localities, historical deities, goods, and regions (see Figure 1-4 p.15; Occhi, 2012). Mr. Miura first used the term to describe a character who was created in Hiroshima in 2000 to promote the Citizen’s Prefectural Cultural Festival (*kemmin*



Figure 1-7 Bunkakki character, Source: Kenmin Cultural Festival Hiroshima (2018)

bunkasai). Bunkakki is a blue oyster (*kakki*) with a red maple leaf on its head (Figure 1-7). At the time, many creators of *yuru-kyara* did not put much effort into their creations, so *yurui* was used as a derogatory term to describe them (Suter, 2016). For *yuru-kyara*, such as Bunkakki, Mr. Miura created three specific characteristic criteria that must be met.

1. The character must convey a strong message of love for its hometown and local region.
2. Its movement and behavior should be unstable, awkward, and unique.
3. The character should be lovable, unsophisticated, and laid-back.

(Miura, 2009; Suter, 2016; Chang, 2017)

Although Bunkakki was the first recognized *yuru-kyara* to meet the three criteria, it was not very popular. However, the *yuru-kyara* phenomenon would change in 2007 when Hikone City created Hikonyan to celebrate the 400th anniversary of its castle. Hikonyan is a white cat with a kabuto-style samurai helmet featuring yellow horns on a red and orange hat (Figure 1-8). His name features the city's name and the Japanese onomatopoeia for a cat's cry (*nyan*) (Suter, 2016). His design came from a legend regarding Ii Naotaka, who was the 3rd lord (*daimyo*) of Hikone. The Lord Naotaka was beckoned by a white cat seeking shelter from a thunderstorm and was thus saved (Hikonyan Profile, 2019).



Figure 1-8 Hikonyan mascot, Source: Hikone City (2019)

Hikonyan would be the first main character for the “*Yuru-Chara Festival in Hikone Kigurumi Summit*” in 2008, which was eventually replaced by the annual “*Yuru-Chara Grand Prix*.” It is said that Hikonyan's fame sparked the *yuru-kyara* boom that helped establish the annual *Yuru-Chara Festival*, which would soon lead to a mass explosion of *yuru-kyara* movement in Japan (Suter, 2016). By 2009, the Society of Organized *Yuru-Chara* was created with the aim to help regional areas and economies gain recognition, while sharing information and making networks with other characters to promote their own local places (Chang, 2017).

The first national “*Yuru-Chara Grand Prix*” took place in 2011. The annual event is comprised of all *yuru-kyara* around Japan looking for fame and hoping to be voted number one. The winner of the first event was Kumamon who was voted the most popular character

for the year. This was all thanks to Kumamon's successful stunt of traveling to Osaka to promote the upcoming bullet-train line and urging residents to travel south to Kumamoto Prefecture (Steinberg, 2016). The success of Kumamon's fame can be attributed to the Kumamon Project and the unique approach taken by the Governor of Kumamoto, Ikuo Kabashima, to appoint a mascot as the Head of Sales Manager position for the entire prefecture (Soltani, et al. 2018).

1.7 The Kumamon Project

The Kumamon Project began three years before the opening of the new *shinkansen* (bullet-train) line between Osaka and Kagoshima Prefecture in 2011. Kumamoto was positioned as an intermediate station, which could easily be ignored by Kagoshima's already popular tourism history. The concern of the prefectural government was that the travelers on the shinkansen would simply pass through the prefecture and ignore Kumamoto. To solve this problem, Kumamoto took the regional marketing approach with the adaptation of mascot-based city branding in 2009 because the prefecture was not known for much except Mt. Aso and Kumamoto Castle. Since Kumamoto is largely agriculturally based, local farmers did not see much potential for tourism in their sector (Steinberg, 2016; Soltani, et al. 2018).

At that time, mascots were only designed for regional events and campaigns, which did not make them appealing to a broader audience (Government of Kumamoto Prefecture, 2017). To overcome the hurdles of single appeal mascots, the prefecture decided to create its own mascot with no limitation, one that could represent the entire prefecture and participate in any event or campaign. "The strategy behind the Kumamon mascot is to form identification at the regional level"; however, the branding strategy would focus on Kumamoto City first to promote the prefecture and believed that if people found Kumamon interesting, then they would be interested in other areas of the prefecture (Soltani, et al. 2018). Furthermore, to encourage

the use of Kumamon by locals, the governor decided that it was best to waive any licensing fees for the use of Kumamon's image. Kumamon could be used royalty-free if the producers of Kumamon goods promised to promote the prefecture and/or its local ingredients on their packaging (Steinberg, 2016).

Kumamon is a link connection between goods, images, services and attractions in Kumamoto Prefecture, so the prefecture has used several marketing strategies to raise awareness of Kumamon as the regional mascot (Soltani, et al. 2018). The Kumamon Surprise in October 2010 was part of the project to exploit the mascot in a nation-wide stunt of hide-and-seek held in Osaka for promotion of the prefecture. In Osaka, Kumamon handed out tens of thousands of business cards to spectators before disappearing. The cards directed people to find Kumamon through a free mobile game app which emphasized the theme of "surprise" associated with the mascot and early childhood memories (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2012; Occhi, 2017).

1.7.1 Kumamon's Image, Character, and Name

Koyama Kudou, Kumamoto-born, first created the "Kumamoto Surprise" logo for the Kumamon Project because he felt that we lose sight of the good things around us. The logo was a red exclamation point with "Kumamoto Surprise" written underneath (Figure 1-9). He believed that it was more important to please the locals first before focusing on tourists (Soltani, et al., 2018; Kumamoto Prefecture Kumamon Team, 2013). To



Figure 1-9
Kumamon Surprise
logo, Source:
Kumamoto
Prefectural
Government (2018)

accompany the logo, he knew that mascots were growing in popularity, so he surprised everyone with a character that resembles a black bear (Steinberg, 2016). His art director, Mizuno Manabu, later rendered two poses of Kumamon, which took him over 3,000 variations before finalizing a design (Figure 1-10, p.24). The final design of Kumamon combines

elements from larger-than-life personages such as Santa Claus and the former New York Yankees baseball player Hideki Matsui. Kumamon's physical form contains many elements of Kumamoto Prefecture. His body is stocky to represent Kyushu men along with their tough and passionate attitude. (Kinoshita, et al., 2014:9; Occhi, 2017). He is black like the castle walls of Kumamoto Castle and Japanese bears (although, there are no wild bears in Kumamoto). His facial features emphasize "surprise" with his large white eyes, raised eyebrows, wide-open mouth and prominent red-cheeks. His cheeks are red to represent the "fire country" that is the mark of Kato Kiyomasa (1561-1611) who was the first *daimyo* of Kumamoto during the Tokugawa Shogunate. The red cheeks can also represent the popular locally grown produce of the prefecture- salty tomatoes. Furthermore, his cheeks resemble the flag of Japan or popular anime characters such as *Pikachu* or *An-Pan Man* (Kinoshita et al., 2014:13; Occhi, 2017).

Kumamon's name can be broken down and analyzed into two key words *kuma* meaning "bear," which derives from Kumamoto, and *mon* meaning, "person or thing" derived from *mono* in the local Kumamoto dialect. Although *kuma* means "bear," it is to be noted that he is not a "bear" even though he resembles one. He is to be recognized as Kumamon and not a bear or person in costume- as detailed by the Kumamon brand position. Kumamon is in his real form in the flesh and blood (Kumamoto Brand Office, 2015; Occhi, 2017).

Figure 1-10 Kumamoto Prefecture (2018) “Kumamon sitting”



Chapter 2 Literature Review

The literature review chapter is composed of five sections. The first section emphasizes the properties that make up an anthropomorphized character, such as a *yuru-kyara*. The second section details how *kyara* are applied to branding products and organizations to appeal and attract consumers through mascot awareness. The third section discusses the tourist gaze and its importance in framing a location to attract visitors to the extraordinary. Furthermore, the fourth section addresses how cities use their competitive advantage through city branding to focus on combining cityscapes and non-materials aspects to attract visitors. The final section focuses on museums as destinations. These are attractions centered around local governments and community stakeholders who seek to educate and preserve culture through exhibitions. The five sections together provide a roadmap for the role of mascots in city branding.

2.1 Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is the practice of attributing human qualities to deities (Xenophanes 1992:90; Brown, 2014). The traits given to anthropomorphized deities represent a collection of culture, identity, norms and ideologies. This allows consumers to have control, which gives them a sense of individualism or collectivism in society. Anthropomorphism largely depends on cultural biases and distinct interpretations of humans and animals. For the Japanese, animals are unable to express human emotions such as laughing, crying, or smiling (Minowa, 2014). Anthropomorphized idols in Japan usually do not show a display of emotion as their counterparts do in the West; however, the idea of “self” is reflected consciously. As characters have evolved, so has their role in modern society to promote brands, goods and localities.

2.2 Mascot Awareness

“Awareness represents the strength of the brand’s presence in the mind of the target, with the goal not being to achieve general awareness, but to be remembered for the reasons intended.” (Aaker, 1996 as cited in Pike, 2012). *Kyara* have long been a part of advertising and building brand strength in Japan. In the instance of DoCoMo, the telecommunications company created a mushroom mascot family to represent their company. The company utilized its name as *DoCoMo Dake* “only DoCoMo mushrooms.” The meaning behind this was to remind people who belong to the DoCoMo network that they are part of the family and can trust the mascots (Occhi, 2010).

Commercial and promotional characters act as brand mascots for organizations by conveying meaning, values and attributes of their related products or the organization to outsiders. Since products cannot speak for themselves, brand mascots take the place as spokesman and act as living celebrities. These spokes-characters are important because they cannot damage the brand on their own as a regular person would. Real celebrities may be attractive, but are uncontrollable in their actions and could lose credibility drastically if acting negatively towards people or the brand. Brand mascots, on the other hand, are controllable and allow the organization to regulate brand image without needing to invest additional resources into it (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016).

“The goal of a brand mascot is to strengthen the identity of the product (Hooverff, 2014 p.1703).” Products themselves are usually like others in an oversaturated market of competitors (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). However, the branding process can create “a unique identity for a company, product or service” to differentiate themselves from other competitors. The positioning process seeks to make the brand appear different and better than other products on the market (Temporal, 2001). Using mascots on products will make it part of the product

identity and help people identify the organizations which it belongs to (Brown & Ponsonby-McCabe, 2014). Consumers may feel loyalty towards the product and its organization. Studies show that people who identify with a certain social networking service (SNS) will likely spread the word about that organization to others (Chiu et al., 2013).

There are two types of product identities for consumers- “choosing change identity” and “forced change identity.” Choosing change identity arises when “the organization does not force the consumers to use it, but they persuade them to use the product” (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Forced change identity occurs “due to unexpected changes in circumstances, requiring individuals to adapt their understand of self and others” (Young, 2007). The advantage of choosing change identity is that it empowers users to choose a preferred identity rather than being assigned one to them (Young, 2007). This occurrence is like “brand fandom” or “product fandom” where an individual chooses a celebrity, team or good, which they identify with (Arunrangsiwed, 2015). It is possible that brand mascots would encourage “brand fandom.” Fans will not question their purchasing power of a product if it supports their favorite mascot unlike hesitant consumers who do not follow a mascot. As an example, users of the LINE messenger application rely on digital stickers (emoticons designed by organizations) to express facial emotions to other users. Users willingly identify with brand stickers and may feel part of the organization that they belong to. After the user is accustomed with the brand mascot, he/she would eventually become a fan and intuitively purchase the mascot branded products (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016).

When consumers see products become popular, this is known as the rich-get-richer phenomena. The product’s popularity spreads through information dissemination (word-of-mouth communication), and it leads to extreme imbalances in product distribution. The extreme imbalance of sales is caused by effective dissemination a product label (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Another idea related to awareness is the *reverse phenomenon*. This

phenomenon means that “the label itself has its own popularity and increases the popularity of the items with the label.” When a product label is popular enough, it spreads like wildfire when used to promote products. For example, items using the label “premium” became smash hits in Japan and led to excellent product sales. This was observed with the sales of the beverage in Japan by Suntory, “Premium Malt’s.” The label signaled to consumers the high quality and value of the beverage. With the use of this label applied to other items such as “premium dog food”, “premium coffee”, and so on, consumers were more likely to increase their expenditures on these labels over a generic label (Sonoda & Ikeda, 2016).

2.3 The Tourist Gaze

Urry (1990) argues that tourism is the search for a visual experience that cannot be normally seen at home or work (as cited in Hospers, 2011; Soltani, et al. 2018). The book, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (2011), focuses on the reasons why people leave their place of work and residence to consume unnecessary goods and services for short holidays.

People travel to experience a different environment or event that interests them out of curiosity. The gaze is a learned ability and socially framed by others. The “frame” is important in that it “enable tourists to see the physical forms and material spaces before their eyes as ‘interesting, good or beautiful’”. The gaze is constructed through mobile images, pamphlets, books, pictures, and recordings (Urry, 2011, ch.1). The gaze is not randomly selected, but is socially constructed through class, ethnicity, gender, age and role that the destination is attracting. The gaze is a contrast of ordinary life and engages people to seek out a unique leisure activity that is separate from home and work. Tourism involves the movement through space to a new destination for a short period of time. The destinations chosen to be gazed at are based on fantasies and daydreams which offer the gazer pleasure. Anticipation of the location is built through media constructs (media, television, internet, magazines) and social networking

services (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), which the gazer assesses as replicable. Once the images linger in the mind of the gazer, they anticipate that it is possible to reconstruct the experience through travel and sightseeing. Traveling and experiencing a destination is not only part of the tourist gaze, but the gaze consists of specific actions at the destination that fulfill the gaze for travelers (Urry, 2011, ch.1).

The gaze is not an individual but a collective action. The *collective gaze* stresses liveliness and energy. The gazers feel a sense of carnival and excitement at a specific location which emphasizes “that *this* is the place to be” (Urry, 2011, ch.1). Tourists gather in large crowds and enjoy a collective consumption together. Furthermore, there is *mediatized gaze* which is a collective type of gaze where specific sites are famous for their media events. Visitors go to these sites or scenes to relive aspects of them where the famous media event happened (Urry, 2011, ch.1). In contents tourism, visitors will pilgrimage to specific sites in Japan to experience a scene from a popular anime, manga, film, live-action drama, visual novel, manga, game, and so on. This type of tourism is often referred to as media or anime-induced tourism (Yamamura, 2014). With the intent to pilgrimage to a special site and be part of the fantasy- comes the *gazers’* desire to interact at that location. *Gazers* have the craving to touch, feel, walk, and interact with the location. Moreover, interaction is not enough, it is important for gazers to collect distinct artifacts that are relevant to the site (Urry, 2011, ch.8).

An important function of the collective gaze comes in the play-aspect of the photography involved at the gazer’s location. Photography is a body-to-body team exercise or “shoulder hold” and “hand-holding” as Goffman states in the family gaze (1967: 55-6). It is an essential relation between friends and family acting together through physical movements that draws them together to produce acts of friendship and intimacy in photography. Photography embraces tenderness and desexualized poses with one another. Even though photography embraces togetherness, it does not necessarily enact the role of physical contact as when the

collective gaze is performed in group photos. After people are drawn together with the camera, it is also the tool which disbursts them once the image is taken (Urry, 2011, ch.8).

The first part of Urry's theory argues that the gaze is about attracting peoples' attention to experience the extraordinary- something that cannot be seen at home or work. Here the gaze is referred to as a learned ability and socially framed by "others." Urry continues that the gaze is a social construct and not randomly selected in regards to class, ethnicity, gender and age; however, others who frame the gaze socially include destinations and people, actual existence, but not characters that are not real. What if the social frame of the gaze is constructed through a new identity, one which is not real? It is possible that mascots could fill the role of constructing the gaze and framing it to others in a dual reality, one that is composed of real sites and fictional characters. The combination of Urry's theory and mascot awareness could form the "mascot gaze." A gaze that that utilizes destination branding presented with mascots that influences visitor to experience something out of the ordinary involving a character. Mascots could fill that role since they are walking deities who are used to attract visitors to a specific destination to consume goods and attractions. While mascots are not human, they do inherit human traits through anthropomorphism and are regarded as "beings." They are mainstream celebrities and represent goods and localities of a location. Mascots could act upon gazers through images of destinations featuring them.

In an overcrowded market of popular destinations, it is difficult to induce the gaze over other well-known attractions. For example, the Eiffel Tower in Paris is preconceived by gazers as a romantic spot that reproduceable through photography once there (unless the Eiffel Tower suddenly vanishes, then visitors cannot reproduce the gaze). The advantage of a well-known destination is that it has been shared millions of times through images, so visitors know what to expect (Crandall et al., 2009 as cited in Hospers, 2011). However, to compete in an

oversaturated market, it could be possible to take a destination and enhance it with a celebrity (or mascot) which would increase the attraction to overseas visitors.

Destination images alone may not be gaze provoking; however, destinations images featuring *yuru-kyara* alongside them could be. For example, Kumamoto Prefecture was not known for much except its castle and scenery, but this perception changed once mascot awareness and city branding were combined. The gaze developed with mascots is subject to misinterpretations and misrepresenting the destination that the mascot is utilized at. For example, Hello Kitty is a commercial character which is used in many cases to promote goods and attractions as a *gotouchi-kyara*. In the example of Nara Prefecture's Tōdai-ji (The Great Buddha Hall), Hello Kitty has been utilized as part of destination branding; however, this type of branding with a commercial mascot could cause puzzlement for consumers who are unaware of her representation goals (Newton, 2011). With commercial characters used to represent destinations and attractions, it could confuse or lead consumers in the wrong direction when gazing at certain locations.

2.3.1 Museum Gazes

In McKercher's (2004) survey, he discovered that museums were the top tourist activity regardless of the destination. Museums also help us define the cultural goods of a location by providing us with specific information that is not available anywhere else (Graburn, 1983, 1998; Tufts & Milne, 1999). McIntyre (2007) and Prentice (2001) recognized that people have the desire to visit cultural attractions while abroad and even art museums. Cultural properties at art museums provide an escape from reality and the life of home regarding the tourist gaze.

In Stylianou-Lambert's study of art museums regarding tourists, her interview results revealed that people who do not normally visit museums, will probably not do so abroad. And, people who normally visit museums at home, will probably do so abroad. For her study, she

developed eight Museum Perceptual Filters (MPFs)- “professional, art-loving, self-exploration, cultural tourism, social visitation, romantic, rejection, and indifference filters.” Of the eight, *cultural tourism* and *social visitation* appeal the most regarding the reasoning why tourists would be interested in visiting a destination promoted by mascots. The first five filters are specifically geared towards art museums visitors while the remainder appeal to non-art museum visitors (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011).

The *cultural tourism filter* is strongly supported through Urry’s theory. The *cultural filter* is seen as a motivator for learning and exploring other cultures. This filter is a primary filter followed by secondary filters such as *art-loving* and *social visitation*. In Stylianou-Lambert’s interviews, people stated the reason they visit art museums. They said for a location’s history and culture that motivated them to visit. Moreover, the second filter of *art-loving* expresses their admiration for the cultural piece on display (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011).

The *social visitation filter* works when people want to engage in social activities at museums. In Stylianou-Lambert’s (2011) interview with a frequent visitor of art museums, it is not always the case that someone is influenced by a single filter. In the interview, the male confessed that he does not particularly like art museums, at all; however, his wife and friends do. He follows them, so they will be pleased, and he believes that others in museums are “faking it.” Although he does not like art museums, he is motivated by the *social visitation filter* of being with friends and family, while influenced by the *rejection filter* of disliking museums and their culture.

Individuals who visit art museums have a main and secondary filter that influences their visitation. The person’s perceptions vary depending on their home country and abroad. People who attend art museums at home will more likely visit when abroad to learn about culture. However, even if it is not the norm for a person, it is possible they will participate anyways but

with different filters to be part of a group. It is important to note that the filter described here may be too broad or inflexible as an outcome of the visit or non-visit depending on the visitor. The importance of filters is not to help categorize people, but it is essential to learn about their perceptions of places (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011).

2.4 City Branding

City branding employs a two-way strategy to distinguish the destination and attract tourism. The first strategy emphasizes unique cityscapes and events. The second relies on a city's nonmaterial aspects- stories, symbols, and slogans as explained by Jansson and Power (Hospers, 2011). To accomplish city branding, cities can rely on "the tourist gaze" theory developed by John Urry, who questioned why people travel to certain destinations for leisure and tourism. Consumers today have more choices now than they ever did before. In a saturated market of choices, brands help ease the decision-making process. Brands also reduce the risk and expectation factors for buyers. In tourism, destinations are branded to distinguish them from others (Pike, 2012).

Cities compete with one another to attract global investment, talent, and tourism. Brand strategies are adopted from the commercial sphere and applied to urban development and planning to rejuvenate destinations and bring about new markets. Cities can benefit from coherent city branding strategies by managing their "resources, reputation, and image" (Temporal, 2001). City branding and corporate branding share parallels in terms of complexity and obligation to appease stakeholders (Dinnie, 2011). Cities are obligated to address their various "targeted audiences, sports-fans, fashion consumers, and current and potential future residents" (Dinnie, 2011; Temporal, 2001). For cities, as stated by Gelder (2008), this branding process promotes the city's competitive advantage against others in a fierce global economy of competition. When successful, it will help attract new visitors, capital investment and residents

while contributing to a diverse economy that benefits individuals in the city (Soltani, et al., 2018).

City branding is not an overnight accomplishment, but it is a prolonged research process that requires time to alter a place's image and character. Even after the branding process is complete, determining whether it was successful or not will require a 10-15-year period to be analyzed (Soltani, et al., 2018). For instance, before the Kumamon Project began in 2009, Kumamoto was only recognized for Kumamoto Castle and Mt. Aso, and local farmers did not believe their agriculture sector could bring in any tourism. However, to combat these stereotypes, Kumamoto City utilized techniques for marketing and branding with the Kumamon Project, which could be recognized as the “mascot gaze” (Temporal, 2001; Steinberg 2016). However, now that the prefecture has become famous for Kumamon since 2010, there is anxiety that his popularity will diminish over time and decrease awareness. The prefecture is concerned that Kumamon has hit his peak in Japan with no room to grow and could end up a “has-been.” KumaLab, Kumamon's research planners, are taking the next step from a local mascot to an international market. The KumaLab has recognized that anime and information technology are incredibly popular with tourists and are eager to tap into new fields with the mascot (Ohata, 2017). This course of action demonstrates that the city is engaging across multiple platforms to ensure that the Kumamon brand remains relevant to the destination of Kumamoto (Temporal, 2001).

2.5 Museum Destinations

Museums- “Non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

(INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS, 2017)

Museums have adapted for a visitor-oriented experience to innovate in attracting more funds from customers and stakeholders (Falk & Dierking, 1992; Reussner, 2003). It is crucial for local governments and community stakeholders to be involved in the coordination and support of museums for its destination's competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). If a museum attracts tourists with successful marketing strategies, it is competitive advantage will be regarded as a successful tourist destination (Ritchie & Crouch 2003; Siano et al., 2010).

“The Loire in France, the ‘Wine Road in Burgundy, and the ‘Romantic Road’ in Germany” became successful thanks to their integration into tourists’ itineraries, which provided attractive destination packages for visitors (Siano et al., 2010). Through this innovation, it would enable museums to overcome development issues and grow the potential number of visitors. For example, tourism operators along with museum curators and local stakeholders can work together in tailoring a museum’s exhibitions to benefit, educate, and compete over other similar tourism attractions in oversaturated markets (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Furthermore, it is important that museums within the same area are incorporated together into tourist itineraries. Other, smaller, destinations should not be overlooked. This will benefit local agencies and promote the surrounding areas in competitive vacation packages for tourists (Siano et al., 2010).

2.5.1 Visitor Movement Patterns

Visitors tend to take the pathways with the least amount of resistance. When people take right turns at intersections, we consider the “economy of movement,” which is the cost of time and effort to complete a motion. People who come to four-way intersections tend to take the “right” path. However, if the person arrives at the left-hand side of an intersection, it is more convenient to take the “left” path (Bitgood, 2006).

William Whyte (1980; 1988), a sociologist who researched pedestrians' behaviors, summarized that people usually walk on the right-hand side unless they are foolish and like to go against traffic. However, despite his humor, people will walk on the left if they must take a left-turn to their destination. Visitors who enter galleries through the right-side door will take right turns because of the economic value, but if they enter through the left-hand wall, then walking straight offers the most economic value (Bitgood, 2006). Through Bitgood's analysis of Melton (1935), Yoshikawa (1942), Weiss & Boutourline (1963), Shettel (1976), Taylor (1986), Deans et al, (1987), and Underhill (1992) studies all observed the right-hand turning pattern behaviors of people in galleries featuring exhibits.

In Bitgood and Dukes' (2006) observations of people in two shopping malls, the patterns observed most in over 50% of people was that they performed right-hand turns on the right side of the path. Moreover, most people remained on the right-hand side over 85% of the time (Figure 2-1, Figure 1a, p.37). However, consistently, left-turners merged into the left path and kept to the left-side at intersections to avoid unnecessary steps (Figure 2-1, Figure 1d). For their summary, if landmarks and attractions are not considered, the major motivation for turning right was to reduce the amount of time and movement spent by the visitor. Unless there is motivation to turn left, such as an attraction at the destination, people will generally follow the right-hand side and right turn (Bitgood & Dukes, 2006).

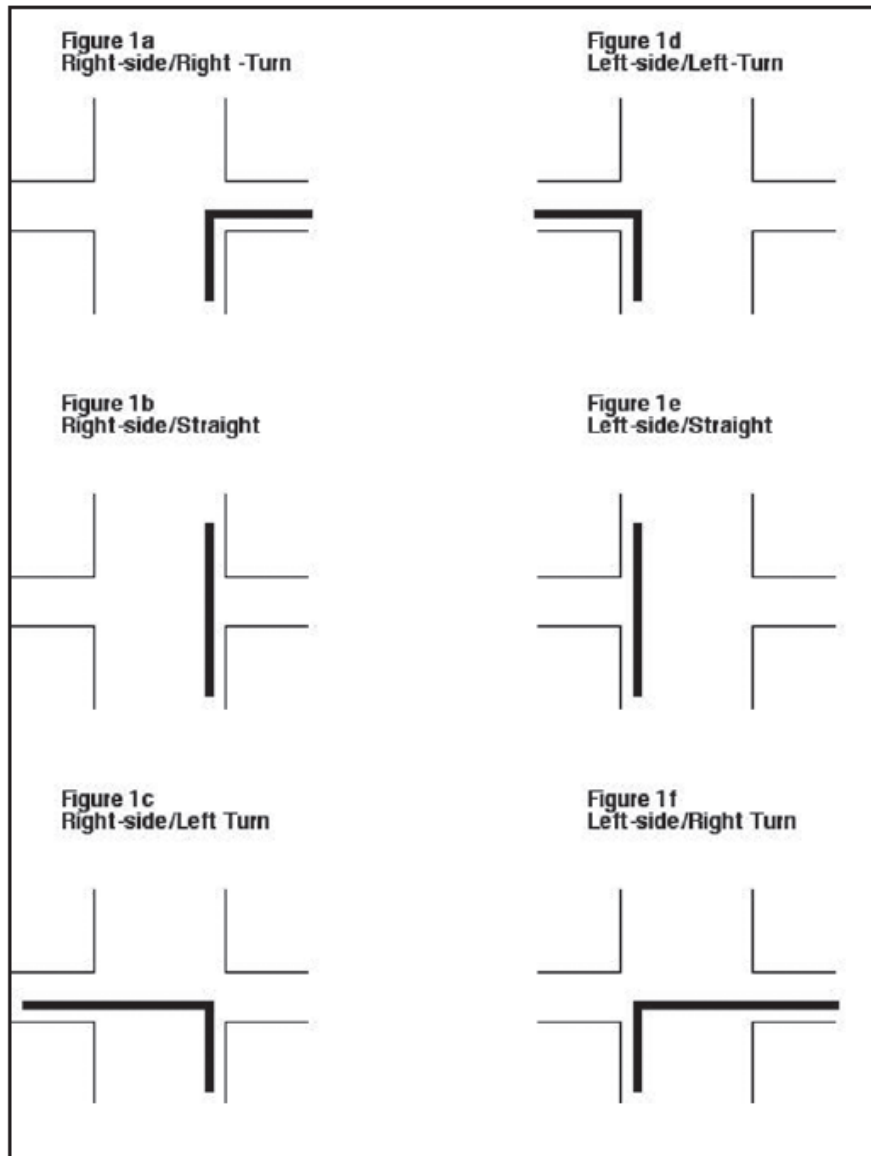


Figure 2-1 Movement Patterns, Source: Bitgood (2006)

People will also take the straightest path between two points if something grabs their attention. It is the path with the least amount of resistance (fewest number of steps). Melton (1935) also found that the reason people take the straight path is that attractions or exhibits influence the visitor's movement and not the inertia of the person (as cited in Bitgood, 2006). However, Parson and Loomis (1973) argued that the entrance and exit routes have the greatest inertia unless something pulls the visitor's attention away from the straightest path. Bitgood (2006) summarizes that the straight line is always the best path because it is economical in steps; however, there is the possibility for attractive objects to interrupt individuals.

All five sections support the relevant foundation for studying *yuru-kyara* and its utilization in city branding. Anthropomorphized characters (*kyara*) have a collection of traits that represent goods, localities, and attractions of a destination. These *kyara* are then presented as “premium” representatives who persuade consumers to choose them over other competitors. More importantly, *kyara* are representatives of their organizations and have become famous in social media constructs by framing locations which are gazed at as beautiful and exotic. Finally, to attract tourists, destinations coordinated with community stakeholders to represent their values, goods, history, and culture through museum tourism destinations that utilize mascots as the main attraction. These destinations can be incorporated into tourists’ itineraries as major points of interest to promote visitor-oriented experiences that will ultimately educate and provide enjoyment to the visitor through a mascot celebrity.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The methodology for this study relies on qualitative reasoning for the purpose of understanding why international visitors come to see Kumamon. The data gathering setting was set in Kumamoto City at Kumamon Square during September and December of 2018. This site was chosen because it is the home to Kumamon and his Official Manager's Office. The following qualitative methods were employed to understand the international tourists' behaviors: onsite participant observation, one-on-one interviews, and online follow-up surveys.

3.1 Qualitative Data Gathering

Qualitative methods seek to highlight the differences in kind rather than in quantity. Qualitative research is about describing "the spirit" of a thing or object and the phenomenal properties that are associated with something, without the reliance on numbers. For this research, the author chose to interpret words and draw meaning from them instead of relying on statistical data. Qualitative is best for sorting and deriving meaning from behaviors, actions, relations, and choices of field subjects. Moreover, qualitative reasoning considers emic responses and making meaning from others' viewpoints and recognizing that subjects are not stagnant but full of thoughts, emotions and beliefs (Ruddell, 2017).

However, there are several faults with qualitative research. First, data gathering is labor intensive; it can take months or years to gather enough data, and there is the strong possibility of data overload. Data saturation occurs when there is enough information to reproduce the study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Walker, 2012), and when further coding is redundant (Guest et al., 2006; as cited in Fusch, I., & Ness, R., 2015). Second, because data is taken in words, there is the chance of research biases and misinterpretation. For example, interviews conducted by a native English speaker with a non-native speaker may incur misinterpretation of words and cultural differences. Finally, readers may not understand how the researcher reached their

final conclusions since sources are not replicable. Conclusions of the reader are based on good faith in the researcher (Ruddell, 2017).

3.2 Data Collection Parameters

Data collection parameters were established for this study to answer the research questions from onsite relevant data and avoid data over saturation. Special consideration was taken to ensure that the setting, actors, and processes are relevant to this study (Ruddell, 2017). The setting of this research is specifically set in Kumamoto City at the Kumamon Square shop with the actors being Kumamon and inbound tourists, and the process being the interaction between him and visitors.

As stated in the background information on Kumamon Square, it is the ideal location to for this study since it is home to Kumamon's Sales Manager Office, and it is the center for his activities (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2018). The shop is in downtown Kumamoto City and is accessible by foot and public transportation. The shop is open daily apart from some public holidays where it may be closed. The Kumamon Square official website provides a calendar on the dates and times that Kumamon is present in Kumamon Square (see Figure 4-6, p.61). Moreover, the shop is a tourism "hotspot" that attracts many foreigners daily because the shop is promoted on numerous tourism websites in a wide variety of languages (UnionPay, Kyushu and Tokyo, Japan Travel, and Kumamoto City Official Guide).

Kumamon Square was chosen because it is a reliable location to view Kumamon and international tourists interacting together. The facilities were advantageous when viewing the actors' (Kumamon and visitors) because visitors frequently appeared at the location according to the times Kumamon was present or not. Each actor has different personalities and are present during the phenomenon of interest at the shop (Ruddell, 2017). Kumamon's personality is naughty and curious while tourist personalities vary depending on age, gender, nationality,

culture and so on. Even though Kumamon's personality is known, it also varies depending on the Kumamon present; however, a separate study is needed to determine whether it affects the average visitors and not fans.

The process unfolds uniformly between Kumamon and visitors. Visitors who arrive half an hour or more before his appearance and wait for his entrance are interested in having a seat in front of the interaction space where Kumamon performs. Visitors who cannot be seated inside can view his performance from outside and briefly touch him before his departure to the next location. This phenomenon happens daily at the shop between actors. The only time this process cannot occur is when Kumamon is not scheduled to appear at his office.

The data collection parameters enabled this study to be carried out with relative ease because the setting, actors and processes are predictable for this location. However, this research was very susceptible to data saturation in that Kumamon performs only a few set routines, and the routines of visiting tourists were always similar. Moreover, one set of actors proved that this is not always the case. Some fans who wish to see Kumamon multiple times would visit the shop every day and time that Kumamon is present.

3.3 Analytical Approach

The purpose of the analysis section is to categorize, order, manipulate and summarize the qualitative data obtained from the primary and secondary data sources. Data is reduced to draw meaning from it. Qualitative data is categorized and examined for themes that are identified through the body of the collected information (Ruddell, 2017). The information is reread to identify reoccurring themes for the categories. For this field research, data is interpreted through the following theories- city branding, tourist gaze, and mascot awareness.

Memos and coding are important to the analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Memos are composed of the author's thoughts and reflections on the data. These personal

records are used as a roadmap to further refine and interpret through theories. Microanalysis is a line-by-line analysis of the data to develop the initial categories for the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 2015). The category properties help define and give meaning to its characteristics which allows of the coding later. This process begins after microanalysis; coding begins in which concepts are identified and their properties are examined to discover different and emerging patterns among data for theoretical understanding (Babbie, 2013, ch.13). For example, tourists usually identified Kumamon as [**kawaii**] during interviews. This initial category is broken into sub-categories for the axial coding procedure to identify richer categories such as [**emotion**] or [**language**] (Strauss & Corbin 1998, 2015).

The inductive approach emphasizes interpretivism- “the interpretive position assumes the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities (Burton, 2010).

3.4 Sampling Design

In-depth interviews: are the most popular qualitative method for tourism research. In-depth interviews are a conversation between the researcher and the respondent. The purpose is to explore a topic in-depth and draw out meanings that people describe in “issues, events, and other people” (Ruddell, 2017). Rather than traditional quantitative survey methods that focus on close-ended questionnaires, qualitative methods rely on, free-flowing, open-ended questions that allow for the interviewee to provide his or her own deep account of the subject (Babbie, 2013, ch.8). In-depth interviews are not mechanically strict and are guided by predetermined questions. The interview conversation can be shaped and considerate of the opinions, feelings, and knowledge that the respondent is giving (Patton, 2015). The interview tone is typically informal and conversational and is recorded by audio if agreed upon by both parties. Interview

recordings should be transcribed immediately after recording and analyzed to uncover emerging themes and knowledge of the topic for further investigation (Ruddell, 2017).

Participant observation: is face-to-face interaction between the observer and participants in their natural setting. Observation is completed through field notes, which contain rich details of the setting, events, and reactions of participants. The level of participation can range from ‘outsider-observer’ to ‘full-on-participant.’ Depending on the skill level of the observer, they may want to watch the event from a distance or take part in the experience with the community. However, it is unlikely that the observer will ever become a full-fledged member of the community; the advantage of participant observation is the chance to connect the recorded experiences with the environment (physical, cultural, and social) and draw out meaning (Ruddell, 2017).

Sampling approach: is to decisively select sample participants based on a category that contributes to theoretical development. Participants are selected by the information or experiences that they may contribute to developing the theory to answer the research questions (Dixon, et al. 2017).

3.5 Data Sources

- *Primary data:*
 - Participant observation (field notes, pictures, and videos) taken on location in Kumamoto City
 - 2 days (September 2018) Kumamon Square
 - 5 days (December 2018) Kumamon Square
 - In-depth interviews (audio recording and field notes) conducted onsite with inbound tourists and online follow-up questionnaires
 - 17 one-on-one, inbound tourist interviews
 - 3 online follow-ups with inbound tourists

- *Secondary data:*
 - Academic articles, scholarly research, journals, news publishing, textbooks, videos (YouTube)

3.6 Mascot Selection Guide Map

In an oversaturated market of destinations, cities use mascots to stand out against rivals. Instead of branding the destination first, city emphasizes on the promotion of the mascot to attract attention. However, for a mascot to be successful, cities must plan around their mascot and its implementation (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). First, the city utilizes resources (local history, attractions, and goods) to determine what the mascot will look like and represent. Next, the city decides which resources are appropriate in the mascot image development. Finally, the city determines how the new mascot will benefit stakeholders and residents. This implantation process does not occur overnight, but it is a prolonged process to ensure the mascot's success. (Soltani, et al., 2018).

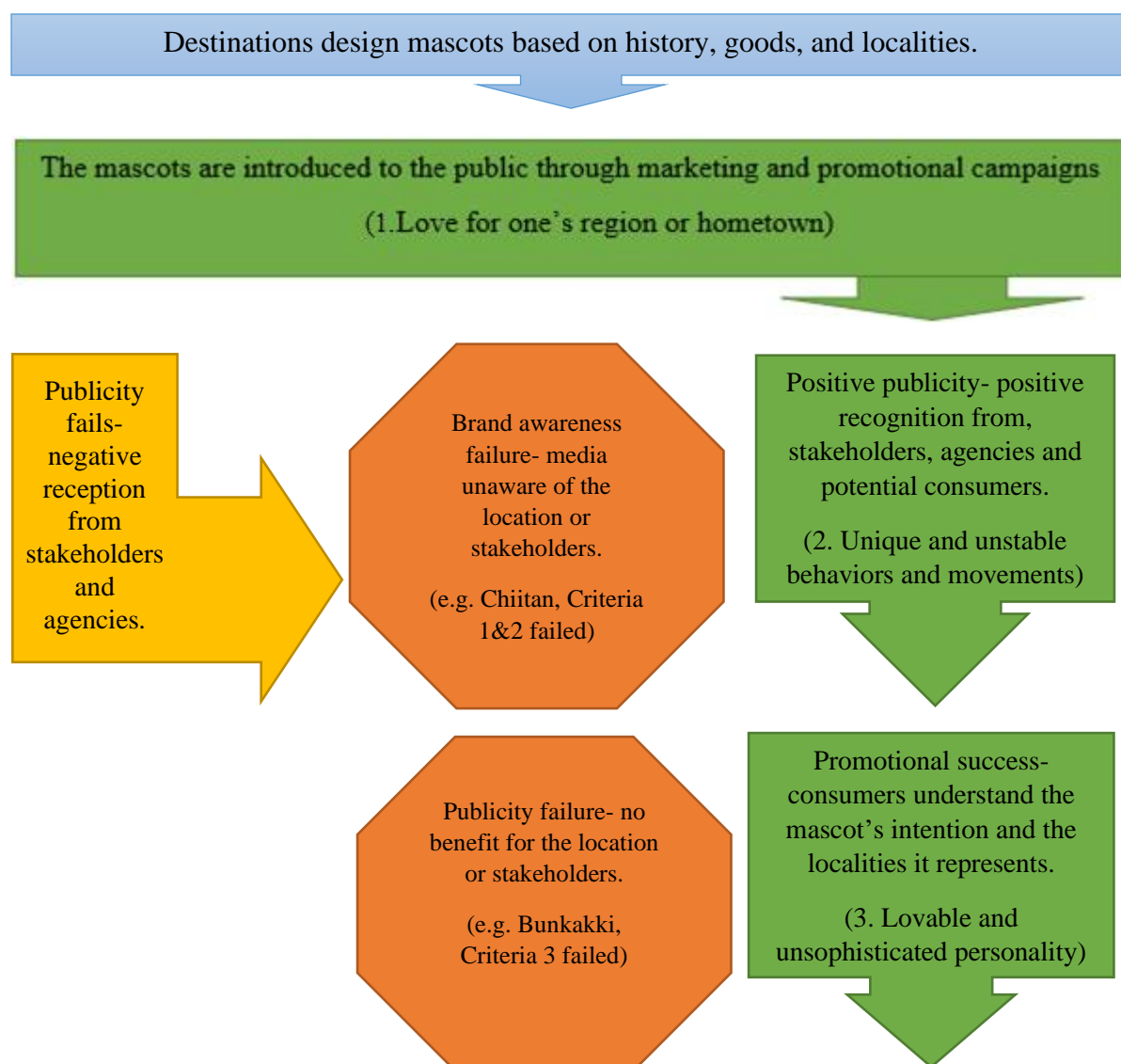
For this study, the author developed the Mascot Selection Guide Map which combines mascot awareness with destination branding- the central theme of the "mascot gaze." The process describes the implementation of mascot marketing for a destination, and whether the mascot itself will be able to effectively gain loyalty from audiences and stakeholders in the end. Moreover, the guide map utilizes the three criteria necessary for successful mascot awareness, developed by Mr. Miura.

Three Mascot Criteria (Miura, 2009):

1. Love for one's region or hometown
2. Unique and unstable behaviors and movements
3. Lovable and unsophisticated personality

For the selection process of a mascot for this study, it was important to examine various mascots through background research and to determine which one succeeded in all three criteria before choosing a viable character. The criteria were applied to the following well-known mascots (Bunkakki, Chiitan, and Kumamon) in determining whether they would be appropriate candidates for this research. Mascots who were successful followed the green path to the blue ribbon shown at the bottom. The three criteria are marked by parentheses.

Mascot Selection Guide Map



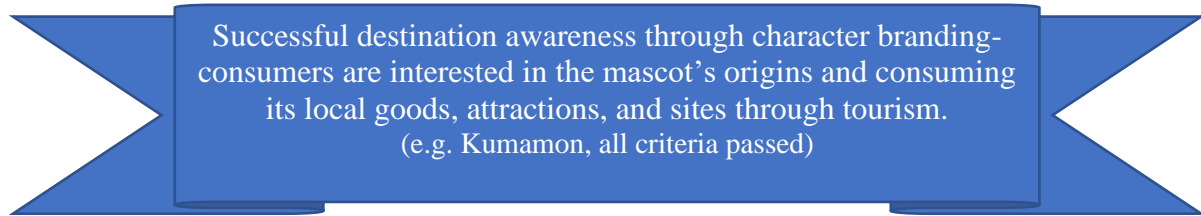


Figure 3-1 Mascot Selection Guide Map, Author (2019)

The following details the outcomes of three individual mascots- Bunkakki (1), Chiitan (2), and Kumamon (3). Each mascot is analyzed to see whether they demonstrate the three criteria. If mascots are successful in all criteria, then they will follow the green path to the blue end ribbon of success. If the mascot was unsuccessful, it stopped directly in the red path or the yellow to red path, which was the end for the mascot's fame and impact on its local destination.

Here is the explanation of each individual mascot and its shortcomings or success. Each mascot is analyzed based on background information and literature review. The mascot who achieved positive public publicity was the chosen victor for this study.

Publicity failure:

- (1) The mascot fails to gain public attention or awareness with consumers. The mascot's failure could be from a lack of marketing publicity, the general image of the mascot, or its personality is not well received (Suter, 2016). This results in no benefit for the location or its stakeholders. For example, even though Bunkakki was one of the first *yuru-kyara* created, the mascot was criticized at the time for its appearance by locals. This character failed to meet the third criteria (unsophisticated and lovable).

Publicity fails:

- (2) The mascot receives positive public attention; however, that attention is viewed negatively by residents, stakeholders, and/or agencies. The mascot assumes a large

cult following on social media, but it fails to meet all criteria. Specifically, the mascot Chiitan fails the first two criteria (love for one's hometown and unstable behaviors) (Miura, 2009; Suter, 2016; Chang, 2017). First, she fails to represent her area as a second ambassador due to her overshadowing of Shinjo-kun, who is the official representative of Susaki City (Nakamura, 2019). Second, Chiitan's behavior and movements were viewed as unacceptable by the residents and local government. Her actions were too devious and violent including self-harm which was viewed as "over-the-top" by the local government and residents (Ives, 2019).

Positive publicity:

- (3) The mascot is a positive influence. Its appearance and behaviors are not questionable. The perception by stakeholders, agencies and consumers is positive. The *yuru-kyara* fulfills all three criteria. The first criteria, the character represents and conveys a strong message of its local area and attractions. The second criteria, the character is unique and well mannered. The third criteria, the character is lovable, unsophisticated, and relaxed. With all three criteria achieved, there should be promotional success and positive recognition in media. Onlookers will be aware of the character and the localities it promotes through its successful branding strategy.

Kumamon represents the best "outcome" for mascots and the best option for in-depth studies and observation. He achieves all three criteria while following up Kumamoto City's agenda of city branding itself first, then the prefecture through mascot awareness (Soltani et al., 2018). By creating a successful mascot campaign strategy, the city represented itself to the public through Kumamon. Finally, with city branding in place, the local government was able to engage locals to utilize Kumamon because of the royalty-free marketing strategy. This

pushed residents to promote and sell Kumamon on their products and further spread brand awareness (Occhi, 2017).

In the following chapters, Kumamon will be the focal point for this research. The Mascot Selection Guide Map was necessary in guiding the researcher in the selection process of a suitable mascot for analysis and presentation of research findings.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The analysis section is comprised of five sections. In these sections, the author explores the various methods used by Kumamoto Prefecture to promote itself to outsiders through the utilization of Kumamon and his image. Kumamon's success relies on the prefecture's strict usage policies and the management of the character's brand and identity. The first section analyzes the city branding approach and the use of his image publicly. The second section informs us on who Kumamon is and his biography. The third section analyzes Kumamon's unique communication discourse through handlers and his multiple personalities to raise mascot awareness. The fourth section analyzes Kumamon Square as a mascot museum destination and attraction for visitors. Lastly, the fifth section analyzes the reasoning why tourists come to see Kumamoto and Kumamon.

For the analysis, it is important to understand the UNWTO (United Nation's World Tourism Organization) definition of a *visitor*, so it can be modified to the study.

- *Visitor*: "A *visitor* is a *traveller* taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her *usual environment*, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited (IRTS 2008, 2.9). A *visitor* (*domestic, inbound* or *outbound*) is classified as a tourist (or *overnight visitor*), if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a *same-day visitor* (or *excursionist*) otherwise (IRTS 2008, 2.13)."

(World Tourism Organization, 2018)

The types of *visitors* that were observed at Kumamon Square:

- *Same-day visitor*: inbound visitor who visits Kumamon Square out of curiosity, as part of a tour, or as a fan. This type of *visitor* only visits once during their stay.
- *Overnight-fan visitor*: inbound visitor who spends most of their time at Kumamon Square and/or following Kumamon to other nearby locations. This type of *visitor* stays multiple nights in Kumamoto.

Both *same-day* and *overnight-fan visitors* could be *expert-fans*. *Expert-fans* are very well educated on Kumamon's history, roles, handlers, personalities, products, and so on. They are different from fans who are uninformed on this information, but who still like Kumamon. If these "novice" fans learn enough, then they could become *expert-fans*. For example, one *overnight-fan visitor* came with her mother from China on vacation. Her teenaged daughter was very into Kumamon; however, her daughter mentioned that she was just beginning to learn about Kumamon and did not know a lot of information on him yet.

4.1 Who is Kumamon?

According to the official Kumamon homepage, Kumamon was born in Kumamoto Prefecture on March 12th, 2011, the same day as the newly opened Shinkansen line. His profile states that he is in fact a boy and not an animal (Figure 1-10, refer to p.24). His age is kept secret, but according to an urban legend, he is 5 years old. His personality type is full of curiosity, and he looks to spread surprise through physical exercise. His job is working as a civil servant for the prefecture. He was appointed the title of Sales Manager and Happiness Manager in 2014. His duties are to spread happiness and the "Kumamoto Surprise" (Figure 1-9, refer to p.22). As part of his job, he wants to make everyone happy in Japan and around the world. He does not only stay in Kumamoto, but he also travels to the Kansai and Kanto regions

of Japan. Every day, the Governor of Kumamoto is challenging Kumamon to spread his awareness (KUMAMON Square Blog, 2018).

4.2 Kumamoto's City Branding Approach Analysis

Part of Kumamon's success lies in the network approach taken by the city. Instead of the Kumamon group reserving all the decision making and usage rights to an elite marketing group, the city adopted a royalty-free approach (Isomura et al., 2015). If retailers want to utilize Kumamon to sell or promote their business and/or products, the only requirement is for the user to follow the strict "utilization method" guidelines and submit the proper paper work for approval by the prefecture (Domestic Use Application, 2019). This network approach emphasizes "Hankinson's (2004) conceptualization of place brands as relations network brands, a perspective that focuses on the need for a collaborative approach between public and private sector organizations and a distributive approach to the ownership of the city branding strategy" (Temporal, 2001). The public ownership of Kumamon grants internal stakeholders (Kumamoto residents) and external stakeholders (outside residents, international users, and businesses) the ability to spread the brand awareness anywhere.

Soltani's (2018) study of city branding falls short in not recognizing the tourist gaze as a possible theory in why people may visit Kumamoto. Soltani's city branding analysis examines how Kumamoto became competitive with the use of *yuru-kyara* to promote uniqueness. However, the study does not acknowledge the possibility that the tourists engage with Kumamon through premeditated gaze from overseas advertising and marketing. The study does acknowledge that Kumamon is popular outside Japan via SNS and has increased the number of tourism expenditures in Kumamoto. Marketing characters as product endorsers can convey meaning for organizations, and they can attract attention and fantasy since they are not

necessarily experienced at home or at work (Urry, 2011; Soltani et al., 2018). Kumamon is not presented as himself but as a promoter of the goods and attractions through Kumamoto PR.

4.2.1 Kumamon Travel Branded Brochures

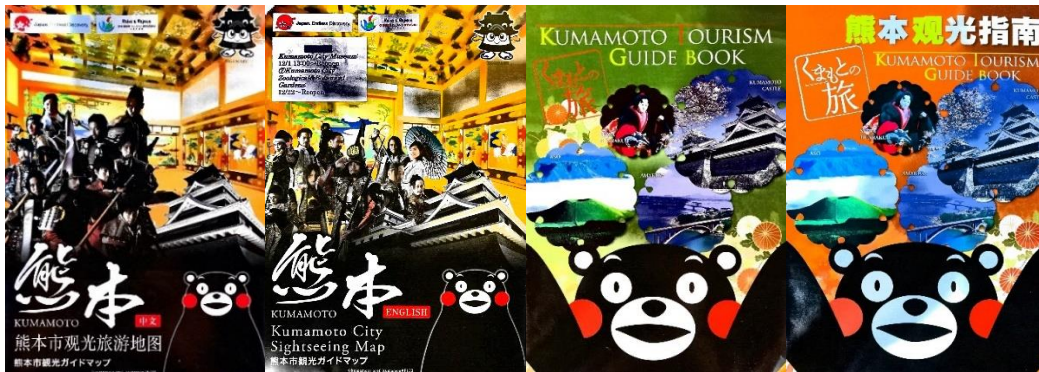


Figure 4-1 Kumamoto Prefectural brochures, Source: Kumamoto Prefecture (2018)

Kumamoto brands itself as a unique destination by utilizing Kumamon on its promotion materials. Figure 4-1 shows different types of travel brochures: a sightseeing map and guide featured in English and Chinese. To compete with external cities and prefectures, Kumamon is displayed happily in his promotional glory. He is composed with his signature facial expression of surprise in both brochures. In the *Kumamoto Tourism Guide Book*, Kumamon is shown thinking about the famous attractions in Kumamoto Prefecture. He is reminding us of Kumamoto Castle, Amakusa, Aso, and Seiwa Bunraku (Japanese puppet-theater). In the Kumamoto City Sightseeing Map brochure, he is pictured under Kumamoto Castle and its trained historical cast. Moreover, the castle's mascot, Higomaru, is also featured on the brochure map.

With Kumamon featured on promotional materials for foreign audiences, Kumamoto Prefecture labels its attractions as 'premium' with its mascot celebrity (Sonoda & Ikeda, 2016). Kumamon's image on Kumamoto Prefectural advertisements increases awareness by persuading visitors with his fame. "Mascot gazers" seeing these advertisements may believe that they can see Kumamon and these attractions in person if they visit. His image on the

brochures is thinking about all the attractions and culture to share with the visitor. Moreover, he is extending his arms out to the reader to “capture” their attention. Rather than providing bland marketing materials, Kumamoto uses its celebrity to emphasize awareness with consumers (Pairoa & Arunrangsiwed, 2016). Finally, Kumamon’s image must remain happy and well represented on promotional materials. It is crucial that he protects the prefecture’s image and enhances the appeal through the “mascot gaze” (refer to p. 34).

4.2.2 Consumer Purchasing Behavior Analysis

Although *yuru-kyara* had little meaning in the early 2000s, the term slowly gained popularity over time and awareness of mascots such as Hikonyan and Kumamon became famous in the public. The *reverse phenomenon* (as described on p.27-28) is applicable with character branding on products to enhance its premium benefits. When consumers see mascot-branded products, they are more likely to purchase them. Interviewees responded that they were more likely to buy products with Kumamon on them. For example, an *expert-fan* from Taiwan stated that Kumamon’s appearance raises awareness of agricultural products through trade fairs and expos. Another *expert-fan* from the United States also mention that visitors who come to Kumamon Square have researched Kumamon well and want to buy his prefectural or “made in Japan” goods. Moreover, the author spoke with a local Oita resident on the matter of Kumamon branded goods and her opinion. She said that products with Kumamon labels are trustworthy because she knows where they are from and because of the high quality associated with them. Products labeled with mascots empowers consumers to take the “choosing change identity” rather than “forced change identity” (Young, 2007). Kumamon acts as spokesmen to persuade consumers that his products are of “high quality” as compared with non-labeled goods. In the event the product is grouped with other similar ones, the “forced change identity” occurs where the consumer must adapt with no choice (see p.27). Mascot labeled products gives

consumers more options, trustworthiness, and knowledge of where the product is from against other generic goods.

The marketing strategy behind Kumamon has been successful since he is employed as a civil servant and “public good” without severing his connection with the prefecture. Acting as a brand mascot encourages consumers to investigate Kumamon’s origins. Thus, the potential for the “mascot gaze” on consumers who see Kumamon presented in image with the prefecture and local goods.

Kumamon awareness led to merchandise sales of ¥2.56 billion for 2011 and ¥11.8 billion for the first half of 2012 (Brasor, 2013). The following year, the prefecture lifted its ban which prohibited the export of Kumamon goods abroad. This lift would attribute another ¥2.1 billion to sales in 2014 (Kyodo, 2016). By 2015, sales surpassed ¥100 billion for the first time which represented the fifth straight year of increased sales for the prefecture. The sales of local produce also doubled to ¥78.1 billion thanks to Kumamon awareness. As of December 2017, the Kumamoto prefectural government has lifted another ban to allow foreign businesses to feature Kumamon on their products in exchange for a fee to combat overseas piracy of Kumamon products (Jiji, 2018). The governor’s decision sparked backlash from local companies since they stated that they cannot compete with overseas firms in China. However, the prefecture assures Japanese companies that the fees collected from overseas use will ensure the protection of the Kumamon brand and fight piracy of look-alike and inauthentic goods, which could damage the brand value of Kumamon (Ohata, 2018).

When comparing Kumamoto’s royalty-free method against prefectural characters who are subject to strict copyright and usage agreements, these regional branded mascots will suffer in sales and losses over time. In 2010, around the same time as the appearance of Kumamon, the local government of Nara debuted its own mascot named Sento-kun. He was hit with harsh

criticism for his disturbing image as a Buddha with antlers. The city decided not to nix him due to the large amount of money spent to create the character (Ryall, 2008). Not only was his appearance questionable, but the local government also collected 3% of all sales royalties from companies, agencies and retailers utilizing his image. As of 2018 though, the Nara government has backtracked on its policies and has allowed Sento-kun to be used royalty free. This is in part due to the decline in sales since 2010 where royalties dropped from ¥49 million to a low ¥1.6 million in 2017 (Jiji, 2018).

4.3 Kumamon's Communications Analysis

The Kumamon Group created Kumamon's two unique narrative discourses for communicating with audience members and fans. When Kumamon is present online on his official blog or through Social Networking Services (SNS), his narration is conducted through multiple modes of discourse- third-person, self-narration, and a mixture of first-person, indirect quotes, ventriloquized voices, interior monologue, and staff commentary (Maynard, 2018). When Kumamon speaks in text, his sentences end with *-mon* as a function of *yakuwarigo* or "role language" to identify him uniquely from other mascots (Kinsui 2003; Occhi, 2017). For example, when he traveled to Los Angeles, California in 2018, he uttered "LA *ni touchaku da mon* ~ ☆," meaning "I arrived in LA" (KUMAMON Square Blog, 2018).

This speech manipulation supports Narrative Theory, "that an internal perspective achieved in first-person self-narration best promotes character identification and reader empathy, and it is most directly associated with character identification." The first-person ventriloquized speech from Kumamon effectively evokes empathy and emotional fusion between him and his audience known as "narrative empathy" (Keen, 2006; Maynard, 2018). However, "empathetic narrative" monologue, Adamson argues, is "especially effective for

instilling empathy. (Keen, 2001; Maynard, 2018).” Although Kumamon is unable to speak in person, his communication through multimedia is clearly understood by the public.

Yet, in real world appearances, Kumamon cannot verbally communicate by himself. To overcome this limitation of discourse, he communicates through body language, drawing on boards, and help from his “handler” (Maynard, 2018). Through body language, Kumamon performs energetic movements such as running, jumping, hand gestures, and other bodily movements to express himself. When Kumamon needs to communicate, he will use writing utensils on boards or paper to communicate simple messages such as autographing his guest book. Even though Kumamon’s face has a motionless surprised expression, it does not limit his interaction with viewers.

4.3.1 Kumamon’s Handlers (Interpreters)

In Occhi’s *Wobbly Aesthetics, Performance, and Message: Comparing Japanese Kyara with their Anthropomorphic Forebears* (2012), she explains the purpose of mascot handlers. Their job is to safely guide mascots to and from performance areas. Second, in her most recent publishing, *Kumamon: Japan’s Surprisingly Cheeky Mascot* (2017), she mentions the handler’s role; they speak for Kumamon. However, the description is brief and does not detail the nature of handlers and their importance in maintaining brand identity.

Kumamon’s “siblings” are his handlers- big sister(s) (*Oneesan*) and big brother(s) (*Oniisan*). Handlers are almost always present during his meet-and-greets and performances (Figure 4-2). Handlers are recognizable by their yellow happi-coat (traditional Japanese long-sleeved coat) decorated with Kumamon. Handlers only wear them when Kumamon is present. According to a Kumamon *expert-fan*, there are 11 teams of handlers



Figure 4-2 Kumamon and Handler,
Source: Author (2018)

(or more) who present with him. Kumamoto Prefecture has 7 teams; Osaka Prefecture has two teams; Tokyo Prefecture has one big sister/big brother team; and Hong Kong has one team.

When Kumamon presents to audiences, a handler is usually by his side, but the Kumamon abroad is known as “free range” because he won the Yurukyara Grand Prix in 2011, according to an *expert-fan*. The Kumamon abroad is special since he can function without a handler in public appearances. However, research on the “free range” Kumamon shows that he always had a handler at his side, even during the Kumamon Surprise awareness campaign.

Figure 4-3 Source: Yuru Chara® Grand Prix Executive Committee (2019)



At the 2011 Yurukyara Grand Prix award ceremony, his handler (big sister wearing Kumamon hat, Figure 4-3) presented a speech on behalf of him. In her speech, she cried while expressing her gratitude towards the time that she put in everyday into making the Kumamon Surprise a success (Hytanne, 2011; Author’s translation, 2019). This analysis confirms that Kumamon has always had a handler at his side to handle communications between him and viewers. Moreover, as recently as January 2019, two big sisters resigned (graduated) from the team in Kumamoto and were replaced with two new sisters. Handlers are very necessary in the interpreting of Kumamon’s speech since he has no voice.



Figure 4-4 Kumamon gestures, Source: Author (2018)

Even though Kumamon cannot speak for himself, he can speak with the help of his interpreter. Handlers act as translators between him and viewers. Handlers interpret his poses and gestures. The coordinated effort is necessary to avoid any misinterpretations for his actions, and for his misinterpretations to be corrected for the audience. The handlers' second job is to spread the awareness of Kumamoto goods and localities. Handlers help maintain the brand image of Kumamoto by ensuring that Kumamon's message is portrayed accurately to the audience. For example, in Figure 4-4, the handler coordinated with Kumamon to spread the awareness of prefectural ingredients used in the Snack Stand's concession foods. Here, Kumamon expresses his love of digging up local vegetables while the handler explains how delicious and beneficial for health they are. Without handlers explaining Kumamon's gestures and acts, it is possible that his love for Kumamoto could be lost. Handlers ensure that mascot awareness is understood correctly and prevent the brand from being damaged by any mascot faults.

4.3.2 Kuma- "Mons"

Kumamon exists in the public-eye as one mascot. He cannot be in two places at once, or it would ruin the image of his identity. Kumamon is a real person in the flesh and blood (Occhi, 2017). He does not have "copies"; however, there are multiple Kuma- "Mons"

according to *expert-fan*'s theory. Non-expert fans and viewers will not know the difference between Kuma-" Mons." The big question is, what are *Mons*? They are the multiple personalities of Kumamon. The term originates from the second half of his name meaning "person" in the local dialect. Each *Mon* is quite different from another, so handlers must adapt to them, according to *expert-fans*. Handlers discover a *Mon*'s likes and dislikes and adjust for that personality when presenting. *Expert-fans* will know the *Mon* which will be present depending on the handler assisting him. Each handler works with a different *Mon* personality. *Expert-fans* created this theory because they understand that it is impossible for Kumamon to travel so fast between venues, even if they are near, adjacent, or within the same area. When Kumamon acts differently, it is apparent.

Mon's actions must match Kumamon's mischievous and happy personality as stated in his biography. When his actions are not energetic enough, *expert-fans* will notice and discuss on SNS communities as to why his performance was lacking. One *expert-fan* commented that his actions were quite weak compared to the previous day's. They felt that Kumamon was not feeling great that day. His "weak performance" could have been attributed to the rainy weather, his handler's performance, or the *Mon* who appeared. Any of these factors could play a role in the performance of a *Mon*. For the author, Kumamon's routine seemed "normal," and no different than the other days. Mascot personalities will require further studies to learn about this new topic.

4.4 Kumamon Square

Kumamon Square is in the Tetoria Building located in the Tsuruya East Wing in Kumamoto City (Figure 4-5, p.60). It is accessible by tram and bus. The nearest tram stop is Suidocho, which takes approximately 17 minutes travel from JR Kumamoto Station where the Shinkansen stops. The facility is open all-year-round, and Kumamon can be seen there on the

official dates and times listed on the Kumamon Square website (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2018). The times that he is available daily are highlighted in blue. During the holiday rush, Kumamon will appear on his off days- Tuesday and Thursday (Figure 4-6, p.61).

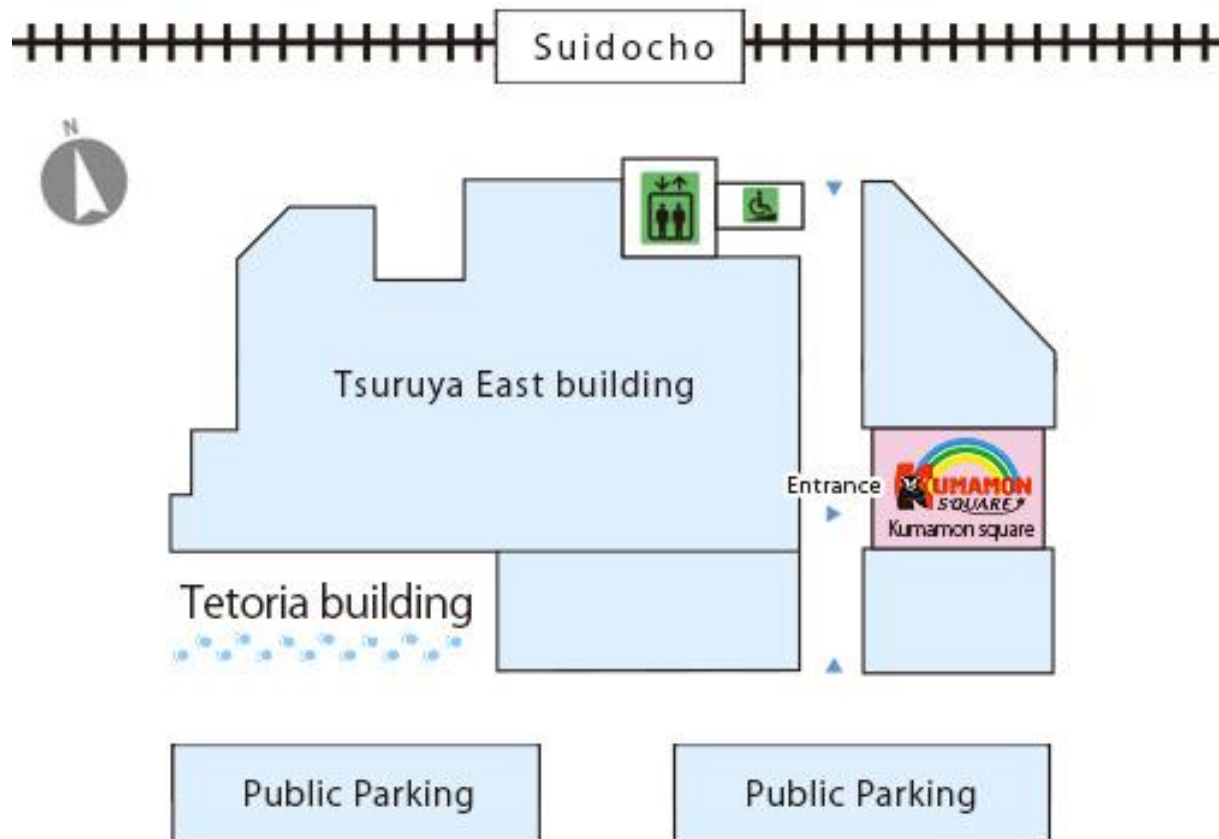


Figure 4-5 Kumamon Square map, Source: Kumamon Square (2018)

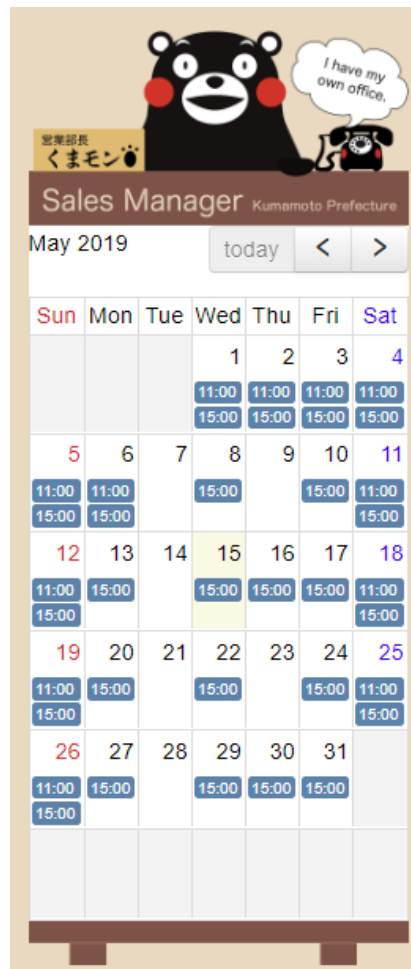


Figure 4-6 Kumamon Square blog time schedule, Source: Kumamon Square (2018)

Kumamon Square is the official center for all Kumamon related activities. Since he travels all over Japan and the world, he requires an office in the city to promote information on tourist attractions and local goods for the prefecture. The destination consists of six major exhibits (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2010). The next section will provide in-depth analysis of the 6 individual exhibits and their use.

Kumamon Square has six major exhibits that were analyzed below. The first exhibit is the Kumamon statue which is located outside the floor space for passersby to pose with. The second exhibit is Kumamon's Sales Manager Office where Kumamon conducts his official work and where visitors can see his official mementos. The third exhibit is Kumamon's motorbike that is featured in red and black with Kumamon branding. The fourth exhibit is the

Interaction Space (Attraction Stage) where Kumamon performs and dances for visitors. The fifth exhibit is the Gift Shop that sells locally branded Kumamoto and Kumamon goods. The sixth exhibit is the Snack Stand where visitors can buy beverages and snacks that utilize local prefectural ingredients. All these exhibits play a major role in creating an educational experience for visitors to learn about Kumamon and Kumamoto Prefecture.

4.4.1 Observational Analysis of Kumamon Square Layout and Patterns

“Theming ‘involves the use of an overarching theme, such as western, to create a holistic and integrated spatial organization’ (Lukas, 2008:67).” A geographic location is invented and reworked in a self-enclosure for leisure and tourism (Hollinshead, 2009). Thanks to themed environments, attractions or sites can dominate the five senses (sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste) of tourists to overstimulate them and create an environment that is absent of time and space. These environments are subjective and fueled by large capital investment, private ownership, and iconic branding. With high levels of surveillance, consumer consumption practices and behaviors are analyzed secretly behind a “recording gaze” to safeguard the consumer experience and functionality of the site (Urry, 2011, ch.6).

Kumamon Square relies on the use of Kumamon theming and mascot branding to justify its uniqueness as a tourism destination to attract visitors. The facility is innovative, as it is promoted by Kumamon and stakeholders as a free public facility. Kumamon Square is crucial for all stakeholders and customers because it is a coordinated effort to ensure visitors will learn about Kumamoto and Kumamon (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Kumamon Square acts as a museum of hundreds of images, products, foods, and memorabilia of Kumamon.

The museum is a stimulus overload with Kumamon’s image and products appearing in every nook and cranny. His appearance is in all forms from pictures, drawings, statues, plushies (stuffed toys), souvenirs, food, and even himself when he visits. The museum is bursting with

interactive exhibits which guests can feel and touch. Moreover, visitors can indulge in a variety of snacks and drinks made with local ingredients. The space reassures visitors that they are indeed in Kumamon's office, and he will appear during his scheduled visitation times.



Figure 4-7 Kumamon Square Floor Map, Source: Kumamon Square (2018)

The initial gaze for onlookers abroad is pre-constructed through promotional content online and print media. Figure 4-7 is provided by the Official Kumamon Square website in the “How to Enjoy” section. Images of Kumamon Square are not randomly chosen; they are carefully framed to intentionally engage visitors into a set movement pattern. The Floor Map is more than an image of the museum's layout, but it is a museum guide to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the tourists who want to visit. The image provided by the website does not explain how to utilize the floor plan once the visitor has arrived at the destination.

The floor map is jumbled with images of Kumamon, camera symbols, souvenirs, and detailed pictures of each area. It provides potential gazers with an idea of how the museum space will look, but it does not provide a coherent way of exploration. As the gaze is a social construct, so is the movement through space and time in the museum. The visitors' movement

patterns are dependent on the exhibits and the movement paths of least resistance (Bitgood, 2006). The movement through a museum is related to *intent*. Displays are juxtaposed together in a sequence to deliberately control the path and experience (Brawne 1982, 11 as cited in Tzortzi, 2014). By understanding the attractiveness of exhibitions, actions can be understood as to why some exhibit areas are more attractive to visitors than others (Bollo and Dal Pozzolo 2005, 2 as cited in Tzortzi, 2014).

4.4.2 Kumamon Square Visitor Movement Patterns



Figure 4-8 Kumamon Square Movement Patterns Source: Kumamon Square (2018); Author Edit (2019)

In the analysis, we will observe that Kumamon Square acts as a “museum” destination for visitors even though Kumamon Square is officially recognized as the center for all Kumamon related activities (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2018). We can imagine that it is a small museum for visitors. The museum is composed of many exhibits featuring Kumamon such as

the Sales Manager Office, Kumamon's Bike, Interaction Space, Gift Shop, and Snack Stand. In Figure 4-8 (p.64), exhibits are marked by circles. These are major displays of interest featuring Kumamon. Moreover, the diamond mark is the beginning and end of the journey for visitors; it marks the only entrance and exit of the facility. The method utilized by visitors to see and interact with exhibits is marked with red letters. *A-F* represent the general flow pattern of visitors from one exhibit to the next. The map is also marked with blue and red lines. These lines represent the movement patterns in and around the museum. The blue lines represent the most economical path with the least amount of resistance which saves the visitors time and allows them to pass quickly in large crowds (Bitgood, 2006).

The researcher observed a consistent pattern among tourist who visited the museum. The visitors followed the loop pattern movement above throughout the facility, which are labeled *A-F*. It is important to note that this was the general path of least resistance that incorporates a right-side flow pattern as described in Bitgood's (2006) pattern chart (Table 2-1, refer to p.37). To accommodate for sporadic movements off the blue path, red lines connect exhibits across from one another because there is no exact definitive movement pattern.

4.4.3 The Kumamon Statue



Figure 4-9 Kumamon statue, Source: Author (2018)

The first letter, A, is written on the image of Kumamon (Figure 4-9). This statue is also out in front of Kumamon Square. A is significant in tourist pattern activities because it is an exhibit and gathering point for visitors. It is the starting point for Kumamon’s “museum.” The statue assures people that this is Kumamon’s home. Even though the statue is not the real Kumamon, it is a positive attraction for onlookers and visitors to take photos and gaze with.

Here, gazers will take part in Goffman’s, body-to-body exercise. Visitors will collectively form together utilizing the Kumamon statue in photos. By performing physical movements of intimacy together with him, the collective gaze will form before splitting up after the photo is taken (Urry, 2011). Once it is taken, the gazers will continue inside the museum to view the other exhibits or leave and be on their way. To the right of the tourists are automated doors to go outside the building. Consequently, the area outside is also the tour bus

pick-up stop for visitors (Figure 4-10). As the author observed, after the visitors finish at Kumamon Square, they then depart to their next destination.



Figure 4-10 Tetoria Build exit way, Source: Author (2018)

4.4.4 Kumamon Sales Manager Office

When visitors enter the facility, they must take a left-turn and walk along the path before turning right again. After entering through a second brown archway (Figure 4-10), visitors will then take the straightest path to Kumamon's office which is the main interactive exhibit (Bitgood, 2006). To get to his office, visitors are guided by red foot-prints on the ground. The space between the entrance and exit archway to his office is the straightest path with only some exhibits causing distraction. If Kumamon is present, then clearly visitors will be swayed away to his attraction.

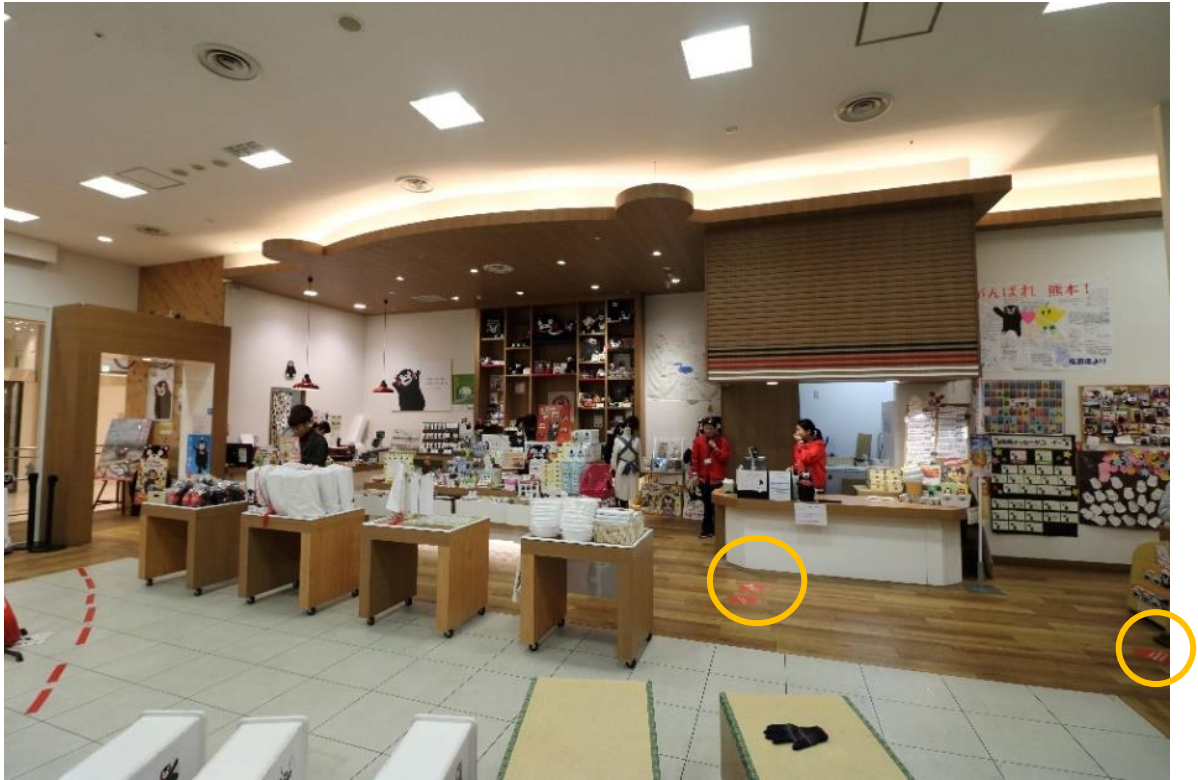


Figure 4-11 Kumamon Square path, Source: Author (2018)

Kumamon Square provides visitors with exhibitions of many unique items that are only found in the museum. In Kumamon's office, there are an assortment of certificates, trophies and memorabilia from all over the world. These Kumamon cultural goods provide a visitor-oriented exhibit not available elsewhere (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

At the center of Kumamon's office is his work desk (Figure 4-12, p.69). At his desk is a Kumamon signature name plate, Kumamon decorated turn-dial phone, signature book, and photos of him working. The office has a positive atmosphere that is enjoyable for visitors to take photos in and perform gazes.



Figure 4-12 Kumamon's desk, Source: Author (2018)

His desk is an important interactive exhibit. The desk creates an illusion for the guest; it allows them to mimic Kumamon's job as Head of Sales Manager. Visitors who impersonate him take on the *mediatized gaze*, which is a type of *collective gaze* as explained by Urry (2011, ch.1). Visitors can relive a fictional scene presented by media and take on the role of Kumamon. The interactive exhibit helps gazers to be part of the location since it permits them to touch, feel, and interact with the environment. The exhibit was curated in mind with the expectation that visitors could experience the duties of Kumamon (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

4.4.5 Kumamon's Motorbike

The next important interactive exhibit in the movement pattern is C. This exhibit is represented by a Honda Motorbike branded with Kumamon (Figure 4-13). The bike is detailed in Kumamon's prominent colors of red and black. The bike is also a symbol of the collaboration between him and Honda. Honda's largest domestic



Figure 4-13 Kumamon's motorbike,
Source: Author (2018)

motorcycle factory resides in Kumamoto (Honda Global, 2019). The bike was also a viral sensation for audiences online because Kumamon rode it (KumamonTV, 2019). This interactive exhibit is like his desk. It can be seen, touched, and played with. It presents another fictional scene for visitors to reenact with his famous bike. The exhibit only takes a few steps to arrive at, so it has economic value for visitors in Bitgood's sense. This exhibit is also next to the Interaction Space.

4.4.6 The Interaction Space (Attraction Stage)

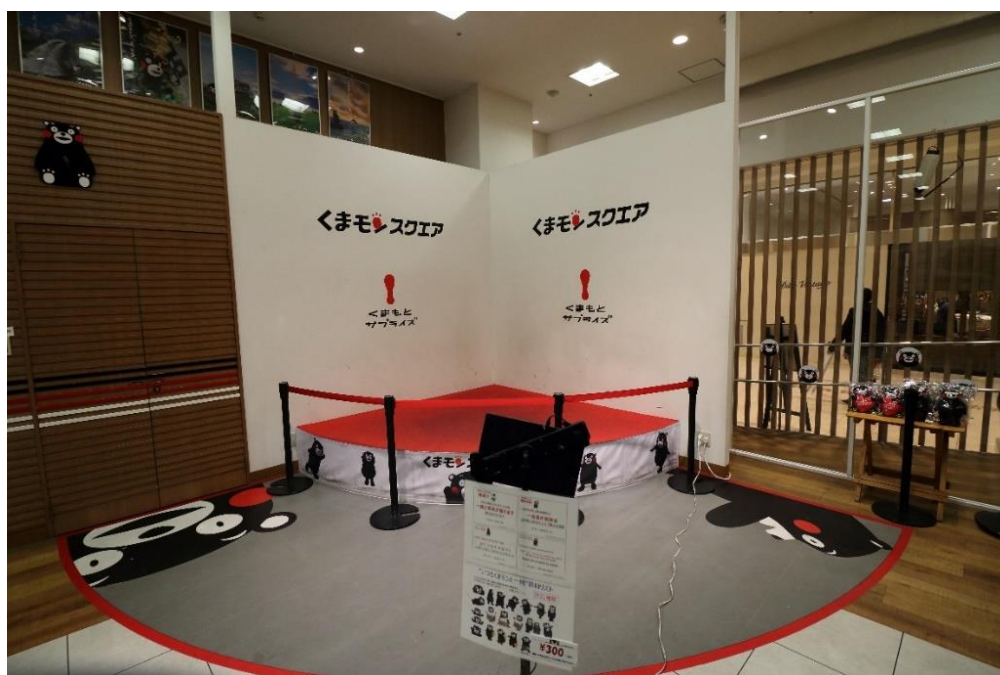


Figure 4-14 Kumamon Square (Attraction Stage), Source: Author (2018)

The Interaction Space (Attraction Stage) is the performance area for Kumamon (Figure 4-14). This interactive exhibit is composed of a lifted red stage, and a ground performance area marked in grey with Kumamon logos (visitors cannot sit here). Outside the area, visitors can sit, stand, and watch Kumamon perform. The ground seating in front of the grey area is where children usually sit; however, some adult fans will sit here to be closer to Kumamon. This area allows gazers the chance to physically interact with him during live performances. In Figure 4-15 (p.71), some fans are right in front with cellphones taking video and photos.



Figure 4-15 Kumamon performing with his handler, Source: Author (2018)

The Interaction Stage induces Urry's (2011) theory of the collective gaze. The gaze is made clear through the sense of carnival and action that the space invokes when Kumamon performs. People gather in excitement as he dances and gestures. In the author's participant observation, he felt a sensation of euphoria as Kumamon performed tribal dances and as his handlers interpreted his language. It was not only Kumamon's movements, but also his expressionless gaze back of surprise (Figure 4-15). Although he cannot change his expressions, "through gestures he easily communicates happiness, sadness, curiosity, naughtiness, regret, and even anger," as stated by one fan in his emotional response to Kumamon.

Figure 4-16 (p.72), is a snapshot of Kumamon performing a pose. He is dressed for the holiday season with his handler. Even though he is expressionless, his gestures arouse the crowd. From Images (1-3), the handler counted down from three to one, and then Kumamon performed his "surprise" gesture. He quickly composed his hands outwards at his hips (4-6), after which he received loud applause and laughter. While composed, people shouted "kawaii"

(cute) and photographed his stance. As this was just one of his many poses, it was important because it encouraged the audience to snap photos and share them later. This collective gaze could be transmitted via SNS applications to spread awareness of the destination and show Kumamon to friends and family.



Figure 4-16 Kumamon posing for audience members, Source: Author (2018)

4.4.7 The Gift Shop



Figure 4-17 Kumamon Square Snack Stand, Source: Author (2018)

Attraction E is a mini gift shop inside Kumamon Square that features locally made and branded goods featuring Kumamon (Figure 4-17). The goods range from a wide variety of souvenirs: plushies, snacks, stickers, pins, buttons, postcards, notebooks, pens, shirts, towels, plates, bowls, and so on. There are items marked “exclusive,” which are only available at the Kumamon Square gift shop. Moreover, some of the items sold are seasonal such as the mini-Kumamon plushies resembling Santa Claus (Figure 4-18). As mentioned before, Santa is part of Kumamon’s larger-than-life persona (refer to p.23-24).



Figure 4-18 Kumamon exclusive merchandise, Source: Author (2018)

The shop has many exclusive items, but they are expensive for consumers. When the author spoke with fans about exclusive goods, one fan from Taiwan revealed that she owns some handmade stuffed Kumamons; however, she will not purchase more because of the price. Another fan commented that official goods are “too expensive.” The fan from China stated that he can buy cheaper knock-offs back home because they look similar and are inexpensive.

The author took notes on consumer purchasing habits. He observed that tourists purchased cheaper, less expensive items such as drink coasters and postcards more often than expensive items. For example, a mother bought her child a variety package of drink coasters featuring Kumamon. This cheap souvenir entertained her child while she walked around area. Moreover, another visitor purchased postcards featuring Kumamon. After they bought them, they took pictures with the cards at Kumamon’s desk to mark the occasion. Some consumers did not buy anything. Instead, they took “selfies” with the items and then put them back on the store shelf.

The author also interviewed a store staffer about the visitors’ purchasing behaviors. The staffer pointed to a table of some original affordable goods that are popular among tourists (Figure 4-18). The staff said that visitors often like to buy cheaper items, for example, hand towels, ballpoint pens, sweets, and keychains that are inexpensive. This information from the gift shop staff confirms the buying behaviors of visitors and fans. International visitors on a tight budget are looking for the best value since similar items could be bought in their home country for cheaper.

4.4.8 The Snack Stand

The final analysis point of the *visitor movement pattern* is the Snack Stand marked by *F* (Figure 4-8, refer to p.64). This is the last attraction for visitors in the museum. This part is operated by one or two staff members who work in Kumamon Square (Figure 4-19, p.75).



To push the awareness of these specialty items, the shop utilizes Kumamon and a staff member during his visits. The staff member explains new items and/or seasonal items to the audience during Kumamon's performance break, and he pays attention and gestures about the items he likes (Figure 4-20, p.75). This routine is performed every time Kumamon visits. It is important for him to spread agriculture awareness and to entice customers to try the products.

4.4.9 Kumamon Square Analysis Conclusion

Kumamon Square is a unique mascot museum destination, full of exhibits for visitors. It is significant because it gives visitors the chance to learn about the prefecture and interact with Kumamon. The facility is unique in that it has been adapted for a visitor-oriented experience (Siano et al., 2010). Exhibits in the museum inform visitors of the importance of Kumamoto's local products and attractions, and the achievements which Kumamon has achieved through community-backed support and stakeholders. In general, the museum seemed to be curated to meet the limited itinerary time that tourists had. The author's observations were based on the visitors fast-paced movements through interlinked exhibits.

For the author's analysis, the *tourist loop pattern* showed how visitors quickly traveled around the museum floor. Tourists often followed one set pattern; although, tourists did not always follow the *A-F loop pattern*. However, this pattern was most commonly observed since it was the most economical. Visitors who came did not have to decide what exhibit to see first since they are guided by Kumamon's red footprints. By following, visitors can take the straightest path and complete right-hand and right-side turn to navigate the museum in a loop before leaving (Bitgood, 2006).

Finally, the museum supports the tourists' gazes by providing them with interactive exhibits and live performances to experience a unique phenomenon not available elsewhere; the "mascot gaze" could contribute to bringing visitors here. The museum is curated to spark

curiosity within tourists. Because Kumamon serves as the Happiness Manager, his facility will ensure that visitors have a great time and form a bond with him through personal exhibits (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2018). And, for visitors who attend during his visitation times, they will have the opportunity to gaze at him and experience the real Kumamon.

4.5 Tourist Interview Analysis for September and December (2018)

The interview analysis focuses on why inbound tourists came to Kumamon Square and Kumamoto Prefecture. At Kumamon Square, interviews were carried out with *same-day visitors*, *overnight-fans*, and staff. Interview time span was determined by how much time participants were willing to allow. Even though interviews were brief, data oversaturation occurred with participants who were not *expert-fans* of Kumamon. *Overnight-fans* and one *same-day visitor*, on the other hand, provided a wealth of new feedback through casual conversations and with an online questionnaire follow-up. Moreover, staff were included since they interact with tourists daily and have knowledge of why tourists visit.

The table below provides categories on the *visitors* that were interviewed by the author. Interviews were sorted based on feedback from questions and observations. The largest number of *visitors* were from China and Taiwan, followed by Hong Kong and the United States. All participants shared Chinese ancestry; this was based on observation and feedback.

Table 4-1 Tourists interview summary table, Source: Author (2018)

Country	Number	Purpose	Motive	Kumamon Interest	Visitor Type	Descent
China	Couple	Leisure	Itinerary	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
China	Couple	Leisure	Itinerary	Fan	<i>Overnight-fan</i>	Chinese
China	Couple	Leisure	Kumamon	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
China	Family	Leisure	Children	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
China	Family	Leisure	Children	No	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
China	Solo	Business	Kumamon	<i>Expert-Fan</i>	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
China	Solo	Leisure	Kumamon	Fan	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Hong Kong	Group	Leisure	Kumamon	Fan	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese

Hong Kong	Couple	Leisure	Itinerary	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Hong Kong	Group	Leisure	Kumamon	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Taiwan	Solo	Business	Itinerary	N/A	Tour guide	Chinese
Taiwan	Group	Leisure	Kumamon	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Taiwan	Group	Leisure	Itinerary	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Taiwan	Couple	Leisure	Kumamon	Yes	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Taiwan	Couple	Leisure	Kumamon	No	<i>Same-day</i>	Chinese
Taiwan	Solo	Leisure	Kumamon	<i>Expert-Fan</i>	<i>Overnight-fan</i>	Chinese
USA	Solo	Leisure	Kumamon	<i>Expert-Fan</i>	<i>Overnight-fan</i>	Chinese

4.5.1 Tourists' Descriptions and Perceptions of Kumamon

Microanalysis was conducted on the interview data obtained from *same-day* and *overnight-fan visitors*. Three sub-categories were created to identify underlying themes. The categories were feeling, perception and the role of Kumamon. Since similar adjectives were used to describe Kumamon by participants, it was important to categorize them correctly to avoid disparities in the data.

Participants feelings were accounted for to understand how they emotionally felt when viewing Kumamon. Since he is a walking being and not a person inside a suit, his loveable behavior should invoke some emotions in individuals. The general emotions evoked were “happy,” “excitement,” and “lovely.” Participants overwhelming stated they were “happy” when seeing Kumamon; however, this emotion is not obviously translatable since the participants’ native language was not English, except for one person from the United States. It is unclear whether “happy” implies the same meaning or not that visitors would have expressed in their native tongue. In Kumamon’s “Welcome to KUMAMON Square!” pamphlet, it states that- “Where he appears: Wherever there is the need to make someone happy.” (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2010).

There were many remarks by visitors as to how they viewed Kumamon. Comments were taken from participant observations and in-depth interviews. When Kumamon performed savvy gestures such as his quick hand pose on (Figure 4-16, p.72), it brought out individuals shouting “kawaii” and “cute.” Kumamon also acted “naughty” during his performances of mischief. For example, he sometimes dismissed his handler’s instructions to act childish and entertain the audience (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2010). Kumamon’s behaviors should not deviate from his known personality or else it will harm his image. As discussed earlier with *Mons* (ch.4.3.2), some individuals noticed when Kumamon is not acting energetic enough to match his character traits.

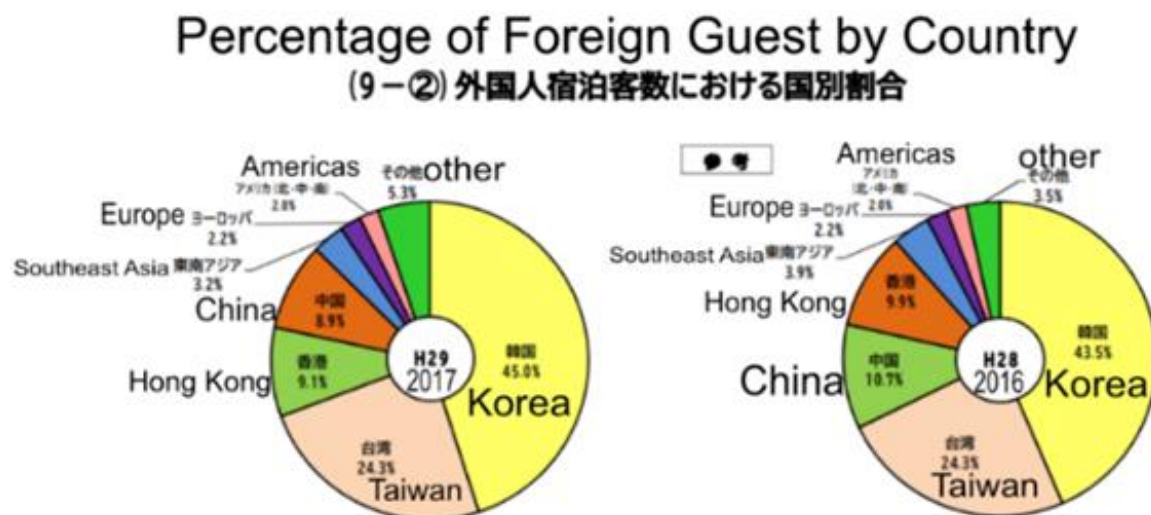
Kumamon’s role should be understood by the individuals. For instance, two interview participants knew him as a government employee. However, not everyone knew his role. Some interviewees viewed him as a “baby,” “bear,” “icon,” and “influencer.” Kumamon being viewed as a “baby” is not quite correct since he is rumored to be a five-year-old. Moreover, Kumamon is not a “bear” because it is stated that he is indeed a boy (Kumamoto Prefecture, 2010). It is critical to note that Kumamon is an icon of Kumamoto Prefecture because of his fame and celebrity status with people locally and abroad, but he should not be view as a “baby” or “bear.” This could damage his image. However, Kumamon can be view as an influencer thanks to his active work of spreading the “Kumamon Surprise” and rallying people to come and visit Kumamoto Prefecture.

4.5.2 Why Tourists Came to Kumamoto Analysis

In China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and even the U.S., Kumamon is cited as being famous by the visitors who participated in the in-depth interviews and follow-up surveys. Although, we cannot measure Kumamon’s level of fame abroad, it is possible to determine where the visitors primarily come from based on the most recent statistics provide by the prefecture’s

tourism agency. The 2017 statistics below (Figure 4-21) show that 87.3% of all guests were from East Asia (Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China), while only 3.2% were from Southeast Asia. Part of the increase in tourism from these regions is because of governmental efforts to ease visa restrictions and the devaluing of the yen (Soltani, et al., 2018). The lowest number of guests were from the Americas. However, in 2017, there were some noticeable changes in the number of guests- Hong Kong (increased by about 1%) and China (decreased by about 2%). From the interview data taken, none of the visitors were from South Korea. Even though Korean guests make up half of the recorded guests from Asia to Kumamoto, none became part of the sample. According to the staff interviewed, most of the visitors are frequently from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. On two occasions during Kumamon’s performance, visitors watching were asked by Kumamon’s handler what countries they came from. However, no participants from South Korea raised their hands or were present while Kumamon was there. It is possible that Japanese mascot culture is not well received in South Korea, so further studies are needed.

Figure 4-21 Foreign guests by country pie charts, Source: Kumamoto Government, Tourism Products Division (2018); Author’s translation (2019)



4.5.3 Tour Guide Interview Analysis

One of the interview participants was a tour guide from China. The guide did not speak English, so interview questions were translated by the author’s colleague who spoke Mandarin

Chinese. Only a few questions were asked because of time, but the feedback was enlightening. The first question was, “Why do tourists come to Kumamoto to see Kumamon?” He answered that it is included in their itineraries since Kumamon is very popular. This detail is essential since it explains the large number of Chinese visitors observed by the researcher every day on site. Next, the author also asked, “How long will they stay in Kumamoto City?” The guide answered that they only stay for the day and then return to the Aso area of Kumamoto, meaning that they are only *same-day visitors*. These visitors will not return during their trip unlike *overnight-fan visitors*. Finally, the author asked, “Who likes Kumamon?” He replied that both children and adults equally love him. Many of the visitors observed were part of large tour groups. These were made up of individuals, friends, couples, and families. Many of the families observed had very young children who would not be in primary school yet.

The short interview gave some important evidence to reinforce the data collected through participant observation. Tourists who come to Kumamon Square do so as part of tours and for a short time. This confirms findings from McKercher’s (2004) survey that museums are a top priority for tourists regardless of the destination. They give tourists the chance to interact with cultural properties in a short time. Since the facilities are small, it does not require a whole day(s) to experience unless the *same-day visitors* want to see more of Kumamon. The only problem which occurred is when tourists came on the days which Kumamon was not present, or the visitors arrived late to his performance. One of visitors who was interviewed described her disappointment because she could not take part in the show. This means that facility was full to maximum capacity, so further visitors were not allowed inside, but they could watch outside the windows (Figure 4-22, refer to p.82). Because of Kumamon’s popularity, it can be a make-or-break on the impression of him for some *same-day visitors*.



Figure 4-22 Outside Kumamon Square, Source: Author (2018)

Tourists may come to Kumamon Square based on Stylianou-Lambert's (2011) *social visitation filter* and *rejection filter* (described on p.32). One couple was not interested in seeing Kumamon except for their son's interest in him. They brought him, so he could enjoy Kumamon. The couple wanted to please him by falsifying their fondness of Kumamon; however, it is a way for them to be a family and participate in activities together. The parents' main filter was *social visitation* and the secondary *rejection filter* of pretending to like Kumamon and his museum. It is possible to apply the same filters to many other couples with children who are part of larger tour groups. Since it is only a small fraction of their tour itinerary in Japan, individuals will please others who primarily gaze through *cultural tourism filter*, and people who dislike cultural attractions will see through secondary filters such as rejection which are not physically expressed.

4.5.4 Staff Interview Analysis

Kumamon Square always has 2-3 female staff members on the floor with one male head manager. For this analysis, 2 staff members were interviewed who had some free time while working. Two of the staff interviewed were Japanese while one was Chinese. One of the Japanese staff members could speak some English while the Chinese staff member could speak Mandarin and some Japanese and English. When the author interviewed the staff members,

they stated that many visitors come from Taiwan, China, and Hong Kong while only a few visitors come from Southeast Asia, the Americas, and Europe. This matches accordingly to the statistical data provided by the Kumamoto Government Tourism Agency (Figure 4-21, refer to p.80). It is necessary to have at least one Chinese staff member to assist many Chinese visitors, yet this is only the case during weekends.

The first question asked was, “Why do you think foreigners come here? Do you think they come to Kumamoto just to see Kumamon or to see Kumamoto?” The staffer replied that some visitors come just to see Kumamon while some visitors just want to visit the prefecture; however, when visitors are curious, then they will come to Kumamon Square. The staffer’s response confirms that visitors from abroad are interested in Kumamon or will have some curiosity in him at some point during their trip.

Next, the researcher asked the question, “Why do you like Kumamon?” to a staffer. The author believed this question to be necessary since staff should have an interest in Kumamon because they work on the behalf of him in his space. The staffer replied that she likes Kumamon, and for her, it allows her to communicate with foreigners. By working there, she can speak with foreigners daily. For her, it is more than just a job, but it is the chance to improve international relations with visitors.

The final question asked was, “Do you think the earthquake had any effect on the amount of people who come to Kumamoto?” The staffer responded that it did have a negative effect on the number of tourists; however, the number recovered to normal levels and greater with more visitors. As show in Figure 4-23 (p.84), the number of foreign guests has rapidly increased after the 2016 Kumamoto earthquakes, but the current published statistics do not show the growth for 2018. With the number of visitors growing each day, it has put limitations on Kumamon Square. The staff said that they can only accommodate 120 visitors inside at one

Kumamon's day off, but the *expert-fan* seemed relieved that he could visit there based on the author's one-on-one interview. *Expert-fans* ensure that they will get the most out of their trip through careful coordination with other *expert-fans* abroad and with local Japanese *expert-fans*. *Overnight-fan* visitors came prepared; they practiced conversational Japanese; they were friends with local *expert-fans*; and they knew Kumamon's appearance schedule at every location (available on the Official Kumamon Homepage).

Overnight-fans and *same-day expert-fan* visitors provided a wealth of details on handlers and *Mons* as discussed in Kumamon's Communication Analysis section. *Expert-fans'* expertise in these areas contributed additional information that the author was unaware of. Future work with mascot fans is needed to understand the reasoning for why they follow mascots and generate related theories.

4.5.5 Interviewee Analysis of Kumamon Awareness outside Japan

The analysis of tourist interviews and follow-up surveys revealed the importance of Kumamon's physical appearance. His physical appearance is highlighted by interviewees' awareness of him. Tourists acknowledged Kumamon's traits as: baby, bear, cute, clumsy, emoji, fat, famous, foolish, naughty, round and even Deadpool

(Marvel comic hero who is red and black). These words strongly support the views of Kumamon by the gaze of audience. When gazers view him, they are attracted to his strong mascot odors (Occhi, 2017). It is possible that Kumamon's odors are easily diffused by people of Chinese descent since he resembles the giant panda from China. In Taiwan, Kumamon looks like the Formosan black bear in Figure 4-24 (Le Blanc & Masami, 2016). The Formosan black bear of Kaohsiung has its own mascot called "Hero" who



Figure 4-24 Kumamon and Hero, Source: Kaohsiung City Government (2015)

resembles Kumamon with red cheeks (Kaohsiung City Government, 2015; Formosan black bear, 2017). Both, Hero and Kumamon, share an alliance to promote direct flights and tourism between Kumamoto City and Kaohsiung, Taiwan, (Kaohsiung City Government, 2018). This example shows the effectiveness of city branding and working together to create the tourist gaze across two different countries utilizing similar mascots.



Figure 4-25 Kumamon emoji, Source: Kumamon Funny Expressions (2013)

In China, Kumamon images are spread word-of-mouth through memes. Meme- “a cultural item in the form of an image, video, phrase, etc., that is spread via the Internet and often altered in a creative or humorous way” (Dictionary.com, 2019). WeChat is popular messenger application developed for the Chinese market which allows users to send messages, make payments and perform booking services (Kharpal, 2019). Users of the service copy images of Kumamon from online and subtitle them with humorous remarks. Many sites exist with pre-created memes for users to enjoy and download. For example, pictures of Kumamon are subtitled with various idioms that reflect the feelings of the user as stated by a Chinese citizen whom the author interviewed (Figure 4-25; “Apply eye cream while staying up late,” author’s translation, 2019). When discussing Kumamon and WeChat, the interviewee noted the restrictions of SNS by the Chinese government, “No emojis, just like Twitter, but you know in China we can’t use Twitter and Facebook.” The interviewee was refereeing to “The Great Firewall of China,” which heavily restricts the usage of websites that operate outside the country. However, even though SNS websites like Facebook are restricted, Chinese users rely

on close alternatives and clones to spread information such as RenRen or WeChat (King, et al., 2013). WeChat users frequently send memes of Kumamon uttering nonsensical comments to reflect their feelings since outside SNS are restricted. The frequent use of Kumamon memes sheds a positive light on him for others to discover where he originates from and attract fans to meet him in real life (Wang, 2017).

To analyze Kumamon awareness through memes, we need to examine “cultural odors.” User-created memes of Kumamon as well as other outside characters or products give off “cultural odors” (Occhi, 2017). The cultural odor determines how easily a product or idea adapts to a local market (Iwabuchi, 2002). Some cultural odors are very strong and are easily diffused by locals, which allows them to integrate into the local market better than foul odors (As stated before, some bears from other countries resemble Kumamon). In Japan, *yuru-kyara* are easily diffused by local markets since their names are a mixture of nouns and onomatopoeic expressions that are understood in the Japanese language (Occhi, 2017). However, abroad, character names are unlikely to be understood by foreign audiences, so the reliance on the character’s image should be considered. In China, for example, Kumamon blends seamlessly into the Chinese market since he bears some resemblance to the country’s national animal, the giant panda (Chelangat, 2018). Moreover, his official Chinese name is translated as Kumamoto and bear in one word (Kyodo News, 2019.). Even though Kumamon is not a bear as stated by the Kumamoto Prefecture, the fact that he resembles a bear or panda is absorbable by the Chinese public (Kumamoto Brand Office, 2015; Occhi, 2017). In the wake of the 2016 Great Kumamoto Earthquake, Chinese citizens supported the prefecture with artworks showing Kumamon being supported by a great panda (Le Blanc & Masami, 2016). However, cultural odors are not always well received. Globalization is problematic when the odor is received as “foul” in the case of western audiences from the United States.

4.5.6 Interview Limitations

On site in-depth interviews had many limiting factors. First, tourists were not restricted to Kumamon Square; tourists could go freely shopping or to other areas of downtown. The site was only recognized as a meeting and departure point for them. Secondly, the author found that conducting interviews for more than 5 minutes was problematic. Tourists were not interested in using their valuable time, because their visit only lasted an hour or less before departing on their tour buses outside the department building. Kumamon Square is just part of their itineraries as stated by a tour guide. Moreover, only one tour guide was interviewed, which does not account for how other agencies include Kumamon Square in their itineraries. It is also likely that other tourism agencies ignore Kumamon Square and the city. To overcome these limitations, arrangements should be made to conduct one-on-one interviews at the interviewees' accommodations or another location, as well as interviews with travel agencies and their itineraries.

Cultural barriers were another problem for interviews. Because of diverse populations, dissimilar cultures and nationalities can pose problems when conducting research since context factors will influence the way people respond. It should be expected that cultural differences will influence people's attitudes and beliefs depending on the structure of the question (Dimanche & Griffin, 2017). At the location, many of the tourists who were interviewed were Chinese or of Chinese descent, so it was difficult to ensure the structure of the questions to individual cultures. To overcome this limitation, questions for international tourists should be tailored to the regions from which the visitors are from. This would solve disparities in the context of questions.

Finally, the language barrier was another constraint. The researcher's native language is only English. Even though English was spoken, as a second language, by many tourists who

were interviewed, they were not necessarily able to comprehend the context of questions. Sometimes, speakers could not respond to the questions, so they had to be reworded. This could cause lost-in-translation interpretations of the original question. Although the researcher was able to compromise with easier-to-understand English, some responses were at risk for misinterpretation later in the analysis. To overcome this final limitation, it would be beneficial to seek out external talent who are bilingual in both English and the target language to be translated. By working with an interpreter, it would benefit the researcher in constructing their ideas and questions into the target language and overcome cultural barriers.

4.6 Conclusion

Emerging themes among interviewees:

There were three groups of interviewees: tourists, tour-guide, and staff. From the analysis, the general theme of “awareness” and “curiosity” emerged from primary data (participant observations, tourist interviews, and follow-up feedback) and secondary data (academic articles, news publishing, journals, YouTube, etc.). Tourists interviewed were aware of Kumamon in their home countries. Tourists had some prior knowledge of who he was from social media (pictures and videos), products available, and SNS (WeChat where Kumamon is popular as an emoji). Moreover, his popularity abroad indicates that tourism agencies pay close attention to mascot awareness when planning tours. The tour guide interviewed said that Kumamon Square is part of travel itineraries; however, further studies are needed to learn if travel agencies are aware of mascot destinations or not. Finally, staff were aware that foreign visitors who are curious will come to see Kumamon in his museum. This information was supported by the author’s participant observations. Passerby visitors were generally curious of going inside, even if Kumamon was not present to see the museums and exhibits. “Awareness” and “curiosity” are themes that go together, so long as the mascot and its destination are

attractive to tourists and people abroad. Undoubtedly, if Kumamon was not popular, people may not be aware or curious about who he is.

The connection between all sections of analysis:

Kumamoto's strategic approach was the connection between all five analysis sections: Kumamon, Kumamoto's city branding approach, Kumamon's communication, Kumamon Square and museums, and tourist. First, the prefecture established the narrative of Kumamon by clearly defining his character, job, and goal of spreading awareness. Kumamoto then took it upon themselves to make him royalty-free instead of holding all the image rights; this allowed for rapid growth and spread through product sales, promotional materials, and user creations. Next, the prefecture needed to ensure that Kumamon's messages would not be misunderstood by viewers. To protect him and the image of the prefecture, handlers were employed to interpret his body language and gestures. Since he cannot speak, handlers watch over him as his family, coordinate with his performances, and more importantly, communicate his love for the prefecture and its goods. Since Kumamon is a government employee of Kumamoto, the prefecture created a dedicated museum to him. This museum functions as a major tourist destination that educates visitors on him and the prefecture's localities and goods. Most notably, the museum is an interaction space between Kumamon and visitors. People who come to Kumamon Square can build a relationship through one-on-one interactions with him. The museum is also free-of-charge and allows visitors to come as often as they like. In conclusion, Kumamon Square can be valued as the key to success in Kumamoto's strategic approach because the museum brings all aspects of Kumamon together in one place.

Chapter 5

5.1 Discussion and Findings

The following explains how the study answered the research question set forth by the author.

1. How does mascot awareness abroad attract visitors to the destination where the mascot is from?

When designed and implemented correctly, mascots are successful in raising awareness of localities and goods with the public. Kumamoto Prefecture has shown that Kumamon follows the green path and all of Mr. Miura's criteria (refer to p.44-46), which is necessary in attracting visitors to the destination. A loveable character must be implemented first which appeals to local stakeholders and consumers. After achieving this, then it is possible for the mascot to be recognized and attract visitors from abroad. However, mascots who cannot follow the three criteria become ineffective and damage the reputation of localities at a cost to the stakeholders and locals. Most notably, Nara Prefecture's Sento-kun received public disapproval based on his appearance and failed Mr. Miura's third criteria (refer to p.44). Likewise, there are examples of one-hit-wonders like Chiitan, who was received well by audiences; however, the mascot ended up being ousted by stakeholders and locals for its violent manners and misrepresentation of the area, thereby failing the first and second criteria. Kumamon, in comparison, has proven himself to be a promotional success with locals, stakeholders, and others outside Japan. His royalty-free rights and strict but flexible image control continue to protect the prefecture's image and locals.

Kumamon stays proactive fresh in the mind of viewers. He frequently appears abroad to promote the prefecture and is fully supported by his PR team, stakeholders, and fans. Kumamon has shown that people abroad view him favorably so long as he continues to adhere to the mascot criteria and does not deviate from the green path of success in other regions

abroad. In East Asia, his image abroad is well-known, and his cultural odors are well received, but this is not always the case. In the United States, his gesture “For the Glory of Satan!” became an unintended meme that lead to “foul” odors abroad with Western audiences, but this did not last (Occhi, 2017; Know Your Meme, 2016).

People abroad who are fans or curious may not hesitate to visit Kumamon and the prefecture if their gaze is strong. From the analysis, tourists were interested in him or adaptable to using secondary filters to please others who were part of their group. Kumamon brings out the best in viewers by making them excited, happy and eager to touch him to achieve their gaze cravings. Without his fame abroad garnering gazers, many would not have come otherwise to discover Kumamoto prefecture. This point was clearly illustrated by one fan’s comment, “Sure, I know of Kumamoto, but without Kumamon I would probably never have gone there. Now I feel a sense of affinity and loyalty to Kumamoto and everything about Kumamoto as well.”

2. Why are international visitors satisfied with Kumamon Square?

- a. How are destination’s museum exhibits unique?
- b. What patterns do visitors follow to utilize the exhibits?

Kumamon has proven that mascot awareness is effective in attracting many visitors to the prefecture, and especially to Kumamon Square in Kumamoto City. Recently, Kumamon Square celebrated its achievement of over 2.5 million visitors since its original opening in 2013 (Kumamon Square Blog, 2018). Kumamon Square, unlike Funassyi’s Funassyiland shop that is dedicated to retail sales (Welcome to Funassyiland, 2019), is a popular destination for tourists. The large numbers of visitors and repeat visitors from field research observations, and the special celebration suggest that visitors are satisfied; however, the author recommends that Kumamon Square expand its facilities as soon as possible to accommodate late visitors and prevent overcrowding.

The museum's exhibits are unique since they focus on building the relationship between visitors, Kumamon, and the prefecture. The exhibits are about educating guests on localities and goods from the prefecture, free-of-charge. Visitors to the museum followed the most economical path around the museum while taking the most direct route to exhibits in the museum when needed (Bitgood, 2006). The museum facilitated in answering research questions and studying new phenomena such as handlers and *Mon* personalities.

3. What are mascot handlers?

- a. How do handlers interpret Kumamon's actions to spread brand awareness?
- b. What are the multiple personalities of mascots?

Handlers guide mascots to performance areas and assist them in promoting brand awareness. Kumamon has used handlers since his first debut to spread the Kumamon brand and promote the prefecture. His handlers are unique in that they assist in his narrative discourse with the audience. Kumamon's handlers rally up the audience and interpret Kumamon's actions into words for everyone to understand. Moreover, these handlers work with multiple *Mon* personalities. Handlers adjust to the *Mon* who is present to ensure that there are no misinterpretations between him and viewers. According to fan speculation, the different handlers hint at which *Mon* personality will be present. However, additional studies are needed to understand why each handler and personality is important to viewers and Kumamon's image.

5.2 Recommendations and Implications

There were three phenomena observed which require further investigation and understanding- mascot handlers, mascot museums, and mascot personalities. The author found these phenomena of importance since they are underlying factors to Kumamon's success and can be applied to other mascots. City branding and mascot awareness have proven successful in marketing a location and products in oversaturated markets. However, for consumers to be

personally engaged in mascots, it is recommended that these other factors be researched, tested, and implemented to help other mascots and marketing teams to follow Kumamoto's method.

5.2.1 Mascot Handlers

Literature on mascot handlers is currently limited and does not detail or account for the number of different roles they play involving mascots. It is recommended that the use of mascot handlers require further studies to understand their roles; why they chose this profession; and how they interact with crowds and fans. The handlers are vital to the success of mascot management and its image since most cannot speak for themselves. Because Kumamon has utilized mascot handlers (his elder siblings) since his debut, they have played a vital role in guiding his narrative and role with audience members.

For this study, the researcher did not have time to communicate or conduct interviews with Kumamon's handlers or view other mascots who also utilize handlers. These limitations will require additional field studies and resources to understand the roles assigned to handlers. The implications of personal handlers with mascots is necessary to build brand awareness of local attractions and goods the same way Kumamon has.

5.2.2 Mascot Personalities

Mons are a new concept that is not fully understood by the author. Currently, it is not possible to know which personality is present without deep *expert-fan* knowledge or research on individual handlers. It is recommended that *Mon* behavioral studies be undertaken to understand how they interact with audiences and other handlers. It may be possible that all mascots have multiple personalities depending on the being who controls them. For the author's research of Kumamon, there is no doubt that a new area of mascot personalities needs to be further investigated since it has promising implications for other *yuru-kyara*. Once mascot

personalities are understood, it might be possible to understand the types of fans that they attract and ways of improving the mascots image to fit various market segments and consumers.

5.2.3 Mascot Museums

Museums serve as a major tourist destination for inbound visitors. Kumamon Square provides the groundwork for other mascots to create their own museums for attracting visitors. Because Kumamon Square is free to the public, anyone can enter and exit the museum out of curiosity or interest to learn about Kumamon. In the case of Kumamon Square, it gives visitors the opportunity to understand Kumamon's history, workspace, treasures (certificates and awards), Kumamoto's prefectural products, and most of all, the chance to interact live with Kumamon.

For future studies, the author recommends that mascot museums, such as Kumamon Square, be further investigated to understand their role as tourist destinations and the implications for other mascots. Mascot museums are special in that they foster an emotional relationship between the public and what the local mascot represents. However, additional studies are needed to understand the functions of this relationship in attracting tourist. Additionally, studies should focus on how mascot museums utilize their floor space and exhibits to quickly educate visitors. Lastly, it is recommended that mascot brand managers understand how to develop and curate their own museums to be accessible to various audiences. The author believes that mascot museums hold the future as new destinations for visitors to experience and be well-informed about local products and attractions.

5.2.4 Future Research Questions

Here are potential questions for further studies into mascot museums, handlers, and personalities.

1. What criteria are important in the makeup of mascot museums?
 - a. How can new criteria be utilized in existing or future mascot museums?

- b. How can regions attract visitors to these destinations to learn more about localities and local goods through mascots?
- 2. How are Kuma- “*Mons*” important to audience members?
 - a. Do different *Mons* and handlers attract different audiences?
 - b. Can viewers predict Kumamon’s exact personality depending on the handler present?
 - c. When multiple handlers are present, does Kumamon possess multiple personalities?

5.3 Research Limitations

Mascots are a popular topic in Japan; however, scholarly research in English is severely limited. Many books that cover Kumamoto’s strategic implementation of Kumamon are available, but only in Japanese text. The book, *Kumamon's Success Rules of being Beloved and the Secret to Earnings*, which is published by the Kumamon Team, would be beneficial to other researchers in learning the strategies behind famous mascots. Scholars, such as Occhi Debra, have read and used Kumamon publishing in their research; however, directly translated text of books on Kumamon’s success are unavailable in English. Having books available in other languages would greatly reduce some of the present limitations in *yuru-kyara* research.

Lastly, the researcher’s destination was limited to only Kumamon Square. Kumamon does not only visit his shop, but he frequently travels around to other prefectures in Japan and around the world. Addressed in Kumamon’s personal blog, he often visits many prefectures throughout the year and places abroad like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China. It would be beneficial to the researcher to follow Kumamon to these other destinations, especially in foreign countries, to see how their residents behave in his presence and to interview them about their intentions to visit Kumamoto. However, to overcome this obstacle would require special

planning and a greater budget to observe and follow Kumamon to other locations. If successful, the data gathered from other destinations would be invaluable for the research on mascots abroad and how to tailor them various market segments.

5.4 Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, the author contributed the following four theoretical contributions to the understanding of *kyara*- the Mascot Selection Guide Map, mascot handlers, mascot personalities, and mascot museums.

First, the Mascot Selection Guide Map contributes as a mascot strategy execution tool for cities looking to develop and introduce their own mascots. Additionally, it may be used as a guide for determining a mascot for study within related research (refer to p.45-46). For cities, the guide is simple because it illustrates the developmental process from start to finish (successful destination awareness through character branding). Furthermore, the guide integrates Mr. Miura's three mascot criteria into the green path, which successful mascots follow. Lastly, the guide warns cities and researchers of the possible failures that mascots may encounter if they do not adhere to the green path and three criteria. While this guide is not perfect, it was developed to understand what makes a successful mascot and assist the author in choosing a feasible *yuru-kyara* over others.

The second contribution to *kyara* research was from the analysis of mascot handlers, as they are not studied well. Handlers play a vital role in the success of a mascot, especially in the case of Kumamon where he cannot speak for himself. Handlers work as interpreters and deliver the message of the agency, which the mascot communicates through bodily movements and gestures. Handlers ensure that the mascot's messages are not misinterpreted, and so they can further educate the audience on localities and goods. By clearly understanding the management roles between mascots and their handlers, the researcher believes that this analysis will assist

other scholars and mascots creators in the current knowledge gaps that exist in *yuru-kyara* research.

The third contribution to the understanding of *kyara* was mascot personalities. A mascot is ultimately controlled by an individual in *kigurumi* (costume) form. Although Kumamon is in his “flesh and blood” as stated by the prefecture, he cannot be everywhere at once. Moreover, it means his personality will likely vary from the typical ‘naughty and curious.’ This is a tricky problem for the prefecture to preserve the illusion of only one Kumamon. However, through an expert-fan’s explanation of *Mons*, we can better understand that multiple Kumamons exist because of his multiple personalities, and we can better explain his presence in various locations. Expert-fans attribute his actions and behaviors in public to whichever handler is present with him during live performances. By understanding the relationship between handlers and mascot personalities, we can begin to understand the role of *yuru-kyara* in public.

The final contribution was in the analysis and understanding of Kumamon Square as a “mascot museum” destination. This location was favorable to the study of *kyara* because it offered an insight to how Kumamoto reinforces mascot awareness and promotion of its localities and goods through interactive exhibitions. Moreover, the museum is a unique prospect for other mascot stakeholders to copy and attract their own tourism. This contribution shows that mascot museums are a necessity once a mascot has achieved awareness with consumers. The analysis of Kumamon Square as a museum is a new way for analyzing *kyara* phenomena.

By tying these contributions together, mascot awareness becomes prevalent in attracting inbound tourists, especially from East Asia. Tourists who come from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, already have some idea of who Kumamon is and where he originates from through mascot awareness in social media and prefectural PR abroad.

Kumamoto relies on a combination of the tourist gaze and mascot awareness, which the author describes as the “mascot gaze” (refer to p.30). The prefecture does this through brochures that are presented in Chinese and English utilizing Kumamon’s image along with local attractions and goods to invoke the gaze. Unfortunately, the “mascot gaze” may not appeal to all audiences. In interviews with Kumamon Square staff, South Korean visitors were not mentioned as guests to the facility nor were they part of the in-depth interviews. Although Koreans represent a large portion of the visitors to Kumamoto (Figure 4-21, refer to p.80), they may only be attracted through the tourist gaze.

The strategies taken by Kumamoto Prefecture show that mascot awareness is effective when the image is tightly controlled but just as effective when not. Giving creators the freedom to use his image, royalty-free, allows many to spread the awareness of Kumamon and Kumamoto Prefecture through the sale of Kumamon branded products. These goods, whether cheap or expensive, are bought and shared by customers at Kumamon Square or are purchased in the visitors’ home countries. However, not all images of Kumamon are controllable. In social media, fans write their emotions on images of Kumamon to share with others. These results demonstrate that invested fans abroad are interested in sharing him with others, so long as Kumamon remains relevant to them. The author believes, though, that the prefecture should work with fans and observe their creations to make official ones which protect the brand and satisfy customers.

Lastly, Kumamon Square is perhaps the first mascot museum dedicated to a *yuru-kyara*. It is filled with interactive exhibits that entertain and educate visitors on Kumamon and Kumamoto’s localities and goods. Observations at the museum showed that visitors enjoyed posing in pictures and taking part in the tourist gaze. The exhibits gave visitors the chance to perform poses and experience a phenomenon only available at Kumamon Square. However, the museum has one serious drawback, the facility’s limited space. The city should tackle this

problem by expanding its location to accommodate larger crowds as mascot awareness increases.

To conclude this work, successful mascot development and implementation leads to the branding of localities and goods in Japan and eventually abroad by invoking the “mascot gaze.” Kumamoto’s Kumamon has shown his achievements based on his success in the Mascot Selection Guide Map and through his contributions (handlers, personalities, and a museum) as a unique *yuru-kyara*. Becoming a famous mascot is no easy task, it requires research and support from all stakeholders. However, once fame is achieved, it is positive for local governments, stakeholders, and consumers. Kumamon is a prime example of a *yuru-kyara* who continues to appeal locally and internationally through support from the prefecture and his fans.

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Appendix A

September 28th and 29th, 2018 *Same-day visitor* Questionnaire:

Kumamoto International Tourist One-on-one Survey

1. Where are you from?
2. Is this your first time in Kumamoto?
3. Why did you come to Kumamoto?
4. Why did you come to see Kumamon?
5. How do you feel when you see Kumamon?
6. Is Kumamon Popular in your home country?
7. Do you buy Kumamon products?

Kumamon Square Shop Staff

1. How long have you worked here?
2. Where do the tourists come from?
3. What items do people buy most often?
4. What are the popular days for people to come see Kumamon?
5. What do you think of the shop space? Is it too big or too small?
6. Why do you like Kumamon?
7. Why do you think foreigners come here? Is it to see Kumamon or Kumamoto?

Appendix B

December 2018 *Expert-fan* Questionnaire

Kumamon Fan International Tourist Follow-up Online-Survey

1. What is your gender?
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
2. What is your age?
 - ☐ Under 20
 - ☐ 20-29
 - ☐ 30-39
 - ☐ 40-49
 - ☐ 50-59
 - ☐ 60+
3. What country are you from?
 - ☐ China
 - ☐ Hong Kong
 - ☐ Taiwan
 - ☐ South Korea
 - ☐ Singapore
 - ☐ Thailand
 - ☐ Vietnam
 - ☐ Other
4. What is the purpose of your trip?
 - ☐ Holiday/ Leisure
 - ☐ Business
 - ☐ Other

5. How long are you in Kumamoto?
 - ☐ Day trip
 - ☐ 1 night
 - ☐ 2 nights
 - ☐ 3 nights or more
6. Is this your first time to Kumamon Square? If “other,” how many times?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ Other
7. How long have you liked Kumamon? (Phueksakorn, 2017)
 - ☐ Less than 1 year
 - ☐ 1-2 years
 - ☐ 3-4 years
 - ☐ 5 years or more
 - ☐ I don't like Kumamon.
8. Where did you first see Kumamon in media?
 - ☐ My home country
 - ☐ Japan
 - ☐ Another country
 - ☐ I don't remember.
9. Describe Kumamon in your own words. For example, characteristics or features (colors, size, gestures, expression, personality, or movements of Kumamon).
10. How does Kumamon's influence in your home country attract you to Kumamoto? Was Kumamon an influence on your decision to visit? Why or why not?
11. What kind of relationship do you share with Kumamon? Do you think your friends have similar relationship with Kumamon, why or why not?
12. How is seeing Kumamon in person different from images online or products?

Kumamon Square and Events

1. Why do you think people come to Kumamon Square?
2. How is Kumamon Square influential on you?
3. Do you think your home country should have a Kumamon Square? Why or why not?
4. What Kumamon events or expos have you attended in your home country? Are they an influence on others to come to Kumamoto, why or why not?
5. What future Kumamon events do you want to see or attend?

Kumamoto's City Branding

City Branding is how one city makes itself stand out from others. For example, Harajuku is known for fashion and culture, and Shibuya is known for expensive shopping and high class.

1. Do you think Kumamoto City is successful at branding its city with Kumamon, Why or why not?
2. If Kumamoto City did not have Kumamon, would you still visit Kumamoto, why or why not?
3. What other mascots from other cities do you think are influential like Kumamon and why?

Follow-up Survey Responses

Tourist Fans	Follow-up Responses of three fans
Survey Completion Date	2018/12/17 (7:23:15) PM GMT+9 2018/12/28 (12:43:04) AM GMT+9 2018/12/30 (3:11:59) PM GMT+9
What is your gender?	Female Male Male
What is your age?	40-49 30-39 60+
What country are you from?	Taiwan China USA
What is the purpose of your trip?	Meeting Kumamon Business Holiday/ Leisure
Who planned your trip?	Myself Myself Myself
How long are you in Kumamoto?	3 nights or more Day trip 3 nights or more
Is this your first time to Kumamon Square? If "other," how many times?	Over ten times Yes More than 10 times this year, 2018
How long have you liked Kumamon?	3 - 4 years 3 - 4 years 1 - 2 years
Where did you first see this Kumamon media?	Japan My home country My home country
Describe Kumamon in your own words. For example,	Cute, friendly, healing, naughty, make my day happy

<p>characteristics or features (colors, size, gestures, expression, personality, or movements of Kumamon).</p>	<p>A big bear with two red circles on the face. Lovely and silly. Just like Deadpool~</p> <p>At first, Kumamon may appear fat and clumsy, but after countless YouTube videos I appreciated that he is actually very athletic and talented in many things! For me, what made me so fascinated and enamored with him was his attitude, in addition to his athleticism and talents. He seemed to do everything with 100% effort, and I felt motivated by this. Even when he is amusing the crowd, he does so with sincerity and seriousness (no contradiction, right?) Of course, Kumamon's character has a fixed facial expression, but thru gestures he easily communicates happiness, sadness, curiosity, naughtiness, regret, and even anger.</p>
<p>How does Kumamon's influence in your home country attract you to Kumamoto? Was Kumamon an influence on your decision to visit? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Because Kumamon is from Kumamoto, it makes me feeling to know Kumamon's hometown more. Yes, Kumamon is an influence on my decision to visit Kumamoto. I usually visiting Kumamoto when I want to go to Japan. Because Kumamoto is where Kumamon is.</p> <p>Kumamon in China be popular in Weibo and WeChat. Usually use Kumamon be chat emoticon. I visit Kumamoto because I like Japanese history to visit Kumamoto Castle.</p> <p>I have visited Kumamoto 3 times in 2018 to see Kumamon, and when he came to L. A. in July 2018, I went there to visit him as well. Sure, I know of Kumamoto, but without Kumamon I would probably never have gone there. Now I feel a sense of affinity and loyalty to Kumamoto and everything about Kumamoto as well.</p>
<p>What kind of relationship do you share with Kumamon? Do you think your friends have similar relationship with Kumamon, why or why not?</p>	<p>I think Kumamon is very important in my life. After seeing him, all my sadness and stress will be gone.</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>I think that I have become a Kumamon and Kumamoto brand ambassador in my circle of friends and family. In my most recent trip to Kumamoto in December 2018, I came across even more fervent Kumamon fans!</p>
<p>How is seeing Kumamon in person different from images online or products?</p>	<p>Kumamon in person is funnier and cuter, and interactive. He will always like you and cheer you up.</p> <p>He is so big and more cute!</p> <p>In real life, Kumamon is BIG! No wonder some little kids are afraid.</p>
<p>Why do you think people come to Kumamon Square?</p>	<p>Meeting Kumamon of course. To see the cutest mascot in the world.</p> <p>See real Kumamon</p>

	Because they have done some research - about meeting Kumamon during his "Office Hours", AND to buy Kumamon products that are all either made in Kumamoto or in Japan!
How is Kumamon Square influential on you?	<p>Kumamon Square is a place that full of joyful and happiness. Going there make me feel happy.</p> <p>I thought Kumamon's office so small.</p> <p>That you can get close to Kumamon.</p>
Do you think your home country should have a Kumamon Square? Why or why not?	<p>No. Kumamon Square should be in Kumamoto. That is what Kumamon's existence value.</p> <p>Should have a square like this. Because many people love him.</p> <p>Perhaps a Kumamoto products office such as the one in Ginza, Tokyo.</p>
What Kumamon events or expos have you attended in your home country? Are they an influence on others to come to Kumamoto, why or why not?	<p>International Travel Fair and Presentation of Kumamoto's agricultural products and Kumamon's goods.</p> <p>In our country haven't events or expos for Kumamon. Intellectual property is a reason.</p> <p>I attended the Nisei (2nd-generation in Japanese) festival in Los Angeles in July 2018. I collected some tourist information about Kumamoto, and made a subsequent trip to Kumamoto in October 2018, and again in December 2018.</p>
What future Kumamon events do you want to see or attend?	<p>He already participated so many different events, I am satisfied with that.</p> <p>I want see a Kumamon film.</p> <p>I will attend the Kumamon Thanksgiving in Osaka in February 2019, and his birthday festival in Tokyo and Kumamoto in March 2019.</p>
Do you think Kumamoto City is successful at branding its city with Kumamon, Why or why not?	<p>Yes. Before Kumamon appears, I didn't know Kumamoto at all, and didn't realize there are so many agricultural products and excellent scenery.</p> <p>Yes it's successful for Kumamoto. Not all the people like me love Japanese history...Most people like lovely thing.</p> <p>Extremely! Governor Ikuo Kabashima is a genius! Harvard, his alma mater, should be very proud!!</p>
If Kumamoto City did not have Kumamon, would you still visit Kumamoto, why or why not?	<p>Yes, but will not be so frequently like now. If is only for travelling, I will choose to go to more places instead of going Kumamoto so many times.</p> <p>Like my answers upon. Japan has three famous castles in Nagoya, Osaka and Kumamoto. The other two I had visited.</p> <p>Probably not.</p>

<p>What other mascots from other cities do you think are influential like Kumamon and why?</p>	<p>Unamo. He is also so cute and he can speak. His movement and voice is really cute.</p> <p>Seriously every Japanese city has a mascot. Before the Kumamon popular. A mother mascot Fanshii was the mascot champion.</p> <p>Not currently interested in any other yuru-kyara at the moment, and as far as I know no other yuru-kyara even comes close to the success of Kumamon.</p>
<p>Any comments, ideas or feedback? Please write freely about anything you want to talk about, thank you!</p>	<p>The birth of Kumamon is a coincidence, but he works so hard and brings so many happiness for people. I will support him forever.</p> <p>Japan like Rome. You should visit it for many time and you still few good !</p> <p>I would love to get a copy of your finished report/work. Thanks for the opportunity.</p>