



The Application of The Wabi-Sabi Concept in Japan's Tourism Marketing Strategy

Arieni Zettira Ariyanto, Marwati Abdulsalam, Putri Hamida Salsabila, Senny Luckyardi, Eddy Soeryanto
Soegoto, Lia Warlina*

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: E-mail: marwati.63821043@mahasiswa.unikom.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine how the aesthetic values of wabi-sabi can be applied in tourism marketing strategies to attract tourists. The research method involved collecting data through questionnaires distributed to 20 respondents, who were asked to assess their perceptions of aesthetic presentation in tourism campaigns. The results show that Japan places high value on its natural beauty and traditional sites, which is reflected in its use of wabi-sabi principles simplicity, imperfection, and transience in marketing. This aesthetic approach emphasizes authenticity and harmony with nature, resonating with tourists who seek peaceful and meaningful travel experiences. Tourist destinations promoted through wabi-sabi-inspired visuals often match their real-world appearance, which builds trust and enhances visitor satisfaction. Respondents noted that tourism materials using natural imagery, subtle tones, and simple yet elegant designs were more appealing and emotionally engaging. These qualities encourage a deeper connection between the tourist and the destination. In conclusion, incorporating wabi-sabi aesthetics into tourism marketing not only enriches visual appeal but also strengthens authenticity, helping destinations stand out by offering more genuine and emotionally resonant experiences.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the tourism industry faces increasingly complex challenges in attracting tourists. Amid intense competition, tourist destinations must develop unique and engaging marketing strategies (Manafe et al., 2016). As one of the world's most popular tourist destinations, Japan boasts extraordinary cultural and natural wealth (Keadplang, 2024). One intriguing concept to apply is wabi-sabi. Wabi-sabi as the essence of beauty and simplicity in Japanese culture. It is a perspective that shapes their way of life, influencing various aspects subtly yet profoundly (Arrasyid et al., 2024 ; Darmawan & Parhan, 2023). The Japanese naturally understand the concept of wabi-sabi, but it is difficult to articulate in words. Wabi-sabi is an intriguing mystery, offering wisdom to those who are willing to contemplate and approach it with an open mind. Wabi-sabi is an essential aesthetic concept in Japanese culture that appreciates beauty in imperfection, transience, and naturalness. In modern marketing, this concept appears in design elements emphasizing simplicity, natural imperfections, and asymmetrical balance (Ruhimat et al., 2024 ; Darmawan et al., 2023).

After understanding the concept of wabi-sabi, it is also important to grasp the concept of tourism marketing. Tourism marketing is a system and coordination that must be implemented as a policy for tourism businesses or industry groups, whether private or governmental, at local, regional, national, or international levels to achieve tourist satisfaction while obtaining reasonable profits (Arrasyid et al., 2019 ; Isya et al., 2021).

Previous studies have highlighted the application of wabi-sabi in art, interior design, and products. Japanese beauty product design demonstrated the use of wabi-sabi in Shiseido products. This approach emphasizes simple eco-friendly aesthetics, reflecting deeper and more sustainable values. Another study suggests sustainable applications of wabi-sabi in ceramic design, proposing its principles as a guiding framework for ceramic products (Du et al., 2024 ; Haghani et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is a need to explore in greater depth how wabi-sabi can be applied in product design as a whole to shift away from the narrow and commercialized view of this aesthetic. Wabi-sabi concept in restaurant interior design and public spaces has the potential to create a calming atmosphere that connects people with nature, thereby attracting consumers who appreciate experiences beyond mere product consumption. However, most existing studies focus solely on product and interior design aspects, with limited research specifically addressing the use of wabi-sabi in marketing strategies for tourist destinations (Sukma, 2024 ; Desi et al., 2024).

Beauty can be found in imperfection, or less is more, which refers to creating excellence through simplicity. For example, Japan applies wabi-sabi aesthetics in marketing its tourist attractions by emphasizing the natural beauty of its landscapes. Japan's approach to marketing its natural and traditional tourist sites, such as temples, has been successful in attracting international tourists to visit and witness their beauty firsthand. Japan does not engage in excessive marketing of its tourist destinations; instead, it highlights the simplicity of its natural beauty and the authenticity of its traditional tourist spots. This ensures that the attractions marketed to tourists reflect the actual beauty they possess, preventing tourists from feeling misled by Japan's promotional efforts (Logaya et al., 2023 ; Darmawan et al., 2023 ; Salira et al., 2024).

However, the Japanese people's understanding of the wabi-sabi concept may differ. From the Japanese perspective, only those with knowledge and expertise can detect and appreciate the subtle and hidden beauty of wabi-sabi. In contrast, Western perspectives suggest everyone can understand and experience it. This contrast makes wabi-sabi more global but may lead to mismatches between tourists' expectations and the experiences offered (Łaziuk, 2020, Du & Joo, 2021 ; Kumar, 2022).

This study aims to explore how the aesthetic values of wabi-sabi can be applied in tourism marketing strategies to attract tourists. This is particularly relevant as Japan is widely recognized for its stunning natural beauty and well-preserved traditional tourist sites. The research employs a quantitative method, selecting respondents who have visited places embodying wabi-sabi values. Data is collected through questionnaires distributed to individuals who have directly experienced wabi-sabi beauty. This approach aims to determine whether the natural beauty and tourist sites marketed by Japan align with the actual reality they offer (Henry et al., 2025 ; Yang, 2021 ; Wang & Zakaria, 2025).

2. METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach using a questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire consists of four main sections: respondents' demographic information, their understanding and perception of the wabi-sabi concept, the application of wabi-sabi in Japan's tourism marketing, and respondents' impressions and expectations regarding the promotion of this concept.

The researcher selected respondents from about 20 Japanese Department students of Universitas Komputer Indonesia who are currently in Japan or have previously visited Japan. The study focuses on individuals who have visited places that embody wabi-sabi values. Data was collected through questionnaires distributed to individuals who have directly experienced the beauty of wabi-sabi. The researcher posed several questions to these individuals regarding their experiences and feelings when witnessing wabi-sabi beauty firsthand. Once the data is collected, the researcher will draw conclusions based on the responses obtained from the questionnaire, reflecting the experiences of the respondents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the research findings using forms to collect data on people's perceptions and understanding of the wabi-sabi concept. The study aims to determine the extent of knowledge about wabi-sabi among individuals who have visited Japan or those with an interest in Japanese culture. The survey was conducted using forms containing questions about the role of wabi-sabi in Japanese tourism and how this concept attracts people to visit Japan.

To understand the concept of wabi-sabi, the author refers to the perspective of expert Leonard Koren. In his well-known book *Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers* (2008), Koren provides a significant definition of wabi-sabi. According to Koren, wabi-sabi is "an aesthetic that finds beauty in imperfection, irregularity, wear, and transience." He explains that wabi-sabi acknowledges the natural, ever-changing, and the world's impermanent nature. In Koren's view, this principle is not only about seeing beauty in broken or aged things but also about accepting the reality that life itself is temporary and filled with imperfections.

This section presents the data collected from respondents from various age groups, genders, experiences, and interests in Japanese tourism or traditional culture. The research scale used consists of five levels: 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), and 5 (Strongly Agree).

3.1. Understanding and Perception of the Wabi-Sabi Concept

Based on **Figure 1** and **Table 1**, 60% of respondents understand the concept of wabi-sabi as "beauty in simplicity," which aligns with Leonard Koren's definition in his book *Wabi-Sabi*

for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers. Meanwhile, 15% perceive wabi-sabi as “embracing imperfection,” and 10% interpret it as “natural and organic beauty.”

Next, based on **Figure 2** and **Table 2**, more than 75% of respondents chose that imperfection in beauty can attract their attention to visit Japan. This is because beauty in imperfection can connect us to a more universal experience. When we see something that appears imperfect, such as an object worn by time, a slightly cracked wall, or an aged item, we often feel closer to the story or journey that the object may have gone through. As a result, this can evoke a sense of empathy and emotional connection for those who appreciate it.

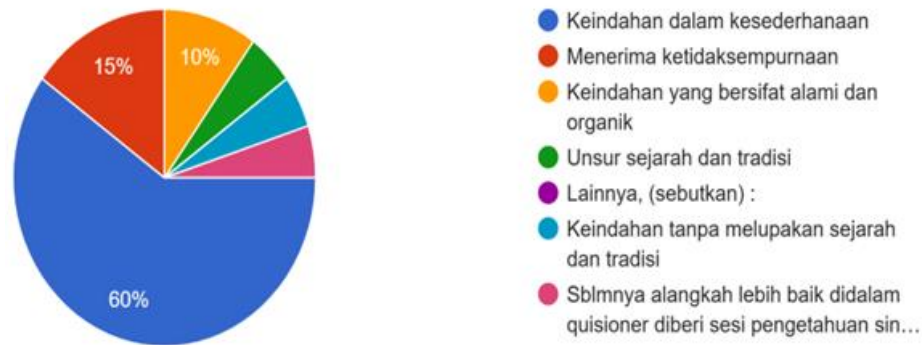


Figure 1. 60% of respondents understand the concept of wabi-sabi as “beauty in simplicity”.

Table 1. 60% of respondents understand the concept of wabi-sabi as “beauty in simplicity”.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	How would you describe the concept of wabi-sabi?						20

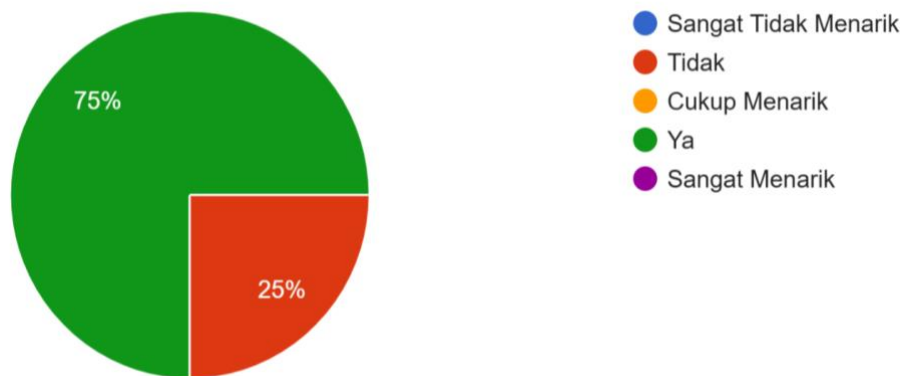


Figure 2. 75% of respondents chose that imperfection in beauty can attract their attention to visit Japan.

Table 2. 75% of respondents chose that imperfection in beauty can attract their attention to visit Japan.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
2	Do you feel that imperfect beauty	0	5	0	15	0	20

	catches your attention when you visit a place?						
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3.2. Application of Wabi-Sabi in Japanese Tourism Marketing

In **Figure 3** and **Table 3**, 35% agree that the concept of wabi-sabi can attract tourists who have an interest in authentic experiences; this is because the era has turned digital and full of distractions, and many tourists feel tired of the hustle and bustle of the world and its endless struggles. Tourism marketing emphasizing the concept of wabi-sabi can provide a space for them to rest their body and soul, reflect, and return to themselves. The concept of wabi-sabi allows tourists to experience stillness and reflection, which is rarely found in entertainment-oriented commercial tourism.

For example, tourists visiting a Japanese garden with tranquil ponds, mature trees, and natural stones not only enjoy the scenery but also experience a tranquility that brings them into a meditative state.

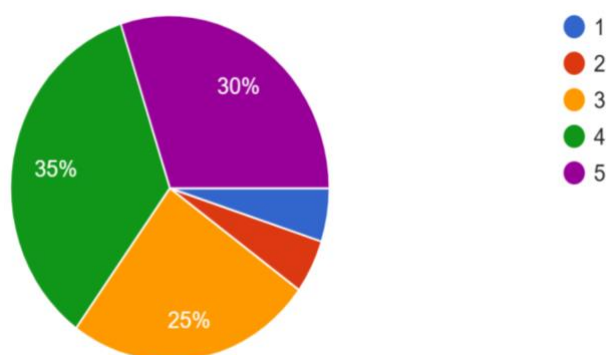


Figure 3. 35% agree that the concept of wabi-sabi can attract tourists who have an interest in authentic experiences.

Table 3. 35% agree that the concept of wabi-sabi can attract tourists who have an interest in authentic experiences.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
3	Japanese Tourism marketing that emphasizes the concept of wabi-sabi can attract tourists who seek authentic experiences	1	1	5	7	6	20

In **Figure 4** and **Table 4**, most respondents agree that objects that illustrate the concept of wabi-sabi can be more appealing than crowded and lively entertainment. This can be factored in if tourists want to find tranquility or want to take a break from the modern world.

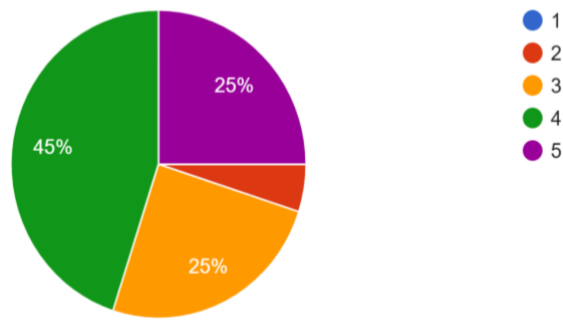


Figure 4. Respondents agree that objects that illustrate the concept of wabi-sabi.

Table 4. Respondents agree that objects that illustrate the concept of wabi-sabi.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
4	Tourist resources that exhibit simplicity and imperfection provide greater appeal to you.	0	1	5	9	5	20

According to **Figure 5** and **Table 5**, 40% agree that the depiction of Japan's natural beauty and traditional culture can add to the experience for tourists, this is because Japan is one of the countries that still maintains its traditional values from the influence of the modern era. Meanwhile, 15% of respondents chose neutral as well as disagreed about whether the Japan's natural beauty and traditional culture can provide their tourist experience.

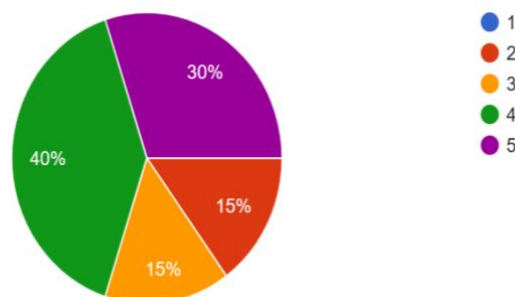


Figure 5. 40% agree that the depiction of Japan's natural beauty and traditional culture can add to the experience for tourists.

Table 5. 40% agree that the depiction of Japan's natural beauty and traditional culture can add to the experience for tourists.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
5	Do you think depicting of Japan's natural beauty and traditional culture in tourism marketing can enhance your travel experience?	0	3	3	8	6	20

Based on **Figure 6** and **Table 6**, 35% of respondents are very interested in quiet and reflective spiritual places and are neutral towards modern tourist attractions or traditional places that attract their attention.

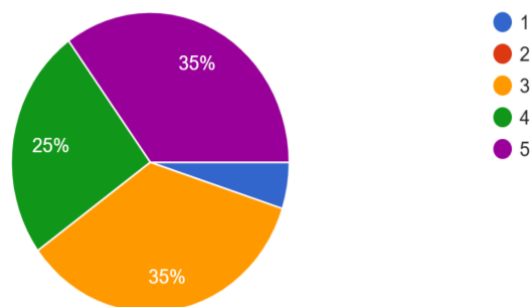


Figure 6. 35% of respondents are very interested in quiet and reflective spiritual places.

Table 6. 35% of respondents are very interested in quiet and reflective spiritual places.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
6	Tourism marketing that emphasizes calm and reflective settings, such as those found in nature or spiritual places, will appeal to you more than crowded or modern places.	1	0	7	5	7	20

Figure 7 and **Table 7** show that 30% of respondents agree and 15% strongly agree that they are attracted to tourist sites that show elements of natural imperfection, such as buildings that are worn out or gardens that appear unkempt. A total of 30% of respondents were neutral to this statement, while 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. Thus, a total of 45% of respondents gave a positive response to the idea, while 25% gave a negative response. This result may illustrate that despite the attraction to the element of natural imperfection, some respondents still feel hesitant or disapprove of this concept.

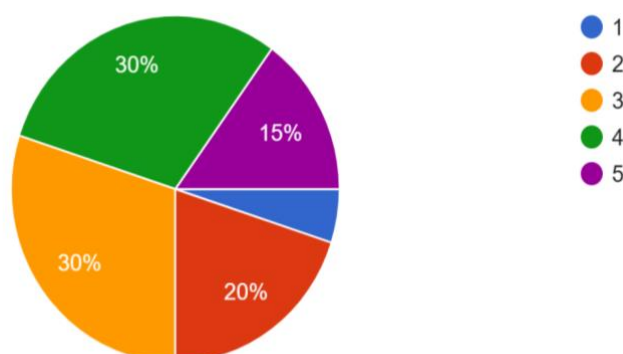
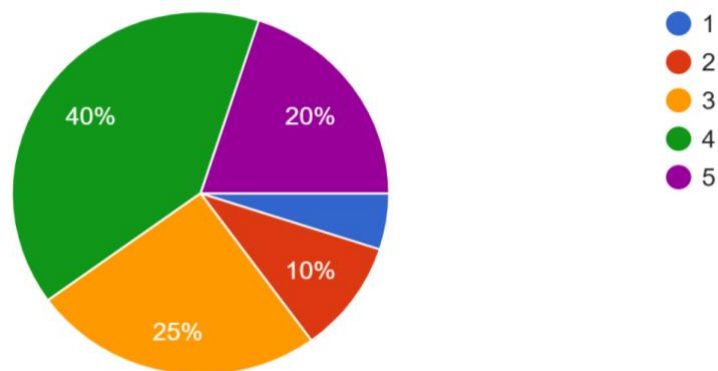


Figure 7. 30% of respondents agree and 15% strongly agree that they are attracted to tourist sites.

Table 7. 30% of respondents agree and 15% strongly agree that they are attracted to tourist sites.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
7	Are you more interested in visiting tourist sites that exhibit elements of natural imperfection, such as worn-out buildings or unkempt-looking gardens?	1	4	6	6	3	20

Figure 8 and **Table 8** show that most respondents (40%) agreed that using wabi-sabi themes in tourism promotional materials, such as posters, videos, and brochures, could make them more interested in visiting Japan. A total of 20% of respondents even strongly agreed with the statement, and a total of 60% of respondents gave a positive response. On the other hand, 25% of respondents were neutral, indicating they had no particular preference. Only 10% of respondents disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed with the statement. These results suggest that the wabi-sabi theme has good potential to be used as part of Japan's tourism promotion strategy.

**Figure 8.** Respondents (40%) agreed that using wabi-sabi themes.**Table 8.** Respondents (40%) agreed that using wabi-sabi themes.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
8	The use of wabi-sabi themes in tourism promotional materials (such as posters, videos, and brochures) will make you more interested in visiting Japan.	1	2	5	8	4	20

3.3. Impression and Expectation

Based on **Figure 9** and **Table 9**, the majority of respondents (75%) agreed that Japan has successfully promoted the concept of wabi-sabi in its tourism marketing. This shows that the concept is well-known and appreciated by tourists. However, 25% of respondents gave a neutral response, indicating that they did not fully understand the concept of wabi-sabi or felt that the element was less prominent in their travel experience. Based on this data, while promotion has been effective, there is still an opportunity to enhance more authentic tourism experiences or promotional campaigns that highlight the philosophical value of wabi-sabi.

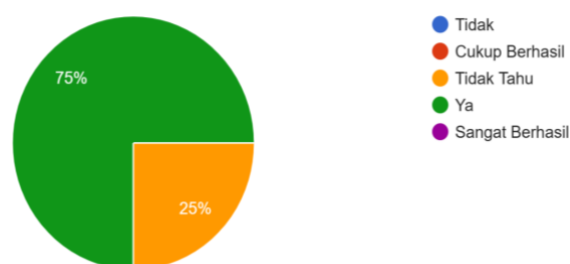


Figure 9. Majority of respondents (75%) agreed that Japan has successfully promoted the concept of wabi-sabi in its tourism marketing.

Table 9. Majority of respondents (75%) agreed that Japan has successfully promoted the concept of wabi-sabi in its tourism marketing.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
9	In your view, has Japan successfully promoted the concept of wabi-sabi in its tourism marketing?	0	0	5	15	0	20

The survey results in **Figure 10** and **Table 10** show that most respondents (95%) are interested in seeking more immersive and philosophical travel experiences, such as those offered by the wabi-sabi concept when visiting Japan. This reflects a high interest in travel experiences that also provide depth and philosophical value. However, one respondent (5%) disagreed, while no one responded in the “Strongly disagree” or “Strongly agree” categories. Overall, this data illustrates that the concept of wabi-sabi has great potential to be further developed as a Japanese tourism attraction.

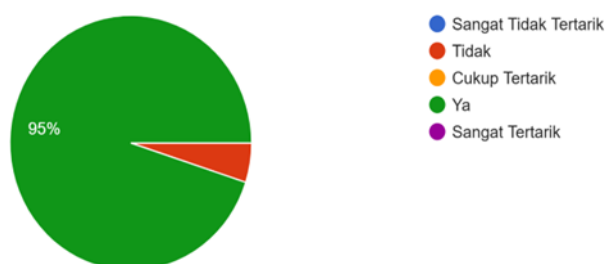


Figure 10. Survey results of respondents (95%) are interested in seeking more immersive and philosophical travel experiences.

Table 10. Survey results of respondents (95%) are interested in seeking more immersive and philosophical travel experiences.

No	Question	Strongly disagree	Do not agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
10	Are you interested in seeking a more immersive and philosophical travel experience, such as that offered by the concept of wabi-sabi, when visiting Japan?	0	1	0	19	0	20

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, applying the wabi-sabi concept in Japan's tourism marketing strategy has attracted foreign tourists by highlighting the beauty in imperfection, simplicity, and historical value. Moreover, marketing using the wabi-sabi concept can also provide a more memorable experience for tourists; indirectly, Japan offers space to reflect and create a deeper emotional connection. From the respondents' results, many tourists are also attracted by Japan's beauty and simplicity. Marketing based on wabi-sabi can highlight the beauty of unspoiled nature, traditions that have meaning and experiences that tourist tourists experience to feel like a local community. The Ministry of Tourism in Indonesia can adopt this concept to market serene and unspoiled natural destinations, such as Ora Beach in Maluku or Koka Beach in NTT, as well as introduce traditional experiences and historical relics such as traditional markets and ancient temples. By applying wabi-sabi, Indonesian tourism can offer more authentic and reflective experiences, attracting travelers who seek tranquility and more profound meaning, thus opening up new opportunities for the development of Indonesia's tourism industry.

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