

Special Issue

Volume 30 Issue 3 - June 2022 DOI: 10.19080/IJESNR.2022.30.55628 **Int J Environ Sci Nat Res**Copyright © All rights are reserved by Chris D Beaumont

Ikigai



Chris D Beaumont^{1*}, Darrell Berry² and John Ricketts³

 1 Institute for Future Initiatives, LifeStyle $_{\mathrm{bv}}$ Design, The University of Tokyo, Japan

²Significance Systems, Brighton, UK

³Significance Systems, Sydney NSW 2069, Australia

Submission: May 31, 2022; Published: June 17, 2022

*Corresponding author: Chris D Beaumont, Institute for Future Initiatives, LifeStyle_{by}Design, The University of Tokyo, 7-3-1 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033, Japan

Keywords: Narratives; Utility; Social sharing; Engagement; Behaviour; People; Big data; AI; Important; Emotional response; Improved decisions; Self-medication; Happiness; Well-Being; Positive health

Context

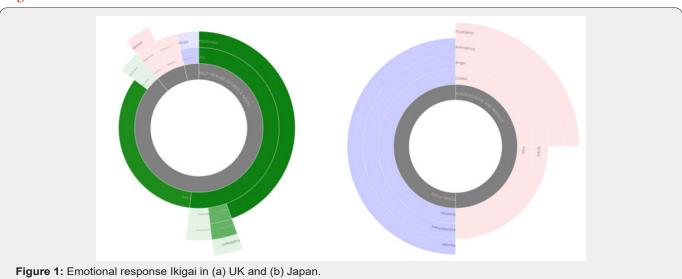
Increasing self-medication in recent years has created a more transformative attitude regarding personal health. Specifically, a shift from treatment to prevention. From a lifestyle perspective it has spawned a greater sense of personal well-being. The seminal work of Huber [1], with her coherent perspective of "Positive Health', captures the essence of this patient-centric [2], trend which empowers the individual to take responsibility.

More generally, people are now re-evaluating their life priorities and lifestyle after COVID-19. Changing from a 'growth' focus on GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to a policy that reflects societal progress life satisfaction and, in time, by a commitment to the GD Well-being (Gross Domestic Well-being). Policies based on the goal of happiness [3] simple to understand, is timely, relevant, and can be a rallying call for the necessary post-pandemic reset.

Money has been a simple and flawed indicator. With a focus on happiness, we can expect people not only to be happier /satisfied but healthy and whole. The overall happiness of a society must be one of the most ethical commitments which can be made.

Of cultural interest, in the context of improving a sense of personal well-being is the Japanese concept of Ikigai. Literally, iki= life, alive; and gai= benefit, worth, so it is akin to the western notion of 'reason for being', but much deeper since intimating purpose of life. It is increasingly being considered by westerners, who consider it an important element of Japanese longevity [4]. Although there is broad empirical evidence linking having a purpose in life to improved well-being and longevity, there is tangible evidence that having Ikigai also has a positive effect on ageing [5]. From this evidence one can infer ikigai can affect behaviour beneficially.

Ikigai



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In the UK the Ikigai narrative is timeless, and the affect orientation is active and positive. In contrast in Japan, it is transient, where the literal daily purpose of life takes backstage with the adjustments to the pandemic. That said the affect orientation is still positive and active. The negativity of frustration

driving annoyance and anger is balanced in the emotional response, in Japan, by a sense of expectation and surprise. The emotional response in the UK around the narrative is much more positive (Figure 1).

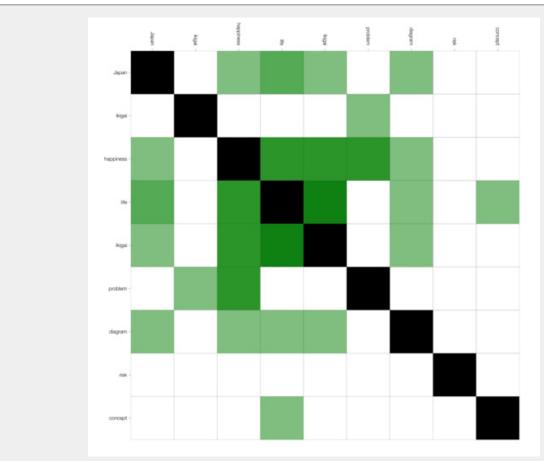


Figure 2: Key topics driving Ikigai in UK.

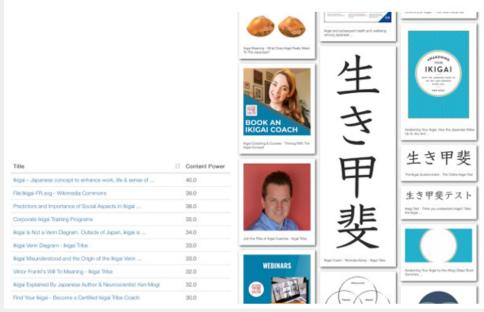


Figure 3: Powerful pieces of content driving Ikigai (UK).

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The key topics driving engagement with Ikigai in the UK are broad (Figure 2), demonstrating the rise in interest in this Japanese concept. Life purpose has naturally been questioned more during COVID-19, when greater pressure on work-life aspirations have brought it home to individuals that economic growth or wealth does not mean happiness or improved life satisfaction. In Japan the key topics driving engagement take the definition of ikigai somewhat literally where it simply boils down to life and purpose, and currently peoples own lives are considered within the context of ikigai and found wanting (Figure 3).

Implications

Ikigai can be viewed as a cultural vessel that could support the regeneration of peoples and societies post COVID-19. It offers a dynamic framework for an individual to seek purpose in life while at the same time finding an improved balance between life's competing tasks. It may during the ongoing transformation in many people's daily lives offer a useful framework to embrace and assess changes. Our analysis shows perhaps the sharpest dichotomy, driven by culture, in comparing the UK and Japan. In

the UK the notion of ikigai is new, increasingly relevant and gaining some traction albeit at an embryonic stage. In Japan, it is implicitly understood and the current volatile and uncertain circumstance lead to a general rational response that ikigai is not currently present and there's a gap between actuality and aspiration.

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