Article

Applying Storytelling Approach to Analyze Kojima Jeans District Based on Slow Fashion Perspectives

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Abstract: This study conducted a case study of Kojima district in Japan, which underwent a rise and fall through the past booms, disruptive innovation, international politics, and changes in government policy. Today, the district has successfully regenerated, and the regeneration is linked to fashion localism. This study aimed to explore how the Kojima district sustained community-based fashion business and analyzed the factors that contributed to its regeneration from the slow fashion viewpoint. This study employed a case study analysis, using the storytelling approach, and established an analytical framework based on keywords derived from slow fashion, namely localism, quality, and value. The results indicate that the strategies of business leadership, improvement in quality, a willingness to address new challenges, success in authenticating strategies, clustering fashion business, path dependency, and maintaining workers and the fashion business community contributed to promoting a series of industrial structural adjustments in Kojima and sustaining the community-based fashion business.

Keywords: slow fashion; Kojima Jeans District; vintage jeans; storytelling approach; SMEs; path dependency; authenticity

1. Introduction

Empirical evidence demonstrated that the pandemic changed the attitudes of consumers toward clothing, as well as the demands for clothing production [1]. Although individuals who are exceedingly conscious about global environmental issues recognize the concept of sustainable development, the concept has further penetrated society during the circumstances of the pandemic. Additionally, efforts to transform national economies are moving toward a more ecologically and socially responsible society [2]. In studies in the field of fashion studies, three important concepts regarding sustainable development are notable, namely sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, and slow fashion. The current study, especially, focuses on slow fashion because this concept is relatively associated with societal well-being. The slow movement is considered the origin of slow fashion, slow food, slow politics, and slow life, which was initiated in Italy. It frequently regarded as the antithesis of speed and immediate effects that are being emphasized by modern times. However, Fletcher (2007) noted that being slow does not indicate an exact time, but values the notion of quality [3]. Additionally, slow fashion includes designing, producing, consuming and living better, whereas designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers are increasingly aware of the impacts of products on workers, communities, and ecosystems [3]. Moreover, Fletcher's definition of slow fashion included local production, traditional values, ecosystem preservation, diversity of sources, and responsible approaches [4]. Jung and Jin (2014) proposed that slow fashion is a broader concept than environmental sustainability, and identified five sub-dimensions, namely (1) equity (caring for producers and fair labor practices), (2) localism (supporting domestic brands and local communities to encourage for sustainable living), (3) authenticity (appreciating handcraftsmanship and traditional methods), (4) exclusivity (seeking diversity for sustainable fashion world), and (5) functionality (maximizing product lifespan, longevity, durability, and efficiency for a

sustainable environment) [5]. Alternatively, Clark (2008) characterized slow fashion on the basis of three principles, namely appreciation of local and distributed economies, transparent production systems and less intermediation between consumers and producers, and production of sustainable and sensory products that render the senses more valuable than longer-life and typical consumables [6]. Pookulangara and Shephard (2013) referred to the process of slow fashion as one in which apparel firms tackle the challenges to exert efforts to include sustainable, environmental, and ethical practices into designs; to select production methods that emphasize quality, craftsmanship, and experienced labor; and to educate consumers to enable them to play an active role in making informed decisions regarding apparel selections [7].

Although the boundaries of the concepts of slow fashion lack a clear definition [4], the academia frequently utilizes certain key words, such as quality [3,5,7], values [3,5,6], and localism [3,5,6]. The current study makes these keywords the main themes for exploring the slow-fashion business. Moreover, business circumstances surrounding small- and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) are facing many difficulties in the fashion business, including the pandemic, globalization, and the rise of fast fashion. This study conducts a case study and examines the success of community-based fashion businesses in Kojima district in the Okayama prefecture, Japan. This business community experienced the rise and fall of the business and gained experience that helped regenerate its community in past days.

This study aimed to identify how the Kojima district sustained its community-based fashion business and analyzed the factors related to the regeneration of Kojima district from the slow-fashion viewpoint. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 briefly describes the methodologies and establishes the analytical framework. Section 3 provides a general overview of the case study area. Section 4 presents a case study of a community-based fashion business in Kojima. Section 5 discusses the factors that associates with the success of the Kojima Jeans Districts based on the established analytical framework. The last section concludes the research.

2. Related Literatures

2.1. Business Strategies

This section provides a review of the literature to address the fundamental concepts of business strategies. Although SMEs are the backbone of any economy and provide a potential source of economic growth [8], business circumstances related to SMEs are fragile and fraught with difficulties. To sustain SMEs, business strategies can be used as clues to solve these problems.

The first fundamental strategy is the competitive strategies, as purported by Porter, who introduced three generic strategies, namely overall cost leadership, differentiation, and focus [9]. Overall cost leadership denotes the achievement of the lowest cost in its industry through economies of scale and the creation of high efficiency based on accumulated experiences to earn above-average returns for its industry [9]. Differentiation pertains to gaining competitive advantage by insulating against competitive rivalries based on brand loyalty among customers, developing technological capabilities, enhancing brand image, and targeting low sensitivity to price. Lastly, focus refers to the development of a particular target through a low-cost position, a high differentiation, or both. Additionally, Magretta (2012) posits that Porter's competitive strategy intends to achieve the dominant market position by enhancing differentiation in the delivery of one's services and products. However, the author mentioned that striving to be the best is a devastating strategy and reflects a mistaken view of the so-called "zero-sum" thinking [10].

The second fundamental strategy is Kotler's competitive positioning. This strategy encourages the creation of compelling and well-differentiating positioning of a firm [11]. Positioning is defined as the act of designing a company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the target market [11]. The competitive position strategy classifies competitors into four types, namely market leaders, market challengers, market followers, and market nichers. Market leaders hold the largest market share and typically

offer industry-leading performance. To dominate the industry, market leaders expand the total market demand and protect their market share through continuous innovation. Alternatively, market challengers are regarded as second- or third-ranked players in their industry. The strategies employed by market challengers is to attack market leaders to divest the position if the industry fails to adequately address customer needs. Market follower are described as second- or third-ranked players who employ the strategy of gaining profit through product imitation and do not challenge the position of the top company. Market nichers are leaders in a small market, or niche [11]. Kotler and Keller (2016) pointed out that small firms generally avoid competition with larger firms by targeting small markets of little or no interest to large firms [11]. The strategy of market nichers is developing a distinctive positioning by limiting product prices and marketing channels [11]. Their strategy is to specialize in the niche market to earn profit and increase the chance of survival.

The final business strategy is the Blue Ocean Strategy, which was developed by Kim and Mauborgne [12]. The Blue Ocean Strategy is one that avoids competition with others by developing businesses in uncontested market spaces. Moreover, this strategy is regarded as value innovation, which is a strategy that renders competition meaningless by significantly increasing value for buyers and the company. It also pertains to opening up an undeveloped market space without competition. Conversely, the Red Ocean is an opposite strategy against the Blue Ocean Strategy. Simply put, the Red Ocean refers to competing within a limited market place, scrambling for the existing markets, influencing the tradeoff between value and cost, and rendering extension of one's reach difficult due to commodity goods. Additionally, the Red Ocean implicates low or declining profits, due to competition in a densely populated and saturated market [13]. Alternatively, the Blue Ocean Strategy encourages the development of innovative business frameworks for the construction of a revolutionary uncontested market place to avoid unnecessary competition. Therefore, avoiding the Red Ocean Strategy and applying the Blue Ocean Strategy is fundamental for SMEs in the search of new business markets and value proposition.

2.2. Community-Based Fashion Business

The community-based fashion business is a vital concept for slow fashion [3,5,6], because local traditions contribute to developing resilient economies grounded in local resources, labor, and culture [14]. For example, the Northern California Fibershed Cooperative (2017) is known as an agricultural coop that uses and creates goods from regionally grown materials and supports the regional ecosystem [15]. Furthermore, it is active in the area of cooperative marketing, education, and economic development. Similarly, there is a community-based fashion business in New York, which is a corroborative project between fiber firms, scientists, and textile designers. Trejo et al. (2019) aimed to encourage local slow fashion by achieving the long-term sustainability of small farms, fiber mills, and local design in NY [16]. Using actor-network theory (ANT), they analyzed the high-quality textile business based on the collaborative slow fashion model. They examined a material- and performance-based exploration of what can be produced in the local slow fashion network. They noted that the ANT model presents the feasibility of local fiber sourcing, yarn production, and high-quality product development [16]. Fletcher (2018) focused on fashion localism based on a case study of Macclesfield in England and explored how connections between place, nature, society, and clothing can create a sustainability future [17]. She noted that fashion localism not only as products, brands, or government policy but also as a collective process and long-term discussion around creating a fashion system that supports the total garment-related material process and social assets of a place such that a specific, vibrant, unconventional fashion culture can emerge (p.156). Brydges (2018) conducted a case study on the Canadian fashion industry and examined why independent fashion designers in Canada choose to work locally in an era of hyper-globalization [18]. She noted that "made in Canada" can be a viable strategy for independent designers, and, by operating outside of the dominant fashion system, it can also create lower barriers and

create a space for creativity, innovations, and control over their brand for independent designers.

3. Methods

3.1. A Storytelling Method

This study employed the storytelling approach to address how community-based fashion businesses succeeded and evaluated the story based on the development of analytical framework. The storytelling approach is defined as a tool for analyzing rationalized stories that hold justifiable objects for operating businesses. Magretta (2002) noted that successful companies have rationalized stories behind their business models [19]. However, regardless of how amazing a story is, certain aspect remains similar to those of stories of the past. Thus, the study infers that this method is a rehash of universal themes rooted in all human experiences [19]. Furthermore, Aaker (2019) defined a story as a narrative framework that brings real or imaginary events and experiences into a single stream [20]. The author also cited that the best strategy for storytelling is determining a means for communicating how a company starts a business, how it processes its products, and how it satisfies the needs of consumers. Meanwhile, a story should hold narrative contents that make people think that hearing the story is worthwhile instead of merely arranging facts in chronological order.

Table 1 presents the difference between the existing storytelling approach and the expanded approach employed by the study. The existing storytelling approach is only applicable to one business model for one company. In contrast, the current approach expands the target of the story method to community-based businesses in line its hypothesis that successful community-based businesses should present rationalized and empathic stories.

Table 1. Comparison of storytelling approach.

	Method	Target
Magretta (2002)	Storytelling method	One business
This study	Expanded storytelling method	Community-based businesses

3.2. Analytical Framework

This study employs the case study analysis, using the storytelling approach, and establishes the analytical framework based on keywords from slow-fashion perspectives, namely localism, quality, and value. The first framework is quality. To arouse quality, bringing the attention of the audiences to the stories is necessary. Quality makes consumers focus on the products, and this apprizes the notion of quality. The second framework is values. In terms of values, the *Oxford Dictionary* notes that "value" means how much goods are worth compared with their price or the quality of being important [21]. It is significant to make people think the products are genuine and worthwhile. The third framework is localism. Fletcher (2018) described fashion localism as a collective process and long-term discussion around creating a local fashion system [17]. Moreover, this study investigated how attractive community-based businesses are through the lens of their traditional values [3], the impacts of their products on the ecosystem [5], and their caring for and appreciation of the local community [6].

3.3. Data Collection

This study collected data from the literature and qualitative and statistical data as the basis of the storytelling approach. First, the literature data were collected from various sources, such as previous studies, websites, books, and historical documents on Kurashiki city. Qualitative data were mainly derived from interview data that were obtained after the establishment of the analytical framework. This study conducted interviews with a manager and a publisher from Japan Blue Co., Ltd., and a manager from the Chamber of

Commerce of Kojima. Lastly, quantitative data were collected from a handbook, websites, and the institutions.

4. General Overviews of Kojima District in Okayama Prefecture

Kojima District

This section provides a general overview of Kojima district, which is located in Kurashiki City, Okayama prefecture, Japan. In 1967, Kurashiki city was established through a municipality merger among Kurashiki, Kojima, and Tamashima cities. The Kojima district faces the Seto Inland Sea (Figure 1). During the Edo era, it was an important location for trading and cargo shipment to Osaka, which was the hub of the merchant city. Kurashiki city has retained its flourishing culture, tourist areas, and historical industrial heritage. According to statistics for Kurashiki city (2015), the population is approximately 480,000, out of which 68,400 are living in Kojima district [22]. Its geographic area of Kojima district spans approximately 80.12 km² [22].
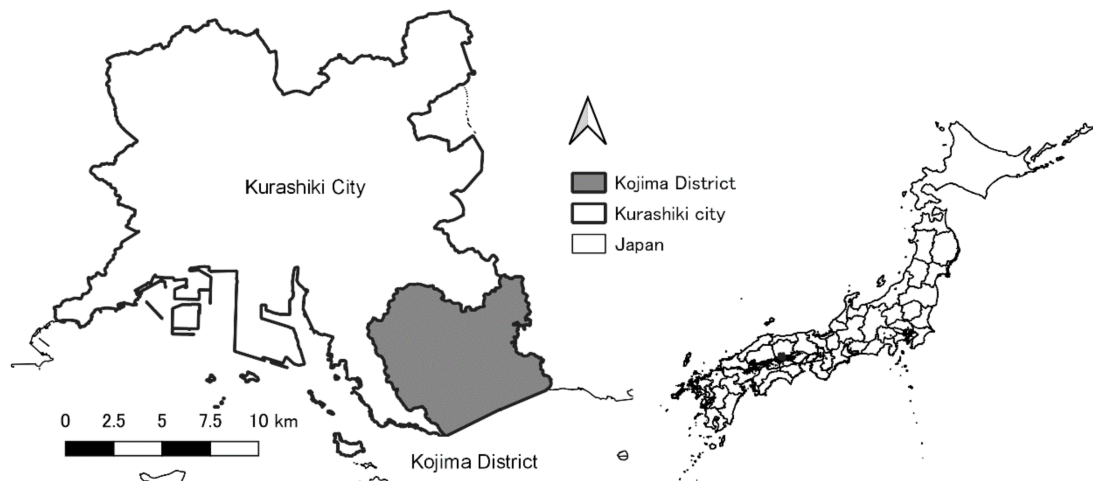
Figure 1. Kojima district in Kurashiki City.

5. Case Study of the Kojima Jeans District

5.1. Transformation of Major Industries in Kojima District

Table 2 presents the history of the textile and fashion industries in Kojima district, which was adopted and modified from Enari et al. (2019) as a reference [23]. During the Edo era, cotton and salt were the major products in Kojima district that sustained livelihood because the area was close to the Seto Inland Sea. However, salt inflicted damage on the reclaimed land. Therefore, the cultivation of cotton was considered more suitable for production instead of rice paddy fields. During the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government promoted the industrialization of the cotton textile industry [24]. Moreover, the government forced the men to wear Western fashion through the military, whereas women continued to wear the traditional Kimono, which is called Kasuri when made with cotton as casual wear. Additionally, Kojima became well-known for its major production of Tabi socks, which were produced by 400 houses in Okayama prefecture. Among these houses, 110 houses were operated in the Kojima district [25].

Table 2. Transformation of main industries in Kojima (modified from Reference [23]).

Period	Years	Main Products
Edo era	1600s~1700s	cottons, salt
Meiji era	1790s~1890s	Kasuri (cotton Kimonos)
Taisho era	1900s~1920s	Tabi socks, Kimonos
Beginning of Showa era	1920s~1950s	school uniform
Showa era	1960s~1990s	jeans, school uniform
Heisei and Reiwa era	2000s~	high quality Jeans

After World War II, the rise of Western culture penetrated Japan, and the traditional Kimono style rapidly declined. Therefore, using the techniques for making cotton kimonos, Kojima's textile industry started to produce school uniforms and soon monopolized the Japanese market. However, in the late 1950s, the innovation of synthetic fibers impacted Kojima's textile industries, and the synthetic fibers only imported from England to Japanese large companies soon dominated the uniform marketplace. Therefore, once again, small- and medium-size textile industries in Kojima should have moved out from the uniform market in order to sustain their business.

As a solution, business owners in Kojima opted to shift to jeans production. Figure 2 indicates the total number of Japanese jeans produced in Japan from 1971 to 2005. The 1960s marked the beginning of jeans production in Japan. At that time, used jeans were very popular in Tokyo and Kobe [26]. For example, Maruo Clothing in Kojima grabbed the opportunity to establish a jeans business, given that business owners were suffering from the innovation of synthetic fibers [26]. Later, the company became known as Big John, which became the first company to produce jeans through Japan in 1964. It learned how to create the first domestic jeans through trial and error [26]. However, the jeans did not gain good a reputation among Japanese consumers because they were starchy and stiff to the touch [27]. Therefore, Maruo adopted several denim-washing techniques. Keet (2011) noted that Japan was known as one of the first countries to invent the denim-washing process [27]. As a consequence, the production system successfully shifted from school uniforms to jeans. Then, techniques for weaving and dyeing, which were originally applied to the production of cotton Kimonos, were also applied to denim [28].
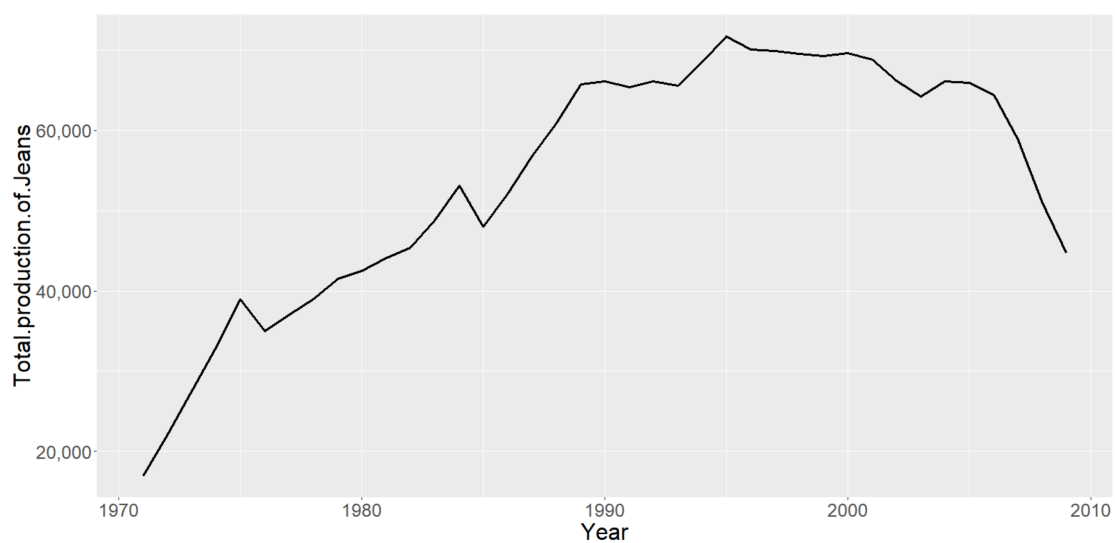

Figure 2. Total production of Jeans: 1971–2009 (modified from Reference [29] for 1971–2005 and Reference [30] for 2006–2009).

Figure 2 demonstrates that the jeans market in Japan rapidly expanded during the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the total number of jeans produced increased from approximately 1,700,000 to approximately 65,732,000. During this period, Big John produced bell-bottom jeans, which became a hyper selling product and was recognized as a social phenomenon [29]. Indeed, Levi's and Lee sold its license to Edwin, whose headquarter is located in Tokyo, and launched a massive advertising campaign. The popularization of jeans rapidly spread across Japan. Since the late 1990s, Kojima has been broadly recognized as the center of Japanese jeans.

5.2. The Multifiber Arrangement (MFA) and Shifting High-Quality Jeans Productions

In 2005, the MFA was phased out. The objectives of the MFA were to regulate national intervention in textile and apparel trade through an international regime [31] and to control the quantitative restriction on textile and apparel imports from developing countries. During the MFA, a long-term structural change was adopted, whereas the power of the trade in the global textile industry was dramatically altered [32]. For example, Japan was once a major clothing exporter to the United States but now imports the majority of its clothing [32]. Increasing the demands of free trade, MFA was gradually shifted to integrate the regulation under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Since 2005, the number of imported textile and apparel imports from developing countries has increased, and the devastation was beyond expectations. Moreover, the tendency toward large fashion companies, including fast fashion, shifted the garment production to developing countries to capitalize on lower labor costs and the mass production of cheap clothes. Kojima obtained severe damages from the influence of the free trade regime, which were mostly composed of SMEs in the garment industry who were subcontractors from large textile companies. Additionally, another reason for the impact on the fashion industry was the influences of the sluggish economy. Because of the clashing with the Japanese bubble economy, the entire fashion market in Japan shrunk. Figure 2 shows that the production of jeans has rapidly declined since 2006.

Thus, the manner in which Kojima sustained its ecosystem of community-based fashion business is truly a wonder. Several important factors to contribute to fashion industry in Kojima, such as a rabid fan of jeans and the shift to the productions of high-quality jeans in terms of vintage jeans. During the late 1990s, vintage jeans were booming in Japan, because several jeans aficionados enthusiastically collected vintage jeans and publicly paid attention to the value. According to Ogawa (2013), jeans originated from fustian, which is a strain of cotton that is grown in Genova, Italy. Genova was known as an international port city and was thriving as the center of Mediterranean exchange. During the frontier age, Genoese fustian was exported to the United States and was later called "jeans" [33]. Alternatively, denim originated from serge de Nimes, which is located in Province, Southern France. The pronunciation of Nimes was quoted as being "denim" [33]. In the frontier days in the United States, Levi Strauss, an immigrant from Germany, started the production of jeans with Jacob Davie. During the 1960s, jeans became an icon of freedom, patriotism, egalitarianism, and democracy for women [28]. These non-tangible values were spread across the worlds.

For dealing with the vintage booming, several studios in Kojima began to reproduce vintage jeans. One of them is Japan Blue Co. Ltd., which was established in 1993. Manabe, the CEO, operated old Toyota shuttle looms to weave selvage denim. According to Fujioka and Wubs (2020), the old shuttle looms produced tightly woven strips of heavy fabric and the selvedge, which are seen in the edge of jean's cloth [28]. These features generally characterized vintage jeans and become a sign of quality as well. Another point of differentiation is that Japan Blue used Zimbabwean cotton, which is produced in the highland of Zimbabwe and is known as a high-quality cotton worldwide. Recently, Japan Blue produced one of the products made of banana fiber as the sustainable fashion strategy. Moreover, Japan Blue developed the distinct indigo color, which was based on the color of an old cotton Kimono, and named its product Japan Blue [28]. Other notable crafts-

manship includes stitching, riveting, cutting, and washing, among others. As a result, vintage jeans retailed at higher prices, such that a pair of jeans could cost over US$200 to US$2500. The case of Japan Blue is one of the examples that shifted from low-end model to high-quality jeans in Kojima. Keet (2011) noted that the business community in Kojima was successfully relocated to some of the jeans' authenticity to Kojima by conducting research on old vintage jeans and promoting innovation of high-quality jeans in Japan [27]. In a process of manufacturing jeans, not all of the processes can be performed consistently by a single company, but they are divided into the processes, such as spinning, dyeing, weaving, sewing, washing and retailing, in various companies [34]. However, the uniqueness of the fashion business in Kojima is that all of the processes of jeans production are clustered within the district and with the boundary of one municipality.

Figure 3 illustrates a distribution map for small- and medium-size fashion companies in Kojima. Data were derived from i-townpage, which is an internet-based telephone and address book provided by the Nippon Telegram and Telephone Corporation. Additionally, the geocoding tool provided by the University of Tokyo was used to transform the address to coordinate. Kojima is characterized by the agglomeration of entire process for the production, except for the procurement of raw materials. Additionally, service engineers are necessary for sustaining the manufacturing system in Kojima, because the production of vintage jeans requires old Toyota shuttle looms, which are outside the scope of maintenance services. Weaving denim using old shuttle looms is the ethos of the high-quality jeans in Kojima. Thus, to sustain the production of vintage jeans, companies are required to repair the old shuttle looms and replace broken parts independently [35]. These advantages characterize Kojima and contribute to the sustainability of the community-based fashion business.
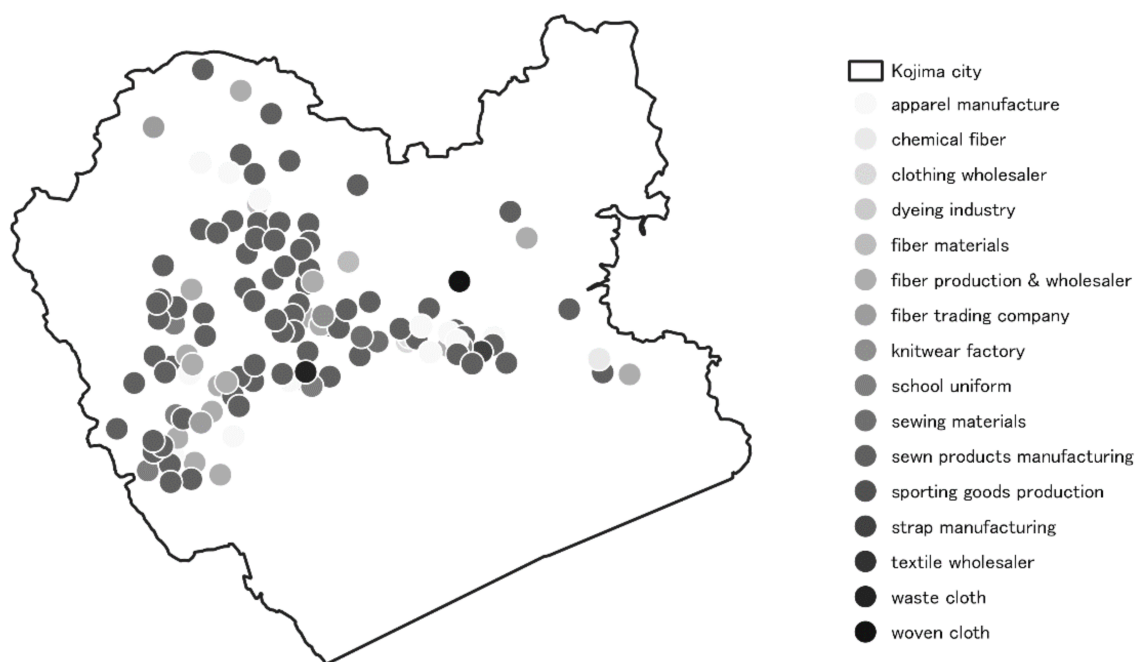
Figure 3. Textile industries in Kojima.

5.3. Emergence of Urban Sprawling Versus Development of the Kojima Jeans Street

Issues regarding urban sprawling and declining local shopping streets are common problems in Japan. Moreover, motorization promoted the thriving large shopping malls and roadside shops in suburban areas. They provided glitzy and colorful advertisement billboards and spacious free parking lots for customers. Conversely, local shopping streets consist of SMEs in typically tight spaces. They lagged behind recent developments and be-

come one of the causes of declining the local economy. The Ajino shopping street in Kojima is a typical example of a deserted shopping street [36]. Although urban sprawling was not the only factor for the decline in the local shopping streets, other sufficient reasons include population decline, local economic decline, and the lack of successors for operating the stores. However, during 1955 and 1965, a total of 250 stores occupied the Ajino shopping street [24]; however, only four shops remained as of 2008: a restaurant, a general shop, and two jeans shops. This decline is a serious issue for the reason that Sumio Manabe, the CEO in Japan Blue Co., Ltd., and the Vice-President of Chamber of Commerce of Kojima at that time, expressed concerns about the situation [23]. In response, he established the Association of Kojima Jeans Street in 2009 to revitalize local shopping streets. The stakeholders of the association are shop owners, Kojima Chamber of Commerce, neighborhood community association, Japan Junior Chamber, Inc., academics, landlady association, Nozaki historical museum, Shimotsui Dentetsu, Sanyo Shinbun, Kojima Fashion center, and Chugoku design school [25].

*5.4. Achievements of Kojima Jeans Street*

Table 3 presents the transition of the Kojima Jeans Street from 2009 to 2020. In 2008, there were only two jean's shops, while, in the next year, 2009, one jeans shop opened in the Kojima Jeans Street. In 2011, five jeans' shops were opened. In 2011, two jeans' shops and two general shops were opened on the street. The increasing trend has continued since 2009. Meanwhile, four shops closed their businesses and four shops were relocated. In 2021, the total number of shops is 39 in Kojima Jeans Street. This number indicates a 11.5-times increase in the shops since the establishment of the Association of Kojima Jeans Street. According to Kimura (2021), the manager of Japan Blue Co., Ltd., in its initial phase, the opening of new stores was mainly reliant on his leadership [23]. In order words, the shop owners were mostly peers in the same businesses or outside of merchant businesses, such as sewing manufacturing, processing, and washing. However, the characteristics of new entrants were gradually changed due to the increasingly good reputation of the Kojima Jeans Street. The new entrants mainly belonged to the neighboring areas, such as Ebara City in the Okayama prefecture and Fukuyama City in the Hiroshima prefecture. Moreover, both areas are well-known for the manufacturing clusters of the Japanese denim industry. Compared with the Kojima district, they have slightly different characteristics. Furthermore, the three areas, namely Kojima, Ebara, and Fukuyama, competed in the global, as well as domestic, fashion markets.

Table 3. Transition of the Kojima Jeans Street from 2009 to 2020 [25].

Years	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total Number	4	5	10	14	18	24	31	34	36	40	42	44	46
Increased shop	0	1	5	4	4	6	7	3	2	4	2	2	2
Closed shop	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Relocated shop	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2

Figure 4 shows the transition of visitors' numbers from 2010 to 2019 [37]. The number of visitors was multiplicatively increased from approximately 10,000 in 2010 to approximately 200,000 in 2007. The figure includes jeans enthusiasts from abroad. In 2018, the visitors were decreased because of the disaster caused by torrential rains in the region. Additionally, this number includes visitors for the Kojima textile festival, which organized in every last week in April [37]. This festival is also a showroom for buyers, as well as tourists [37]. Increasing numbers of shops and visitors are also recognized as the accomplishment of Kojima Jeans Street.
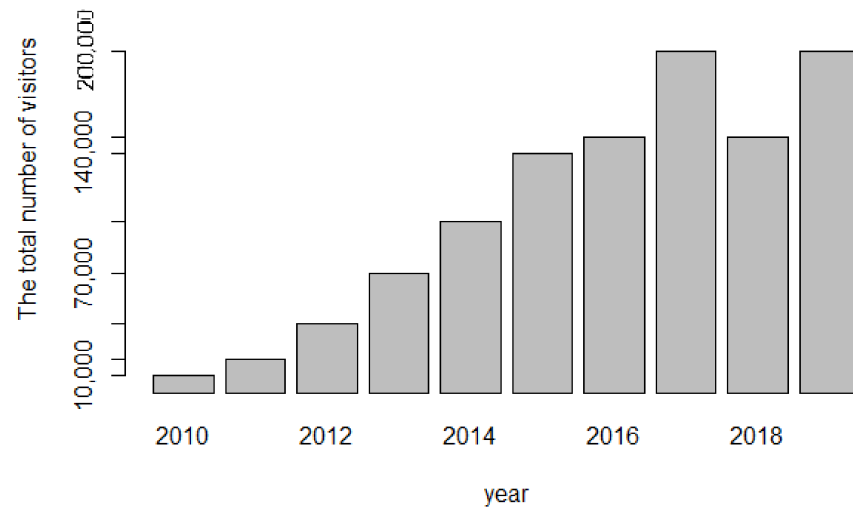
Figure 4. Transitions of the number of visitors: 2010–2019 (modified from Reference [37]).

6. Results and Discussion

This section presents an evaluation of the case of Kojima, using three analytical frameworks, namely localism, quality, and values.

6.1. The Perspective of Localism

The uniqueness of Kojima is its creative ingenuity in the fashion business community. More than 200 small- and medium-size fashion companies have established networks among one another. Additionally, the entire process of jeans production is clustered in Kojima, such as spinning, dyeing, weaving, sewing, washing, and retailing, except for the procurement of raw materials. Moreover, the establishment of Kojima Jeans Street represents the linkage among retail shops and the development of the unique fashion retail community. Although Kojima Jeans Street is rustic, the well-crafted goods have been seen in the street, including a façade, signboard, and places to rest. Since 2009, the number of shops in Kojima Jeans Street increased from 4 to 39. Moreover, the number of visitors increased from approximately 10,000 in the first year to approximately 200,000 in 2020 (including visitors to the Jeans Festival). Therefore, the business community in Kojima Jeans Street undertook a great achievement in regenerating this district. Furthermore, Jung and Jin (2016) pointed out that one of the advantages of local textile and garment production is that it can enhance environmental sustainability [5]. The reason for this notion is that global production requires long-distance logistics that leads to more carbon footprints. In the case of a community-based production system, the amount of carbon footprints is minimized, thus indicating that the cluster in Kojima has contributed to global environmental issues.

6.2. The Perspective of Quality

In general, consumers are impressed with the exquisite workmanship of vintage jeans and take pride with regard to the traditional craftsmanship displayed in Kojima. Additionally, high-quality jeans provide values and differentiation that cannot be imitated by other emerging garment-production regions, because Kojima has accumulated 400 years of knowledge and experiences in textile. As such, Snyder (2009) stated that Japan built a worldwide reputation for high-quality and fashionable jeans that undergo generous washing and finishing, trendy denim with avant-garde and postmodern designs, and jeans with special materials and fabrics [38]. Additionally, Keet (2011) pointed out that Kojima was successful in rendering authenticating strategies [27]. Thus, vintage jeans exude a certain air of spirituality, which helped spread their fames. Authenticating strategies contributed to the allocation of authenticity to Kojima by being renowned as the birthplace of

vintage jeans [27]. However, several issues remain, such as whether the "new vintage jeans are original or not". It is related to the issues regarding collective intellectual properties of culture. Alternatively, empathic stories underlie vintage jeans, such as selvedge jeans produced by using old shuttle looms, tasteful stich and rivets, artistic washing techniques, and deep indigo color, among others. Therefore, consumers fully understand the qualities based on their perception and experiences. As a result, jeans enthusiasts visit Kojima from all around the world.

6.3. The Perspective of Values

Kojima emotionally attracts the attention of consumers because those who run it believe that textile production technologies accumulated over 400 years are worthwhile. Sugiyama (2009) pointed out that the historical values of Kojima's jeans industry is reliant on the path dependency. In general, path dependency arouses several criticisms, because the concept is regarded as an example of institutional issues that are intended to preserve existing industrial structures [39], leading to the postponement of structural reforms that are essential for economic revival. However, path dependency is seemingly effective in the case of Kojima. From the perspective of path dependency, Sugiyama (2009) explained that the factors that contributed to the sustainability of Kojima are openness of regional characteristic and entrepreneurships, cotton processing techniques, dyeing techniques derived from Kimono production, and manufacturing techniques derived from uniform production. Additionally, the production of Tabi socks was also helpful in cutting thick denim cloth [40]. Moreover, the accumulated techniques not only indicate the production of jeans, but also point to the necessity of mechanical repairs. As Kimura (2021) explained, the role of service engineers is important to the maintenance of the old shuttle looms [35], which creates the atmosphere of vintage Levi's 501xx. Therefore, the fashion business community in Kojima was organized as a corporate ecosystem, as well as a human work system. For this reason, people consider new vintage jeans deserving of their high price. In other words, quality is dependent upon the degree to which consumers acknowledge the values of new vintage jeans.

7. Conclusions

This study conducted a case study of community-based fashion businesses in the Kojima district, which underwent a rise and fall through the past booms, disruptive innovation, international politics, and changes in government policy. This study contributes by elucidating enabling factors that regenerated a series of industrial structural adjustments and sustained community-based fashion businesses. In the face of a crisis, Kojima endeavored to jump on the bandwagon and shifted to new product developments, using locally and historically accumulated techniques. Additionally, the driving forces behind the Kojima Jeans Districts of business leadership, quality improvement, willingness to take on new challenges, authenticating strategies, maintaining workers, and the business community contributed to the shift to the new product development. Moreover, the results presented in this paper have provided two insightful findings for fundamental business strategies. One of these findings is that the authenticity strategy utilized by the jeans industry in Kojima supports Porter's differentiation strategy (2008) [9]. This study found that customers in Kojima recognize the value of vintage jeans and pay a high price for their added value. The second fining, which related to the authenticity strategy, is relevant to the Kotler's competitive positioning strategy (2016) [11]. The jeans business in Kojima targets a small niche market that large firms avoid to establish themselves in the market. This strategy stems from the fact that manufacturing vintage jeans requires additional processes. Moreover, vintage jeans in Kojima are generally more popular among jeans enthusiasts, as compared with others. Creative authenticity is one of the reasons that jeans enthusiasts from across the world visit Kojima and support its vintage jeans. Meanwhile, Kojima's jeans are exclusive, owing to their high prices and unique design. Kojima has not aimed to reach near-ubiquity in the worldwide market; rather, it has opted to emerge as a

business-leading brand in a niche market. Therefore, although the rapidly growing fashion industry has gained tremendous worldwide, Kojima has managed to survive and thrive in its niche market.

The other characteristics of Kojima are the extensive networking of small- and medium-size fashion industries. Moreover, the uniqueness of Kojima is the fashion business agglomeration in this district. Its transformation from starting out as the Ajino shopping street to emerging as the Kojima Jeans Street highlights the ingenuity of this region. Therefore, Kojima Jeans Street is the only street that has managed to agglomerate 39 jeans stores within a span of 400 m. The concept of Kojima Jeans Street has contributed to create the emergence of a unique, unparalleled fashion community. Additionally, to the author's knowledge, the literature lacks studies on similar cases in a field of community-based fashion businesses. These strategies encapsulate Kojima's fashion business, which is replicable in other regions as a means of supporting the local fashion industry, as well as ensuring community business development. Finally, future research could focus on the fashion industry in the neighboring districts of Ebara city and Fukuyama city to understand how the neighboring areas impact each other.

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