

Jeans Advertisements with Hollywood or Japanese Celebrities: Semiological Analysis

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Abstract

In this paper a total of four jeans TV and print advertisements (ads) that have appeared in Japan are analyzed through a semiological approach: two in 1999–2001 and two in the 2010s. The two ads that appeared between 1999 and 2001 include an Edwin jeans ad with Hollywood star Brad Pitt, and a Levi's ad with the Japanese celebrity Takuya Kimura. About 15 years later, in 2015–2016, two (Levi's and Edwin) jeans ads featuring Japanese celebrities appeared, and they have also been discussed here. Pitt's glamorous yet casual image generated a friendly attitude toward him while Levi's ad showed a sexy and playful image of Kimura in 1999–2001. In contrast, Levi's and Edwin jeans ads that ran in the 2010s focused on a feeling of friendliness that was conveyed through a person next door type of celebrity. Although more recent Japanese ads may not feature many prominent Hollywood celebrity endorsers compared to earlier ones, they still seem to rely on celebrities' fame as endorsers.

概要

この論文では全部で4つのジーンズCMを記号学から分析した。2つは1999年から2001年のもの、そしてもう2つは2010年代のものである。1999年から2001年のCMとして選んだのはハリウッドスター、ブラッド・ピットのエドウィンのCMと日本のスター、木村拓哉のリーバイスのCMである。約5年後の2015年と2016年のCMで日本人スターの2つ（リーバイスとエドウィン）のCMを分析した。1999年から2001年にかけてのCMでは、豪華で、けれどカジュアルなイメージを持つブラッド・ピットは親しみやすさを感じさせ、一方で木村拓哉はセクシーで陽気なイメージを作っていた。しかし、2010年代のリーバイスとエドウィンのCMでは、すぐ近くに住んでいるかのようなスターのフレンドリーさに焦点が当てられていた。しかしながら、ハリウッドスターは一時ほど使われなくなったとはいえ、いまだに日本のCMは彼らの人気に頼ってCMを作っているようである。

Introduction

Companies in both Japan and the United States spend large amounts of money on ads. In Japan, in 2106, more than 6 trillion yen, or 1.17% of the gross domestic product (GDP) was spent on advertising (Dentsu, 2017), which is around 5.52 billion dollars (based on the rate of 100 yen for 0.92 dollars) as of January 29, 2018 (Fix Rate, 2018); and the United States spent 178.84 billion dollars on ads in 2016 (Statista, 2018), which was close to 1% of their GDP each year from 2009 to 2014 (Friedman, 2016). Such large amounts of money spent on advertising shows its importance in both countries.

Ads have a strong impact on the economy by motivating consumers to purchase products, and thus companies use endorsers to attract consumers. For example, advertisers may show not only show a brand of whiskey in a liquor ad but also show a person drinking the whiskey in the setting of a luxurious room, suggesting the status of the person consuming the drink. The ad conveys a positive image of both the room and also the product itself. Thus, ads are said to reflect the desired lifestyles of consumers (Kato, 1981).

In order for ads to show a lifestyle consumers might wish to have, some companies hire celebrity endorsers who reflect the image of that lifestyle to promote their product. Arai (2013) showed that it was beneficial for advertisers to feature a celebrity in order to attract viewers' attention in Japan. Amo (2017) found several advantages to having celebrities in ads, including communicating trustworthiness, achieving recognition, and gaining the potential for increased purchases if consumers personally like these celebrities. Therefore, companies have employed the strategy of having a celebrity in ads to motivate consumers to choose the product the celebrity endorses (Heath, McCarthy, & Mothersbauch, 1994; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins et al., 1989; Ohnian, 1991).

In Japan, there has been since 1990, a ranking of which celebrities appear in ads the most in each year (Nihon [Japan] monitor, 2017). However, the number of ads that celebrities appear in to endorse a product is not a factor in their popularity in the United States (Ozaki, 2009). Such a ranking in Japan has positive implications for ads with celebrities. Popular celebrities also appear in many TV ads, and this has been an indicator of their popularity. Consequently, about half of the ads feature celebrities in Japan, although in the United States, only about 10% of ads do so (Kantar Japan, Inc., 2013). Yamada (2010) also found that out of the 1,606 ads she identified from 1999 to 2001, 49.8% of Japanese ads starred either Japanese or Hollywood celebrities, although most of them were Japanese (46.8%), with only 3% percent being Hollywood

or Western celebrities (e.g., the golfer Tiger Woods).

Ads in the United States focus on the quality of products and do not rely on the fame of celebrities, as is the case in Japan (Ozaki, 2009). Thus, a useful approach is to provide “something people chat about” to create “effective” ads in Japan. Although this may not lead to the increased sale of a product, it is nevertheless considered a successful advertising tactic (Yamada, 2010).

In the United States, although fewer ads feature celebrities, this approach can also have a positive effect to get the viewers’ attention (Amo, 2017) as it does in Japan. However, Daboll (2011) found that hiring a celebrity for product endorsement was not worth the cost in the United States. In addition, a scandal involving a celebrity can lead to a negative reputation not only for a celebrity but also an endorsed product. Even after the famous golfer Tiger Woods had an affair in 2009, Nike retained him as an endorser (Finn, 2017) and created an ad with the catchphrase “Did you learn anything?” (Martinez, 2010, para. 2). This ad was chosen as the worst one of 2010 (Daboll). Thus, the image of a celebrity and of the endorsed product are interrelated in a positive and also a negative way.

The present paper analyzes two jeans ads that ran between 1999–2001 in Japan: one featured the Hollywood star Brad Pitt, and the other the Japanese celebrity Takuya Kimura. About 15 years later, in 2015–2016, two other ads appeared; one for Edwin in 2015, starring Eita and Kiko Mizuhara, and the other for Levi’s, with Mirai Moriyama and Rinko Kikuchi, in 2016. In each one, both a male and a female celebrity appeared. These ads are also discussed here. In the following section, these four ads, two from 1999–2001 and two from the 2010s, are analyzed through a semiological approach.

Research Methodology

Semiology is utilized in this paper to analyze the selected ads. Saussure (1966) proposed semiology, which is a sign system comprising two components: sound or *signifier* and meaning or *signified*. For example, when one hears the word “rose,” the sound “rose” or a combination of the four letters r, o, s, and e is the signifier, and its meaning, a type of flower, is the signified. A combination of signifier and signified is not definite but arbitrary because English sets the rule for the combination of the four letters, r, o, s, and e (in this order) to mean a type of flower. In other cultures, a different signifier, for example, *bara* in Japanese, has the same signified.

Though Saussure (1966) proposed this idea only as it relates to the field of linguistics, Barthes (1972) further analyzed cultural artifacts through semiology. He proposed two levels of sign systems, each with signifier and signified. The

combination of signifier and signified at the first level creates a sign, also called a denotation, that shows a literal meaning. This sign with signifier and signified was also called a language system by Barthes. The sign in the language system becomes a signifier at the second level, where signifier and signified compose a sign, which is called connotation. This second level is also called a myth system because connotation at the second level is an implied meaning that varies depending on the culture and creates a myth in each culture. For example, the word “chrysanthemum” can be divided into its sound and meaning, in the first level of the language system, denoting a kind of flower. However, at the second level, it has different meanings depending on the culture. Although this might only mean a type of flower in the United States, it has a connotation of a funeral in Japan, and people never send this flower as a Valentine gift. Thus, connotation is culture bound, and is, therefore, a myth. In the same way, a celebrity has connotations when she or he is utilized in ads. In the following section, this paper analyzes the connotations for the four ads mentioned above.

Semiological Analysis

A jeans ad starring Brad Pitt in 1999–2001

Pitt endorsed two types of Edwin jeans, 503s and 505s, in this ad. Throughout the ad, the screen is split in half in the center, and viewers can see Pitt on each side of the screen. In the following, all explanations are shown either as (R), which is the right side of the screen, or (L), which is the left.

In the first shot, both (R) and (L) show a person wearing a pair of jeans, but viewers cannot see the person’s face. Yet viewers *can* see the company logo, EDWIN, in the top left corner of the screen in a small red font. In the second shot that follows, viewers can see the person is Brad Pitt wearing jeans, and he is moving around in an old apartment in the shots that follow. Pitt is doing different household chores on each side of the screen, such as opening a refrigerator, Pitt (R) brushing his teeth, and Pitt (L) drinking a cup of juice, while Pitt (R) scowls after smelling the juice. In the eighth shot, Pitt on both sides says the style numbers of the jeans in Japanese, “Go maru san” (Five oh three, or 503) for Pitt (R), or “Go maru go” (Five oh five, or 505) for Pitt (L), while the screen shows his upper body. In the final, tenth, shot, both Pitt (R) and (L) say, “Edwin” while wearing a headphone. Pitt does not speak much in this ad except to say the product’s style numbers and the company name.

On both sides of the screen, Pitt seems to have an ordinary, and not a glamorous, celebrity life. This helps viewers feel friendly toward him. It also may move them to buy Edwin jeans, as the product does not appear pricey because these jeans suit Pitt’s

casual life as shown on the screen. Therefore, Edwin succeeds in creating an attractive image by using Pitt, yet at the same time communicates a friendly image by showing him in a casual apartment and not living a luxurious life.

On purchasing these products, viewers can also be part of the Pitt “tribe” that is made possible for them by identifying with Pitt. His cowboy-like image, as seen in the film *Thelma & Louise* (1991), corresponds with his casual look in the ad, and thus he conveys a friendly image to viewers. Moreover, by belonging to the same tribe as Pitt, viewers can have a positive feeling because they are promised a pseudorich status. In this sense, this ad attracts viewers’ attention as well as presents a positive image of Edwin jeans.

In addition, Pitt has is a very popular Hollywood actor who has portrayed various characters in films before 2000, in addition to *Thelma & Louise* (1991), such as *The Legend of the Fall* (1994) and *Meet Joe Black* (1998). His character in *Thelma & Louise* (1991) presented him as a “sex symbol” (Gillette, 2017, para. 2), and this reputation continued to be part of his image for a long time. Thus, this Edwin jeans ad connotes Pitt’s friendliness and glamorous image as a worldwide famous celebrity, and in turn, this becomes consumers’ image of their desired lifestyle.

Levi’s ad with Takuya Kimura in 1999–2001

In this ad, Kimura is wearing a pair of Levi’s jeans and moves around on the screen, and three white women appear later in the ad. They do not talk to Kimura but just look at him. A techno type of music without vocals can be heard throughout the ad, and it gives a playful image of him.

The fact that three white women are looking at Kimura in the ad indicates his attractiveness, and in turn that of the jeans. It tells the viewers to get this pair of jeans if they want to be popular with women, especially white women. This message suggests that white women are highly valued in Japan, which can be interpreted as reflecting a perspective of white supremacy among Japanese (Mills, 1997).

A few English lines can be seen in this ad, including “freetomove” and “Engineered jeans.” Also, a male voiceover saying “Levi’s” can also be heard. Other than that, there is no conversation between Kimura and the white women during the ad. Here “freetomove” seems to imply not just a characteristic of the pair of jeans but also Kimura’s freedom to choose any woman. The ad thus suggests that purchasing these jeans can lead to the freedom to choose any beautiful woman the consumer wants. The male voiceover’s statement “Levi’s,” toward the end of this ad, with the word also shown on-screen, summarizes everything one can enjoy once he or she purchases the

Levi's jeans and becomes part of the Levi's jeans tribe.

An endorser who attracts white women's attention in this ad should thus be someone who is attractive and powerful in order to convince viewers through his or her attractiveness. Kimura was a young man of about 30 years old in 2000, and could portray a man who can get anything he wants in this ad because he was a member of the famous boy band SMAP until 2016. Furthermore, he was chosen as the celebrity who appeared most often in Japanese ads from 2005–2009 and 2010 (Nihon [Japan] monitor, 2017), which indicated his popularity. The television drama *Byutifuru raifu* [Beautiful life], in which he portrayed the protagonist, was the third-highest-ranking drama in history of Japanese TV shows as of 2018 (Video Research Ltd., 2018). Thus, featuring Kimura in this ad was effective.

By communicating that consumers will belong to the Levi's tribe once they have purchased a pair of jeans, it is suggested that they will attract beautiful women and stay popular like Kimura. Connotations for this ad are related to Kimura's playful and sexy image, which is transferred to the product itself. This image is further transferred to consumers' lifestyles once they purchase the product. Thus, consumers need to purchase this product in order to belong to the same tribe as Kimura.

When comparing Pitt's and Kimura's ads, Pitt's shows a casual and cool image, while Kimura's indicates a more playful yet sexy man who can attract beautiful Caucasian women by wearing a certain pair of jeans. Pitt does not need to convey a sexy image, probably because he is already considered sexy worldwide, as he was chosen as the sexiest man by *People* magazine in 1995 and 2000 (Kirby, 2014). Thus, showing Pitt's friendly side can help viewers feel close to him, and this also creates a positive image for the advertised product. In this way, both ads transfer celebrities' images to the respective products they endorse and connote a cool lifestyle consumers can have once they buy the product.

Almost two decades later, in 2015–2016, popular ads for a pair of jeans seemed to focus more on Japanese celebrities. In the following section, Levi's and Edwin ads (Edwin in 2015 with Eita and Kiko Mizuhara, and Levi's in 2016 with Mirai Moriyama and Rinko Kikuchi) are analyzed.

Eita and Kiko Mizuhara, Edwin (2015)

Edwin aired a new ad starring two young Japanese celebrities, a male actor, Eita (then 32), and a female actress, Kiko Mizuhara (then 24), (CM Japan, 2015) in 2015. Eita earned popularity after starring in a drama about a men's synchronized swimming club, *Water Boys*, in 2003 (Entertainment Topics, 2015). Mizuhara was cast as the

protagonist for the movie *Noru-uei no mori* [Norwegian wood] (Shintani, 2010), which was based on the book of the same name that sold more than 10 million copies by 2009 (Oricon, 2009).

The ad with Eita and Mizuhara thus successfully drew the attention of viewers because it featured both these popular celebrities. The ad begins in a dark nightclub, with Eita saying, “Damasarenaize” (I would not be deceived) in the first shot. Here, the line “E Standard no otoko” (A man with E standard) can also be seen on the background behind him, with a big “E” and smaller letters for “standard” written below in English. In the second shot, Mizuhara says, “Meow.” The two of them get closer to each other. A male voiceover says, “Kawaiku mietemo” (Though she looks pretty), and Mizuhara says, “Onna ha mehyou” (Women are tigers), and her face changes to that of a catwoman with cat ears, big yellow eyes, and long teeth, and nails.

Then, they get even closer to one another, doing a tango-like movement, with Mizuhara lifting her leg up and bending her knee, while Eita holds her knees with his arm. A woman pulls at the fabric of her jeans, which is stretched out (the viewers only see the fabric and a hand on the screen, and cannot tell whether the hand is Mizuhara’s), and a male voiceover says, “Geenzu ni mietemo” (Looks like a pair of jeans, but). Then Mizuhara says, “Jyaagiizu” (Jerseys), while rubbing his cheek with her hand. He pushes her away, but she kicks him with her elbow and leg. He lifts her up and spansks her rear. She moans “Aan” (Ah) while opening her lips. Her pink lipstick, fluorescent red earrings, and red bracelet stand out in this scene against a dark background. He says, “Iidaro” (Is it not good?), and she replies, “Ikamo” (Yeah, I guess it is kinda good). He then says, “Otoko to” (Men and), she says, “On-na no” (Women’s). Then the male voiceover says, “Ii” (Good), while the screen shows the capital letter “E” on the screen, and then says, “Sutandardo” (Standard).

The sound “E” in Japanese is the same as for the word, “good.” Thus, saying “E standard” sounds like “good standard” in Japanese. Showing the letter E not only looks cool because it is written as a letter but also implies the good quality of the product. Admiration for the West, including the alphabet, can be seen in Japan. Furuta (2008) analyzed various women’s magazines after the 1960s and showed that increasing numbers of newly released women’s magazines with titles that include many alphabets reflect Japanese women’s admiration for the West.

In the following section a Levi’s still picture ad from 2016, with two Japanese celebrities, Mirai Moriyama and Rinko Kikuchi, is analyzed

Levi's ad with Mirai Moriyama and Rinko Kikuchi (2016)

The TV ad for Levi's starring celebrities in the 2010s was a still picture that featured two popular Japanese celebrities (an actor and dancer, Mirai Moriyama, and an actress, Rinko Kikuchi), and this ad is analyzed here.

In this ad, both Moriyama and Kikuchi are lying on a dance floor in a dark room. They are both wearing a white T-shirt and blue sweat pants. On the right side of picture, it says, "150 nen ijyou mae kara ari, genzai mo karera no katawara ni aru. Genten kara Genzai he. Atarashii toiu na no kurashikku" (It was there more than 150 years ago. We still have it besideus. From the ancient to now. It is classic, which is named as new). Below this line, it says, "Classic Levi's 502 503 507" in English. Here, 502, 503, and 507 all stand for style numbers. Then the larger bold letters show "I'm Levi's. Genten to toiu Ikikata" (I am Levi's. Going back to the origin is your way of living).

The dancer and actor Moriyama achieved nationwide popularity after starring in the drama *Water Boys* in 2003, with another Japanese actor, Eita, who was featured in an Edwin ad with Kiko Mizuhara in 2015. Another movie that made Moriyama famous was *Sekai no Chushin de Ai wo sakebu* (Scream your love in the center of the world] (2004) (Entertainment Topics, 2016). Kikuchi was nominated for the best supporting actress Academy Award for her performance in *Babel* (2007) (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2007). Thus, both Kikuchi and Moriyama are well-known celebrities in Japan. They are presented as very strong and independent individuals in this ad. When they say, "Going back to the origin is your way of living," it tells the audience the importance of keeping one's core values and moving forward. In addition, it suggests a positive message for the future. Both ads in the 2010s effectively utilize Japanese celebrities to create positive messages.

Discussion

Hollywood celebrities who connote a luxurious and gorgeous lifestyle have been utilized as attention-getters in Japanese ads. However, these recent jeans ads from the 2010s indicate a changing trend in that viewers may desire to see person next door type of celebrity who is strong and independent rather than Hollywood celebrities to whom they cannot feel so close. This approach may also indicate tighter marketing budgets in Japan, which has forced advertisers to reconsider hiring Hollywood celebrities. Decreased spending on ads was reported in Japan in 2016 (*Nikkei Koukou Kenkyujyo* [Nikkei advertisement analysis center], 2017), although there was a constant increase from 2010–2015. Thus, there may soon be a tendency in Japanese

advertising not to rely so much on Hollywood celebrities.

Japan is a good market for Hollywood celebrities to make money, but the number of ads featuring them seems to be fewer (*Chuo Nippou* [Central Daily News], 2009, *Nikkei Koukou Kenkyujyo* [Nikkei advertisement analysis center], 2017). However, another reason may be due to changing trends among Japanese consumers, who wish to see someone who is more relatable.

In addition, it is possible that what Japanese consumers want to see in ads has changed, with a person who appears friendly and fun-to-watch being the most important element in creating an ad (Matsui, 2006). Thus, the Edwin jeans ad in 2015 created a fun-to-watch element by having Eita and Mizuhara dancing a tango, yet with Mizuhara also being a catwoman. Moriyama and Kikuchi's Levi's ad in 2016 shows friendly yet strong and independent figures in the two celebrities who are featured, and these positive messages transfer to those who wear Levi's jeans after purchasing this product. There may be increasing numbers of these kinds of portrayals of person next door types of celebrities in the future in Japan.

Although there currently appears to be less reliance on Hollywood celebrities in Japanese ads, many celebrities are still utilized in ads. Nevertheless, the cool and sexy image seen in Kimura's Levi's ad in 1999–2001 may no longer work well and have the same impact in the 2010s. Instead, customers may want to see a person next door type of celebrity who conveys friendliness. This changing trend is reflected in the use of celebrities in jeans ads in the 2010s, such as Eita, Mizuhara, Kikuchi, and Moriyama who do not have huge fame like Pitt or Kimura yet show friendliness, strength, and independence.

How consumers respond after watching an ad depends on the culture (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Although a celebrity's appearance is considered as having a positive impact in Japanese ads, reliance on Hollywood celebrities may not now have as strong an impact as before. Instead, advertisers appear to be looking for another way to reach their audience. Ads in the 2010s that are discussed in this paper may indicate this change in viewers' taste from Hollywood stars who are unreachable to friendly person next door types of celebrities who are doing great in Japanese ads .

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