

Types of Products and Appeals in Japanese Advertisements of the 1990s and 2000s

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Abstract

A total of 240 Japanese commercials from the 1990s and 2000s were collected, and the types of product they endorsed and their informational and emotional appeals were examined. A hundred and twenty TV commercials each from 1996 and 2006 were recorded and analyzed to determine how informational or emotional appeals were. Results showed that some product advertisements including those related to image improvements, and alcohol/cigarettes, were seen significantly more often in the 1990s than in the 2000s. Informational appeals of price, new ideas/models, and nutrition, appeared significantly more frequently in the 1990s than in the 2000s. Five kinds of emotional appeals including appeals to the elderly, health, real life, romance, and tradition, were also seen significantly more frequently in the ads from the 1990s than in those from the 2000s.

Informational and Emotional Appeals

Informational appeals are known for providing information about a product such as price, quality, product performance, and research (Harmon, Razzouk, and Stern, 1983). Royo-Vela (2005) summarized the studies of Puto and Wells (1984), and Puto and Hoyer (1990). Additionally, Royo-Vela summed up by describing an informational appeal as “that which supplies factual, arguably verifiable information, or logically relevant to the product, to such an extent that consumers acquire greater skills in the assessment of the product attributes after viewing this kind of advertisement” (p. 16).

It is believed that these kind of informational appeals help consumers to make a logical decision when purchasing a product, though having too much information may not work well, since people get bored and stop viewing such material (Elpers, Wedel, and Pieters, 2003).

While informational appeals focus on information about a product, emotional appeals promote consumers to make emotional, rather than rational decisions. They mean to “arouse a range of feelings in the audience. The aim of emotional or sentiment advertising is to trigger an emotional response in the receptor when exposed to the commercial” (Aaker and Stayman,

1992, cited in Royo-Vela, 2005, p. 16) by using visual imagery (Batra and Ray, 1983).

Much of the existing studies have been comparisons of Japanese advertisements with those from another country, especially the USA, therefore, in this literature review section, I examined studies that have compared advertisements from these two countries. Lin's (1993) study showed that Japanese advertisements focus on products' packaging and availability rather than on price, quality, and performance. Nishimura's (1988) study found that functionality, savings, and safety did not strongly impact customers, but aesthetic enjoyment, pleasant sensation, curiosity, and relief from restraint did. Gaumer and Shah (2004) claimed that the preference of Japanese advertisements was to stress on visual images. Similarly, Akiyama's (1993) study showed that soft-sell approaches of using nonverbal elements such as scenery and facial expressions were often used in advertisements instead of verbal elements. These findings indicate that Japanese advertisements tend to use emotional rather than informational appeals. However, some studies, such as those by Caballero et al. (1986) and Hong, Muderisoglu, and Zinkhan (1987), contrarily showed that Japanese advertisements focused on informational appeals. Therefore, it is important to examine how different appeals are employed and determine if there have been any changes over time in the kinds of appeals used in Japa-

nese advertisements.

Research methodology

I examined 10 categories of advertised products in this study: autos, appliances/furniture, service, image improvement products, entertainment/toys, alcohol/cigarettes, household supplies, medicine, food, and retail.

Informational appeals are divided into twelve categories based on the studies by Resnik and Stern (1977) and Stern, Krugman, and Resnik (1981): price, quality, performance, availability, special offers, taste, nutrition, packaging, safety, independent research, company research, and new ideas/models. Two additional categories – packaging and safety – were not examined in this study, as no commercials included either element.

Emotional appeals tended to be centered on images. The following 11 categories of emotional appeals were assumed in this study: veneration of the elderly and having a high social status (Mueller, 1987), harmony with nature (Wagennar, 1978), humor, tradition, the future, romance, drama, fear, health/diet, touching/warmth, and real-life situations (Hasegawa, 1990).

Sample

A total of 240 commercials collected by a Japanese person were examined; half of them were recorded in 1996 and the other half in 2006. In 1996, TV advertisements were ran-

domly recorded by her in Tokyo in October and November for one and a half months from a randomly chosen broadcast channel between 8 and 9 pm. The 120 advertisements from 2006 were randomly chosen from 42 hours of data recorded from April to May between 7 and 10 pm in Osaka (on the west side of the Japanese mainland) and Tokyo (the east side of the Japanese mainland).

Results

Products shown in advertisements

In 1996 (see Table 1), some types of product advertisements were seen quite often including household supplies (23 ads or 19.2% of a total): there were also 22 ads each for auto/parts, alcohol/cigarettes, and food (18.3% each). Other products appearing in more than 10 ads included 13 ads each for service and image improvements (10.8% each). The remaining

products each appeared in fewer than five ads: entertainment/toys (two ads or 1.7%) and appliances/furniture, medicine, and retail (one ad or 0.8% each).

A decade later in 2006 (see Table 1), the most frequent ads were those for food (27 ads or 25.8%) followed by those for household appliances (21 ads or 17.5%). Other product ads that appeared between 10 and 20 times included service (18 ads or 15%), auto/parts (16 ads or 13.3%), appliances/furniture (14 ads or 11.7%), and medicine (11 ads or 9.2%). Product types shown fewer than 10 times in commercials included entertainment/toys (seven ads or 5.8%), alcohol/cigarettes (four ads or 3.3%), image improvement (one ad or 0.8%), and retail (one ad or 0.8%).

Significant differences were found between the ads from the 1990s and the 2000s (see Table 1). Two kinds of ads had significantly

Table 1 Types of Products in Advertisements in 1996 and 2006

	1996	2006	p
Auto/Parts	22 (18.3%)	16 (13.3%)	
Appliances/Furniture	1 (0.8%)	14 (11.7%)	**
Service	13 (10.8%)	18 (15%)	
Image improvement	13 (10.8%)	1 (0.8%)	**
Entertainment/Toys	2 (1.7%)	7 (5.8%)	
Alcohol/Cigarettes	22 (18.3%)	4 (3.3%)	***
Household supplies	23 (19.2%)	21 (17.5%)	
Medicine	1 (0.8%)	11 (9.2%)	**
Food	22 (18.3%)	27 (25.8%)	
Retail	1 (0.8%)	1 (0.8%)	
TOTAL	120	120	

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

higher numbers in 1996 than in 2006. First, there were 13 image improvement commercials in 1996 while only one appeared in 2006, as $\chi^2(1, n = 14) = 10.29, p < .01$. Second, ads for alcohol/cigarettes were significantly more frequent in 1996 ($n = 22$) than in 2006 ($n = 4$) for $\chi^2(1, n = 26) = 12.46, p < .001$. Conversely, two products appeared significantly more frequently in the 2006 commercials than they did in the 1996 ones: appliances/furniture ($n = 1$ and 14 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) for $\chi^2(1, n = 15) = 11.26, p < .01$; and medicine ($n = 1$ and 11 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) for $\chi^2(1, n = 12) = 8.33, p < .01$.

Informational appeals

Significantly more informational appeals were used in the 1996 ads than in the 2006 ones in the following three categories: price ($n = 12$ and 1 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 13) = 9.31, p < .01$; new ideas/models ($n = 26$

and 7 in 1996 and 2006, respectively), as $\chi^2(1, n = 33) = 10.94, p < .01$; and nutrition ($n = 8$ and 1 in 1996 and 2006, respectively), as $\chi^2(1, n = 9) = 8.33, p < .01$. Interestingly, no categories had significantly higher numbers of informational cues in the 2006 study than in the 1996 one (see Table 2).

Emotional appeals

Some emotional cues were found in significantly higher numbers in 1996 than in 2006. These included appeals involving the: elderly ($n = 11$ and 1 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 12) = 8.33, p < .01$; health ($n = 17$ and 1 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 18) = 14.22, p < .001$; real life ($n = 52$ and 19 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 71) = 15.34, p < .001$; romance ($n = 15$ and 2 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 17) = 9.94, p < .01$, and tradition ($n = 20$ and 1 in 1996 and 2006, respectively) as $\chi^2(1, n = 21) = 17.19,$

Table 2 Informational appeals in 1996 and 2006

	1996	2006	p
Price	12 (7.9%)	1 (0.7%)	**
Performance	56 (36.8%)	69 (45.1%)	
Quality	22 (14.5%)	22 (7%)	
Independent research	0	3 (2%)	
Company research	0	3 (2%)	
Availability	4 (2.6%)	3 (2%)	
New ideas/model	26 (17.1%)	7 (4.6%)	**
Offer	6 (3.9%)	9 (5.9%)	
Nutrition	8 (5.3%)	1 (0.7%)	**
Taste	0	0	
TOTAL	152	153	

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 3 Emotional Appeals in 1996 and 2006

	1996	2006	p
Humor	25 (15.6%)	22 (34.9%)	
Nature	4 (2.5%)	6 (9.5%)	
Health	17 (10.6%)	1 (1.6%)	***
Real life	52 (32.5%)	19 (30.2%)	***
Future	2 (1.3%)	2 (3.3%)	
Drama	9 (5.63%)	4 (6.3%)	
Tradition	20 (12.5%)	1 (1.6%)	***
Elderly	11 (6.9%)	1 (1.6%)	**
Romance	15 (9.3%)	2 (3.2%)	**
Warm	5 (3.1%)	5 (7.9%)	
Fear	0	0	
TOTAL	160	63	

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001

p < .001. As with the informational appeals, no emotional cues appeared significantly more frequently in the 2006 ads than in those from 1996 (see Table 3).

Discussion

The significant drop in price information between the 1990s and 2000s commercials may indicate that while Japanese consumers were concerned about price, quality was equally or even more important in the 2000s than in the 1990s. In a survey by *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (the Nikkei) (2015) 40% of the respondent consumers cited price as the most important factor when purchasing a product, whereas around 25% cited quality. In 2006, quality of product, product functionality, and design were found to be the three most important factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions, with product

price coming in fourth (*Keizai sangyou sho* [Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry]. 2006). As my study's data was collected in 2006, my findings reflected Japanese consumer trends of 2006. It is likely that many companies learned what consumers looked for in products and addressed the concerns of customers interested in quality rather than price.

Regarding new ideas/models, Miura (2007) stated that Japanese consumers made purchases based on emotion rather than reason. As companies were aware that simply changing the color and/or design of a product could attract consumers' attention and entice them to buy the product, they kept creating and selling "new" products one after another, even though the difference in quality of these products may not have been very distinctive.

Some emotional appeals were used more

frequently in the 1990s than in the 2000s, including elderly, health, real life, romance, and traditions. It is ironical to see significantly lower numbers of ads with the elderly in the 2000s since Japan has become aging society: one out of five persons in Japan were over 65 in 2005, and one out of eight over 75 in 2014, according to *Soumushyou Toukei Kyoku* (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications: The Statistics Bureau, the Director-General for Policy Planning, Statistical Standards, and the Statistical Research and Training Institute, 2005, 2014). Thus, Japan started to become concerned about its aging society around 1996, as reflected in the result of the present study. However, by 2006, it had become widely known that Japan was an aging society, and as a consequence, advertisements did not necessarily have to reiterate this.

Liquor sales peaked in 1996 but constantly diminished in the following years (Minakata, 2010). In the 2000s, *Kosei rodo-sho* (The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2008) attempted to improve Japanese health by urging reduce liquor intake. This policy may have been reflected on the significant decrease in liquor ads from the 1990s to the 2000s, as seen in my research. *Nihon Tabako kyoukai* (The Tobacco Institute of Japan, 2015) indicated that while approximately 3.5 million boxes of cigarettes were sold in 1996, this figure dropped to around 2.7 million in 2006. Thus, the decrease of cigarette consumption was reflected in my research

as a significant deduction in cigarette/alcohol ads between 2006 and 1996.

Limitations

Both informational and emotional appeals were counted only once even if they appeared more than once in advertisements in this study, as it was done in Franke's (1996) study. However, advertisements using only one instance of a given type of appeal might impact customers' minds differently than those that used that type of appeal multiple times; therefore, it is important to re-examine how frequently each appeal is used in advertisements. In addition, advertisements in this study tended to provide information about product price in small print in the corner of the screen instead of through verbal narration. Thus, it is important to pay attention to how each piece of information is presented in advertisements.

It would also be useful to examine differences in advertising strategy by product. Seitz and Handojo (1997) and Seitz and Johar (1993) found that perfume ads employed the same or similar strategies in ads even in different countries. Their study found that cosmetics ads took neither a globalized nor localized approach; instead they fell somewhere in between. Thus, it would be important to examine the strategic differences used for different products. Furthermore, while my survey did not intend to examine customers' characteristics, personal differences have been found to affect the per-

ception of ads (Krolikowska & Kuenzel, 2008; Moore & Harris, 1996; Moore, Harris, & Chen, 1995; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 1995; Ruitz & Sicilia, 2004). Thus, it would be important to examine customers' personal characteristics in future research. In addition, the location of the airing of an ad and the product's characteristics (Ramarapu, Timmerman, & Ramarapu, 1999) should be examined in the future. Furthermore, I noticed that the car ads were commonly the commercials with emotional appeals in the 2000s, and they rarely provided much information of the car itself. Thus, it would be useful to analyze the quality of emotional appeals in advertisements.

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