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Research Article

A Discourse of Beauty Standards in Japanese Beauty Product Advertisement (Japanese Women Perspective)

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze advertisements' textual and visual elements and discursive and sociocultural analysis of beauty product advertisements in Japan. Data were taken and studied from several examples of beauty product advertisements and interviews with seven Japanese women as informants about the discourse in beauty product advertisements. In addition, the speakers were also asked to express their opinions regarding the beauty standards in Japanese society today.

The results show that advertising has a role in reproducing and maintaining the standard of beauty in Japanese society. The image of women with clean and shining white skin is still the standard for Japanese women. Taglines and beauty products in Japan offer clean white skin as demanded in Japanese society. From this, it is also known that advertising producers use beauty constructions formed in society to make advertisements for beauty products. This causes the discourse on Japanese beauty standards to persist in Japanese society.

Keywords: *Advertisements, Beauty product, Beauty standard, Critical discourse analysis*

Introduction

Women are always demanded to appear beautiful in their daily lives. They are expected to possess and display their beauty, and men desire women who have such beauty. Beauty has become a standard for women to succeed in romance and daily lives (Wolf, 2002). To attain this beauty, using beauty products has become one of the paths women choose. The perception and societal demand for attractive

appearances drive the emergence and development of various beauty products. Many women consider beauty products essential needs they must fulfill (Hidayah & Milal, 2016). This condition encourages the emergence of various beauty products with various advertisements to promote these beauty products.

Advertisements are the most potent medium to introduce and persuade the public about a product. Product manufacturers

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employ various advertising strategies when advertising a product, one of which is to construct a problem and demonstrate that their product can solve that problem (Kaur et al., 2013). Advertisements for beauty products that target women as the main consumers also show the same thing. The use of visuals and language in beauty product advertisements plays a crucial role in capturing the attention of potential consumers. G. Cook (2001) stated that advertisements provide information, persuade, remind, influence, and even change the opinions, emotions, and behaviors of those who view them. Beauty product advertisements typically feature beautiful women in the ads, accompanied by text that constructs discourse about the advertised products. In Japanese beauty product advertisements, it is common to find text such as 美白 (beautiful white skin) and 赤ちゃんの肌 (baby-like skin), which promise specific benefits to consumers using a particular brand.

Beauty product advertisements shape the stereotype of the "ideal" woman through the visual and textual aspects presented in the ads, both of which are targeted toward consumers of these beauty products. The portrayal of the "ideal" woman in beauty product advertisements is influenced by the construction of beauty standards prevailing in society. In Japan, for instance, women are defined as beautiful if they have fair white skin (Ashikari, 2005). The formulation of beauty standards in society and the discourse formed by beauty product advertisements are interconnected, with both targeting women as the object of discourse regarding beauty.

Several previous studies have shown that beauty product advertisements play a significant role in shaping perspectives and propagating the "ideal" beauty for women. Studies on this topic have been conducted by Lestari (2020), Susanti (2019), Hidayah and Milal (2016), Kaur et al. (2013), and Mendrofa (2020). However, previous research has primarily focused on the visual and textual analysis of advertisements without delving into the aspects of discursive and socio-cultural analysis to understand how the discourse formed and conveyed by an advertisement is internalized and perceived by society. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing the textual and

visual elements of beauty product advertisements in Japan and exploring Japanese women's perspectives on the discourse regarding beauty standards depicted in these advertisements using critical discourse analysis.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative research method, which is widely used in socio-humanitarian studies. The steps involved include presenting, interpreting, validating, and indicating potential research outcomes (Creswell, 2016, p.247). The research data was obtained through the collection of qualitative documents, namely beauty product advertisements in Japan, and transcripts of interviews conducted with 7 Japanese women as respondents.

The research problem analysis is conducted using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis theory. Critical Discourse Analysis analyses the connection between linguistic levels and the hidden social relations within written and spoken texts. The analysis process involves three stages: text analysis, discursive analysis, and sociocultural analysis.

The text analysis stage is conducted by observing and analysing the formal aspects of the text. This analysis includes linguistic aspects such as language use, grammar, metaphor, and diction present in the text. Additionally, visual elements in the text are also analysed. Visual elements include colour, images, and symbols used in the advertisements, which serve as the data source. The visual elements are analysed using Roland Barthes' Semiotics, which discusses the relationship between signs (signifiers) and their meanings (signified) in advertisements to create connotations or myths associated with the respective ads.

The discursive stage is related to producing and consuming texts or advertisements used as the data source. At this level, the analysis examines the text's coherence within the advertisement and how it is interpreted. In the discursive stage, the analysis incorporates the results of interviews conducted with 7 Japanese women as research participants. The discursive stage is followed by the sociocultural stage, which looks at how the discourse conveyed by the text (beauty product advertisements) influences the social structure in Japanese society.

To understand the interpretation and influence of the advertisement on the social structure in Japanese society, interviews were conducted with 7 Japanese women aged from their 20s to 40s. The research questions were formulated based on the points to be analysed regarding how Japanese women perceive the discourse of beauty presented in advertisements and internalize the discourse about beauty standards in Japanese society. The interviews were conducted face-to-face via the Zoom application.

Result and Discussion

1. Text Analysis Stage

In this stage, the analysis is conducted on the linguistic and visual aspects of the advertisements used as the research object. This aspect involves examining the words, sentences, images, and symbols presented in the advertisements that depict beauty standards for women in Japan. The analysis is performed using Roland Barthes' Semiotics.



Figure 1. Advertisement Analysis A

Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/9b/76/7b/9b767b248aadcae8cebcd16a611d53cf.jpg>

Table 2. Verbal and Visual Aspect in Advertisement A

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Verbal Text	焼かない (not tanned)	Indicates the product's function as a sunscreen where the product's user will not get sunburned.
	最強 UV (the strongest UV)	Indicates that the product can protect the skin from exposure to UV rays (sunlight)
	高密着で汗・ 水に強い (High adhesion and resistant to sweat and water)	Indicates that the product has high resistance to sweat and water
	さらさら続く (Continues to feel smooth)	Indicates that product users will not feel sticky on their skin, and their skin will continue to feel soft.
Visual Picture	Golden colour	Indicates the variant of the product, of which this product is the "gold" variant. The gold color contains yellow elements, representing the color of sunlight. In addition, the gold color shows a glamorous image.
	A golden layer on the model's body	Indicates the product can be used all over the body, not just for the face



Figure 2. Advertisement Analysis B

Source: https://makeshop-multi-images.akamaized.net/yanacosme/items-images/000000000001_rYqsgAl.jpg

Table 3. Verbal and Visual Aspect in Advertisement B

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Verbal Text	見た目年齢-5 歳肌 (Visibly younger-looking skin -5 years)	Indicates the effect of using the product, where the user's skin will look 5 years younger.
	肌悩みは光で飛ばして (Blast away skin concerns with light)	Indicates that the product will make the user's skin glow white and, at the same time, can solve the skin problems that the user has.
	厚塗りとサヨウナラ (Goodbye to heavy makeup)	Indicates that the product will have a light effect on the user's skin when applied, making it appear that no makeup is being applied.
	パールのようなツヤ感を叶える (Deliver a pearl-like shine)	Indicates the product will make the user's skin shiny like pearls
Visual Picture	White background	It indicates a clean and bright image. It also indicates the skin tone achieved if the product is used.
	Pearl shell picture	Indicates the variant of the product, i.e., Pearl CC Cream



Figure 3. Advertisement Analysis C

Source: <https://obs.line-scdn.net/r/myhome/hex/b5edc224aca9bae6ec90fd9cd57d8d4f897d830ae1203bcd8016ee3fac1437a8tf5eb7a219d17041t0f5e3912/w750>

Table 4. Verbal and Visual Aspect in Advertisement C

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Verbal Text	朝の印象、くずさない (Morning impression, no mess)	Indicates the effect of the product where the product user will keep a bright face throughout the day, just like a fresh face in the morning.
	夕方まで「つや玉」 (Tsuyadama until evening)	Indicates a healthy, bright, and radiant face until late afternoon/evening
Visual Picture	Cheek glow on female models	Indicates 「つや玉」 which is a face that glows and looks moist and healthy.
	Blue and orange colour background	The blue colour indicates morning, and the orange colour indicates sunset. This colour indicates that the product will give a bright and fresh effect throughout the day.



Figure 4. Advertisement Analysis D

Source: <https://www.takaski.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ROHTO-Hada-Labo-Perfect-Hydration-Gel-Made-in-Japan8.jpg>

Table 5. Verbal and Visual Aspect in Advertisement D

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Verbal Text	美白 (beautiful white)	Indicates that beautiful skin is white
	オーロラ透明感 (Aurora Transparency)	Indicates beautiful skin that is clear, clean, without any blemishes, and appears radiant from all angles.
	シミの根本から抑える (Control from the root of blemishes)	Indicates the product will remove blemishes from the skin by the root
Visual Picture	Close-up picture of the female model	Indicates the product's effect on the model's skin, which looks healthy, clean and radiant.
	Colourful background	Indicates light from the aurora bouncing off the model's face



Figure 5. Advertisement Analysis E

Source: https://pool-inc.net/pool_2020/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/sugao_spring_main.jpg

Table 6. Verbal and Visual Aspect in Advertisement E

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Verbal Text	色白になりたいすべての女子へ (To all the girls who want fair skin)	Indicates the product is targeted at young female consumers who want to have fair skin
	ふわふわ (fluffy)	Indicates the product's creaminess and the effect of using the product that will make the consumer's skin soft.
	シロネコ肌 (White cat skin)	Indicates the effect of using the product, where the consumer's skin will become white and soft, like the fur of a white cat.
Visual Picture	Close-up face of a female model with the product highlighted	Indicates the product's effect on the model's skin, which appears pure white. Pose of the model imitating the white cat on the side
	White cat	Indicates the effect obtained from using the product, where the consumer's skin will become white, like the white colour of cat fur. In addition, the skin of the product user will become soft, just like cat fur.

2. Discursive Stage

In this stage, interviews are conducted with 7 research participants to observe how they interpret the text and visual elements present in the advertisements. During the interviews, the participants are asked how they perceive and interpret the textual and visual elements of the advertisements with the products offered in the ads. The questions given to the participants are as follows:

1. In Advertisement A, it says "Do not bake!" Do you like the result on baked skin? What do you think?
2. Is it a good thing for Ms./Mrs. ~ to look younger?
3. What does "Tsu Yadama (つや玉)" mean in Advertisement C?
4. What kind of image does "Aurora Transparency (オーロラ透明感)" convey in Advertisement D?
5. What does "White cat skin (シロネコ肌)" mean in Advertisement E?

In question (1), the participants are asked about the product in advertisement B, where the tagline "焼かない!" (No burning!) indicates a sunscreen product. All participants stated that they use sunscreen products in their daily lives, primarily for health reasons to protect their skin from skin cancer. This is evident in the following statements:

I think that non-tanned skin is more beautiful, and I prefer lighter skin. So, I use sunscreen to prevent tanning. I often see advertisements like this. (KA)

It's not about "I want to become fair, so I apply sunscreen," but for my future. I apply sunscreen for my skin, so when I hear words like "not getting tanned" or "the strongest" in advertisements, I think, "Oh, maybe it's a strong sunscreen," and I feel like buying it. (NA)

From the statements above, it is evident that the standard of beautiful skin as being white still prevails in Japanese society, as stated by Participant KA. Participants also mentioned that the use of the word 焼かない! (not getting tanned) has a significant impact, as people who see the advertisement will use sunscreen to protect their skin from sunburn, as stated by participant NA.

In the second question, the participants were asked about their opinions regarding products promoting anti-aging effects, claiming that their products can make users appear five years younger than their actual age. The responses from the participants are as follows:

I'm still thinking it's okay for now. I'm 25 years old, and if I subtract a few years, it's like being 20, so well, it might change a bit, but it's still okay. However, when I reach my 30s or 40s, it might be nice to hear people say that slightly younger-looking skin is beautiful. (YT)

For me, what's considered common among Japanese people right now, well, I'm not so sure about that. I don't want to be seen as ten years younger, but it would be nice to be seen as younger. When I was in Indonesia, even though I'm 36 now, I was sometimes mistaken for a college student, and I genuinely felt happy about it. Even in Japan, when I say I'm 36, people occasionally react with "Oh, really?" and that honestly makes me happy. So, something like "minus five years skin" as in this advertisement, well, that sounds good, I think. (OY)

Young-looking women... Yes, I think it's a good thing. People often buy various skincare products to maintain a youthful appearance, and when they see something like "minus five years," it might make them want to buy it. (KA)

Based on the interview results, it is evident that the use of the words "anti-aging" or "look younger" has a significant impact on the attention of Japanese women toward such products. As mentioned by participants OY and KA, who are in their 30s and late 20s, they consider products that make them look younger to be a positive aspect. This is because both participants believe that women would feel happy if they were told they look younger than their actual age. Participant YT, who is in her mid-20s, thinks that products with anti-aging effects do not have much impact on her at her current age. However, she believes it might be more relevant when she reaches her 30s or 40s.

Regarding the third question concerning the tagline "つや玉" appearing in the advertisement, the participants' responses are as follows:

I often see this product in stores. It's called "Elixir" and frequently mentions

"Tsuyadama." I've often wondered about its meaning, too. "Tsubyadama" seems to imply a sense of glossiness, a bit beautiful and radiant, like having healthy and glowing skin. (SK)

Do you understand that kind of sparkling feeling on the cheeks? It's like there's enough moisture, and the skin looks glossy, and for people with such shiny skin, it's like having round white lights here, right? ... Is that what "Tsuyadama" means? It has that feeling of firmness and moisture in the skin, not just an appearance of moisture but more like a youthful skin impression. I've been seeing this "Tsuyadama" concept quite often lately. (NK)

Is it something related to having skin that looks like it's shining on the cheeks here? When this area shines, it's like a baby's skin. It gives you the feeling of seeing skin just as it was when you were born, which is really nice. When this area shines or looks glossy, it gives the impression of having the same kind of skin as a newborn baby, so having that kind of skin is nice and something I'd like to aim for. (KA)

The tagline つや玉 that appears in the advertisement is said to be a tagline commonly found in beauty products in Japan recently, as stated by participant SK, who mentioned seeing this tagline frequently in beauty stores. All three participants stated that the word "つや玉" gives the impression of a radiant and healthy face, as it appears moist throughout the day. The product promises to provide moisturized and radiant facial skin, giving the feeling of having baby-like skin, which becomes the product's selling point.

In the fourth question, the participants were asked about the key points they captured from advertisement D and the meaning of the word "オーロラ透明感" that appears in the advertisement. The responses from the participants are as follows:

I wonder what "Aurora" means. It's like the light of the aurora. We often hear

the word "transparency." "Aurora" seems to have a similarity with "Tsubadama." It feels like it conveys something similar, something you want to communicate or express. ... Well, there's an image of it sparkling. Various colors, like the sparkling green, convey a pure sense of being clear and transparent. (KA)

Fells like not using anything, just like baby skin. It has a sense of transparency, you know. (OY)

Transparency, however, feels a bit moist and soft. But "Aurora," in this advertisement, seems to have various colors, not seen the same way by everyone. Depending on the viewer, it might appear lively, gentle, or even beautiful, something like that. (YT)

From the participants' responses, it is known that the word オーロラ透明感 refers to clear, radiant, and smooth skin. Participant KA stated that オーロラ透明感 has a similar image to つや玉, but it emphasizes clear and radiant skin. Participant OY mentioned that オーロラ透明感 evokes the image of baby-like skin. A similar statement was also made by participant YT, who described the image conveyed by this word as healthy, beautiful, and soft skin.

In the fifth question, the participants were asked about the word シロネコ肌 written in advertisement E. Here are the participants' responses regarding this matter:

White is associated with skin whitening because there are girls who want to become fairer, they use whitening products. Fluffy gives the impression of soft skin. This advertisement might say that even if your skin is firm, it will appear smooth if you use this product. And lately, cats are pretty popular in Japan, as well as dogs. But I often see cats in advertisements. (YT)

If someone says "white cat skin," I think it refers to something like this because there are photos to illustrate it. It implies having no acne, no wrinkles, and

a soft texture when touched, like a baby's face. When someone is described as having "cat skin," it suggests that it's not rigid, not rough, but relatively smooth, soft, and easy to imagine when touched. (OY)

White cat skin. White is still associated with skin whitening or desiring that whiteness, so I thought it might be related to that. As for the cat part, it's cute, and there's also "fluffy" mentioned here, so it gives that kind of impression, which is different from "Tsubadama." It has the opposite meaning. It's like matte or something like that in that sense. (SK)

The participant's responses to the fifth question indicate that beauty products in Japan still prioritize white skin as a selling point of the products. The use of cat images and the word "cat" (ネコ) suggests that the product will make the user's skin soft like a cat's fur, as mentioned by participant YT regarding the image of "ふわふわ" (fluffy), which gives the impression of soft skin.

3. Sociocultural Stage

This stage analyses the coherence between the discourse conveyed by the text (beauty product advertisements) and its influence on the social structure in Japanese society, represented by the seven research participants. Advertisers reproduce the existing discourse in Japanese society regarding beauty standards in beauty product advertisements.

The participants were asked to express their opinions regarding what beautiful skin means in Japanese society. Most participants mentioned that beautiful skin is moisturized, white, and free from acne, blemishes, and small facial pores. These statements can be seen from the following interview results:

The conditions for beautiful skin are, well, it's still about that transparency we talked about earlier. Having clarity, being moisturized, and not being dry or rough, perhaps. (NK)

No blemishes, a fair complexion, and closed pores. Pores are small openings on the skin, and they feel tightly closed. These are what we call clear skin, aren't they? (KA)

No pores, no acne. There are no unnecessary things on the skin, like pores, acne, or blemishes. (OY)

My idea of beautiful skin is having no acne, roughness and smooth, clear skin. (YT)

From the statements above, it is understood that beautiful skin is characterized by being clean (clear skin), radiant, free from blemishes and acne, and having small facial pores. To achieve such skin, the participants mentioned using skincare products daily, such as moisturizers, face masks, and sunscreen. Regarding facial care, the participants emphasized that besides having beautiful skin, the most important aspect is having healthy skin. This is evident in the following statements:

Rather than saying "not to get tanned," there's the risk of getting sunburned and even developing skin cancer, so I think people use sunscreen for that reason. (OY)

I think quite a few people are cautious, even in the summer, using sunscreen and carrying sun umbrellas. I wear sunscreen, but I find it troublesome to worry too much about things like dark spots, wrinkles, and so on in the future. (SK)

However, I believe that having healthy skin is the most important. So, it's not necessarily about being fair or tanned, but rather having firm skin and, well, maybe not precisely "mizumizushi" (moist), but that's what I think is good. (YT)

Having beautiful skin is something some participants desire, but beyond that, they state that maintaining healthy skin is even more important. Maintaining healthy skin is related to

using sunscreen, which participant OY mentioned can prevent skin cancer. This statement aligns with what participant YT mentioned, that even though having white skin is not essential, having healthy skin is the most important aspect.

Beauty product advertisements are generally targeted toward female consumers, so advertisers observe how society perceives women as beautiful and attractive to anyone who looks at them. In connection with this, participants were asked what generally makes Japanese men interested in Japanese women. The participants' responses regarding this question are shown in the following data:

Usually, they talk because they are nice or cute. However, that is both true and not true. They look at her physique, not her nature. The appearance is like, it looks like, here, the kids are more into girls who look like innocent girls, rather than girls who are not cheerful, who are like models, like Caucasian girls who are independent, like talking about their own opinions, that is not preferred. So, they choose from what it is, from the girl's appearance, the style of clothing is not the models that like to show their skin. If I look at my male friends, it seems like that. (FS)

It seems that men often notice people with beautiful skin and those who take care of their nails. Even if they don't have nail polish, men notice when the nails are well-groomed, as mentioned in a book. (NA)

Japanese men might prefer cute girls over beautiful ones. I mean, with big and distinct eyes, you know. In Japan, I have the impression that advertisements don't often use people with attractive eyes. (YT)

Skin color is still important, preferably fair. And I think people who have a radiant look, things like that, are attractive. (OY)

From the participants' responses above, it is known that Japanese men find women attractive with beautiful skin and innocent and pure faces resembling children. Having white and radiant skin also appeals to men in Japan. This is evident in the models in the five beauty product advertisements discussed earlier. All five female models featured in the ads have beautiful, blemish-free, radiant skin. Some models emphasize white skin and wear light makeup, showcasing their fresh and youthful appearance. Especially in advertisement E, it is noticeable that the model in the ad, actress Hashimoto Kanna, displays a fair and pure face, appearing like a sweet young woman. Another point stated by the participants is that Japanese men tend to be attracted to women with big eyes, as seen in the advertisements above.

Furthermore, the participants were asked about the current beauty standards in Japanese society. All participants stated that the beauty standard in Japan still revolves around having white skin as the norm. As shown in the following data:

So, fair skin and whitening are still part of those standards, right? Are there still plenty of advertisements like that? (SK)

The standard for beauty... I think it's being a bit slim, having large eyes, and having fair skin. ... Fair skin and big eyes that should be enough. The nose doesn't matter that much. It's all about the eyes and the skin. (KA)

The beauty standards in Japan... it's about having fair skin, right? Fair skin, no visible pores, and no acne. That's what I think. ... All the women in these advertisements have that kind of look in photos, magazines, and commercials. They all have fair skin because there are no tanned people. So, we often see references to whitening, fluffy, poreless skin, and such. I think these are the current beauty standards. (OY)

It is evident from the participants' responses that the discourse on the standard of

beauty is white skin, which is raised in various media, in advertisements, photos and magazines. The women who appear in these media all have white skin, as revealed by participants SK and OY. In addition to having fair skin, Japanese women will be considered beautiful if they have big eyes and smooth skin without acne and pores.

Based on the results of interviews with participants, it can be seen how the discourse on beauty standards reproduced continuously through advertising media encourages women in Japan to consume beauty products on the market. Although some participants indicated they were not concerned about the demand for fair skin, most stated that having fair skin and smooth, glowing skin is the standard of beauty expected by Japanese society. This study shows that the discourse shaped by the media (advertisements) greatly influences the conception of beauty in Japanese society. This research shows that women, particularly in Japan, are still

Conclusion

Advertisements for beauty products in Japan have the effect of shaping the construction of beauty among Japanese women. The use of language and visuals in Japanese beauty advertisements clearly shows the functions and results obtained from using the products in question, where these products promise fair skin, younger-looking skin and face, and clean, glowing skin. The discourse on beauty formed in society is continuously reproduced by various media, including advertisements. The female models shown in the advertisements always have bright, white, and radiant faces, as is the construction of beauty in Japanese society.

Analysis of the five beauty product advertisements using Critical Discourse Analysis shows that the use of symbols, taglines or sentences that appear in the advertisements all aim to shape the construction of beauty. In addition, it is also to strengthen further the construction of beauty that exists in Japanese society. This discourse is captured by people who see the ads and are interested in using the advertised product in the hope that they will get results like the model in the advertisement. People do this not only because of the desire to have healthy facial skin but also because of the

desire to conform to the standards that exist in society. Also, this is related to how other people perceive the women concerned.

The results of this study are expected to provide knowledge and views related to the influence of beauty product advertisements on a woman's perception of viewing herself and placing herself in the surrounding environment. Women, as individuals and collectives, are always bound by constructions that exist in society, especially those related to their bodies. The construction of beauty standards makes women do various things to meet these standards. Beauty product manufacturers also have a hand in shaping this beauty construction by coming up with advertisements featuring female models that fit the beauty standards in Japan. Beauty product production and advertising producers also utilize this already-formed beauty construction as the basis for making beauty advertisements, which causes the reproduction of beauty discourse to continue.

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