



The Perception of Foreignness in Japanese Marketing:

Dangers in the Age of Social Media

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Introduction

The boon in Internet and social media has made the marketing world smaller. Established brands like Coca-Cola, Microsoft, and Proctor and Gamble can be found in every corner of the globe, but even small local corporations can reap the benefits of marketing to a worldwide audience with news of, if not the products themselves, reaching new customers across new borders. However, this leap to globalize does not come without price. Logos, universally recognized regardless of language, have historically been effective marketing tools, but logos are static. To appeal to online targets, marketers make fresh dynamic videos or upload commercials used in the local market onto YouTube. Few companies consider how their efforts might be viewed by those outside the target market of their own country, or what that market's specific cultural or social needs might be. Every business student hears the story of Chevrolet trying to sell *Nova* brand cars in South America in the 1970s, where in Spanish 'no va' means 'does not go' - not good for a product that is supposed to go somewhere. While this naiveté may bring a giggle today, the company will never live the failure down. Nowadays, the great reach of social media can reverberate negative publicity much further and be even more devastating to products and their companies.

Not only is the Internet affecting how marketing is done, but also what is marketed and how marketing is perceived. Some argue that the consumer has become the product, with credit card companies tracking consumer spending via embedded mi-

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crochips and search engines, like Google, culling personal searches and email in order to target ads to the individual. Companies can sell such personal information to allow other, occasionally unscrupulous, entities to target potential buyers. This has led to vexing overloads of spam and target ads, phishing attacks on the uninformed, and even an uptick in identity theft that many protest as an invasion of privacy, and blame corporations for. Social media has also contributed to what is marketed. In the late 20th century focus shifted to selling the *image* of a product, or brand, instead of selling the product itself. People can now be the product. Savvy personalities promote themselves by putting their name on products, television and radio shows, and a wide variety of social media accounts. Justin Bieber's meteoric rise is directly attributable to his innovative self-promotion on Twitter. Rihanna's choice has been Instagram, which has captured both her luxurious lifestyle and her volatile and violent relationship to fellow singer Chris Brown. Perez Hilton is now accused of trolling his namesake Paris Hilton to the detriment of each of their personal brands but to the amusement of tabloid readers. Damage to any brand image can affect the entire product mix negatively. Not every application of online marketing is bad, but as with any consumer experience, it is the negative ones that are remembered and made public. Brands with a negative image reflect their company, and by extension, countries of origin.

Corporations are expected to have an ethical obligation to adhere to the social conventions of their markets. Breaches of social contracts by insensitive and ethnocentric companies reflect poorly on more than just the product; they reflect poorly on the entire country and its people. Activists who suffer affronts to their culture now have a global cyber-platform from which to express their offense and do not hesitate to air grievances in the court of public opinion. With a few scrolls through a Twitter account on a given day, one may find a national news anchor being called out for using a fake Indian accent (Allan 2013), a list of 14 accidentally racist international products (truTV 2013), or just an ordinary guy being assailed for writing in his personal ad that he refused to date African-Americans (Zimmerman 2013). No entity online is immune.

Not only are people protesting cultural offenses on the new global stage, but

they are also protesting what is perceived to be a lack of ethics in marketing as a whole. Marketing is a powerful tool, and it is seen by some as a manipulative attempt to drive consumerism within populations that may not need, or cannot afford, the marketed products. An anti-corporationalism and anti-consumerism backlash is playing out loudly in social media with accounts of even the smallest gaffe echoing across continents that may not even have access to the product.

Many of these problems could be avoided if greater care were taken in the marketing process to consider cultural differences regardless of the obvious target market. This is especially true in an extremely homogenous culture such as Japan's. While so-called *gaikokujin*, or "foreigners," are but a small percentage of the demographic - and not generally considered a target market - it is they who are speaking out against overt insensitive stereotypes perpetuated in Japanese marketing to a worldwide audience. To counter the negative image Japan has created for itself regarding its insensitivity towards other cultures, it would be wise for the face of Japan (i.e., marketing) to show more positive depictions of non-Japanese. It is with that hope that this paper seeks to explore the perceptions that both Japanese and non-Japanese have regarding foreignness in Japanese marketing and to offer suggestions to offset the current trend of perceived foreigner-bashing that is drawing negative publicity to Japan as a whole especially through social media.

Understanding the Global Perspective

While the word *global* permeates almost every aspect of Japanese society nowadays, its true meaning often is misunderstood. Cultural Studies employs three levels of cultural acceptance and integration.

- * global: the crossover of ideas, culture, and products (food, music, fashion)
- * international: working together across cultures to meet individual goals (working in a foreign company, co-authoring, conversational travel language)
- * multicultural: the acceptance and possible assimilation into a culture (an extended homestay, international marriage, writing in a foreign language)

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In this sense, globalism is a concept concerning only the superficial and shallow aspects of a culture. Many of the *products* of globalism are simply that, products which can be bought and sold across national boundaries but which do little to convey any greater meaning or depth of the culture of origin. Most international marketing aims at the global level. McDonald's and Pizza Hut are well known for offering culturally specific toppings, but consumers of these products learn little about the culture that developed these products. In truth, broad stereotypes are easily perpetuated like that of the fat fast-food eating American.

Arguably, multinationals seen to be pushing a social or political agenda may be accused of *cultural imperialism*, as happened to McDonald's in France in 1999 and again in Australia in 2005 when protesters complained about trade protectionism and an unhealthy menu's effect on the local populations. McDonald's image was further sullied when they were perceived to be insensitive to Muslims and vegetarians when it was reported in 2002 there was residual traces of beef in their frying oil. Large corporations are often the targets of activism, but it is avoidable. Unlike McDonald's 34,734 franchise-strong chain, the largest international restaurant, Subway, with 39,767 franchises (Entrepreneur. 2013) has avoided the crosshairs of activists. This is due in part to strong promotion of a healthier menu that more closely reflects the local cuisine, but also more sensitivity at the corporate level. No one culture makes all the mistakes nor has all the politically correct answers. Companies must be able to identifying the prevailing international winds of change. Chick-fil-A in the US, Barilla pasta in Italy, and the Russian government regarding the Sochi Olympics have all faced detrimental public attacks and product boycotts regarding their anti-homosexual stances. Navigating all facets of international culture is precarious for any marketing team, but ignorance or stubbornness is unacceptable when answers can be found often at the touch of a button or the greater worldwide majority a differing view. Pockets run deep in marketing, and to not have a system of checks in place to avoid cultural faux pas further paints the corporate image as manipulative, callous, and monetarily opportunistic. Only by understanding what prejudice is can we prevent it.

Bias Defined

World history is riddled with *the other* being segregated and denied certain rights based on gender, race, age, ability, sexual orientation, economic or educational status, or anything else that may have differentiated an individual or group. Social scientists argue that prejudice in humans is psychological, not genetic, and are generally irrational and useless in modern times (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). Tribal psychology developed due to those outside the group being perceived a threat, either in the form of interpersonal violence or, specifically in the case of xenophobia, disease (Schaller and Neuberg 2012). The theory that people from other races pose a “group threat” is long established (Blumer 1958, Blalock 1967) and continues to be documented (Samson 2013). The other, the minority, the conquered, or the different in any society, are historically and regularly shunned and thought of as lesser. This in turn has led to feelings of distrust towards the majority. With the advent of the Internet, there now exists a forum to express these feelings and reach a potentially worldwide audience.

“Part of the Internet’s function, in fact, might be as an anonymous release valve for society’s disgruntled, dislocated and disturbed. For those who perceive themselves as powerless against the changing tides of culture, economy and demographics, the misspelled, caps-lock ugliness spouted online is their power.” (Sultan 2013)

What might seem a slight on one side may seem a gross insult to the other, but there are accepted international definitions of what constitutes bias today.

According to the America’s Anti-Defamation League’s (ADL 2008) *Pyramid of Hate* (Figure 1), there are five degrees of bias. Bias itself is defined by the ADL as being “a preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with mutual judgment.” (p. 5) At the lowest level of the pyramid, *stereotyping* is the oversimplification of ideas regarding an entire group that does not take into

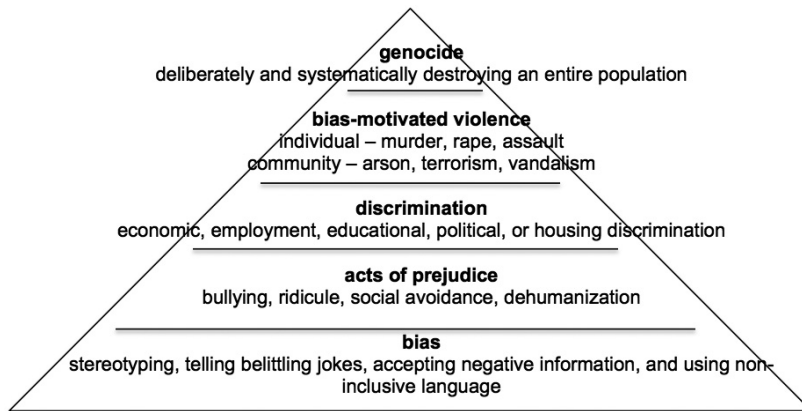


Figure 1: ADL *Pyramid of Hate*

account individual differences within the group. Moving up the pyramid, *prejudice* is an attitude based on ignorance and stereotypes. *Discrimination* is the actual action of exclusion.

Individuals and corporations alike may be called out by today's citizen journalists and so called *iReporters*. No one likes being accused of being biased even at the lowest level of the pyramid, but few can truthfully deny having told an off-color joke. This can be written off as human nature amongst friends when no one is looking. However with the prevalence of cell phone cameras, perpetrators are easily held to a reckoning as Prince Harry of England can attest when in 2005 pictures of him surfaced wearing a Nazi uniform to party. This was taken by media around the world as an act of prejudice that dehumanized Jews who lost their lives in the Holocaust. What was meant to be a joke became a public relations fiasco for the royal family. Though rare outside political circles, claims of genocide, the apex of the pyramid, do exist. Nestlé has never fully recovered from accusations of deliberate eugenics regarding "aggressive marketing" of infant formula in underdeveloped nations in Africa in the late 1970s. Opening itself up to new infant formula markets in China this year has only regurgitated the company's debacle as it is forever linked to its history via search engine. Regardless of whether "human nature" is to blame, societies are changing to become more purposefully inclusive and proactively accepting of the *other*.

Discrimination is largely judged as a question of volition. Cultural relativism

has historically dictated that a person is a product of their era and therefore should not be held accountable for acts of prejudice that were socially acceptable at that time; but even these empathetic views are becoming stricter. Al Jolson is remembered by younger generations more for his performance in the movie *The Jazz Singer* in blackface (a practice that did not die out until the mid-1940s) than for being the “World’s Greatest Entertainer” at the height of his career in the 1930s. At that time, even African-Americans wore blackface, which brings up an ethical conundrum of whether or not these comedians could be called biased. Due to the lack of harmful intent of their acts, many overlook their self-parody and perpetuation of stereotype by saying no harm was meant. Prince Harry was not afforded the same consideration because he was thought to know better. His offense was viewed as deliberate, so his personal brand suffered. However, judging volition is subjective, and self-reporting in research surveys usually leads to answers presumed politically correct.

New research highlights the depth of unconscious bias, or how people deny their prejudices even to themselves. Anthony Greenwald, a social psychologist at the forefront of unconscious cognition, argues that self-delusion is a psychological defense mechanism. He argues that people avoid knowledge of harsh or negative realities by limiting exposure, overt attention, and complete comprehension to bias (1989). The Implicit Association Test, a test of strong word associations that he co-designed, revealed that most of the hundreds of thousands of respondents to the anonymous online test were completely oblivious to their own strong biases regarding race, sexual orientation, gender, and religion (Nosek, B. A. et al. 2009). Another co-designer, Mahzarin Banaji, has been using a version of the test to teach people about their own unconscious biases, but found overtraining had little effect (Banaji & Greenwald 2013). Instead, she and others (Lai, C., Marini, M., A. Lehr, S. et al. 2013) found the method of *counter-stereotyping*, providing positive messages to counteract negative stereotypes, to be somewhat effective, albeit temporarily. Counter-stereotyping in advertising would be an obvious fix not only for individual and social biases, but also for the tarnished reputations of today’s mega-corporation. As it is, brands continue to be caught stereotyping.

Cases of Perceived Bias Exacerbated by Social Media Affecting a Brand

In the US, there has been a decades long push to be politically correct with the expectation that other societies fall in line. But even within that country, ethical issues regarding bias and stereotyping in marketing are regular hot-button topics in social media. Great steps have been taken across all media to eliminate deliberate instances of discrimination, whether it is Caucasians in blackface or sexist jokes on sitcoms. Nonetheless, accounts of such biased behavior regularly appear in headlines, tweets, and email. Focusing on racial discrimination, three events occurred in the spring of 2013 that highlight the power of social media, its impact on a brand, and the level of volition as perceived by the public.

A case in June, 2013, highlights the ongoing racial tension in America and the instance of a brand becoming the target, not the perpetrator, of Internet vitriol. It started with a commercial for General Mills' anchor-brand cereal, Cheerios, which featured an interracial family with a biracial child. General Mills was forced to disable the YouTube comments after Internet trolls turned the site into a profanity-filled platform from which to disgorge hatred against non-Caucasians and Caucasians alike: "race-traitors" who marry outside their race. This time, the netizens, newscasters, and print media leapt to the defense of the brand, and their response was overwhelming shock at how, in this day and age, anyone would dare openly express such blatant racism, and against a child no less. It was a stark reminder that regardless of what social mores Americans have and what is deemed common decency, is may not be as common in the country as one would hope - a perfect example of Greenwald's avoidance of comprehension. A wide variety of counter-stereotyping developed at the grassroots level. The commercial became an Internet meme questioning racism and spawned at least two parody videos tackling more than just racial discrimination. A popular YouTube channel known as *The Fine Brothers* focused their *Kids React* show, which features pseudo-sociological studies on current events and culture, on the subject by showing the commercial to 12 children ages seven to 13, none of whom seemed to perceive an issue with the interracial family,

though one astutely noted that such racism may exist in parts of the country unfamiliar to her. In this case, it was not the brand that was perceived as victim, and neither was the brand the focal point. The biracial child was. Cheerios, the brand, merely survived the attack and was well regarded for the initial portrayal of the family and the graceful handling of the issue. Unfortunately for General Mills, the company was not credited for having started the subsequent national discussion on race, and the brand, already a household name, did not obtain a greater market share from the publicity.

In a separate case, racial discrimination unexpectedly affected two brands already reeling from negative fallout from a plane crash in which three people died. On July 6, 2013, an Asiana Airline flight landing in San Francisco clipped the seawall on final approach. Though the pilots' names had been previously released, on July 12 an anchor on local news station KTVU reported four names, including "Sum Ting Wong" and "Wi Tu Lo" which, when spoken aloud, sound like "something wrong" and "we too low," playing on the stereotypes of poor pronunciation and grammar of Asians. One of the other reported names was an expletive. Going out on live television, the nightly news anchor did not understand that the station was being pranked. The video and screen capture went viral. Three veteran staffers and a National Transportation Safety Board intern were fired for failure to exercise due diligence in their fact checking. It transpired that a former pilot and KTVU consultant provided the fake names. The station apologized immediately, saying it was the victim of the prank, but not in time to stop a South Korean station from retaliating by airing its own fake name story related to a separate Southwest Airline incident. A spokesperson for Asiana lamented that the fact something so racially demeaning and offensive had been broadcast, and the company brought suit against KTVU. After receiving an apology, the suit was dropped. Asiana, which was already suffering through the media fallout from the tragic accident, had to squander its resources to address this insensitive and ill-timed "joke." Both companies suffered intense social media condemnation that soiled their brands - Asiana, from falling victim to the racist stereotype and the television station from being portrayed as bullying bigots. The saving grace for both companies was

In Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Faculty of Business Administration that in the end both were viewed as victims and neither were deemed at fault.

However, a third case in late June of 2013 best illustrates how volition to commit discrimination affects public perception. Celebrity chef and darling of southern cooking, Paula Deen, admitted to having used racial slurs and cracking off-color jokes about African-Americans. Though she was referring to events that occurred more than 25 years ago, her personal brand suffered irreparable damage. The darling of southern cooking's two YouTube video-apologies were judged to be unapologetic in that she excused her behavior as being part of the cultural heritage of The South which tolerated such utterances at the time. While some rallied to her support, others argued that discrimination in "The South" persists and that Ms. Deen was only upset because she got caught. Either way, due to the virulent spread of court case details and videos via social media, she was forced to cancel an imminent cookbook publication, virtually all lucrative business partnerships, and her branded product sponsorships. According to Gene Grabowski, crisis manager at public relations firm LEVICK, racial discrimination is the worst offense to be found publically guilty of, equal only to being found to be a sexual predator (Bruell 2013). In August 2013, her court case was dismissed, but she is still perceived as guilty by many in the court of public opinion who do not trust the celebrity has any motivation to cease discrimination other than to save her personal brand. She had volition. Public relations experts believe her personal brand can be redeemed if she demonstrates heartfelt contrition specifically by taking persistent positive steps to reach out to African-Americans by using her power of celebrity to influence the public - in short, by counter-stereotyping (Bruell 2013).

Just like Paula Deen discovered on an individual level, one of the worst intercultural mistakes an entire society can make is the perpetuation of stereotypes that belittle their foreign residents. What may be intended as a whimsical joke is often one of many "micro-aggressions" that minorities contend with daily. Few Japanese are aware of micro-aggressions suffered regularly, such as being asked about one's ability to use chopsticks, being complimented for one's Japanese after a single word, or being assumed to be completely incompetent in Japanese - nor would many comprehend these as aggressive. Foreigners frustrated with the continual

onslaught, on the other hand, would not understand these as a way for Japanese to reach out to their exotic and alien guests. Long-term foreigners in Japan come to understand they will forever be seen as the outsider, not to be trusted, as natural tribal psychology dictates. The onus rests on them to be accepting of the majority culture. They must understand that Japanese are at the extreme end of being a *high-context* culture, one in which criticism and true feelings are avoided. An open discussion of racism, sexism, ageism, or any other discrimination is virtually impossible. Ordinary Japanese would no doubt be shocked if confronted with their micro-aggressive tendencies or unconscious biases, just as they would be shocked to learn many foreigners have been denied housing at least once while residing in the country. Having no place within the society to vent, aggrieved foreigners have turned to Facebook, blogging, and other forms of social media, which is available at the touch of a button and accessible to a worldwide audience indefinitely. One saving grace for Japan's international image is the fact that the volition to discriminate against foreigners is usually not blamed on individuals, but it is generally viewed as the ignorance of the whole society. That being said, non-Japanese who live outside of the country usually do not have an opportunity to learn the depths of the culture and therefore may pose more of an economic threat to the clean-cut and positive image the Japanese have created for themselves.

Though ubiquitous, Japanese icons such as Hello Kitty, sushi, and karaoke serve as light and easy cultural ambassadors and marketing tools, Japan is just as notorious abroad for turning a blind eye to complaints of racial discrimination. It has been reported worldwide that for the first time in almost 20 years, Prime Minister Abe omitted mention of his country's onus and aggression during the already controversial the annual World War II memorial ceremony, even though he did not in his previous term in 2007. Though he did not make the controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, he did send flowers, which was viewed by international media as placating his nationalist critics. Also in August, another in a series of worldwide statues memorializing Korean "comfort women" was unveiled, this time in Glendale, California, sparking protest demonstrations throughout many Korean neighborhoods in Japan by the likes of the political Restoration Party New Wind and others. The fact

In Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Faculty of Business Administration that Japan continues even to use the phrase “comfort women” to euphemistically refer to conscripted sex slaves offends many around the globe. Cell phone shots of demonstrations placards reading, “all Koreans, both good and bad, should die” and other serious threats went viral on the Internet. Counter demonstrations ensued the following week, to the dismay of many outside the country who did not realize such immediate racial tensions existed. That applicants for national universities are no longer rejected for having an address in an “untouchable” neighborhood does little to mitigate the fact that even today third and fourth-generation Japan-born Koreans are still required to hold Korean passports. Northern Ainu and southern Okinawans lament continued prejudice. Both the mayors of Tokyo and second city Osaka are infamous for their vociferous anti-immigration, anti-foreigner stances. A Gifu man has sued NHK over the distress foreign words used in his broadcast are causing him. “Afro Tanaka” is the stage name of a television comic. “Black melon-bread,” with its see-through packaging that makes the chocolate bread look like cartoon characters with Afro hairstyles, is a real product. The National Defense Service will not hire anyone who is not of 100% Japanese descent. Even the *Nikkei Marketing Journal* (2013) is oblivious to its racism in its July article on how to apply makeup to look like a “half,” or mixed-race Japanese. The list of flagrant discrimination is virtually endless. Bias is difficult to combat when it is subtle or can be ignored, but when aimed at you, transgressions like these and cannot be ignored.

For Japanese culture to persistently continue an inward-looking, self-delusional, and tribal stance that seeks to avoid the harsh realities of its overt racial discrimination only draws more attention to its perceived indifference from the very people they seek as customers and business partners. It is the public relations equivalent of shooting oneself in the foot, but on a global level. It is imperative for Japan to truly learn how to not discriminate against people of other races. Whereas marketing is often viewed as a negative, it can be utilized as a positive form of educating the populace through counter-stereotyping, which will not only improve the image of marketing, but of the Japanese society as a whole.

Case study of Marketing in Japan

In an effort to raise the awareness of students in a target third-year Marketing in English class, a unit on marketing mishaps and issues was presented in which the perpetuation of native negative stereotypes was discussed. Included in the racial stereotypes in marketing discussed was the blackface used in a 2004 Spanish McDonald's advertisement and the 2009 Japanese McDonald's spokesperson "Mr. James," who spoke only in katakana-script (highlighting his foreignness and implying he could not master kanji characters). Also presented were a wide variety international ads depicting blacks with monkeys, including a recent one from Gatsby in Japan. This year the previously mentioned Cheerios commercial was also included. While the class was engaged in this online presentation, a video commercial by a famous Japanese maker portraying an over-the-top image of a foreigner on Debito Arudou's website came up. Arudou is a well-known activist in Japan and regularly writes columns for the Japan Times calling out all manner of racism in the country. He himself gave up his American citizenship to become Japanese, but his citizenship is regularly challenged due to his Caucasian features (2003).

The commercial in question begins with a dark-haired Japanese character in her office remarking specifically about her convenient and homemade Japanese-style, rice-based *bento* lunch, but that she dreams to sometimes have a bread-based lunch. That Japanese eat rice and non-Japanese eat bread is a common stereotype in Japan. Another Japanese actress plays her obviously foreign and highly exuberant colleague. This character is sporting a blonde wig and big fake nose that looks like a plastic "Hello Gaijin-san" brand party favor similar to other gross prosthetics Japanese actors occasionally use to portray themselves as foreigners. Notably, a Gusto commercial, aired earlier this year, also garnered complaints of discrimination for a similar portrayal. (Ashcroft 2013a/b). The blonde gesticulates broadly and speaks in Japanese with a thick foreign accent about how much she likes her Western bread-based lunch. Like the McDonald's foreign character, Mr. James, all her words are subtitled in *katakana*, the alphabet-script reserved for foreign words -

In Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Faculty of Business Administration even when the words are Japanese and would normally be written with *kanji* characters. The dark-haired character's words are not subtitled. The two women discuss how virtually impossible it is to bake bread at home - until they are introduced to the bread/rice-making product being advertised, at which point they agree how easy it can be. The blonde character announces somewhat brashly making "yummy" noises about how delicious the bread is as the dark-haired character asks her sarcastically how much longer she is going to keep talking about it.

Several comments on Arudou's website, as well as on another from which the video was pulled (Ashcroft 2013c), were strongly negative, calling it racist. Some thought the offense was overblown, and a few accused less critical writers as being apologists for Japanese culture. Several pointed out that both character portrayals were equally stereotypical. To the company's credit, it was never aired, possibly due to the fact the commercial contradicts its own corporate standards of conduct, which states, the company should "... not use advertising to cast third parties in a negative light. . . not cause offense or show disrespect by implying discrimination based on race, religion, sex, national origin, physical disability, or age." (Arudou 2013). Nonetheless, curiosity motivated me to conduct an exploratory study on how differently Japanese versus non-Japanese may view the biases. I wanted to learn:

1. whether or not the Japanese (J) or the non-Japanese (NJ) would identify either character in the commercial as a stereotype,
2. what aspects of each character were thought to be stereotypical and were those positive or negative, and
3. to what degree either group (J or NJ) would find the overall message positive or negative.

I hypothesized that:

1. NJs would find the blonde character portrayal to be a negative stereotype,
2. Js would not easily recognize the blonde character to be a negative stereotype,

possibly indicating an insensitivity to racial discrimination within their own society.

Method

The first version of the ten-question, one-page survey (see Appendix) was administered on paper during the last Marketing in English class of spring semester. Four demographic questions were included in the anonymous survey. The students who served as the initial convenience sampling were all of advanced English level, many of whom had studied abroad for one semester. Due to their ability, the survey was written mostly in English, but to ensure comprehension, step-by-step explanations and translations were given in Japanese. The class watched the video twice. Students were encouraged to write descriptions in Japanese, so that they could express themselves thoroughly. There was no treatment or discussion about the commercial, mainly because it came to light after the unit on marketing mishaps was complete. Part of the reason for the survey initially was to see if students could extrapolate from the points of the unit. The second version of the survey differed only in that it was online, included an embedded link to the the video and had one additional demographic question regarding Japanese language ability. To assist the non-Japanese speakers, a brief description, similar to that above, was given about the events in the commercial. Requests were put out on several social media platforms internationally by myself and a number of helpful colleagues. This resulted in a somewhat random sampling of fluent English speakers, both J and NJ, residing in Japan and abroad. The word “stereotype” was chosen for its neutrality and because it was used in the original class discussions. For questions number one, nine, and ten, an even numbered ten-point Likert scale was chosen in order to force a choice and avoid neutrality, with the five lower numbers indicating negatives and the five higher numbers indicating positives.

Results

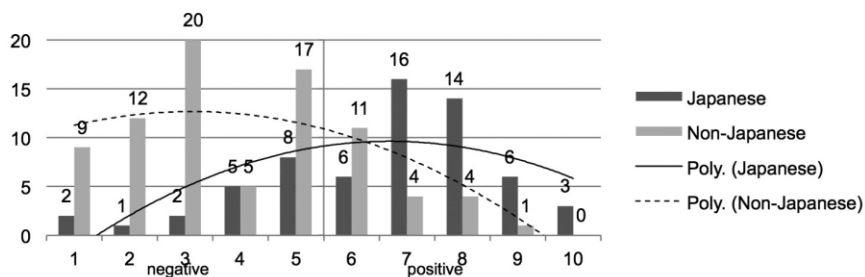
In reporting the results, all parts of speech were turned into adjectives when possible and a bilingual speaker translated all Japanese into English. A Fishers Exact Test was used to determine whether the observed differences between J and NJ responses were statistically significant for each contingency in which there were two levels of nominal variables in either the rows or columns. In the event that there were more than two levels in either the rows or columns, a two-way chi-square analysis determined significance.

Over the course of three weeks, a total of 147 people responded to the ten-point survey. The average age of the 76 females and 70 males was 36.3 years of age with the maximum being 74 years and minimum being 18. The majority (117) lived in Japan. NJ accounted for 84 respondents and was comprised of eight nationalities. Of the NJ, 22 reported zero to little Japanese language ability and 19 did not reside in Japan. Only two NJ reported near-native fluency. Most (45%) were at the conversational level; some (30%) felt they could function in business; and a few (17%) reported fluency enough to read newspapers. There were 64 J respondents.

Table 1. Overall impression of CM

	J	NJ	Σ
+	45	20	65
-	18	63	81
n	63	83	146

Question One asked for an overall impression of the commercial. Before any mention of character portrayals or stereotypes that ensues, a difference in perception can be seen. Three quarters of NJs, compared to one third of Js, had an overall negative perception of the commercial. Me-



dian score for NJs was 4.0. For the Js, the median score was 6.5. Only one NJ ranked their impression in the top quintile, whereas nine Js did. Inversely, only three Js rank their impression in the lowest quintile, opposed to 21 NJs. A chi square test determined that NJ found the commercial to be overall more negative than the J, with significant observed differences ($p < .01$, $\chi^2=51.62$, $df=9$). There was a slight correlation that indicates a negative response to overall impression related to the perception that the two characters were not equal and that the blonde character was a negative stereotype bears further study, but was not statistically significant here.

The second question asked for three adjectives to describe this commercial in order to determine more concrete impressions. What may be seen as a positive in one culture or in one situation, might be seen as a negative in another. Examples are the words “comical” or “typical”. Also, it is difficult to assign value to differences between similar words, like “simple” and “simplistic”. Instead of subjectively assigning positive or negative values to these words in order to do a statistical analysis, they were qualitatively grouped and counted. There were total of 419 descriptors with an average of 3 per respondent. As expected, some contrary opinions were reported; for example “ordinary” versus “unique,” “long” versus “short,” and “typical Japanese” versus “different.” Even with instructions to the contrary, some respondents described the product, the situation, or the production values instead of the content of the commercial itself in question. Descriptions of the two characters, both positive and negative, corresponding to Question Two will be shown in Questions Seven and Eight below. Of the 65 respondents who had an overall positive impression, simple one-word adjectives such as “pleasant,” “interesting,” or “fun” were usually used. A few longer descriptions were also used; for example, “girl in pink is hero,” “if bento-girl is satisfied, I’ll buy it,” “nosed girl is convincing.” Even some who responded positively, used negative adjectives in their descriptors. For example, the phrases “taking a chance at offending with the nose,” “annoying blonde,” and “seems to critique middle-class professional Americans” were used. Interestingly, three respondents, all Js, specifically viewed the commercial to be non-offensive and even “international”.

On the other hand, the 85 respondents with a negative opinion used more di-

Table 2. Sampling of impression descriptors

Positive opinion, positive adjectives	65	Negative opinion, negative adjectives	85
funny, amusing, entertaining, comical	47	racist, biased, bigoted, prejudiced	34
(very) interesting	20	farcical, puerile, corny, over acted	27
wonderful, amazing, exciting, fantastic	12	provincial, unsophisticated, immature	12
light, enjoyable, happy, cheery	10	offensive, tasteless, bias for humor	12
easy to relate to, feels like myself	4	insidious, demeaning, condescending	10
makes me want to use	1	mortifying, shocking, disturbing	6
not offensive, international	3	pointless, obsolete, trite, insular	4
Positive opinion, negative adjectives		Negative opinion, positive adjectives	
ridiculous, weird, strange, astonishing	13	comical, funny, amusing, enjoyable,	11
silly, goofy, stupid, eccentric, uncool	8	clean cut, beautiful, cuuuuuuuute	3
gratuitous, questionable stereotypes	7	lively, brisk, energetic	3
exaggerated acting, over act, theatrical	7	self-explanatory, clear message	3
racist, offensive to Jews	2	simple	2

verse and stronger adjectives to describe their negative reactions. While some used the same negative adjectives as those who had a positive impression, like “boring,” “annoying,” or “not funny,” the question of intent (i.e. volition) was at the forefront of many responses, including “insulting,” “degrading,” and “mean-spirited.” The single most used adjective was “racist”. Many respondents alluded to the “tasteless,” “non-inclusive,” and “unsophisticated” content that was “ironical(ly)” “written by Japanese” who are “the ones who use exaggerated katakana English,” and that perpetuates an “erroneous link that bread equates to Western culture”. Some “question (ed) the target market” and the purpose of the “silly girl” when neither the portrayal of the rice, which had “none of the artistry seen in the magazines,” nor the bread “lead me to think neither one comes out delicious when using this product.” That the “Japanese lady looked dignified and respectful and the other lady look(ed) like a fool” and a “wild caricature of *gaijin*” “promoting the image of ‘noisy comical foreigner’ who can t speak Japanese” was a “mocking” “reflection of most Japanese people s definitions regarding what they consider to be impossible: speaking a foreign language well.” The “incomprehensible use of a fake blonde hair/wig and nose” and “accented speech and gestures to (signify) ‘other and the ‘foreigner ’” was “exaggerated,” made the “American look like a clown,” and “seem(ed) to

make fun of non-Japanese ?” A few held a more moderate yet negative view, claiming the commercial was “negative to both races”. Several pointed out that not only does it “use ‘Western’ images in a radicalized fashion to legitimize worth of the product,” but it is also sexist and “makes fun of American female office worker (s),” “negative to women,” and, in general, is also “negative to Japanese.” An understanding that it may have been “*manzai*-influenced” and “reinforcing mundane comedic dramatics” did not lessen the feeling that the commercial’s producers “should use English better - to show some education !” Clearly, those with a negative overall impression of the commercial, and the majority of NJ, perceive it to be racially discriminatory.

Questions Three and Four, asking respondents to predict what the Japanese and non-Japanese might answer respectively for Question One, tried to elicit whether

Table 3. Japanese opinion of CM

	J	NJ	Σ
+	49	66	115
-	15	17	32
n	64	83	147

either group could empathize with the impressions the other group had to the commercial. For Question Three, 78% of respondents, both J and NJ, predicted that the Japanese would feel the commercial to be positive overall. Indeed, this is not

far from the 70% of Js who did responded positively to the commercial. A Fisher Exact Test showed there was no statistical difference between the groups ($p < .01$, $x^2 = .16$, $df=1$), and that instead, both groups were equally apt to believe Js would find the commercial positive. No other significant correlations were found.

Conversely, Question Four did show a significant statistical difference between the groups’ abilities to determine whether NJs would find the commercial positive ($p < .01$, $x^2 = 8.19$, $df=1$). J respondents were split 50-50 in their opinion of whether NJ would respond positively or negatively to the commercial. However, 81% of NJs felt their fellows would find the commercial to be negative - similar to the 76% who reported

Table 4. Non-Japanese opinion of CM

	J	NJ	Σ
+	30	15	45
-	32	68	100
n	62	83	145

so in Question One. The results of Questions Three and Four confirm the hypothesis that the Japanese may not be able to recognize racial discrimination when it occurs

In Commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Faculty of Business Administration in their own society.

In order to determine what is perceived as a stereotype, Questions Five through Eight look at the two characters as individuals. First, Question Five asks if the two female characters are portrayed as equal. Taking into account that the phrase “not equal” is considered fairly negative in most societies, it is interesting that the results on this question are almost exactly the same as those for Question Four. Again, NJs overwhelmingly felt the characters are equal, albeit a fairly negative portrayal of the blonde character - a result that will be sustained in Questions Six and Eight.

Question Six asked which of the two characters were viewed more positively, if either. Though the blonde character received more derision in the overall comments on impression, 35% of all respondents viewed the two characters to be equal.

Table 5. Equality of Characters

	J	NJ	Σ
equal	30	20	50
not equal	34	63	97
n	64	83	147

What is less easy to determine, is whether this equality indicates equally positive or equally negative portrayals, as several survey respondents noted less than positive points about the dark-haired character. However, the dark-haired character

is perceived more positively than the blonde, 47% and 29% respectively. That ranking is at least somewhat related to one’s group, proven statistically significant by a Fisher Exact analysis ($p < .01$, $\chi^2 = 21.20$, $df = 2$).

Table 6. Positive stereotype

	J	NJ	Σ
blonde	24	18	42
dark	13	56	69
same	26	9	35
n	63	83	146

To determine if and to what degree the dark-haired character was considered a stereotype, Question Seven consisted of three

Table 7. Dark-haired stereotyped

	J	NJ	Σ
stereotype	30	68	98
not	34	15	49
n	64	83	147

parts. One was the character stereotype; two was it positive or negative; and three, how is the character stereotyped. Ninety-six respondents contributed an average of 2.6 out of a total 252 descriptors. Not only did many NJs comment about the blonde stereotype in Question Two, they

were just as likely to identify the dark-haired character as being a stereotype

(82%), whereas the Js consistently were less able to at a consistent 47% - and statistically significant to be determined by group membership ($p < .01, \chi^2 = 21.09, df = 2$). However, of the 64 NJs and Js who did consider the dark-haired character

Table 8. Dark-haired stereotype

	J	NJ	Σ
+	16	48	64
-	14	14	28
n	30	62	92

to be a stereotype, and the 28 people who responded to the second part of the question regardless of answering “no” to the previous part, 68% felt the stereotype of be positive. Positive adjectives used to describe the dark-haired character tended to regard her as being more “proper,” “feminine,” and dutiful either as an office worker or as a Japanese female. Very little were made of her physical features other than her standard business attire. Overall, she was described as a “traditional” and “proper” “stereotypical” “rice-eating” “office worker” who “desires Western food.” As with impression in Question Two, some descriptors were difficult to categorize due to their cultural significance; for example, “pale” versus “fair” and “Western” versus “westernized.”

Table 9. Sampling of dark-haired character descriptors

Positive ST, positive adjectives	30	Negative ST, negative adjectives	62
pleasant, genial, dainty, demure, calm	52	dark-hair, quiet, whiny, informative	17
bento, brings lunch, homemade, rice	36	bento, frugal, loves rice, lazy	13
office look, conservative, appropriate	32	unhappy, boring, oddball, stodgy	10
prim, proper, standard, traditional, clean	31	prim, prudish, office look, serious	8
black-haired, dark eyes	6	Western wannabe, not subtitled	3
Positive ST, negative adjectives		Negative ST, positive adjectives	
brainwashed, one-dimensional, boring	8	sensible hair, clothes, Japanese	5
arrogant, proud, frigid, uptight	12	office worker, business	3

Though similar, Question Eight about the blonde elicited much stronger responses. One hundred-twenty respondents wrote an average 2.8 descriptors each for a total

Table 10. Blonde stereotyped

	J	NJ	Σ
stereotype	47	74	121
not	17	9	26
n	64	83	147

of 309. For the first time, both NJs (89%) and Js (73%) perceived this character was a stereotype. Interestingly, as the NJs were prone to see the dark-haired character as being positive, the opposite was true for Js, 65% of whom were more

likely to see the counterpart blonde as positive.

Table 11. Blonde stereotype

	J	NJ	Σ
+	30	12	42
-	16	64	80
n	46	76	121

Each culture seems to favor the positive stereotypes of the other more than they do their own - confirmed to be statistically significant ($p < .01$, $\chi^2 = 30.24$, $df=1$).

The positive adjectives tended to focus on physical appearance and “friendly” personality. Those who perceived a positive stereotype yet complained, alluded to the exaggeration of the stereotype. Negative descriptors also centered on physical appearance, but a also focused on the “shocking” and “ridiculous” “exaggerated mannerisms” of the “dumb blonde” who has been subtitled to look like “Westerners cannot grasp Japanese properly.” NJ respondents especially felt belittled and racially discriminated against by what may seem to be positive stereotypes to the Js. Difficult to categorize adjectives ascribed to the blonde included “assertive” versus “aggressive” and “talkative” versus “talks too much,” which are culturally and situationally subjective.

Table 12. Sampling of blonde character descriptors

Positive ST, positive adjectives	42	Negative ST, negative adjectives	80
gaijin looks, big nose, blonde, eyes	29	big nosed blonde, foreigner	55
cheerful, lively, fun, likable	20	shallow, superficial, silly, exaggerated	38
elegant, cool, fashionable, beautiful	8	culturally biased, condescending	22
young, sensual	3	bad Japanese, accent, clown, unkempt	33
shows opinions clearly	1	stereotypical behavior, pushy, invasive	31
Positive ST, negative adjectives		Negative ST, positive adjectives	
too much mimicry, overreact, fake	6	cheerful, winsome	6
loud, assertive, talks too much, selfish	7	American equals successful, confident	4

Question Nine in the survey asked whether or not the commercial helped a potential customer to understand the product. Overall, opinions leaned towards the characters not being helpful, at 53%, but at this point in the survey, questions leading to issues of stereotypes might have swayed respondents' answers toward the negative.

Table 13. Helpfulness of characters

	J	NJ	Σ
helpful	44	25	69
not	19	58	77
n	63	83	146

Js (30%) found the characters to be more helpful than the NJs (17%). The two-way chi-square test determined the observed differences were significant

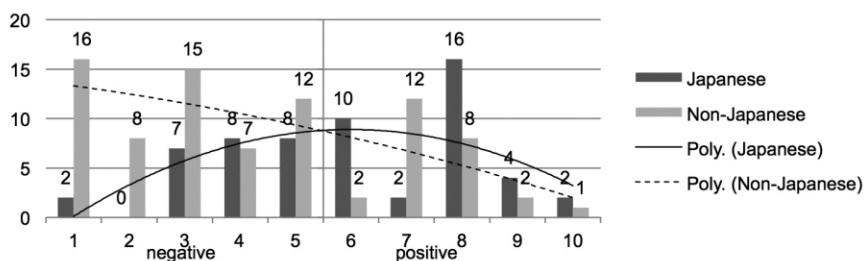


Chart 2. Characters help sell the product

($p < .01$, $\chi^2 = 37.76$, $df = 9$). That 25% of NJs live outside of Japan and reported zero Japanese-language ability, perhaps accounts for the more negative NJ scores. Body language is said to account for 90~% of communication (Schlefen 1972). NJs who could not understand the verbal explanations and potentially already had a negative attitude toward the commercial, may not have understood the commercial as well as the native speaking Js.

The final question, what is your image of the word “*gaijin*,” sought to question the respondents’ perception of foreignness from a different angle. The term “*gaijin*” is a part of the vernacular throughout the English-speaking world. While a more proper and respectful Japanese word

Table 14. Impression of “*gaijin*”

	J	NJ	Σ
+	45	20	65
–	18	63	81
n	63	83	146

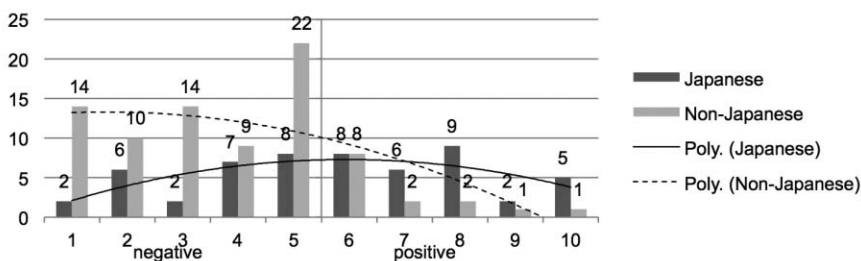


Chart 3. Impression of “*gaijin*”

exists, “*gaikokujin*,” its usage tends to be in more formal settings and is potentially unknown to the English-only speaking respondents, so the former word was chosen.

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This survey was not intended to ascertain a rationale for a response to this question particularly, but was intended as a separate, unrelated check of the concept of foreignness. Interestingly, again, while 69% of the respondents overall felt the term to be negative, NJs perceived the term “*gaijin*” to be far more negative (82%) than the Js (52%). Chi-square analysis determined that the observed differences for the final question were significant ($p < .01$, $\chi^2 = 25.26$, $df = 9$). At this exploratory level, it appears NJs generally find the word distasteful. A further study with a larger n-size would be needed to validate these findings, and perhaps investigate the roots of this negative perception.

Educational Implications

In order for Japan to truly become an internationalized country, it must shed its notoriety for being racially biased instead of paying lip service to a superficial level of the concept. Corporations need to carefully self-censor their marketing, as did the famous appliance manufacturer in this study. National agencies can recognize positive players, such as Sweden, which “rewarded” establishments catering well to the disabled with *CP Beer*, *Cerebral Palsy Beer*, instead of just giving an official certificate. Of course, the greatest impact can be achieved through diversity training, not only at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education, but also through counter-stereotyping, which uses reverse positive images of non-Japanese, to make a wider societal impact. All citizens can afford to incorporate the following aspects into their daily life (adapted from ADL 2011):

- * self-exploration: examining one’s own cultural biases and assumptions
- * comprehensive integration: incorporating culturally diverse perspectives in all aspects of life
- * creation of an accepting environment: allow for mistakes and the possibility something you did or said could be offensive to another
- * intervention: intervene positively, but resist preaching, if you observe an act of prejudice instead of practicing self-delusion and avoidance techniques

- * lifelong learning: keep abreast of current international norms and discuss them with others
- * home-school-community connection: involve parents, family, and the community
- * time and maturation: allow time for someone to adjust their views and understand if someone lacks the maturity to recognize and address the long history of shared tribal psychology

In this age of social media, companies can enter new markets, but they can also trip up on unexpected international expectations and social conventions. Especially damaging is when marketing is perceived as racist, and once an error is made, it is virtually impossible to avoid being called out internationally online. Marketing can have a very strong negative impact by perpetuating stereotypes; however, it also can be used as a means of counter-stereotyping to portray more positive images of people unlike ourselves. No group is immune to bias, but only groups which choose to be proactive against discrimination and commit to respecting “the other” will ever be successful in a “global” sense of the word.

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