

### Campaign for Real Beauty Japan, 2005

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This is a short case about introducing the Dove 'campaign for Real Beauty' in Japan. It introduces and discusses the use and interpretation of cross-cultural survey data and how data collected for the Dove brand were translated into a marketing communications campaign for the Japanese market. The case also illustrates pitfalls when using unconventional and culturally incompatible advertising styles, concepts and content. Finally the case briefly discusses how a competing Japanese brand was extremely successful by using a diametrically opposite approach to the one used for Dove.

Unilever introduced the Dove brand to the Japanese market in 1999. Since the beginning it has used testimonials by average users in its advertising for Dove (Gotoh, 2005). This approach is in stark contrast with the usual approach taken by virtually all competing brands in the Japanese personal care product category: the use of famous actresses and fashion models as brand endorsers.

The Real Beauty campaign started in Japan on March 18, 2005, and mainly used newspaper ads and billboards. The first newspaper ad in the campaign used the slogan "Japanese women are not beautiful". This referred to one of the results of a survey on perceptions of beauty among 3200 women across 10 countries and published in a 2004 Unilever sponsored white paper (Etcoff et al. 2004). The results to which the campaign slogan referred were that 86% of Japanese women answered "no" to the question if they considered themselves beautiful. (Gotoh, 2005)

The problem with the interpretation of these results is that most Japanese women will say they don't consider themselves beautiful because this is the socially accepted answer. This doesn't mean they consider themselves ugly.

This "Japanese women are not beautiful" slogan must have raised quite some Japanese eyebrows, as it sounds negative, blunt, and insulting to Japanese women, the target group of the brand. Japanese advertisers generally are very cautious not to insult customers and always treat them with the utmost respect. Japanese consumers thus expect to be approached with respect. In order to understand the meaning of the slogan people had to read the fine print section of the ad.



3月18日 朝刊

Without reading the additional information the slogan sounds very negative. This must have turned off casual readers of the ad and probably left many female consumers with a negative impression of Dove, the ad's sponsor.

This newspaper advertisement –in the fine print– included an invitation to register for a free seminar in the Four Seasons hotel in Tokyo, including a room for the night in the hotel, an offer available to 300 women.

This led to a response by over 10,000 women, which was considered to be a great success. (Gotoh, 2005)

However, the response rate is not that surprising if one considers that the Four Seasons hotel is a luxury hotel, where probably most Japanese women would like to spend a night for free.

The success of this campaign was the huge response to the offer of a free night in a luxury hotel. However, this did not necessarily translate into increased sales of the Dove products.

Ogilvy & Mather Japan made the 300 participants to the seminar wear a blonde wig at the end of the seminar. After the seminar the women were instructed to simultaneously throw the blonde wigs into the air (Gotoh, 2005), the way in the US students throw their caps into the air after graduation. This referred to one interpretation of the Japanese word 'graduation' meaning that you have gone through a certain stage of life. It was suggested that this meant the end of a stage in which women should conform to a standard beauty ideal.

This was done on the square in front of the Shinjuku station in Tokyo. Photographs made at this happening were used for the second newspaper advertisement.



5月24日 朝刊

This second newspaper ad appeared on May 24 2004. The ad's slogan was "I am not going to be restricted anymore by what someone else has defined as beauty". (Gotoh, 2005)

One major problem with this second ad is that the very same Unilever survey (Etcoff et al, 2004) also clearly showed that – unlike women in other countries – Japanese women don't feel that the popular meanings of beauty and physical attractiveness have become increasingly narrowed and unattainable. For instance, only 20% of Japanese women in the survey agreed with a statement suggesting that the media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women can't ever achieve. The ad's message thus completely missed the mark, as it addresses a problem that the majority of its intended target customers do not perceive as a problem: The ad presents a solution looking for a problem.

In August 2005 the follow-up campaign showed a photograph of a Japanese woman with grey hair and asked whether this picture represented 'grey hair' or 'gorgeous'. Another photograph showed a Japanese woman with Asian single eyelids (as opposed to western double eyelids for which many Japanese women crave) with the question whether this was beautiful or ugly. Consumers could vote for the one or the other on the Internet. Outdoor advertising with a digital counting system showed real time voting. The end results were published in newspaper ads: Grey hair was considered gorgeous by 68% of respondents and Japanese eye lids were voted beautiful. (Gotoh, 2005)



8月1日 朝刊



8月11日 朝刊

In a 2006 follow-up campaign, billboards showed a group of women in their underwear, like the western campaign. However, whereas the western campaign showed a variety of shapes and colors of women, in the Asian version, consisting of Japanese, Chinese and Korean women, women's body shapes were more or less the same and they all wore the same (and more decent) undergarments.





In contrast to other countries, Japan is currently (2010) no longer listed on the Real Beauty website, a clear sign that Unilever has stopped the campaign there. In fact, instead of using normal people, Dove in 2008 was using well-known fashion models like Chisa Miyauchi, Yuki Akimoto and Yuki Ishikawa in TV commercials. This is most probably due to the failure of the real beauty concept to strike a chord with Japanese female consumers and the campaign's failure to result in increased sales. It was also most likely in response to the enormous success of the Tsubaki brand introduced by competitor Shiseido in 2006.

Shiseido introduced Tsubaki in mid-2006 with a huge ¥5 billion marketing budget and hired an unusually large number (7 in the initial campaign ad) of famous Japanese models and actresses to appear in ads for the brand. The brand quickly reached the number 1 spot in sales attained ¥18 billion, or \$155 million, in sales of 43 million bottles during its first year. (Kageyama, 2007)



In stark contrast to Unilever's message in its second ad of the Real Beauty campaign, Tsubaki launched the Tsubaki brand using the slogan "Japanese women are beautiful", tapping into a changing sense of confidence about Asian beauty among Japanese consumers. Hiroyuki Ishikawa, who oversees hair care at Shiseido said "Our message really appealed to Japanese women, who are starting to awaken to a sense of self-confidence". (Kageyama, 2007) These are the very same Japanese women who answered to Unilever's research that they don't consider themselves beautiful!

**References**

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