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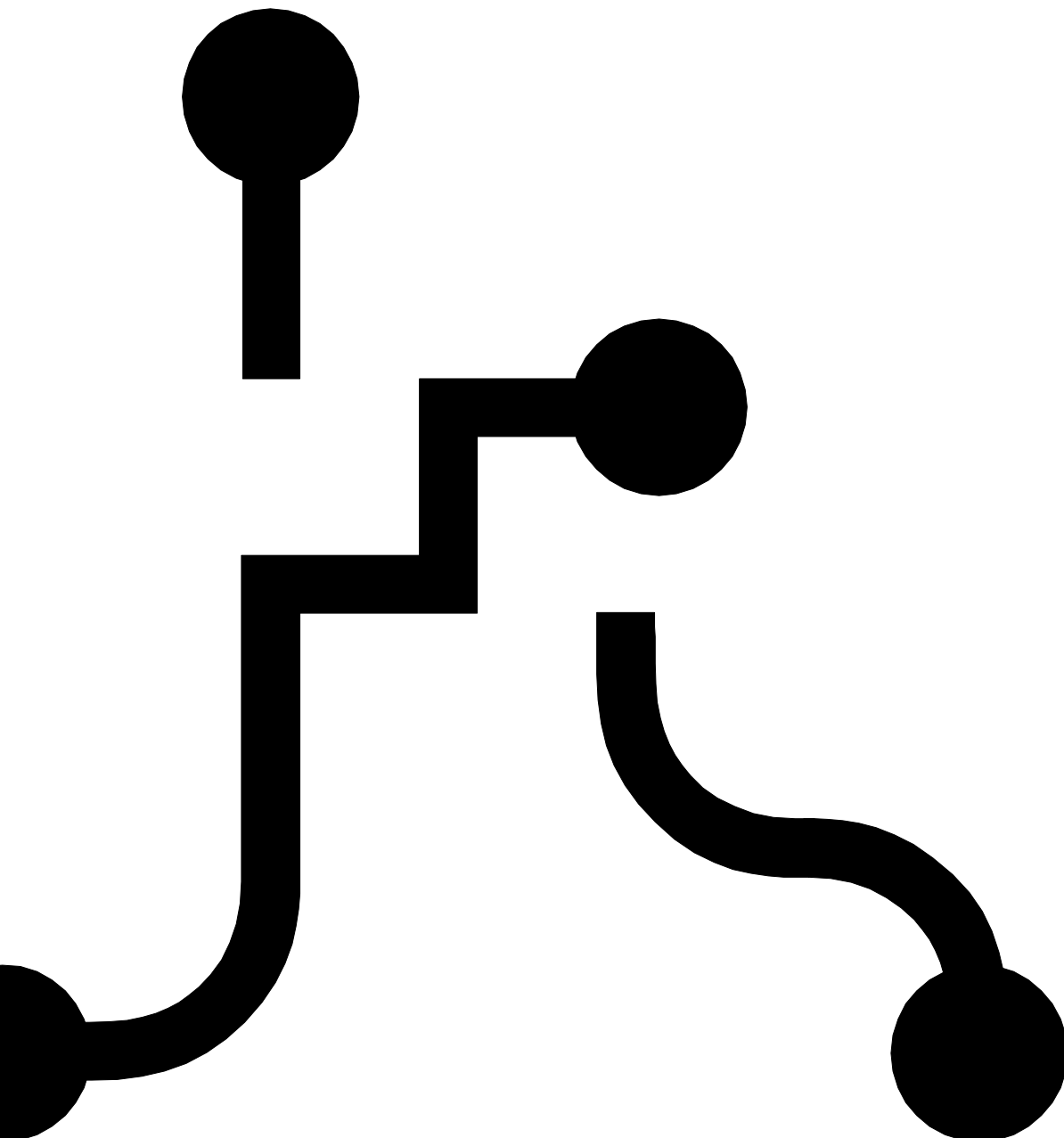
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Analysis of discursive strategies in Aojiru supplement commercials on Japanese TV: framing happiness through heuristic bias alignment

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Abstract

The vigorous promotion of dietary supplements such as *Aojiru* is visible every day in contemporary Japan. Due to regulations under the Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Instruments Act (1960), advertising of the pharmacology or functions of dietary supplements is generally prohibited in Japan. However, advertising strategies whose aim is to lead customers to the decision of purchase may be dubious if not coupled with detailed explanations of efficacy. This research aimed to determine how dietary supplement TV commercials manage the restrictions on health food advertising. Based on the analysis of a corpus of TV commercials by the *Aojiru* manufacturer *Asahi Ryokken*, the analytical frames of heuristic bias (Tversky & Kahneman 1974) and alignment of evaluation (Du Bois 2007) were mobilized to identify certain discursive strategies that are operative in the ad narratives.

Keywords: heuristic bias, representativeness, misconception of change, alignment of evaluation, discourse boundaries

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1. Introduction: TV commercials about food supplements

Following the increase of the senior population in Japan, there is widespread recognition of the need to maintain a satisfactory level of health to avoid ill health and frailty. In response, promotion of healthy food and supplements is flourishing, ranging from dried garlic to lactic acid bacteria. Among these supplemental foods, *Aojiru*, a drink or smoothie made from green kale, or its Japanese counterpart, is well-known; it also visually encodes good health due to its all-green color.

However, certain types of advertising in Japan are restricted due to regulations under the Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Instruments Act (1960). According to the guidelines of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, health supplemental foods are divided into two groups: Group A (the government permits advertising of this group to describe certain medical functions) and Group B (the government does not allow advertising of this group to describe any medical functions or drug efficacy). In addition, the Japan Satellite Broadcasting Association has produced guidelines (2020) for the advertisement of healthy foods, stipulating that information should not be included about their efficacy or effect, so that the product is not easily misunderstood as being medicinal.

There seems to be a certain dilemma in the advertising of food supplements between consumer perceptions and policy restrictions. Given that advertising of supplemental health food should neither state that it can cure or improve ill health, nor provide any information on efficacy, how can it appeal to its target consumers? Usually, potential consumers are assumed to expect a specific food ingredient to have some effect or cause a chemical reaction after its digestion inside the body; thus, it can satisfy their anxiety or desire to improve their current state of health. This contradiction between consumer perceptions and restrictions on the information that can be conveyed also leads to problems in advertising strategy regarding how commercials can use certain discursive elements to persuade the TV audience to purchase the product without having explained the chemical efficacy of the dietary food in promoting good health.

This paper examines discourse strategies employed by marketers of dietary supplements to lead consumers to the purchase decision without stating the efficacy of the product, which could be contradictory to the customer's original expectation of a certain chemical reaction. In

doing so, it scrutinizes whether the current guidelines conflict with consumers' best interests.

The marketer's strategies are analyzed from three perspectives in a psychological and linguistic framework: 1) heuristic bias, a mental shortcut for making judgments under situations of uncertainty that includes several types of bias related to logical legitimization and statistical evidentiality; 2) alignment of evaluation, or agreements about a certain interpretation of an object, constructed through collaboration among evaluators; and 3) the structure of the discourse boundary.

Following the above-mentioned theoretical framework, transcribed data from 9 Aojiru TV commercials are analyzed, using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Sequential Analysis.

Based on the analysis of the findings, this study proposes an amendment to the current domestic guidelines for health supplements and foods in Group B, and raises consumer consciousness and literacy to help the public cope with sophisticated marketing strategies, directly affecting consumers' purchase decisions.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1 Background on communication strategies without a focus on the efficacy of dietary food or medicine

Although the advertisement of medicinal effects is prohibited in Japan, it is allowed in some countries, such as the USA. Nevertheless, even under conditions in which medical advertisements are legal, companies use solutions to convince customers to purchase their products without a detailed explanation of their scientific efficacy.

In a study that analyzed the discourses used in advertisements for sexual enhancement medications, such as Levitra and Viagra, Gomez et al. (2004) reported the use of strategies to evoke a sense of lack or disorder in men. The advertisements for these 'lifestyle' drugs, whose aim is to improve individuals' lives, draw on customers' desire for happiness and improved relationships with others, which can be key factors in purchase decisions.

Furthermore, regarding the visual strategies used to sell dietary products, which can be categorized as lifestyle drugs, MacGregor et al. (2021) suggest that impressions of fashion,

health and youth are more important than scientific efficacy in purchase decisions that are made in response to advertisements for superfoods. Moreover, companies mobilize the criteria of choice and responsibility involved in purchase decisions and a subsequent feeling of worrying.

Beyond advertisements for dietary foods, ambiguity in advertisements has been reported on many levels, across product categories. For example, Lunkka (2021) reported the ambiguous usage of the term 'patient' in a healthcare project plan based on two texts. Furthermore, Lewin-Jones (2019) noted the use of ambiguity in the context, logical integrity and linguistic expression of the concept of 'internationalization' in order to cater to both domestic and international students.

As noted above, companies utilize strategies that do not involve references to the quality of products themselves and instead appeal to potential customers' emotional state, such as a sense of lack, or encourage customers to pursue impressions of fashionable and healthy lives.

2.2 Theoretical frames

Given the advertising restrictions under which TV *Aojiru* commercials operate, they are required to avoid a logical explanation of efficacy. However, if the marketer's persuasiveness cannot be based on how the chemical effects of substances work, how can they appeal to their audience to purchase their product by highlighting its advantages and benefits?

This paper addresses this question by drawing on the following conceptual constructs from linguistic theories.

2.2.1. Framing and schema

Discourse analysis can reveal both social structures and strategies of social representation (Van Dijk, 1990) behind manifest linguistic content. Rumelhart and Ortony (1977) also describe a related concept, that of schema," which comprises structures that are stored in long-term memory. Based on these structures, new information is processed in order to interpret meaning.

A further approach to understanding cognitive representations is the use of framing.” According to Tannen’s (2006) work, the same topics in family conflicts are repeated in different frames and tones by different agents. Based on previous research, such as Becker (1995) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Tannen describes the characteristics of framing as: “Individuals recall language they have heard in the past and adapt it to the present interaction, thus creating the context in which they are speaking” (2006, p.559)

In line with Tannen, Becker (1995, p.185) describes framing as “Jarwa dhosok” (placing an old text in a current context). Furthermore, Bakhtin (1981,1986) explains his concept of multiple voices as follows: “Every conversation is full of transmissions and interpretations of other people’s words” (1981, p.338), or “When we select words in the process of constructing an utterance, we by no means always take them from the system of language in their neutral, dictionary form; rather, we usually take them from other utterances” (1986, p.87).

Thus, the cognitive representation of existing knowledge about the world, which influences consumers’ mental states, is important for companies that want audiences to desire the products they sell. For example, communication strategies encourage consumers to view food supplements as tools they can use to improve their quality of life by drawing on their mental schema of happy and healthy lives.

2.2.2 Alignment as agreement of evaluative stance

Alignment in stance-taking theory refers to agreements on a certain interpretation of an object, constructed by the collaboration between more than two different evaluators. In considering the construction of subjectivity as it relates to intersubjectivity, there must be more than two subjects, whereby the evaluation and interpretation by the first subject are also related and evaluated by a co-operative interpretation of the message. Intersubjectivity is constructed through the interactive negotiation between subjects.

This phenomenon is called alignment of the stance of agreement or disagreement toward each subject’s subjectivity. This alignment happens where more than two subjects share the same perspective and then align with each other. When subjects take the same stance, a mere perspective and interpretation is transformed into a conditional fact.

According to Du Bois (2007), the interactional mechanism consists of the following three elements: object as the message in terms of utterances, non-linguistic expressions, and written text; subject as recipient of the message; and alignment as a managed relationship between parties (see Figure 1).

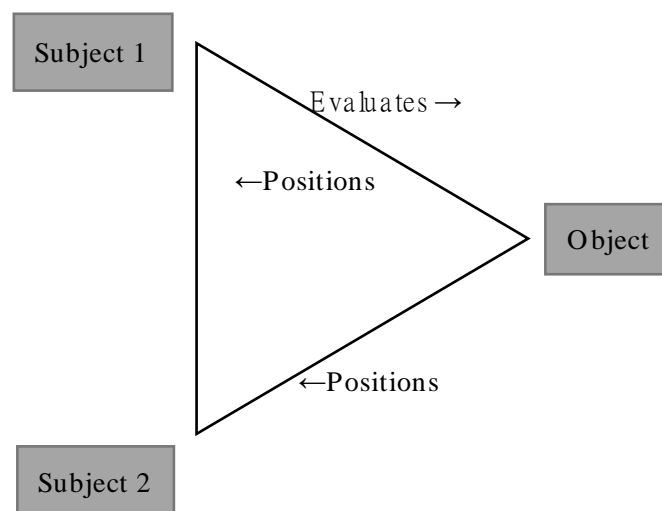


Figure 1. Stance-taking triangle (Du Bois 2007).

The subject takes a stance and evaluates an object through his schema or background. This co-operative interpretation could also be layered inside, as a subordinate structure, where the subjects can be the object to be evaluated by a subordinate subject, as the next class of stance-taking, hidden in discourse. In this case, the inner layer of alignment could cause some structural repetition of alignment, which could increase persuasion by indicating ambiguous cohesion and implied meanings.

2.2.3 Heuristic bias in the context of insufficient information

Heuristic bias is a mental shortcut for making judgements under situations of uncertainty; usually, heuristics are efficient and effective but represent a systematic problem in arriving at correct decision-making. Types of heuristic bias can be roughly classified into the following three categories (Tversky & Kahneman 1974):

- i. Representativeness: the probability that an object or event A belongs to process B.

- ii. Availability of instances or scenarios: frequency of a class or a particular development.
- iii. Adjustment from an anchor: numerical prediction when a relevant value is available.

The representativeness heuristic further includes insensitivity to the probability of an outcome or to predictability, where bias is enabled when evidence that is not relevant to an accurate prediction is given. A phenomenon called ‘illusion of validity’ also emerges when people’s judgement of the selected outcome and the input match each other, with no regard for the factors that limit predictive accuracy.

Heuristic bias relating to availability and adjustment from an anchor also contains a subordinate class called misconception of chance, in which condition people judge that they have grasped the entire sequence through the local parts presented by putting too much faith in the results of small samples.

The characteristics of heuristic bias can be divided into two types: the first is relevant to logical legitimization, such as the representativeness heuristic and the illusion of validity, and the second is relevant to statistical evidentiality, such as the availability of instances or numerical prediction. Moreover, these two types can be correlated with each other or layered in a case.

Thus, these heuristic biases could be used to mislead people, allowing them to assume an illusory correlation regarding the frequency whereby two events co-occur.

3. Data and methods

3.1 Discourse analysis and sequential analysis

Although there are several definitions of discourse analysis, it is usually conducted on linguistic units which are larger than sentences, and is pragmatically based on the actual usage of words (Hajer et al. 2005). Tannen (1993) suggests that discourse analysis targets a broader range than sentences and addresses contexts and discourse grammar. Furthermore, Maynard (1993) defines discourse analysis as investigating the meaning and function of linguistic expression by focusing on the anteroposterior context.

Sequential analysis, an analytical approach in the German tradition of sociology, is particularly valuable in the analysis of social structures. According to Maiwald (2005), sequential analysis

focuses on semantic content that merges through interactions. Sequential analysis is used to reconstruct semantic structures based on these interactions. This process utilizes real data, such as recordings, and is applied to discover patterns in semantic structures. Moreover, utterances are analyzed line by line, following the sequential development of meanings as interactions unfold, which enables the cumulative development of hypotheses.

This study utilizes the sequential analysis method to identify discursive and semantic patterns in *Aojiru* advertisements, by drawing on the theoretical framework outlined in Section 2.

3.2 The use of critical discourse analysis in revealing unfair influencing tactics in advertisements

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a branch of critical linguistics. The term ‘critical’ refers to the establishment of pragmatic connections between social and political activity in order to construct society. Studies based on CDA aim to reveal discrimination or power imbalances in linguistic discourses, with a particular focus on the examination of social expressions, structures, or systems that emerge through these discourses. Thus, CDA covers various critical territories, ranging from large corporations, politics, gender issues, to the media (Nabeshima, 2005).

In this study, CDA is used to critically evaluate communication strategies that are not rooted in explanations of products’ efficacy and appeal, but rather in psychological and social factors that influence their audiences.

3.3. Data

The above-mentioned theoretical frames were adopted to analyze transcribed data from nine *Aojiru* TV commercials. This product is manufactured by *Asahi Ryokken* and the respective TV commercials have had the same format since the peak of the company’s prosperity in 1990, although some changes were made up until 2021.

Before this manufacturer advertised *Aojiru*, it used a negative approach to sell its kale-based smoothie in the 1990s, which increased nationwide recognition. In a famous commercial, an actor growled “tastes bad,” with an agonized facial expression, which was intended to remind

Japanese audiences of the famous proverb “good medicine is bitter.”

In contrast to the earlier *Aojiru* product, its successor employed a totally different approach by emphasizing how delicious the product is. The new *Aojiru* commercial was broadcast before noon, when many retired senior citizens, owners of small businesses or parents are at home, potentially engaging in household activities or preparing their lunch. These groups are the manufacturer’s target audiences. The ad themes making up this study’s corpus are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. The study’s corpus.

#	Ad theme	Time	Year	URL (access date)
1	Stone barbecue “ <i>Minoru</i> ”	08:31	2017	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJx3semgxHg&t=97s (03/12/2021)
2	Pub restaurant “ <i>Hose-maru</i> ”	08:09	2015	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6TEbOhmhuk (03/12/2021)
3	<i>Kaki</i> persimmon “Cinderella”	06:03	2013	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8udcl6gBR-Q&t=97s (03/12/2021)
4	Steel founder <i>Hokuse</i> Corporation	08:07	2011	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGroW0CoVqc (06/10/2021)
5 *	Hair stylist Ms. Miura	08:17	2009	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ba5VjU3s1MI (06/10/2021)
6	Bus driver (Mrs. <i>Umezu</i>)	06:05	2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvQNIVdnHUE&list=PL84f1PtToeRxDVs-W_gcS2zqdYcisMpSd (06/10/2021)
7 *	Interior planner “ <i>Veldissimo</i> ”	05:59	2010	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKI2cJ0Ptgw (06/10/2021)
8	Professional bowler	06:01	2016	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3

				gRgThWJvk (06/10/2021)
9	Fish market "Fujiwara"	07:14	2017	https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x5inrpo (06/10/2021)

The video-ads range from approximately 6 to 8.5 minutes in length, and each has a different main character who narrates their life-story and talks about how regularly they drink *Aojiru*. Almost all of these characters are self-employed business owners, mainly in the field of food hospitality, but some work in agriculture, manufacturing, or services.

4. Main findings

4.1 Vague boundary between non-fictional and fictional aspects

This series of TV commercials merges the boundaries between the narrative of each character's life-story and descriptions of the products advertised. Consequently, the audience cannot be certain whether they are viewing a documentary program or an advertisement until the final part of the series. Thus, the boundary between the two different discourses becomes blurred, as shown in Example 1.

Example 1 (Table 1, no. 1)

01 Narrator: A place where few cars or people are present. In this

02 location, a bar is standing alone. However, you may notice how it is

03 crowded, with many customers. All these

04 customers commute here frequently for the purpose of experiencing

05 numerous services provided by the owner.

06 Customer 1: The owner likes to hold events. He likes people.



07 Customer 2: Good-looking guy with Regent hair-style.



【Multimodal Cue: The screen shows the program's title and the tone of music changes.】



08 Narrator: Kirari, Genki-jin (sparkling, cheerful people)! 【Title call】

09 Narrator 2: This program is presented by Asahi Ryokken. 【Introduction of sponsor】



10 Narrator : A coastal city facing the Japanese sea, the *Kawahara* area in *Nigata*
 11 prefecture. *Hosemaru* welcomes customers with these words.



Usually, the broadcasts begin with an introduction of the main character's daily routine, such as their place of work, or with a reference to this character by a customer, friend, or family member. After the narrator names the presenter of the program, the introduction of the main character begins, with a slight change in the tone of music as a multimodal cue, as shown in Examples 1–3. Following the change in tone, the narrator introduces the title of the program (title call) at frame 08 (Example 1), and the sponsor's name appears at frame 09. Next, at frame 10, the narrator resumes the telling of the story which was interrupted at frame 06.

This discursive strategy is highly ambiguous, since the audience cannot determine whether they are viewing an advertisement or a documentary program, which encourages them to focus on the story. The same strategy is deployed in Example 2.

Example 2

- 01 Narrator: Japanese persimmon, arranged neatly inside a high-grade box made of
 02 paulownia wood. This brand of persimmon, named Cinderella
 03 *Taisyu*, costs 3000 to 5000 yen per piece. It is said to be
 04 the most expensive persimmon in the world. Here are some opinions
 05 from customers who tasted samples...
 06 Customer 1: Tastes good. Very sweet.
 07 Customer 2: A little expensive, but it is worth it.

08 Narrator: This man here is the manufacturer who created this persimmon. This
 09 product was carefully created from numerous prototypes.
 10 However, the road to success is full of obstacles.
 11 (Omitted) These obstacles could never have
 12 been overcome without the support of his wife.

【Multimodal cue: The screen shows the program's title and the tone of music changes】

13 Narrator1: Today, we feature Mr. and Mrs. Fukuma from Fukuma orchard as our
 14 *Kirari, Genki-jin*.
 15 Narrator1: *Kirari, Genki-jin* (sparkling, cheerful people)!
 16 Narrator 2: This program is presented by *Asahi Ryokken*.

(Table 1, no. 3)

As in Example 1, after the narrator introduces the main character's business and daily routine and his customers make references to him, from 1–12, the tone of music implies that the narrator is finally revealing that this is not a documentary program, but an advertisement by a corporation, from 13–16.

However, the context at 12 and 13 encourages the audience to believe, erroneously, that this is a documentary program by using the program's title. Although there is some variation in the title of the TV program and the use of *Egao no kippulKirari Genki bito* to present this TV commercial in the form of a documentary TV program, the same discursive strategy is consistently used, whereby after a short description of the business by the owner, the narrator introduces the title of the program and the name of the sponsor, as if it were a TV program, and subsequently begins to introduce the main character.

Except for Ad theme 1 (Table 1) which lacks the introduction of the business before the program's title is presented, all of the data collected in this study follow the same discursive strategy as the introductory part, as follows:

- 1) Introduction of the main character's business
- 2) Title call (the introduction of program's title)

- 3) Introduction of the sponsor
- 4) Narrating the story of the characters

Furthermore, the ending of this documentary-style section, which appears immediately before the transition to the presentation of the *Aojiru* product, deploys the same discursive strategy, in which the narrator closes the story with a positive comment or a reference to their desire to continue living their happy life forever. This is usually enacted through the expression of *te-iru*, which is a grammatical expression pertaining to the continuation of a resulting state (Toratani, 1997).

Example 3

01 Narrator: Happy life, with smiling faces of precious people.

02 Character 1: I feel good working in a couple, when both of us are in good health.

03 Narrator: The joy of working as husband and wife. (1) Their dream

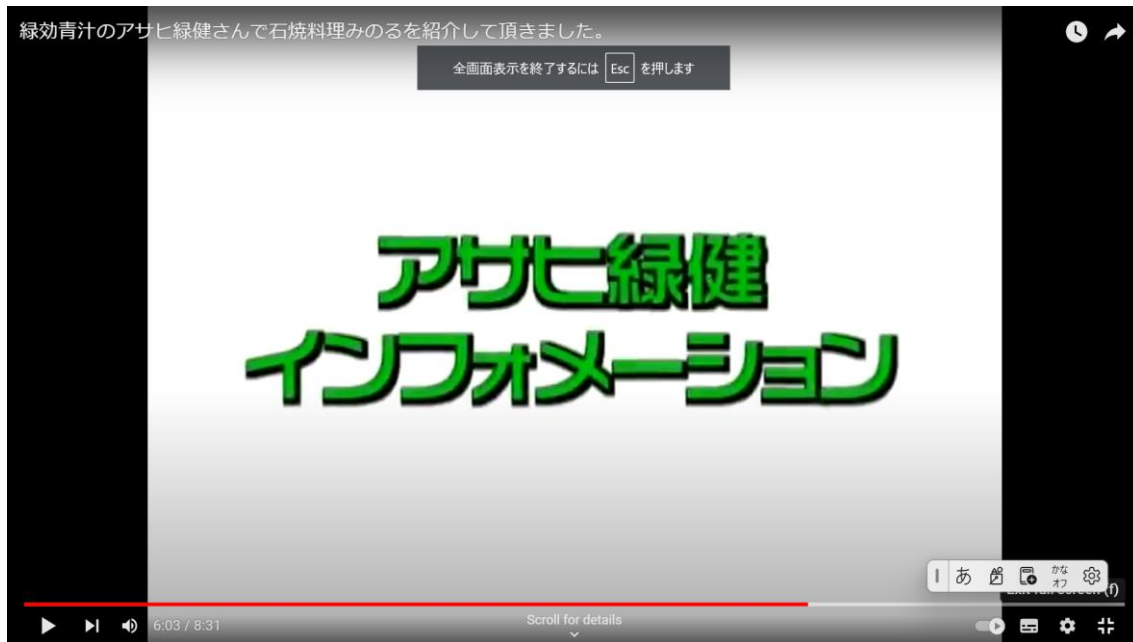
04 of many happy customers (2) continues. They don't want to

05 feel the same as before. This is why they stay healthy and

06 smile.



【The screen shows information about the product from the sponsor, and the tone of music changes.】



07 Narrator 2: *Asahi Ryokken* information!

08 Narrator: Are you looking for an easy-to-take *Aojiru* supplement? *Ryokko*

09 *Aojiru* is exactly what you are looking for.

(Table 1, no. 1)

Each character's story usually concludes with a vision of their future, which suggests that their happiness may continue forever, conveyed through a grammatical expression that suggests continuity. In Example 3, the aspect and an auxiliary verb that imply a state of continuity are used to express a continuous state of health or happiness.

(1) Their dream continues until now.

(*Karera no yume wa tudui-teiru*)

(THEIR—possessive; DREAM—subject marker; CONTINUES (intransitive verb)—aspect)

(2) They remain healthy

(*Yume wo mamori-tuduk-eru*)

((they) DREAM—object marker; PROTECT (transitive verb)—aspect) ↓

As shown in Examples (1) and (2), the verb stem “continue” and “protect” is attached to the aspect, “-*teiru*,” a grammatical form used to express the continuation of the resulting state, as implied in (1); in (2), the continuation of happiness is suggested by the use of the transitive

verb, as an active agent.

After this closing of the documentary part, the tone of the program suddenly changes through multimodal aural and visual cues, at which point the marketer finally reveals the promotion. Until this moment, when the specifications of the product are introduced, the audience receives few clues that might enable it to grasp that the story is part of the promotion, and that the final purpose of the documentary is purely promotional.

The marketers employ this discursive strategy to secure the attention of their audience and maintain their curiosity, through the main character's life story, until the point where the product itself is introduced. In the above examples, the marketer carefully conceals the intention to promote their product, while blurring the boundary between fiction and non-fiction.

4.2 Securing attention and generating interest in the program

If the structure of the *Aojiru* series is considered within the framework of AIDMA (awareness-interest-desire-memory-action, Hall, 1924), the introduction of the business and the title can be viewed as a method to secure the audience's attention, encouraging them to become involved in the story. Usually, in the introduction to the main character's business, an attractive product or service is presented against a backdrop of beautiful scenery. This can be seen in the following examples, which feature exactly the same structure as in Example 1.

Example 4 (modified from Example 1)

- 01 Narrator: A place where few cars or people are present. In this
02 location, a bar is standing alone. However, you may notice how it is
03 crowded, with many customers. All these customers
04 commute here frequently for the purpose of experiencing numerous
05 services provided by the owner.
- 06 Customer 1: The owner likes to hold events. He likes people.
- 07 Customer 2: Good-looking guy with Regent hair style.

(Table 1, no.2)

Example 5

- 01 Narrator: A small island, floating on the west cost of *Nagasaki* prefecture.

02 Here, you can find a hotel, crowded with many tourists. They
 03 seek only this hotel, with its multi-course dinner that includes lobster,
 04 the local specialty. Now reputation is given.
 05 Customer 1: I am surprised to see such a gorgeous dinner.
 06 Customer 2: Everybody said that it was a good decision to come here, yes.

(Table 1, no. 4)

In Example 4, the prosperity of the bar is obvious, with joyful customers who speak highly of the business owner's personality. These positive reviews are also present in Example 5 where the customers seem highly satisfied with the attractive lobster dish, the famous local specialty. These lively scenes, full of customers and their positive reviews, combined with the fresh and attractive seafood, are sufficient to attract audiences in the first few minutes of the advertisement.

4.3 Encouraging interested audiences to desire

After the title call, the main character's life story is explained. This part also features a positive description of the main character's enjoyable life, which is presented through features of happiness, such as good relationships with family, colleagues, neighbors, and customers.

Example 6

01 Narrator: This program is presented by Asahi Rokken. Kyoto *Kifune* shrine, which
 02 is a famous site for marriages. Here is a guy who commutes from the
 03 nearest bus stop to the shrine: Mr. *Mitsuru Umedu*, 64 years old (omitted).
 04 He still loves driving the bus. He also volunteers to drive a micro
 05 bus on his family trip, which he conducts a few times in a year. Here is his
 06 grandson, who travels with him.
 07 Grandson: He managed that curving road well; it was cool.

(Table 1, no. 6)

Example 7

01 Narrator 2: Kirari, *Genkibito* (sparkling, cheerful person)! This program is
 02 presented by *Asahi Ryokken*.
 03 Narrator1: At 5 o'clock in the morning, Mr. Fujiwara commutes to Nakatsu
 04 fish market by driving along the mountain road. It takes one hour

05 each morning (omitted).

06 Colleague: There is no one who doesn't know about him in this fish market,

07 where he commutes.

08 Colleague 2: Everybody says he is an extraordinarily nice person. You

09 can see just by looking at his face, can't you (omitted)?

10 Wife: He likes his work and is so pleased to hear customers saying that this is

11 tasty, so he happily puts in a lot of ingredients at once.

(Table 1, no. 9)

In Example 6, the main character even utilizes his occupation in his private life, during this family trip, and this attitude is highly respected by his grandchildren: "It was cool." Furthermore, in Example 7, the main character, Mr. Fujiwara, is famous in, and proud of, his occupation. The positive comments about his personality are further corroborated by his wife.

This section is of sufficient length to stimulate the interest of potential audiences, especially those who center their lives around family and grandchildren after their retirement and watch TV in the late morning in their living-rooms. Table 2 shows the type of businesses they own and by whom they are highly valued which could encourage the audience to desire the same quality of life as themselves.

Table 2. Elements of interest and desire.

	Type of business	Human relationship
1	Stone barbecue	Wife's support
2	Seafood dining bar	Repeated customers
3	Fruit brand	Wife's support
4	Lobster dishes	Mother's words
5	Charismatic hair stylist	Good colleague and customer evaluations
6	Transport driver in Kyoto	His dream of becoming a driver has been achieved Positive evaluation from his grandchildren
7	Interior designer	Good colleagues and customer evaluations
8	Professional bowler	Narrator's introduction of him as the oldest professional bowler in Japan
9	Fresh seafood	Good evaluations from colleagues and wife

This section of the advertisement can be associated with the 'interest' and 'desire' aspects of the AIDMA model, according to which audiences are motivated to obtain products and begin

to desire to possess them.

After this documentary section of the commercial ends, the tone suddenly changes. This is signified by multimodal aural and visual cues. Next, the promotional section of the commercial is finally revealed.

This pattern was found in almost all of the commercials analyzed and tends to blur the boundary between each character's life-story narrative and the explanation of the product's specifications; the audience is unable to determine whether each commercial is a documentary program or an advertisement until the last section of the broadcast. This blurring of discursive boundaries is employed because the marketer intends to attract the audience's attention and maintain their curiosity in the main character's life-story until the end of the product's introduction.

4.4 The discursive patterns of heuristic bias and alignment

The following discursive patterns were identified in the corpus with regard to heuristic bias and alignment:

1. An imaginative strategy is used whereby consumers are encouraged to picture or guess product functions without being provided with an explicit explanation.
2. Identifying a potentially different story as similar to previous ones.
3. Invoking an image of happiness, but in relation to the product itself, through the storyteller's narrative.
4. Double evaluation, in which someone with a positive reputation in relation to their business gives a positive evaluation of the *Aojiru* product.

These specific characteristics of the *Aojiru* discourse are used to persuade the audience to make a purchase decision.

4.5 Problem–solution rhetoric and the representativeness heuristic

The next part of the commercial aims to encourage the audience to remember the products. This part has the function of strengthening the purchase intention and gives the audience the impression that they could solve their current feelings of health insecurity or anxiety by consuming *Aojiru* products.

After showcasing the business owner's products and their positive reviews from customers, colleagues, and other family members, the next part of the commercial focuses on how the main character overcame a problem to achieve life success; a story is usually told about how they overcame this adversity. This part of the commercial consists of several iterations of problem–solution–success, primarily related to problems concerning business issues, followed by one related to their health status.

In Example 8, the main character's strong source of support, his wife, had been diagnosed with a serious illness. The commercial describes how she faced this adversity with the support of her husband.

Example 8

01 Narrator: This couple works with the ambition to allow many customers to enjoy

02 their tasty dishes. However, they once almost gave up their dream,

03 due to a difficult experience in the past. His wife, Sachiko, was

04 affected by a serious disease. (...) Her surgery continued for more

05 than 5 hours, and she lost all of her guts in this surgery. She was

06 allowed to be discharged from hospital afterwards, and encountered

07 an unexpected scene at home, where she had returned after a long

08 interval.

09 Sachiko: My husband prepared festival red rice and set the table with a flower on

10 the 2nd floor. Even though it was a little early to eat it, I appreciated

11 his effort very much.

12 Narrator: She endured a long and hard rehabilitation, which continued even

13 after her discharge from hospital with the support of Minoru. Now
14 they have come to know the dignity of life.

(Table 1, no. 1)

In this storyline, the main character's wife successfully overcame her illness with her husband's support, as stated from line 9 to 11, which is irrelevant to whether or not his act helped her to recover. The couple applies the same reasoning as to how they overcame their critical problem through mutual co-operation to the story of how they overcame their problem regarding their current eating habits by taking an *Aojiru* supplement, as described in Example 9.

Example 9

01 Narrator: Through this experience, they made a drastic change to
02 something compared to their previous situation. Their eating
03 habit. They looked all over Japan for a food that
04 would supply enough nutrition to a body which cannot digest a lot
05 of food at once. Then they finally managed to find this product.
06 *Aojiru*.

(Table 1, no. 1)

Thus, the problem–solution strategy used to describe overcoming a serious illness is also applied to the couple changing their eating habits by incorporating the easily accessible *Aojiru* supplement. As in Example 9, the couple defined changing their eating habits as a new problem to be solved (lines 01-05) and found the solution of drinking *Aojiru* through their co-operative efforts (lines 05-06). Here, the marketer utilizes the same problem–solution discursive strategy to strengthen persuasion and increase the product's credibility.

In Example 8, Sachiko was welcomed home by her husband on the day she was discharged from the hospital, while her health has been improving ever since. Here it could be argued that Sachiko seemingly overcame her health problem thanks to her husband's help; however, their quest for new dietary habits would not have been achieved without discovering the *Aojiru*

product through their mutual collaboration. Here, the marketer appears to be utilizing the representativeness heuristic, which creates the illusion that event A belongs to process B. In other words, in the face of illusory evidence about how *Aojiru* could give the couple an ultimate solution to their health problems, the statements are invested with validity and predictive accuracy.

The same application of a problem–solution strategy is found in all of the data and constructs that make up the core structure of the *Aojiru* commercials, as observed in Example 9.

Example 10

01 Narrator: *Hoseimaru* started their business 33 years ago, when their father,
02 *Ushitaro*, founded the business. In that era, there were a lot of fish
03 markets here, frequented by a lot of tourists. However, all of the
04 markets have closed their businesses as time went by, and have never
05 seen customers recently. Their business turned out to be facing a harsh
06 situation. This is when Masakazu inherited the bar from his father. He
07 never thought of relocating this business to another area. In the midst of
08 a sense of urgency to get the bar running, his younger brother Takeshi
09 rushed to help him. The brothers reunited as one to relaunch Hoseimaru.

(Table 1, no. 1)

In this storyline, the main character, the owner of the dining bar, faced a slump in trade due to the decreasing number of tourists. However, with the help he received from his brother (lines 07–09), as well as from newly established popular services, their business prospered again.

This rhetoric of problem–solution–success, identified in Example 10, is also repeated in another story where the main characters overcame a health issue, as shown in Example 11.

Example 11

01 Narrator: However, their daily diet tends to be irregular, due to the type of their

02 business.

03 Masakazu: I really realize that I tend to neglect my daily dietary habit and

04 recognize that it lacks vegetables.

05 Narrator: In such a moment, he found out about this *Aojiru* product, which

06 supplies nutrition originating from vegetables.

(Table 1, no. 1)

In Example 11, the same storyline of overcoming the problem seen in Example 10 is applied in the context of the main characters' dietary habits. The problem of a low intake of fresh vegetables is solved by drinking *Aojiru*, as stated in lines 5–6. Thus, this script becomes the second repetition of the problem–solution strategy. As seen in Example 9, the repetition of a similar context of the problem–solution strategy, which was used once to recover their business, is used again to describe how they reach a solution to cope with the next problem: supplying sufficient nutrition.

This phenomenon shares the same logic as the representativeness heuristic, in which people mistakenly believe that object A belongs to process B despite the fact that there is no logical cohesion between the two incidents. This strategy is utilized to lead the audience to buy the product because of their misled purchase judgement.

Regarding repetition, the structure of problem–solution–success stories is repeated several times in the commercials, and this repetition could function to emphasize or strengthen persuasiveness in this series of commercials. Although the main characters' methods of overcoming a problem in their lives do not entail that there is a correlation between their decision to purchase *Aojiru* and overcoming their health issues, this repetition fills the ellipsis between two or more occurrences. It implies an indirect interpretation of their similarity and

stimulates an imaginative cohesion between the messages.

Thus, alongside the function of repetition there is the misconception of chance, where the same logic is applied to several consecutive cases. Furthermore, this observation is also related to the availability of instances. Only worthless evidence which does not lead to an accurate prediction is given, which leads the audience to perform decision making based on an illusory idealization.

4.6 Evoking the image of happiness as representativeness heuristic

In order to work around the restriction on explaining product efficacy, the marketer uses other persuasive tools, such as imagery. In this case, the marketer leads the audience to the misunderstanding that this product could help them to achieve their overall image of an ideal life or happiness, instead of demonstrating why and how this product could improve their life. This imaging strategy is primarily achieved through a discursive pattern that leads the audience to imagine that drinking *Aojiru* can result in happiness.

In this strategy, the marketer tries to get the audience to recognize the main characters' successful lives, promoting purchase decisions that would enable them to replicate the main characters' excellent quality of life in their own lives. The emphasis is primarily placed on the harmonious relationships that they maintain with their family members, and how positively they are evaluated by their colleagues, spouse, and neighbors.

All of the main characters in the data emphasize their current state of happiness, mainly in terms of human relationships, such as good family ties, good friendships, or the positive reputation noted by many customers, as shown in Example 12.

Example 12

01 Narrator: This program is brought to you by Asahi Rokken. This is the Kyoto

02 *Kifune* shrine, which is famous for marriage. Here is a guy who

03 commutes from the nearest bus stop to the shrine, Mr. Mitsuru

04 Umezu, 64 years old. (Omit) He has never stopped loving driving
05 buses. He also volunteered to drive a microbus on family trips, which
06 were conducted a few times each year. Here is his grandson, who
07 traveled with him. Grandson: He was good at navigating curving roads,
08 and it was cool.

(Data no. 6)

In Example 12, the main character utilizes the skills from his occupation in his private life, such as during family trips; this is positively evaluated by his grandson, as seen in lines 07-08.

Example 13

01 Narrator: At 5 o'clock in the early morning, Mr. Fujiwara commutes to Nakatsu
02 fish market by going through a mountain road, and it takes one hour
03 every morning. (Omit) Colleague: There is no one who doesn't know
04 about him in this fish market, which he commutes to.
05 Colleague 2: Everybody says he is an extraordinarily nice person. You can see it
06 just by checking his face, can't you? (Omit)
07 Wife: He likes his work and is so pleased to see customers mentioning that it is
08 tasty, so he easily puts in a lot of ingredients at once.

(Data no. 9)

In Example 13, the main character's colleagues and wife highly value not only his good personality traits, such as diligence over a long period of time (lines 03-04) or his personality itself (line 05), but also the quality of fish he serves (lines 07-08).

As well as being a successful businessman, the main character seems to be loved by his family members, colleagues, and neighbors, and even by customers. This segment of the commercial contains enough features to interest the potential audience, especially those who have centered their life on family and grandchildren, following their retirement, and are watching TV in the late morning in their living room. This could be the core target-audience of these commercials. The variety of types of happiness portrayed in the data are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. The concept of happiness as represented in each commercial.

Ad themes	Owner's business	Type of happiness in human relationship
1	Stone barbecue	Wife's support
2	Seafood dining bar	Repeated customers
3	Branded fruit	Wife's support
4	Lobster dish	Life accomplishments reflect the lessons learned from his mother
5	Charisma hair stylist	Colleagues' and customer's high esteem
6	Travel driver in Kyoto	His dream to be a driver has been achieved positive evaluation from his grandchildren
7	Interior designer	Colleagues and customers' positive evaluation
8	Professional bowling player	Narrator's introduction about him as the oldest pro bowler in Japan
9	Fresh seafood bowl	Colleagues' and wife's positive evaluation

There seems to be a type of representativeness bias where the probability of an object A belonging to process B is raised. However, in reality the main characters' achievement of happiness is solely the result of their own effort or talent, and in some cases by chance, and is not dependent on their habit of drinking *Aojiru*. Nevertheless, the repeated emphasis on their quality of life that follows the introduction of their habit of drinking *Aojiru* may lead to a misunderstanding that these two occurrences are related. This illusion of validity is also constructed as a metaphor, which implies that the logic that works in the source domain can also be applicable to the target domain. Thus, the marketer's imaging strategy may create

an ambiguous implication of cohesion between living a contented life and drinking the advertised product.

4.7 Double alignment to increase the persuasiveness of a good review

The positive reputation of the main character in each commercial is obvious from the starting point of the narrative, and this series of commercials is structured in such a fashion as to convey that *Aojiru* is highly evaluated by people with a positive reputation. The main characters who give a positive evaluation of *Aojiru* are also evaluated positively by their relatives, colleagues, and customers.

In Example 14, the first alignment between two customers towards the owner's personality as an object is found.

Example 14

- 01 Narrator: In this place, scarce numbers of cars and people are observed. In this
02 location, a bar is standing alone. However, you can notice how it is
03 crowded by a lot of customers who have come to investigate this bar.
04 All these customers travel here frequently for the purpose of
05 experiencing numerous services provided by the owner.
06 Customer 1 : The owner likes to hold events. He likes people.
07 Customer 2: Good-looking guy with a regent hairstyle.

(Table 1, no. 2)

The owner's business seems to be prospering, while attracting a large number of customers (lines 02-03), followed by customers describing the good reputation of the owner, which is partly based on his personality and popularity, as shown in lines 06–07.

In the discourse in Example 14, a conversation takes place later on. Here, “the owner” is referred to in line 06-07 and he evaluates *Aojiru* in the next Example 15.

Example 15

- 01 Owner: This product is not bitter at all, rather it contains something savory. I
02 was surprised to find this is so delicious. 14 years have passed, since we
03 had begun to drink this product. I thought that this in enormous
04 advantage to be able to take nutrition so easily.
05 Owner: Ah... Delicious.
06 Narrator: Then, recently he cares about his brother’s health, who is older than
07 50 now.

(Table 1, no. 2)

In this second evaluation, the owner who was evaluated positively in Example 15, is offering positive evaluations of the *Aojiru* product.

Thus, the marketer introduces positive reviews from other customers, including a focus on taste (01, 02, 05) and nutrition (03-04). Some of the customers are introduced as having a good reputation in their own business area which strengthens their positive review as being the opinion of someone with authority, a frequently used argumentation strategy. This rhetoric of double evaluation functions mimetically as a persuasive tool.

As stressed earlier, alignment in stance-taking involves an evaluation given by a subject who shares the same perspective and aligns with another evaluation given by a second subject, while the belief or consideration stated in this inter-subjective view seemingly turns out to be a conditional fact.

In Example 14, the owner himself is the object to be evaluated by two subjects; customers 1 and 2, but in example 15 this same owner turns out to be a subject to evaluate the *Aojiru* product itself.

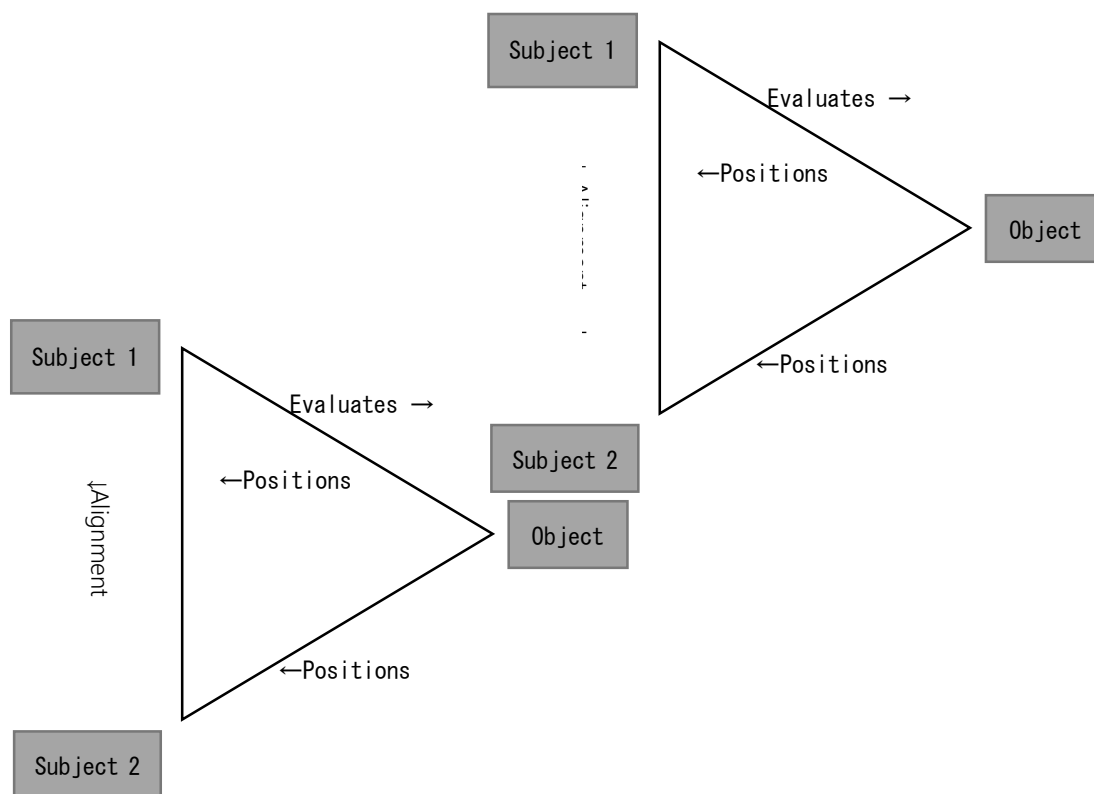


Figure 2. Double alignment in evaluating *Aojiru*..

This double alignment in evaluating *Aojiru* is intended to strengthen the audience's reception as a reliable product. The main character who enjoys a positive reputation in the perceptions of significant others could function as a certain authority in this discourse.

In addition, alignment is an important factor in Japanese collectivism, where other-centered styles of communication are systemically used to save face and maintain harmonious relationships with others (Miyahara, 1998).

This structure, where the *Aojiru* product is evaluated by the main-character (business owner) after he has been evaluated by his customers, corresponds to the use of repetition. However, the relationship between the two evaluation instances is not organized in parallel. Thus, the marketer utilizes the mechanism of stance-taking, attributed to double alignment.

5. Discussion

The communicative strategy that blurs the discursive boundaries between documentary and commercial corresponds to Stealth marketing. The term stealth marketing designates a strategy where marketers attempt to conceal the objectives of an advertisement. Cause-related advertising is considered to be most effective when consumers do not recognize it as advertising (Calvert, 2008).

In addition, the strategies related to heuristic bias, which utilize a problem-solving rhetoric and stimulate an image of stereotypical happiness, could lead the audience to a purchase decision based on wrong criteria.

As noted by Gomez et al. (2004), advertisements for dietary supplements or medicines utilize this kind of ambiguity in discourse to attract as many customers as possible. A typical manifestation of this technique is a sense that something is lacking in consumers' lives. For example, audiences may have concerns, which are discursively constructed, about maintaining or improving their health, or about their quality of life. By showing representatives of main characters leading happy lives through depictions of their relationships with their spouses, family members, neighbors, or customers, marketers can tap into audiences' hidden desires, or their dissatisfaction with their daily lives, encouraging them to feel that they could enjoy a much better quality of life. In particular, the potential audiences of the commercial in this study, including retired seniors, housewives, and the self-employed, may experience difficulties with social engagement. Therefore, strategies utilizing heuristic bias or imaging may stimulate their desire to purchase products in order to improve their human relationships, in a similar manner to the strategies used in the marketing of sexual-enhancement medicines.

Furthermore, the *Aojiru* series can be classified as a 'super food' commercial, to use MacGregor et al.'s (2021) categorization, in that the marketer's strategy appeals to impressions of fashion, health and youth, rather than efficacy. The *Aojiru* marketer also portrays images of happy lives, adjusted to the target audiences for their product, such as impressions of good relationships with grandchildren or delicious foods.

In both of these marketing strategies, the marketers design cognitive models with which potential customers can frame the discursive features of their daily social lives. Moreover, the marketers succeed in embedding these ways of recognizing the world into the discourses of their commercials (Van Dijk, 1990). Finally, the *Aojiru* commercial deploys the common strategy of separating people into double categories. In this commercial, people are

represented as either satisfied (happy) or unsatisfied (unhappy).

6. Conclusions & recommendations

In sections 4.1–4.7, the main characteristics of the structure and rhetoric of the *Aojiru* commercials were analyzed by drawing on select discourse analytic theoretical frames. It was found that the marketer carefully conceals the promotional intent and succeeds in merging the boundary between non-fiction (each character's storytelling) and fiction (the *Aojiru* promotion). In detail, they only give vague clues that this is a commercial and not a documentary program at the beginning of each commercial, before revealing its promotional pedigree at the end of the program.

This structure of vague discourse boundaries is effective in attracting the audience's attention and maintaining their curiosity in the main character's life-story until the end of the product introduction itself.

After showcasing each business owner's products and their positive reviews from customers, colleagues, and other family members, the next part of the commercial focuses on how they overcame a problem to achieve brilliance in their life; a story is usually told about how they overcame this adversity. This part of the commercial consists of several iterations of problem–solution–success, primarily related to business issues, followed by one related to their health status.

Furthermore, the stories about how the main characters overcame problems, such as recovering from a business crisis or a serious illness through mutual collaboration with family members, do not have any logical correlation with how they came across the *Aojiru* product to correct their eating habits. This may cause representativeness bias where people misunderstand object A as belonging to process B, even though there is no logical cohesion between them. Given the repetitively cohesive imagery in the two discourses between overcoming life problems and problems of dietary habits solved by the *Aojiru* product, this also causes other types of heuristic bias (availability of instances and misconception of chance), while the same rationale applies to several consecutive cases.

In section 4.2, another type of heuristic bias was found where a stereotypical example of happiness is presented via the main character's life story, such as a positive reputation among colleagues, spouse, and neighbors. This image of happiness could create an ambiguous implication of cohesion between leading a contented life and drinking the advertised product. This matches the representativeness heuristic which increases the probability of an object A belonging to process B. In this case, the employed imagery leads the audience to the misunderstanding that this product could help them achieve their overall image of an ideal life or happiness, instead of arguing why and how this product could improve their life.

Finally, the rhetorical device of double alignment was found to be operative in this discourse, allowing *Aojiru* to be positively evaluated by the main characters, who are also given a positive evaluation by their relatives, colleagues, and customers.

This double alignment in evaluating *Aojiru* is intended to strengthen the audience's sense of reliability on the provided information, while endowing the commercial with a certain sense of authority. This alignment can be said to be effective, especially in the Japanese culture which values collectivism. The above strategies are utilized to lead the audience to buy the product as a result of their illusionary purchase judgement.

As referred to in 1.1, there are some restrictions on the advertising of dietary supplements, under which products that belong to Group B are not allowed to lay claim to medical functions or drug efficacy. In addition, the Broadcasting Association has produced guidelines for the advertisement of health foods.

Given these restrictions, there seems to be a certain dilemma in the advertising of supplemental foods between consumer demand and marketers' success in avoiding breaching the stipulated guidelines, related to "examination, prevention, medication, curing, and mitigation." The marketer utilizes expressions to imply the efficacy of this supplement to the audience. This is achieved through the mixed approach of heuristic bias in terms of representativeness, availability of instances, misconception of chance, analogy, and repetition of alignment which could lead the audience to assume that the product is also applicable to their own situation.

Moreover, these strategies could also bring about some unexpected negative consequences.

First of all, the restriction on references to scientific efficacy potentially contradicts consumer's

intention to buy these supplemental foods. Obviously, purchasing these foods is not driven by tastefulness expectations, but by a desire for improving one's health status. Thus, restrictions on expression may potentially run counter to these motivations.

Second, the restriction on the range of expressions allows the advertisements to heavily use the noted discursive strategies and heuristic biases.

These strategies are not subject to control, even though they are potentially more harmful than the restriction on expressions related to efficacy or the product specification itself. To ensure fairness in this matter, rather than restricting information on efficacy and facts related to "examination, prevention, medication, curing, and mitigation", the extent to which it is permitted to use expressions related to the above aspects could be examined. More detailed guidelines, including references to the degree of and examples of expression, are required, rather than relying on the current vague restriction. For example, the discursive methods used to mobilize audiences to feel a certain lack in their quality of life through strategies of categorization could be restricted. Furthermore, marketing strategies that utilize heuristic bias to create psychological effects, or other discursive cues, such as stance-taking or alignment, could also be restricted.

Moreover, beyond the imposition of restrictions on companies, a certain degree of literacy is required from audiences if they are to resist the stealth strategies described in this study.

Thus, this study recommends that the current Drugs, Cosmetics and Medical Instruments Act should be revised by adding conditions concerning how and to what extent commercials for supplements belonging to Group B are allowed to describe their medical function and drug efficacy.

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