

Desire Addiction: The Mediation of Identity in Japan¹

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Esse est percipi (to be is to be perceived)
— George Berkeley

The late French historian, literary critic, and philosophical anthropologist René Girard's work does not focus on contemporary media, but his observations on related subjects do offer compelling insights into media's influence on human interaction and development. Advertising, for Girard, demonstrates two important points, the first being that it is the consummate demonstration of *mimetic desire*. He writes, "[T]he most skillful advertising does not try to convince that a product is superior but that it is desired by Others" (Girard, 1976, p. 104). Given the purpose and makeup of ubiquitous online social media platforms such as LINE, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, to name a few, Girard's observation about advertising can be plausibly extended to include the rapidly expanding form of online social media as well.

As noted in a previous mimetic study that focused on Japanese advertising (Cholewinski & Taylor, 2004, p. 387), "what Girard considers the fundamental makeup of the human self, and of what he (2003) and Jean-Michel Oughourlian (1991) call the "interdividual" relation, can be seen simply in the fundamental way advertising works: our desires and identities are formed (and continually re-formed) through reiterative exposure to and imitation of models." The authors

assert that it is not the products being advertised that we necessarily want, but the amplification of our desires that the appealing person, action or scene in the ad confers on the product, and promises likewise to confer on us.

I believe that a correlative version of this interindividual-relation forming mimetic triangle exists in the use of online social media (OSM), where virtual communication spaces are utilized to facilitate our desires, self-expression, and identity development.² And as with advertising, it is not the online person or things that we necessarily want; with OSM, it is the desire for the development and acknowledgment of our sense of self (impression management) that interactions with others promise to confer on us (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997, p. 9; Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Sundar et al., 2015). With OSM, the interplay within the mimetic triangle is further complicated and intensified. In contrast with traditional advertising, in much of online media individuals participate in concurrent roles as objects of desire (“advertisers” of their content), and as imitators of others’ content, with the monetization of OSM through *corporate* advertising acting as both data harvester³ and biased *deus ex machina* that primes participation in heretofore largely unregulated ways⁴.

In this sense, with OSM we present content of ourselves as objects of desire *and* content of ourselves that represents our desires. The question of how our ‘likes’, ‘dislikes’, or ‘*non*-responses’ fit into our relational motivations, as defined by Baumeister and Leary (1995), and their results further complicates this relational situation. A growing body of research has shown that for many individuals the maintenance of this digital presence can become an alarmingly disruptive influence in their lives (Griffiths et al., 2014; Song et al., 2004; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010; Young, 2004),⁵ an issue that institutions and society seem loath to confront head on.

A second point that Girard’s analyses reveal about modern advertising is that it represents “... the quintessential index of larger historical developments. The pervasiveness, the intrusiveness, the increasingly brazen appeal to envy and

personal appropriation present in contemporary advertising manifest the end stages of a historical process (especially from the Renaissance to the present) that Girard continually tracked in his literary analyses” (Cholewinski & Taylor, 2004, p. 387). As an example of this, we can see in the following passage Girard describing the literary-historical movement from “external mediation” (as in Don Quixote’s servile imitation of Amadis of Gaul), to “internal mediation” (the unwitting and obsessive imitation – so well depicted by Flaubert and Stendhal – of neighbors, peers, etc.), and finally to “double mediation” (those deadly and destructive struggles with one’s rivals exemplified by characters in Proust and Dostoyevsky):

There is a gradual transition from chivalric novels to serial romances, to the modern forms of collective suggestion which become increasingly abundant and suggestive ... [Mimetic desire] penetrates the most petty details of daily existence. As we sink deeper into the hell of reciprocal mediation, the process described by Cervantes becomes more universal, more ridiculous, more catastrophic. (Girard, 1976, p. 104)

Along this same historical line exist “the modern forms of collective suggestion,” an evident reference to contemporary media, and few aspects of society exemplify this form of “collective suggestion” better than advertising⁶ and with the advent of the Internet, online social media.⁷

Cholewinski and Taylor’s (2004) research, as does the present paper, reaffirm Girard’s contention that this historical process is no longer confined to the West:

Double mediation has invaded the growing domain of collective existence and wormed its way into the more intimate depths of the individual soul, until it stretches beyond national boundaries and annexes countries, races, and continents, in the heart of a universe where technical progress is wiping away one by one the differences between men. (1976: 104)

They further maintain that it is advertising, and, as I contend in this paper, online media presence and interaction, that perhaps more than anything else in modern life, define so much of the “domain of collective existence,” and which appeal so directly to what Girard labeled as “the more intimate depths of the individual soul” and what I assert is one of the foundations of identity development. This social phenomenon is as true in an industrialized liberal democracy like Japan as it is in the United States or Europe, societies on the cultural cutting edge, where consumerism and media generate more and more envy in the very process of making everyone more and more alike (a phenomenon rapidly spreading to all reaches of the globe). An increasing number of media analysts and social scientists are making essentially the same point as they struggle to understand this hydra-headed phenomenon. Japanese media specialist Todd Miles Holden (2004) noted that with consumption being one of the most important common denominators of existence, advertising possesses the capacity to homogenize various economic and cultural strata in society by allowing people to share the same aspirations, possibilities, and desires. The same can be said about online social media, with its reliance on incessant connectivity and visual content to maintain a ‘relevant’ presence.

Online social media, by its very structure and nature however, enhances and convolutes this phenomenon by rendering individuals, through an extension of their online actions, into a type of mediated-content participant. That is to say, their digital interactions become part of an algorithmic clockwork medium, a textual- and image-rich digital feedback loop to which, all too often, the individual [consumer-participant] becomes psychically tethered as it recursively ‘satisfies’ their desires through its use and recycling of their own user and usage data and interactions.

As a longtime resident and media-dilettante in Japan, I find Girard’s observations to be particularly apt in describing the enormously pervasive influence from Japanese media and advertising, and its correlative social developments that I see

taking place in my adopted home. I continue to believe that the psychological component of Girard's thesis can be a useful tool to understand the interpersonal dynamic within which online social media and advertising operate, and that the historical component of his thesis allows us a way to better understand many of the changes occurring in Japanese society, not least of which is the aggressive role that Japanese media, more specifically online social media, have come to play in shaping Japanese identity.

Media's evolution and integration into both the digital and online sphere (Walther, 2017) has been raising new questions about the interplay of media and interpersonal processes and how OSM technologies are blurring the boundaries between interpersonal events and/or the roles that communicators take on. In Japan, Japanese media specialist and social scientist Todd Miles Holden⁸ (2000, 2007) was one of the first to offer cogent analyses of particular aspects of this relation. Holden proposed the concepts of "adentity" and "globalizenity" to describe how recent modern advertising and media have been instrumental in promoting a fluid and more individualistic identity among the Japanese through an increased use of exogenous identity referents versus local ones (and, how this process is being normalized). Holden's analyses and conclusions on "adentity" and "globalizenity", though informed by semiotics and to a large degree postmodern theory and criticism,⁹ clearly articulate a thesis regarding the relationships between the self and mediating influences in the world of consumer capitalism, and, in my opinion reveal conclusions remarkably compatible with what can be extrapolated from Girard. Thus, I feel that bringing together Holden's thesis on "adentity" with Girard's "mimetic model" offers a strong approach to develop a better understanding of the interplay between the self/identity and consumer-capitalistically driven media influences. In this paper concerned with "desire addiction" and "mediated identity development", my discussion will be supported by several aspects of media-identity research conducted both in and outside of Japan, but will be primarily grounded in Holden's media-based

concepts and Girard's conceptual framework.

Within such a framework, this paper will undertake an overview of Japanese media trends in both the areas of online social media as well as advertising. My goal is to convey a sense of both the *quantity* of Japanese media (in the way it ceaselessly saturates Japanese society in a dizzying collection of forms and techniques) and its *qualities* (the ways in which it attempts to shape identities and lifestyles through implicit messages and techniques, which in my opinion are unambiguously mimetic). In the section that follows, I first provide select background on contemporary Japanese society. In the third section, I overview a selection of Japanese media by reviewing current data, presenting representative samples of various media visually, and discussing current research related to media influences. In the fourth section, I discuss various characteristics of Japanese advertising and provide a general overview of the state of OSM in Japan. In the final section, I attempt a detailed analysis (primarily mimetic in focus) of a Japanese TV ad from the early days of mobile-phone use, and then discuss currently prominent social networking services in Japan as a means of revealing how the media landscape of Japan has evolved, and the implications of this.

Contemporary Japanese Society

Contemporary Japan presents a dynamic picture of change, and often contrasting trends. As it has for more than a half century, Japan retains its place in the world as an advanced, stable, industrialized democracy with an edge in technological innovation. However, since the collapse of the Bubble Economy in late 1991 and the Great Recession of the late 2000s to early 2010s, the nation has been plagued in turns by economic stagnation, institutional inertia and, until only relatively recently, a high unemployment rate (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, 2017). During this period, the country has suffered two catastrophic (and several smaller) environmental disasters, the 1995 Great

Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Disaster that severely damaged much of Kobe City and took 6400 lives, and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that struck off the east coast of Japan causing extensive damage and taking nearly 16,000 lives across 20 prefectures that the country is still struggling to deal with. In addition, the increasingly dire trend of its aging society and steadily declining birthrate are beginning to signal a loss of dynamism, a shrinking labor pool, and a strain on support systems for an increasingly graying population and working families (National Institution of Population & Social Research, 2012; Nomura & Koizumi, 2016).

This is certainly not to say that much in Japan is bleak; it clearly isn't. The nation has undertaken a lengthy economic restructuring, which has allowed it to steadily pull out of its economic difficulties. In fact, Japan's current economic expansion has become its second-longest in the postwar era (Japan Times, 2018b), extending a nearly 10-year record, with the ratio of job openings to job seekers in 2017 having increased to 1-to-1.50, making it possible for 98% of newly minted college graduates to find jobs in 2018 (Japan Statistics Bureau, 2018, p. 131; Japan Times, 2018d). Indeed, even the two recent major natural disasters Japan has suffered have been shrewdly utilized by the nation as a means of economic stimulus through infrastructure repair and replacement — as well as becoming wellsprings of national identity reinforcement (Ando, 2009) that have fostered a sense of social awareness and volunteerism that continue to ripple through the fabric of society to this day. Furthermore, Japanese people continue to push for greater gender and economic equality and increased grass roots engagement (e.g., consumer advocacy, campaigns against sexual harassment). Continuing a trend begun post-bubble, more and more Japanese are also less willing than before to simply submit to the status quo with resignation and are increasingly willing to entertain a variety of 'selfish' aspirations: more reasonably priced goods, more efficient services, more opportunities for travel, individual freedom of choice, expression and fulfillment, and, more rewarding

work. Seen in light of its perennial image as a ‘tradition-bound’ nation, such attitudes reflect a revitalized sense of emerging modernity and globalization (Smith, N., 2018).

Compared to older postwar generations, today’s younger generations continue to develop away from ‘traditional’ culture-bound ‘group think’ and social conformity toward lifestyles based more on personal initiative and individualism, as well as on personal expression and idiosyncrasy as seen in dyed hair, piercing, tattoos, flamboyant clothing styles, and perhaps most importantly as it relates to this paper, digital connectedness through online social media, to name but a few prominent social phenomena. For the most part, young people, though their life prospects are comparatively reduced and uncertain compared to those of previous generations, live relatively comfortable, carefree, and fun-filled lives.

Paralleling such trends has been a marked shift in social relations and cultural values, represented by a number of sobering trends. Many of these trends are rooted in the changing demographics of marriage, family, and work; and yet others have been associated with the growing ubiquity of digital technology and communications. Before I begin, it is important to note that it is beyond the scope of the present paper to attempt anything more than a cursory overview of the items I’ve chosen to present. I also do not want to overstate the social problems that I present, or pretend to propose facile causal relations for what are no doubt very complex situations.

Of primary importance is Japan’s declining population, which began shrinking in 2010 and which declined by 227,000 in 2017 alone (Japan Statistics Bureau, 2018, p. 16). Furthermore, the population is projected to fall from the current 126 million to 88 million people by 2065 (Siripala, 2018). This is a complex phenomenon attributed to a variety of causes, chief among them being the fact that an increasing number of young people are putting off marriage or opting for a lifetime of non-marriage, which is exacerbating the declining birthrate. The average age at first marriage in Japan has climbed steadily — from

the middle of the 20th century to the present — to around 31 for men and 29 for women. And, by 2015 (the most recent available data) the percentage of *lifetime non-marriages* hit a historic peak of 23.4% for men and 14.1% for women (Japan Statistics Bureau, 2018, pp. 18–19). Moreover, many young people cite long-term financial insecurity, satisfying work self-fulfillment needs, the easygoing lifestyle of living with parents, the difficulty of meeting and developing substantive relations with the opposite sex as well as the complexity and costs of raising children (e.g., childcare, education) as reasons for some of these trends (Nippon.com, 2018a), all of which impact population growth.

In addition, the decline in the amount of extended-family households in Japan continues a trend begun in the early 70s. Nuclear-family households (55.9%, a drop of 3% since 2000) remain the most popular living arrangement. However, the percentage of single-parent households continues to grow (34.6%, up 7% since 2000), as does the percentage of dual-income households (60%, up from 45% in 2000) (Bank of Japan, 2017). What is significant in these numbers is that various ethical or social values are much less likely than before to be transmitted through parents, extended family members, older peers, or authority figures. Moreover, since such values in Japan are largely a product of social relationships (Ando, 2009) rather than religious commitments, religious institutions in Japan (devoted mainly to services for the dead in the case of Buddhism, or a few key life events in the case of Shintoism) are not ideally constituted to address modern society's moral and spiritual vacuum. In disconcerting numbers, individuals have turned to media and media-related subcultures, and primarily those which are hosted on the Internet, as a source of values, social belonging, or identity.

While the types of striking social behaviors first seen in young people in the early 2000s garner less media attention today due in some cases to a decrease in frequency, cultural normalization, or press self-censorship, today's youth attitudes are still markedly different compared to previous generations. Promiscuity remains a troubling social issue, including the prevalence of transactional

relationships such as the casual exchange of sexual partners (*sekusu furendo*, or “sex friends”), and the phenomenon of child prostitution — known in its sanitized Japanese (*mediagenic*)¹⁰ terms as *enjo-kōsai* or *enkō* (compensated dating) or *deaikei* (online dating) — typically arranged through the Internet and practiced among high school and even junior high school girls (McLellan, 2013). What is perhaps even more surprising is that more than half of such individuals surveyed show no signs of delinquency, had no criminal records, and attended school regularly, according to the National Police Agency (as cited in the Japan Times, 2018a).

Since the burst of the bubble economy, the orderly functioning of school classrooms and students has fallen increasingly out of teachers’ control, which has led to a phenomenon called *gakkyū hōkai* (classroom collapse)¹¹ that has slowly progressed to the elementary school level in many areas. In addition, much attention has been given to the issue of children who have become more socially withdrawn or socially inept (lost in TV, computer or handheld games and smartphones, other solitary pursuits) yet increasingly sensitive or volatile in the presence of others. The behavioral pattern called *futōkō*, (translated as truancy or non-attendance — though in many cases the students remain registered),¹² either from social insecurity or well-grounded fears of physical or cyber bullying remains an ongoing problem that began as early as the mid-70s (MEXT as cited in Nippon.com, 2018b). *Hikikomori* (social withdrawal)¹³ — a corresponding category of *futōkō* — was initially associated with adults but now includes children and is believed to afflict more than 1.5 million individuals nationwide (Conrad, 2018). The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2018) defines *Hikikomori* as a condition in which the affected individuals isolate themselves from society in their homes for a period exceeding six months.

Where post-Bubble Japanese (and largely pre-Internet) society exhibited a marked increase in violent crime and other social pathologies, as well as an alarmingly high suicide rates well into the early 2000s (largely attributed to

joblessness, lack of job security among adult men), present-day Japan is enjoying the lowest crime rates in the postwar era (National Police Agency, 2018). Moreover, the number of deaths caused by suicide, which hovered above 30,000 for over a decade, and which peaked at 34,427 in 2003, fell to 21,431 in 2017 (Japan Statistics Bureau, 2018, p. 167). Notable for the purposes of this paper, however, is that the rate of youth suicides has continued to climb and in 2017 reached its highest level in 30 years, with 250 youths (mostly high school students) taking their own lives due mostly to stress, suicide ideation, and physical and cyber bullying (John et al., 2018; Sugimori, 2012; Wakatsuki & Griffiths, 2018). With the development and spread of the Internet (since about 2000), however, has come a ten-fold increase in the rate and types of cyber-crimes in Japan (National Police Agency, 2018).

Without question, Japanese institutions have undertaken laudable political, economic, social or educational reform to deal with such social pathologies; however, many remain persistently entrenched (e.g., birth-rate, bullying, Internet-related crimes/issues) and have proven difficult to effectively redress. The Japanese taboo of discussing or admitting mental health problems, however, shows signs of weakening, due partly to the media-driven disclosure of the diversity of the nation's psychosocial maladies, but doctors or experienced psychotherapists (still very much a rarity) are ill prepared to take on such challenges (Kitanaka, 2011).

As I mentioned before, it is beyond the scope of the present paper to attempt anything more than this cursory overview of these very complex situations. Nevertheless, I do believe that many of the issues related to human relations and identity in Japan *are* media-related, and that countervailing influences being offered through schools, family, religion, traditional values, or the like, are often seen as nominal. In the absence of such coping influences, what is left? One plausible answer is, I believe, the media with its capacity for indifferently offering, ironically, both amelioration and dissonance.

Japanese Media

Japanese media, fully engaged in an industry-wide digital transformation (Oku, 2018), is one Japanese institution whose influence is *not* in decline, and consumerism reigns in Japan as strongly as ever.

The three largest global advertising markets, in terms of ad expenditures, are the United States (34%), China (9%), and Japan (7%) (Barnard, 2018). While Japan's global share of ad expenditures (43 billion dollars) may seem trivial compared to America's 198 billion dollars, its expenditure figure is nearly equal to that of the fourth and fifth ranked countries of the UK and Germany combined, implying a formidable advertising presence in Japanese society. Indeed, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, and the largest in Japan, is the renowned firm Dentsu. Furthermore, Japan has a long history of being an innovator in communications technology, often being the first to introduce these innovations to the mass market. Digital media (e.g., the Internet, smart-phone technology, and social media apps) is fast making its way into society as *the* primary avenue of influential ad messaging, as will be discuss later in this paper.

To a noticeable extent, media and commercialism in Japan tend not to be filtered through the same sort of critical consciousness that exists in the West. Advertising and OSM use thus tend to be absorbed less skeptically by Japanese viewers and users, and conspicuous consumption is less likely to be indulged with a troubled or insecure conscience as it might have been in previous generations.

It isn't my goal to condemn consumer-oriented media 'culture' as necessarily *immoral*, but I think I can with somewhat more confidence say that it is *amoral*. That is, much media is obviously not directed toward the *humanitarian* betterment of society but towards getting individuals to spend money in certain ways. Further, media does this not just by making products and ideas look good, but by surreptitiously promoting a certain lifestyle and certain views of the self (Manago et al., 2014; Manovich, 2017; Marwick, 2013, 2015; Ranzini, 2014).

In fact, Japanese OSM participation and advertising do both, and with supreme efficiency.

Media constitutes the ongoing background noise of Japanese life to a considerable degree. During an average day, the Japanese are bombarded with an extraordinary volume of sophisticated (and not so sophisticated) information media. This includes TV ads; subway, bus, and roadside signs and advertising; Internet and mobile-phone news, information, education and entertainment sites; magazines; newspapers; and intrusive messages blared from trucks, vans, buses, and at times even low-flying airplanes. Much of this daily offering is meticulously crafted, timed, placed, and targeted for optimal effect. These messages, which are very difficult to disregard due to their ubiquity, address individuals on powerful multi-sensory levels, and (I feel) strongly influence their thoughts, behavior, desires, and sense of identity.

Below I present a visual sampling of the types of everyday media influences one might be exposed to while transiting to work or merely walking down the sidewalk. Some of these media are utilitarian (municipal signs and symbols directing the public) while a great many others are purely commercial. It is clear that Japanese advertisers, businesses and information ministries are very adept at squeezing every ounce of functionality from available space as a means of competing with others in the quest to capture, maintain, and manipulate a share of the citizens' attention.

Media messages in the environment

Figures 1–9 below reveal the interior of a subway train that has been entirely ‘themed’ using a licensing school company’s ads. This ‘theming’ or saturation-ad technique is used to target specific riders and lines, depending on the product, demographics, and train schedule. (When this technique is not in use, the ad space is filled with a pastiche of ad types.)

The ads above were displayed in the mornings and afternoons on a subway line that carries large numbers of targeted consumers (junior and senior high



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

school students, their working parents, and younger workers — a growing number of whom are considering career change, known as ‘job-hopping’, once they begin full-time employment). Short of closing your eyes, staring at the floor or reading a book, there is almost nowhere to look without confronting these ads. Indeed, the interior of the cars are actually aglow in their sunny yellow aura. The implied lifestyle/mimetic tag line of the ads is, *Unsure or unsatisfied with who you are? We can help you get what you desire.* Peripheral prompts about what is desired in life (exotified by the use of English) fill the ad space nooks and crannies of the train car: “I want” (Fig. 2); “I want a good job” (Fig. 6); “I want to improve myself” (Fig. 7); “I am motivated” (Fig. 8); “I want stability” (Fig. 9). What is implied, of course, is that this licensing school can satisfy

you — as it did the serenely happy girl in the happy, blue-themed ad: “I found what I want” (Fig. 3).

The theme-ing of trains is not only relegated to the interior of the cars, but can extend to the outside as well. There are two basic types, individual ads on the outside of the train next to door openings (Figs. 10–11), and *train wrapping* (Sign Source, 2018), in which the entire exterior of the train is wrapped in a decal-like substance (Figs. 12–13). In addition, the digitization of advertising has now allowed for subway ad campaigns that bathe commuters in an omnipresent and easily manipulated environment that is increasingly difficult to ignore.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

Figures 14 and 15 (with Fig. 11 above) reveal how just pervasive this style of advertising exposure can be.



Figure 14



Figure 15

Almost anything can be (and is) used as an ad space in Japan. A great number of tall buildings on main thoroughfares are purposely constructed with exterior banner apparatuses in place, with building-side banners, often announcing sales or specific products are run up wire guides (Fig. 15). Such banners, though, are increasingly being replaced with digitized versions that can be easily programed to display a variety of content at different times (Fig. 16). Heavily trafficked outdoor areas have become zones of ad saturation, with massive roof billboards or building façade ads *becoming the urban landscape* in near totality (Fig. 18). Because of their high visibility, such ads act as powerful beacons or reminders to consumers moving in the city. The ubiquitous *presence pressure* of such media both pumps and primes lifestyle desires and expectations.



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

Other surfaces such walls in closed areas are utilized to an extent rivaling the interiors and exteriors of wrapped or themed transportation in the degree of *captive saturation* to which individuals are exposed (Figs. 18–21).

In the wall ad in Fig. 23, passersby are rather innocuously reminded that this particular department store is a place to shop; but conveniently enough, the ad next to it (Fig. 24) informs the shoppers of a convenient new way to spend their money, using a “My Style CF [high-interest consumer finance] Card.” The ad (in an inflamed red) is an obvious play on the Louis Vuitton brand, one of several haute couture brands coveted in Japan. It is nearly impossible not to connect to



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24

dots between these two images.

Another area in Japan where media saturation can be found is along less intensely urban sidewalks, road, and places of rest in the form of colorful banner ads (*nobori*) (Figs. 25–26), billboards (Fig. 27), or even images painted on the sidewalks (Figs. 28–29).

The density or obtrusiveness of these media are also very difficult to ignore. These can be commercial in nature or civil admonitions or reminders to conform to various behaviors. Again, it should be noted that each of these forms of messaging are becoming digitized with the ongoing development and spread of technology, which allows for programmable cross-platform ad integration.

Public service media (often in the form of manner campaigns), though not



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27

offering as pervasive a presence as commercial advertising, is used as a means to counteract what many — young and old alike — see as deteriorating social constructs.



Figure 28



Figure 29

Wall posters of the type displayed in Figure 30 (versions which can also be found displayed inside of subway cars) remind people of a series of social manners (from left to right: to be mindful of having oversized rucksacks on public transportation, to be mindful of talking on smartphones inside the train, and to be mindful of priority seating).



Figure 30

Television media

Television remains one of the main and most influential forms of media in Japan. There is an average of 3.1 televisions per Japanese household, with 95%

of the Japanese watching TV every day for an average of 4 hours and 35 minutes. This number is actually higher compared with the 1980s, but this is a reflection of the long viewing hours of members of the aging population (Nippon.com, 2015). The digitization of television, which began in 2000 and officially became the standard in December of 2003, has overturned the traditional broadcasting ecosystem, with major private companies (telecoms and others) now offering paid digital video-on-demand (VOD) services (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Avex, YouTube). There are five major networks, all based in Tokyo.¹⁴ Local commercial TV stations are controlled by the five television companies, which are in turn closely connected to the major national newspapers through corporate structuring.

While TV news-magazine programs and weather forecasts are the most commonly viewed programming, there are a handful of main ‘genres’ that seem to dominate Japanese TV. The ubiquitous *anime* (cartoons) target all age groups from toddlers through teens. TV *anime* are almost always adapted directly from some printed comic book (*manga*) series. They are often surreal or fantastic in texture, sometimes hilariously (and often crudely and scatologically) comic, and often sophisticated and allusive (cartoons like *The Simpsons* in the U.S. were anticipated decades ago in Japan). Mornings and afternoons are dominated by ‘wide shows’, which feature gossip and tabloid-esque news coverage. Evenings are dominated by 1) extremely popular short-running serial weekly dramas, which are often rerun in the daytime, 2) ‘daytime and evening variety talk shows’ (with participation by a large studio assemblage of major and minor celebrities, or *talento*) that combine games, quizzes, talk, and often sadistic pranks or tests of endurance, and 3) pop music programs (in which group participation by an onstage audience of ‘idols’ is also the norm). Later in the night, ‘variety’ shows with relatively soft pornographic content are common. The two channels offered by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) broadcast commercial-free news, high quality documentaries, and well-produced historical and other dramas, in

addition to children's programs and information programs aimed at homemakers during the daytime. Weathering the intense competition from various other digital devices, services, and media, television remains the primary source of news for 72% of Japanese households.

Print media

Another important area where media proliferates in Japanese society is in the print industry, namely newspapers, magazines, and comic books.

Newspapers

Eighty-six percent of Japanese households subscribe to print newspapers, making Japan the largest per capita consumers of newspapers in the world with a combined circulation of over 53 million (Nihon Shinbun Kyokai, 2018). Japanese reportedly feel that newspapers provide them with more reliably in-depth and trustworthy coverage of the issues.¹⁵ However, with an increase in alternative news sources (Internet and specialty TV programming) newspaper subscription and readership continues to drop (ibid). In 2018, more Japanese people reported reading their news on their smartphones or computers than in their morning print newspapers, which continues to affect newspaper profitability. Ironically, print is still favored over internet news sources in terms of credibility. On a scale of 100, trust in newspapers edged up to nearly 69%, while online sources fell a little over 2 points to 51.4% (Japan Times, 2018c).

Magazines

Magazines, unfettered by the strict journalistic press clubs, known as *kisha*,¹⁶ which virtually guarantee that all main newspapers print similar versions of the same news, have been picking up the slack. As of 2015, there were over 3000 monthly, and 87 weekly magazine titles being published in Japan (Japan Book Publishers Association, 2017), catering to everything from tabloid-esque star coverage to men's and ladies' makeup and romantic advice, and such things as news scoops that the newspapers are reluctant to carry for fear of alienating their sources (big business and government bureaucracies), which amounts to a



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34

pervasive form of self-censorship. Such weekly magazines (Figs. 31–32), often carrying a mixed fare of soft porn and revealing stories, are an increasingly important/relevant source of information for the general populace in search of a more critical source of what is ‘out there’ in society.

Bookstores, convenience stores and kiosks are the primary venues for magazines (though the Internet is increasingly absorbing this media type as well). These locations are extremely popular places for people to park themselves in immersive solitude from their daily grind in the practice of *tachiyomi*¹⁷ (reading while standing) (Fig. 33), and present a crowded and disjointed clutter of material in which, for instance, children’s comic books may be found displayed near magazines or adult comics with pornographic content, viewing of which (Fig. 34) has become more restrictive. Indeed, several of the main convenience store chains (e.g., Seven and I holdings, Family Mart, Lawson, Ministop) have either stopped selling or have announced that they will soon stop selling adult manga, books, or magazines for various reasons (e.g., social image-reform for the upcoming 2020 Olympics, franchise owner complaints, parental organization complaints) (Nikkei Asian Review, January 21, 2019).

Manga

To say that comic books (*manga*) are popular in Japan would be an understatement. Japanese comic book culture is a world unto itself, impossible to adequately overview here, and has (to my knowledge) no counterpart in any other nation. Comic books cater to all ages (with the possible exception of the elderly), genders, and social groups (with the possible exception of academics). They are published (often serialized) either in small paperback form, or in prodigiously thick notebook-sized pulp compilations. Comic books often provide immersive solitude in public places, especially on commuter trains, restaurants, and coffee shops.¹⁸

Online social media

The term “online social media” covers a wide, and ever shifting, range of information domains, corporations, and applications. What began with effective but relatively quaint (by today’s standards) email and chat rooms, social media has evolved into mega-billion dollar corporate entities (e.g., Facebook, Google, YouTube, LINE, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, NicoNico) that cater to any imaginable genre of shared communication, most for no direct cost.

In essence, OSM in Japan can be broken down into three basic groups (which are discussed in minor detail below): 1) Social Networking Services (SNS), the top three of which are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram; 2) Messaging apps and business networking platforms, the top three of which are LINE, Snapchat, and LinkedIn; and 3) Streaming video, the top three of which are YouTube, NicoNico, and AbemaTV (Plus Alpha Digital, 2019).

Since its inception in the late 1990s the Internet, and its continually evolving offspring “online social media,” has been a phenomenally successful and transformative juggernaut in society not only here in Japan but globally. What was once the province of the connected few, the use of the Internet rapidly evolved into an alarmingly influential aspect of *normal* present-day social and business fabric. As an indicator of the prevalence of this media, I offer the following sum-

mary figures: For 2018, out of a population of 126 million, there were over 100 million *Internet* users (six years of age and older), with a usage rate exceeding 90% in each age group between 13 and 59 years old (the rate for 6–12 years old was 82.6% and growing). Internet usage is split between computers/devices (58.6%) and smartphones (57.9%). Moreover, 70% of individuals between the ages of 13–49 use the Internet on smartphones. This usage number rises to 92% for individuals in the 20–29 year-old age group (Japan Statistics Bureau, 2018, pp. 89–91). The average amount of time spent online is 160 minutes (high school students 213.8 minutes, junior high school students 148.7 minutes, and elementary school students 97.3 minutes. What is more, 68.9% of all 100 million Internet users in Japan utilize SNSs (ICT Research and Consulting, 2017). As of October 2018, there were 78 million monthly active LINE users (Smith, C., 2019), with more than 15 million of them utilizing its “Online Shopping” service — which only commenced services in June of 2017 (LINE, 2018), a number that is projected to continue expanding. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (2017), after SNS use, online video network usage has become the second most time consuming activity for smartphone users. YouTube dominates the online video space of the country at 97.8%, with Facebook, LINE, and Twitter garnering 21%, 20%, and 17.7% respectively (Ishida, 2018). While providing little information about the influences these media exert on individuals and society, these usage figures do provide an indication of the degree that digital communications have permeated people’s lifestyles and the social fabric in Japan.

Unique aspects of Japanese Media

Though there is undeniably a great deal of Western and particularly American influence in Japan (brand names, store and restaurant chains, film, TV imports, music, fashion, etc.), it would be misleading to assume that the influence is straightforward or one-way. When it comes to media and communications

technology, Japan drives the world at least as much as it is driven by it. This is also often true of media content. Movie plots, cartoons and *anime* (animation), and even some early reality TV concepts (e.g., *Funniest Home Videos*) appeared in Japan before being franchised or adapted for Western consumption. The Japanese lead in gaming technology and software is of course well known. Among other Far Eastern countries, Japan's influence — music, movies, TV, fashion — is considerably stronger (McCarthy, 1999).

Also, the prevalence of advertising in Japan is not indicative that Japanese ads adhere to an American or Western 'model', even when Western motifs or icons are used in them. Holden uses the term "diaspora" to describe this free floating alphabet of recognizable media images (for instance, Marilyn Monroe with her uplifted skirt) that are used in global media. Yet Holden observes that in Japanese ads, such "diaspora"¹⁹ are used in uniquely Japanese ways (2000).

Analysts and writers (e.g., Holden, T. J., 1999; Mosdell, 1988) have noted that Japanese ads are much less likely to be pitched to viewers in the form of argument or direct persuasion. The 'hard' or 'soft sell' are not always the expected characteristics of Japanese ads, in which the product is often not shown or mentioned at all (instead, a company logo may appear in some unobtrusive place). Japanese ads are often highly emotive and highly impressionistic, often with little or no straightforward connection between the message and the product (or even between the text and the picture or image sequence).

In his popular reader, Mosdell (1988) has noted that commercial art and fine art in Japan do not co-exist in two impenetrable worlds as they do in the West. Renowned artists in Japan will often cross over into commercial work or advertising without the stigma of 'selling out.' Japanese advertising often displays considerable craftsmanship, aesthetic control and wit. In fact, Japan's pop art tradition goes back to the Edo period, when its justifiably famous silk-screen prints (*ukiyo-e*) introduced art as both a mass-produced product and a revolt against the stultified artistic traditions from the Chinese heritage.

What Japanese online social media and advertising have in common with the West, therefore, is neither the medium nor the message as such, but the desires that they both create and draw upon. Japanese online social media and advertising, like that in the West, are very much mimetic, both in the sense of playing to the hard-wired human psychology of mimesis, and in the sense of feeding on the more generally unbounded *priming and pumping* of mimesis that defines (increasingly online) consumer culture. I contend that OSM, which was born of and has co-evolved with the convergence of analog and digital media forms, makes use of these very same mimetic principles.

Next, I present a specific example of advertising (which aired in the smartphone lifestyle infancy of 2004) for which I will attempt a basic mimetic analysis. The TV ad chosen is highly representative both of a great number of similar Japanese ads that aired at the time and which, in some form or another, continue to air. More importantly it also introduces and promotes a nascent Japanese lifestyle — the role of the mobile phone and the act of networked image sharing as the center of social existence among Japanese young people — which has arguably become an inseparably integral aspect of youth lifestyle, identity, and identity formation.

My analysis is an attempt to show how successfully it framed the product/activity in a “product-least” and ideational sense, and to present the reader with an idea of how far present day society has come in accepting such activity as *the* social norm that drives or determines identity development (in Japan and elsewhere).

Socio-historically speaking, capturing moments on film has not been just a commemorative action for the Japanese in general, but an integral part of a given event itself. In Japan, picture taking has gone through a great number of developments and trends in a very short time, including the increasingly miniaturized camera, the disposable camera, the digital camera, the commemorative photo booth (which produced decal-sized pictures called *purikura* that young

people collected diligently and added to specialized mini-albums), the picture- and movie-taking mobile phone, and in the early 2000s as global technology trends evolved, most Japanese cell- and mobile-phone users transitioned to multi-functional smart-phones (e.g., iPhone, Samsung), which have picture- and video-taking capabilities rivaling enthusiast-level DSLRs. Indeed, such developments have had domestic and global industry wide ramifications for product development and sales.

In these iterations of mobile telephony, commemorative technology has combined with communicative technology on multiple levels (photo and video taking and sharing, face-to-face video communications) across a wide variety of device applications. Nearly a generation of Japanese young people (digital natives) have grown up within this continually evolving digital universe of technology, and their lifestyles have evolved to adapt to such changes with a surprising sense of ease and fluidity. In fact, with this technology they have come to *naturally* live a great deal of their conscious existence in the company of their friends, even when they are not physically present. This technology provides a reassuring and what has come to seem as a *natural* bubble of community within which to develop their social sense of being. Without question, it has become a firmly embedded aspect of the modern Japanese sense of identity and lifestyle. This was not always so as the following pre-smartphone DoCoMo advertisement will demonstrate.

The following DoCoMo iShot mobile phone ad takes the form of a mini-drama and relies upon a “product-least” structure (Holden, T. J., 1999) meaning that it emphasizes secondary discourse (ideational information) over primary discourse (product information). Though short, this ad manages to include an abundance of ideational information about consumer lifestyle, identity and desire in the process of selling the mobile phone itself. It is the makeup of this “product-least” structure, used to inflame mimetic desire, that is germane to this discussion.

In the image in Figure 35, the viewer sees a college-aged girl lying on a bed in a clean, sparsely furnished room. Colors are mid-range bright and mildly earthy. Orange balloons suggest a lifestyle of festivity and childishness.



Figure 35

In the center of the room is a picture of a mid-summer's field of cosmos surreally imposed on what appears to be a virtual easel. The girl is either bored, lonely, or lazily daydreaming. As she gazes at a CD case, the viewer sees a series of pictures on the easel. The images progress from inanimate to animate to human, presumably images from the girl's life and lifestyle. She then rises and picks up and opens her mobile phone, which it seems was on a table.



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

It becomes apparent by the image in Figure 38 that the viewer is being presented with the girl's thoughts and memories, which develop into a fluid stream as she moves to retrieve her phone, from which the imagery appears to flow. There are two important themes developing here: One, the representation of lifestyle indicators; and two, the implication of a fluid, casual, natural connection between *the machine* and *the human*, with the machine augmenting the user's lifestyle and sense of identity.

In the image in Figure 39, she reviews a picture from her camera that shows



Figure 39

two people (one assumes friends?) striking an “Easy Rider” pose on a Harley, the person on the back exposing most of his/her backside and a collection of tattoos there. Simultaneously, white letters on the screen inform that the background music of the ad is from a popular band of the time, *Mr. Children* — an indicator of musical preferences for this lifestyle.

Figure 40 then shows a picture of a young girl’s backside and her tramp-stamp-esque butterfly tattoo. This raises a small smile from the girl holding the phone. It is not important who the tattoos belong to. What is important is that the girl holding the phone is not only *not* bothered by them, but in fact finds them mildly amusing, which signifies her approval or tolerance of this, even to this day, risqué flamboyance. The style of this ad establishes an ongoing overview of readily identifiable lifestyles.



Figure 40



Figure 41

The viewer follows our iShot-generation maiden’s rapid-fire thoughts to a poignant moment in her techno-enhanced daydream, to a shot of a young couple standing under an elevated expressway holding umbrellas at a crosswalk (Fig. 41), a lifestyle reference of friendship or romantic intimacy, something with which the target audience can easily identify.



Figure 42



Figure 43

Her daydream then moves to memories of an outing in the city with friends. The viewer sees first in the image in Figure 42, a purple-tinted shot of friends having fun. The frames of pictures taken with friends via the mobile phone represent a fusion with the real-time action. The following series of pictures (Figures 44–46) show her and her friends in a city park, the tall imposing city buildings in angled backdrop shown in monochrome or sepia. This bland backdrop signifies the impersonality of the overwhelming cityscape in contrast to the colorful, creatively, playful life that peers or acquaintances (and by proxy recall, the pictures) are able to provide. In short, this series of pictures plays on the desire for a lifestyle of group and community in an impersonal world — through the aid of technology.



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46

The retro-mood of the pictures (peace symbols, floppy duffer hats, flouncy long skirts with tie-dyed patterns, and the chestnut husks) is suggestive of artsy childishness and a lifestyle that departs from mainstream tradition; a lifestyle of youthful togetherness, of people creating their own fun, making believe and being alive in a harmless way in an impersonal, concrete city. Such lifestyle ‘ideational text’ is used extensively in Japanese ads, indicative of how much

such lifestyles are an object of desire among Japanese youth.

Up until the scene depicted in Figure 46, the viewer has been exposed to a range of lifestyle markers (fashion, activity, the desire of friendship, self-expression, enjoyment, personal identity, and the like). The key (ad) expectation in this dizzying presentation is that the viewer will identify with and desire those aspects of the girl's lifestyle that she feels are important. The identification the viewer will make with the young girl is of course highly mimetic simply by virtue of the sanctioning and 'authenticating' presence of these young models of such desires.

The viewer is treated to a staccato flow of images that suggest a flamboyant if not exhibitionistic lifestyle (Figs. 44–49). With the image in Figure 47, the viewer sees a carnivalesque body exposure, while the image of the face in Figure 48 exudes shy virginity and suggests innocence. But does it? She is holding a 'Beginner Driver' magnetic decal, which is attached to cars in Japan to designate newly licensed drivers, yet she is apparently unclothed and reclining in bed. Who took or sent the picture? The meaning of the picture is open to the viewer, but the lifestyle marker is clear: the ability to express oneself physically, openly.



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49

To bolster this point of expressing identities, the image in Figure 49 shows the girl in a *purikura* style print (*Purikura* booths, described earlier, often supply *identity*-changing features, sometimes even including costumes). The series displays four different costumes, signifying four different identities. The viewer is shown that this multiplicity of identities is okay, a desirous aspect of the new normal. It is suggesting that "this is part of what *we* do in our lives in *this*

generation.” The ad legitimizes the desire and lifestyle of being different from others and even from yourself.

The narrative flow of largely outdoor activities in the city then abruptly moves to shots of a party indoors. These lifestyle memories/ideations (no longer separated by superimposed personal pictures) are aglow in the warmth of the golden light of communal happiness. The viewer sees four people indulging in an orgy of food and fun, which implies a sense of community, happiness, and satiation. In Figures 50–55, the viewer sees images of androgynous dressing (head scarves) and roles (cooking and serving). There are also, in Figures 54 and 55, two rather small taboo busting shots: The first is the use of chopsticks to pass food from one person to the other, a traditional taboo in Japan but clearly not problematic for this generation. The second is of a girl exhibiting a pierced tongue. The scenes in this ad emphasize what this generation does: tattoos, fashion, exhibition, piercing, androgyny, etc. The implied question is, *Can the viewer identify with this lifestyle?*



Figure 50



Figure 51



Figure 52



Figure 53



Figure 54



Figure 55

It is important to note that (in my view) that this ad does not present a ‘rebellious’ tone, but simply a casual, commercial statement of sorts, as if the

flamboyant lifestyles portrayed here do not even need to be legitimized as such. Yet the ad *does* imply that a lifestyle of tolerance of difference is a *norm*, a clear break with the traditional past.

When the DoCoMo-enhanced daydream is over (Figs. 56–58), the girl has to attend to the mundane, everyday tasks of taking out the garbage and being on her way. The viewer never knows what she does, whether she is a student, temporary worker, office lady (OL), or even convenience store clerk. The fact is that for many viewers she is a an anonymous Japanese, a kind of nobody, a social status a great many young viewers can identify with as they enter society. What *is* important is that she is smiling and walking into a new day, *happily* existing in her generation, content in her lifestyle. She has been reassured of her community of friends by her (technically) accessible memories, and this transcends the drab, faceless anonymity of everyday existence in Japanese society.



Figure 56



Figure 57



Figure 58

The image in Figure 59 brings the viewer back to the (direct) ad world with a wide shot of the city fronted by the product, which until now has largely been used as an embedded prop to communicate a series of lifestyles. It is both interesting and ironic that in this ad the product is used as a prop to lend credibility *to the lifestyle*, when traditionally ad props have been used to lend credibility to the product.

In the last scene of the ad (Fig. 60), the viewer sees a changing collage of young faces (with the sound of mobile phone camera shutters clicking) of this generation, suggesting the kind of photo ensemble that can be assembled with the phone, an advertising imaging technique borrowed from UNIQLO (a causal



Figure 59



Figure 60

clothing store somewhat along the lines of the GAP), in turn borrowed from Benetton. This dynamic parting shot reasserts the flamboyance and diversity of personalities within ‘our’ group.

This ad aired in 2004. Many aspects of the ad’s messaging content are perhaps as jarring as they were 15 years ago; yet so much more of it seems to be a laughably quaint portrait of what now passes as mundane everyday existence, an indication of just how much this technology has become woven into mainstream lifestyles. *This* is who we’ve become. Present day TV smartphone ads (largely scarce) now focus almost exclusively on models and services, the ‘connected lifestyle’ a near absolute given.

Sato’s early research (2006) into the pathological use of the Internet (Internet addiction) in Japan as compared with that of other countries, as well as Song, et. al’s (2004) work on the uses and abuses of “New Media” shed early light on the problems that Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) would eventually come to pose for present day society (Griffiths et al., 2014; Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010), which include among others, issues dealing with identity formation, self-esteem, anxiety disorders (i.e., FOMA), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, academic impairment, and the like. Sadly, each seems to be taken and *dealt with* separately by present society without much consideration being given to increasingly well-researched and documented evidence as to their causal origins.

As discussed earlier, Internet/OSM use is an exceedingly pervasive (and still growing) force in modern society, and yet it is being met by a largely [social]

media-obsessed society's acquiescence to its normalization, which it does at its own peril.

Conclusion

As was noted in Cholewinski and Taylor (2004, 417–18), “those familiar with Girard’s writings on Dostoyevsky (1987, 2012; 2003) might be tempted to see contemporary Japan in much the same way that Girard saw Dostoyevsky’s Russia: a society that has leapfrogged into the most advanced forms of mimetic desire and bypassed the transitional stages of its putative models (e.g. the U.S., France, Europe).” In a historically short period of time, Japan has changed from being a nation based on relatively rigid traditional values and strong national identity, to one in which it is increasingly difficult to define *any* locus of social values and in which identity seems to be in extreme flux (besides largely temporal fixated points of locus, i.e., disasters, the Olympics, globalization trends). In descriptions offered by social analysts Nakane (1970), Sugimoto (1989), and Ando (2009) the ‘grand narrative’ of Japan (the conventional picture of the nation as unified and static) is in a state of marked transformation.

It is in this context, I believe, that the myriad online media in Japan have picked up the slack of a fading traditional culture and have offered (or rather promised) Japanese individuals what Holden calls an “adentity”: a lifestyle, a fluid, more individualistic, more expressive and creative self. Holden’s premise is particularly well-supported in the advertisement I examined, with its emphasis on casual nonconformity and carefree exuberance; and it is important to reiterate that this ad occurred at the beginning of this socially transformative process, that continues to evolve unabated to this day.

As mentioned at the outset of the paper, advertising and OSM have the capacity to homogenize various economic and cultural strata in society by allowing people to share the same aspirations, possibilities, and desires, and an online social media presence offers a rich multitude of opportunities to experiment with

and express oneself; however, there are consequences for such a mediated life. To conform to someone's call to nonconformity is something less than nonconformity — this being perhaps the central irony and paradox of contemporary social existence. From a mimetic perspective, nonconformity is a non-possibility. There is no escape from mimesis. At best, and perhaps even this is idealistic, we can be sensitized to the potent and inescapable forces of mimesis, and find or develop the 'right' models to imitate. My concern is that this is becoming increasingly more difficult to do or even consider given the addictive aspects of OSM and the fact that it in itself promotes an addiction to desire; however, I do not believe that the task is an impossibility.

This promotion of nonconformity presents an interesting phenomenon in Japan where social conformity has long been deeply ingrained. What has become apparent is that a great many Japanese seem able to adopt the new "adentity" without even thinking, without a sense of the problematizing contradiction that sends many Americans, Europeans and other Westerners on ever more desperate and defiant efforts to be 'different.' In other words, Westerners may go to great lengths to make sure that their imitation is not imitation, whereas the Japanese tend already to *know* that their imitation is imitation, and do not particularly care; in fact, they embrace it. This is in essence, I believe, a new form of 'group-think.' The adoption of differently appropriate personae, mannerisms, and language according to the social situation has traditionally been an integral aspect of Japanese life. Because of this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Japanese should be less caught up in some pointless attempt to locate an 'authentic self' outside of social interaction. Seen from an outsider's perspective, this might actually represent, instead, a reasonable and practical adaptation to human realities.

It might be that the 'problem' with Japanese conformity in postwar Japan was never the fact of conformity. Instead, it might actually have been a form of Bateson's (1963) "double bind" barely concealed within this "harmonizing" conformity playing out a fiercely and ruthlessly competitive ethos: what school

one went to, what company one worked for, what gradation of social status or distinction set one apart from someone else — without setting one apart *too* much (Taylor, 2002, p. 13ff). This particular mimetic relation — with its envy and resentment seething beneath the everyday civility and deference — is clearly showing signs of falling apart, or perhaps it might better be said, evolving; and it appears that it is being replaced by a mass cultural migration to various online social media, which have become the de facto venue for identity experimentation and development. But at what cost? Under this promising, creative and comfortingly interconnected omnipresence lies the false promise presented by “adentity”; yet more searching for nonconformity in a reality where it is a mimetic non-possibility, a realm filled as much with the potential for good as with the potential for spawning new social pathologies the likes of which we see and experience daily as we use or see others use their mobile devices. And as we act out this automaticity, we accept our actions as being as *normal* as yawning (except that we know that there is something about them that isn’t).

We are left then, I think, with the reality that ‘identity’ is, in fact, *the never-ending development* of identity amid a [now digital] universe of models. We live in a world where increasingly “to be” is to be seen — to borrow a phrase from the philosopher George Berkeley, which creates its own unique set of consequences. Technology and advertising and mediated capitalism is not going away; and it can’t be ‘fixed’ because it isn’t ‘broken.’ It is what it is, ‘the’ *new ecology* that we happen to inhabit. Which leaves us holding the proverbial bag.

With regards to online social media, advertising, and their impact on identity development, I think what is needed now is not so much more public service campaigns about good behavior. Instead, perhaps it would be more beneficial if we began placing a greater emphasis on creating a clearer awareness among the Japanese people about the uses and abuses of media itself (in particular, the ominous growth of information manipulation for political and monetary purposes, both online or off) through an orchestrated promotion of media-literacy educa-

tion that includes corporate, governmental, medical, and individual participation in order to develop a paradigm in which this new ecology can develop for the betterment of all. This would require a forthright engagement of Japan with its media, technologies, and society, but would enhance the potential of ushering in an era of responsible, humanitarian social mediation.

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Notes

- 1 The present paper, which takes as its focus “digital social media’s” influence on identity development, evolved from an ad-centric-only article (Cholewinski & Taylor, 2004) first reported in *Passions in Economy, Politics, and the Media: In Discussion with Christian Theology* (Palaver & Steinmair-Pösel, 2005).
- 2 Walther, et al. (2010b) deliver a succinct overview of the concerns arising from the convergence of old and new media explaining that new communication technologies, including SNSs, are blurring the boundaries between interpersonal and mass communication events and or the roles that communicators have taken on in these new systems. A growing number of other researchers (too many to list here) are providing nuanced discussions about these and other topics pertaining to this still evolving digital domain. Two sources that I relied heavily upon for this paper were Johnson & Ranzini (2018; 2014) and Zhao et al. (2008) for their work on identity formation.
- 3 Liang and Zhu (2017) and Binns et al. (2018) provide both interesting and authoritative explanations of “Big Data” collection as well as a discussion of ethical issues related to its techniques and uses.
- 4 The evolving roles of online corporate entities (and their data collection and use) has been discussed at length across a broad spectrum of cultural, economic, and national areas. This paper cannot begin to cover the enormity of that research; however, with these authors, I include here a sampling of pertinent research (Batinic & Appel, 2013; Kudeshia et al., 2016; Thorson & Wells, 2015; Walther et al., 2010a).
- 5 Problems commonly associated with excessive Internet use, or “Internet addiction”, include excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, impulse control disorders, or behaviors that lead to impairment or distress (dependence, obsessive thoughts, tolerance, inability to cease, and

withdrawal.

- 6 Media scholars Leiss et al. (1990), have posited an evolution in ad formats (utilitarian, product-related, personification, lifestyle) that neatly parallels the historical overview proposed here by Girard.
- 7 Research on “collective suggestion” comes from many areas. Many early media researchers (Cooper-Chen, 1997; Gatzten, 2003; Hara & Shioda, 2000; Ito et al., 2005; Okada, 2005; Takahashi, 2009, 2011, 2014) began the process of linking pre-digital concepts of collective suggestion to media as they converged with the digital sphere of communications. This research is ongoing, with much recent research now focusing on the effects that SNSs are having on identity formation (see sources noted elsewhere in this paper).
- 8 “Todd Joseph Miles Holden is an American-born social scientist, essayist, philosopher, and novelist. He was the first tenured foreign professor at Tohoku University, one of Asia’s elite universities, where he taught for 26 years. His scholarship has been multi- and trans-disciplinary, embracing globalization, media studies, cultural studies, semiotics, advertising, television, Japanese popular culture, sociology, cultural anthropology, political communication, gender, identity, and digital youth. His recent work includes literary treatments of the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake and tsunami, dystopia, philosophical detection, comedy and caper” (Holden, T. M., 2018).
- 9 For a more thorough explanation of Holden’s views on postmodern influences, see *Semiotic Literacy, Post-modernity, Malaysia and Japan: How Television Advertising Reveals Political-Economic Development and Change* (Holden, T. J., 2002). Holden discusses the development of what he calls a “Post-modern Format” of ad presentation, claiming that it is a logical extension to the four historical ad presentation formats (utilitarian, product-related, personification, lifestyle) posited by Leiss et al. (1990).
- 10 Some examples of mediagenic terms that commonly appear in the press are as follows: *hikikomori* (withdrawal syndrome), *enjo-kōsai* (compensated dating), *ijime* (bullying), *kurasu hōkai* (class collapse), *sutoka* (stalker), *furēeta* (temporary worker), *rēstura* (economic restructuring), *sekuhara* (sexual harassment) *futōkō* (non-attendance), and so on.
- 11 For more nuanced explanations and backgrounding on the issue of “classroom collapse,” see the research of Katherine Zidonis (2004), Matthew Taylor (2006), and Jeffery Hays (2014).
- 12 For further explanation and background about the issue of “non-attendance” see, Japan Times Editorial (2014) and Yamamura’s (2011) research on the role of social trust in the reduction of long-term truancy.
- 13 For more in depth definitions and analyses about the issue of “social withdrawal” see research conducted by Takeo Doi (1986), Tamaki Saito (2013), and Timothy Li (2015).
- 14 Five major television networks exist in Japan, and are all based in Tokyo: Nihon Television (NTV), Tokyo Broadcasting (TBS), Fuji Television (Fuji TV), Television Asahi (ANB), Television Tokyo (TV Tokyo). All of these companies are privately owned (Media of Japan, 2019). The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (Nippon Hoso Kyokai — NHK), with its two channels that broadcast nationwide, is the only non-commercial public television and radio network

- in Japan (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).
- 15 There are 117 daily newspapers in circulation in Japan, with a total of 53 million copies in distribution. This is an average subscription rate of .78 newspapers per household, which has declined from 1.13 in 2000 (largely attributed to the advent of the Internet and the aging and decline of the population) (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2019). Approximately 86% of the Japanese people read a newspaper every day. Average daily reading time is 27.7 minutes on weekdays and 31.7 minutes on holidays and Sundays (Japan Broadcasting Corporation, 2017).
 - 16 ‘Reporter Clubs’ or, *kisha kurabu*, are a unique aspect of Japan’s media structure. There are about 400 of these clubs nationwide, having anywhere from 10 to 300 member reporters each. Clubs have a close affiliation with bureaucrats, politicians and businesses (sources), creating a relationship where choices on what to print are based upon how ‘mutually beneficial’ the release of information will be to both parties — not the general public. In this form of self-censorship, members of the club tend to agree on what issues should be reported on and what should not (Kisha Club, 2019).
 - 17 Spending extended periods of time reading and socializing at the magazine rack of stores or kiosks is a favorite activity of many young people as well as businessmen. This practice, tolerated by most stores, is known as *tachiyomi* (standing reading).
 - 18 Many coffee shops or restaurants (*manga kissa*) cater exclusively to *manga* readers. They are found in nearly every city in Japan, their walls lined with shelves jammed with popular series (new and old) of these comics.
 - 19 For Bolter and Grusin et al. (2000), the use of such diasporic images constitutes a phenomenon they have labeled “remediation,” the refashioning of one medium by historical and technological predecessors or contemporaries. Holden (2002) claims that retooling ad content with such images often appends a conception of identity alien to the indigenous context of the ad, and that Japanese ads do this intentionally to create dissonance for the viewer.

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