

Digital Communication in Japanese Companies: The Corporate Blog. Current Trends, Challenges, and Future Perspectives

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Цифрова комуникация в японските компании: Корпоративният блог. Съвременни тенденции, предизвикателства и бъдещи перспективи

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Abstract

The present article examines the digital communication patterns exerted by domestic Japanese companies through Japanese-language blogging practices: main characteristics, current trends, challenges, and future tendencies at the intersection of Japanese corporate culture, communication, and the digital realm. After a concise literature review of Japanese corporate identity and predominant cultural features of Japanese management, we will conduct a qualitative content analysis on a selected corpus of Japanese language corporate blogs to investigate the digital corporate discourse (content, types of public, communication strategies, and techniques) on a national level and to inquire into the extent of the impact exerted by the digital evolution of media platforms and the emergence of new AI tools. The implications of the present research are twofold. First, the database we manually compiled contains only Japanese language sources, thus surpassing the linguistic barrier many Western academics confront when researching Asian countries and media content in Asian languages. Examining the Japanese language digital discourse of domestic companies in a post-pandemic globalized context bridges the unceasing gap between the West and the East, thus decentring the focal point from the Western companies and shifting the attention from English-language digital communication. Second, connecting the Japanese-language business discourse with domestic blogging platforms represents another aspect of particular importance neglected by previous research.

Keywords: Japanese digital communication, Japanese companies, Japanese-language corporate blogs, Japanese digital trends

Резюме

Настоящата статия разглежда моделите на цифрова комуникация, прилагани от местни японски компании чрез практики на блогове на японски език: основни характеристики, настоящи тенденции, предизвикателства и бъдещи тенденции в пресечната точка на японската корпоративна култура, комуникацията и цифровата сфера. След кратък литературен преглед на японската корпоративна идентичност и преобладаващите културни характеристики на японския мениджмънт провеждаме качествен контент анализ на подбран корпус от японоезични корпоративни блогове, за да изследваме дигиталния корпоративен дискурс (съдържание, видове публикации, комуникационни стратегии и техники) на национално ниво и да проучим степента на въздействие, оказвано от дигиталната еволюция на медийните платформи и появата на нови инструменти на изкуствения интелект. Последиците от настоящото изследване са

две. Първо, базата данни, която съставихме ръчно, съдържа само източници на японски език, като по този начин се преодолява езиковата бариера, с която се сблъскват много западни учени, когато изследват азиатски държави и медийно съдържание на азиатски езици. Изследването на японскоезичния дигитален дискурс на местни компании в постпандемичния глобализиран контекст преодолява непрекъснатата пропаст между Запада и Изтока, като по този начин измества фокуса от западните компании и измества вниманието от англоезичната дигитална комуникация. Второ, свързването на японскоезичния бизнес дискурс с националните платформи за блокове представлява друг аспект от особена важност, пренебрегван от предишните изследвания.

Ключови думи: японска дигитална комуникация, японски компании, корпоративни блокове на японски език, японски дигитални тенденции

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Introduction and Literature Review

With their “unique management style,” marked by “a very strong cultural stamp,” Japanese companies have undergone dramatic changes since the late 2000s, with the onset of the digital transformation process (DX) on a global level (Haghirian & Haghirian, 2017; Khare et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, there is a degree of slowness in the globalization process of Japanese companies, a tendency caused by factors such as the government’s lack of consciousness toward globalization, improperly adjusted communication policies – on a public and private level – due to the unique Japanese communication and cultural style (Kameda, 2007). This particular communication style imbues the digital environment of private corporate communities, and their output is highly sensitive, formal, and “people-orientated” (Haghirian & Haghirian, 2017). Specific societal values and belief systems such as group orientation, social harmony, politeness, vertical hierarchies, honoring seniority, or paying attention to one’s education and achievements are ubiquitous factors that impact the nature of Japanese corporate communication style, both offline and online (Haghirian & Haghirian, 2017). Unlike the Western-like task-orientated management style, relationship-focused leadership represents the norm, whereas the typical leader reaches consensus through nonverbal communication, subtle clues, and indirect communication (Haghirian & Haghirian, 2017).

According to an oft-cited definition, the digital transformation is

The process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies (Vial, 2019).

Moreover, in nowadays interconnected global society, digital communication has turned into an indispensable component of the global ecosystem and represents

The broad area that deals with the transmission and reception of binary information across analogue channels. [It] empowers the Internet since it is the primary mechanism for conveying information across diverse media, including optical fiber, copper wire, and air (Heath & Salvekar, 2004).

In light of the above-stated operational definitions, scholars argued that Japan’s digital transformation and digitization of corporate communication have led to the emergence of “robust new digital” models among domestic large-size and medium companies (Khare et al.,

2019). The spreading of Internet-based markets, the shift toward digital platforms, the emergence of new working styles (e.g., remote), and the proliferation of Internet of Things (IoT), augmented and virtual reality, and robotics are just several of the new tendencies with profound repercussions on how Japanese companies communicate nowadays (Khare et al., 2019).

Several of the most critical challenges stemming from the ongoing digitization process of the country in all its three sectors – private, public, and non-profit – are stated by Khare, Khare, and Baber (2019) as follows:

- Absence of “suitably skilled human resources in top management and operational levels.”
- Incapacity “to coordinate with foreign hired human resources or outsource firms.”
- Absence of “anthropology and ethnography skills needed to understand users well enough to create new services for them.”
- Absence of “effective data governance, management, and standardization.”
- Customer and end-user conservatism.
- Aging human resources and technology infrastructure.

Therefore, Japan’s corporate landscape registers a slow transition and presents “a lack of corporate digital maturity” reflected in how companies prioritize standard investment practices and digital innovation policies (Broeckert, 2022). The “underdeveloped startup ecosystem” that hinders innovation on a national level, cross-border collaborations, and communication is also connected to the fragmentation and evolution disparities between SMEs and large corporations (Broeckert, 2022).

Furthermore, compared to their Western counterpart, several distinguishable features make Japanese companies stand apart: the lifetime employment (終身雇用制), seniority-based wage and promotion system (年功序列型賃金), and the labor unions (企業別労働組合) (Kazuo, 1966). The lifetime employment characteristic refers to the century-old practice initiated by zaibatsu (財閥企業, Japanese business conglomerates that dominated the pre-war Japanese economy) (Kazuo, 1966):

Workers become employed right after their graduation from school with a particular company. The employer will not lay off his workers if possible, even in the course of depression. The employee, in turn, will not quit his job at this company but will continue working there until he reaches retirement age (Koshiro, 1984).

Hence, the primary mechanism of the lifetime employment principle decreases drastically the possibility of laying off an employee, except for criminal offenses, while promoting altruism among co-workers and increasing one's loyalty toward the company (Arai, 1998).

According to the second fundamental characteristic – the seniority principle – wages and company promotions are obtained on “the basis of school, career, age, family or service term without regard to ability” (Matsuoka, 2012).

Without delving into further details, we add concerning the third principle of Japanese-style employment and management system – the presence of the enterprise unions – that they are well known for their role in increasing corporate productivity while mitigating conflicts between the employees and those assigned to managerial positions (Fujimura, 2012).

Nonetheless, in the contemporary era of globalization and transborder corporate cooperation and communication, all wired up under the perpetually disruptive impact of emergent technologies, the characteristics mentioned above now face severe challenges derived from new social perspectives and different understandings and interpretations.

For instance, gradually replacing or at least actively competing with the seniority principle is the “performance-orientated employee assessment and compensation system,” otherwise known as *seikashugi* (成果主義) (Fujimura, 2012). Likewise, other drastic changes and pervasive transformations become visible in the classical Japanese management style with “the decline in long-term employment” or the increase in the ratio of non-regular and foreign employees (Fujimura, 2012).

Considering the above necessarily short theoretical background, the convergence of three main factors lies behind the motivation of this study:

1. The role of various national contextual factors, such as traditional culture or linguistic specificities, in adjusting how companies digitally communicate in the aftermath of the pandemic
2. The socioeconomic disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and, overall, the highly fluctuant and perpetually changing global environment, and with all the consequences worldwide businesses had to endure
3. The fast-paced nature of technological advancement and the nebulous issues surrounding the prolific emergence and propagation of all AI-related tools

Do specific technical affordances and sociocultural and ideological features make Japanese-language corporate blogging stand apart? What are the main characteristics of digital practices and Japanese corporate internal communication conventions? How do the latest technological

developments impact the Japanese digital corporate environment? What distinctive practices and strategies of online communication with the audience stand out? The present study aims to answer these questions in the following sections.

The research void – theoretical and empirical – concerning the digital communication patterns and (untranslated) blogging practices and discourses of Japanese companies in the post-pandemic era increased the difficulty of compiling an adequate literature review. The same scholarly gap – the absence of previous studies on untranslated Japanese corporate blogging practices – proved equally challenging in generating an adequate set of hypotheses. Nonetheless, we propose the following:

H1. The corporate blog has a naturalized character: The Japanese traditional culture continues to exert a significant impact on the blogging content of national companies.

H2. The corporate blog addresses the public's social needs.

H3. Japanese-specific visual elements accompany the corporate blogging content.

Method and materials

The present study is based on the qualitative content and visual analysis of 30 Japanese language corporate blogs, summing up to 788 posts published in January 2019 and February 2024. As outlined before, the primary objective of the present study is to examine the digital communication activity of Japanese domestic companies in the post-pandemic business context by focusing on national corporate blogging practices. In creating the database, we performed a Google Japan search alternatively using the following keywords: “企業のブログ” (corporate blogs), “コミュニケーション” (communication), “日本” (Japan/Japanese), “人気” (popular) or “面白い” (interesting).

To compile the corporate blogs database, we took into consideration several criteria:

- (i) The blog is officially associated with a Japanese company of at least a medium size activating in Japan from January 2019 to February 2024.
- (ii) The blog is active and has at least an average posting frequency of one post per month.
- (iii) The blog has no bilingual interface; hence, it is available only in Japanese.

We recorded the first 30 blogs that fit the above criteria, and the coding procedure focused on identifying similarities across the content, design, visuals, targeted public, Japanese language use, and communication strategies and techniques. Several significant categories representing the overarching themes were generated and discussed in the following section.

We excluded from the start any blog sources in languages other than Japanese or those referring to international and transnational business entities conducting core operations in countries other

than Japan. We chose to limit the study to the geographical area of Japan and untranslated Japanese-language corporate blog content to achieve better accuracy in terms of cultural awareness and to decrease the impact of any external intercultural influences as much as possible. Furthermore, confining the focus of the analysis on Japanese-language corporate blogs requires, on the one hand, sufficient language proficiency to understand the content and, on the other hand, a good grasp of expertise in communication sciences and public relations.

The study adopts an interpretivist approach, considered ideal for understanding phenomena related to digital communication (Ono, 1994). Given its reasonably flexible and non-invasive nature, the selected qualitative content analysis method allows the in-depth examination of a wide range of communication artifacts: texts (adverts, political and diplomatic speeches, and newspaper articles), audio, video, and pictures (Lilleker et al., 2020).

Regarding the selected type of corporate communication tool, the blog is deemed the most appropriate for generating corporate communication material to fit the above-mentioned objectives of this paper. As a significant characteristic of online corporate culture, the blog excels in granting access to the company's online self-representation and converges into creating virtual communities (Hookway, 2008). Furthermore, conducting research on blogs offers "substantial benefits for social scientific research" and allows the collection of generous amounts of raw information, while their archived nature can provide insights into the development of "social processes across different spaces and time" (Hookway, 2008).

Results and Discussion

In this section, we present and explore the findings in detail, which we group into five main categories. The first category is entitled "Types of Blogging Platforms Employed by Japan's Private Sector" and examines data concerning the blogging spaces most frequently employed by Japanese companies (types, main features, graphic and visual options, and technical performance). The following four categories dive into the Japanese corporate blog as a communication instrument and are listed as follows: "Content and Public," "Sociocultural Characteristics," "Visual Characteristics," and "Stylistics and Language Use." The summary of the findings is provided in Table 1.

Types of Blogging Platforms Employed by Japan's Private Sector

In addition to the already well-known blogging platforms such as WordPress, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Joomla, or Blogger, several Japanese-language blogging platforms stand apart and require further attention and examination. During our research, we noticed that Japanese domestic companies tend to manifest a clear preference for the latter categories of platforms, which

include Hatena, AmebaOwnd, Rakuten, Lekumo, FC2 Blog, and Note. However, corporate blogs not affiliated with these platforms are far from being an exception.

Hatena

With more than 400 domestic companies maintaining an up-to-date blog on Hatena Pro, the platform holds a preferential position on the market and hosts corporate blogs of high-reputation companies such as JCB、SmartHR, Cybozu, Sega, ZOZO, TVer, and Fujitsu (Matsuura, 2022). Blog viewers can navigate between a wide range of corporate blogs with content categories classified by tags such as “corporate culture” (企業文化); “working style” (働き方); “security” (セキュリティ); “apps” (アプリ); “conferences” (コンフェレンス); “recruitment/hiring” (応募・採用); “events” (イベント); “studying meeting” (勉強会); “internships” (インターン) or “joining the company/retirement” (入社・退職). The high platform accessibility, user-friendly interface, and navigation are several of the main assets that explain the popularity of the blogging platform among domestic Japanese companies.

AmebaOwnd

With a lower-than-average number of adverts per blog page, AmebaOwnd stands out thanks to its simplicity and stylish design templates that have been successful in attracting companies such as Moussy, Nihon Kikou or Nippon Souseikei (Moussy, 2024; Nihon Kikou, 2024; Nippon Sousei-kei, 2024). With hyperlinks to Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X accounts, most corporate blogs tend to include typical sections similar to the ones of the official websites: “About us/Information about the Company” (企業情報); “Contact” (お問い合わせ); “Q&A” (よくあるご質問); “News” (ニュース) or “Recruitment” (求人情報).

FC2 Blog

In addition to its mobile-friendly design, availability as a smartphone app, and thus high connectivity independent of time or space, this blogging platform allows users to upload a maximum of 10,000 photos, illustrations, and short videos and grants access to around 6000 templates.

Rakuten

Ideal for small to medium businesses affiliated with the e-commerce platform Rakuten, the blogging service can be distinguished thanks to its high connectivity and technical architecture that ensures seamless integration with other applications and social media platforms while granting users unlimited space to upload photos and videos, and the option to customize special-themed templates.

Lekumo

The platform describes itself as “the most suitable blogging service for companies, (...) with simple, enriched and optimized design functions, which include content management through multiple administrative accounts and providing nonstop assistance at low costs for business usage” (Lekumo, 2024).

Note

With paid versions such as Note Pro and Note Premium available for the private sector, it partially fits the criteria of a social media platform, given that it permits users to publish microblogging-like short messages and upload audio video content such as short videos, voice messages, and images. Technical support and additional assistance are available upon request.

Content and Public

Based on the nature of the public targeted by the published content, we propose the following typology of Japanese language corporate blogs:

- (1) Society and public orientated
- (2) Recruitment orientated
- (3) Employees orientated
- (4) Mixed approach

(1) The society and the public-orientated corporate blog includes an overwhelming number of posts that generally target the following areas: news about the company’s activity (any potential disruptions, holidays, extended worktime, or change of address); useful information concerning soon-to-be-launched products and services; global market tendencies that tend nonetheless to affect the Japanese public as well (the prolific emergence of Chat GPT and related tools of generative AI in the corporate arena); success stories, outstanding contributions and involvement of the company in various social initiatives.

(2) The recruitment-orientated corporate blog (usually referred to as *採用ブログ*) becomes a human resources instrument, fulfilling two significant roles: first, as a low-cost and highly efficient search tool; second, as a mediatization space between the company and highly skilled human capital. Addressing these roles are blog posts that concern daily schedule and work responsibilities; insights into the corporate culture; interviews with staff; studying meetings and informal discussion sessions with the employees and the upper staff; recruitment sessions; interview manners (dress code and language); tips on writing one’s curriculum vitae (*履歴書*).

(3) The employees-orientated blog nurtures cohesion among colleagues and serves as a cross-cultural communication management interface that increases awareness and alleviates potential

conflicts and misunderstandings between the Japanese native staff and international employees within the same work environment. Interviews with colleagues and announcements concerning informal internal events fit this category. In response to the last function of cross-cultural communication, blog posts advise Japanese native employees on how to successfully communicate and adjust their interactions with their foreign colleagues (to avoid using ambiguous linguistic expressions, keep a casual and friendly communication style, and be patient and kind). Likewise, Japanese language training sessions are made available to facilitate and accelerate the integration of foreign staff within domestic corporate environments (Mercan, 2020).

(4) The mixed approach type of corporate blog provides a heterogeneous perspective of the business discourse, with posts that are prone to fit all the above-identified categories and thus disseminate information by employing a mix of communication strategies suitable for the needs of a wide variety of publics.

Sociocultural Characteristics

Corporate Philosophy and Culture

A distinctive element of Japanese traditional culture reflected by the blogging practices of Japanese domestic companies is the group-focused approach that associates high-performance results with collective engagement and team empowerment. Nonetheless, the notion that an individual is considered significant only within the context of the group stems from the disparity in the perception of individualism in East Asian cultures compared to Western ones (Hwang & Hiebert, 2024). Unlike the Western current of thinking that emphasizes the importance of individual rights as a significant liberal democratic value, East Asian ideologies focus on preserving in-group harmony, subordinate individual needs and goals to the ones of the group, therefore, placing above all the interests of the community as a whole (Hwang & Hiebert, 2024). For instance, mirroring glimpses of this cultural and national philosophy are many blog posts that aim to create an emotional attachment toward the working environment, to nurture a collective state of mind grounded in modesty and a sense of togetherness, thus militate for team cohesion:

- “How to keep in mind teamwork to develop yourself and the team” (チームと自分を成長させるためにチーム開発で心がけたいこと) (Dely Tech Blog, 2024);
- “Company research presentation: How to train [yourself] and understand the crucial importance of teamwork” (企業研究発表会! チームで協力する大切さを知ることが出来る訓練) (Splife Blog, 2024);

- “The era of remote work: What will happen with team culture?” (リモートワークの時代。チームカルチャーはどうなる?) (MCT Corporate Blog Page, 2020).

Another critical feature that encapsulates the participative character of informal Japanese corporate culture is the *nomi-kai* (飲み会), in translation, “drinking meeting,” a type of after-work event where colleagues share sake and discuss informal topics, hence the coined word “*nomination*” (飲みにケーション) (Yamauchi & Orr, 2011). As an expression of national corporate heritage, the *nomi-kai* becomes a vector of unity within the working team, as it nurtures long-term relationships among the employees and temporarily ceases the vertical relationships existing between top management and subordinates (Yamauchi & Orr, 2011). *Nomi-kai* gatherings are an opportunity to foster small conversations, usually referred to as “*zatsudan*” (雑談). These casual discussions amongst Japanese employees typically occur in informal spaces such as *izakaya* bars and cafés after the working program and fulfill the role of building strong interpersonal relationships based on trust and empathy, which are essential for fostering a stress-free work environment. By doing so, the performance of employees is expected to be enhanced, thus the company’s overall productivity will be significantly improved (Freee, 2023).

Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic pressured Japanese companies to adjust their meeting policies and internal communication practices accordingly while continuing to nurture the team spirit. The nationwide corporate response was to organize a new type of event: the online *nomi-kai* (オンライン飲み会) (Yamauchi & Orr, 2011).

Nationalist Discourse

The following sociocultural characteristic worth highlighting is the *nationalist discourse* deeply embedded in the corporate discourse: blog post titles such as the following ones sustain nonetheless an overwhelmingly nationalist narrative imbued with a thoroughgoing nostalgia for a once again socioeconomically striving Japan:

- “I want to make a better Japan by working at freee” (freee で働くことを通して日本を良くしたい, [Author’s note: “freee” is the company’s name]) (Freee, 2023);
- “The middle-size companies are saving Japan” (中小企業が日本を救う) (Business Doctor 28, 2023);
- “Dialogue: How is the Japanese miracle broadcast in the world” (対談 : 「日本の魅力」を世界にどう発信するか?) (Recruit, 2024).

Acritical and apolitical character

A third key feature relevant to the present discussion and one that reflects the culturalized character of the corporate blogging practice exerted by domestic Japanese companies is the acritical character of the narrative discourse: While companies consider their duty to signal various challenges, critical downsides and potential threats that might exert their influence and affect the general public at a national level, the general communication pattern and strategy are to purposely avoid increasing the social polemic by placing the blame on a particular agency. References to various social issues specific to the Japanese corporate environments are not entirely absent: a notable such issue known as “seikai-byou” (正解病) refers to the malign tendency of being overly focused on identifying the correct solution, which can ultimately lead to a decline in creativity and flexibility over time (Sogitani, 2023). In addition, political discussions, references, or allusions to political figures, and participation in current political confrontations are conspicuously absent – hence, the apolitical character.

Cultural empathy, communication, and harmony

Another socio-cultural feature constant throughout the corporate blogging discourse is the emphasis on values such as empathy, kindness, care, and harmonious communication. Employees are actively encouraged to avoid group conflicts, extend help to their colleague, and provide assistance to those in need wherever applicable.

Wellness of the Public: The Omotenashi Strategy

The corporate attitude toward the general public seems to be significantly amplified by the intertwinement of the traditional culture: There is utmost care and respect toward the public/the customers, while the general and overall purpose is “to keep the customer happy.” We consider this communication strategy, which we will refer to as the omotenashi strategy, a reconceptualization of the omotenashi spirit (おもてなし) within the Japanese-language blogging space. Considered a quintessential cultural concept that embodies Japanese etiquette, courtesy, and hospitality, omotenashi is the mission “of [providing] good service and keeping the customers happy” (Chon & Schuckert, 2021) while connecting with the secular practice of the tea ceremony (chadou, 茶道) (Morishita, 2021). From this perspective, the same hospitality spirit can be deemed a significant element in the blogging discourse of Japanese companies.

Culturalized Corporate Social Responsibility

Several culture-related communicational aspects central to Japanese corporate social responsibility (企業の社会的な責任) hint at the existence of a hybrid model of CSR that

emerged from a nexus of Asian and Western influences: law compliance (法令遵守), social contribution to the geographical region and the people living in the area (地域への貢献) and environmental consciousness and awareness toward sustainable development (持続可能な開発).

Visual Characteristics

Visual Cultural Markers: Symbols, Images, Icons, Kaomoji

Besides delivering sociocultural-specific content, Japanese companies frequently display typical Japanese cultural symbols and visual images rooted in national cultural history and identity on their public blogs, together with other cultural markers prone to enhance the public's appreciation.

Furthermore, domestic blogging platforms such as Hatena Pro or Rakuten grant administrators the option to use Japanese-specific cultural themes imbued with the above-mentioned categories of visual cultural markers, which can stand as cultural metaphors: sakura (桜, cherry blossoms in spring, symbolizing Japanese spirit), the four seasons (季節, the transience of life), mountain Fuji (富士山, immortality, holiness and luck), and many others.

Another culture-specific trait that imbues Japanese corporate blogging space is the presence of kaomoji (顔文字), Japanese emoticons that are created through “manipulations of keyboard symbols to create ‘faces’ – by e-mail and Internet users in Japan” (Katsuno & Yano, 2002). Unlike the American emoticons, which focus on reproducing the shape of the mouth and “[can be] read at perpendicular angles to the words,” the kaomoji emphasize the cuteness of eyes (e.g., such as (^_^)) and “[are] read in line with the words” (Katsuno & Yano, 2002).

We noticed that kaomoji customarily accompany the less formal types of Japanese corporate blogs, while their moderate usage can be interpreted as a properly balanced and friendly self-expression of the companies in their digital interactions with the readers (consumers, [potential] business partners, current employees and future members of the staff). In this regard, a unique but equally interesting strategy that stands out is the combination of kaomoji with sonkeigo (尊敬語), which is the ‘honorific-polite language’ (Hasegawa, 2012), and it is employed “when the speaker wishes to show [the highest possible form of] respect for the other person and the person being discussed” (Hasegawa, 2012). This strategy of blending visual elements specific to informal communication with linguistic formality suggests, on the one hand, politeness and respect toward the customer/reader of the blog and, on the other hand, discloses instances of humanity and kindness as fundamental Japanese corporate values and desirable identity vectors

(e.g., “ご検討ください” – [go-kentou-kudasai], a sonkei expression that can be translated as “please consider [this]” or “please think about [it]” – is frequently rendered together with the kaomoji “(*^^*)”).

Aesthetics and Design: The Manga/Anime and Kawaii/Chibi Influences

The ubiquitous influence of manga and anime aesthetics is particularly visible across the blog posts. The drawing style that occasionally accompanies blog posts takes inspiration from visual and narrative tropes derived from these mainstream media genres, which remain the hallmarks of contemporary Japanese popular culture. As previously emphasized by other scholars, the manga-anime intertextual relation “has largely drawn upon three intersecting attributes: Japanese nationality, visual style, and intermedia marketing” (McFarlane et al., 2020).

Hence, one can notice blog posts incidentally spattered with figures, characters, speech balloons, and surrounding décors drawn closely following manga and anime distinct visual conventions such as the characters’ “large eyes, small mouth, and pointed chin” (Nasir, 2021). Therefore, some characters’ design not only captures mainstream influences from the manga-anime aesthetics but also embody the typical iconography of the kawaii (可愛い, cute) and chibi (チビ, small) lifestyles.

Nonetheless, society and public-orientated blogs of companies that activate in industries such as (oil/renewable) energy (Nihon Kikou, 2024), aviation, or machine manufacturing maintain a highly formal communication; hence, the manga/anime style elements are used far less frequently, if not wholly absent, compared to the recruitment/employees orientated and the mixed approach types of corporate blogs.

Stylistics and Language Use

Several stylistic and linguistic features characterize the communication strategies, techniques, and content of the Japanese corporate blogs recorded in the database. The society and public-orientated type of corporate blogs adopt a highly formal communication style, imbued with a high number of sonkei expressions and a client-orientated and abstract lexis. In examples no. 1 and 2, we can notice the usage of formulaic phrases ideal for Japanese language communication at the workplace: “誠にありがとうございます,+” (makoto-ni-arigatou-gozaïmasu), “来年も変わらぬお引き立てのほどよろしくお願い申し上げます” (rainen-mo-kawaranuku-ohikitate-no-hodo-yoroshiku-onegai-shimasu) and “ご利用頂きまして誠にありがとうございます” (go-riyou-itadakimashite-makoto-ni-arigatou-gozaïmasu).

Example 1

*Formal Japanese language in society and public-orientated corporate blog**Source Text*

平素は格別のご高配を賜り、誠にありがとうございます。

誠に勝手ながら、年末年始休業日を下記のとおりとさせていただきます。

年末年始休業期間：2021年12月29日～2022年1月3日

新年は2022年1月4日より、平常通り営業させていただきます。

来年も変わらぬお引き立てのほどよろしくお願い申し上げます。

English Translation

Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

We apologize for any inconvenience we may have caused. Please note that we will be closed for the New Year's holiday from December 29, 2021, to January 3, 2022.

We will resume business as usual in the following year starting from January 4.

We express our sincere gratitude for your ongoing support throughout the year and hope to receive it in the following year as well (Nihon Kikou, 2024).

The attachment of the polite prefix go- (ご-), the humble verbal forms (“sasete itadakimasu” – させていただきます), honorific adverbs (“makoto-ni” – 誠に) and gratitude expressions (“onegai-moushiagemasu” – お願い申し上げます) emphasize, from the linguistic perspective, the respect shown to the customer.

Example 2*Formal Japanese language in society and public-orientated corporate blog**Source Text*

いつも MOUSSY をご利用頂きまして誠にありがとうございます。

English Translation

(i) Thank you for always using Moussy.

(ii) It has been our pleasure to serve you here at Moussy.

(iii) We sincerely thank you for using Moussy (Moussy, 2022).

Example 3*Informal and casual Japanese language in an employees orientated corporate blog**Source Text*

イギリスで RCA に行きたいなとか思ったんですけど、RCA 行って行って見てわかった
ってというか、（行く前に調べろって話なんですけど、）学費がめっちゃめっちゃ高い。

それと卒業制作を見て、向こうの人と話をしてみたんですけど、もう全然、内容が理解できなかつたんですよ。そして「これは俺はいけないな」と思って方向転換をして、そうすると僕は日本のすごい有名なソニーとかで働いてたわけでもないんで、当時は英語もできなかつたから、ゲリラで行くしかなかつたんですよ。

English Translation

I thought I wanted to go to the Royal College of Art in the UK, but I realized that the tuition fees were enormously high when I went there. As I have mentioned, it is super important to do your research [which wasn't something I did back then]. And then I saw [the requirements of the] graduation project, and I tried speaking with someone there, and suddenly I realized I [just] can't do this anymore and [decided to] change the direction. However, [at that time] I wasn't working for some super famous Japanese company like Sony, and I couldn't speak any English, so my only option was to take matters into my own hands and act fast (Vicc, 2024). [Author's note: RCA is the abbreviation of the Royal College of Art].

Corporate blogs falling into the categories of recruitment, employee-oriented, and mixed-approach tend to use a casual and informal communication style. Various linguistic devices are employed to emphasize directness, casualty, and informality:

- imperatives (“shiraberotte” – 調べろって) and short verbal forms (“motte-nainaatte” – 持てないなあって);
- men-specific pronouns (“ore” – 俺) and informal particles (“yo-ne” – よね);
- informal and colloquial adverbs (“sugoi” –すごい and “mecha-mecha” – めちゃめちゃ);
- metaphors and colloquial phraseological expressions (“gerira-de-iku” – ゲリラで行く).

Example 4

Informal and casual Japanese language in an employees orientated corporate blog

Source Text

【渡辺】 なぜでしょう。

【丹野】 建築デザインにこんなに情熱を持てないなあって。

【渡辺】 ああ、そういう意味ですか。

【丹野】 すごい強い意志を持ってデザインを追求される方なので、昔の建築家の方ってそういう方が多いと思うんですけど、こんなに情熱持てないなあっていうのがありました。

English Translation

Watanabe: Why is this?

Tanno: When it comes to architectural design, I cannot have this [kind of] passion.

Watanabe: Oh, so this is what you mean?

Tanno: I believe there are so many people with a strong interest in pursuing design, just like the old-fashioned architects, but I just didn't have this [kind of] passion (Vicc, 2024).

[Author's note: The interviewee is Tanno Kiichirou, CEO of Sudare Inc., explaining why he chose to give up his career as an architect.]

Table 1

Summary of Findings

Types of Blogging Platforms Employed by Japan's Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hatena • AmebaOwnd • FC2 Blog • Rakuten • Lekumo • Note
Content and Public. Proposed Typology of Japanese Language Corporate Blogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society and public orientated • Recruitment orientated • Employees orientated • Mixed approach
Sociocultural Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate philosophy and culture (team empowerment, collective engagement, collectivist discourse, nomi-kai) • Nationalist discourse • Acritical and apolitical character • Wellness of the public: The omotenashi Strategy • Culturalized corporate social responsibility (law compliance, social contribution, environmental consciousness and awareness)
Visual Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japanese-specific visual cultural markers: symbols, images, icons (cultural metaphors), kaomoji • Aesthetics and design: The manga/anime and kawaii/chibi influences
Stylistics and Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The society and public-orientated type of corporate blogs adopt a highly formal communication style. • The recruitment and employees orientated and mixed approach types of blogs adopt a casual and informal communication style.

Conclusions

The present study examined the Japanese language blogging practices employed by domestic companies that are active in Japan. Though not exhaustive, one of the significant contributions of our analysis is providing a classification typology of Japanese corporate blogs, which can also advance the contribution to cross-cultural understanding and interdisciplinary academic participation. The results have demonstrated several specific characteristics of sociocultural, visual, and linguistic nature. Upon revisiting the hypotheses formulated in the introductory section and considering the empirical evidence we summarized in Ttable1, we concluded that our initial hypotheses were accurate. Finally, future scholarly directions could further advance cross-cultural comparisons between Western/Asian and Japanese blogging strategies and communication techniques. Another promising research avenue that may yield valuable insights for academia and the industry connects with the growing interest of Japanese companies in utilizing generative AI tools for co-writing and distributing blog content across various platforms, particularly for advertising public relations, and communication-related purposes (Mercan, 2022).

Note

All translations from Japanese to English are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated, and have been prepared for the purpose of this paper.

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