Older Celebrity versus Non-Celebrity Television Advertising: A Japanese Perspective

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Introduction

Japanese commercials are famous for their high usage of celebrities. Studies have reported celebrities appearing in approximately 50% (Lee, Choi, & Tsai 2007; Praet 2009) to 70% (Hagiwara, Prieler, Kohlbacher, & Arima 2009; Mooney 2000) of Japanese commercials. This figure stands in stark contrast to most other countries. As Praet (2009) shows in his comparative research on commercials in 25 countries, only one other country, Korea, shows a similar number of celebrities in television advertisements. Analyzing the percentage of celebrities in TV advertising, Praet found three groups of countries: One in which 50% or more commercials used celebrities, including Japan and Korea; one in which around 25% of commercials showed celebrities, including Brazil, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia; and finally Western countries, where celebrities are not very common in commercials (less than 15%). Japan's situation is quite unique in this respect. Although some research has highlighted this phenomenon in general, as yet no study has focused specifically on older celebrities.[1] This article will examine this phenomenon in greater detail.[2]

Older celebrities are becoming an increasingly important topic, since Japan is one of the world's fastest-aging societies. According to the latest estimates (October 2009), people aged 65 and older account for 22.7% of the population, and those at least 50 years old constitute more than 43% of the population (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2009). Is Japan's age distribution reflected in the well-known phenomenon of celebrity usage within Japanese TV advertisements, and if so, how are these older celebrities portrayed compared with their non-famous counterparts?

In short, this article is the first that investigates the differences between

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older celebrities and non-celebrities in Japanese television advertisements. More specifically, this article will show how many commercials employ older celebrities and what types of celebrities they are. To ascertain if there are any visible differences in their portrayal, the following sections will compare and analyze the age segments of the older celebrities and non-celebrities featured in commercials. Finally, this article will explore differences in the usage of celebrities and non-celebrities based on product categories. In summary, this article tries to explain how the use of older celebrities and non-celebrities differs, in order to better understand celebrity's function in Japanese television commercials.

Celebrities in Television Advertising

As outlined in previous work (Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, & Arima 2009a), various literature exists on older people in television advertisements. Only a few studies mention the use of older celebrities at all (Hajjar 1997; Higgs & Milner 2006; Simcock & Sudbury 2006; Zhang et al. 2006), though none of these studies investigate the phenomenon itself. On the other hand, literature on celebrities in advertising has a long tradition; these studies, however, do not specifically mention age or older celebrities.

The main concern of most literature is the possible effects of celebrities on the audience. Erdogan (1999) mentions four theories as being the most important in the context of celebrities: the source credibility model, the source attractiveness model, the product match-up hypothesis, and the meaning transfer model. Shimp (2010) further subdivides *source credibility* and *source attractiveness* into five important aspects to assess the endorser's effectiveness, which he calls the TEARS model. TEARS stands for *trustworthiness*, *expertise* (both dimensions of credibility), physical *attractiveness, respect* and *similarity* to the target audience (which are components of attractiveness). The question here is, however, not if a celebrity is really an expert in an area or similar to the audience, but only whether the audience perceives the celebrity as such. Research results differ on which of these aspects are the most important to sales. Several studies have focused on the attractiveness of the endorser/celebrity (Kahle & Homer 1985; Till & Busler 1998). Kahle and Homer (1985) mention physical attractiveness as an important feature for selling a product, though this is only the case if there is a product match-up. The *match-up hypothesis* suggests that "the image of the celebrity and the image of the product should converge in effective advertisements" (Kamins 1990: 5). In other words, attractiveness only works for products that are attractiveness-related. In contrast, Lee and Thorson (2008) have found that a moderate mismatch between celebrity and product can be more beneficial than a perfect match. The reason might be that the moderate mismatch "boosts interest and curiosity about the advertisement" (Lee & Thorson 2008: 446). Others found expertise more important than attractiveness

to make the product endorser effective (Till & Busler 1998).

From a business point of view, research on the United States found that celebrity endorsers are mostly worth their fees (Agrawal & Kamakura 1995). Nevertheless, the risks connected with celebrity endorsements clearly underscore the fact that companies must be extremely careful in choosing a celebrity. Till & Shimp (1998) have investigated the effects of negative information about celebrities on products. What they found is that negative information about a celebrity can lead to lower brand evaluations. In fact, a meta-analysis of 32 articles on celebrities showed that negative information about the celebrity had a larger impact on endorsement effects than any other positive endorsement strategies (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton 2008). A study on Japan and the United States (Money, Shimp, & Sakano 2006) divided negative information about a celebrity into self-oriented (deleterious behavior affecting only the celebrity him/herself) and other-oriented behavior (behavior that harms other people). While the latter had negative effects on brand purchase intentions, the former had the effect of increasing intended product purchases, perhaps because of sympathy and empathy with the celebrity in trouble. Celebrities pose other risks as well. One is that they might overshadow the brand (in other words, the celebrity is remembered, but not the product); another is overexposure (using them to sell too many different products); and finally, that celebrities might simply be too expensive (Erdogan 1999).

How do celebrity ads actually work? Kamins (1989) mentions identification with the celebrity as an important factor. Further, the consumer internalizes the characteristics of the celebrity that are in accordance with his/her own values and interests. McCracken (1989) takes a semiotic approach to explain how celebrity ads work through his *meaning transfer model*. He subdivides this meaning transfer process into three stages. In *stage 1*, a celebrity acquires powerful meanings within a culture, e.g. based on his or her film roles. McCracken makes clear that this is how celebrities differ from non-celebrities. Celebrities generally have more powerful meanings, while non-celebrities can only transfer meanings connected with their age, gender, and status. In contrast, the celebrity already has a meaning established outside of the advertisement environment. McCracken gives the example of Audrey Hepburn, whose image represents "elegance" more vividly than the most elegant model.[3] In *stage 2* the celebrity who best suits the marketing plans is used for the advertisements. Ideally, the celebrity has something in common with the product. In *stage 3* the consumer buys the product, and so can indirectly acquire the meaning of the celebrity, thus helping the consumer define him/herself.

Most previous literature, then, deals at least indirectly with the question of how celebrities can affect people.[4]

Celebrities in Japanese TV Advertising

Celebrities are used to endorse products in Japan for very similar reasons to those briefly discussed in the previous section.[5] Indeed, they are considered "one of the best ways to attract attention to a company's products in an age of communication clutter" (Moeran 1996: 143); they help the products "stand out from the competition" (Mooney 2000: 41). Moeran (1996) also suggests that celebrities are used to create an image for a product. Based on reasoning similar to that of McCracken's meaning-transfer model, the idea is that the use of celebrities in advertising allows consumers to understand that advertisements from various media sources all belong to the same integrated marketing communication campaign. Praet (2001) details additional reasons for celebrity sponsorship: celebrities are often used as a shared vocabulary between agency and client, since celebrities are easier to discuss than complicated advertising concepts. Celebrities are also used as a form of risk avoidance, and to replace the product concept. In other words, celebrities have proven effective in Japan and, since they already carry meaning, this makes the actual product concepts less important. Some scholars have criticized this extreme concentration on celebrities at the expense of other concepts (e.g., Kawashima 2006). They have argued that advertisers do not want to take any risks and concentrate on celebrities rather than big ideas, thereby leading to lower quality advertisements.

Most of these reasons for celebrity endorsements are also valid for other countries. Therefore, they still do not reveal why so many more celebrities are used in advertising in Japan. In an attempt to answer this question, Praet (2009) correlated the number of celebrities in different countries with Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and individualism-collectivism. Only the last "dimension" revealed significant results, indicating that individualism-collectivism may be a clue as to why celebrities are so dominant in Japanese advertising. At the same time, the use of celebrities to advertise products in a collectivistic culture like Japan might seem like a contradiction at first, since the "cult of the personality can be seen as a product of the myth of the individual" (Moeran 1996: 164). However, Japanese celebrities do not develop their public images according to this myth, unlike their Western counterparts.

Celebrities play a very different role in the Japanese media and cannot be compared directly to Western celebrities. While many Western celebrities seem hard to approach, untouchable, and almost otherworldly, Japanese celebrities are more like everyday people, like neighbors. In accordance with this image, they are shown in everyday situations in commercials (Mooney 2000; Painter 1996). In Japanese culture it is very bad manners to show off and put oneself in the center; modesty regardless of social status is part of the culture of politeness (Davies & Ikeno 2002). This social code also seems to apply to celebrities.

The phenomenon of celebrities in Japan must also be seen in the wider context of the Japanese media, where they are omnipresent. Indeed, almost every TV program in Japan features multiple celebrities. They act in dramas, sing, and appear on television in variety and quiz shows, and also in the commercials in between. Celebrities in Japanese culture are almost regarded as part of the family or a member of an individual's peer group, since the average Japanese sees them every day and knows much about their private lives. It is not surprising that they speak to the audience as if they were speaking directly to friends (Mooney 2000). The audience follows the details of their entire lives, often including events in childhood, puberty, marriage, birth of children, middle-age, and death (Painter 1996).[6] This is especially true for so-called *tarento* (from the English "talent"), i.e., TV personalities who are famous mostly due to their appearances on television and often have no other special "talents," despite their moniker. Television produces celebrities and keeps them popular by giving them constant exposure, including their private lives (Painter 1996). Viewers in Japan do not see *tarento* as fundamentally different from themselves. Therefore, Japanese people are able to reflect on their own lives when they hear *tarento* speak about theirs. This identification provides a safe environment for discussions about difficult issues such as divorce, infidelity, or disease. "Without such a vicarious universe, I think, many Japanese would have real trouble discussing these topics openly because they would have to relate them to actual socially connected others" (Painter 1996: 214). As Painter suggests, celebrities/*tarento* play a very important social role in Japan, so it should be not surprising that the attitude towards celebrity advertising differs from the West.

For young and aspiring actors, an appearance in a commercial can be the first step to a career in TV and film. If their appearance in an advertisement increases their popularity, it might lead to contracts for TV dramas or quiz and variety shows. Some celebrities actually gain their fame through advertising (Mooney 2000; Praet 2001). In contrast to the view held by many Hollywood stars, TV commercials in Japan *can* enhance a film star's career (Nakanishi 2002) or be an important way for models, singers, and entertainers to increase their popularity (Praet 2001). Even appearing in several commercials at the same time is not a problem; rather, it serves to demonstrate the popularity of a particular celebrity (Mooney 2000).

The structure of the Japanese media must also be considered to understand the role of celebrities in advertising. Traditionally, Japanese advertising agencies have very close links with the media and the entertainment industry. Advertising agencies often organize big events and concerts and sometimes even develop new program ideas for television channels (Moeran 1996). Arguably, this intermarriage between advertising agencies and the media and entertainment industry also leads to a mutual interest in promoting the celebrities they all feature. For example, advertising agencies use a celebrity who will star in a new drama that begins

airing at the same time as the launch of a product they are promoting (Moeran 1996). Thus, the advertisement becomes a reminder of the drama, and the drama becomes a reminder of the advertisement (and its product), which will be broadcast during the commercial breaks of the drama. Additionally, a musician might use an advertisement to promote him or herself, or a new song.[7]

Method

For this article we conducted a content analysis of a systematic sample of TV commercials over 28 days, with an equal distribution of weekdays over two full years (1997 and 2007). The sample is based on a database of television commercials that includes all advertisements broadcast by the five commercial television stations (Nihon Television, Fuji Television, TV Asahi, TV Tokyo, TBS) in the Greater Tokyo Area since 1996. In our previous research, we analyzed all commercials in order to find out the overall percentage of commercials showing older people (Hagiwara et al. 2009; Prieler et al. 2009a). For this study we used only the commercials in which older people appeared.[8] There were 208 applicable commercials in 1997, and 306 in 2007: 514 commercials in total. Since celebrities generally appear in major roles, we focused only on commercials using older people in major roles. 63 commercials in 1997 and 88 in 2007 did not include an older person in a major role. In order to be able to show a clear distinction between these two types of commercials (i.e. those with celebrities and those without), we also excluded the relatively few commercials that featured both celebrities and non-celebrities in major roles (5 commercials in 1997 and 9 commercials in 2007). The resulting sample consisted of 140 commercials in 1997 and 209 commercials in 2007: 349 commercials in total.

Two doctoral students[9] conducted the coding. After a pretest on commercials not included in the sample showed sufficient consistency between the coders, they began coding the 349 commercials independently. All coding categories reached an intercoder reliability of at least 80%; most were over 90%.[10]

Results

In the following paragraphs, we present the results of our content analysis. First, we show how many celebrities appear in Japanese television advertisements, what types of celebrities, and if the celebrities appear as themselves or acting as a character other than themselves. Then, we compare older celebrities with non-celebrities in terms of age and sex, and determine what other age groups are featured with older celebrities in television commercials. Finally, we investigate the portrayal of older celebrities and non-celebrities, specifically whether they are

depicted in a favorable or unfavorable light, as comical or serious, and/or active or passive.

Types of Older Celebrities

The majority of commercials showing older people in major roles feature celebrities (65.7%, n=92 for 1997; 61.2%, n=128 for 2007); this held true for both 1997 and 2007. We have differentiated between several types of celebrities (see Table 1). Within these types, actors, singers, and musicians[11] clearly dominate the field at 67.4% (n=62) for 1997 and 54.7% (n=70) for 2007. Among them are Yoshinaga Sayuri, Nakamura Tamao, Yazawa Eikichi, Nakamura Masatoshi, and Satomi Kōtarō. The second most frequently employed type of celebrity are *tarento*, who account for 13.0% (n=12) in 1997 and 21.1% (n=27) in 2007. These include, for example, Mino Monta, Ōhashi Kyosen, Kobayashi Katsuya, and Tokoro George. This category is followed by a surprisingly low number of athletes at 2.2% (n=2) for 1997 and 8.6% (n=11) for 2007. Popular athletes tend to be baseball legends such as Kinugasa Sachio, Hoshino Senichi, Emoto Takenori, and Egawa Suguru. Finally, there were also professionals such as company owners, hair and makeup artists, essayists, politicians, and astronauts who did not fit into the other types of celebrities. This category, termed "other," amounted to 17.4% (n=16) in 1997 and 20.3% (n=26) in 2007.

Table 1: Types of Older Celebrities

	1997 (N = 92) n (%)	2007 (N = 128) n (%)
Actor/Singer/Musician	62 (67.4)	70 (54.7)
Tarento	12 (13.0)	27 (21.1)
Athletes	2 (2.2)	11 (8.6)
Other	16 (17.4)	26 (20.3)

Note: Multiple types of celebrities possible within one commercial.

Most celebrities appear as themselves (60.9%, n=56 for 1997; 77.3%, n=99 for 2007), and a smaller group act as characters other than themselves (39.1%, n=36 for 1997; 21.9%, n=28 for 2007). For example, celebrities play a family in one commercial though they are not a family in reality; one celebrity plays a teacher; or two celebrities play office workers. In one 2007 commercial four celebrities play themselves at first, then later switch to another role.

Age Groups among Older Celebrities and Non-Celebrities

In terms of age, males between 50-64 dominate for both the celebrity and

non-celebrity groups (see Table 2). While the number of older people shown in commercials generally increased between 1997 and 2007 (Hagiwara et al. 2009; Prieler et al. 2009a), this was not the case for older females. The number of females of all age groups decreased, with the exception of non-celebrities between 50 and 64. By contrast, older male celebrities between 50-64 increased their prevalence during this decade. There are significant differences between celebrities and non-celebrities only in 2007, with clearly more celebrities than non-celebrities in the male 50-64 segment (48.1% vs. 68.8%; $\chi^2(1) = 8.832$, p < .01) and clearly more non-celebrities than celebrities in the female 50-64 segment (43.2% vs. 21.1%; $\chi^2(1) = 11.629$, p < .001).

Table 2: Celebrities and Non-Celebrities: Age Groups

			Male 50-64	Male 65+	Female 50-64	Female 65+
1997	Non-Celebrity (N = 48)	n	30	8	11	8
		%	62.5	16.7	22.9	16.7
	Celebrity (N = 92)	n	46	14	31	10
		%	50.0	15.2	33.7	10.9
2007	Non-Celebrity (N = 81)	n	39	8	35	7
		%	48.1	9.9	43.2	8.6
	Celebrity (N = 128)	n	88	19	27	7
		%	68.8	14.8	21.1	5.5

Note: Multiple sexes and age groups possible within one commercial.

We know now about the age segments of older celebrities, but with what other age groups do older celebrities actually appear in commercials? In this aspect, there is not much difference between older non-celebrities and older celebrities. As do older people in general, older celebrities tend to appear most often with other adults who are not yet 50 years or older. They appear with other age-groups less frequently than do non-celebrities, however. The major reason for this difference is that older celebrities tend to appear alone more often than non-celebrities. This was the case for 27.2% (n=25) of celebrities in 1997 (versus 20.8%, n=10 for non-celebrities) and for 55.5% (n=71) in 2007 (versus 40.7%, n=33 for non-celebrities). This finding is not surprising, since celebrities are employed for their celebrity/star-power and can therefore hold their own in a commercial. However, as the numbers show, there is a general trend towards showing older people – both celebrities and non-celebrities – alone.

Portrayals of Older Celebrities and Non-Celebrities

Let us now compare the portrayal of older celebrities versus non-celebrities in three specific dimensions: (1) favorable versus unfavorable, (2) comical versus serious, and (3) active versus passive.
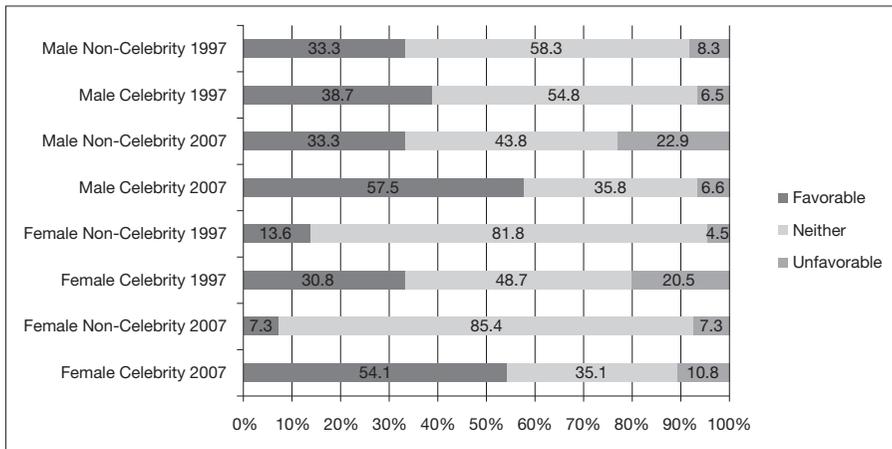

Figure 1: Favorable versus Unfavorable Portrayals

In order to understand more clearly how older people are portrayed in Japanese television advertisements, we have followed Simcock and Sudbury (2006) in investigating whether older people were depicted in favorable ways (e.g., older people shown as competent, authoritative, skilful and being in control) or in unfavorable ways (e.g., incompetent, helpless, weak, forgetful). Celebrities tend to be shown more favorably than non-celebrities (see Figure 1). In 2007, this is especially strongly pronounced for females ($\chi^2(1) = 20.432$, p < .01) and also for males ($\chi^2(1) = 7.748$, p < .05).[12] In contrast, in 1997 there was little difference between celebrities and non-celebrities in terms of being depicted in favorable ways. This was true for both males ($\chi^2(1) = 0.283$, p > .1) and females ($\chi^2(1) = 2.227$, p > .1). If we consider all aspects (favorable – neither – unfavorable) among both years and sexes, however, there is a statistically significant difference between celebrities and non-celebrities (females 1997: $\chi^2(2) = 6.650$, p < .05; females 2007: $\chi^2(2) = 22.646$, p < .001; males 2007: $\chi^2(2) = 11.935$, p < .01). The only exception is males in 1997 ($\chi^2(2) = 0.342$, p > .1).

Celebrities are shown in more comical ways than non-celebrities, while non-celebrities are generally serious in Japanese television commercials (see Figure 2). This is true for both sexes. Celebrities portrayed in a more comical way than non-celebrities is especially pronounced for males in 2007 ($\chi^2(1) = 12.149$, p < .001), but also for males ($\chi^2(1) = 4.832$, p < .05) and females ($\chi^2(1) = 8.427$, p < .05) in

1997. This difference is, however, less pronounced and not statistically significant for females in 2007 ($\chi^2(1) = 3.285$, p > .05).
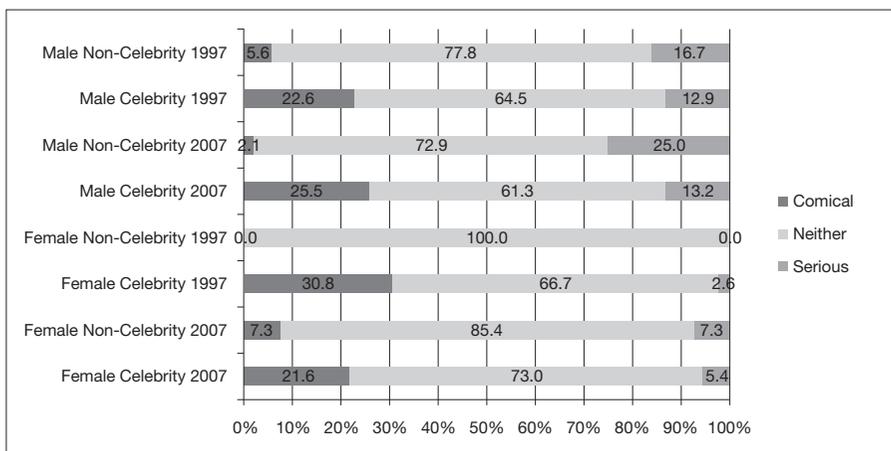

Figure 2: Comical versus Serious Portrayals

As Figure 3 shows, celebrities are clearly shown as more active than non-celebrities. This is true for celebrities of both sexes.
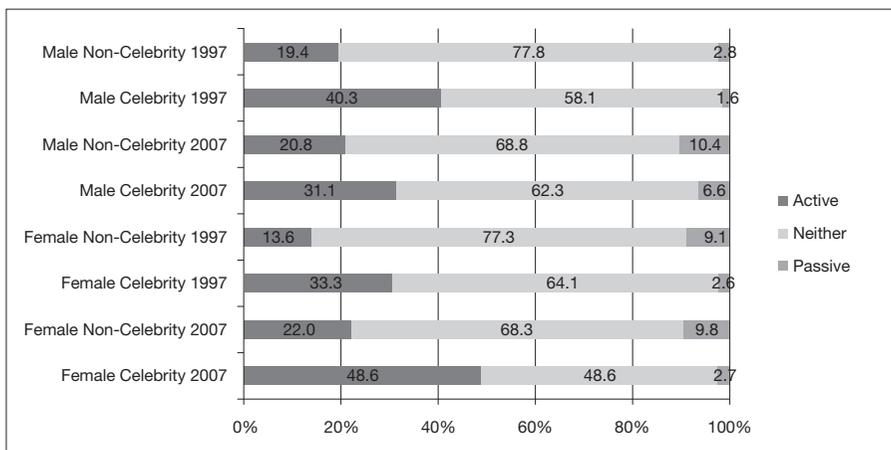

Figure 3: Active versus Passive Portrayals

More celebrities than non-celebrities being shown as active is especially pronounced for males in 1997 ($\chi^2(1) = 4.515$, p < .05) and females in 2007 ($\chi^2(1) = 6.125$, p < .05), and less pronounced for females in 1997 ($\chi^2(1) = 2.820$, p > .05) and males in 2007 ($\chi^2(1) = 1.741$, p > .1).

Product Categories

Are there are any differences in the product categories that celebrities and non-celebrities advertise (see Table 3)? Most product categories show no significant statistical difference between non-celebrities and celebrities. Only one product category, cosmetics/toiletries, shows a surprising difference, being dominated by older non-celebrities (1997: $\chi^2(1) = 9.613$, p < .01; 2007: $\chi^2(1) = 17.894$, p < .001). There were also some significant differences within only one of the two years, such as service/leisure for 1997 ($\chi^2(1) = 6.302$, p < .05; 2007: $\chi^2(1) = 0.059$, p > .1).

Table 3: Product Categories featuring Older Celebrities and Non-Celebrities

	1997		2007	
	Older Non-Celebrities n (%)	Older Celebrities n (%)	Older Non-Celebrities n (%)	Older Celebrities n (%)
Foods / Beverages	9 (18.8)	23 (25.0)	14 (17.3)	34 (26.6)
Pharmaceuticals / Medical Supply	0 (0.0)	15 (16.3)	5 (6.2)	3 (2.3)
Cosmetics / Toiletries	12 (25.0)	6 (6.5)	21 (25.9)	7 (5.5)
Apparel / Fashion, Accessories / Personal Items	1 (2.1)	4 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (3.9)
Publications	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.5)	8 (6.3)
Precision Instruments / Office Supplies	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (2.3)
Home Electric Appliances / AV Equipment	4 (8.3)	4 (4.3)	1 (1.2)	8 (6.3)
Automobiles / Related Products	2 (4.2)	1 (1.1)	3 (3.7)	5 (3.9)
Household Products	4 (8.3)	3 (3.3)	1 (1.2)	6 (4.7)
Real Estate / Housing	3 (6.3)	7 (7.6)	5 (6.2)	9 (7.0)
Distribution / Retailing	9 (18.8)	4 (4.3)	10 (12.3)	11 (8.6)
Finance / Insurance	2 (4.2)	4 (4.3)	7 (8.6)	10 (7.8)
Services / Leisure	1 (2.1)	15 (16.3)	8 (9.9)	14 (10.9)
Others	1 (2.1)	4 (4.3)	4 (4.9)	5 (3.9)
Total	48 (100)	92 (100)	81 (100)	128 (100)

There were almost no significant differences between celebrities and non-celebrities for different product categories. Overall, however, chi-square tests reveal a significant difference between product categories advertised by celebrities and those advertised by non-celebrities (for 1997: $\chi^2(13) = 35.299$, p < .05; for 2007: $\chi^2(13) = 31.437$, p < .05).

Discussion

The results section demonstrated that older celebrities play a major role in Japanese television advertising. We found that of all commercials with people, 62.0% featured celebrities in 1997 and 67.4% in 2007 (Hagiwara et al. 2009). The numbers for older celebrities were very similar, accounting for 65.7% in 1997 and 61.2% in 2007. Comparing these two percentages, one can see a slight decline of celebrities in commercials with older people, possibly significant since it occurs within a general trend towards an increased usage of celebrities overall. This decrease, however, is not connected with a real numerical decrease of older celebrities (n=92 for 1997; n=128 for 2007), but with the increase of older people in general. This data shows that not only celebrities in general but also older celebrities play an important role in Japanese television advertising. Older celebrities play an important role beyond Japan, as well. Higgs & Milner (2006) found a high percentage of older people in commercials to be celebrities (46%) in Australia, while celebrities accounted for only 9% of people younger than 50 years. In contrast, Hajjar (1997) found that celebrities accounted for only 5% of older people in U.S. commercials.

The high number of older celebrities in Japanese commercials leads, not surprisingly, to multiple product endorsements for a single celebrity.[13] Multiple product endorsement is a trend that has already been mentioned in previous literature on Japan (Lee, Choi, & Tsai 2007) as well as on Korea (Choi, Lee, & Kim 2005). A study examined the same phenomenon in the U.S, but there it was claimed to have negative effects (Tripp, Jensen, & Carlson 1994). Western studies have claimed multiple endorsements to be less effective, but the popularity of this tactic in Japan might be connected either with cultural differences or the fact that advertisers consciously use one of the few highly popular celebrities, knowing that there might be some negative effects. A good example of a celebrity doing multiple product endorsements is Yoshinaga Sayuri. She appeared in five different commercials for three companies (Sharp, Japan Railways, Kagome) during our 2007 sample. In a survey she was ranked the 5th most liked celebrity in Japan. Among males in their 50s and 60s, and females in their 60s, she was even ranked the most popular (she was ranked second among females in their 50s). When the public was asked about which celebrities they admire for their way of living, she was ranked second among all age groups. As for which celebrity would be most likely to inspire interest in a product, she was ranked first (Nikkei Shōhi Mining 2008). She has been popular since the 1960s, when her numerous (male) fans were given their own name ("Sayurists"), and her appeal has apparently still not faded. Regarded as the personification of purity and innocence, even nowadays she appears mainly in movies and rarely on television, another possible reason why she has been able to maintain her star image.

One could argue that the high usage of older celebrities is a good strategy to target older consumers. The "similarity" from the TEARS model clearly applies (Shimp 2010). Advertising agencies also report that using older people in commercials lends a higher degree of credibility (Greco 1988), another important possible effect. The big difference between older non-celebrities and celebrities, however, might be that younger people also like older celebrities (Nikkei Shōhi Mining 2008). For celebrities, age plays less of a role than for non-celebrities. They have achieved something in life, something that younger and older people can relate to and respect. It is no coincidence that Japanese advertising agencies told us in interviews that they use only older celebrities who are still professionally active.

In terms of differences between celebrities and non-celebrities, we can see that in 1997 both males and females in commercials were more often celebrities than not (male 50-64: 46 [60.5%] vs. 30 [39.5%] commercials; male 65+: 14 [63.6%] vs. 8 [36.4%] commercials; female 50-64: 31 [73.8%] vs. 11 [26.2%] commercials; female 65+: 10 [55.6%] vs. 8 [44.4%] commercials). In 2007, this was not the case for females aged 50–64 (non-celebrities: 36 [57.1%] commercials; celebrities: 27 [42.9%] commercials) and for females over 65 (non-celebrities: 7 commercials [50%], celebrities: 7 commercials [50%]). The data suggests that the main reason for the increase of older people in Japanese television advertising is the increased usage of older male celebrities in the 50–64 age segment, who appear in 88 commercials in 2007 (only in 46 in 1997), as well as the increase of older non-celebrity females in the 50-64 age segment, from appearances in 11 commercials in 1997 to 35 in 2007. In short, in 2007 being an older male most often means being a celebrity in the 50-64 age segment, while being an older female means being a non-celebrity of the same age group.

The celebrities used most frequently are actors, singers and musicians; athletes are used relatively little. This is similar to previous findings on Japan (Lee, Choi, & Tsai 2007) and Korea (Choi, Lee, & Kim 2005). This is rather different from findings from the United States, however, where Choi, Lee and Kim (2005) found a comparatively high number of celebrities in commercials to be athletes (22.6%). While we found that celebrities mostly appear as themselves, this contrasts with a previous study on the U.S. and Korea, where 54% of celebrities portrayed themselves in the former country, and only 38% in the latter (Choi, Lee, & Kim 2005). In Japan, however, more than half of the celebrities appeared as themselves (Lee, Choi, & Tsai 2007).

That celebrities were shown in more favorable ways than non-celebrities is not surprising. Celebrities are used in commercials because of their popularity and likability; it is these traits that will lead consumers to buy the product, a fact explained by the source attractiveness and source credibility models. Although comical depictions of older people are often associated with unfavorable depictions (Simcock & Sudbury 2006), this was not necessarily the case for celebrities, since

many of them are known to be comedians in the first place, and so it is only natural that they are shown in more comical ways than non-celebrities. That celebrities were also shown as more active than non-celebrities refers to their dynamic lives, a lifestyle not shared by all older people. Of course, only older celebrities who are still professionally active appear in Japanese advertisements. This might be another reason why a relatively low number of former athletes appear in television commercials.

The product category results showed few significant differences between celebrities and non-celebrities, though results were rather mixed. Only the cosmetics/toiletries product category displayed a significant difference for both years, and showed a clear trend that these products are being promoted by more non-celebrities. This is a rather surprising finding, since cosmetics/toiletries are often advertised by celebrities (Choi, Lee & Kim 2005).

Conclusion

This article has provided insight into a new research area: older celebrities in Japanese television advertising. What we have found is that celebrities are mostly actors/singers/musicians, playing themselves rather than other roles; they increasingly appear alone. Being an older celebrity means being between 50 and 64 years of age and most probably male, the category that also most strongly increased between 1997 and 2007. Being an older female means being a non-celebrity in the age group 50-64. The portrayal of older celebrities was more favorable, comical and active than those of non-celebrities. Last but not least, there was a significant difference in increase in non-celebrities promoting cosmetics/toiletries.

Aging populations in television commercials are a phenomenon not only in Japan; several countries show a trend toward a higher number of celebrities as well (Hsu & McDonald 2002). As a result, the question is an important one that should be further investigated. More research is required to better understand how older celebrities, as compared to non-celebrities, influence people's purchase decisions, and how to best match types of older celebrities with product types. Further investigation of advertising agencies' attitudes and strategies is also required. How do Japanese advertising agencies choose celebrities, and how much does the intersection between advertising agencies and the media and entertainment industry influence these choices? These and other questions are at the core of future research on older celebrities in advertising.

NOTES

1. In accordance with Japanese advertising agency conventions (Dentsū Senior Project 2007; Hakuhōdō Elder Business Suishinshitsu 2006), we define "older" celebrities/people as 50 years and above (50+).

2. This study is part of a larger research project on older people in Japanese television advertising that includes: (a) a content analysis of television advertisements from 1997 and 2007, (b) a survey among advertising agencies, and (c) a survey among consumers. We would like to thank the Yoshida Hideo Memorial Foundation for supporting this project.

3. For an interesting case of meaning transfer between French actress Catherine Deneuve and the perfume Chanel No. 5, see Williamson (1978).

4. There is some literature that offers a more practical approach, including suggestions of how advertisers should decide on using celebrities (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg 2001; Miciak & Shanklin 1994; Shimp 2010). A review of these works is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

5. For a detailed overview of possible reasons for the high celebrity usage in Japanese advertising, see Praet (2001).

6. Japanese people often follow the details of celebrities' lives over many years. Several celebrities also act as spokesperson for the same product for a very long time. For example, Iwashita Shima has appeared in advertisements for the cosmetic company Menard since 1972. Now she advertises products for older people for this same company. Other examples include Okae Kumiko, who has appeared in advertisements for Zenyakukōgyō since 1975; Kiki Kirin, who has acted as a spokesperson for Fuji Film since 1978; Takeda Tetsuya, who has appeared in advertisements for Tōyō Suisan since 1978 and Wada Akiko, who has acted as a spokesperson for Nagatanien since 1981 (Senden Kaigi 2008). As a result, some of the celebrities in our sample from 1997 also appear in our sample from 2007. Although some of these celebrities were not yet over 50 years of age in 1997, they had become 50 years of age or older by 2007 (e.g., Tokoro George appeared nine times in 1997 and three times in 2007). This long-term connection between celebrities and products can also be read as a symptom of collectivistic cultures. Indeed, Hofstede (2001) describes East Asian cultures in the context of this kind of long-term orientation.

7. Some of the reasons stated here were reconfirmed by Japan advertising expert John McCreery (e-mail communication, November 11, 2009).

8. We used the same sample in another article (Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, & Arima 2009b), where we contrast commercials featuring older males with commercials featuring older females.

9. We would like to thank Murayama Yoh and Shiki Yuko for helping with the coding of the commercials.

10. Only two coding categories proved to have low reliability. These were active-passive (69.7% in 1997; 79.9% in 2007) and comical-serious (65.6% for 1997). Nevertheless, we have not excluded these data, because commercials for which there existed a disparity in coding were discussed by the coders to establish the final data set.

11. Actors, singers and musicians were grouped together, since these categories often overlap in Japan, where many celebrities/*tarento* work as singers and actors.

12. Here and in the following, most of the portrayals were coded as "neither," making it impossible to categorize them clearly.

13. For example, in 1997 many celebrities appeared in several commercials, endorsing more than one product. 9 times: Mita Yoshiko; 5 times: Shimakura Chiyoko, Takada Junji; 4 times: Fujioka Takuya, Kiki Kirin; 3 times: Sugawara Bunta, Nakamura Tamao, Nagashima Shigeo; 2 times: Takasaki Ichirō, Yamaoka Hisano, Fujita Makoto, Kandagawa Toshirō, Kusabue Mitsuko, and Ōno Shigehisa. In 2007, 5 times: Yoshinaga Sayuri; 4 times: Nishida Toshiyuki, Yakusho Kōji, Watari Tetsuya, Wada Akiko; 3 times: Kiki Kirin, Tokoro George, LaSalle Ishii, Ogawa Sawako, Hoshino Senichi, Nakajima Kaori; 2 times: Mino Monta, Ayado Chie, Katsura Sanshi, Miyake Yūji, Izumiya Shigeru, Shimakura Chiyoko, and Kitaōji Kinya.

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