

The Use of Older Models in Japanese TV Advertising: Practitioner Perspective vs. Consumer Opinions

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Introduction

Given the current demographic development in the form of aging populations in many countries around the globe (Kohlbacher and Herstatt 2011), it is an important question in the marketing context how and with which models older people are addressed adequately. Indeed, research has shown that the way older television viewers perceive their representation by companies in their advertisements has an impact on both purchase intentions and company image (Festervand and Lumpkin 1985; Kolbe and Burnett 1992). Therefore, choosing the right models and portraying them appropriately are crucial tasks in marketing management and advertising creation (Kohlbacher et al. 2010; Prieler et al. 2011). However, despite its obvious importance, previous research on the perceptions of advertising practitioners about the use of older models in advertising as well as empirical research on the consumer response to the portrayal of older people is scarce. A thorough review of the literature on advertising practitioners' perception revealed that there are only two empirical studies that have been reported to date: The first one is a study conducted by Greco (1988, 1989) in the US and its replication in the UK by Szmigin and Carrigan (2000). Studies on the consumer response to the portrayal of older people are also scarce, especially regarding TV commercials. Those studies that do exist have mostly been conducted about 20-25 years ago (e.g. Festervand and Lumpkin 1985; Kolbe and Burnett 1992; Langmeyer 1984) and there is no single study available from Japan, the most mature society and market in the world, revealing an outstanding gap in the literature.

This small number of studies and the fact that they have been conducted a long time ago, along with the rising importance of demographic changes, show the urgent need for further empirical research. Besides, so far, no research has looked at both practitioner perspective and consumer opinion together. This article presents results from a survey of advertising practitioners as well as

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consumers in Japan.

The first study focuses on the opinions of advertising practitioners about the communication objectives (in terms of awareness, comprehension, attitude and persuasion) for older spokespersons (age 65 and older), their general views on older models in advertising and the effectiveness of older models by product category. The second study focuses on the consumers' views of the portrayal of older people in television advertisements and their planned actions based on these perceptions and opinions. Comparing the two perspectives will help to gain a better understanding of how older models should be used in advertising, both in terms of advertising efficiency and corporate social responsibility.

Literature Review

Previous research has investigated the portrayal and representation of older people in mass media, and there is a particularly strong body of literature focusing on advertising, both magazine (Ursic et al. 1986; Zhou and Chen 1992) and TV (Kessler et al. 2010; Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Swayne and Greco 1987). The overarching findings of these studies are a consistent and significant underrepresentation of older people in advertising and an even more strongly pronounced underrepresentation of older women (Prieler et al. 2011), while the results on the general portrayal of older models are rather mixed (Simcock and Sudbury 2006). Overall, neutral and positive portrayals seem to prevail (e.g. Miller et al. 2004; Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Swayne and Greco 1987), but there are also incidents of negative portrayal (see Gunter 1998 for a review of the literature). Besides, research also showed that older models appear in stereotypical roles and promote a circumscribed, stereotyped set of products and services (e.g. Langmeyer 1993; Lee et al. 2007; Prieler et al. 2009). It is therefore not surprising that marketing practitioners have been criticized for focusing too much on younger age segments, neglecting older consumers and considering them only for such items as denture cleansers, laxatives, arthritic remedies, and other products that are clearly designed to relieve the aches and pains of old age (e.g. Bartos 1980; Carrigan and Szmigin 1999).

Perceptions of Advertising Practitioners about the Use of Older Models

There are only two empirical studies on the perceptions of advertising practitioners about the use of older models in advertising that have been reported to date: The first one is a study conducted by Greco (1988, 1989) in the US and the second one is its replication in the UK by Szmigin and Carrigan (2000). Greco (1988) found that in general, advertising executives feel that it is possible for

older spokespersons to get an audience's attention and help gain awareness for new products, while there is generally less agreement that an older spokesperson enhances message comprehension. Advertising practitioners further believed that older spokespersons can aid in persuasion and serve to enhance source credibility, while only a smaller number of them felt that older spokespersons help to gain action or the purchase of the product. In terms of product categories, advertising practitioners most often recommended older spokespersons for health and medicines if the target audience was also older consumers. While older spokespersons were also deemed appropriate for travel and vacations, financial services, insurance, rental property, hotels, and food, this was not the case for clothing, cosmetics, and shampoo (Greco 1988, 1989). Finally, Greco's (1988) respondents agreed that stereotyping of older characters in advertising occurs, but most of them did not think that older consumers learn how to behave from the portrayals of older models in advertising or that they serve as role models for older audiences.

In their replication in the UK, Szmigin and Carrigan (2000) found that advertising executives were cautious about recommending the use of older models in their advertising executions, but agreed that the frequency of use of older people as central figures would increase during the next couple of years. In terms of product categories, health and medicine and financial services were the only two categories, for which the majority of the respondents recommended to use older models in their advertisements as central figures. They concluded that part of the explanation for the lack of representation of older people in advertising had less to do with their "unsuitability" and more to do with ingrained stereotypical prejudice on the part of many advertisers. Finally, Szmigin and Carrigan's research also revealed that advertisers are aware of the problem of stereotyping older characters in advertising and that older people are not viewed as aspirational.

Consumer Opinions on the Portrayal of Older People in TV Commercials

One of the earliest empirical studies that included questions on the perception of the portrayal of older models in TV advertising was Davis' (1971) survey of retired Americans in 1969. While 44.6 per cent of the respondents said that the image of older persons was presented factually and honestly on television, 48.7 per cent were of the opinion that this was not the case for older persons in commercials. In Schreiber and Boyd's (1980) US sample, the majority of the respondents reported the elderly in TV commercials to be either "active and healthy" or "likeable", while 31 per cent noted that the elderly were not often shown in commercials.

Festervand and Lumpkin (1985) found "pronounced disenchantment" expressed by their older respondents towards their portrayal in advertisements and

a strong desire for a more positive portrayal of older models in advertisements in the future. They further showed that the negative portrayal of older characters in advertisements can influence attitudes towards a company and subsequent purchasing decisions. Indeed, the majority of the respondents indicated that they would discontinue to use a product if the advertisement promoting it was offensive, even though this would not mean that they necessarily also discontinued the use of other products from the same company; besides, the probability of such boycott behavior was strongly reduced if the product offered attractive benefits. Their findings indicate that older consumers generally do not have a positive attitude toward advertising, with the primary reason being a perceived lack of credibility and the inaccurate portrayal of older characters in advertisements. This was also confirmed in a replication and extension by Kolbe and Burnett (1992). Overall, it seems obvious that older consumers are aware of unfavorable depictions of older people in advertising and often hold a negative attitude toward this kind of portrayal. This negative attitude can even lead to product or company boycotts, with varying degrees of intensity.

Study 1: Advertising Agency Survey

Method

We conducted a large sample survey of advertising practitioners (N=185) in Japan in July and August 2009 (see also Kohlbacher et al. 2010). We used the online database of the widely read professional advertising magazine *Senden Kaigi* in June 2009 to obtain the names and contact details of all advertising agencies with more than 10 employees in the four categories 1) Full service, 2) Mass media, 3) In-house and 4) Foreign-owned.

Because the database only provided the addresses and phone numbers, but no individual names, we had a research assistant call each of the 514 advertising agencies individually, explain about the purpose of our research and ask for participation in the survey. For each of the 354 companies that accepted we asked for two people per agency – generally, the managers in charge of strategic planning and those in ad creation – to participate in the survey. In some agencies, especially smaller ones, one and the same person was responsible for both planning and creation. So, depending on the agency, we were given the names of one or two managers to address the survey to. A total of 433 questionnaires were sent out to the managers in July 2009. As an incentive, we included a hard copy of an article we had recently published in Japanese language (Hagiwara et al. 2009). A total of 185 questionnaires were returned for an effective response rate of 42.7 per cent. Respondents were aged between 23 and 66 years ($M=46.87$, $SD=10.31$),

predominantly male (86.9 per cent) and had an average of 21.28 years (Min=1, Max=44, Mdn=22) of experience working in the advertising industry.

The survey instrument was created in a series of steps following a systematic review of the literature. A pretest with managers in the mature market divisions of the two largest Japanese advertising agencies and managers at the research department of a large foreign agency’s Japan office were conducted. The feedback from the pretest was intensively discussed and the questionnaire draft amended accordingly. Most of the questionnaire items and scales were adapted from Greco (1988, 1989) and the replication by Szmigin and Carrigan (2000). They focused on the opinions of advertising practitioners about the communication objectives for older spokespersons, their general views on older models in advertising and the effectiveness of older models by product category. In line with Greco’s (1988, 1989) study and the definition of older people (*kōreisha*) in Japan, older models were defined as those age 65 and older.

Results

We first looked at the opinions of advertising practitioners about the communication objectives for older spokespersons. Table 1 presents the percentages of those who agreed or strongly agreed to each attitudinal statement in comparison to the percentages of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 1: Opinions about communication objectives for older spokespersons

Statements	Older Model = 65plus years	
	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
Mood with elderly spokespersons aids persuasion.	2.16	75.68
Elderly spokespersons help enhance source credibility.	4.32	62.70
Elderly spokespersons get the audience’s attention.	5.43	40.76
Elderly spokespersons are effective at gaining comprehension.	4.92	40.44
Elderly spokespersons are effective for gaining intention to purchase.	5.95	33.51
Elderly spokespersons are as effective as nonelderly for simple messages.	13.59	32.61
Elderly spokespersons are as effective as nonelderly for complex messages.	15.14	29.19
Elderly spokespersons are effective in persuading audiences to switch brands.	11.96	25.54
Elderly spokespersons are effective for gaining purchase.	8.70	22.28
Elderly spokespersons help gain awareness of new products.	9.24	19.57

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

While these percentages do not suggest that the opinions of advertising practitioners about the communication objectives for older spokespersons are overly positive, they are at least not negative. It seems that the advertising practitioners tended to agree more strongly with rather abstract statements, such as those concerning mood, source credibility, audience's attention, and comprehension, than with more concrete ones, such as those concerning intention to purchase, switching brands, purchase, and awareness of new products. Note that the two statements regarding simple and complex messages asked the respondents to compare older and non-older spokespersons and were thus also on a rather concrete level.

Next, we looked at the advertising practitioners' general views on older models in advertising (Table 2). The highest agreement was found for the statement that the number of older models is going to increase over the next five years. This finding clearly supports the idea that based on the demographic changes in Japan, a higher number of older people will be shown during the next years. An interesting finding is that while almost 60 per cent agree that advertising portrays older models in a positive manner, still 40 per cent admit that stereotyping of older people occurs in advertising. This may be explained by the fact that not all stereotyping of older people is necessarily negative and it may well be the case that both statements hold true at the same time. The fact that almost 45 per cent of the advertising practitioners agree that pretesting ads with older models is more important than

Table 2: General views on older models in advertising

Statements	Older Model = 65plus years	
	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
The amount of older models will increase during the next five years.	5.41	61.08
Advertising today portrays the elderly in a positive manner.	8.11	58.92
Pretesting ads containing the elderly is more important than pretesting ads with younger characters.	15.76	44.57
Stereotyping of elderly characters occurs in advertising.	15.76	40.76
Over the past five years, there has been increased client interest in including elderly characters in their advertising.	11.35	32.97
Elderly persons "learn" how to behave from the portrayals of elderly characters seen in advertising.	23.24	30.81
More elderly persons should be used in advertising.	5.41	28.11
There are greater risks of negative effects on a general audience when elderly spokespersons are used.	28.65	24.86
Elderly spokespersons should be used in the advertising of products targeted to general audiences.	22.28	9.78
Advertising has little impact on elderly persons' buying behavior.	61.96	9.24

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

with younger models shows that using older models may be a delicate and difficult issue for advertisers. This is corroborated by the fact that still almost one quarter of the respondents agree that there are greater risks of negative effects on a general audience when older spokespersons are used and that less than 10 per cent think that older spokespersons should be used in the advertising of products targeted at general audiences. Finally, more than 60 per cent of advertising practitioners disagree with the statement that advertising has little impact on older people’s buying behavior, which clearly shows that they are convinced of the importance of their work. Overall, the results are not perfectly conclusive, but in general the opinions seem to be neither overly positive nor negative, but neutral.

Finally, we looked at the advertising practitioners’ perceptions about the effectiveness of older models by product category. Figure 1 shows the responses to the effectiveness of older models by product category for both the case of older people as target group and for the case of a general audience as target group. Overall the recommendation rate for using older models is much higher in the case of an older audience than in the case of a general, non-older audience. The recommendation rate is particularly high for certain product categories in the case of an older audience, while this difference is not as strongly pronounced in the case of a general target audience. Advertising practitioners’ perceived effectiveness of older models by product category is highest for health-related products if the

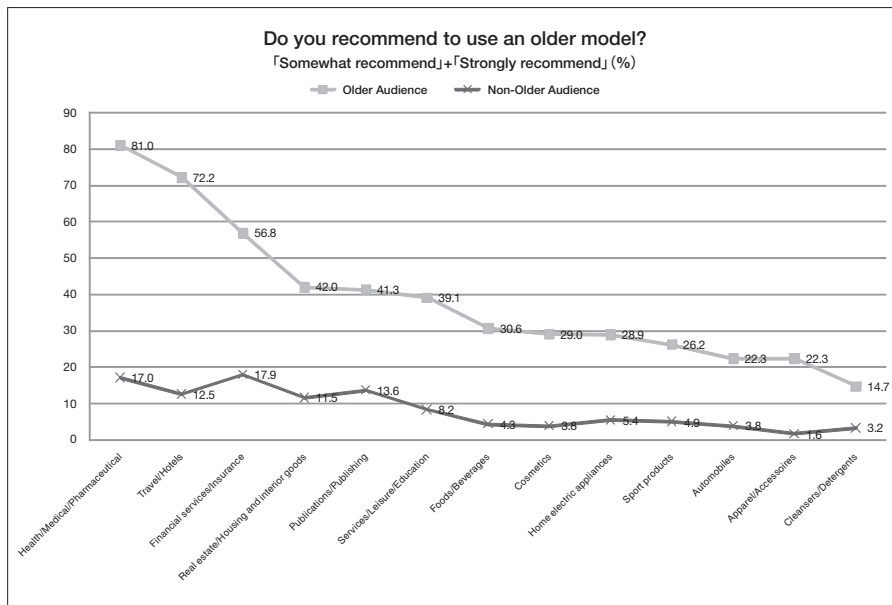


Figure 1: Effectiveness of older models by product category

target group is older people, but if the target group is a general audience then the perceived effectiveness is highest for financial services/insurance.

Study 2: Consumer Survey

Method

We contracted Cross Marketing, a Japanese professional marketing research company experienced in academic research to carry out a large sample survey of Japanese consumers in November 2009. The survey was conducted online using the company's regular consumer panel. Members of the panel were quota sampled based on age and gender in accordance with their actual distribution in the Japanese population through a two-stage sampling process. A total of 344 fully completed questionnaires (no missing values) from consumers aged 65 and older ($M=71.15$ years, $SD=3.47$) were obtained within less than 24 hours on November 28, 2009. The items on the portrayal of older people used the Japanese term "kōreisha" and defined it as 65 years and older as is common in Japan.

The survey instrument was prepared in a series of steps following a systematic review of the literature and a pretest with 50 Japanese people of various age groups was conducted. The feedback from the pretest was intensively discussed and the questionnaire draft amended accordingly.

The attitudes of the respondents toward the portrayal of older people in TV commercials were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A total of 20 statements dealing with the portrayal of older people in advertising were adapted from various sources, including Greco (1988, 1989), Szmigin and Carrigan (2000), and Festervand and Lumpkin (1985). Some of these items had also been employed by Langmeyer (1984) and Kolbe and Burnett (1992). They had originally been adapted from similar studies which examined women's attitudes toward advertising and role portrayals (Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia 1977; Sciglimpaglia et al. 1979). These 20 items could be roughly categorized into three different groups: 1) Portrayal of older people in TV advertising, 2) General views on older people in TV advertising and 3) Product groups and older people in TV advertising.

Results

We first looked at the opinions on the portrayal of older people in TV advertisements. Table 3 presents the percentages of those who agree or strongly agree to each attitudinal statement in comparison to the percentages of those who disagree or strongly disagree.

Table 3: Opinions on the portrayal of older people in TV advertising

Statements	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
Elderly people in TV advertisements seem to be happier than they are in reality.	7.85	49.42
TV ads which I see do not show the elderly as they really are.	8.14	43.90
Stereotyping of elderly characters occurs in advertising.	9.88	34.59
TV advertisements in general suggest the elderly as physically limited.	20.35	33.43
I believe that TV advertising in general treats the elderly as socially inactive and unproductive.	15.99	31.40
Many of the TV advertisements I see portray the elderly person as being lonely.	25.29	24.13
TV advertisements suggest that the elderly are financially dependent on others.	23.84	19.77
I find the portrayal of the elderly in TV advertisements to be insulting.	41.28	13.08

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

Looking at the percentages, the opinions on how older people are depicted in TV advertising are not overly negative. Note, however, that they are not positive, either. Almost 50 per cent agree, for example, that older people in TV advertisements seem to be happier than they are in reality and about one third agree that TV advertisements in general suggest the elderly as physically limited and almost as many think that TV advertising in general treats the elderly as socially inactive and unproductive. Similarly, almost one quarter think that many of the TV advertisements they see portray the elderly person as being lonely, even though about the same number of respondents disagreed with this statement. The case is similar for the statement that TV advertisements suggest that the elderly are financially dependent on others.

Our older respondents are also of the opinion that older people in TV advertising are not shown as they really are and that they are stereotyped. However, only 13 per cent think of the portrayal of older people as insulting, confirming the impression that while the opinions are not really good, they are not very bad, either.

Next, we looked at older consumers' general views on older models in advertising (Table 4). The highest agreement was achieved for the statement that the number of older people in advertising is going to increase, which shows that people are aware of the demographic changes. However, while only about one quarter of the respondents say they wanted more older people be shown in advertising in the future, almost 50 per cent of the respondents reveal that they would not mind at all if older people were not shown in advertising. So, we can

Table 4: Older consumers' general views on older models in advertising

Statements	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
The amount of older models will increase during the next five years.	6.10	56.10
I would not mind at all if elderly people were not shown in advertising.	8.43	48.26
I feel that future advertisements should portray the elderly in a more positive manner.	5.23	42.73
More elderly people should be used in advertising in the future.	10.76	25.87
Elderly persons "learn" how to behave from the portrayals of elderly characters seen in advertising.	27.62	20.93
Advertising has little impact on elderly persons' buying behavior.	32.85	19.77
Older people prefer younger models in advertisements.	20.64	19.19
Overall, I do not believe that the portrayal of elderly in TV advertising is changing for the better.	20.35	13.95

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

observe here a clear difference between the actual expectations of consumers and their wishes. This is rather surprising regarding the fact that we have surveyed people 65 years or older. What older people, however, wish is with more than 40 per cent that advertisements should portray them in a more positive manner. But only about 20 per cent of them think that the portrayal of older people in TV advertising was changing for the better, indicating that they do not have much hope for the situation to improve.

Next, we looked at the consumers' views on which product categories have a strongly pronounced representation of older models (Table 5).

Table 5: Older consumers' general views on product categories using older models

Statements	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
In general, most TV advertisements in which the elderly appear are for medicines and health-related products.	3.78	77.33
Most TV advertisements in which the elderly appear are for finance and insurance related products.	12.79	45.06
Most TV advertisements in which elderly appear are for food and beverages.	19.77	28.49

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

More than 3 quarters of the respondents agree that most TV advertisements in which the elderly appear are for medicines and health-related products and about

45 per cent agree that most TV advertisements in which the elderly appear are for finance and insurance related products. As for the product category food and beverages, which was reported to be the strongest product category in ads with older people (Prieler et al. 2009, 2011), less than 30 per cent agree that most TV advertisements in which older people appear are for them.

Finally, we looked at consumers' reactions and planned actions to the perceived negative portrayal of older people in TV advertising (Table 6). More than 45 per cent believe that how the elderly are portrayed in advertising merely reflects the general attitude of that company toward the elderly's place in society, an opinion that may have a strong impact on company image. The level of agreement with the next three statements shows that consumers are apparently willing to boycott products and companies if they perceive their advertising to be offensive or insulting to older people. This reveals that the opinions and views held by consumers about the way older people are portrayed in advertising will not only have an impact on their attitudes but also on their actual behavior, i.e. their consumption.

Table 6: Reactions and planned actions to negative portrayal

Statements	% DA/SDA	% AG/SAG
I believe that how the elderly are portrayed in advertising merely reflects the general attitude of that company toward the elderly's place in society.	6.40	45.64
If a new product is introduced with advertisements that portray elderly people offensively, I would not buy the product even if it offered benefits I found attractive.	11.63	43.60
If I see an offensive ad for a product, I will not continue to purchase other products from the same company, even if I am a user of those products.	10.47	41.57
If a product or service I use adopts an advertising campaign which portrays the elderly offensively, I will discontinue using it.	15.99	30.23

Note: DA = disagree, SDA = strongly disagree, AG = agree, SAG = strongly agree

General Discussion

Communication Objectives for Older Spokespersons and Consumer Opinions on the Portrayal of Older People in TV Advertising

Advertising practitioners in Japan do not seem to hold negative opinions about the communication objectives for older spokespersons (cf. also Kohlbacher et al. 2010). When interpreting the results, it is however important to bear in mind that in

general, Japanese TV commercials feature a very high percentage of celebrities and this is also true for older models (Prieler et al. 2010). Our pretest and interviews with advertising agencies revealed that celebrity models and non-celebrity models are perceived and treated very differently by both advertising practitioners and the audience. This is also one of the limitations of our research and future studies will have to control for this distinction.

The highest agreement was achieved for the item “Mood with elderly spokespersons aids persuasion” and the second highest for “Elderly spokespersons help enhance source credibility”. Especially the second one is in line with research results from experimental studies on the effectiveness of older models in advertising (Bristol 1996; Milliman and Erffmeyer 1990). Maybe advertising practitioners share the opinions of Bristol (1996) who argues that the perceptions of lack of credibility of a younger endorser may reflect a belief in the “inexperience of youth” and that seniors may also lack trust in the opinions of the younger generation. Our results are also more or less in line with Greco’s (1988), while Szmigin and Carrigan (2000) had found more negative opinions. However, a direct comparison has to be interpreted cautiously, given that these studies were conducted many years ago in different countries and business environments. Looking at these results from a Japanese perspective, one could also interpret them as older people being highly respected (Palmore and Maeda 1985). Both “aiding persuasion” as well as “source credibility” could be read in this direction and might be a reason why older people in Japan are even more useful for doing this than in other countries.

Results from the consumer survey reveal that consumers perceive some of the depictions of older people in TV commercials as problematic. They think that the older models look happier than they are in reality, that they are not shown as they really are and that they are stereotyped. Even worse, almost one third think that TV advertisements in general suggest the elderly as physically limited, and more than 30 per cent feel that TV advertising in general treats the elderly as socially inactive and unproductive. It is difficult to imagine that a company’s intended communication objectives for older spokespersons can really be achieved through these kinds of stereotypical or even negative portrayals. Indeed, our findings also show that consumers may be willing to boycott certain products or companies if they perceived their advertisements to be offensive or insulting towards older people. This is in line with previous research in other countries, where consumers also indicated a propensity to boycott certain products or companies if the advertisement promoting it was offensive (Festervand and Lumpkin 1985; Kolbe and Burnett 1992). Finally, almost one third think that advertising has an impact on elderly persons’ buying behavior, which is in line with the views held by advertising practitioners that advertising is an important means in targeting this market segment.

General Views on Older Models in Advertising

The general views of Japanese advertising practitioners on older models in advertising are mixed, but overall neutral. Obviously, it is necessary to differentiate in greater detail and analyze and discuss each item individually. It is interesting to see for example that our respondents acknowledge that stereotyping of elderly characters occurs in advertising while at the same time they feel that advertising today portrays the elderly in a positive manner. This is quite similar to what Greco (1988) had found in the US more than 20 years ago. While, as already pointed out, consumers also agree that stereotyping exists, they cannot share the opinion that older models are portrayed in a positive way, at least they think that the portrayal should be more positive in the future. So, advertising practitioners still have to become more self-critical and there is still much to do. The fact that the majority of advertising practitioners agrees that there will be an increased interest by clients to use older models and an increase in the number of older models during the next five years underlines the importance of research on older models in advertising. Older consumers also see these developments, however, report that they would not mind at all if elderly people were not shown in advertising. As a result, it might not be so much the actual numbers that count, but rather the portrayal. That this is an important question also shows that more than 45 per cent of the respondents believe that how the elderly are portrayed in advertising merely reflects the general attitude of that company toward the elderly's place in society. This again seems to be in line with previous research that found older consumers to hold rather negative attitudes towards advertisements showing older people in an unfavorable way and towards the companies using these advertisements. It is also remarkable that about 20 per cent agreed that older people prefer younger models in advertisements and that only another 20 per cent explicitly disagree with this.

Product Categories

The findings that advertising practitioners find older spokespersons effective for the product categories health-related products and finance/insurance is in line with content analytic research on Japanese TV advertisements (Prieler et al. 2009, 2011; Yamanaka 2000) and also with the surveys by Greco (1988, 1989) in the US and Szmigin and Carrigan (2000) in the UK. It is interesting to note that the former holds true for the case of an older target group, while the latter holds true for a general audience. This is a new insight beyond what we know from content analyses, which usually only analyze the older models and rarely distinguish between target groups of advertisements (cf. also Greco 1988). Health related products being associated with older people confirms previous findings and is also in accordance with products that are stereotypically associated with older people.

In addition, it can be assumed that many health-related products are specifically targeting older people. In contrast, finance/insurances advertisements using older people for targeting a general audience points toward the increasingly important insurance sector in Japan, where showing older people in advertisements might seem appropriate for suggesting younger people their own nice future when acquiring such additional health or pension insurances. The finding that the product category hotel/travel was ranked as the second highest for an older target audience makes good sense as many companies in this industry seem to target retirees and offer special packages for them.

The results from the consumer survey are in line with the findings from the advertising agency survey and thus also with the content analytical research in terms of the product categories health-related products and finance and insurance. What differs, however, from the insights from content analysis for both the consumer and the agency survey is the fact that both groups of respondents do not really associate the product category foods and beverages with older consumers and/or older models. Even though previous research has shown that food/beverages is the strongest product category within advertisements using older people, it should not be forgotten that this product category is in general the dominant one within all advertisements and not particular for ads with older people (Prieler et al. 2009).

Conclusion

Our survey of advertising practitioners has shown that overall, older spokespersons may be effective in achieving communication objectives depending on the purposes, product category and target group (see also Kohlbacher et al. 2010). When targeting an older audience, older spokespersons may be particularly effective for the product category of health-related products; when targeting a general audience the product category is financial services/insurance. Regardless of the product group, older spokespersons may be more effective when targeting an older audience than a general audience.

Overall, the interest by companies to use older models in advertising is going to increase over the next five years and so will the amount of older models, a perception that is also shared by consumers. According to Rotfeld (1982) the reasons for greater use of older models in advertising are two-fold: First, in terms of communication strategy, the inclusion of older models might improve the advertising appeals directly or collaterally aimed at older consumers. Second, there is the critical “social responsibility” as well as ageism concern that more visible and positive use of older people in advertising could assist in providing some much needed improvements in our cultural perspectives on the old and aging (Rotfeld et

al. 1982; cf. also Carrigan and Szmigin 2000).

Our survey of older consumers and their opinions about the portrayal of older models in TV advertising reveals that they are clearly aware of a stereotypical and negative depiction of older people in advertisements. Miller et al. (2004) have suggested that “one might expect that many of the images of the elderly in advertising would be a function of marketing strategies designed to meet the needs of increasingly affluent seniors” and Robinson et al. (2003) warn that “as marketers begin to discover the potential size and spending power of the senior market segment, they should take heed to how their advertising addresses senior citizens”. Indeed, the finding of a negative influence of mass media interactions on older consumers’ orientations towards age-based marketing stimuli has been explained by the stereotyped depiction of the elderly in mass media causing older people to react adversely to such depictions (Moschis et al. 1993). Therefore, the advertising industry should be as concerned about its social esteem as with its selling effectiveness because if it “fails to address their use of older negative stereotypes, they risk alienating the rapidly growing older market and dissuading younger consumers” (Robinson et al. 2008). This seems to be especially true in the world’s most mature market of Japan. As demographic change around the globe is accelerating, these issues are about to further increase in importance and urgency (see also Kohlbacher and Herstatt 2011).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Yoshida Hideo Memorial Foundation for supporting this research. We acknowledge the contribution of Akie Arima to the project and would also like to thank Yuko Horiuchi for her help in conducting the advertising agency survey.

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