

The Limitation of “Single Stories” in the Age of Interactive Communication and Diversity

ABE Yukiko*

Introduction

A Nigerian novelist and storyteller, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, introduced “single stories” as a worldview concept in the 2009 TED Global talk, “The Danger of a Single Story.” In her talk, she describes the danger of “single stories” being told repeatedly and forming stereotypes that are perceived as the only truth. Her story made a big impact on society. As of November 26, 2020, it has more than 25 million views from around the world. The term “Single Story” has become accepted to the degree that it was introduced as an entry in a traditional Japanese dictionary, *Digital Daijisen*, by Shogakukan. Inc (n.d.).

In her TED talk, Adichie shared her stories as follows, she grew up happily in a conventional middle-class Nigerian family. However, at 19 when she studied abroad in the United States (US), she realized her American roommate felt pity for her because the roommate had a “default position image” of Africa such as wars, poverty, and HIV AIDS. The roommate was disappointed when she learned that Adichie’s favorite music was Mariah Carey because she believed that Africans loved tribal music. Adichie guessed that the “single stories” of Africa came from western literature. On the other hand, some years later, when Adichie traveled to Mexico, she realized that she herself also had “single stories” about Mexicans which she learned from the media. She was ashamed of herself for doing what she had disliked about her roommate.

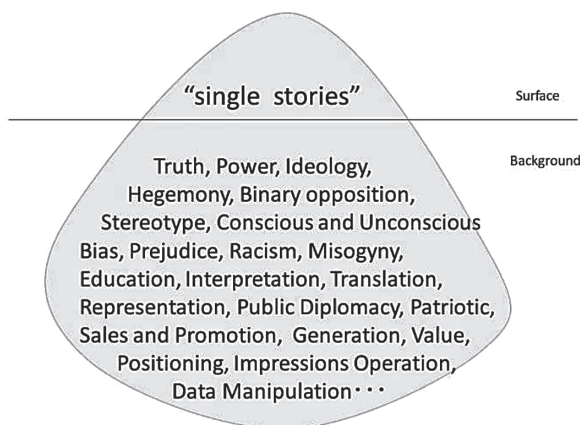
She found that there are many “single stories” which do not reflect facts and reality in the world, and that the power structure of the world creates “single stories.” She alerted listeners to the subtle way a “single story” is spread using an Igbo word, *nkali* (the concept to be greater than others). “Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of *nkali*: How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, and how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Adichie, 2009, para. 28&29).

Mass media is built on power and the public sphere. In the process of framing,

*Associate Professor, Department of English, Tokyo Woman’s Christian University, Tokyo, Japan

a number of single stories have been created and these stories have generated a lot of criticisms. The following Figure1 designed to analyze “single stories” in the media was shaped by the author. Many components including power, ideology, conscious and unconscious bias, education, and positioning create and effect “single stories.”

Figure 1: Analysis of surface and background of “single stories”



However, as society shifts to value diversity, equity, and inclusion, and interactive communication becomes more popular and common, “single stories” in the media are becoming unacceptable. This is a global trend, but “in Japanese media, where men still have majority power” (Hayashi, 2019, p.23), “single stories” are still prevalent despite the global trend to be unaccepting of a “single story.” An obvious example of how public acceptance of “single stories” is diminishing is the constant barrage of criticism on social media.

In this paper, the limitation of “single stories” in Japanese media in an age of interactive communication and diversity will be examined. The first section recounts examples of limitations of “single stories” in the media, and the power structure of society behind the “single stories.” The second examines the transformation of media and society where “single stories” have become unacceptable. The third section introduces how media should address audiences in the age of interactive communication and diversity, followed by the interpretation of the conclusion.

1. The Limitation of “Single Stories” in Media

There are many examples of the limitation of “single stories” in Japanese media.

These examples give insight to the power structure of society behind the “single stories.” Examples from the perspective of gender equality and diversity in gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/

Questioning, and others: LGBTQ+), are discussed and analyzed using contents analysis and critical discourse analysis in the following section.

1.1 The Limitation of “Single Stories” in terms of Gender

In many “single stories,” females have been described inappropriately as being weak, dependent on men, and sex objectifications. In his book, *Media, Culture and Society*, Paul Hodkinson(2017)from the University of Surrey pointed out that “although women figure prominently within media content, their role often has been secondary to that of men” (p.244). Adichie (2009) was expressing this same concept when she quoted Palestinian poet, Mourid Barghouti saying “if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, secondly” (para. 29) to introduce her “single story” idea. The portrayal of women in the media is frequently the second part of the story. Women are casted in subordinate roles, not because they cannot be in lead roles as viewers seeing only the “second half” of the story may unconsciously conclude, but because the men making casting decisions want them there.

It can be said that the traditional power imbalance between men and women in the world has been reflected in the media, and media also has contributed to creating a “single story” about the positions of men and women in society.

However, this is not society and media as they should be. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights confirmed that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights in 1948. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted in 1979 by the United Nations (UN) bans the discrimination toward women. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which the international community works eagerly and proactively to reach by the target year 2030 includes gender equality as Goal 5. Gender equality has been claimed as a priority worldwide, and practical actions for gender mainstreaming such as law and rule revision, education, and advocacy have been taken in many areas. Under pressure, society is moving toward gender equality step by step. The media may not have kept up at the same pace, but they are also changing slowly.

In this atmosphere, Japanese society and media are left far behind other countries in the recent global level of “gender equality.” Therefore, there have been many cases that illustrate the limitations of “single stories” in Japan.

Before analyzing “single stories” in the media, the recent social structure and the power balance of gender in a global context and in Japan will be examined. In business, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2019) reported that globally, female managers and leaders accounted for only 27.1% of managers and leaders worldwide in 2018. This number had slowly increased from 24.8% in 1991 (28&29); however, the Japan figure was 12% in 2018, which is almost equivalent to that of the Arab region’s figure of 11%, the lowest figure worldwide (Kawaguchi, 2020, p.72). In the field of politics, the proportion of female members in national parliaments

around the globe has increased from 11.3% in 1995 to 24.3% in January 2019 (the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019, p.2); however, Japan's female members in the House of Representative was only 9.9% and ranked 165th out of 191 countries as of January 2020 (the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2020). Japan currently still remains below the global 1995 level.

In addition, Japan placed quite low in rankings in the World Economic Forum's annual gender equality ranking. In 2019, Japan placed a record low coming in 121st out of 153 countries, the worst among the G7 major economies (World Economic Forum, 2019, p.32). Although the Japanese government had set a goal of reaching a 30% ratio of women in leadership by 2020 in 2003, their failure to meet this goal as of June 2020 caused them to restate the target date to "as early as possible by 2030" (Hori, 2020).

Movement toward gender equality in the media showed a similar distinction. A Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)¹ 2015 report found a slow but steady increase in the overall presence of women in the news. As Table 1 shows, the proportion of female reporters in the world has increased from 31% in 2000 to 37% in 2015 (GMMP, 2015a, p.48). There is no country level data in this report, however, according to the data by Nihon Shimbun Kyokai (NSK), the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association, the proportion of female reporters in newspaper and news agent companies in Japan was 17.6% in 2015. This number was up from 10.6% in 2001 (NSK, 2020). The proportion of female reporters and staffs in news sections in commercial TV companies based in Tokyo was 25.3% as of 2018 and 2019 (Japan Federation of Commercial Broadcast Workers' Union).

Table 1: Female reporters in the world. 1995-2015

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Newspaper reporter	25%	26%	29%	33%	35%
Radio reporter	n/a	28%	45%	37%	41%
TV reporter	n/a	36%	42%	44%	38%
Total	28%	31%	37%	37%	37%

Note: The data is from *the Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 Reports* (p.48.), by the GMMP, 2015. Copyright (2015a) by the GMMP

The figures that show a rise in the ratio of female reporters is that equivalent to

¹ GMMP is research and advocacy initiative to measure the pace of change in women's media representation and participation at five-year intervals since 1995. The results are based on data gathered by volunteer teams in 114 countries, who monitored 22,136 stories published, broadcast or tweeted by 2,030 distinct media houses, written or presented by 26,010 journalists and containing 45, 402 people interviewed and/or subjects of the stories (GMMP, 2015b)

a rise in women's relative presence. As seen in Table 2, women's relative presence in the news has slowly increased from 17% in 1995 to 24% in 2015 in the world (GMMP, 2015a, p.31).

Table 2: Female news subjects by medium. 1995-2015

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Newspaper	16%	17%	21%	24%	26%
Radio	15%	13%	17%	22%	21%
Television	21%	22%	22%	24%	24%
Total	17%	18%	21%	24%	24%

Note: The data is from *the Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 Reports* (p.31), by the GMMP, 2015. Copyright (2015a) by the GMMP

From these figures, we can see a slow shift toward gender equality in the media. The number of reporters, however, was not the only information in the report. It also showed that only 10% of news stories across all media featured women as the central focus in 2015 – exactly the same figure as in 2000 (GMMP, 2015a, p.1). The report also acknowledged that the overwhelmingly male composition of the newsroom impacts decision regarding how news is selected and reported, and the need for women's representation in editorial decision-making positions is evident from these figure (GMMP, 2015a, p.46&47).

A study on women's leadership in the news media by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) revealed figures about leadership positions in the media. The study was conducted with samples of 200 major online and offline news outlets in ten different markets across four continents as of February 2020. According to the survey, only 23% of the top editors across the 200 major outlets in their sample were women, despite the fact that, on average, 40% of journalists in the ten markets were women. In Japan none of the major news outlets in the sample had a woman as their top editor² (Andi, S., Selva, A., & Nielson, R., 2020).

Meera Selva, Director of the journalist fellowship program at the RISJ says "It's really important to make sure the people selecting the news that we see are truly representative [of] the population. If you don't have [a] diverse amount of people selecting the news, that narrows the way stories are selected, the way stories are

² Sayuri Daimon from the Japan Times, a leading English newspaper in Japan, was appointed to the paper's top editorial and management job in 2013 as the first female managing editor of a Japanese national newspaper (Alexander, L, 2013). The Japan Times might not be included in the study sample, possibly because it is an English language publication and therefore has a different target reader than Japanese language news.

framed and it changes the way audiences also understand the news” (Reuters Institute, 2020).

Japan is also far behind in gender equality in the media industry from a global benchmark. There were 53 directors on the board at the Japan Newspaper Publishers & Editors Association as of June 2019, but not one woman (Massmedia & Information Culture, 2020, p.7). This board consists of major and local newspaper companies in Japan and sets the direction of the newspaper industry. According to a 2020 White Paper on Gender, the proportions of female journalists at the management level is quite low. In newspaper and news agencies, it was only 8.5% in 2019, up from 4.5% in 2014 (there is no data related to female management level reporters before 2013). The ratio of females in management, including chief producer and executive directors, was 9.1% and 15.1% at public broadcasting service in Japan, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), and private broadcasting services in 2019 respectively. The 2019 figures show an increase from 2.1% and 6.6% in 1999 respectively (the Cabinet Office, 2020, p.96 &97).

The male-dominated or male-centric society and media has created countless “single stories” in terms of gender. Under-Secretary-General of the UN, Izumi Nakamitsu who grew up in Japan, and works globally, alerted the public to the Japanese media’s abnormal representation of the “roles” of males and females. Many Japanese news discussion programs have a male main anchor and female sub-anchors. Experts are mostly men. Nakamitsu pointed out “children (in Japan) are brought up watching such scenes from an early age, so they are imprinted with the idea that this is what society is all about. But in fact, it is an unusual thing. People (in Japan) are not even aware of the fact that it is abnormal. I think that’s where we need to start changing” (Yamaguchi, 2020).

As stated, experts are mostly men, and these men, in some or many cases, are invited to discuss their fields in a manel³ or, if in a mixed panel, the females present are only tokenism.⁴ As the traditional weekly TV news discussion program, *Nichiyo Touron* (Discussion on Sunday) by NHK has a male main anchor to facilitate the discussion and female sub-anchor(s). According to program archives from 2010 to 2019, all or almost all experts invited to discuss the week’s topics were men.

³ Macmillan Education(n.d.) defines manel as a panel of experts or participants, for example on a TV quiz show or at a conference, that consists of men only.

⁴ The inclusion of one or a small number of people from a minority or marginalized group in an organization, an event or a cultural text in order to appear inclusive (Hodkinson, 2017, p.294).

Table 3: Ratio of male and female experts on *Nichiyo Touron*
(Discussion on Sunday) by NHK from 2010 to 2019

Fiscal Year	Number of all sessions	Number of sessions for men only in all sessions	Number of male (M) and female (F) experts in all sessions
2019	45	15	286 (M 247, F 39)
2018	48	24	319 (M 282, F 37)
2017	45	28	296 (M 273, F 23)
2016	47	23	291 (M 254, F 37)
2015	47	20	278 (M 243, F 35)
2014	49	26	306 (M 268, F 38)
2013	49	21	323 (M 286, F 37)
2012	50	28	354 (M 327, F 27)
2011	50	29	330 (M 298, F 32)
2010	51	29	341 (M 311, F 30)

Note: The data was retrieved and counted from <https://www.nhk.or.jp/touron/backnumber.html> on January 10, 2021.

General news programs have the same tendency. Some programs do have female anchors, but when high school students conducted a survey of the news programs of four television stations in 2018, in total more than 30 of the programs, the average age of the anchors was 8 to 17 years younger for women than for men on all stations (Okuno, 2019). In fact, a prestigious daily TV news program, News 7, a primetime show aired at 7:00 pm by NHK has six newscasters (four males and two females) and two female weather forecasters. Two experienced-looking men are the main newscasters while women who are visibly younger and two men serve as sub-newscasters. Its official website introduces the TV program in promotional photos in which the two main male newscasters are centered and proportionally larger than the others.⁵

When this kind of representation is repeated in various programs in a variety of TV stations, what kind of “single story” is imprinted on the mind? People may have the notion that it is the role of men to work for difficult and specialized issues and the women’s role is to assist men while men do the important jobs. It has discouraged women from striving to reach decision making positions by showing only men in dominant roles in news and other programs.

In addition to the imbalance in employment rates, “single stories” created by men dominate the media. TV Caster and Essayist, Keiko Kojima points out that in workplaces (like Japanese media) dominated by men with macho values, men

⁵The photo was confirmed on NHK News 7 website, <https://www.nhk.jp/p/news7/ts/YV1K1Z3YV8/>, on November 10, 2020.

(producers) have female (cast members) talk about men's impartial female views, and this make men's value internalized in female audiences (Shirakawa, 2019, p. 142).

However, media companies themselves are realizing that they are reaching the limitation. Young people's distancing from traditional media is a good example. As media companies realize this unrepresentative situation, some media started taking action to avoid "single stories." Journalists from Asahi Newspaper, one of the nationwide leading newspapers in Japan, where only 19.6% of 4481 staff members are female (Massmedia & Information Culture, 2020, p.3), began to worry that their value judgments, article design, and document expression might be biased and out of step with society's gender recognitions. They examined cases such as "the illustrations representing members of parliament are wearing ties, which remind readers of men" "Linkage between babysitting and working women are inappropriate because there are many men who are responsible for raising children nowadays" (Kajita, 2017). They also planned a public forum on gender and media and carried out a series of feature articles on gender in 2017. As part of that series, more than 50,000 survey responses and approximately 5000 voices were gathered from readers. A female reader in her 40s voiced that "middle-aged men have the privilege of media, whether on radio or papers... The images they created are poor comedies for me" (Egi, 2017). In 2017 the Asahi Newspaper revised the in-house gender guide book for the first time in 15 years. In 2020 the Asahi Newspaper declared a gender equal policy with benchmarks stating that representation of both genders will not fall below 40% throughout the year in its papers and events, and that the company will increase the number of women in management positions to at least double the current 12% (the Asahi Newspaper, 2020).

There were also many comments concerning advertisements, TV programs, picture books and cartoons on the current state of gender expression in Japan, which create gender biased "single stories." Especially gender biased "single stories" in advertisements has caused a social media firestorm and public criticism more frequently than gender bias news. An executive from Sampo Japan Insurance Inc. which released the first insurance service to investigate the cause of criticism, prevent its spread, and deal with press inquiries in response to the barrage of criticism on the Internet in 2017, disclosed that corporate commercial complaints have increased tenfold in the last five years at a symposium in 2017 (Jibu, 2018, p.24). Due to the widespread nature of social media, outdated traditional values in male dominated culture and society have become a focus as more people are able to voice their opinions. Kaku Sechiyama (2020), the author of *Gender Theory in Firestorm Commercials*, analyzed firestorm commercials that treat females as sexual objectifications concluding that they derive from middle-aged men's desire. Many commercials under criticism were made by men. These men did not give enough consideration to how women of different generations feel about the content (p.148).

In the following examples, some firestorm cases with “single stories” that propagate a gender stereotype of the traditional role of women and, in general, disrespect women will be discussed. A variety of criticisms were voiced concerning these cases on SNS and in articles. The following examples from the author’s point of view, which may overlap with some other examples.

Figure 2: Examples of firestorm “single stories” in terms of gender

Summary of gender biased commercials (denotation)	“Single stories” behind the commercials (connotation)
Cosmetic products, Shiseido (2016) A woman celebrating her 25th birthday is teased by her two friends that she is no longer a girl due to her age beyond 24	✓ Young females are superior to old ones ✓ Beauty is important criteria for women ✓ Making fun of your appearance and age is not sexual harassment
Tourist promotion film, Miyagi prefecture (2017) Tourism promotion by a female actor with overtly sexual associations	✓ Disrespect women as sex objectification ✓ Men are attracted by the form of sexual association
Diaper, Unicharm (2017) A mother’s struggle to raise her children alone	✓ Housework and childcare are women’s role ✓ Women and men have different role
Poster to promote 110th anniversary of the company, Nishi Nippon Railroad (2018) Message that “defenselessness is a girl’s power” with a small girl photo	✓ Women are (should be) weaker than men ✓ Men have to protect women ✓ Encouragement of no protection and sexual victimization
Poster to promote a female magazine, Shogakukan (2019) The message that working women are becoming more masculine	✓ Women at work and house wives are different ✓ Work like men is style for working women
Survey on official twitter, Toyota (2019) Asking on Twitter if female drivers are still bad at driving with young woman’s troubled face	✓ Women are not good at driving ✓ Men are good at driving ✓ Disrespect for women in general

A journalist specialized in gender issues, Renge Jibu (2018), raised further structural questions. Even if women are on a team, it is important to consider whether the women really represent the consumer and what attributes the woman represents. This is because working women are themselves a minority in organizations and may have “male values” that helped them to survive in a male dominated organization. Jibu reflected on her own experience as an economic journalist at a male dominant publishing company saying that she tried to have “male perspective” (p.63).

The author experienced the same pressure Jibu described when working as a female journalist making her a minority in her field. She worked in several media outlets including the largest newspaper company in Japan, for approximately ten years after graduating from university in 1999. During that period, all editors in management level and senior staff members who had the responsibility to edit young journalists' articles were men. They kindly taught a lot about news reporting and values, however, what the author learned from them may have been how to portray "news" from a male's perspective.

Chapter 3 will discuss the important question, "How can this gendered "single story" be changed?"

1.2 The Limitation of "Single Stories" in terms of LGBTQ+

In addition to "single stories" of females, there have been "single stories" concerning LGBTQ+. Judith Butler says that opposite sex attraction and encounters between men and women lie at the core of the way media discourses construct masculinity and femininity and the marginalization of LGBT orientations or identities. This forms an integral part of this heterosexual matrix, or hegemony (Butler, 1990 as cited Hodkinson, 2017, p.259). Hodkinson (2017) argues that since lesbian characters have tended to be positioned as troubled, dysfunctional or nasty characters, in recent times there has been a shift toward a different image of lesbianism (p.260).

As female representations' change, society's understanding and awareness of LGBTQ+ are growing. LGBTQ+ people had been traditionally subjected to discrimination and prejudice for years. Their nonconformation to the mainstream has even been considered illegal, but in the 21st century, human rights are proactively being upheld. In 2001, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. In 2015, the US Supreme Court ruled to allow same-sex marriage, and then many countries followed in this legal decision. In many major cities in the world, pride parade festivals to advocate LGBTQ+ rights have been conducted every year, and many world leaders including former US president, Barack Obama celebrated the event. The number of celebrities, politicians, and ordinary people disclosing their sexual orientation as LGBTQ+ is increasing.

While Japan does not recognize same-sex marriage, in 2015 Shibuya Ward in Tokyo enacted its ordinance on same-sex partnership as equivalent to marriage, and several municipalities have followed this ruling. High school official textbooks have introduced the term LGBT beginning in 2017. In 2017, sexual minorities and diverse families were mentioned in a total of 31 textbooks; Four out of the 31 textbooks use the expression, LGBT" (Sasaki, H and Takagi, K, 2016). Nowadays, many people, especially younger generations have accepted the right of sexual orientation and identity naturally.

In response to social change, the media also changed its attitude and positioning

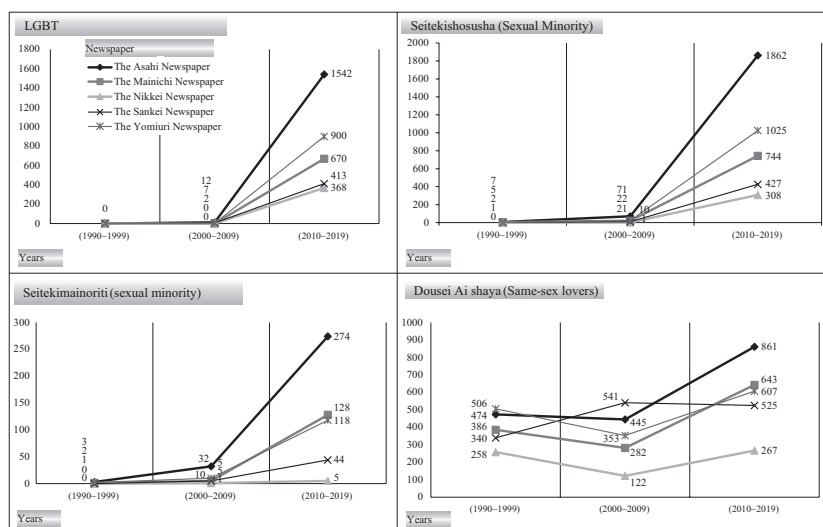
of sexual orientation. In Japan, a country with a strong conservative base and male dominance, sexual minorities had been traditionally outed by people as “othering” with the exception of a few biologically male celebrities who identify as “female.” Some of these celebrities have been positioned in “single stories” in the media as “onee” (men who act and speak like females) characters or unusual people. Fukui (2017) analyzed that except for “onee” characters, it was difficult for LGBTQ+ celebrities to find a position in media. In the 1990s there were many TV shows that featured a large number of “transgenders” in a variety of settings such as sports competitions and cooking events. This positive public attention strengthened the image of LGBTQ+ people as “onee” (p.14&15).

Today, there are a few LGBTQ+ people outside “onee” characters on variety shows, but their numbers are limited. In particular, the number of female-turned-male celebrities on shows is few. This may be because many LGBTQ+ still have a hard time revealing their sexual preferences in a Japanese society where sympathetic pressure to be “the one standard” is strong.

On the other hand, in TV dramas LGBTQ+ has recently been presented from a variety of perspectives. In 2001, one of the most popular TV drama series in Japan, (*3 nen B gumi Kinpachisensei* (Mr. Kinpachi, the teacher of: Third year students, Class B)), features a transgender student with gender identity disorder as the main character. This show had a big impact on conservative society in Japan and it came to be a good turning point for awareness of LGBTQ+ as a matter of course. Since then, the number of dramas and films on LGBTQ+ has continued to increase, and their settings and approach have become more diverse. Especially in recent years, there are many popular dramas in which LGBTQ+ are the main characters. In an article featured LGBTQ+ and media, Rina Sobue, a producer who created a popular LGBTQ+ drama analyzed that the recent trend in drama, which has been to liberate itself from stereotypes of how things should be done, contributes to producing LGBTQ+ dramas. At the same time, popular Japanese actors are actively appearing in LGBTQ+ productions as many LGBTQ+ films abroad continue to receive high praise, including an Academy Award nomination (Nikkei BP, 2019, p.46). As high audience ratings show, the audience is enjoying these shows naturally.

In addition, the number of instances in media coverage has dramatically increased in recent years. Words related to LGBTQ+ in the media were counted by the author, using database services in major newspaper companies in Japan. Quantitative research doesn't allow for qualitative interpretation, but it does show how much more visible sexual minorities are becoming in daily news.

Figure 3: The number of stories in media related to LGBTQ+



According to a survey of 60,000 people nationwide in Japan conducted by Dentsu Diversity Lab in 2018, 8.9% of respondents identified as LGBT (Dentsu, 2019, p.2). It can be estimated that there are a certain number of LGBTQ+ people in the media and in audiences. In addition, 68.5% of respondents said they knew the word of LGBT, and 76.0% of respondents said they wanted to understand LGBT correctly (Dentsu, 2019, p.3).

In this atmosphere, a Japanese traditional media created a “single story” on LGBTQ+. In September 2017, one of the major nationwide TV stations in Japan, Fuji Television Network, Inc. (Fuji TV) created a shock in society when it revived a gay character, *Homooda Homoo* (a biological man being teased as “homosexual”) for the 30th anniversary of a popular TV show. *Homooda Homoo*, is a man but acts like a woman; he has pink skin and a light stubble beard. He was a “popular” character in TV shows from the late 1980s to 1997 when the media and its viewers were more insensitive to LGBTQ+. Due to his popularity, boys who acted like girls were often teased at schools as being *Homooda Homoo* during this time period.

However, the big question was why did he come back in 2017? Over the past years, there has been a dramatic shift in perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ in society. The Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association has the broadcasting regulation that due consideration to human rights of sexual minorities is needed when addressing them.

After the revival of *Homooda Homoo* on TV, criticism erupted, mainly on the Internet. Ideas such as the character is “too insensitive in this day and age” were expressed by viewers. Anti-harassment groups submitted a joint written claim to Fuji

TV saying that “the word ‘homo’ is a derogatory term for male homosexuals. Expression of the word ‘homo’ as an object of ridicule promotes discrimination and prejudice against sexual minorities” (SOGI Harassment Committee, 2017). The president of Fuji TV apologized for the inappropriate expression on the TV program, and posted a written apology on the official website.

This is one example of the limitations of “single stories” in regard to LGBTQ+. In Chapter 3, how the media can address these “single stories” will be discussed.

2. The Power Shift of Communication and Society in a Digital Age

In this section, the transformation of media and society in the digital age where “single stories” have become unacceptable will be examined. Media transformation is discussed from the perspective of a power shift in communication, social values and generational viewpoints in the following section.

2.1 Entering the Age of Interactive Communications

The media has traditionally held a great deal of power in society with its ideology and hegemony. It has been considered a fourth power. British political and social theorist, Steven Lukes (2004) explained power in this way, “A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (p.27). Manuel Castells (2013) defined power in his book, *Communication Power*, by saying that “the most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind” (p.3). The traditional mass media including print media, TV, and film had power and influence led by powerful corporate channels. In the past, they built the “public sphere” concerning society through agenda setting, framing, othering and so on in one-way communication from media to large and demographically broad audiences. However, in this age of digital media, the power balance of media and people has changed. Technology allows everyone to have the power to create “e (digital) -public spheres” and/or “social spheres” by using internet, social networking services (SNS), applications, and other digital contents. The #MeToo movement, which began with a celebrity’s tweet to make sexual harassment and assault public in 2017, and has spread worldwide, is one good example of how much power social media has.

The digitalization of society has been accelerating since the 1990s and has clearly changed the way we communicate and receive information. At the end of 2019, 53.6% of the global population, or 4.1 billion people, are estimated to use the Internet, which dramatically increased from 8.0% in 2001 (International Telecommunication Union, 2020). From the late 1990s and 2000s, New Media companies including Yahoo (1994), Google (1998), Facebook (2004), YouTube

(2005) and Twitter (2006) became major corporations with giant user bases. As of October 2020, 53% of the world population are estimated to be active social media users (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020a). Digitalization is progressing in Japan as well. 89.8% of the population were estimated to use the Internet in 2019, up from 43.6% in 2001 (the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2020, p.2). As of January 2020, 65% of the Japanese population in Japan are estimated as active social media users (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020b).

As new media has become powerful, it gives more power and freedom to individuals for communications. Thanks to this technology and service, individuals have the capacity to use online search engines, online commerce, user-generated sites including SNS, archives and so on. Communication power is no longer held only by the mass media but also by individuals. In addition, new media has huge power including online domination (in politics) including algorithms, big data, and behavioral targeting.

With the introduction of digitalization, technology advancements including automatic translation machines and other commonly used applications of technology have led to worldwide globalization. People now know more about “global standards” due to their own investigations using diversified media which influences ordinary people beyond the scope of traditional media. In this situation if audiences are forced into a biased “single story,” they may find it unnatural and uncomfortable. The new digital age gives active audiences the ability to search for the reason they feel uncomfortable, share their opinions on SNS and even change channels to get more accurate information.

2.2 Changing Social Values at the Age of SDGs and ESGs

Society is also rapidly shifting. Currently the international community values embracing environmental issues, ethics, compliance and diversity more than in the past. People approach these areas with the lessons learned from past mistakes that caused environmental destruction and human right violations, created by prioritizing economic, corporate and human activities. The priority given to business concerns has put a tremendous strain on the environment leading to climate change, abnormal weather, natural disaster, and ecosystem destruction. Population expanding and economic development have added further burdens to the environment. The world’s population, which was 2.5 billion in 1950, is 7.7 billion in 2020, is expected to be 10.5 billion in 2075 (the UN, 2019.). As the population grows, economic and social activities and environmental burden such as CO2 emissions and water consumption increase. Scientific data and day-to-day changes have made people aware that the earth cannot survive without shifting its focus to creating a sustainable society.

With the push of imminent needs, the UN adopted the now well-known SDGs in September 2015 with all member states’ agreement to reaching the common global goals between 2016 and 2030. SDGs consist of 17 Goals with 169 associated

targets to strengthen the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Gender Equality is defined in Goal 5 of the SDGs, and LGBTQ+ is also understood as part of an inclusive human rights and anti-discrimination perspective, although it is not marked as LGBTQ+. The world is working together proactively to make this a reality.

Japan is also active in promoting global goals. The government established an SDGs Promotion Headquarter with a membership of the Prime Minister and all ministers in 2016. SDGs are being promoted in all areas of government, business, and education nationwide. In 2017, KEIDANREN, Japan Business Federation, a comprehensive economic organization with a membership of representative companies of Japan, incorporated the SDGs into its Charter of Corporate Behavior. In 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan includes SDGs education on curriculum guidelines for elementary schools.

This momentum has been encouraged by the business community as well. ESG (environmental, social, and governance) investments have grown in importance and amount around the world after the introduction of the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) in 2006. ESG investment means that investors use environmental, social, and governance factors, e.g., environmental protection, human rights, gender, and legal compliance as well as financial data in the investment analysis and decision-making process. The Global Sustainable Investment Alliance (GSIA) showed a dramatic global shift in almost every region. In 2018, the proportions of global sustainable investing assets were 63.2% in Australia and New Zealand, 50.6% in Canada, 48.8% in European countries and 25.7% in the US; Japan was 18.3%, but has shown impressive growth considering the figure of 3.4% in 2016 (GSIA, 2018, P.9). Nowadays companies that do not take ESG considerations into account are losing money and opportunities.

In line with social changes, the amount of coverage of SDGs and ESG is also dramatically increasing in the media. In addition, the media itself is a company; and how seriously they face meeting SDGs is being challenged. This is because SDGs are extremely important considerations for the companies themselves, sponsors, and audiences as well. The UN led initiative, the SDG Media Compact which media and entertainment companies around the world commit to leverage their resources and creative talent to advance SDGs, includes more than 100 members, reaching a combined audience of about two billion people in 160 countries as of May 2020. 32 members of this group are Japanese media (the UN, 2020).

Miyuki Kitago, in charge of SDGs news coverage at the Asahi Newspaper, tries to utilize SDGs as a basis for thinking about what the media should become in an age where everyone can communicate on SNS and the media itself is challenged. She pointed out that media need to take on the challenge themselves, and SDGs are the perfect theme. However, there are still many skeptics in the media who ignore SDGs, claiming that SDGs are “ideal beauty stories.” “Until those people are to

admit that the SDGs are “right” values, I will take actions with two perspectives; one is to recognize that SDGs are a global issue, and the other is to delve into the SDGs issues within Japan. I want to take half a step or more out of the “existing framework” as our responsibility for future generations” (Kitago, 2019, p.102).

The shift of social values has forced individuals and organizations to change. The time has come for the pursuit of what we should consider ideal.

2.3 Considerations from a Generational Perspective

It is also necessary to consider the current shift in how media presents stories from the viewpoints of different Generations. The population is divided into generational cohorts, each spanning approximately fifteen to twenty years. Each generation consists of the people who were born and came of age in relatively similar social atmospheres. Even if their background such as family, education, and nationalities are different, they go through the same phases of life like childhood, adulthood, and senior age during the same era. Therefore, they tend to be inclined toward similar attitudes and values. Of course, individuals are different and generational attitudes don't determine all, however, Generations give us a guideline to see the age trend.

There are several generational cohorts,⁶ such as Silent Generation (born 1928-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980) and so on. Nowadays, Millennials (born 1981-1996) get particular attention worldwide. They will make up the majority of the world's workforce and will have a huge impact on society in the coming years.

They grew up as the first digital native generation, and in global issues such as climate change, the Great Financial Crisis, inequality, disparity and terrorism. It is widely said that Millennials have a high level of interest in social and environmental issues such as SDGs, a high level of health consciousness, and a value of “experiences” over “possessions” as status symbols. In a survey by the Pew Research Center in the US, Millennials expressed more acceptance toward sexual minorities' rights as well as had far lower rates of involvement with religion, compared to older generations (Pew Research Center, 2015, p.7&8,20&35).

As to media, Millennials have benefited from the advantages of information communication technology (ICT) and the rapid spread of digital devices since their teenage years. They are accustomed to getting information they want via digital tools in an instant. Millennials communicate with friends in real time on SNS, and value “empathy” and appreciation of others. KEIZAI DOYUKAI (2016) reported that while Millennials use SNS in all aspects of their lives, they tend to place less

⁶There are several ways of classifying generational cohorts. This paper uses a definition of the Millennial Generation by the Pew Research Center.

importance on existing media and corporate advertising (p.4). Therefore, they do not have “empathy” when the media pushes “existing old values” in biased and discriminated “single stories” because of significant differences in values and behavior. Admittedly, this is a particularly big challenge for Japanese traditional mass media, in which older people have more power under a seniority system, and a male-dominated culture.

The Millennials are followed by Generation Z (born after around 1997-) and Generation Alpha (born after 2010-). As new values emerge, the question of what kind of values can the media provide to attract new generations as well as old generations must be considered.

3. How Can Media Address to Audiences beyond “Single Stories”?

3.1 Critical Thinking and Empathy

The third section discusses how media address audiences beyond “single stories” in this age of interactive communication, SDGs, and new generations. The only way for the media to go beyond telling “single stories” is for the media themselves to accept the changes of the times, and strive for change that reflects current social trends.

In Chapter 1, the current male-dominated media landscape in which women and LGBTQ+ have been treated as inferior and “single stories” have been created, were discussed. “Single stories” are created from power structure, biased and outdated sense, and discrimination. The classic “feminine” and “masculine” perspective has become a conscious and unconscious bias. The lack of awareness of human rights and dignity toward others contributed to this.

Munakata (2004) said that the background of discriminatory expressions has roots that follow the traditional methods of the past, try to make an impact, and have the indulgence of being allowed to digress a little. Media need to become more aware of human dignity and equality, and each of them needs to keep an attitude of non-discrimination in their work (p.20 &21). It is necessary for the media to face up to the changing values of society, to unlearn old habits, and update themselves regularly. It is also necessary to think critically and repeatedly about whether there is any bias in one's way of thinking and to listen impartially and humbly to various opinions from diversified people.

This is a critical issue from not only the viewpoint of human rights and dignity toward others but also the state of organizations. A failure to critically evaluate what is said can lead to organizational weakness and limit organizations to small stereotypical frameworks.

Psychologist Irving Janis presented the concept of Groupthink. Tadamatsu (2020) explained that “Groupthink” is a risk factor that occurs in low-diversity organizations. People overestimate their own groups’ competence through

overconfidence and optimism, conversely, they underestimate risks and the competence of those outside their group. In addition, the group seeks to exclude opinions and inconvenient information that are different from their own, which significantly reduces a group's risk management capabilities" (p.108). Just as a person has a conscious and unconscious bias, a group has in-group bias which is the tendency to favor one's own group, its members, its products and its characteristics. In organizations like the Japanese media, where college graduates are hired for life into a system that includes seniority-based promotions where older people have decision-making power, there will be even more Groupthink and in-group bias.

In fact, in 2017 when Fuji TV broadcasted *Homooda Homoo*, a TV show character in 1980s and 1990s referred to earlier in this paper, a report was made that the young staff members thought, "it is not appropriate to introduce such a character in the current age" but they could not go against the voice of the upper management (Shirakawa, 2019, p. 142). Fuji TV, once the most popular private television network, has been showing a rapid decline in popularity in recent years. Yoshitaka Yoshino, who worked for Fuji TV for 23 years, argues that Fuji TV was too conforming to the 1980s, its golden period. Therefore, even when the circumstances changed, the company could not change. Pride in its own brand blinded it to what viewers wanted (Yoshino, 2016, p.211).

A former news reporter and scholar on media, Kaori Hayashi, explains the minority's position through her experiences. "the majority has a powerful network behind it, so they just watch things steadily move in their direction without having to raise their voices in meetings. Women and other minorities are like birds of paradise in the black crows even if they give a good argument in meetings. Their presence may be alibis that ensure the "diversity" and governance of organizations, but there are long distances and high hurdles to overcome before their ideas lead to eventual change" (Hayashi, 2019, p.21& 22).

As Hayashi said, if there is not equity and inclusion with psychological safety where people can speak freely and without fear of being judged or ignored, surface "diversity" would be completely meaningless. This is recently called DEI; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion management. Diversity means not only gender, but also attributes as diverse as race, culture, class, generation, thought and so on. Equity is to create fair conditions for all people's characteristics. Inclusion means the action or state of including within a group or structure. It is especially important that those who belong to the majority need to understand their privileged position and make proactive efforts to create DEI in their organizations.

Audiences of media have become more diverse not only domestically, but also worldwide thanks to globalization and ICT advancement. To reach out to diverse audiences and get approval in the age of SDGs, a more diverse perspective is essential. New organizational structures, decision-making process and company culture that is more DEI conscious are expected by this generation and necessary to

be beyond “single stories.”

A media critic, Chiki Ogiue, pointed out that minorities fear that “single stories” are responsible for something deeper than spreading false information. “They see that the consequences of the spread of these one-sided stories in TV also spread an attitude that ‘these people can be treated in this way’ in society. That’s why people today have voiced that they are not going to let it happen any longer. If expression of only one-side of a story continues, minorities will be attacked in their daily lives” (Ogiue, 2017, p.244). Media needs more sensitive awareness that there are diversified people including women, LGBTQ+ and other minorities in their audience, stakeholders, and colleagues, and makes sure that they are not excluding these people by making them uncomfortable. Empathy, compassion, and the awareness of human rights and dignity for others are essential keywords for the current and coming age.

3.2 Foresight and Creating Shared Values

Adichie (2009) said “stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity” (para. 54). In fact, though this paper focused on the limitations of “single stories,” the media has created a lot of great stories and social values that attract people. With so many channels, information and fake news stories in this age of interactive communication, media which have organizational power, resources and professional experiences continues to contribute to creating shared values (CSV)⁷. An increasing number of media outlets are creating articles, programs and advertisements that counteract bias (“single stories”) against minorities. E.g., Always brand for their #Like A Girl campaign by Procter & Gamble (P&G) sent the message that girls are “unstoppable” and should “be confident” even if society limits them with the motto “rewrite the rules” (Always, 2014). The film of #Like A Girl, posted in 2014, has more than 69 million views on YouTube as of November 27, 2020. The campaign has motivated girls and adult women to change the concept of females. In 2015, Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity started giving the Glass Lion award toward content that promotes culture-shifting (to break down sexism and prejudice) creativity. The first 2015 award was presented to P&G. These actions contributed to establish new concept of “good advertisement.”

In journalism, the New York Times disclosed three major sexual harassment cases in investigative reporting in 2017. The company addressed the issue from various angles, including contributions by female victims. As a result, anti-harassment became a social phenomenon and the #MeToo movement spread (Shimoyama, 2019, p.286&287). This movement was also possible due to the spread of social networking. The Washington Post officially adopted “they” as a singular

⁷ CSV is addressing societal needs and challenges with a business model (Harvard Business School). Michael Porter at Harvard Business School, proposed in 2011.

gender-neutral pronoun to avoid sexist pronouns like “he” or “she” in its style guide in 2015. The Associated Press Stylebook added an entry for “they” as a singular pronoun in its 2017 edition. A movement toward favoring Solution Journalism which reports how people are responding to problems in addition to reporting the problems themselves is spreading worldwide (Solution Journalism Network).

In Japan, the Asahi Newspaper declared a commitment to SDGs, and then featured many articles related to SDGs including gender equality and LGBTQ+. It also organized SDGs events and introduced SDGs in their Newspaper in Education (NIE) activities for schools. A magazine that is popular with Japanese females, FRAU, featured an entire issue dedicated to SDGs in their August 2020 edition. Some news online media like the Huffington Post and BuzzFeed are trying to change attitudes from the existing invisible mass-attracting approaches to more individual-attracting approaches. These media underscore that the new online media value “empathy” and “interactive communications” with readers instead of reporting news from an authoritative perspective and preestablished statuesque. Ryuichiro Takeshita, the Chief Editor of the Huffington Post in Japan said “I have the desire to reverse-illuminate the problems Japan has had as traditional custom” (Takeshita, Furuya and Goto, 2016, p.47&48). These new online media have proactively raised issues on gender stereotypes as well as other minority and ordinary people.

Thus, the time has come for the media themselves to step away from their vested interests and traditional practices, and create new values with foresight to society. Media can repair the broken dignity of minorities and people who have been oppressed in society. This will lead to popularity among younger generations but it will take more than simply putting old stories into the modern packages of social media. The media will not only need to change the way they deliver stories, but also the content of the stories that are delivered.

Conclusion

In this paper, the limitation of “single stories” in mainly Japanese media in an age of interactive communication and diversity was discussed from the standpoint of current trends in society and media response. The paper found that the limits have already been reached and change is required. At the same time, this is a time of change not only on the media side, but also on the audience and the sponsor side. Adichie (2009) concluded her TED talk with “when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise” (para. 56).

Every person can create a world beyond “single story” thought patterns in an age of interactive communication and diversity by being a proactive, critical thinker.

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