

Sakazuki, Kodokushi: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors in the World's Grayest Society

Ji Hong, COOPER Anne, KANAYAMA Tomoko and GILLIFORD Eiko*

[Japan is] a society older than any in the history of the world. (Bartel, 2015: 200)
With more than a third of all countries now considered to be aging, Japan is setting an example. (How Japan..., 2016: 34)

On January 5 of 2020, Kanae Tanaka had a birthday—her 117th. Tanaka, who thus kept her status as the world's oldest person, had received, on Respect for the Aged Day, a *sakazuki* (sterling silver *sake* cup) when she turned 100. Likewise, so did Chitetsu Watanabe, 112, the world's oldest man until his death on February 23 of 2020, as well as the world's prior oldest man, Masazo Nonaka, who died in 2019 at the age of 113, and Nabi Tajima—the world's last known person to be born in the 19th century—who died in 2018 at age 117. Not so for centenarians who recently celebrated that milestone; starting in 2016, they were reduced to “sipping sake from cheaper vessels” (Oda, 2016)—silver plate instead of sterling. Moreover, in another yen-saving move, the government had already (in 2009) made the cups smaller.

As of September 2019, Japanese centenarians numbered more than 71,000; the U.S. number of centenarians per capita is less than half of Japan's rate. By 2025, Japanese citizens over age 65 will account for 30 percent of the population, making the country's experience “a topic of interest for other graying industrialized nations following Japan into uncharted demographic territory” (Martin, 2019). (In 2019, Japan had the lowest birth rate in the 100 years since records were kept.) The smaller and cheaper sake cups, given to 32,000 centenarians in 2016 (Oda, 2016), represent but one implication of grayness.

Other effects include the downsizing and lightening of appliances, since the

*Ji Hong is Assistant Professor, School of Visual & Communication Arts, Avila University. COOPER Anne is Professor Emerita, School of Journalism, Ohio University. KANAYAMA Tomoko is Professor, Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences. GILLIFORD Eiko is Office Manager, College of Science and Health, Avila University.

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average non-muscle-bound Japanese older female (women represent the majority of elders) stands less than five feet tall; moreover, adult diapers now outsell baby diapers (Hershings, 2016). More expensive pedestal toilets have largely replaced traditional squat toilets, which elders cannot negotiate (J. Ikeda, personal communication, 2/15/2020). Products related to *daiojo* (“peaceful death”) have increased in number (Bartel, 2015: 201), as have easy-to-use devices such as phones with large keyboards and care support products such as household robots (Prieler & Kohlbacker, 2016).

By 2065, with only 1.3 workers per each senior citizen (up from 2.3 per senior in 2015), the dearth of younger people has meant the government has “committed to accepting limited numbers of immigrants to handle vital work such as caring for the elderly” (Dooley, 2019)—a significant move for a notoriously insular and homogeneous society. However, the “Japanese appear far more comfortable with allowing robots rather than foreigners to do the work that a missing generation of young people would do” (Runciman, 2018: 22).

More tragically, with one-person households expected to reach 40 percent of all households by 2040, a sad trend will likely accelerate: *kodokushi* (“lonely death”), whereby “those living alone are found dead in their home, often going unnoticed for long stretches of time” (Martin, 2019). The majority of single people living alone are elderly.

Purpose of Study

What other options, other than a lonely life and death, does a gray society have for housing its senior citizens? Considering healthier options than living alone, what can we learn about Japan that might inform decisions in soon-to-turn-gray other countries? Italy, Germany, South Korea, Spain, Poland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France and Canada (in that order) are all projected to have over-60 seniors making up more than 30 percent of their populations by 2040; the U.S. figure will top 25 percent (Turnbull, 2011). Comparisons with Japan, which “is heading toward a ‘super-aging society’” (Ohara, 2004: S210), might be “instructive for other countries” (Tsutsui & Muramatsu, 2007: 1). Japan has already had to adjust communication practices in the Age of Aging. This paper will examine visual approaches to marketing when the intended audience is known to be elderly.

Housing for Seniors

Traditionally in Japan, it “was considered shameful for the family to commit their elderly to institutional care” (Auestad, 2009: 224). However, the days when seniors lived with extended families have all but vanished (Naoi, 1996), partly because the “housewives [who] have been the main care-givers” now work outside the home (Kubota & Babazono, 1997: 31) and partly because of women’s “seeing their male siblings, who have not participated in the care of parents, assuming equal

rights to inheritance” (Auestad, 2009: 224).

Today about 5 million of Japan’s 35 million over-65 citizens live in facilities with care services. Hundreds of nursing homes have been built in the past 15 years, following the passage in 2000 of the Nursing-care Insurance Law, which made “long-term care services a universal entitlement for every senior” (Tsutsui & Muramatsu, 2007: 1). The 9,600 public nursing homes, which have large waiting lists due to their minimal cost, require seniors to share a room.

The private elder care facilities, where “the price can be high” (Brasor & Tsukuba, 2014), offer amenities such as exercise sessions, crafts classes, and more privacy. Most (75 percent) of the firms in the booming private senior care market operate just one facility (Aizawa, 2014). Companies that oversee multiple facilities have often developed from seemingly unrelated roots. Sompo, the largest operator of fee-based nursing homes in Japan with more than 25,000 rooms, branched out from its 130-year-old property and casualty insurance business. In 2018, it created four regional headquarters to coordinate its 1,000 offices (SompoCare, 2019). Watami, a restaurant chain, added housing to its food-based origins (Brasor & Tsukuba, 2014). Benesse, a publisher of educational materials and the parent company of Berlitz language schools, moved from issuing correspondence courses for those seeking certification to work at elder-care facilities to operating the facilities themselves; it offers five different types of facilities (Benesse, 2019).

The nation’s *satakazumi* dwellings, such as operated by Benesse, started in 2011 as seniors’ rental units with extra services. In July 2015, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare mandated that these units for seniors needed to be barrier-free, but could also offer other amenities. This type of housing, to which healthy seniors can move for a lower cost than full-service care facilities, as yet account for a limited number of units. Costs climb if services such as night-time emergency response, laundry and meal preparation are added.

The lump-sum payment to enter a paid care facility can range from 0 to tens of millions of yen, followed by monthly fees. For an incoming resident aged, say, 90, it makes more sense to negotiate a high monthly fee, but a lower entry fee (Aizawa, 2014). The difficulty of getting back the lump sum fee was underscored by a rare victory that made international news when a retired harpist got her money back after she moved out of a high-end facility (Kageyama, 2018).

Operated by Community Net, the 13 Yui Maru properties offer service apartments for independent seniors aged 60 or older. The 2011 revision of the law regulating senior housing meant startups could get government subsidies for barrier-free, comfortably large (at least 25 square meters) units. At one Yui Maru village, 80 percent of the tenants are single women (Martin, 2019).

As another alternative, villages in shrinking rural venues such as the Share Kanazawa experiment might take hold. Japan has 8.2 million empty homes and buildings, a number the Nomura Research Institute says will grow to 21.7 million by

2033 (Johnston, 2016). However, the alternatives remain the exception in the landscape of Japanese senior care, where public nursing homes clearly dominate. The need for alternatives is growing, but the U.S. phenomenon of Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) “is not something Japan really has” (Johnston, 2016). This study will focus on marketing by the private housing sector, since government-run nursing homes need not market themselves.

Related Studies

Theoretical Bases

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. The typology developed by Maslow (1954), a humanist psychologist, described a five-level hierarchy of needs common to all of humanity: 1. *Physiological*-oxygen, food, water; 2. *Safety*-security and protection; 3. *Social*-love (both giving and receiving), affection, belongingness (absence of loneliness); 4. *Esteem*-a high level of respect (absence of feeling weak, inferior, helpless and worthless); 5. *Self-actualization*-realization of one’s potential, with joyful feelings that life is worth living.

Trying to meet all these needs would constitute an ambitious, even unrealistic, goal for a residential venue, but no “law” prevents marketers from presenting an idealized version of senior living--up to and including Maslow’s Level 5. As universal values, the hierarchy would apply equally to Japan as to Brooklyn-born Maslow’s U.S. home base.

Hofstede’s Dimensions of Cultural Variability. Geert Hofstede (2001), who died on February 12, 2020, studied the differences between societal cultures by using a data bank containing 116,000 questionnaires on the work-related values of employees of the IBM multinational business organization in 72 countries and regions, collected between 1967 and 1973. After publishing the first edition of *Culture’s Consequences* in 1980, he updated his findings in 2001. This project revealed that four major dimensions along a 0-100 scale distinguished societal cultures: *Power distance (PDI)*, which suggests different societies handle differently the issues of human inequality; *Individualism (IDV)*, which describes the degree to which the individuals are integrated into groups; *Masculinity (MAS)*, which represents gender differentiation; and *Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)*, which indicates the extent to which a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Later, *Long-term orientation (LTO)* was added to the original four dimensions.

Japan scored high on LTO, 80 (fourth of the entities in the study) and UAI, 92 (seventh of entities studied). For this paper, the scores would indicate a penchant for planning ahead for one’s housing needs in old age in order to avoid finding a facility in a crisis situation. It scored highest in the world on MAS, 95. In senior facilities, one would expect to see women and men pursuing separate activities. Japan scored a

middle-range 46 on IDV, indicating a society not highly individualistic but rather group oriented. (The fifth dimension, PDI, has little relation to the present study.)

Studies on Japanese Elders

Media attention to elder issues soared in 1992, the year identical-twin sisters Gin (“silver”) and Kin (“gold”) turned 100; the world’s oldest identical twins, who lived in three centuries, continued as media superstars until Kin, age 107, and Gin, age 108, died in a nursing home in 2000 and 2001 (BBC, 2001). Since then, as noted above, centenarians have gained government attention in the form of the scaled-down *sakazuki* cups, as well as being a focus of research. Yasumoto, Gondo, Nakagawa and Masui (2017), who conducted interviews with 13 centenarians, found five components of super-aged well-being: a positive approach to everyday life, ability to live within limits, keeping good relations with others, feeling satisfied with life and accepting reality. Losses that their interviewees suffered were physical functions, social status and lack of social interaction.

Research attention preceded the passage, in the year 2000, of the Nursing-care Insurance Law, earlier in Japan (Hiroshima, 1987; Kubota & Babazono, 1997) than in the West (Traphagan & Knight, 2003). The facilities in which Japan’s seniors might live if they moved from their own homes, the subject of this paper, has attracted the attention of Japanese scholars writing in English (Ohara, 2004), Japanese and Western collaborators (Raymo & Kaneda, 2003) and of course Japanese scholars (Iwama, Kiyosumi & Shizuka, 2014; Hara, 2016). These studies deal with the decision components that affect moving to elder care facilities as well as the physical aspects of the facilities (not directly related to the present research).

Germane to this study, the topic of marketing to Japanese elders has been looked at to some extent. Nitta (2009) studied marketing in a general sense, interviewing older workers approaching retirement, not specifically how private care facilities try to attract residents. Suzuki (2010) noted that research on the elderly had its roots in the serious problems of the frail elderly; he argued, instead, for a focus on healthy elderly people as a new approach to corporate communication and marketing.

Lacking Japan’s 43.3% projected 60-and-above demographic for the year 2040 (Turnbull, 2011)—the U.S. projection is only 25.4%; the U.K.’s, 27.9%—marketing studies in English using Japan as an example are rare. In fact, Helgert (2006), in a book comparing U.S. and Japanese marketing strategies, does not mention aging, the elderly or senior citizens. In a more recent volume, Bartel (2015: 201), in *Postmodern Advertising in Japan*, notes that the social phenomenon of aging “created a new elderly market segment that had plenty of money as well as time,” but does not include original research.

Representations of Japan’s elders was one focus of Prieler and Kohlbacker’s (2016) book on Japan, *Advertising in the Aging Society*. They refer to a study of

older people in 3,000 TV ads on five Tokyo commercial networks: 4.6% of people shown in 1997, rising to 6.1% in 2007—much below the over-65 actual percent in the population. In both years, older men outnumbered older women in the ad world, contrary to the female senior citizens' dominance in the real world.

One study that directly relates Hofstede's (2001) Dimensions of Cultural Variability to representations in advertising looked at portrayals of seniors in media targeted at seniors, as does the present study—but in print magazines rather than websites. Lei, Cooper-Chen and Cheng (2007) found that print ads in collectivist China in fact portrayed elders more frequently in groups than alone. (Though both are Asian cultures, China is ranked as more collectivist than Japan.) Portrayals were positive, although as in the Japanese TV ads, women were underrepresented.

Non-Japan Studies on Elder-care Marketing

Focusing on the United States, Baiocchi-Wagner (2012) looked at 202 photos in brochures from 56 randomly selected U.S. long-term care facilities, somewhat equivalent to the Japanese facilities in the present study. She found, for setting, 58.3% indoors and 34.2% outdoors; for gender, 55% female and 44% male; for affect, 85.7% positive and 14.3% negative; for interactions, 49% with one or more peers, 30% with one or more family members; and 23% with one or more staff.

Another U.S. study (Ji & Cooper, 2017), which did for U.S. elders' residential websites what the present study does for Japan, differed somewhat from Baiocchi-Wagner's brochure findings. An analysis of 407 photographs of residents from 69 randomly selected, accredited Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) websites depicted residents as mainly happy, never sad, while enjoying good health—99.5% were free of wheelchairs, canes and walkers. Residents were about evenly shown indoors (45.5%) and outdoors (47.7%). Fully 86.0% of residents were shown not alone. Regarding gender, 35.6% were male; 62.7%, female.

The above two U.S. studies provided this study's authors with ideas regarding key variables, but U.S. and Japanese cultures differ so greatly (Hofstede, 2001) that any comparisons must be tentative. While any studies of representations of Japanese seniors in media aimed at seniors are rare, studies of images of seniors on websites aimed at seniors in the world's grayest society seem nonexistent. The present study aims to address that void.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

- Q1a. How many persons are pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?
- Q1b. How many elder persons are pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?
- Q1c. What is the percentage of female and male elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?
- Q2. What type of elder persons' infirmities are pictured in the senior living

websites in Japan?

H1a. More elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will exhibit positive/happy affect than negative/sad affect or neutral affect.

H1b. More staff pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will exhibit positive/happy affect than negative/sad affect or neutral affect.

H1a and H1b are based on Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, Level 5-Self actualization.

H2. Older women vs. men pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will show gender differentiation.

H2 is based on Hofstede's (2001) MAS Dimension of Cultural Variability.

H3. Elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will be shown more often with others than alone.

H3 is based on Hofstede's (2001) IDV Dimension of Cultural Variability and Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, Level 3- Social.

Method

Sampling

The authors analyzed photographs of people on the websites of the top 50 companies that operate senior living facilities in Japan. Appendix A lists these companies in descending order, based on the number of facilities they owned in 2019 ("Number of owned facilities," 2019). As a company that provides consulting and information services for elderly living and nursing care businesses, Care Produce Inc. issues an annual ranking of these businesses ("Company profile," 2020).

Coding of websites, done February 26-March 3, 2020, used a person's image as the unit of analysis. If a top-50 company engaged in multiple lines of business, then the web page directly linked to its senior-living business was analyzed. If the company's primary business was senior living, the company's home page was analyzed.

Two of the authors did all the coding. Given their popularity and attraction to the eye (Cronin, 2009), slideshows took priority for coding. If the website had no slideshow, then the coders analyzed the still photo that viewers could click on to watch a video. If the website had neither slideshow nor video, the coders analyzed the site's dominant stand-alone photo.

To avoid oversampling one photo, a maximum of 10 dominant human images were coded. These procedures yielded a total of 355 human images depicted in 146 photos from 44 senior living companies. (Six companies did not include photos of humans on their home pages.)

Variables and Operational Definitions

In addition to housekeeping variables (e.g., company name in English and Japanese), the authors created six key variables related to the research questions and hypotheses.

Role had coding options of elder, staff and other/ can't tell. *Elder* was operationalized as a person who seemed to be over 60 years of age, perhaps having gray hair and wrinkly skin. *Staff* was operationalized as a person in a uniform or "dressed professionally and/or wearing a name tag" (Baiocchi-Wagner, 2012: 359).

Affective state for both elders and staff had coding options of 1) positive/happy, defined as smiling, looking upbeat or showing enjoyment; 2) negative/sad, defined as looking depressed, frowning, crying; and 3) neutral, defined as having a blank expression, looking neither happy nor sad, thinking/sleeping; and 4) other/can't tell (Baiocchi-Wagner, 2012).

Gender had coding options of male, female and other/can't tell. *Setting*, referring to the background of the photo, had the coding options of indoors, outdoors and other/can't tell.

In the case of an elder person's image, infirmity and social context were also coded. *Infirmity* (adverse physical condition) had the coding options of sitting in a wheelchair, using a walker, using a cane, being in a hospital bed or exhibiting another infirmity. *Social context* (interaction with others) had the coding options of alone, not alone and other/can't tell.

Inter-coder Reliability

Five sites (10% of the total 50 sites) were randomly selected for reliability testing, using simple agreement, between the two authors who did the coding. Those five sites yielded 16 photos with 32 images of people. Agreement for key variables was as follows: role, 97%; affect, 88%; gender, 94%; setting, 94%; infirmity, 86%; and social context, 100%.

Results

This study of 50 senior living companies' websites in Japan yielded descriptive and theory-based results for 355 images from 146 photos. The images appeared on the sites during the coding period, February 26-March 3, 2020.

Q1a. How many persons are pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?

Q1b. How many elder persons are pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?

Table 1 shows that 355 total persons are depicted, of whom 167 (47.0%) are elders. The remaining persons are staff (38.3%) and other/can't tell (14.6%).

Q1c. What is the percentage of female and male elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?

Table 1: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Persons Pictured

	Frequency	Percent
Elder	167	47.0
Staff	136	38.3
Other/can't tell	52	14.6
Total	355	100

Table 2, with 17 “other/can’t tell” images removed, shows that 97 (64.7%) of elders are female, while 53 (35.3%) are male. For senior living facilities overall in Japan, the authors could not find any gender data, which likely changes almost daily. However, according to Martin (2019), at one senior apartment complex (not in this study), 80% of tenants were single women.

Table 2: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Females and Males

	Frequency	Percent
Female	97	64.7
Male	53	35.3
Total	150	100

Note: 17 Other/can't tell omitted

Q2.What type of elder persons’ infirmities are pictured in the senior living websites in Japan?

Table 3 shows that 35 (21.0%) of elders with infirmities were shown in wheelchairs, one (0.6%) used a cane and one was undergoing rehab (0.6%). The vast majority (77.8%) did not exhibit an infirmity; none was bed-ridden.

Table 3: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Persons’ Infirmities

	Frequency	Percent
Wheelchair	35	21.0
Cane	1	0.6
Rehab (using bars)	1	0.6
Infirmity none visible	130	77.8
Total	167	100

H1a.More elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will exhibit positive/happy affect than negative/sad affect or neutral affect.

Table 4 shows that, indeed, by far the majority of elders, 114 or 68.3%, had

positive/ happy expressions on their faces, while 20 or 12.0% showed neutral affect. No depicted elder looked sad. (For 33 or 19.8% of photographs, coders could not discern an expression). Based on Maslow’s (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, we may infer that the depicted elders feel joyful and self actualized. **H1a is supported.**

Table 4: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Persons’ Affect

	Frequency	Percent
Positive/happy	114	68.3
Negative/sad	0	0
Neutral	20	12.0
Other/can’t tell	33	19.8
Total	167	100

H1b. More staff pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will exhibit positive/happy affect than negative/sad affect or neutral affect.

Table 5 shows that staff also looked positive/happy (104 or 76.5%). Similarly, no staff members looked sad. Only 9.6% or 13 had neutral expressions, while coders could not discern expressions of 19 or 14.0%. **H1b is supported.**

Table 5: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Staff Affect

	Frequency	Percent
Positive/happy	104	76.5
Negative/sad	0	0
Neutral	13	9.6
Other/can’t tell	19	14.0
Total	136	100

H2. Older women vs. men pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will show gender differentiation.

Tables 6-9 deal with four aspects of gender differentiation, for which Hofstede (2001) found (MAS Dimension of Cultural Variability) Japan to rank highest in the world. Table 6 shows that women compared with men did not differ significantly regarding affect; women had positive/ happy expressions more often (78.4%) than men (71.7%), but not significantly so. Table 7 shows that women (67.0%) were shown indoors more than men (49.1%), a result significant at the .06 level. Table 8 shows that slightly more men (20.8%) than women (17.5%) have visible infirmities, but the difference is not significant. Finally, Table 9 shows that women (95.9%) are shown more often than men (86.8%) with others, a noticeable difference (Chi-square

is not appropriate, as one cell—25.0%—has an expected count of less than 5). Thus **H2 is partially supported.**

Table 6: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Gender vs. Affect

	Positive/happy	Neutral	Other/can't tell	Total
Male	38 (71.7%)	6 (11.3%)	9 (17.0%)	53 (100%)
Female	76 (78.4%)	14 (14.4%)	7 (7.2%)	97 (100%)
Total	114 (76.0%)	20 (13.3%)	16 (10.7%)	150 (100%)

Chi-square =3.512, df=2, p=.173. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

Table 7: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Gender vs. Setting

	Indoors	Outdoors	Other/can't tell	Total
Male	26 (49.1%)	16 (30.2%)	11 (20.8%)	53 (100%)
Female	65 (67.0%)	23 (23.7%)	9 (9.3%)	97 (100%)
Total	91 (60.7%)	39 (26.0%)	20 (13.3%)	150 (100%)

Chi-square =5.760, df=2, p=.056. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

Significant at the .06 level

Table 8: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Gender vs. Infirmary

	Infirmary None Visible	Infirmary Visible	Total
Male	42 (79.2%)	11 (20.8%)	53 (100%)
Female	80 (82.5%)	17 (17.5%)	97 (100%)
Total	122 (81.3%)	28 (18.7%)	150 (100%)

Chi-square =.235, df=1, p=.628. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

Table 9: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elder Gender vs. Social Context

	Not alone	Alone	Total
Male	46 (86.8%)	7 (13.2%)	53 (100%)
Female	93 (95.9%)	4 (4.1%)	97 (100%)
Total	139 (92.7%)	11 (7.3%)	150 (100%)

Chi-square =4.162, df=1, p=.041. 1 cell (25.0%) has expected count less than 5.

H3.Elder persons pictured in the senior living websites in Japan will be shown more often with others than alone.

Table 10 shows that the overwhelming number of elders (156 or 93.4%) are shown with other people. (This table, with a larger frequency than tables 6-9, includes 17 elders whose gender could not be coded, but who could be seen as alone/not alone.) Hofstede’s (2001) IDV Dimension of Cultural Variability found Japan to be in the middle range, i.e., clearly not an individualistic culture. Moreover, the people depicted seem to have achieved Maslow’s (1954) Level 3 of the Hierarchy of Needs, Social—belongingness, absence of loneliness. **H3 is supported.**

Table 10: Website Depictions of Japanese Seniors: Elders’ Social Context

	Frequency	Percent
Not alone	156	93.4
Alone	11	6.6
Total	167	100

Discussion

Overview

This study analyzed 355 images of Japanese persons—167 elders, 136 staffers— who appeared in 146 photos taken, apparently, at the senior living facilities. The marketing-oriented websites showed primarily healthy, joyful-looking elders assisted by a bevy of staff members who seemed to love their jobs. Both carers and the cared-for appear to have reached Maslow’s (1954) Level 5, Self-actualization, joyful feelings that life is worth living.

Moreover, the 92.7% of seniors shown with others underscores the sense of belongingness —Maslow’s Social-need Level. This universal value seems a more

robust explanation for “togetherness” in the website world than Hofstede’s (2001) Individualism dimension.

By contrast, Hofstede’s Masculinity Dimension, whereby Japanese would be expected to show gender differentiation, has at least some predictive power. Women did indeed appear in “their place”—indoors, if not specifically in the home—more than men; likewise, they seemed more gregarious (shown with others) than men. However, women and men did not exhibit infirmity or affect (facial expression) differences. The authors conclude that marketing goals partly trump the MAS cultural dimension, given that both female and male portrayals need to underscore the message of “move here to enjoy your golden years,” as well as “move here to make new friends.”

Comparison with the United States

No hypotheses were advanced to compare seniors’ images in the world’s #1 and #3 economies, since the two nations’ cultures, health insurance systems and subsidies for senior living facilities differ markedly. However, both Ji and Cooper’s study (2017) and the present study looked at private-company living options with websites designed to attract new residents.

A striking similarity emerges when comparing the two studies. Ji and Cooper (2017) found U.S. males to account for 36.3% of the website seniors; female, 63.8%. The present study found Japanese males to account for 35.3% of website seniors; females, 64.7%. Perhaps about 1/3 males, 2/3 females is emerging as a perceived cross-cultural gender norm for seniors, whether or not that proportion reflects reality.

For CCRCs in the United States, Ji and Cooper (2017) found 86.0% of seniors not alone— somewhat less than Japan’s 93.4% not alone, but still conforming to Maslow’s universal Level 3 of social/ belongingness. Likewise, both countries conformed to Maslow’s Level 5— a joyful feeling that life is worth living—U.S. 75.2% happy, 10.8% neutral, 0% sad; Japan 68.3% happy, 12.0% neutral, 0% sad.

U.S. depictions of seniors about equally indoors (45.5%) and outdoors (47.7%) contrasts with Japan’s 60.5% indoors, 27.5% outdoors. The difference could be due to U.S. CCRCs’ having more of the proverbial wide, open spaces in their landscaped campuses. Another contrast relates to infirmities. Only one U. S senior (0.2%) used a cane and one (0.2%), a walker; none was in a wheelchair. However, in Japan 21.0% of seniors used wheelchairs, possibly because Japan has such a high number of old-olds (2 million people 90 and above as of 2017). The truism of a U.S. youth culture may prompt marketers to portray a retirement-as-resort aura, but again the facilities’ differences in the two countries undoubtedly affects the portrayals.

Contributions of the Study

1. Focus on media aimed at seniors. The under representation of older persons in mainstream media is well documented (Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Prieler &

Kohlbacker, 2016), but the present study takes a different approach. Given seniors' wealth amassed over a lifetime, marketers would do well to attend to research on senior-specific media, especially new media, such as the present study.

2. Research attention to Japan in English. As the world's third largest economy, it is surprising how little research appears in English on Japan, which for 42 years (until 2010) ranked as the world's second largest economy (Barboza, 2010). Looking at the titles of the AEJMC's International Communication Division's paper abstracts over the past five years, one finds 31 papers with the exact words of "China" or "Chinese," but only one paper with the words of "Japan" or "Japanese." Perhaps the imbalance derives partly from the larger number of U.S. graduate students from China than from Japan. To paraphrase a line from "Death of a Salesman," more attention should be paid; this paper and the Keio Communication Review help to address that issue.

3. Currency of housing issue. The baby boom in devastated, war-ravaged Japan occurred later than in the United States, Japan's peak years being 1949-1953. Those post-war babies are now over 65, just the age when senior housing begins to look not only attractive, but often necessary. This study of website marketing is well timed.

4. Support for the universalism and endurance of Maslow's and Hofstede's theories. These classic theories, published 66 (Maslow, 1954) and (in the case of Hofstede's first edition) 40 years ago, still have cross-cultural relevance. As noted above, the fact that 5 million elders have already moved into various types of senior housing dovetails with Japan's high scores on Long-term Orientation and Uncertainty Avoidance. Moreover, Hofstede's Individualism and Masculinity dimensions were at least partly borne out by this study's findings.

Similarly, the findings supported Maslow's Level 3, Social and Level 5, Self-actualization needs. In addition, we may infer that the web images show needs at Level 1, Physiological and Level 2, Safety as being met. Level 4, Esteem (absence of feeling weak, helpless) is less clear; the depiction of wheelchair-bound elders might portray weakness and dependency, but the presence of smiling staff may send the message, "Empathetic helpers are here to assist you." Overall, the theories hold up well.

5. A pre-Covid 19 case study. Inadvertently, this study's coding occurred just before most of the world felt affected by the virus, which especially hurt elders living in close quarters such as nursing homes and senior facilities. A follow-up study could compare the same sample of Japanese facilities. Are staff and elders now pictured with masks and washing their hands? Are they practicing social distancing? Are elders shown in hospital beds? Are more doctors and nurses evident? Japan had recorded only 108 Covid-19 deaths as of April 6, 2020, but that number was expected to rise (Sugiyama & Johnston, 2020).

Future Research

By way of contrast, as of March 28, 2020, deaths in Italy had passed 10,000. Few news reports emphasized that Italy ranks second to Japan in the percent of elderly in its population, a major factor in the high death rate. At this writing, Italy has had more deaths even than China, where the virus was first identified and reported to WHO. A post-virus study of Chinese elderly would also yield valuable insights; with the world's largest elderly population—220 million (Llana, 2017)—China “will get old before it gets rich” (Campbell, 2019: 51). The third nation for fruitful study would be Mexico, with a more youthful population (only 7.67% of the population is 65 and over, according to CIA (2019)) but attracting a retirement cohort from other countries. Beyond Japan and the United States, already studied, these three additional countries could be studied to add global insights to research on seniors' portrayals. The Age of Aging, which has already arrived, deserves international researchers' attention.

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Appendix A. Sources of website images: 50 firms, elder care providers

rank	# of facilities	Company Name (Japanese)	Company Name (English)
1	398	SOMPO ケア株式会社	Sompo Care Inc.
2	165	株式会社ベストライフ	Bestlife Inc.
3	145	株式会社ヴァティ	Vati Co., Ltd.
4	125	株式会社ウイズネット	Wisnet Co., Ltd.
5	124	株式会社 学研ココファン	Gakken Cocofump Corporation
6	111	HITOWA ケアサービス株式会社	Hitowa Care Service Co., Ltd.
7	111	株式会社 ケア 21	Care Twentyone Corporation
8	106	株式会社木下の介護	Kinoshta Group
9	102	株式会社ユニマットリタイアメント・コミュニティ	Unimat Retirement Community Co., Ltd.
10	80	株式会社ニチイケアパレス	Nichigakkan Co., Ltd.
11	74	株式会社ツクイ	Tsukui Corporation
12	69	株式会社ニチイ学館	Nichigakkan Co., Ltd.
13	68	株式会社やまねメディカル	Yamane Medical
14	63	パナソニックエイジフリー株式会社	Panasonic Age-Free Co., Ltd.
15	51	ミモザ株式会社	Mimosa Co., Ltd.
16	50	株式会社チャーム・ケア・コーポレーション	Charm Care Corporation
17	44	株式会社ソラスト	Solasto Corporation
18	43	株式会社三英堂商事	Saneido Corporation
19	43	株式会社生活科学運営	Seikatsu Kagaku Un-Ei Co., Ltd.
20	42	株式会社らいふ	Life Co., Ltd.
21	40	株式会社フロンティアの介護	Frontier Co., Ltd.
22	39	株式会社シダー	Cedar Co., Ltd.
23	33	日本ロングライフ株式会社	Japan Long Life
24	32	グッドタイムリビング株式会社	Good Time Living Co., Ltd.
25	32	株式会社レイクス 21	Lakes21 Corporation
26	27	株式会社スーパー・コート	Super Court
27	27	プラウドライフ株式会社	Proud Life Inc.
28	24	株式会社社会福祉総合研究所	Social Welfare Research Institute, Inc.
29	24	株式会社東日本福祉経営サービス	East Japan Welfare Management Service Corporation
30	24	あなぶきメディカルケア株式会社	Anabuki Medical Care Inc.
31	22	ライクケアネクスト株式会社	Like Care Inc.
32	22	有限会社ネクストライフ	Nextlife
33	22	株式会社日本ケアリンク	Nippon Care Link Co., Ltd.
34	20	旭化成ホームズ株式会社	Asahi Kasei Homes Corporation

rank	# of facilities	Company Name (Japanese)	Company Name (English)
35	20	グリーンライフ株式会社	Green Life
36	20	株式会社 川商	Kawasho Inc.
37	20	株式会社レオパレス 21	Leopalace21 Corporation
38	19	株式会社めいとケア	Mate-Care Co., Ltd.
39	19	株式会社メディカルケアシステム	Medical Care System Co., Ltd.
40	18	株式会社カームネスライフ	Calmness Life Co., Ltd.
41	18	株式会社東急イーライフデザイン	Tokyu E-Life Design
42	18	株式会社アズパートナーズ	As Partners Co., Ltd.
43	18	スマリンフィルケア株式会社	Sumirin Fillcare Co., Ltd.
44	17	株式会社ハーフ・センチュリー・モア	Half Century More
45	17	株式会社ネクサスケア	Nexus Care Co., Ltd.
46	17	トラストガーデン株式会社	Trust Garden
47	17	東京建物シニアライフサポート株式会社	Tokyo Tatemono Senior Life Support Co.,Ltd.
48	16	株式会社リエイコミュニケア 24	Riei Co., Ltd.
49	16	メディカル・ケア・プランニング株式会社	Medical Care Planning Co., Ltd.
50	15	株式会社しまナーシングホーム	Shima Nursing Home Co., Ltd.

(From <https://www.roujin-homes.jp/ranking/shisetsu/> Dec. 6, 2019)