

## **Gender Portrayals of Older People in Japanese Television Advertisements: Continuity or Change?**

Michael Prieler

*Hallym University, Korea*

Florian Kohlbacher

*The Economist Corporate Network, Japan*

Shigeru Hagiwara

*St. Margaret's Junior College, Japan*

Akie Arima

*Tokyo Woman's Christian University, Japan*

### **Abstract**

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There is extensive research about gender representations in advertisements, but little research has been conducted regarding gender portrayals of older people. Based on a content analysis of 2,972 Japanese television advertisements from 1997 and 2007, we identified gender stereotypes of older people including: a higher percentage of depicted older males than older females, more females in advertising for the cosmetics/toiletries products, and males being shown more often in the workplace and females at home. Surprisingly, gender differences were even more pronounced in 2007 than in 1997, with even more males than females appearing in the television advertisements, and males being depicted more favourably than females. The potential effects of such representations on audiences are discussed based on social cognitive theory and cultivation theory.

### **Key words**

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Japan, older people, television, advertising, content analysis

## **Introduction**

There is a vast amount of literature about gender portrayals in television advertisements. This type of gender study first emerged in the United States in the 1970s during the second wave of the feminist movement (Dominick & Rauch, 1972; McArthur & Resko, 1975). Two decades later, these were followed by some English-language studies on Southeast and East Asian countries including Japan (Arima, 2003; Bresnahan, Inoue, Liu,

& Nishida, 2001; Milner & Collins, 2000), China (Cheng, 1997; Siu & Au, 1997), Taiwan (Bresnahan et al., 2001), South Korea (Kim & Lowry, 2005; Prieler, 2012), Malaysia (Bresnahan et al., 2001; Tan, Ling, & Theng, 2002; Wee, Choong, & Tambyah, 1995), Singapore (Siu & Au, 1997; Tan et al., 2002; Wee et al., 1995), and Hong Kong and Indonesia (Furnham, Mak, & Tanidjojo, 2000). Nearly all of these studies concluded that television advertisements portray gender, and especially women, in stereotypical ways (Furnham & Paltzer, 2010).

Despite the large quantity of studies on gender portrayals in television advertisements, and on the aging of many societies around the world, to date there have only been two publications of quantitative content analyses that dealt explicitly with gender representations of older people (Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, & Arima, 2011; Stern & Mastro, 2004). In this study we define older people, in accordance with Japanese advertising agency conventions, as people over the age of 50 years (Dentsu Senior Project, 2007; Hakuhodo Elder Business Suishinshitsu, 2006). This study was the first to analyze gender portrayals of older people in Japanese television advertising over an extended period using data from 1997 and 2007—a time period in which the number of older people in Japanese society increased particularly strongly. This study provided an opportunity to investigate whether gender representations of older people in Japan have changed over one decade, and if advertisements reflect any social changes, including the rising importance of older people in Japanese society. In addition, this study is also able to show if there are any gender differences in the representation of gender in general and gender representations of older people in particular. Finally, possible effects of gender representations are discussed in terms of social cognitive theory and cultivation theory.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Advertising reflects a society's social norms (Frith & Mueller, 2010) and teaches social roles and values (Pollay, 1986). Several theories support the argument that advertising shapes society. For example, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) suggests that most social behavior is learned through direct as well as vicarious observation, such as watching television. People model their behavior based on their television viewing, which includes information about appropriate gender or age roles. Thus, both

younger and older people learn about appropriate behavior and roles for their respective age groups and gender through advertising and the media. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998) argues that exposure to television cultivates perceptions of social reality. Television, a major storyteller of our time, often creates distorted views of reality, especially for heavy viewers. Watching television produces a worldview of social behavior, norms, and values that are consistent with those observed on television. In short, those who watch a lot of television may believe that older people are only a small proportion of the entire population because they are rarely seen on television, or they may obtain negative feelings about older people because of negative portrayals in the media (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980). Both the social cognitive and cultivation theories emphasize the social influence of media images. Research has confirmed that television and advertising shape how we think about gender roles (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997; MacKay & Covell, 1997), how older people regard themselves, and how older people are regarded by younger people (Donlon, Ashman, & Levy, 2005; Gerbner et al., 1980; Mares & Cantor, 1992). Although the results of this research cannot claim to describe the effect of television on audiences, content analysis is an important first step in understanding the possible impacts of media (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005).

### **Older People, Gender, and Social Change in Japan**

Many societies around the world are aging, and this phenomenon will continue in the foreseeable future. By 2050, an estimated 40.8% of the population of South Korea, 39.6% of Singapore, and 44.2% of Japan will be 60 years or older (United Nations, 2009). Japan will continue to be, as it already is, the country with the highest percentage of older people. The increasing importance of older people in Japan, not only from a demographic perspective, but also from a business perspective, can be seen as the percentage of people age 50 or older increased significantly from 34% of the population in 1995 to 41.9% in 2005 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 1995, 2005). Furthermore, Japanese who are 50 years or older hold approximately 80% of total personal financial assets in Japan (Boomers World Financial Clout, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that consumers and advertising agencies in Japan expect an increasing number of older people in television advertisements in the coming years because

of the need to target older people (Kohlbacher, Prieler, & Hagiwara, 2014).

Japan is generally characterized as having deep respect for elders based on Confucian values (O'Leary, 1993). Expressions of respect can be noted in honorific language towards older people or priority in seating. Koyano (1989) challenges this idea by arguing that Japanese also have strong negative attitudes towards older people. Research has shown that both young and old Japanese have a less favorable image of older people than people in China and the United States (Levy, 1999). Koyano explains this apparently contradictory behavior by explaining that rituals of respect towards the elderly are mere customs without substance. Indeed, negative attitudes of Japanese toward older people are especially prevalent in the case of older women (Formanek, 2008).

As in other countries, stereotypes of older people are abundant in Japan, including those for older women. Matsumoto (2009) found no proof of this negative self-image in interviews with older women, although there is a Japanese stereotype of older women as being depressed, submissive, and unconcerned about physical attractiveness. In general, the situation of women in Japan is still mixed. While their educational outlook has clearly improved, the status of women in the Japanese workplace still contrasts with the status of women in many other industrialized nations, even twenty-five years after the enactment of the 1986 Equal Opportunity Law. Many women in Japan still stop working after marriage, and, after they have finished childrearing, may only re-enter the workforce in order to supplement their family income as low-paid, part-time laborers. Japan is unique in this respect since women in most other industrialized nations do not stop working when they marry or have a child (Sugimoto, 2003).

Nevertheless, attitudes of the Japanese have changed significantly during recent decades. Currently 48% of the Japanese population think women should balance their lives between home and work (20% for 1973), 37% believe women should bear all of the responsibility for childrearing (42% for 1973), and only 12% currently favor an absolute devotion to home life for women (35% for 1973). Similarly, in 2008 48% of Japanese imagined the ideal home as a cooperative enterprise between husband and wife (21% for 1973), 13% favored a dominant husband/supportive wife household (22% for 1973), and 16% favored a division of roles (39% for 1973). Finally, in 2008, 86% of Japanese thought that husbands should help in the household (53% for 1973). These relatively recent attitude changes, how-

ever, are not yet matched by reality, and there are still stark discrepancies between the time Japanese males and females spent on household duties (Kono, Takahashi, & Hara, 2010).

Based on these changes related to status of older people, as well as gender in Japanese society, our research posed the question of whether these societal changes were also reflected in the content of Japanese television advertisements. Specifically, this study asked the following research question, which was analyzed for all investigated variables:

*RQ: Were there any changes in gender representations of older people in Japanese television advertisements between 1997 and 2007?*

### **Portrayals of Gender and Older People in TV Ads**

Since there is nearly no quantitative content analysis that explicitly deals with gender portrayals of older people, we refer in the following literature review to research on gender and older people, especially those studies published after 2000 on Asian societies. Deriving hypotheses from this diverse body of literature posed several problems, such as cultural and national differences; the variety of sampling methods (recording times, geographical area, channels) and units of analysis (TV ads vs. TV show characters); sample size; and wide variations in the definition of the term older people, which can range anywhere from 45 years to over 65 years of age. While we cannot superimpose our results on these previous findings, they nevertheless functioned as a basis for developing hypotheses and variables for our own research.

### **Numerical Representation of Older People by Gender**

Numerical representations of social groups in the media are a possible indicator of the importance, relevance (Gerbner et al., 1980), and recognition of a particular social group within a given society (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Such representations may shape the audience's consciousness and influence what they learn about these groups (Gerbner et al., 1980), specifically, in this study, for older people or gender. Most previous studies from all around the world found a higher percentage of older males than females in television advertisements. This was true in North America

(Fullerton & Kendrick, 2000; Lee, Carpenter, & Meyers, 2007; Milner & Collins, 2000; Prieler, 2016), in Europe (Furnham & Farragher, 2000; Milner & Collins, 2000; Simcock & Sudbury, 2006), in Australia (Milner & Higgs, 2004), and in Asia (Furnham et al., 2000; Lee, Kim, & Han, 2006; Milner & Collins, 2000; Ong & Chang, 2009; Prieler et al., 2011). Therefore, we formulate hypothesis 1 in the following manner:

*H1: There will be more older males than older females in Japanese television advertisements.*

## Setting

Setting is one of the most popular variables for gender studies on TV advertisements. Whereas numerical representation alone does not indicate the quality of the representations, the inclusion of the exact nature and type of the portrayals may reveal the society's respect or lack thereof for a given social group (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). The setting teaches us more about the lives of older people, and their activities in different locations, than does the number of times that they appear in advertisements. The findings of several studies regarding the portrayal of older people found that they were primarily depicted in the home (Swayne & Greco, 1987), while other research found that older people were typically depicted in outside settings (Ong & Chang, 2009; Robinson, 1998). In contrast, literature on gender showed clear patterns with most females shown at home, while most males were shown outdoors and in workplace settings. This pattern held true in the United States (Bresnahan et al., 2001; Kim & Lowry, 2005) and in several Asian countries, including South Korea (Kim & Lowry, 2005; Prieler, 2012), Singapore, and Malaysia (Wee et al., 1995). These stereotypical depictions for the setting in which older people were depicted were confirmed for China (Siu & Au, 1997), Indonesia (Furnham et al., 2000), and Japan (Bresnahan et al., 2001). Based on these commonalities, we tested the following hypotheses regarding setting:

*H2a: More older females than older males will be shown in home settings.*

*H2b: More older males than older females will be shown in workplace settings.*

## Social Interaction

The depiction of the social interactions of older people may allow us to infer the perceived value of older people. Of importance is whether older people are shown alone or together with other age groups, and identifying the groups with whom they interact. Most studies around the world concluded that older people appear with other age groups in more than 70% of advertisements (Greco, 1993; Roy & Harwood, 1997). For example, Greco (1993) reported that older people are shown interacting with multiple age groups in 78% of advertisements in 1985 and 70% of advertisements in 1990, while only 14% of the older advertisement characters appeared alone in 1985 and 22% in 1990. Similarly, Roy and Harwood (1997) found that 76.4% of older people appeared with multiple age groups and only 13.0% appeared exclusively with other older characters. These findings may imply that older people are not regarded as valuable enough to appear only with members of their own age group such that other age groups must generally appear with them.

To date, no study has focused on the influence of gender on the representation of social interactions of older people. However, gerontology literature indicates that older males have smaller social networks, which is also true in Japan where retirement tends to cause changes in the social networks of males (Ando, 2005; McLaughlin, Vagenas, Pachana, Begum, & Dobson, 2010). Based on these findings, we formulated the following hypothesis:

*H3: More older males than females will be shown alone in television advertisements.*

## Image

The image of older people, depicted in advertisements, portrays their importance and status in the society and whether they are depicted in positive or in negative ways. Identified studies of gender portrayals did not employ image as a category, but there are some studies regarding the portrayal of older people in television advertisements. Most studies found that older people were more often portrayed positively than negatively (Ong & Chang, 2009; Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, & Arima, 2015; Simcock & Sudbury, 2006). Lee et al. (2007) reported similar results, finding older people are associated mostly with positive attributes such as “active,” “happy,”

and “healthy.” Similar findings were also true in an East Asian context, where Ong and Chang (2009) found more than 70% of older people in South Korean advertisements were depicted as happy, lucid, emotionally strong, and active; this was found to a much lesser extent in Malaysian advertisements. Finally, one study in Japan (Prieler et al., 2015) also found more positive depictions of older people (39.2%) than unfavorable ones (11.1%), though the majority of depictions were neutral (49.7%). Based on these findings in the literature that showed the dominant role of Japanese men, along with the negative images of older women in Japanese society (as outlined in the introduction), we formulated the following hypothesis:

*H4: Older males will be depicted in favorable ways more often than older females.*

### **Product Category**

The products associated with social groups indicate the group’s pre-occupations, competencies, and values (Mastro & Stern, 2003). For example, the strong association between women and cosmetic products emphasizes the importance that society assigns to female beauty and contributes to their sexualization (Luyt, 2011). Such limited portrayals lead to a distorted knowledge of various social groups. Older people in television advertisements, for example, are most often used to promote foods and beverages (Lee et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2007; Miller, Leyell, & Mazachek, 2004; Prieler et al., 2015; Simcock & Sudbury, 2006; Zhang, Song, & Carver, 2008), financial/insurance (Lee et al., 2006; Ong & Chang, 2009), and medication or health (Atkins, Jenkins, & Perkins, 1990/1991; Lee et al., 2007; Ong & Chang, 2009; Robinson, 1998). Research on gender portrayals in television advertising also found some gender-based trends in certain product categories with females often appearing in television advertisements for cosmetics and toiletries products (Bresnahan et al., 2001; Furnham & Paltzer, 2010; Prieler & Centeno, 2013). In contrast, previous research has shown a wide range of products associated with males (Prieler et al., 2011). Based on these previous findings, we formulated the next hypothesis as follows:

*H5: More older females than males will advertise for the product category cosmetics/toiletries.*



## Method

### Research Sample and Coding Procedure

Our research sample was drawn from a database of television advertisements that includes all advertisements broadcast for the first time on any given day in the Greater Tokyo Area by the five commercial Japanese television stations: NTV, TBS, Fuji Television, TV Asahi, and TV Tokyo. We chose TV ads from 1997 and 2007, since during that time period the number of older people in Japanese society increased particularly strongly. We systematically selected a sample including all TV ads of 28 days for each year, with an equal distribution of weekdays. This led to a sample of 1,495 TV ads from 1997 and a sample of 1,477 TV ads from 2007. Those that featured people totaled 1,236 advertisements in 1997 and 1,220 in 2007. Of these advertisements, 145 ads in 1997 and 218 in 2007 showed older people (50+) as main characters. Our sample consisted of these advertisements showing older people.

Two Japanese doctoral students (one female and one male) were trained for several hours on the coding procedures and they individually coded all television advertisements independently. Reliability coefficients, as measured by Cohen's kappa, ranged above .80 for most variables. Only the variables for the categories of image (.705 for 1997; .692 for 2007) and social interaction (.704 for 1997; .777 for 2007) had lower results. Nevertheless, these results exceeded the minimum coefficient of .60 recommended by Neuendorf (2011). To establish a final data set, disagreements between the coders were settled through discussion.

### Variables

**Gender.** Characters in the television advertisements were coded as male or female. In the rare case that more than one older person appeared in a single advertisement, the most prominent older person in the advertisement was coded as the subject of the study.

**Age.** A character's age was estimated to be older or younger than 50 years. Following Simcock and Sudbury (2006), the age of characters was determined in three ways: (1) the actual age of the actor (half of all were celebrities), (2) a reference to the age of the character within the TV ad, or

(3) the physical appearance of the character (e.g., hair color, thinning of hair, wrinkles).

**Setting.** The places where older people appeared were separated into the following five categories: home (inside), workplace (inside), other (inside), outside, and other. In case an older person appeared in several settings, the most prominent setting was coded.

**Social interaction.** This variable investigated if older people were interacting with other people in advertisements. The social interactions of older people with other people were coded in the following way: alone, with older people, with adults (younger than 50), with a child, or with multiple generations. If several social interactions appeared, the most prominent one was coded.

**Image.** The image of the older person in the television advertisement was coded in the following way: favorable, neither, or unfavorable (Simcock & Sudbury, 2006). A favorable depiction was one where older models were shown as authoritative, competent, skillful, controlling, and/or enjoying a particular activity. An unfavorable portrayal was one where older models were shown as incompetent (comical or otherwise), helpless, a victim, weak, and/or displaying stereotypically negative behavior associated with age (e.g., bad temper, forgetfulness).

**Product category.** The product categories in this research, which are in accordance with the product categories commonly used in Japan, were provided by the database of television advertisements. These product categories were as follows: foods/beverages, service/leisure, cosmetics/toiletries, distribution/retailing, pharmaceuticals/medical supplies, automobile/related products, real estate/housing, finance/insurance, household products, apparel/fashion/accessories/personal items, precision instruments/office supplies, home electric appliances/audio-visual equipment, publications, materials, and other.

## Results

The results of this study are based on chi-square analyses that were executed on a sample of unduplicated television advertisements that included older people. Because we were interested in identifying the overall significant differences between 1997 and 2007 for each category, and which subcategories contributed to this difference, we broke the results down

even further using the adjusted standardized residuals (ASRs) for post-hoc tests. In turn, we will try to answer each hypothesis while simultaneously addressing RQ1 (regarding the changes between the years 1997 and 2007) through conducting chi-square tests for each gender.

Between 1997 and 2007, there was a significant increase in the number of advertisements depicting older males (from 93 to 153), as well as the number of ads showing older females, (from 52 to 65). Despite an increase in depictions of both genders over the decade study period, older females were much less represented than older males in both years (1997:  $\chi^2 = 11.593$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .001$ ; 2007:  $\chi^2 = 35.523$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This proved hypothesis 1 for both years, which predicted the depiction of more older males than older females in the advertisements.

**Table 1.**  
*Relation between Variable and Gender of Older Person in 1997 (N=145) and 2007 (N=218)*

	1997		2007		$\chi^2$
	Male (n=93)	Female (n=52)	Male (n=153)	Female (n=65)	
Setting					12.173*, $df=4$
Home (inside)	19.4	32.7	12.4	21.5	
Workplace (inside)	6.5	11.5	18.3	4.6**	
Other (inside)	36.6	25.0	41.8	46.2	
Outside	26.9	9.6*	16.3	12.3	
Other (artificial, unclear, etc.)	10.8	21.2	11.1	15.4	
Interaction					9.457*, $df=4$
Alone	16.1	30.8*	45.1	43.1	
Only Senior	8.6	15.4	9.8	9.2	
With Adults	63.4	48.1	38.6	44.6	
With Children	6.5	0.0	3.3	0.0	
Multigenerational	5.4	5.8	3.3	3.1	
Image					1.185, $df=2$ , ns
Favorable	37.6	28.8	50.3	33.8*	
Neutral	51.6	57.7	35.3	60.0***	
Unfavorable	10.8	13.5	14.4	6.2	11.843**, $df=2$

Product Category	1997			2007		
	Male ( <i>n</i> =93)	Female ( <i>n</i> =52)	$\chi^2$	Male ( <i>n</i> =153)	Female ( <i>n</i> =65)	$\chi^2$
			27.655***, <i>df</i> =6			43.276***, <i>df</i> =6
Food/Beverage	24.7	19.2		27.5	10.8**	
Cosmetics/Toiletries	6.5	23.1**		3.9	35.4***	
Real Estate/Housing	8.6	5.8		7.8	3.1	
Distribution/Retailing	11.8	3.8		10.5	10.8	
Finance/Insurance	5.4	1.9		9.8	4.6	
Services/Leisure	4.3	26.9***		11.1	7.7	
Other <sup>a</sup>	38.7	19.2*		29.4	27.7	

*Note.* The significance levels for differences between sub-categories are based on post-hoc tests using adjusted standardized residuals. In case of low cell counts, we used Fisher's exact test.

<sup>a</sup>Due to low cell counts the following (non-significant) product categories were added to the other product category: Pharmaceuticals/Medical Supplies, Apparel/Fashion/Accessories, Publications, Precision Instruments/Office Supplies, Home Electronic Appliances/AV Equipment, Automobile/Related Products, Household Products, Materials. ns=Non Significance.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

In terms of the setting (see Table 1), gender differences emerged for both years ( $\chi^2 = 12.173$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .016$  for 1997;  $\chi^2 = 9.875$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .043$  for 2007). Breaking the results further down, using the adjusted standardized residuals (ASRs) for post-hoc tests, showed that significantly more males than females appeared in the outside setting in 1997 (26.9% vs. 9.6%,  $ASR = \pm 2.5$ ) and in the workplace setting in 2007 (18.3% vs. 4.6%,  $ASR = \pm 2.6$ ). However, while there was a higher percentage of females than males in the home setting, these results were not statistically significant, as indicated by the adjusted standardized residuals (32.7% vs. 19.4% for 1997,  $ASR = \pm 1.8$ ; 21.5% vs. 12.4%,  $ASR = \pm 1.7$  for 2008). Thus, hypothesis 2a, which stated that more older females than males will be shown in the home setting, was rejected. Hypothesis 2b, which stated that more older males than older females will be shown in the workplace setting, was supported for 2007, but not for 1997. Comparing the 1997 and 2007 results found a significant increase in depictions for males ( $\chi^2 = 11.299$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .023$ ), but not for females ( $\chi^2 = 7.398$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .116$ ). As compared to 1997 data, in 2007 more males were depicted in the workplace (18.3% vs. 6.5%,  $ASR = \pm 2.6$ ) and less in the outside setting

(16.3% vs. 26.9%, ASR =  $\pm 2.0$ ).

Analyzing the social interaction of older people showed that in 2007 no overall gender differences emerged ( $\chi^2 = 2.246$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .717$ ), although in 1997 ( $\chi^2 = 9.315$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .046$ ) a gender difference was found as more females than males being depicted alone (30.8% vs. 16.1%, ASR =  $\pm 2.1$ ). Thus, hypotheses 3, which stated that more older males than older females would be shown alone, was not supported by the data. Changes emerged between 1997 and 2007 for males ( $\chi^2 = 24.895$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not for females ( $\chi^2 = 2.716$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .449$ ). More males were shown alone in 2007 (45.1% vs. 16.1%, ASR =  $\pm 4.6$ ) and less with other adults (38.6% vs. 63.4%, ASR =  $\pm 3.8$ ).

The image of older people showed no gender differences in 1997 ( $\chi^2 = 1.185$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .553$ ), while gender differences did emerge in 2007 ( $\chi^2 = 11.843$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .003$ ). More specifically, more males than females were depicted in a favorable way in 2007 (50.3% vs. 33.8%, ASR =  $\pm 2.2$ ) and more females than males were shown in a neutral way (60.0% vs. 35.3%; ASR =  $\pm 3.4$ ). Thus, hypothesis 4 stating that older males will be depicted in favorable ways more often than older females was supported in 2007, but not in 1997. Comparing the two years, no differences for favorable depictions of females emerged ( $\chi^2 = 1.895$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .388$ ), but more favorable depictions of males were found in 2007 ( $\chi^2 = 6.346$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .042$ ) and there were a smaller percentage of males in the neutral category in 2007 than in 1997 (35.3% vs. 51.6%, ASR =  $\pm 2.5$ ).

In terms of the product category, gender differences were found for 1997 ( $\chi^2 = 27.655$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as for 2007 ( $\chi^2 = 43.276$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < .001$ ). More specifically, in 1997 more older females than older males were shown in advertisements for the product categories of cosmetics/toiletries (23.1% vs. 6.5%, ASR =  $\pm 2.9$ ) and services/leisure (26.9% vs. 4.3%, ASR =  $\pm 4.0$ ). Conversely, for other product categories, more older males than older females were depicted (38.7% vs. 19.2%, ASR =  $\pm 2.4$ ). In 2007, more older males were depicted in advertisements for food/beverage (27.5% vs. 10.8%, ASR =  $\pm 2.7$ ) and more older females for cosmetics/toiletries (35.4% vs. 3.9%, ASR =  $\pm 6.3$ ). Thus, hypothesis 6, which stated that there will be more older females than males in advertising for the cosmetics/toiletries product category, was supported. When 1997 and 2007 results for the product category service/leisure were compared, no differences emerged for older males ( $\chi^2 = 7.117$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = .310$ ), al-

though differences were found for older females ( $\chi^2 = 12.930$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = .035$ ) with less older females being portrayed in service/leisure advertising in 2007 than in 1997 (7.7% vs. 26.9%,  $ARS = \pm 2.8$ ).

## Discussion

Overall, gender representations of older people in Japanese television advertisements were rather stereotypical in both 1997 and 2007. For example, more older females were depicted in advertising for the cosmetics/toiletries products in both years, and more older males than older females were shown in television advertisements. However, while the representations of older females did not change much between the two years, the portrayal of older males became increasingly more dominant and more positive. While males were already dominating in 1997, even a higher percentage of older males than older females were depicted in 2007, more males than females were shown in the workplace in 2007, and males were being represented in more favorable ways than females in 2007.

In both years, depiction of older males in advertisements clearly outnumbered the depiction of older females. The percentage of older females depicted even decreased between 1997 and 2007 (from 35.9% to 29.8%). This is a surprising result, given that older women outnumber and outlive men in Japan. However, this finding confirms that negative attitudes toward older women still exist in Japan (Formanek, 2008). This discriminatory under-representation of older females was already decried in the 1970s in the United States as the “double standard of aging” (Sontag, 1972, p. 29) and over the past 40 years not much seems to have changed in Japan. This mis- and under-representation of older females has real consequences in that it can shape society’s attitudes towards older women (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner et al., 1980). For example, people might learn through such representations that older women are not as valuable as older males and as younger females (Bandura, 2009).

Older people were not only misrepresented in terms of gender and numbers, but also in terms of the settings in which they were shown. Older females were shown more often than older males at home (32.7% vs. 19.4% for 1997; 21.5% vs. 12.4% for 2007, though not statistically significant). Older males were shown more often in outside settings and in the workplace in 2007, while surprisingly more older females than older

males were shown in the workplace in 1997 (though not statistically significant). Thus, the stereotypical gender depictions of older people in terms of the setting increased between 1997 and 2007. In short, setting in Japanese television advertisements depicted the two genders in a stereotypical division of roles with more males at the workplace and more females at home. Japanese television advertisements mirror the traditional stereotype that women should stay at home and take care of the family even though this traditional stereotype does not reflect current attitudinal changes within the Japanese population. Our findings on setting are consistent with most previous research on gender representations (Furnham & Paltzer, 2010).

Results for social interaction differences were rather mixed and not clear-cut. While more older females than older males were shown alone in 1997, the situation changed in 2007 when both males and females were predominantly shown alone and not portrayed in the company of other older adults as in 1997. At first sight, these findings might imply that representations of older people has become more aligned with the stereotype of older people as being lonely. However, this result could also be interpreted as a positive sign – namely that older people are finally being regarded as important enough to be shown alone and do not need to be depicted with other age groups. There might be various reasons for these results that showed an increase in the portrayal of older people being alone. As previously shown (Prieler, Kohlbacher, Hagiwara, & Arima, 2010), more than 60% of older people in Japanese television advertisements are celebrities. Thus, the predominance of older people being shown alone might be also connected with the fact that the majority of older people depicted were celebrities.

The overall image of older people also changed between 1997 and 2007. While no significant gender differences were identified in 1997, in 2007 significantly more older males than older females were depicted in a favorable way (50.3% vs. 33.8%). In short, over the 10 year period there was an increasing discrepancy between the favorable representations of males and females. The fact that the image of older people became even more stereotypic and differentiated by gender from 1997 to 2007 might come as a surprise, but this result is hardly unexpected since Japan is still a highly patriarchal society where men generally play more important roles than females (Sugimoto, 2003) and are regarded as having a higher status than females

in society.

Last but not least, the gender representations of older people in terms of the product category were most stereotypical as exemplified by the cosmetics/toiletries product categories using more older females than males in both 1997 and 2007. Social cognitive theory suggests that we can learn from such associations (Bandura, 2001). In other words, the strong association between females and cosmetics/toiletries emphasizes the importance that society assigns to female beauty and contributes to their sexualization (Luyt, 2011). Previous research, in such diverse places as Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan, India, Indonesia, and Singapore, has shown that such findings are not only true for older females, but for females in general (Bresnahan et al., 2001; Das, 2011; Furnham et al., 2000; Tan et al., 2002). This association was not only prevalent in Asia, but also the most consistent finding around the world (Furnham & Paltzer, 2010).

Overall, such stereotypical gender representations of older people, which increased between 1997 and 2007, are problematic since advertisements and other media can help to define gender and age roles, something that has been pointed out by the social cognitive theory and the cultivation theory (Bandura, 2009; Gerbner, 1998). Empirical research supports these theories. Advertisements have been shown to influence gender role attitudes (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997; MacKay & Covell, 1997) and media influences the way in which older people perceive themselves (Donlon et al., 2005; Mares & Cantor, 1992) as well as how older people are perceived by younger people (Gerbner et al., 1980). Thus, the representations of older people as well as gender are important social issues with real consequences.

## Conclusions

Gender differences of older people in Japanese television advertisements were examined for 1997 and 2007. Surprisingly, gender differences increased between the two years with more stereotypical gender representations in 2007. While the occurrence of older males in advertisements outnumbered the number of older females in 1997, this difference became even more pronounced in 2007. In addition, more older males than older females were depicted in the workplace in 2007 with the older males being represented in a more favorable way. For both years, the cosmetics/toiletries product category was predominantly advertised using females. Overall,



such representations might have negative effects on the audience by perpetuating gender stereotypes.

This study has been one of the first to shed light on the increasingly important question of how older people are represented by gender in television advertisements. At a time when many societies around the world, including in Asian countries, are dealing with an increasingly aging population, this research area should no longer be neglected. Our study has answered some questions, but much still remains to be done. As is the case for every content analysis, we can only claim representativeness for the two periods of time analyzed (1997 and 2007). As a follow-up study, we suggest future investigation of audience reaction to these representations of older people in order to gauge the possible social effects. In conclusion, the representation of older people in advertising is a research topic ripe for further examination, and such research stands to significantly benefit gender and women's studies as well.

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*Biographical Note:* **Michael Prieler** is an Associate Professor in the School of Media and Communication at Hallym University, South Korea. He has worked and studied for more than ten years in Japan and South Korea. His research focuses on media representations of gender, race/ethnicity, and age in Japan, South Korea, China, the Philippines, and the United States. He has published on these areas in books and in a variety of international journals, including *Sex Roles*, *Asian Women*, *Ageing & Society*, *Asia Pacific Business Review*, *Communication & Society*, and the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, among others. In addition, he has published the book *Advertising in the Aging Society: Understanding Representations, Practitioners, and Consumers in Japan* (co-authored with Florian Kohlbacher, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). E-mail: prieler@gmail.com

*Biographical Note:* **Florian Kohlbacher** is the North Asia Director of The Economist Corporate Network. Prior to joining The Economist Group Florian was an Associate Professor of Marketing and Innovation in the International Business School Suzhou at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University and the Founding Director of the XJTLU Research Institute on Ageing and Society; he also was a Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Business & Economics Section as well as Deputy Director at the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) Tokyo. Florian holds a doctorate from the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU Vienna) and teaches marketing and business at universities in Japan. Florian is co-editor of *The Silver Market Phenomenon: Marketing and Innovation in the Aging Society*, co-author of *Advertising in the Aging Society: Understanding Representations, Practitioners, and Consumers in Japan*, and author of *International Marketing in the Network Economy: A Knowledge-Based Approach*. E-mail: f.kohlbacher@yahoo.com

*Biographical Note:* **Shigeru Hagiwara** is a Professor Emeritus of the Institute for Media and Communication Research at Keio University in Japan. Currently, he is the professor and head of the Department of Contemporary Communication at St. Margaret's Junior College. His work has been widely published in the areas of social psychology and mass communication, e.g., *Henyō suru media to nyūsu hōdō* [The Changing Image of the Media and the News] (*Maruzen*, 2001), *Terebi to gaikoku imēji* [Television and the Image of Foreign Countries] (*Keisō Shobō*, 2004), *Terebi nyūsu no sekaizō* [The Representation of the World in Television News] (*Keisō Shobō*, 2007). E-mail: s-hagiwara@rikkyojogakuin.ac.jp

*Biographical Note:* **Akie Arima** is a Professor in the Department of Communication at Tokyo Woman's Christian University. Her major research focus includes the areas of mass communication and social psychology. She has translated several books and published in numerous journals and books. She has published *Naiyō bunseki no hōhō* [Methods of Content Analysis] (*Nakanishisha Shuppan*, 2007). E-mail: arima@lab.twcu.ac.jp