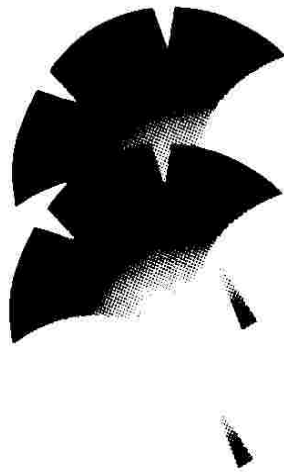


DEUTSCHES INSTITUT FÜR JAPANSTUDIEN



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**The Representation of Older People
in Japanese Television Advertising**

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The Representation of Older People in Japanese Television Advertising

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Abstract:

The Representation of Older People in Japanese Television Advertising

This paper presents preliminary results of the project “Advertising to the Silver Market in Japan,” which examines how older people are represented and targeted in Japanese television advertising. We conducted a content analysis of a systematic sample of television commercials from the years 1997 and 2007. This paper presents the first results of our content analysis, which focuses on the representation of older people in television commercials. Analyzing a total of 2972 unduplicated commercials, our study is the biggest of its kind ever undertaken, and is also the first study that compares two systematically sampled periods of time.

The overall results of this research confirmed major findings from previous research in various countries and include: a general underrepresentation of older people; an even more pronounced underrepresentation of older females; an inside setting for most commercials featuring older people; their appearance predominantly with other age groups, and finally, that they mostly appear in commercials advertising food or beverages. What we add to these findings is the increasing importance of older celebrities, and the general increase of older people over the ten year period from 1997 to 2007.

Key words: advertising, aging, demographic change, elderly, Japan, older people, representation, television

1. Introduction

This working paper presents the preliminary results of the project “Advertising to the Silver Market in Japan,” a joint project conducted by the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) (Dr. Florian Kohlbacher, Dr. Michael Prieler), Keio University (Prof. Shigeru Hagiwara), and Tokyo Woman’s Christian University (Assoc. Prof. Akie Arima). The project has two main research questions. One is based in a marketing research tradition and asks: how are older consumers² targeted in Japanese television advertising? The other question addresses the cultural/media studies research tradition and asks how older people are represented in Japanese television advertising. In order to answer these questions, three main research approaches are used: (1) interviews with advertising agencies, (2) case studies on products especially targeted at older consumers, and (3) a content analysis of television commercials from the years 1997 and 2007. In this working paper, we present our first results on one part of the project: a content analysis of the representation of older people in Japanese television advertising. How older people are targeted will be analyzed in another paper.

Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world and, at 42 per cent (in 2005), the highest percentage of people over 50 (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2005). In addition, this older age group has on average the highest monthly expenditure (Dentsu Senior Project 2007: 29). Companies, and particularly advertising agencies, soon took note of these statistics. As a result, the market for older consumers has become more and more important (e.g., Coulmas 2007). One way to target elderly customers is to use their peers as models in advertising. This is where the two larger research questions of our project come together.

We have chosen television advertising as our research focus for an important reason. Television advertising accounts for the largest percentage of the advertising budget

² For this project, we define “Older” consumers/people as 50 years and above (50+).

in Japan (33.6%). While older people regard television as only the second most reliable/trusted advertising medium after newspapers, they agree that television features the most interesting advertisements of any media form (cf. Nikkei Kōkoku Kenkyūjo 2007: 47, 208). Television also clearly dominates when older people are asked about their everyday amusement/hobby (Jōhōressha 2007: 33), or provider of everyday information (Nakajima 2007: 97). No other medium is consumed as frequently and by so many people as television. A TV set exists in nearly a hundred percent of Japanese households and was viewed daily for an average of 3:43 hours in 2005. This time is even longer for older people, who watch more than any other age group in Japan. Women of 50-59 years watch 4:06 hours daily (men in the same age segment only 3:23). Women over 60 watch even more at 5:00 hours, topped by men in the same age group at 5:21 hours (cf. Shiraishi 2008: 514). This difference is certainly connected with the increasing retirement rate of Japanese males over 60.

Clearly, a large majority of the Japanese population, including older people, watches television commercials regularly. There is a substantial literature on the long-term effects of media exposure (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli 1986). Some research also indicates that how older people regard themselves and are regarded by younger people is highly influenced by the environment and also by media (Passuth & Cook 1985; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Moran 1980; Mares & Cantor 1992; Harwood 1999).

By turning their attention to this long-neglected older market, business and industry could easily confer visibility and value to this group, given these facts. This in turn could help improve society's images of and attitudes toward its older members as well as older people's perceptions of themselves. In short, part of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy of each company should include portraying older people and other social groups in a responsible way. This aspect of the social responsibility of advertising

companies has also been discussed in previous studies (e.g., Peterson & Ross 1997; Simcock & Sudbury 2006).

The following section will give an overview of the important literature on the representation of older people in television advertising. In section three we explain our methodology in detail and introduce the next steps of the project. Section four, the core of this paper, will present the first results of the content analysis. These results will then be further analyzed in the discussion section. The final section gives a short outlook and conclusion. We welcome any comments on this working paper, as well as suggestions for our overall project.

2. Literature Review

This literature review will highlight previous literature specifically on the representation of older people in television commercials. Any other comparisons, such as with the representation of older people in television dramas or even in other advertising forms, are rather problematic. Television advertising has a very different purpose than other television genres, and differs somewhat from advertising in other media as well (Kotler et al. 2006; Arens & Schaefer 2007).

Even direct comparisons of studies about TV commercials within the same country are problematic, since they are often based on very different sampling methods. These differing variables include: geographical area, channels, recording times, and definitions of terms. Recording times vary greatly in terms of the length of period (from a single day to a year), but also in terms of the daily recorded time, as shown in Table 1. Each time slot of the day has its special audiences; advertisers consciously target each group. Since it can be assumed that the representation of older people changes over the course of the day, comparisons become rather difficult.

Research: Authors; Year	Recording Times
Moore & Cadeau 1985	8.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.
Swayne & Greco 1987	10.00 a.m. to 12.00 a.m., 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m., 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.
Atkins, Jenkins & Perkins 1990/91	3.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.
Tupper 1995	8.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.
Roy & Harwood 1997	5.30 p.m. to 10.30 p.m.
Peterson & Ross 1997	8.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.
Yamanaka 2000	11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.
Zimmerman 2001	8.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.
Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004	Archives & 6.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.
Simcock & Sudbury 2006	6.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.
Lee, Kim & Han 2006	8.00 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.
Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007	8.00 a.m. to 11.00 p.m.
Prieler 2008	6.00 a.m. to 2.00 a.m.

Table 1: Previous Research: times during which samples were recorded (if applicable)

Diverse terminology also creates problems. Common terms for older people in advertisements include mature models (Peterson & Ross 1997), elderly (Moore & Cadeau 1985; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Zimmerman 2001; Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004), elderly persons (Swayne & Greco 1987; Tupper 1995), elderly people (Prieler 2008), older adults (Roy & Harwood 1997; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), older models (Simcock & Sudbury 2006), and older people (Lee, Kim & Han 2006). Some use multiple terms such as the elderly and older persons (e.g., Hiemstra et al. 1983, Swayne & Greco 1987). Things become even more complicated when authors use the same or similar terms but define them differently (see Table 2). For example, the term elderly is defined as 50+ (Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991), 60+ (Zimmerman 2001; Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004), and 65+ (Moore & Cadeau 1985). In short, such divergent definitions make meaningful comparisons with previous research difficult.

Another reason why comparisons among previous studies are problematic is the treatment of commercial repetition, or duplication. In other words, did researchers only analyze different (unduplicated) commercials, or did they record all commercials and analyze them no matter how often they were broadcast (duplicated)? Many researchers did not control for duplications, but we followed those who did. Duplication is not a problem in itself, because there are some arguments in favour of accounting for it. It may more closely reflect reality, given that the television audience has to watch the same commercials several times a day; repetition, of course, heightens their intended effect (Swayne & Greco 1987). There is, however, a very strong shortcoming, which is determining if the sample is really representative. Just to give an idea of how few different commercials some of the mentioned research includes, we refer to Prieler's (2008) research. He had a sample of 3352 unduplicated commercials, based on a sample of nearly 20,000 commercials he recorded during a two week period. This ratio suggests that some research with lower sample sizes might have a much smaller number of unduplicated commercials. For example, Swayne and Greco (1987), which is based on a sample of 814 duplicated commercials, theoretically has a sample of only around 200-300 unduplicated commercials. Since they report that only

50 of these 814 were ads featuring older people, one has to wonder how many of those were really different. If only half were unduplicated, then their research would actually be based on 25 commercials, a rather small sample for producing statistically valid data.

Research: Authors; Year	Year of Recording	Country	Age	Sample Size (ads)
Francher & Jay 1973	Not stated	USA	Not stated	100
Hiemstra et al. 1983	1981	USA	50+	136
Moore & Cadeau 1985	1983	Canada	65+	1733
Swayne & Greco 1987	Not stated	USA	65+	814
Atkins, Jenkins & Perkins 1990/91	1990	USA	50+	458
Tupper 1995	1994	USA	65+	278
Roy & Harwood 1997	1994	USA	60+	778
Peterson & Ross 1997	1991	USA	45+	1874
Yamanaka 2000	1998	Japan	50+	612
Zimmerman 2001	1998	USA	60+	383
Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004	1950s-1990s (Archives)	USA	60+	1662
Simcock & Sudbury 2006	Not stated	Britain	50+	2058
Lee, Kim & Han 2006	2002	USA/South Korea	60+	859/1436
Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007	2003	USA	55+	1977
Prieler 2008	2004/2005	Japan	60+	1680/1672

Table 2: Previous Research on the Representation of Older People in TV Commercials

Nevertheless, we should mention some recurring themes in the literature and also some common results. What all these research results have in common is that they report an **underrepresentation of older people** in television commercials. However, the degree of underrepresentation varies greatly (see Table 3 for an overview). Francher (1973) found that only 2% of commercials featured older people. Swayne & Greco (1987) found that 6.9% of commercials included people older than 65, though the actual percentage of all appearing people was even only 3.2%, whereas in the population this age group accounted for 12%. Hiemstra et al. (1983) found only 3.1% of people in ads appeared to be older than 60, which was at the time however 15.7 percent for the US population. Roy & Harwood (1997) found 6.9% of the characters in commercials to be over 60, whereas the elderly were at the time 16.4% of the population. Prieler (2008) found that in Japanese commercials older people are clearly underrepresented. He found that 13.6% of commercials featured people over 60, though this age group accounted for 24.4% of the Japanese population. While Yamanaka also found an underrepresentation of the 65+ group in his research, there was, interestingly, a clear overrepresentation of models between 50-64 years (38.8%), which was at the time 20.2% of the population. Lee, Kim & Han (2006) also found an underrepresentation in Korean ads, where 8.0% of ads comprised people over 60, an age group that accounted for 12% of the Korean population. In contrast, they reported that 15.4% of US ads include at least one person over 60, which is nearly the same as the percentage within the population (they cite this at 16%). Also, Lee, Carpenter & Meyers (2007) found 15% of commercials included people older than 55, whereas the actual percentage of this age group in the region where the commercials were recorded was 18%. Similarly, Simcock & Sudbury (2006) report that 31% percent of their recorded commercials included older people, which was close to the actual demographic situation. However, they also emphasize that this is only true for a few product categories; in most product categories older people are clearly underrepresented. Another interesting finding is presented by Peterson & Ross (1997), who reported that $\frac{3}{4}$ of all people in commercials that target the 45+ market are also in the same age group. The connection between the

target group and the older models in commercials is certainly a potentially interesting direction for further analysis.

Research: Authors; Year	Country	Term used for “Older People“	Age	Percentage of Older People
Francher & Jay 1973	USA	Older People	Not stated	2% of commercials
Hiemstra et al. 1983	USA	Elderly/Older Persons	50+	23.5% of commercials, 3.1% of people
Moore & Cadeau 1985	Canada	Elderly	65+	8.19% of people
Swayne & Greco 1987	USA	Elderly (Persons)/Older Persons	65+	6.9% of commercials, 7.5% of commercials with people, 3.2% of people
Atkins, Jenkins & Perkins 1990/91	USA	Elderly	50+	11.8% of commercials
Tupper 1995	USA	Elderly Persons	65+	15% of commercials, 8.2% of people
Roy & Harwood 1997	USA	Older Adults	60+	6.9% of people
Peterson & Ross 1997	USA	Mature Models	45+	23% of commercials
Yamanaka 2000	Japan	In Japanese: <i>kōreisha</i> 高齢者 (means older person).	50+	24.2% of commercials, 50.1% of people
Zimmerman 2001	USA	Elderly	60+	21.4% of commercials
Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004	USA	Elderly	60+	2.40% (1950s), 3.72% (1960s), 7.07% (1970s), 4.55%

				(1980s), 5.15% (1990s) of commercials with people
Simcock & Sudbury 2006	Britain	Older Models	50+	28% of commercials with people
Lee, Kim & Han 2006	USA/South Korea	Older People	60+	Korea: 8.0% / United States: 15.4% of commercials
Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007	USA	Older Adults	55+	15% of commercials
Prieler 2008	Japan	Elderly People	60+	13.6% of commercials with people

Table 3: Percentage of Older People Found in Previous Research

Another common finding is the **underrepresentation of older females**, which also generally holds true for research that also count the overall number of people; nevertheless, the differences vary. This underrepresentation has remained consistent in the US, starting with Hiemstra et al (1983), who report a male vs. female ratio of 65.9% to 34.1%. Later papers report similar results, as shown in Table 4. In Canada, older males outnumbered older females by as much as 2:1 (Moore & Cadeau 1985). In Korea, males outnumbered females almost 3 to 1. Findings in Japan were similar, where the number of older males was double that of older females (Yamanaka 2000). There was only one paper that reported more older females than males in TV commercials (Swayne & Greco 1987). Swayne and Greco reported 57 females and 43 males over 65 in their sample. Although their finding is an exception, in general it seems to be a global phenomenon that older males outnumber older females in television commercials.

Research: Authors; Year	Country	Percentage of Male	Percentage of Female
Hiemstra et al. 1983	USA	65.9%	34.1%
Moore & Cadeau 1985	Canada	76.8%	23.2
Swayne & Greco 1987	USA	43%	57%
Atkins, Jenkins & Perkins 1990/91	USA	71%	29%
Tupper 1995	USA	57.4%	42.6%
Roy & Harwood 1997	USA	61.8%	38.2%
Yamanaka 2000	Japan	71.3%	28.7
Zimmerman 2001	USA	69%	31%
Lee, Kim & Han 2006	USA/South Korea	77.1% (US), 74.8 (Korea)	22% (US), 25.2% (Korea)
Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007	USA	82%	38%

Table 4: Male/Female Ratio of Older People in Previous Research

Several studies have emphasized the **role of older people** in commercials (sometimes distinguishing between male and female), and whether they have major, minor or background roles; as another question is whether they act as information providers or receivers. In Tupper's (1995) sample the distribution among roles is nearly even, with 36% major roles, 31% minor roles, and 33% background roles. In Roy & Harwood's (1997) research background roles dominate (52.8%), followed by major roles (38.2%), and minor roles (19.5%). In addition, they showed that older people are more often information providers (45.3%) than information receivers (12.5%). Atkins & Jenkins (1990/1991) make different distinctions, but identify 18.4% as main characters, and 21.5% spokespersons for older people. Zimmerman (2001) goes a step further and also shows differences in respect to gender. In her research males feature mostly in major roles (48.5%), whereas females are

generally shown in minor (34.5%) and background roles (28.1%). Similarly, 42.3% of males were information providers as compared to 28.1% of females. The same tendency is also true for information receivers, where females account for 9.4%, but males only for 2.8%. Swayne & Greco (1987) found 31.6% of older people in major roles, 56.0% in minor roles, and 12.3% in background roles. Minor roles dominate over major roles in Yamanaka's (2000) work on Japan as well. This is true for the age groups 50-64 and 65+, for females as well as for males (Male 50-64: Major 40.5%, Minor 59.5%, Female 50-64: Major 28.4%, Minor 71.6%; Male 65+: Major 20.7%, Minor 79.3%; Female 65+: Major 30.0%, Minor 70.0%). The greatest exception to this tendency of older people in minor roles is Lee, Kim & Han (2006). Whereas they also reported a dominance of minor roles in the United States, in Korean commercials they found 86.1% of older people in major roles, 13.9% in minor roles and none in background roles.

Some researchers also analyzed the significance of **other groups appearing with older people** in commercials. Hiemstra et al. (1983) found that older people in commercials seem to have no family ties. Most other research disagrees. Swayne & Greco (1987) found that elderly people rarely appeared alone (see also Roy & Harwood for similar findings). In general, older people tend to appear with multiple age groups. This finding is also confirmed by Miller, Leyell & Mazachek (2004). Prieler's (2008) research has led to similar findings in a Japanese context. He found that older people are shown with multiple age groups; most commonly they appear with those aged 30-59 years. Additionally, he found that in cases where older people do appear alone it is nearly always for products which are clearly targeted at them, such as dentures, diapers for the elderly, hearing aids, food supplements, and anti-wrinkle creams.

Another popular area of investigation is the **positive or negative representation of older people**. In television commercials, older people were mostly shown in a positive way. For example, Roy & Harwood (1997) point out that the majority of older people are shown as strong, active, happy and lucid. Lee, Carpenter & Meyers (2007) and Miller,

Leyell & Mazachek, who both analyzed stereotypes of older people, also found them overwhelmingly positive. Other researchers confirm the generally positive depiction of older people (Swayne & Greco 1987; Tupper 1995; Zimmerman 2001; Simcock & Sudbury 2006). Lee, Kim & Han (2006) found that Korean ads were more likely to show older people in a positive way than US ads. In contrast to most findings, Hiemstra et al. (1983) found only a few commercials with a positive view of being old, and some that denigrated older people. Peterson & Ross (1997) reported that the age group 65+ is shown in a less desirable way than younger age groups. This was true even for commercials that were selling products targeting older people. In a Japanese context, Yamanaka (2000) reported that older people were shown as less active than their juniors, and males were shown as less dependent on others than females.

Some researchers also analyzed in what **setting** older people are shown. A home setting is clearly dominant (Swayne & Greco 1987; Tupper 1995; Yamanaka 2000). Swayne & Greco found home settings in 56% of ads, followed by business settings in 18%. Tupper (1995) found 36% in home settings and a surprising 40% in professional/corporate settings, in which she included retail stores, factories, offices, etc. Yamanaka (2000) found that for 50-64 old males, the dominant setting was retail stores (24.1%), which increased to 29.3% percent for the 65+ age group. In the latter age group, the home setting becomes more important for males (25.9%). The home setting is clearly dominant for females of the age group 50-64 (33.3%), as well as for the 65+ group (40.0%).

Although most researchers examined different **product categories**, there were some similar findings across studies. In commercials including elderly people, the following product categories were reported to be especially dominant: Food/Drinks dominated in most studies (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Swayne & Greco 1987; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Yamanaka 2000; Zimmerman 2001; Lee, Kim & Han 2006; Simcock & Sudbury 2006; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007; Prieler 2008). Other strong categories were financial/insurance (Roy & Harwood 1997; Zimmerman 2001; Lee, Kim & Han 2006;

Simcock & Sudbury 2006; Prieler 2008) and health products (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Yamanaka 2000; Zimmerman 2001; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007, Prieler 2008). Some researchers also identified product categories that made a poor showing in commercials featuring elderly people. These categories include automobiles (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Roy & Harwood 1997; Lee, Kim & Han 2006; Simcock & Sudbury 2006), personal products and cosmetics (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Lee, Kim & Han 2006; Simcock & Sudbury 2006), games/toys (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), and travel (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Roy & Harwood 1997; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007).³

3. Methodology

In this section we will first outline our overall method for researching the representation of older people in Japanese television advertising, and will explain in detail the steps we have already undertaken.

The representation of older people in Japanese television advertising will be investigated in three steps: (1) a content analysis of television commercials from 1997 and 2007, (2) a deeper analysis of television commercials from 1997 and 2007 featuring older people, and (3) a qualitative analysis of the results. The reason for undertaking these three steps – and thus to mix quantitative with qualitative methods – is that each method has its strengths and weaknesses. By combining both, we tried to benefit from both strengths and thus compensate for the weaknesses of each. Dyer (1982) writes about content analysis that

³ Another result reported by all researchers investigating this area is the underrepresentation of minority groups (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Moore & Cadeau 1985; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Tupper 1995; Roy & Harwood 1997). Similarly, Lee, Carpenter & Meyers (2007) found not an underrepresentation of minorities, but an overrepresentation of Caucasians. This is, however, not an area of concern for this research. In addition to these areas, there were also some other issues analyzed, such as the network stations and time slots where more older people appear (Swayne & Greco 1987; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), or how older people were clothed (Hiemstra et al. 1983; Atkins & Jenkins 1990/1991; Yamanaka 2000). However, discussing these findings in detail would go beyond the scope of this working paper.

it is “a procedure which relies on the identification and counting of significant categories of content” and that it “can tell us a great deal about ads that we would not normally discover by impressionistic or cursory readings” (111). Another strength of content analysis is its ability to detect patterns of similarities and differences and to be able to generalize these findings (Leiss et al. 1990: 218-228). In short, content analysis can make hidden patterns visible within a large sample.

Content analysis seeks to be objective (other researchers using the same data should come to the same or similar results), and the same criteria are applied to the whole data set (which makes comparisons possible). The frequency of appearances of codes and categories can be stated explicitly in percentages, rather than as vague qualitative statements. Only *surface content* is measured to produce reliable data. There is no reading between the lines. Only what is apparent to everyone is coded. In short, content analysis allows us to treat qualitative data in quantitative terms, thus helping us to ground our analysis of images and words in something more solid than individual and impressionistic interpretation.

However, content analysis also has its drawbacks, which are partly connected with the method responsible for its strengths. Content analysis can only deal with surface meaning. As a result, many have dismissed it as an insufficient method for measuring deeper (and some argue “true”) meaning (Rose 2001). By categorizing and taking elements out of their context, the overall meaning can be lost, since the whole is more than the sum of its parts. For example, a commercial featuring a male doing housework does not necessarily say something about the fact that society has changed or is changing. The meaning also depends on how he is shown doing the housework: for example, in a humorous way, or so inexpertly that finally the wife takes over the housework. Moreover, content analysis places too much emphasis on frequency. A few instances (or even a lack of them) can have a greater effect and more importance. For example, a homosexual couple shown in a commercial might have more effect than many heterosexual couples due to their

otherwise rare appearance on TV. In the context of advertising, it is problematic to deal with only the surface, or denotative, level of the message, as traditional quantitative content analysis does. This is because, especially in advertising, the connotative level is of such importance (Barthes 1964/1977). Another drawback of content analysis is that it cannot distinguish between an occurrence that fits perfectly into a code⁴ and one that does not. E.g. one person might have clearly fit the code main actor, while another one was still coded main actor, but was already on the border to the code supporting actor. In short, there is no way to show the interconnectedness of parts; only statistical measures are possible (Dyer 1982; Berg 1989; Leiss et al. 1990; Rose 2001).

Most of the drawbacks of content analysis turn out to be strengths of semiotic analysis. Conversely, the main weaknesses of semiotics are the strengths of content analysis, so they combine to form a perfect symbiosis. That is why we decided to use both methods in tandem. In the case of semiotics, it “can admittedly do a better job on the single ad in isolation, because it is explicitly concerned with the ‘movement’ of meaning within the text and between the text and outside world” (Leiss et al. 1990: 218). However, semiotic analysts often do not use any sampling procedures and do not regard the applicability to a wide range of material as an important factor, and so often comprise not much more than a detailed case study (Rose 2001: 73).

The method we use is similar to what Creswell (2003) calls the “most straightforward” of “mixed methods” (215), the sequential explanatory strategy. Our sequential procedures first use numeric content analysis (a quantitative method), followed by a qualitative method, semiotics. In this way, the quantitative research method is helping “with the choice of subjects for a qualitative investigation” (Punch 2005: 242). Furthermore,

⁴ Punch (2005) offers this definition for a code: “Codes are tags, names or labels, and coding is therefore the process of putting tags, names or labels against pieces of the data. The pieces may be individual words, or small or large chunks of the data. The point of assigning labels is to attach meaning to the pieces of data, and these labels serve a number of functions. They index the data, providing a basis for storage and retrieval. The first labels also permit more advanced coding, which enables the summarizing of data by pulling together themes, and by identifying patterns” (199).

“quantitative data can be a source of information, which supplements or complements qualitative data” (Neuman 1994: 324). In conclusion, keeping in mind the strengths and weaknesses enumerated above in both semiotics and content analysis, both methods will be combined in this research to achieve more valid overall results.

This paper focuses on the results of a content analysis of television commercials from 1997 and 2007, as we will explain in more detail. As a next step, we are planning to conduct a second content analysis of only those commercials including older people, as well as a qualitative analysis of the results.

Our research sample was based on a commercial database which includes all newly broadcast advertisements in Kanto⁵ area since 1996. In other words, in this database one can find all commercials that were broadcast for the first time on any given day. In order to produce a valid sample, commercials from all four seasons⁶ were included in our set. A systematic sample of 28 days (four weeks) with an equal distribution of weekdays over each entire year (1997 and 2007) was established (see table 5 for the specific dates we sampled).

January 10	April 11	July 11	October 10
January 23	April 25	July 24	October 23
February 5	May 7	August 6	November 5
February 18	May 20	August 19	November 18
March 3	June 2	September 1	December 1
March 16	June 15	September 14	December 14
March 29	June 28	September 27	December 27

Table 5: Sampled Dates in 1997 and 2007

⁵ The Kantō region is a geographical area in Honshū, the largest island of Japan. The region encompasses seven prefectures which overlap with the Greater Tokyo Area: Gunma, Tochigi, Ibaraki, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, and Kanagawa.

⁶ Seasonality is often cited as one of the specialties of Japanese TV advertising – see Görtzen 1995: 83.

This led to a sample of 1503 commercials in 1997 and a sample of 1481 commercials in 2007: 2984 commercials in total. 12 commercials could not be accessed. As a result, the final analyzed sample consisted of 1495 commercials in 1997 and 1477 commercials in 2007: 2972 commercials in total. Out of these commercials, 1236 of the 1997 commercials included people; in 2007, 1220 commercials included people.

The commercials were analyzed using a coding sheet, which included 20 coding categories and 62 codes.⁷ The coding was undertaken by one of the authors and one doctoral student. The two coders coded all the commercials independently. Both coders undertook a coding pretest on 200 commercials, which were not included in the sample. Once this test had established sufficient consistency between the coders, they began the coding of the 2972 commercials. Both coders were coding all commercials independently and compared their results after they both finished their task. The coefficient of reliability for all presented codes in this working paper was above 0.9, a sufficient number according to the content analysis literature (Neuendorf 2002; Krippendorff 2004). For establishing a final data set, codes that each coder coded differently were discussed between the coders to reach a final decision.

4. Results

In this section we present our content analysis on older people; our findings are further discussed in the next section. The content analysis included all commercials whether or not they included older people or people at all. This also led to valuable insights regarding Japanese television advertising in general. This paper, however, will only highlight some of our major findings on commercials featuring older people. These include: Older people are underrepresented in Japanese commercials; older females are even more underrepresented

⁷ A coding category is e.g. "Age," which includes the codes for the following age groups: 0-14, 15-34, 35-49, 50-64, 65+.

than older males; the number of older people has greatly increased from 1997 to 2007; older celebrities play a dominant role in half of all commercials with older people; older people appear mostly with their own age group or with people from the 35-49 age group; older people tend to appear in groups and rarely alone; older people are mostly displayed in indoor settings and are present in a large number of commercials where a workplace is shown; and the major product category using older people is food/beverage.

Age Distribution

A significant finding of our content analysis was an unequal age distribution within commercials featuring people. The 15-34 age group clearly dominates (66.3%/n=820 for 1997, 64.2%/n=783 for 2007), followed by the 35-49 age group (37.9%/n=469 for 1997, 39.3%/n=480 for 2007). Age groups 50-64 (13.7%/n=169 for 1997, 21.4%/n=261 for 2007) and 65+ (4.6%/n=57 for 1997, 6.1%/n=74 for 2007) are only minimally present in Japanese commercials. The same is true for the age group 0-14 (19.3%/n=238 for 1997, 19.8%/n=242 for 2007).

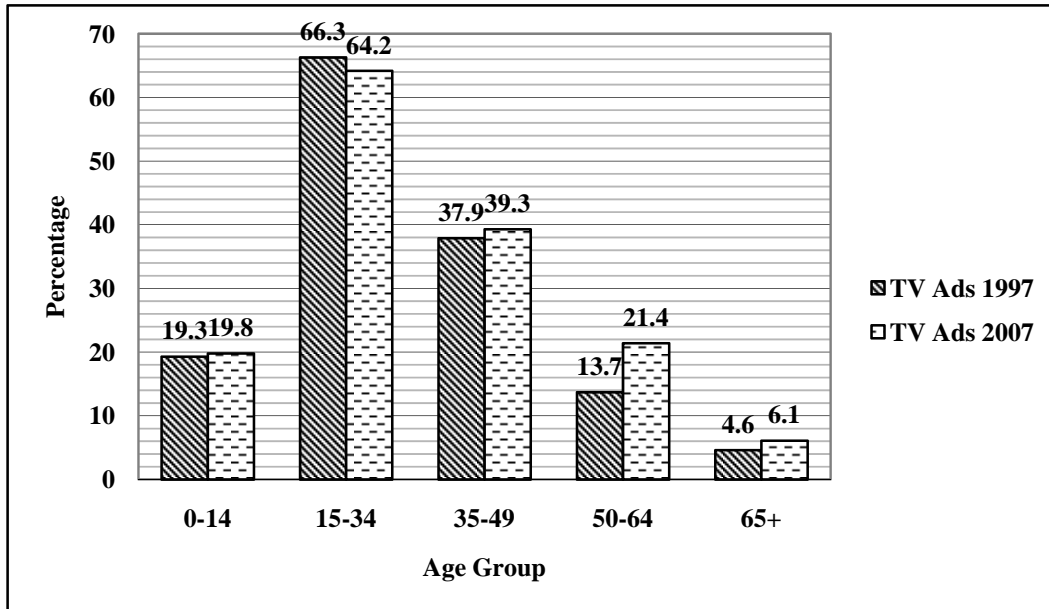


Figure 1: Age Distribution in Japanese Commercials (percentage of commercials featuring people of a specific age group within all commercials featuring people - different age groups in one CM possible)

It is striking that the changes in distribution between 1997 and 2007 (see Figure 1) are overall very similar. However, there is one major exception, namely the age group 50-64, which increased strongly from 13.7% to 21.3%. Also, while perhaps not obvious at first sight, the 65+ age group also increased by more than 30%.

These results already tell us a great deal about what age groups are preferred in Japanese commercials. However, it is still not clear what these numbers actually mean, if they are not compared with the age distribution of Japanese society overall. Figure 2 shows the comparison between the percentage of older people in TV commercials and older people as a percentage of the actual population, since this might give better insight into a possible under- or overrepresentation of age groups.

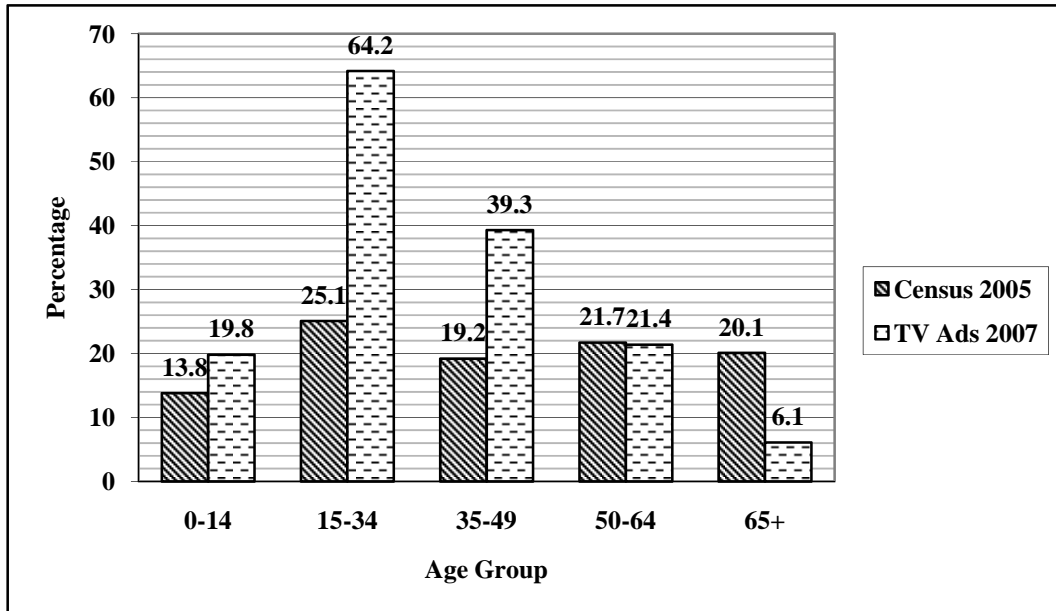


Figure 2: Age Distribution in Japanese TV Commercials versus Japanese Society Overall (Percentage of commercials featuring people of a specific age group within all commercials featuring people - different age groups in one CM possible. Source of Census: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2005)

The age distribution in the 2005 census and the 2007 TV commercials are not perfectly comparable since the TV ads amount to more than 100 percent (due to the fact that different age groups can coexist in one commercial). Nevertheless, there are some clearly visible findings, as shown in Figure 2. The two most obvious ones are that the age group 15-34 is clearly overrepresented, and that the age group 65+ is clearly underrepresented in Japanese TV advertisements.

Male vs. Female Ratio

There are clear proportional differences between males and females within different age groups (see Figure 3). Whereas in the 0-14 age group there are only slightly more females (69.4%, n=161) than males (64.2%, n=149) in the 2007 TV commercials, in the 15-34 age

group females (78.8%, n=617) are clearly outnumbering males (47.3%, n=370). The situation, however, changes drastically after the age of 35, when males (70.6%, n=339) start dominating Japanese commercials and females (54.2%, n=260) become subordinate. This is especially pronounced in the age group 50-64, where males (76.2%, n=199) appear twice as often as females (36.8%, n=96). The same is true for the age group 65+, where males (73.0%, n=54) again clearly outnumber females (39.2%, n=29). This is even more noteworthy, since in Japanese society it is actually older females who outnumber older males. This is the case with the 50+ age group, where females outnumber males at a ratio of 1.18:1; it is also the case with the 65+ age group, where females outnumber males at a ratio of 1.29:1 (based on Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication 2005).

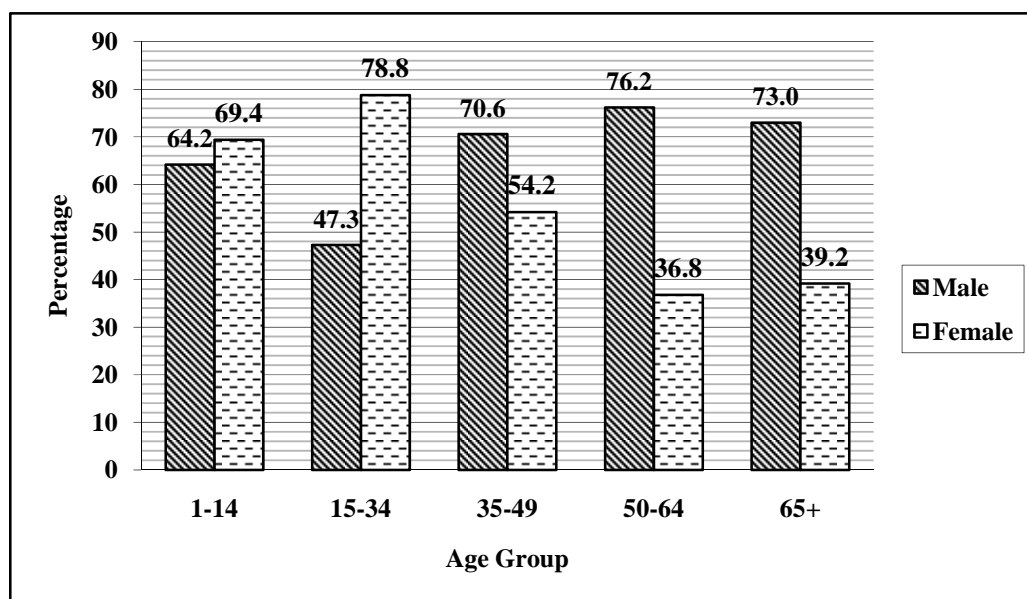


Figure 3: Male vs. Female Ratio in Japanese TV Commercials, 2007 (Percentage of commercials featuring males/females within all commercials in which a specific age group appears - male and female together possible)⁸

The overall percentages between 1997 and 2007 are rather similar, so the results from 1997 will not be displayed here. In the context of older people, it is worth mentioning that the

⁸ Figure 3 does not include infants, since their sex could not always be determined.

number of males increased, whereas the number of females decreased. The number of females in the 50-64 bracket increased slightly, though the percentage decreased (from 42.6%/n=72 to 36.8%/n=96), which does not match the growth of appearances by males of the same age (from 65.7%/n=111 to 76.2%/n=199). Similarly, the number of females 65 and over decreased (from 61.4%/n=35 to 39.2%/n=29), whereas the number of their male counterparts increased (from 63.2%/n=36 to 73.0%/n=54). This led to a clearly lower number of females in all commercials featuring this age group. The finding that the number of older females decreased from 1997 to 2007 clearly runs against the overall trend of more older people appearing in Japanese TV commercials, and should be further examined in the future.

Older Celebrities

Celebrities (in Japanese: *tarento*) play a major role and are present in many Japanese commercials. This trend is true among older people as well. In commercials with older people, 50.5% of those in 1997 included older celebrities (n=105); in 2007, this increased to 52.0% (n=159). Among commercials with older males from 1997, 45.4% of characters were older male celebrities (n=64). This number was even greater in 2007, when 54.9% of commercials with older males included older celebrities (n=129). In accordance with the male/female ratio presented above, the number of older female celebrities decreased. In commercials including older females, the percentage decreased from 47.5% in 1997 (n=48) to 37.4% in 2007 (n=43). The significant presence of older celebrities certainly make *tarento* a major issue for further investigation.

The Role of Older People

Older people tend to appear together with people of their own age groups (50-64 or 65+), and also with people from the 35-49 age group. Whereas the percentage of older people (50+) in commercials with people accounted for 16.8% (n=208) in 1997 and 20.7% (n=306) in 2007, these numbers increase when one considers commercials including people from the 35-49 age group: 22.2% (n=104) in 1997 and 28.1% (n=135) in 2007. The

opposite is true for the age groups 15-34 and 0-14, where the percentages of older people slightly decrease.

Another important finding is that older people appear alone in commercials much less often than other age groups. Table 6 shows that 23.5% of all 1997 commercials featuring people included only one person; in 2007, it was 28.9%. In contrast, in commercials including older people this percentage drops to 6.3% in 1997 and 14.4% in 2007. The numbers are opposite in the case of commercials that feature more than 3 people. Here, the percentage of all commercials featuring people which include 4 or more people is 43.4% in 1997 and 45.0% in 2007. Among commercials including older people the percentages are higher at 55.3% in 1997 and at 59.8% in 2007. Basically, older people are rarely displayed alone in Japanese commercials and tend to appear in groups.

Number of People	1997		2007	
	Percentage (Number) within CMs including people	Percentage (Number) within CMs including older people	Percentage (Number) within CMs including people	Percentage (Number) within CMs including older people
1	23.5 (290)	6.3 (13)	28.9 (353)	14.4 (44)
2	23.7 (293)	28.4 (59)	16.4 (200)	15.7 (48)
3	9.4 (116)	10.1 (21)	9.7 (118)	10.1 (31)
More	43.4 (537)	55.3 (115)	45.0 (549)	59.8 (183)

Table 6: Number of People in Japanese TV Commercials

So what role do older people play in these appearances? Do they play a major role or are they only used as a backdrop? In commercials including older people, 69.2% (n=144) of 1997 commercials had older people playing major roles; in 2007, it was 69.9% (n=214). Minor roles accounted for 35.1% (n=73) in 1997 and 34.3% (n=105) in 2007. Background roles appeared less often, which had somewhat to do with the fact that it was often not possible to agree on an age for people in background roles. In 1997, 4.8% (n=10) of

commercials with older people featured them in background roles; the percentage was in 2007 4.6% (n=14).⁹

Length of Commercials

Interestingly, when older people are featured, commercials tend to be longer (see Table 7). If we remember that 13.9% of all commercials in 1997 and 20.7% of all commercials in 2007 included older people, it becomes apparent that there is a clear trend (especially in 2007) towards longer commercials. Please note that the category “other” involved only time periods longer than 30 seconds, mostly also longer than 60 seconds and only in very rare cases 45 seconds. In short, older people tended to appear more often in longer commercials.

Length of Commercial	1997			2007		
	Number of all CMs	Number of CMs including older people	Percentage of older people in all commercials	Number of all CMs	Number of CMs including older people	Percentage of older people in all commercials
15 Seconds	833	102	12.2	808	139	17.2
30 Seconds	516	73	14.1	464	90	19.4
60 Seconds	94	20	21.3	139	50	36.0
Other	52	13	25.0	66	27	40.9

Table 7: Length of Commercials

Setting

Diverse settings¹⁰ were coded during the content analysis. These included indoor (home, workplace, other), outdoor, and other. The clearly dominant setting in commercials

⁹ These percentages account for more than 100%, because a single commercial could include one person in a major role and one person in a minor role.

including older people was indoor, with 69.7% (n=145) in 1997 and 80.4% (n=246) in 2007. Outdoor settings amounted to 41.3% (n=86) in 1997 and 37.3% (n=114) in 2007. Finally, other settings accounted for 19.2% (n=40) in 1997 and 15.7% (n=48) in 2007. What is worth mentioning is the importance of older people in the workplace setting. Although the overall percentage of commercials set in workplaces was relatively small, 31.7% (n=19) of commercials with that setting used older people in 1997; this percentage increased to 49.5% (n=46) in 2007.

Product Categories:

Out of 16 coded product categories, there are some that clearly dominate commercials including older people. The product category outnumbering all others is foods/beverages. Other strong product categories in commercials including older people are services/leisure, cosmetics/toiletries, and distribution/retailing, as shown in Table 8.

1997	2007
Foods / Beverages (23.1%, n=48)	Foods / Beverages (25.8%, n=79)
Services / Leisure (11.1%, n=23)	Cosmetics / Toiletries (10.1%, n=31)
Cosmetics / Toiletries (9.1%, n=19)	Distribution / Retailing (9.5%, n=29)
Distribution / Retailing (8.7%, n=18)	Service / Leisure (9.2%, n=28)
Real Estate / Housing (7.2%, n=15)	Finance / Insurance (7.2%, n=22)
Others (40.9%, n=85)	Others (38.2%, n=117)

Table 8: Product Categories in Commercials Featuring Older People

¹⁰ Multiple settings were possible, since the setting can change within a single commercial.

However, Table 8 only tells us about the percentage of product categories advertised in commercials featuring older people. It does not tell us whether this percentage is high or low relative to the percentage of product categories advertised in all commercials. For example, the product category foods/beverages is frequently advertised in all commercials. 19.8% of commercials in 1997 and 18.8% of commercials in 2007 advertised foods/beverages. In contrast, the respective percentages for the product category foods/beverages in commercials featuring older people were 23.1% in 1997 and 25.8% in 2007. Thus, in this case, the percentage is higher for commercials featuring older people.

Additionally, it is also important to examine the percentage of older people represented in each product category. For example, in the product category foods/beverages, the percentage is 16.2% (n=48) for 1997 and 28.4% (n=79) for 2007. An especially high percentage of older people appear within three particular product categories. These are real estate/housing (40.5%/n=15 included older people in 1997, 35.4%/n=17 in 2007), distribution/retailing (24.7%/n=18 included older people in 1997, 43.3%/n=29 in 2007), and finance/insurance (20.6%/n=13 included older people in 1997, 45.8%/n=22 in 2007), though there are substantial differences between the years.

In contrast, commercials for the following product categories use relatively few or no older people: materials, machinery, household products, publications, and automobiles.

5. Discussion

The overall results of this research were similar to previous research, which found a general underrepresentation of older people, especially older females, mostly inside settings, their appearance with multiple age groups and lastly an emphasis on the food/beverage product category. The new result not found in previous research is the importance of older celebrities. This is certainly connected with the general importance of celebrities in

Japanese television commercials, a phenomenon not seen in most other countries of the world.

Should these results be read in a global context, as the similar results from previous research might suggest, or in a narrower Japanese context? It is too early to perform a deeper qualitative interpretation of the data at this stage, since we are still in the first quantitative content analysis and must take several steps (including a second, deeper content analysis on older people) before we can undertake a deeper qualitative analysis of the data. Nevertheless, some assertions can be made here.

We must ask whether a global influence was responsible for the current results or if they are related to traditional Japanese society and are so somehow universal. At first glance, the underrepresentation of older people in a country that is traditionally regarded as respecting the elderly seems like a contradiction. Of course the question is not that simple. First of all, even if Japanese society still holds special respect for the elderly, there may not necessarily be a connection with the number of older people appearing in Japanese commercials. Respect for the elderly is not the same thing as older people representing the beauty ideal of a society, but might affect a more positive representation of older people. In addition, the supposed respect for the elderly in Japanese society is actually a highly disputed issue. As Formanek (2008) shows, there are traditional concepts of respect for the elderly, but also a history of negative views of old age in Japan (331-333). In modern Japan, several surveys have revealed very negative views of older people, where Japanese agreed with prejudiced statements about older people to a much higher degree than did British or Americans (cf. Formanek 2008: 340). Referring to Akiko Hashimoto's thesis, Formanek argues that the idea of a "generational contract" better explains the relation between the generations in Japan than so called "respect." (cf. Formanek 2008: 340-341)

Another important aspect of the underrepresentation of older people in advertising is what Nyren (2007) has found in the US context: a general agreement at advertising agencies that only the young count, a trend one can observe in the employment policies of

those agencies as well. As Nyren argues, young people are usually not able to imagine the world of older consumers. That is why he is in favour of an increase in older people working at advertising agencies. This point, however, must be analyzed for its validity in a Japanese context.

The second form of underrepresentation found in this research is that of older females. This is a finding common to nearly all studies worldwide (Furnham & Mak 1999). So, how do we read the underrepresentation of older females in Japanese television commercials? Western researchers mostly refer to a type of sexism that celebrates younger females and ignores older ones (Lee et al. 2007: 28). Roy & Harwood (1997) claim that “societal sexism extends, indeed perhaps intensifies, through the lifespan” (5). While aging enhances a man, it destroys a woman, or so the idea goes (Simcock & Sudbury 2006: 100). This interpretation seems highly probable in the Japanese context as well; indeed Yamanaka (2000) notes the preference in commercials for young and beautiful women. Arima (2003) found that most females in Japanese commercials were young. It must be added here that Formanek (2008) also emphasizes that there is a clear difference between the traditional depiction of males and females in Japan, where older women are often represented in a rather negative light, often connected with their roles as mother-in-law (339-340).

There might also be other reasons for the low usage of older females in commercials, but these are still only assumptions and must be further analyzed. One cultural stereotype is that Japanese women are the ones who keep the household expenses; another suggests that the main decision makers, especially for bigger and more expensive products, are nevertheless men. Another possible issue, similar to Nyren’s argument why older people are rare, is that the advertising agencies and media who produce and broadcast the commercials are still dominated by men, who might favour younger female models. Last but not least, even magazines for women encourage an ideal of beauty that is very much connected with youth (Clammer 1995).

Older people were rarely depicted alone in Japanese commercials, and usually appear with multiple age groups. This finding is in accordance with previous research which suggests that older people are not “trendy” and “fashionable” enough to be shown alone. There is substantial and highly debated research by scholars and ad agencies alike on the idea that older models are disliked by younger consumers, and even by older consumers who on average identify with models some years younger than themselves (e.g., Greco 1989). In contrast to most previous research from the US, the scholarly research on this topic has found that most older people are shown in major roles. This might be connected with the different cultural context and perhaps also with the so-called respect for age in Japan, a phenomenon also reflected in the seniority system of Japanese companies. A similar trend was also reported in a Korean context by Lee, Kim & Han (2006). In contrast, Yamanaka (2006) found substantially more older people in minor roles than in major roles. The reason for this might be his use of a different counting method than the one we employed.

A higher percentage of older people in longer commercials was not that surprising. It is assumed that many of these commercials using older people are also targeted at older people, and there is various literature indicating that older audiences need slower forms of communication in order to understand the message (Stroud 2005). Many of these commercials were more like teleshopping or infomercials. So, it is also not surprising that 2007 especially showed a tendency in commercials with older people for more information-based commercials (hard sell), typical for this kind of advertising.

An inside setting for most commercials with older people is perhaps to be expected. There is a general impression that older people stay at home, especially after retirement, a trend also apparent in Yamanaka’s (2000) work, where he notes that males over 65 were usually featured in a home setting. Another reason for this setting might also be that most product categories older people are used for, such as food/beverage, are mostly consumed and therefore shown indoors. The dominating category within the indoor setting is however

not the category Indoor (home), but the category Indoor (others), something that must be further specified and analyzed in subsequent research steps.

There are several reasons for the importance of the product category food/beverage within commercials including elderly people. First of all, this was by far the most dominant product category for all commercials. Therefore, this result does not tell us much about the overall importance of elderly people in such commercials. As already pointed out, there are commercials for other product categories that boast a higher percentage of older people. However, the high number of older people in commercials for foods and beverages might also be connected with the appearance of multiple age groups. As Prieler (2008) points out, the appearance of multiple generations is especially common with food products, since the producers want to emphasize that every generation likes that kind of food. Food or the place where people eat, namely the dining table, is certainly one of the places where several generations frequently come together.

Older celebrities are definitely one speciality of Japanese commercials that have no equivalent in any previous research. Based on the fact that they comprise nearly half of all older people appearing in ads, this will definitely be an area of high interest for further investigations.

6. Conclusion

The impact of television advertising on people and society as a whole can hardly be disputed and therefore involves a certain (corporate) social responsibility. Analyzing television commercials is a meaningful and helpful means to discuss certain aspects, images and attitudes of individuals, organizations and society. In the face of demographic change and aging societies all over the globe, the representation of older people in advertising can yield valuable insight into how older people might be perceived and treated.

The results presented in this paper are preliminary, and are but the tip of the iceberg. As we continue, a more detailed and deeper analysis of the data already presented will be necessary. We are currently undertaking our second content analysis on the representation of older people, using only those commercials including older people. This method opens the possibility for more detailed codes and deeper investigation. After this coding step a qualitative analysis of the data will also become necessary. Mixing quantitative and qualitative methods and triangulating our results with data from interviews and archives allows us to dig deeper and better understand the underlying mechanisms and preconceptions that govern the representation of older people in Japanese television advertising.

The representation of older people is only one part of this research. Commercials targeting (and not necessarily including) older consumers, and the communication used by such commercials, are the next step in our research. Some insights can already be gained from the current analysis of commercials featuring older people, since one can assume that a great number of commercials targeting older consumers also include older people. As a result, this analysis is simultaneously an explorative study for the other research part of the project (i.e., an analysis of how older people are targeted with television commercials). Both research angles together, enriched by interviews with advertising agencies and other experts as well as a thorough literature review, should allow us to present a valid picture of the status quo of “Advertising to the Silver Market in Japan.”

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