

## THE REPRESENTATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN MALAYSIAN ADVERTISING

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### Abstract

This paper presents the results of a content analysis of older adults in Malaysian advertising. It is the first study to utilize both print and television advertisements. Despite a global ageing population, many businesses in general and advertisers in particular have been criticized for not meeting the needs of older consumers. Previous content analyses reveal that older adults are vastly under-represented, and this is true across many countries in the world. The present study finds that while older women are still slightly underrepresented, there appears to be progress made in that greater numbers of older adults are now included in mainstream advertising. Moreover, these seniors are depicted as relatively happy, active, and physically strong and are utilized in ads for a range of different products. The study is the first content analysis to tentatively suggest that business is now beginning to respond to the shift in demographics.

Keywords: Older Adults, Advertising Portrayal, Seniors, Content Analysis

### Introduction

The rapidly ageing population of the industrialized world is well documented with projections suggesting that by 2050 the over-60s will comprise a third of the population in the developed world. The numbers of very old are also increasing, and by 2050 there will be 379 million people aged eighty and above (United Nations 2010). Globally, senior consumers (those aged 50+) comprise 1.4 billion adults—almost 21% of the world's population (US Census Bureau 2011). In Asia-Pacific, older consumers comprise not only the fastest growing but also the wealthiest of all segments (Walker 2011). While Malaysia's current population does not reflect the astonishing proportions of old people that can be found in some countries, it is nevertheless experiencing a phenomenal demographic transition. The United Nations populating ageing projects (2010) suggest that by 2025 this number will rise to 13.4%. Increasingly, international researchers are using age fifty as the cut-off age for studying older consumers (Sudbury-Riley, Kohlbacher, and Toth 2012). However, the Malaysian government has adopted age sixty as the threshold for formulating plans for older adults (Ong and Phillips 2007). Consequently, no precise figures for those Malaysians who are over fifty

exist, but analysis of the UN statistics suggests that currently approximately 15% of the population is aged 50+. More importantly, the standard of living for older consumers in Malaysia is increasing, and they have access to substantial disposable and discretionary income (Ong, Kitchen, and Jama 2008).

Malaysian-based empirical research into marketing and advertising to older consumers is sparse, and there is evidence to suggest that many businesses are not yet properly prepared to serve this growing and increasingly important market (Walker 2011), despite the fact that many international researchers have shown that this group responds to and depends on advertisements for information (Simcock and Sudbury 2006). The research presented here is part of a larger study into older adults in Malaysian advertising. The first stage to any marketing plan is to ascertain an answer to the question, "Where are we now?" This paper answers that question insofar as it analyses the numbers and portrayals of seniors in both print and television advertisements, and is the first empirical study in Malaysia to do so. An analysis of the ways in which a segment of the population is represented and portrayed in advertising is important because advertising both reflects and shapes wider stereotypes and social attitudes. The current study utilizes content analysis to evaluate both print and television advertising in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the representation and portrayal of this important demographic segment in a developing country.

### **The Importance of Advertising**

While the basic function of advertising is to provide information, create awareness, and assist consumers to make purchase decisions (Ayanwade, Almi, and Ayanbimipe 2005), social scientists also acknowledge its pervasive and persuasive characteristics that can lead to unintended negative outcomes. Advertising is therefore an important socialization agent in any society (Pollay 1986). It follows, then, that the ways in which people are portrayed in advertising is important from both marketing and social perspectives.

Advertising has been particularly condemned for its stereotypical and negative depictions of older people, including portraying them as "feeble, foolish or inept" (Smythe 1996, 113), and has recently been criticized for being out of touch with modern society (Robinson et al. 2008). Indeed, relatively recent research suggests that little has changed over the last quarter of a century, with many people believing that older people suffer loneliness, boredom, and dissatisfaction with life (Tornstam 2007). Because of improved health, diets, and advances in medical care, people are living longer and healthier lives (McKean Skaff 2006) and consequently feel much younger than their actual age (Barak 1998; Sudbury 2004). Today's older consumers, then, are unlikely to be able to identify with such negative images, and associated advertising messages will therefore be less effective. At the same time, negative images can reinforce and shape the attitudes of younger people toward older adults, can damage the self-esteem of older adults, (Robinson et al. 2008) as well as affect a person's own developmental trajectory (Williams, Wadleigh, and Ylänne 2010).

Two similar theories highlight the potentially serious consequences if a negative portrayal is internalized by an older person. The first, "Social Breakdown Syndrome" (Kuypers and Bengston 1973) suggests that one's sense of self is a function of the kind of social labelling and valuing that one experiences in ageing. Due to vulnerability owing to the nature of social reorganization in later life (for example, a lack of positive reference groups or role loss), negative portrayals can have a

detrimental effect on a person's self-concept (Brown and Moschis 2006). Discouraged older adults tend to view themselves and other old people as inactive, incapable, and undesirable (Myers 1999). The process of social breakdown then becomes a vicious circle where the individual is vulnerable to and dependent on sources of external labelling. This eventually leads to society's negative view of older people being internalized by the individual, creating further susceptibility, and thus continuing the cycle (Kuypers and Bengston 1973). The theory has previously been applied to mass-media advertising where it was found that exposure to advertising was negatively related to self-esteem and perceptions of the elderly in general among older consumers (Smith, Moschis, and Moore 1984).

Labelling theory (Rodin and Langer 1980) is an alternative attempt to explain causes and outcomes of labelling individuals with stigmatized statuses (Tepper 1994). The theory posits that the mere presence and application of negative labels and stereotypes can lead to negative outcomes, including low self-esteem and even age-stereotyped behavior. Similarities between labelling theory and the social breakdown model are apparent. Both suggest that older people may internalize negative stereotypes, leading to lowered self-esteem, which in turn decreases their ability to exercise control over the environment. The models differ, however, in the starting point of the process. The social breakdown model suggests that an older person becomes susceptible to negative labelling because of the lack of normative guidance and role loss that typically accompanies the movement from middle to old age, while labelling theory suggests that merely the presence and application of negative labels and stereotypes can lead to negative outcomes. Both models agree that assigning people a label influences subsequent behavior, a suggestion that has much empirical support (Tybout and Yalch 1980; Breakwell 1986). Positive portrayals of what it means to be old are particularly important then. Indeed, findings suggest people increasingly rely on the media as they age (Festervand and Lumpkin 1985; Steven 1981). Theories of successful ageing therefore propose that positive portrayals of old age in communication and media are important in order to aid individuals in adapting to older age (Nussbaum, Thompson, and Robinson 1989). Hence, advertising should depict older adults as physically healthy, intellectually capable, and socially active (Roberts and Zhou 1997) in order to boost self-esteem among older adults. At the same time, such positive portrayals can positively impact the ways in which older adults are treated by society as a whole (Rodin and Langer 1980).

### **Older Adults in Advertising**

Not all writing suggests advertising depicts older adults in a negative way. Indeed, an extensive review of the literature led Evers (1998, 20) to conclude that "there is little commercial interest in presenting older people at all," and this finding has been echoed by content analyses conducted across a range of advertising media, including print media where high numbers of the target readership are over fifty years old (Carrigan and Szmigin 2000) and for products oriented to seniors (Peterson 1995). This underrepresentation is particularly pertinent for older females (Raman et al. 2006; Sudbury and Simcock 2006). The underrepresentation of older adults in advertisements is not limited to a minority of countries and cultures but has been found to exist in Australia (Higgs and Milner 2005), Canada (Davis and Carson 1998; Zhou and Chen 1992), Germany (Kessler, Schneider, and Bowen 2009), India (Harwood and Roy 1999), Japan (Prieler et al. 2009), South Korea (Lee et al.

2006), Taiwan (Morton and Chen 2009), the UK (Carrigan and Szmigin 1998; Simcock and Sudbury 2006), and the United States (Robinson 1998; Tupper 1995).

Potential reasons for this neglect include outdated misconceptions, prejudices (Mumel and Prodnik 2005), and stereotypes (Niemelä-Nyrhinen 2007), the belief that youth is glamorous whilst middle-aged is not (Schewe 1991), the belief that older people do not want to see older models in advertising (Nelson and Smith 1988), or that marketers themselves are young and are therefore unable to empathize with older consumers (Treguer 2002; Waite 2008). Greco (1989) found reluctance among advertising executives to use older models for mainstream products, even for products where older persons are above-average users, due to a fear that younger buyers would be deterred if older adults were used.

When advertising does include an older model, the evidence pertaining to how seniors are depicted is less clear cut. Some studies find older adults are used in a stereotypical and negative way (Davis and Carson 1998; Zhou and Chen 1992). Bailey, Harrell, and Anderson (1993) found that there had been some improvement in the portrayal of older women in US magazine advertising, and while Peterson (1992; 1995) found the depictions of older adults to be less favorable than their younger counterparts, these differences were not statistically significant. A further body of research suggests criticisms regarding negative portrayals have been exaggerated and found that when older models are used, they are depicted in a positive light (Carrigan and Szmigin 1998; Gantz, Gartenberg, and Rainbow 1980; Langmeyer 1993; Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Swayne and Greco 1987; Ursic et al. 1986).

Finally, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that the roles (major, minor, background) given to older adults in advertising tend to be minor or background (Roy and Harwood 1997; Swayne and Greco 1987; Zhou and Chen 1992). Additionally, advertisements that do feature older adults tend to be for limited product categories with older adults rarely featuring in ads for products such as cosmetics and other beauty products, clothing and fashion, and cars (Carrigan and Szmigin 1998; Simcock and Sudbury 2006).

### **Asia and the Special Case for Malaysia**

The majority of research pertaining to ageing consumers has been conducted in Western countries and cannot always be applied to the East because of cultural differences. Respect for older adults is profoundly rooted in the norms of Asian collectivist culture (Sug 2001). In contrast, social behavior in Western individualist cultures is guided by personal attitudes (Kashima et al. 1992) and the accomplishment of individual goals is stressed. Cuddy, Norton, and Fiske (2005) found that Westerners stand alone in their perception of older adults as warm and caring though feeble. Liu et al. (2003) found that older adults in Chinese society are respected and revered for their wisdom and experience, with older adults being perceived as optimistic, generous, and health conscious. Ironically, as Ng et al. (2002) note, some aspects of Asian culture, particularly filial piety, may have perpetuated older adults as being invisible from the marketplace, due to them being treated with “venerable respect rather than as active participants” (Ong and Phillips 2007, 88). However, a study by Gerlock (2006) claims that there are mixed feelings towards older adults in Asian countries, suggesting this traditional pattern may be shifting. Some older adults in Asia lack self-confidence

about their capabilities and due to deteriorating health they are beginning to feel like a burden to their families. Gerlock (2006) further adds that in several Asian countries, particularly Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Korea, and China, those older adults who are poor are concerned about growing old, feeling that survival is difficult and surrounded by uncertainty and even suffering.

Most Eastern studies pertaining to age and culture focus on the Chinese population, and there are vast differences between China and Malaysia. Malaysia is unique in that its population is multi-ethnic (Malaysia Demographic Profile 2014), comprising Malays and other Bumiputera groups (61%), as well as large proportions of Chinese (24%), Indians (7%), and other ethnic groups (8%). Differences between the ways in which these ethnic groups age have been found (Tengku Aizan and Masud 2010) and each group displays different cultural characteristics (Rabieyah and Hajar 2003), which affects their consumer behavior (Ong, Kitchen, and Jama 2008; Moschis and Ong 2011). The ways in which older adults in general, and perhaps the different ethnic groups in particular, are portrayed in advertising is therefore worthy of investigation, especially in light of the fact that different languages are widely used across Malaysian television, print, and radio advertisements.

Limited facts are available with regards to financial behaviour and wealth of Malaysians, particularly the very old (Tengku Aizan and Masud 2010; Sabri et al. 2010). Nevertheless, Ong and Phillips (2007) found older Malaysians to be rather discerning, price conscious consumers with good ability to discriminate, a finding that suggests they are not very different from their senior counterparts in many other countries (Sudbury and Simcock 2009). Yet, in line with so many other countries, older consumers in Malaysia “tend to be either ignored or thought of as small and insignificant” (Ong and Phillips 2007, 88). As Asian markets are growing (Shao, Raymond, and Taylor 1999), advertising plans and tactics in Asia are considered to be particularly important (Tai 1997). Consumers favor advertisements that serve core cultural values (Zhang and Gelb 1996) and consider local cultural values to be particularly persuasive (Gregory and Munch 1997; Taylor and Stern 1997).

Only one previous study has ever investigated older adults in Malaysian advertising. Based on a sample of 494 television advertisements that featured people, Ong and Chang (2009) found 9.5% of these contained older adults. However, analysis of the actual numbers of people in these advertisements paints a different picture. Senior consumers were frequently depicted as part of an inter-generational group, rather than the focus of the ad itself. Indeed, in total 2566 people featured in these advertisements, but only 2.4% were seniors. In total, only four older men and three older women featured in major roles, and no single advertisement contained solely older adults. When older models were used, they were mainly depicted in a positive way; however it is noteworthy that all of the older females that were utilized were portrayed in the home. Finally, older models were overwhelmingly used in advertising for financial services products, followed by medicines and other health products. Not a single older person appeared in any advertisement for food, beverages, ICT, cosmetics, beauty products, electricity, cars, or transport.

Ong and Chang’s study, published in 2009, comprised television advertising from 2008. There are signs that some businesses have begun to address the needs of older adults, although these do tend to limit their efforts to the needs of the very old (Walker 2011). Nevertheless, an increase in the numbers of older models would be expected, given the years that have elapsed since Ong and Chang completed their study. Moreover, the current study also includes Malaysian print advertising, which has never before been considered.

## **Method**

### ***Sample***

Advertisements appearing on the three major broadcast networks in Malaysia—TV3, TV8, and TV9—were recorded between 8pm and midnight for two weeks.

The ten most popular magazines in Malaysia (Media Guide 2011) were selected as the population for print advertising. There are no magazines specifically for older adults readers in Malaysia. It should be noted that not all of the top ten magazines published in Malaysia are country specific; rather, several are international publications. The top ten magazines that comprised the population for this study are Times Magazine, Asian Week, Reader's Digest, Fortune, Forbes, The Edge, FHM, The Economist, Dewan Ekonomi, and Flavour. From this population, a simple random sampling technique was used in order to select one edition from each magazine, thus the final sample comprised one edition of each publication (ten magazines in total) all of which were in print between January and December. All full page and half page advertisements that contained human characters were analyzed. Advertisements that contained no people (product only), or non-human characters (cartoons, etc.) were excluded, as were ads without faces (such as hands or legs only).

### ***Judges***

One of the authors and two independent judges coded and categorized both the TV and print advertisements. All judges have marketing related training; one is aged thirty-two and was chosen on the basis of his extensive knowledge of advertising and PR. The other is aged fifty-five, and was chosen because an older judge can improve reliability (Carrigan and Szmigin 1998). In line with previous content analyses (Zhou and Chen 1997) any differences or disagreements were discussed and consensus reached through discussion.

Ambiguity among researchers surrounds the ages at which the senior consumer market begins. For example, the starting age has been placed as forty-five (KeyNotes 1994), fifty (Alexander 1990; Banks 1992; Oliver 1995), fifty-five (Calver, Vierich, and Phillips 1993; Johnson 1995; Moschis 1992; Uncles and Ehrenberg 1990; Van Auken, Barry, and Anderson 1993), sixty (Wilkes 1992), and sixty-five (Day et al. 1988). Previous content analyses pertaining to older adults in advertising also lack consistency in terms when later life begins, which makes direct comparisons between studies difficult. Age forty-five (Peterson and Ross 1997), fifty (Atkin, Jenkins, and Perkins 1991; Kohlbacker, Prieler, and Hagiwara 2011; Simcock and Sudbury 2006), and sixty (Roy and Harwood 1997; Ylanne, William, and Wedleigh 2009) have all been used in previous content analyses. Malaysia uses age sixty as the starting point for deliberating aging trends and formulating plans for older adults, which follows guidance given by the United Nations World Assembly on Ageing in 1982. However, the retirement age in Malaysia is fifty-six, suggesting that the threshold for when a person enters "older age" is actually earlier than age sixty (Ong and Phillips 2007). Nevertheless, at least among market practitioners and service providers, there does appear to be some agreement that age fifty is the starting point for this market. Such firms include tour operators offering specialist holidays, insurance firms offering age-related discounts, and services such as those offered by Saga, AARP, and Age-UK. Moreover, age fifty has become the key age at which many researchers begin to study

older consumers (Sudbury-Riley et al. 2012), and this is the starting point for many age-related periodicals (for example, AARP's The Magazine, Fifty-Plus News) offered to seniors. On this basis, age fifty was chosen as the lower parameter for the older consumer market.

### **Coding**

Content analysis has been used for over two centuries (Harwood and Garry 2003). With regards to consumer research, the seminal paper by Kassirjian (1977) developed a structure for the use of content analysis, which, with some refinements (Kolbe and Burnett 1991), remains one of the best templates for using the technique and forms the basis of this study. The first stage, in order to ensure a technique that is a "scientific, objective, systematic, quantitative, and generalizable description of communications content" (Kassirjian 1977, 10), is to ensure objectivity, which is the process by which nominal categories are developed (Kolbe and Burnett 1991). A model was judged to be aged fifty or above using the following criteria:

1. Age was directly mentioned, or the ad included any reference to retirement or being older.
2. Physiological indicators were apparent, such as extensive grey/white hair or balding; wrinkles of the skin on hands and face; the use of a walking-stick, wheelchair, or other mobility aid.

Product/service categories were developed based on previous content analyses and comprised fourteen different product/service sectors. When an older person was included in an ad, his/her race (Malay, Chinese, Indian, Others, Mixed) was noted. This was straightforward, based on language, skin color, and clothing. Additionally, their physical appearance (strong, weak), setting (residential, business, outdoor), and activity (sedentary, active) were categorized. Finally, judgement was made in terms of how older adults were depicted from an emotional perspective and categorized as positive (depicted as happy, having fun, light-hearted), negative (sad, depressed, weak, unhappy, miserable), or a mixture.

### **Results**

A total of 2230 television advertisements were analyzed, 1729 of which contained people. Of these, 277 (16%) contained older adults, which is approximately representative of the numbers of older adults in the Malaysian population. For the magazine sample, however, this was not the case. Of 2687 print advertisements analyzed, 1238 included people, and 304 of these (24.5%) contained older adults. A total of 581, or 19.5% of the sample, depicted at least one older adult either alone or as part of a group. Clearly, older people in advertising in Malaysia are not underrepresented.

Table 1 presents the breakdown of older adults by ethnicity and media. As can be seen from table 1, Chinese and Indians are slightly overrepresented in TV advertising, and this is the case for Indians in print advertising too. Almost one third (30%) of print advertising featuring older models does not contain the major races in Malaysia, which was expected given that many of the publications are international, thus more Western models were found. Nevertheless, it is clear that when older models are used, there is a variety of all ethnic groups, and also noteworthy is the healthy percentages of adverts (10% of TV and 16% of print) that depict older adults of different races mixed together. Only the Malays were underrepresented, with only 32% of all older models being Malay.

Table 1: Older Models by Ethnicity and Media (%)

<i>Race</i>	<i>Population Breakdown</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Malay</i>	61	46.2	19.4	32.2
<i>Chinese</i>	24	29.6	20.4	24.8
<i>Indian</i>	7	10.5	14.1	12.4
<i>Other</i>	8	3.2	29.9	17.2
<i>Mixture</i>		10.5	16.1	13.4

Table 2 clearly shows that when older models are used, they are given major roles. Indeed, of the ads containing older models, over half of TV and over two-thirds of print ads portrayed these older adults as central to the advertisement. Token (background) older models were not utilized at all in television advertising, and in less than 3% of print ads. Moreover, it seems that older adults are utilized in food and retail advertisements (Table 3) as well as health ads, though less than 10% are used in all other product categories.

Table 2: Older Models by Role and Media (%)

<i>Role Classification</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Major</i>	54.9	69.4	62.5
<i>Minor</i>	31.4	7.6	18.9
<i>Background</i>	0.0	2.6	1.0
<i>Product Expert</i>	0.0	6.9	3.6
<i>Celebrity</i>	13.7	13.5	13.6

Table 4 shows the portrayal of older adults in terms of emotions, activities, and physical abilities. Overwhelmingly, seniors are depicted as positive, in that they are depicted as happy, light-hearted, and having fun. It is perhaps noteworthy, however, that more than one-third of print advertisements featured seniors who were sad, depressed, or unhappy. Likewise, more than two-thirds of television



advertising, compared to just over half of print ads, portrayed seniors as physically active. In contrast, three quarters of print ads depicted seniors as strong, while almost one third of television ads showed them as weak. Nevertheless, in the majority of Malaysian advertising, seniors are depicted as happy, active, and physically strong.

Table 3: Older Models by Product Category and Media (%)

<i>Product Category</i>	<i>TV</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Food</i>	25.6	15.5	20.3
<i>Retail</i>	20.6	11.2	15.7
<i>Health</i>	7.9	17.8	13.1
<i>Drinks</i>	15.5	0.0	7.4
<i>Insurance</i>	3.2	10.5	7.1
<i>Banking</i>	3.2	8.9	6.2
<i>Moral</i>	11.9	0.0	5.7
<i>Communication</i>	2.9	7.9	5.5
<i>Auto supplies</i>	2.9	4.9	4.0
<i>Vacation</i>	0.4	7.2	4.0
<i>Electronics</i>	0.0	7.2	3.8
<i>Restaurant</i>	0.4	5.6	3.1
<i>Education</i>	5.4	0.0	2.6
<i>Airlines</i>	0.0	3.3	1.7

Table 4: Portrayals by Media (%)

	<i>TV</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b><i>Emotion</i></b>			
<i>Positive</i>	80.9	65.8	73.0
<i>Negative</i>	11.6	34.2	23.4
<i>Changed</i>	7.6	0.0	3.6
<b><i>Activity</i></b>			
<i>Sedentary</i>	31.8	47.0	39.8
<i>Active</i>	67.5	53.0	59.9
<i>Mixed</i>	0.7	0.0	0.3
<b><i>Depiction of Physical Ability</i></b>			
<i>Strong</i>	64.3	75.3	70.1
<i>Weak</i>	31.4	24.3	27.7
<i>Mixed</i>	4.3	0.3	2.2

Tables 5 and 6 show gender differences, where it can be seen that almost half of all ads that did use older models used males, and a further fifth used both genders. Only one third used females. Thus, while over 13% of people-based ads featured an older male, only 10% featured an older female either alone or as part of a group. Nevertheless, both genders were depicted in major roles in more than half of these with fairly even splits in terms of product categories such as food and drink, health, banking, restaurants, and communication. In comparison to their female counterparts, older males featured in more ads for retail and moral-related messages and fewer in ads for insurance. Nor were older models restricted to home settings. Rather, one third of ads that did use older adults depicted them in business settings, and a further 40% showed them outdoors. Older females were not restricted to residential settings. Three quarters of older men and almost two-thirds of older women were depicted as physically strong, and the majority of ads that did feature seniors depicted them as active (60%), although it is perhaps noteworthy that over half did depict older women as sedentary in comparison to less than one third of older males.

Table 5: Older Models by Gender and Media (%)

Gender	TV	Print	Total
Male	66.4	28.3	46.5
Female	26.0	37.8	32.2
Mixed	7.6	33.9	21.3

Table 6: Gender Depictions (%)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b><i>Role</i></b>				
<i>Major</i>	60.7	55.6	76.6	62.5
<i>Minor</i>	23.3	19.3	8.9	18.9
<i>Background</i>	0.4	2.7	1.6	1.4
<i>Product expert</i>	1.5	5.9	4.8	3.6
<i>Celebrity</i>	14.1	16.6	8.1	13.6
<b><i>Product Category</i></b>				
<i>Food</i>	19.3	23.5	17.7	20.3
<i>Retail</i>	21.1	11.2	10.5	15.7
<i>Health</i>	11.5	13.4	16.1	13.1
<i>Drinks</i>	7.0	10.7	3.2	7.4
<i>Insurance</i>	4.1	10.2	8.9	7.1
<i>Banking</i>	5.2	5.3	9.7	6.2
<i>Moral</i>	8.5	2.7	4.0	5.7
<i>Communication</i>	4.8	5.3	7.3	5.5
<i>Auto supplies</i>	4.4	1.6	6.5	4.0
<i>Vacation</i>	2.6	4.3	6.5	4.0

<i>Electronics</i>	2.2	4.8	5.6	3.8
<i>Restaurant</i>	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.1
<i>Education</i>	3.7	2.7	0.0	2.6
<i>Airlines</i>	2.6	1.1	0.8	1.7
<b>Setting</b>				
<i>Residential</i>	20.4	27.8	28.2	24.4
<i>Business</i>	30.7	34.8	35.5	33.0
<i>Outdoor</i>	45.9	36.4	32.3	39.9
<i>Mixture</i>	3.0	1.1	4.0	2.6
<b>Activity</b>				
<i>Sedentary</i>	30.7	51.9	41.1	39.8
<i>Active</i>	68.9	47.6	58.9	59.9
<i>Mixed</i>	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.3
<b>Depiction of Physical Ability</b>				
<i>Strong</i>	75.2	64.2	67.7	70.1
<i>Weak</i>	20.4	35.8	31.5	27.7
<i>Mixed</i>	4.4	0.0	0.8	2.2

## Discussion

Clearly, Malaysian advertising has made enormous progress in terms of both the numbers of advertisements that utilize older adults and the way these older adults are depicted. Contrary to previous content analyses conducted in the West (Carrigan and Szmigin 1998; Davis and Carson 1998; Kessler, Schneider, and Bowen 2009; Robinson 1998; Tupper 1995; Zhou and Chen 1992), other Eastern countries (Higgs and Milner 2005; Lee et al. 2006; Morton and Chen 2009; Prieler et al. 2009), and even Malaysia itself (Ong and Chang 2009), senior adults are not underrepresented, and are not depicted in a stereotypical manner. Indeed, seniors are portrayed as active, happy and light-hearted, physically strong, in an assortment of settings including outdoors and business scenarios, and are deemed suitable to feature in ads for a wide range of products and services. The latter point is particularly noteworthy, as for decades it was found that older models utilized only in advertising for particular products such as medicines, vitamins, and mobility products (Francher 1973; Simcock and Sudbury 2006).

These findings are important for three major reasons: First, because advertising is an important socialization agent (Pollay 1986), the ways in which older adults are depicted in advertising can impact the attitudes of other age groups toward the elderly. Older adults in Malaysian advertising are portrayed as active, happy, and are shown in a variety of settings, so the message sent to the rest of society is that older adults are not passive, miserable, and only fit for limited activities. In turn, these attitudes can impact the ways in which older adults are treated in society. Second, positive portrayals should have an optimistic impact on the self-esteem of older adults themselves (Robinson et al. 2008). Indeed, just as Social Breakdown Syndrome (Kuypers and Bengston 1973) and Labelling theory (Rodin and Langer 1980) suggest that negative portrayals can result in the internalization of negative traits such as inactivity and loneliness, so too should positive portrayals have a constructive impact on the belief systems of older adults, reinforcing the fact that even aged

people can lead happy, productive, and active lives. Finally, positive portrayals should have a beneficial impact on the developmental trajectory of individuals (Williams, Wadleigh, and Yläne 2010). Ultimately, then, positive advertising portrayal has benefits to the well-being of different cohorts in society.

While there is little evidence of older women being portrayed as stereotypically old, there is still an under-representation of older females in general. Perhaps this is due to the fact that in Malaysia, the educational levels and economic independence enjoyed by women still lags far behind that of elderly men (Rabieyah and Hajar 2003) and this difference is particularly large in rural areas (Ong 2002). Or perhaps the “double standard of ageing” first suggested by Bell (1970) and extended by Sontag (1972) is still present, albeit to a lesser degree than when it was first postulated. The double standard viewpoint argues that society believes ageing enhances a man but progressively destroys a woman, noting that “society is much more permissive about ageing in men” (Sontag 1972, 325), that being old and female—often referred to as double jeopardy—is worse than being old and male appears to be borne out by studies that found women are perceived to age more quickly than men (Drevenstedt 1976; Jackson 1974; Kogan 1979; Lipka 1987; Seccombe and Ishii-Kuntz 1991; Zepelin, Sills, and Heath 1987), and that women select younger ages than men as the best age to be (Staats 1996). Nevertheless, the current study does not find the degrees of invisibility (Simcock and Sudbury 2006) pertaining to older women that previous research reports.

## **Conclusions**

A little over twenty years ago, the first baby boomers were set to enter what was then called the “Grey Market,” a term first coined by Gelb (1978). At that time, there was an abundance of articles—many of them little more than journalistic—that stressed the importance of older consumers in demographic and economic terms (Barr 1994; Elliott 1995; Kreitzman 1994) and warned companies that they must do more to target this potentially lucrative segment (Aldersey-Williams 1993; Banks 1990; Flanagan 1994; Fry 1992; Nicholason-Lord, 1995; Philp, Haynes, and Helms 1992; Peters 1994; Whetton 1990). What was lacking at that time, however, was a serious and empirically-based body of knowledge that aided managers in better understanding the motivations, attitudes, and preferences of these older adults. Academic research has made massive strides in the last two decades, and, while there are still large areas of senior consumer behavior that needs to be investigated, there is nevertheless a growing body of empirical literature that guides marketing practice. The study conducted here is the first to tentatively suggest that business is finally listening.

In 2014, the youngest baby boomers entered the senior market. The results of the study presented here show that, finally, seniors are being included in advertising and that major strides have been made in terms of the inclusion of older women. The next stage of the study is to ascertain attitudes towards these adverts in order to discover whether or not seniors themselves can relate to the ways in which they are depicted and whether or not younger audiences are alienated by them. Indeed, there are signs that the traditional aged stereotype of old, feeble, decrepit, and miserable is being replaced with one of an exaggerated positive image of retirement where all seniors are healthy, wealthy, and greedy (Tornstam 2007) after enjoying full employment, low mortgages, and generous pensions. For now, however, we must be content with the tentative conclusion that advertisers have at last begun to take note of the demographic time bomb that is global population ageing.

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