The Portrayal Of Aged People In The Media

Posted on September 13, 2019

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/the-portrayal-of-aged-people-in-the-media/

Introduction

This essay is about how the media portrays the elderly in TV commercials and how it depicts their ageing process. We will discuss the stereotypes that have been associated with the older adults portrayed in commercial media. Most of the time, we notice that people of advanced ages are portrayed in commercials as child-like or crazy, alone or having a dull routine, or as elders having health problems, etc. They are featured in many ads for life insurance and medicine as well. All these commercials show some stereotypes associated with aged people, which will be discussed in detail in this essay.

Stereotyping is defined as the set of fixed images or characteristics which people associate with a group of people or things. Media is the platform through which stereotypes can be developed and advertised at a greater rate. Old people are often used in advertisements, but these advertisements portray older people on the basis of either positive or negative stereotypes. According to the research, portrayals of older people in any form of media, including the internet, TV, newspaper, etc., can impact the way old people perceive themselves as well as how other people perceive them (Lin, Harwood, & Hummert, 2007). Media planners and advertisers should take into account the negative and positive portrayal of old people in the commercials of the products and services they are offering to customers. They should check the negative impacts of the portrayal on people and old people as well to eliminate stereotyping. In this essay, I have chosen commercial advertisement as a form of media as there are many commercial advertisements that have featured old people in the campaigns. Research shows that a large portion of television's audience consists of older people. This means that they are mostly exposed to the advertisements, including the commercials that include stereotypes of old people, whether negative or positive.

Discussion

Many Coca-Cola commercials feature people of advanced ages, and these commercials depict most of the elders as lonely, having a boring life, and being in the hospital for a check-up. After having Coca-Cola, they feel refreshed and adventurous. They start enjoying their lives and do not go to have check-ups. A commercial for the bladder-control medicine Myrbetriq shows that people of advanced age face issues of bladder control, and they have to go pee even if they are busy in some gathering or playing a game. A British Airways commercial depicted an old lady travelling alone, and she needs

help to fasten her seatbelt or wear socks, which shows the dependence of old people on others as they cannot do their tasks. She is lonely and sad, but she is a kind lady. The air hostess helped the old woman feel good, and she showed kindness, love, and affection in return. Another ad I chose for the report is IKEA, in which three old people are living their routine lives by sitting on the ground without talking to each other and passing the time. One day, an old man could not get his place on the bench, so he got a chair from IKEA to sit on the next day, and by buying that chair, he was able to enjoy every moment of life by sitting on the chair, enjoying different places and participating in many adventurous activities. Other commercials include old people featured in the advertisements for insurance policies, which show that there is a risk to their lives and they should have an insurance policy for a better future. Old women are featured in advertisements for beauty products to show wrinkled and freckled skin.

Stereotyping is referred to as labelling people with unrealistic or incomplete information. Many people believe that old people are all the same, having the same ideas, lifestyle, beliefs, etc. This is a myth, as it is not true; many older adults in their 50s to 70s believe that they felt the freedom of expression and action, which is contrary to stereotypes of older people (Anon, 2012). Stereotypes about old people, such as that they are dependent on younger people, cannot understand you easily, have hearing problems, and are frail, etc., are associated with old people in these ads. These commercials also attribute to old people qualities such as kindness, wisdom, and sweetness. They show hospitality in these commercials. These commercials show that old people have a boring life and the same routine over many days to spend their time. They have been shown sitting alone, not having any friends or fun in their lives. They are weak and unattractive; they are grumpy and frail. They have health problems, and they have to go for regular check-ups. The message being sent by these TV commercials is that old people are weak, dependent, lonely, incapable of understanding you quickly, and boring. Still, by using the products, they can have a happy, adventurous, and better life. They are not just dependent on you. They can have a fun and healthy life. They also have a right to change their boring routine life, and they are kind, wise and friendly.

Older adults are linked with stereotypes like they are dull, weak, unhappy, sad, frail and grumpy. They do not have a social life or any excitement in life. They cannot look after themselves. They are dependent and have many medical problems. They are unfriendly and lonely. Their social life is not vast, and they live on a repetitive daily routine. Through these commercials, the stereotypes associated with the old people are reinforced through the media. They have been shown in the commercials as the public expects them to be, i.e., portraying the typical stereotypes, but by using the products, they start to behave differently and contrary to these stereotypes. These ads show lively, energetic, and adventurous old people only when they use these products, but before that, they were typically stereotyped. This strategy cannot have an effective influence over the audience. People who see the advertisement will judge old people based on these stereotypes.

In this essay, I have used examples of older adults being underrepresented or misrepresented. Previously, many commercials and advertisements portrayed the old people negatively through stereotypes and gender-based differences. But now, the media has changed its perspective by

showing positive stereotypes of old people, and they want to work on ways to refute the stereotypes by showing the different lifestyles of older adults in the ads. However, showing them weak, lonely, sad, unfriendly, and boring at the start of the advertisement promotes a negative impact on the older person as well as other people about aged people and the ageing process.

The portrayal of older people in media is changing slightly over time from the negative to the positive side. They are portrayed in media as breaking the stereotypes linked with aged people. At first, they are shown as frail, boring, grumpy individuals, but after they use the product or service, they behave opposite to their stereotyped expectations. For example, the Coca-Cola advertisement shows that old people started feeling energetic like children. They feel active and adventurous, which is an attempt to change the stereotyped perception of old people from the negative to the positive side. Similarly, the IKEA advertisement tries to portray it in the same manner. Over time, the study has shown that the negative portrayal of stereotyping has been reduced to a positive representation of old-age people in the media (DW, TS, & J, 2004).

The companies are trying to transform the negative portrayal of old people stereotypes into positive portrayals. By watching the commercials featuring adults and their opposite behaviour, people's attitudes toward older adults have evolved. From these advertisements, they get to know that not all old people are just boring, dependent on others, or lazy; they now believe that there are some older people who want to have fun in their lives and are kind, wise and sweet. The present media portrayal of elderly people has a positive impact on people in this era because people are more open-minded than before, and they avoid stereotyping. They get influenced by watching the positive portrayal of old people in media and accept the change. For example, in the commercial advertisement for British Airways, they portray an old lady with some positive stereotypes, such as that she is kind and loving. She showed hospitality to the air hostess and invited her into her home. She made her a meal and gave her lovely company in her home and with her family. She presented her with a gift at the end. All these characteristics can build a positive image and stereotypes of old people, which can help replace the negative stereotypes in the mind of the audience. Research shows that there is a significant impact of the positive portrayal of the ageing process. People tend to have a positive perception of personal ageing by watching the positive representation of old-age people (Fung et al., 2016).

It is a realistic but difficult task for advertisers to change the representation of old people in commercials. The approach is good but difficult to implement and achieve. This approach can help old people feel better about themselves and the ageing process. Also, young people will show a positive response to the ageing process. Advertisers may face many challenges in eradicating age-related biases in TV commercials. However, a few steps can be taken to reduce the adverse portrayal of old people and show more positive portrayals. They can improve how old people are portrayed in advertisements by replacing negative stereotypes with positive ones. For example, show them lively and fun-loving rather than showing them dull and bored. Use those old-age people in the advertisement of beauty creams that do not fit the stereotypes of having wrinkles on the face or unattractive personalities, like an old-age athlete or a well-groomed TV anchor, etc. Show that people

can maintain themselves by using these products in a beautiful way like the person used in the advertisement. However, the challenge for marketers is that repeated exposure to the negative portrayal of old-age people may prevent them from changing their perspective of older people (Milner, Norman, & Milner, 2011).

Conclusions

Stereotyping can be positive or negative, but it can have both positive and negative impacts on the stereotyped group. The portrayal of aged people in the media, especially in television commercials, is mostly negative and has a negative effect on old-age people as well as young people about the ageing process. These advertisements mostly show negative stereotypes about old people. But now, commercials of products and services featuring old-age people are evolving to change the perception of people and remove the stereotypes associated with old people and ageing, but it needs more strategies and planning to implement and bring out the transformation of negative stereotypes into positive portrayals. Portraying old-age people positively does not necessarily impact advanced-aged people positively. Still, most of the time, the positive portrayal helps people to have a positive stereotype of ageing and aged people. Media planners and advertisers face many problems and challenges to remove the stereotyping effect from the advertisements, but it is their responsibility not to portray older people through negative stereotypes that may have a negative impact on them.

They can get hurt, and they can get emotionally harmed by such advertisements, which show them as a group of people who are lazy, who cannot understand things easily, who are sad and lonely, who are unfriendly, who have a boring life, and who have health problems. Marketers and advertisers should think about some effective strategies to eliminate negative stereotyping from television advertisements, and they should improve the image of old people being portrayed in the ads. They should not portray them as unhappy, frail, lonely and boring people. Not everyone is the same. Most of the advertisements show them as unhappy, unhealthy, boring, lonely, dependent on others, etc. It creates repetition of the under-representation and misrepresentation of old people, which strengthens the concept of stereotyping. When they show them doing exciting things after using the products of their company, people think of it as descriptive marketing techniques and do not consider it as an effort to change the attitudes and beliefs we have formed about old people.

References

Hillier, S. M., & Georgia, B. (2015). *Aging, the Individual, and Society.* Edition 10, pages 496

Helene H. Fung, Tianyuan Li, Xin Zhang, Iny M. I. Sit, Sheung-Tak Cheng, Derek M. Isaacowitz; Positive Portrayals of Old Age Do Not Always Have Positive Consequences, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, Volume 70, Issue 6, 1 November

Anon. (2012). Ageing: Myth and reality. *Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability*

Services, 20-60.

DW, M., TS, L., & J, M. (2004). Stereotypes of the elderly in U.S. television commercials from the 1950s to the 1990s. *Sage journal*, 315-340.

Milner, C., Norman, K. V., & Milner, J. (2011). The Media's Portrayal of Ageing. *Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise?*, 24-28.

Lin M. C., Harwood J. , & Hummert M. L. (2008). Young adults' intergenerational communication schemas in Taiwan and USA. Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 27, 28–50.