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Impact of Model Gender on The Effectiveness of Advertisements Targeted at Older Viewers: An Analysis in The Context of Ageing

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Senior consumers are a consumer group of growing interest to advertising professionals in the current context of worldwide demographic ageing. This study aims to examine the role of the advertising model's gender on several variables linked to advertising effectiveness on senior consumers. When working on consumer representation in advertisements, the choice of the model requires specific attention. Indeed, viewers' perception of models influences the ad's efficiency (Bandura, 1977; Milliman & Erffmeyer, 1989-1990; Yazdanparast et al., 2018). The process of advertising persuasion relies partly on the viewer's identification to the model used in the ad. Several characteristics of the model, when they match those of the viewer, facilitate the identification process and play a key role in the effectiveness of the advertising. Among these characteristics are age (Chevalier & Lichtlé, 2012; Greco, 1989) and gender (Vilela & Nelson, 2006). Few studies have looked at the influence of the model's gender on senior consumers. To fill this research gap, the influence of ageing on older viewers' perception is an element to be taken into account as it has been demonstrated that ageing, characterized by the gerotranscendence of older adults (Tornstam, 1999), can modify their perceptions of themselves and others.

Gender is an important marketing variable (Oumlil & Erdem, 1997; Porter et al., 2012). Numerous studies have examined its influence in advertisements. Viewer's gender influences information processing (Meyers-Levy, 1989a, 1989b), the purchasing process (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004; Putrevu, 2001), ad perception, evaluation and recall (Baker & Churchill, 1977; Petroschius & Crocker, 1989; Reichert et al., 2007), spokesperson's perception (Reichert et al. 2007) and purchase intention (Bui et al., 2012; Caballero & Solomon, 1984; Mitchell & Walsh, 2004; Pinna, 2020; Putrevu, 2004; Reichert et al., 2007).

Concerning the gender of the model, it influences product perceived quality (Kanungo & Pang, 1973; Petroschius & Crocker, 1989), advertisement credibility (Kanungo & Johar, 1975; Todd & Melancon, 2018) and purchase intention (Adigüzel & Donato, 2019; Baker & Churchill, 1977). Finally, the concept of gender also applies to the product and the brand, which can be gendered in the mind of consumers (Alreck, 1994; Whipple & McManamon, 2002). Product gender impacts men and women's perception of advertisements (Bellizzi & Milner, 1991).

Socialization theory tells us that older consumers seek reference models in the media (Schewe & Balazs, 1990; Swayne & Greco, 1987). One of the criteria for identification is gender. A perceived similarity between the gender of the model and the gender of the receiver will therefore favor identification.

Tornstam (1994, 1999) claims a distinct path to spirituality in relation to age: gerotranscendence. Gerotranscendence would be the final stage of a natural progression towards maturity and wisdom. One of the foundations of gerotranscendence is a change in behavior resulting from a redefinition of the meaning of social relationships. A sense of freedom to be "oneself", to be able to let go of and free oneself from certain social masks and social roles traditionally attributed to men and women. When it comes to the gendered division of roles between men and women according to which they were raised and lived for most of their lives, the more spiritually mature ones declare that: "dividing life into male and female roles doesn't matter much to me anymore". As a consequence, we might observe that their perceptions of and reactions to gender might become less segmented with age.

In line with the gerotranscendence theory, we assume that, for older consumers, the gender of the model will have no effect on variables of the persuasion process. Similarly, if the interest of the congruence between the gender of the product type and the gender of the spokesperson has been shown in numerous researches (Kanungo & Pang, 1973; Whipple & McManamon 2002), the gerotranscendence theory seems to contradict the existing thought. From these elements, we deduce 12 hypotheses.

As our intention is to compare the influence of models of both genders, we chose two services widely used by consumers of all genders and for which older adults make an important consumer segment: banking services and travel agency services. In order to avoid biases associated with a potential a priori toward the brand or ad, fictitious ads were created. To test the impact of the gender of the model on the persuasion process variables (attitude toward to the advertisement, attitude toward the brand and purchase intention), we conducted a quantitative study. In this research, 512 older viewers aged 60 to 85 were surveyed.

This research represents the first one to examine the influence of the model's gender on persuasion variables while taking the impact of ageing into account through the theory of gerotranscendence (Tornstam, 1999). The survey reveals that the model's gender has little impact on the perception of ads by senior viewers. However, matching product gender and model gender can be relevant in several specific instances.

Keywords: *gender, advertising, older adult, ageing, gerotranscendence.*

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