Abstract

This research analyzes how cultural media products such as telenovelas and advertising campaigns portray the third age in an evolving society, and discusses how these representations often antagonize these consumers’ identity projects as well as contradict the normative legitimacy which these groups have acquired through changes in legislation and public policy. Our work complements extant research which has studied stigmatized consumers’ struggle for legitimacy in the marketplace by showing how stigmatized portrayals in the media often contrast society’s efforts for marketplace integration of marginalized consumer groups. We demonstrate that acquiring normative legitimacy does not necessarily equate to de-stigmatization and we argue that positive stereotypes can contribute to perpetuating stigma.

Key Words: marketplace exclusion, stigma; marginalized consumers, cultural intermediaries, third age.
(Mis) Representations of third age in the media: stigma and inadequacy in evolving societies

Introduction

Marketplace exclusion, marginalization and stigma have been discussed from various points of view in consumer research literature (see Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2012; Williams and Henderson 2012; Mirabito et al. 2016). Consumer researchers have focused on how marketplace resources and practices can evolve from being marginalized to acquiring some level of legitimacy among some segments of society (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013). Particularly, extensive research has been carried out to understand power structures and resistance mechanisms (Kozinets el al. 2010) in relation to poverty (Hill 2015; Hamilton et al. 2014), religion (Sandıkç and Ger 2010), body image (Veer 2006; 2009, Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), parenthood (The Voice Group 2010; Pavia 2012; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Cross and Gilly 2013, 2014 a and b; Atkinson 2014), LGBT rights (Visconti 2008) and immigration (Wong 2007; Jafari and Goulding, 2008; Visconti 2010; Visconti and Napolitano, 2009).

Extant literature sustains that marginalized consumers may leverage resources and apply a wide range of strategies to resist market exclusion, or alternatively, to promote market evolution. Particularly, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) argue that marginalized consumers mobilize to seek greater inclusion in and more choice from mainstream markets while in search for a collective identity by identifying inspiring institutional entrepreneurs and through access to mobilizing institutional logics from adjacent fields. Similarly, Sandikci and Ger (2010) show how marketplace institutions such as retailers, fashion designers and the media contributed a project of de-stigmatizing Islamist veiling practices.
Nevertheless, research also shows that consumers are not always successful at their efforts of acquiring market legitimacy, for instance, the at-home fathers studied by Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) struggle to attract the attention of major advertisers or to attain legitimacy given the mainstream ideological connections of men with career achievement, public-sphere recognition, and economic means. A similar struggle is observed in working mothers, who are often faced with sociocultural constructions of motherhood portrayed in the media which are frequently prescriptive, hindering their ability to pursue individual identity projects, which often diverge from the mainstream ideals of motherhood (The Voice Group 2010, Araújo et al. 2016).

Hence, previous research has examined how consumers resist marketplace exclusion, whether their attempts result in acculturation, community-based exchange, segregation or promote market evolution and legitimation. However, research on how cultural intermediaries such as media and advertising portray the social image of marginalized consumers in an evolving society is scarce (Dumer and Miles 2009; Priesler et al. 2015), particularly where legislation and public policy are being changed and are aiming at integrating marginalized groups into society.

Our work complements research on stigmatized consumers’ struggle for legitimacy in the marketplace by showing how stigmatized portrayals in the media often contrast society’s efforts for marketplace integration of marginalized consumer groups and demonstrate that acquiring normative legitimacy does not necessarily equate to de-stigmatization. To do so, we discuss how mainstream media and advertising representations of the third age often antagonize these consumers’ identity projects as well as contradict the normative legitimacy which these groups have acquired through changes in legislation and public policy. We ask: “How do mainstream cultural media products such as telenovelas and advertising campaigns
“To what extent these representations contrast with society’s efforts towards third age marketplace integration”. Furthermore, our context showcases the aging phenomena in an emerging market context, where the population is younger if compared to developed markets like the USA, Canada, Germany or UK (The Economist 2014).

**Literature Review**

*Aging - Social Images Communicated in Advertisements*

Advertising is a sort of content that is very present in the daily life of people, either in traditional media (TV and Radio) and in social media (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). Since advertising not only sells products, but also communicates images of different social groups (e.g.: gender, social class and age), in the long run advertising helps to establish and homogenize the way people are perceived by other social groups and by themselves, fostering what is to be older and to age in society (Donlon et al. 2005).

Arguably, there are issues of representation of older individuals in advertisements, as they are under-represented (Signorelli & Bacue 1999; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), and are portrayed stereotypically (Hummert et al. 1994; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), although not necessarily in a negative way. In fact, extant literature shows that older individuals’ representation is not monolithic, as they are represented sometimes in positive ways, such as in a happy and content moods, or in glamorous situations such as driving sports cars; or with a “young at heart” attitude, practicing what is perceived as youthful activities and thus departing from the “traditional” grandparent role, and instead focusing on the individuals interests and not on their family roles (Zhang et al. 2006).

In a historical analysis of the use of stereotypes portraying the elderly in the USA, constructed through the analysis of 1,662 TV commercials from the 50s to the 90s, Miller,
Leyell & Mazachek (2004) found very little negative stereotyping, and considerable use of positive stereotyping. In fact, according to Miller, Leyell & Mazachek (2004), the most commonly used positive stereotypes were the *Adventurous Golden Ager* (fun-loving, lively, interesting, sociable, and determined), the *Perfect Grandparent* (family-oriented, loving, supportive, happy, and trustworthy), and the *Productive Golden Ager* (productive, intelligent, skilled, successful, and independent). Nevertheless, there is also literature showing that older models are represented in a less positive way as compared to younger counterparts, where age itself is presented as a negative condition that can be overcome using some product. In fact, intergenerational relationships tend to be more positive in real life than the way they are represented in the media (Zhang et al. 2006).

Several studies in different countries converge that older adults, specifically individuals over 65, are underrepresented in relation to their respective proportion in the population (Roy & Hardwood 1997; Ylänne 2015; Priesler et al. 2015) and are also under-represented in centric roles, in terms of high level, status awarding occupations and are shown as less open to new experiences (Kessler et al. 2009).

Additionally, the number of studies on the third age representations outside of Europe, USA, Canada and Japan is limited (Zhang et al. 2006; Priesler et al. 2015), implying that significant contribution in this field can still be made by studying the phenomenon outside of these markets, particularly in countries where the population is aging and legislation reforms are being carried out to accommodate this change. Brazil represents one of these markets.

**Third age in Brazil**

Brazil is a market where the population is aging rapidly, given the decrease in the fertility rates, which have dropped from 4.3 in 1980 to 1.7 children per woman in 2015. A significant
decrease in infant mortality rates - dropping from 42.8 children per 1,000 births in 1990 to 16.2 in 2015, paired with an increase in life expectancy – which raised from 66 years old on 1990 to 75 in 2015 and will reach 78 in 2030, can also be observed. Due to these demographic changes, the Brazilian population over 60 years old is expected to grow from a 13.2% share of the demographic pyramid in 2015 to a 36% share in 2050 (UN 2015). Despite the increased relevance of third agers in demographic terms, in many markets negative stereotyping and discrimination known as ageism is still a concern in many markets in many markets, as it contaminates the social image of these consumers, causing third-agers to introject the established models (Palmore 1999). Nevertheless, aging is a process that is beginning to be seen globally as a social fact, an ecological, cultural and psychological process, as well as a natural and expected physical process (Gullette 2004).

More recently, adults in the third age in many societies have demonstrated habits and a lifestyle that is dissociated from the negative stereotypes of aging - they are psychically and socially active (Schau, Gilly & Celsi 2009). Brazil is no exception.

In the public sphere, there are in Brazil a few initiatives, both from government and non-governmental organizations; to transform the image of the third age. Additionally, changes in legislation reflect a more inclusive society. For instance, priority services are guaranteed by law both in public and private agencies. Also, third agers are entitled to half price in educational, cultural and sports events and receive free public transportation (Estatuto do Idoso 2003).

Furthermore, the Brazilian congress is currently discussing changes to the public welfare law: per current legislation, in a move that would mimic decisions made in developed economies (Iglesias 2016). Despite these efforts, most representations of the third age in Brazilian media stigmatize third age individuals (Debert 2003).
Research on the representation of third-agers in Brazil is scarce, although some research on the role of cultural intermediaries in reflecting or changing cultural stereotypes has been conducted with data from Latin America, particularly on telenovelas (soap operas), as these cultural products tend to provide a great cultural portrait of Brazil and other Latin America countries (Ribke 2015; Kjeldgaard & Nielsen 2010). Our study addresses this gap by analyzing third age representation in TV commercials and telenovelas in Brazil.

**Method**

To analyze how people over 65 years old are represented in the media, we collected commercials of 49 brands that appeared in the top of mind ranking of one of the main Brazilian newspapers, Folha de São Paulo, between the years of 2012 and 2016. We then added to that list the brands that appeared in a second ranking of top of mind brands in Brazil, built by the market research company Millward Brown. According to both studies, these brands are the most remembered in Brazil in their product categories.

Commercials were collected on YouTube and two of the authors coded the commercials separately and posteriorly solved the differences of interpretation. Materials were coded for presence / absence of “individuals over 65”, according to the perception of the researchers, following the roles proposed by Signorelli (2001): busy, retired, unknown, single, widower, married/couple, comic, serious, and by Lee, Carpenters, and Meyers (2007) - perfect grandparent, golden ager, John Wayne conservative, severely impaired, shrew/curmudgeon, despondent, and recluse. As in these commercials men and women can appear simultaneously, two of the authors independently classified each person in accordance to the stereotypes present in the literature (Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007) but were also open to new stereotypes that may emerge and that were not proposed by previous literature.
The final product of this phase of analysis was a spreadsheet with 271 coded commercials. With these results in mind, we started a second round of analysis-interpretation, now with the three authors connecting these stereotypes with a cultural reading of what it is to be aged in the Brazilian society.

To complete our data, we analyzed, with the same method, characters of three high ratings telenovelas broadcasted on open television channel, Rede Globo, in 2013. Rede Globo is a major open channel in Brazil and its telenovelas have the largest average audience in Brazilian television (including open and cable). The three telenovelas were Malhação (Working out), broadcasted at 5 PM and targeted at younger consumers. Flor do Caribe (Caribbean Flower), broadcasted around 6 PM and targeted at housewives and Amor a Vida (Love for Life), broadcasted in primetime, around 9 PM, the most traditional telenovelas hour in Brazil, targeted at all the family.

Results

Our Brazilian TV commercials data shows that individuals belonging to the third age appeared in a leading role only in 19 out of 271 commercials third age individuals and in 20 commercials they appeared in a secondary role. These individuals were mostly framed in three different manners:

I. Men and women, in leading or secondary role, were predominantly portrayed as per the Golden Ager stereotype - people full of energy and health, sociable and enjoying the pleasures of life. This was by far the most common stereotype and it was most often used for women in secondary roles.

II. The second most common stereotype is the Housekeeper. Only women were portrayed in this role. This is not a stereotype which was present in the studies
conducted in North America (Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004; Lee, Carpenter & Meyers 2007), but which appeared frequently in our analysis.

III. The third most common stereotype is a variation of the first: *The Productive Golden Ager* (Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004) is also portrayed as healthy, full of energy and enjoying life, yet he / she also seems economically active and productive (he or she seems to have a professional occupation).

Next, we proceed to describe a few examples of how these stereotypes are present in Brazilian cultural media products and we analyze the implications of these media stereotypes in framing the social image of the third age in Brazil.
The Golden Ager

Extant research has shown that advertisements generally do not present a negative portrayal of the elderly in society and it is generally the positive stereotype that is emphasized (Miller, Leyell & Mazachek 2004). Our findings concur with previous studies as The Golden Ager seen in the Brazilian advertisements gets along well among the family: they are portrayed at a Christmas celebration or watching soccer games. Third agers are also shown as protective of their children who are facing serious health issues: In one TV commercial, the narrator states that “she is more helpful than his insurance company”, or while enjoying happy moments playing cards among friends at a bar. In one case, a woman character is seen approving the quality of the food prepared by a teenager for a family dinner –drawing on patriarchal family values which imply that grandmothers are cooking experts.

Contrary to advertisements, telenovelas allow the screenwriter to develop more nuances in a character, because this character will remain in the plot for several months. Therefore, it is interesting that even being able to portray third age individuals in more complex manners, the Golden Ager stereotype remain as the most common for men.

Although the Golden Ager is presented always as someone who is content with his life, free from obligations and outside of any productive circle this is not the life that most individuals in third age have, research has shown that either by working outside the house or having personal duties to handle in the quotidian most individuals above 60 years old do not simply live a life of fruition (Palmore 1999). This means that, although positive, this stereotype is, at best, incomplete. In the Brazilian telenovelas third age male characters were often portrayed as the Golden Ager. We could observe this stereotype both in “Flor do Caribe” (Caribbean Flower) and in Malhação.
The Housekeeper

In our data, the Housekeeper is a stereotype which originated from our data. She can be an aunt who is a terrific cook, but she is also someone who is hard to tolerate, so the nephew prefers to cook the ready-to-made pasta of a leading brand. The Housekeeper appears to always know best which detergent to use to keep the clothes clean, “even with blinded eyes”, since the smell is easily recognizable. These are women who are shown to be happy in their daily home duties. As expected, there was no sign of men in these advertisements and they are assumed to be somewhere else, inside or outside the house. This reflects Brazil’s patriarchal values, implying that washing clothes is not a manly task: women should keep a man’s clothes clean for him to wear them when he is doing something more important. Socially, cleaning clothes or cooking for the family are not activities that have much valued. Although necessary, these activities are thought to have no significant economic value and even middle class people tend to hire house workers who receive low payments in Brazil. Thus, third agers represented in this role are socially equated to low skilled and low paid workers. Accordingly, the Housekeeper is a stereotype used mainly by the home care and food industry. In our database of advertisements, no other industry portrayed such a strict role for women.

The same stereotype is observed in the Brazilian soap opera “Flor do Caribe”, in which the third age female character analyzed also played the role of a housekeeper.

The Productive Golden Ager

The third agers portrayed by this stereotype appear to be professionally active, this being the main difference to other stereotypes. In one example, a health insurance company pays homage to doctors, and among them, two senior doctors in gray hair, working to “take care of people from other families”. In another example, a Brazilian mining company describes all
the benefits that it brings to society, and the narrator seems to be around 60 years old. He is an operational analyst from the company.

In another advertisement, of a telecom company that is supporting Brazilian athletes to the Olympic Games of 2012 in London, a woman in her mid-60s sews the kimono of an athlete, apparently, her granddaughter. She is presented as a “non-official sponsor” of the athlete. Sewing as a profession in Brazil is usually associated with having low cultural and economic capital and as being an activity either of the poor or of third age women.

Curiously, this stereotype was not seen in any of the telenovelas analyzed. Old characters do not seem to work or be productive in any other way in Brazilian telenovelas.

Positive stereotyping and stigmatization

Goffman (1963) argues that a stigma “refers to an attribute that is deeply discrediting” and that a person’s stigma “makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind” (Goffman 1963, 3). Extant literature suggests that, stigmatization occurs in connection to negative stereotypes (Jones et al. 1984). Nevertheless, our findings show that even when third agers are mostly portrayed by positive stereotypes, these stereotypes depict them as being different and less desired than younger characters in the same media products.

More specifically, although none of these roles can be said to create a negative social image of the elderly, two of them - the Golden Ager and the Housekeeper - circumscribe the elderly to either family or leisure roles, limiting their social impact to mere supporters of younger family members and therefore taking only secondary roles. There is no sign of a meaningful aging, of a life with purpose in the third age, no trace of “the beautiful old age” (Goldenberg 2013), nothing to make aging desirable or interesting.
Much has been said about positive ageism (Palmore 1999), or the biased perception that elders are relatively more kind, wise, dependable, affluent, freer, and happy than their younger counterparts. Though positive bias can have beneficial consequences, such as receiving better family support and privileged institutional treatment in society (usually in the form of benefits from government programs), it also brings with it negative consequences for the elders.

The first negative consequence is that by showing only the good side of the third age, positive ageism keeps society from forming a clear perception of what it is to be old and to age, along with its positive and negative consequences. If stereotypes over emphasize just a few traces of a group while blocking the vision of other traces, it does not help in the work of inclusion, understanding and acceptance of what it is to age.

These over-simplified stereotypes do not show that even if elders do enjoy the company of family members, they also value their own individuality; if they enjoy free time traveling, they also like their routine. In sum, to present a third age woman as someone who is truly happy while doing the family’s laundry is an image that blocks the view, reinforces patriarchal values and ignores the complexities of third agers identity projects.

Discussion

Our context portrays a situation in which positive stereotypes contribute to perpetuating stigmatization of the third age. We argue that the stereotypes seen in mass media cultural products such as TV commercials and telenovelas deter a process of de-stigmatization which has been initiated by public policy in an evolving society. In this sense, our findings complement previous research on stigma by demonstrating that normative legitimacy of consumer groups, acquired through legislation and activism, does not necessarily equate to de-stigmatization.
To understand how telenovelas and commercials move the blades of stigma, we use the model of Mirabito et al. (2016), analyzing factors of commercial winds that exacerbate and blunts stigma. Mirabito et al. (2016) created the Stigma Turbine concept to describe how a marketplace stigma is labeled, stereotyped and devaluated in a broad sociocultural context. The Stigma Turbine has three blades: the individual, the societal and the marketplace, and these blades are moved by winds of historical, socio-cultural, institutional and commercial winds. The winds move the blades to exacerbate or to blunt stigma, reflecting bidirectional tensions in a dynamic interplay.

In our context, de-stigmatization of the third age is moved by three winds: institutional (e.g. modification of laws), socio-cultural (e.g. activist groups and empowerment of third age) and historical (e.g. the baby boomer generation behaviors have partially changed the social image of third age although several negative and positive stereotypes are still present).

The factors that exacerbate stigma are: stigmatizers who perceive stigmatized individuals as responsible for stigma, the visibility of the stigmatizing attribute, the market and social exclusion of the stigmatized individuals, and the power held by the stigmatizer. On the other hand, factors that blunt stigma are the power held by stigmatized groups, their social connectedness, their proactivity and the self-esteem (Mirabito et al. 2016).

Figure 1 shows the application of the stigma turbine model, with commercial winds present in our data, that increase and decrease third age stigma. The bidirectional forces represented in the model contributed both for stigmatization and de-stigmatization.
Figure 1: Stigma turbine model

Exacerbating stigma winds:
- Exclusion: Minor representation in commercial and telenovelas.
- Responsibility for stigma: In telenovelas, some third age characters do not have a paid job.

Blaming stigma winds:
- Pre-activity: All the third age male characters of telenovelas and a few third age characters of commercials have a paying job.
- Self-esteem: The third age characters have a similar sense of self-esteem to the others.

Societal

- Exclusion: In some telenovelas scenes, the third age characters’ opinions are disregarded by other characters.
- Power held by stigmatizers: In commercials, the third age characters play mostly secondary roles. In telenovelas, most third age characters appear with family and are economically dependent on them (especially female characters).

Marketplace

- Visibility of the stigmatizing attribute: In commercials, the “Golden Age” stereotype is overstated, portraying third age individuals as not having occupations or problems, and merely enjoying life.

Individual

- Social connectedness: In commercials, the third age characters appear in consumption situations with other in-group e out-group characters not showing prejudice.

- Power held by stigmatizers: In commercials, the third age characters appear interacting with family (most female characters) and friends (most male characters).
We argue that the individual blade receives most of de-stigmatization wind. Despite being under-represented in the media and the fact that some characters in telenovelas do not have a formal career, they are shown to have a great sense of self-esteem, which is similar to characters of other ages. In fact, all the third age male characters in telenovelas, as well as a few shown in commercials, have a paid job.

On the other hand, female characters in telenovelas and commercials do not usually have a paid job, a common status of third age women in Brazil’s patriarchal society. Rather, women are responsible for tasks at home and with the family, although most live independently, paradoxically reinforcing the active way of life of third agers in the country. Thus, the commercials winds move the individual blade to de-stigmatization.

Concurrently, the societal blade receives wind forces in both directions, toward stigmatization and de-stigmatization, thus reflecting both an ongoing de-stigmatization movement of third age in Brazilian society. This is evidenced by third age characters being generally shown as connected to their families and friends, as well as respected by the other characters, thus moving the blade for de-stigmatization. However, at the same time, other factors move the societal blade for stigmatization: third agers are mostly portrayed as secondary characters in commercials, appearing only for a few seconds, without a determinant role in those narratives while in telenovelas, the third age characters appear mostly with family members on whom they are dependent economically, particularly the female characters. In fact, in telenovelas, sometimes often the opinion of third age characters is disregarded.

The marketplace blade receives more stigmatization winds, which emanate mostly from commercials. In commercials, although the third age characters appear in situations with other in-group and out-group characters, they are portrayed like infantilized people. The "Golden Ager" stereotype is often overstated, portraying third age individuals as not having
occupations or problems, and merely enjoying life. Thus, despite the intention to portray a "happy" third age, commercials stereotype reality, thus creating a hyperreal character, moving the marketplace blade to stigmatization while reinforcing some stigmatized attributes, such as having no-occupation or responsibilities.

**Conclusions and final remarks**

This research analyzes how cultural media products such as telenovelas and advertising campaigns portray the third age in an evolving society, and discusses how these representations often antagonize these consumers’ identity projects as well as contradict the normative legitimacy which these groups have acquired through changes in legislation and public policy. Our work complements extant research which has studied stigmatized consumers’ struggle for legitimacy in the marketplace by showing how stigmatized portrayals in the media often contrast society’s efforts for marketplace integration of marginalized consumer groups. We demonstrate that acquiring normative legitimacy does not necessarily equate to de-stigmatization and we argue that positive stereotypes can contribute to perpetuating stigma.
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