Older consumers and celebrity advertising

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ABSTRACT

Older consumers have long been the 'invisible majority' in advertising despite the rapid increase in an ageing population. A significant proportion of this population have high levels of disposable income, even in times of recession, but advertisers are not encouraging them to part with it. This paper intends to find out why advertisers have been slow or struggle to target older consumers effectively. The aims of this study are two-fold. First, it explores the portrayal and representation of older consumers in Tesco's 'Dotty' campaign and Marks & Spencer's (M&S) 'Twiggy' campaign, with special reference to the use of celebrities. The second aim is to demonstrate how the focus has shifted from the more traditional, negative stereotyping (Tesco campaign) to a more progressive approach, presenting aspirational images that older consumers can identify with (M&S campaign). Although both campaigns were effective in terms of increasing profits, this paper suggests that the ongoing M&S example of using older celebrities in advertising campaigns demonstrates a more effective creative strategy that is in tune not only with a growing population of older consumers but is also especially applicable in times of economic uncertainty.

KEY WORDS – ageing, older consumers, advertising, creative strategy, celebrity advertising.

Introduction

Older consumers have long been the 'invisible majority' in advertising. A significant proportion of this population have high levels of disposable income, even in times of recession, but advertisers are not encouraging them to part with it. The failure to engage with older people as consumers is made more alarming when one considers the scale and characteristics of the ageing population. The number of older persons has already trebled over the last 50 years, and is forecast to more than treble again over the next 50 years (United Nations 2005). Not only do we have an ageing population, but life expectancy is also increasing. Indeed, in the United Kingdom (UK) it 'has reached its highest level on record for both males and females' with an average life expectancy age for men of 77.2 years and 81.5 years for women

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(Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2008*a*). The proportion of the population aged under 16 is declining due to sustained low fertility and is projected to fall to 18 per cent by 2031 (ONS 2011). In contrast, the number of older people is increasing and the proportion of people over state pension age is projected to rise to 22.3 per cent in 2031 (ONS) 2008*a*). We have for the first time in the UK a larger proportion of the population defined as 'seniors' than teenagers (ONS 2008*b*). According to the ONS (2007), 'this is an inevitable consequence of the age structure of the population alive today, in particular the ageing of the large numbers of people born after the Second World War and during the 1960s'.

According to Szmigin and Carrigan (2000: 128), 'a key factor in the potential attractiveness of the older market is that it includes people who have money and are willing to spend it'. Despite the potential economic clout of this section of the population, older consumers have not attracted much attention in the UK advertising industry. Indeed, as argued by Ahmad (2002) and Simcock and Sudbury (2006), the older consumer market in the UK is among the least researched and understood of market segments. Most studies regarding the UK's ageing population have centred on either social policy or health-care service and delivery (Ahmad 2002). One of the earliest studies on older consumers in the UK is Long's (1998) which explores and acknowledges the existence of the older consumer market as a discrete sector. More recently, Sudbury and Simcock (2009) provided a comprehensive segmentation study of older consumers in the UK, arguing that the population of older consumers cannot be regarded as homogeneous due to diversity in needs, lifestyles and consumption habits. Few studies have, however, examined how the older consumers might be approached creatively. Research on marketing to older people is also limited. To date, the vast majority of the literature in relation to older consumers centres on empirical studies undertaken in the United States of America (*see* Bartos 1980; Bradley and Longino 2001; Greco, Swayne and Johnson 1997; Hiemstra *et al.* 1983; Johnson and Cobb-Walgren 1994; Leventhal 1997; Miller, Leyell and Mazachek 2002; Moschis, Lee and Mathur 1997; Nielson and Curry 1997; Robinson and Umphrey 2006; Wolfe 1990, 1997) and is therefore difficult to generalise (Simcock and Sudbury 2006). A few attempts have been made to consider the Canadian context (*see* Zhou and Chen 1992) and the British context (*see* Ahmad 2002; Carrigan and Szmigin 1998, 1999*a*, 1999*b*, 2000; Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Sudbury and Simcock 2009). A wealth of literature can be found on the topic of the portrayal and representation of older people in the media although the weakness here lies in the lack of marketing implications. Nevertheless, the findings of these studies indicate that there is a consistent and significant under-representation of older people in advertising (Kessler, Rakoczy and Stauginger 2004; Ong and Chang 2009;

Simcock and Sudbury 2006). Furthermore, where such studies have been undertaken, a lack of consensus is evidenced concerning the representation of older consumers. Some studies found negative stereotyping of older people whereby they are often depicted as feeble, foolish, inept, ill, confused or unfriendly (Hiemstra *et al.* 1983; Smythe 1996). In contrast, Miller and colleagues (Miller, Leyell and Mazachek 2002; Miller *et al.* 1999) found that positive stereotypes such as the 'perfect grandparent', 'adventurous golden ager' and 'productive golden ager' were commonly used in North American television commercials from the 1950s to the 1990s. Others have challenged such binary positions, arguing for no evident consensus of representation (Simcock and Sudbury 2006). Overall, the majority of the literature concurs that too many advertisements featuring older people are for a limited range of products and point towards an emphasis on incapacity in old age (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999*a*).[1]

The aims of this study are two-fold. First, it explores the portrayal and representation of older consumers in advertising campaigns, in particular the use of celebrities in two significant campaigns within the British retail sector for two British stalwarts of the High Street, Tesco and Marks & Spencer (M&S). It analyses and contrasts the former's 'Dotty' campaign (featuring British actress Prunella Scales) and the more recent work of M&S featuring Twiggy (a British model). The second aim is to examine celebrity advertising as a creative strategy and to question why advertisers have been slow or struggle to target older people effectively in relation to this creative approach. Case studies illustrate how the focus has shifted from traditional stereotyping (Tesco campaign) to a more progressive approach, embracing modern ideas and values (M&S campaign). Celebrity advertising has been in use since the 1920s and it is therefore not surprising to discover that a number of studies have considered the topic (*see* Erdogan and Kitchen 1998; Pringle 2004*a*, 2004*b*; Stevens 1996; Turner 2004). There has, however, been little or no research carried out on celebrity advertising in relation to older consumers. This study aims to fill this lacuna by examining the above examples while locating the analysis within the broader context of advertising in times of economic uncertainty.

Understanding the older consumer market

Figures released by the ONS indicated that the British economy officially came out of recession in the fourth quarter of 2009 with growth of 0.3 per cent. This marked the first evidence of growth in the economy since early 2008 but did not come with overt cheering and flag waving. Indeed, City economists at large argued that 'the figures did not change the overall

economic picture, which remains weak. Some warned that the economy could slip back into recession' (Kollewe 2010). Indeed, throughout 2010 and 2011 growth in the UK has remained sluggish largely as a consequence of continued coalition government austerity measures and household indebtedness. And yet the impact of the recent economic crisis is interesting in relation to the study of older consumers, for data supplied by SAGA indicates that this sector of the market tends to be more recession proof. Not only are they less inclined to unemployment and burdened less by debt, especially in relation to mortgage payments, but overall, the over-50 s hold 'more than 80% of the country's private wealth, 60% of its savings and 40% of its disposable income' (Clark 2009: 24).

However, there is another possible argument that one might put forward that explains how those over 50 could be protected to a degree from this economic downturn and that concerns their relationship to the ideology of consumerism that gathered pace under the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher government but which recent economic turmoil has placed severely under threat. For the consumer 'as an engine of wealth and representative of the public interest is an established figure in contemporary politics and discourse' (Trentmann 2006: 1) and indeed is a key figure underpinning the neo-liberal position. However, what this paper establishes is that such a figure is perceived by the advertising industry to stop holding such power once they reach the age of 50. As Trentmann observes, the role of ageing in the lifecycle of the consumer is an area very much under-represented (2006: 16) and can be evidenced beyond the field of advertising. For example, from the 1980s onwards there was a sharp rise in the number of lifestyle television programmes tied to the neo-liberal ideology of transformation through consumption (Powell 2009). However, all of these evidenced youthful participants despite audience research indicating that the viewing audience was certainly much older (Healey and Ross 2002:114).

In terms of a working definition, there is also a distinct lack of consensus over the chronological point that should be used for establishing what is meant by an older consumer (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999a). Conventional demarcations have varied from 50 to 65. The ONS regards the elderly as those aged 65 and over (ONS 2000: 142). This is also the case with the United Nations, whose criteria for an 'Ageing Society' is when the number of people aged 65 plus accounts for more than 7 per cent of the total population (ONS 2004). However, 50 plus is often used as the starting point of the mature years' lifecycle and functions as a common segmentation benchmark by many academics as well as practitioners (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999*a*). For example, the UK Association of Retired and Older Persons (AROP) and the SAGA Group consider 50 plus to be old (AROP 1998). To place the older consumer in the context of the development of

contemporary marketing, the first wave of baby boomers emerged between 1945 and 1954 and was the first generation to live through a time when a mass consumer revolution transformed taste cultures (Phillipson *et al.* 2008). By the late 1950s and into the 1960s the 'boomers' materialised as the first 'teenagers' and at this stage in their lives were prey to the advances of marketers. It is thus ironic and somewhat misplaced to think that they no longer have an interest in music, fashion and entertainment, the once perceived primary tools of their identity construction (Miles 2008; White 2008). Today, 'they may be different from younger people but they are still interested in many of the same goods and services from credit cards to cars, and many are better able to pay for them than their younger counterparts' (Szmigin and Carrigan 2000: 128), particularly in this current economic climate. Indeed, the over 50s are the fastest-growing users of social networking sites and will share their online experiences with other silver surfers (Clark 2009: 25).

The difficulties in engaging with older consumers

One of the reasons why advertisers have consistently struggled to engage with older consumers is that they are not a homogeneous group. Sudbury and Simcock's study (2009) found that a heterogeneous market exists in the UK for older consumers. The older consumers market is often segmented by age with conventional breaks falling at 50–60/5, 60/5–75 and 75 plus. However, Sudbury and Simcock proffered that self-perceived age is a more useful variable than chronological age and put forward the following five identifiers: solitary sceptics, bargain-hunting belongers, self-assured sociables, positive pioneers, and cautious comfortable (2009: 261). Further demarcations have been set around the lifestage, health and fitness, income and marital status. Specific generational experience is also recognised, especially at the top end of the age scale. People who grew up in the depression and lived through the deprivations of World War II are held in stark contrast to the baby boomers, who occupy the bottom of the age scale. These cohorts may have rather contrasting attitudes to life, based on differing life experiences (*Admap* 2002). There is a range of lifestyles from cash-rich, time-poor senior executives and managers, to genuinely impoverished pensioners (*Admap* 2002). Indeed, Silvers (1997) finds that the life of people in their fifties is far from settled and that much more change is occurring at this age than to those in their twenties. In view of this, Millennium, a full-service agency for the mature market, recognises from their research that there are four distinct age groups within this 20 million cohort: the Thrivers (aged 50–59) who take 43 per cent of the market; the Seniors (60–69) who take

32 per cent of the market; the Elders (70–79) who take 18 per cent of the market and the Survivors (80+) who take 7 per cent of the market (Miles 2008: 25).

A second factor that makes the older consumer harder to reach is that research demonstrates that they evidence a fundamental rupture in their cognitive age (or self-perceived age) *versus* their chronological age (Szmigin and Carrigan 2000). This makes the specificity of appropriate communication based on age difficult. Many older consumers regard themselves as being much younger than their actual age, which has formulated the so-called 'mask of ageing' (Bradley and Longino 2001; Featherstone and Hepworth 1991). Such a hypothesis has been used in order to explain why marketers use relatively young models to sell self-image-related products to older consumers. Being elderly is relative not absolute (Clark 2009; Long 1998) and it is more about lifestage than age. There is a belief among marketers and advertisers that older people do not wish to see older characters in advertising, which has led to their removal in many advertising campaigns such as the Werther's original confectionary brand (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999*a*). However, the stereotypical grannies of the Kellogg's Shreddies cereal campaign in the UK has been a noticeable exception, albeit laced with postmodern irony. Greco (1989) and Balazs (1995) found that older consumers can effectively be reached when older models are used in advertising but that this was most productive when used directly in relation to the promotion of elderly-oriented products. If the product has no specific age orientation ('age-neutral' products), there is a favourable appeal from older consumers in the use of models 10–15 years younger than themselves (Greco, Swayne and Johnson 1997). Overall, studies found that there is a general preference to favour younger models regardless of viewer age (Greco, Swayne and Johnson 1997; Mazis *et al.* 1992).

A third factor lies in the disparity of the age of those working in the advertising and marketing industries and the age of those they are trying to reach. One reason suggested for the disinterest shown towards older people is the youthful profile of those who work in advertising (Carrigan and Szmigin 1999*a*). The mean age of employees within the advertising industry is 33.7 years. Only 5.3 per cent are aged over 50 (IPA 2011). Thus creatives have few personal reference points when devising a campaign for this age group. This lack of empathy among marketers and advertisers for the needs of older consumers has manifested itself in communications that are often inappropriate for this new generation of older consumers. The creatives of many agencies look to produce 'great creative work' and believe that such work has the potential to reach all ages. However, it does seem that consumers over 50–55 engage more effectively with advertising that evidences particular characteristics. These include, in relation to television advertising,

strong characters, a narrative and an unhurried pace. Across all media they appreciate advertising that allows them to digest an argument rather than having to decode imagery (Long 1998; White 2008). They tend to look for more or less rational advertisements (*Admap* 2002). Indeed the 'more edgy style' of advertising that is likely to win creative awards 'tends to be greeted with incomprehension by most older people' (White 2008: 3).

Celebrity advertising

The growth of celebrities in advertising campaigns now extends on to social media sites including Twitter and is underpinned by a belief whereby through a process of association certain images, values and successes are transferred from the celebrity on to the brand or service being promoted. Perhaps the most effective place to start in the history of this creative style is with an advertising problem that the modern agency in its infancy faced; namely to find an appropriate form of communication that somehow mediated between its creators and the intended target audience. For in the United States of America, the birthplace of the modern agency, staff were characterised as being white, middle class and highly educated, and yet producing advertising aimed at a mass urban population. The J. Walter Thompson agency in the 1920s adopted two particular approaches to this problem; the first came to be known as a 'tabloid style' (Marchand 1985: 86) that drew upon the language of cinema and magazines for body copy. However, of particular interest to both the public, and therefore to advertisers, were the stars that populated these media, prompting Stanley Resor, chairman of the agency, to begin to explore the way in which brands could attain fame by association, through 'movie stars (Lux), Countesses (Pond's) or simply famous people (US Lines)' (Mayer 1958: 79). In 1927 a headline for Lux Soap read '9 out of 10 screen stars care for their skin with Lux toilet soap'.

The appropriation of the Hollywood close-up shot was a critical step in developing identificatory practices between the product and the potential consumer and years of success ensued with Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe and other female Hollywood icons. What Resor tapped into was the promotional possibilities of fame: of the star appearing in the advertisement and the product appearing as an essential aspect of the lifestyles of the famous. He recognised that the opportunity to become famous is not necessarily democratic but access to consumer goods that the stars endorsed gave greater numbers the possibility of vicarious access to their lives.

The use of the celebrity in advertising today comes from their overall appeal that is generated and located within the wider arena of popular culture and the mass media. It can be argued that the public feel closer to

and identify more effectively with contemporary celebrities than Hollywood stars, firstly due to their domestication, the location of the television set within the house, and secondly 'as stars develop their reputation by playing someone else' (Turner 2004: 15). With the celebrity there is a distinctive flow between their performance on and off screen. The range of qualitative differences between celebrities allows agencies to identify, select and manage the appropriate celebrity for the brand in question. A critical concept in the selection process is that of synergy. This registers the appropriateness of the celebrity in terms of transferring the meanings and associations affiliated to them within the domain of popular culture into the world of the brand and the targeted consumer (McCracken 2005). In this way their cultural capital has the capacity to be converted into economic capital. However, synergy is not synonymous simply with the scale of being well known; the nuances of selection are far subtler than this as the case studies that follow will testify. Rather, we need to contextualise the role of the celebrity in advertising in relation to their 'value': which is not a use value but rather an exchange value and a symbolic value that are inextricably linked. That is to say, the value of a celebrity to an advertising campaign and the brand they are endorsing comes from what they represent: a particular image that consumers identify with and wish to buy into. This might be affiliated to their looks, their lifestyle, their personality or a particular skill set, or any combination of these.

What has united advertisers and their clients in the neo-liberal age is the wish to consistently project an image of their brand as aspirational. However, this has not appeared to be a quality they relate to the buying habits of older people. Indeed, if brands began to be associated with older consumers, it was feared, an inverse correlation towards 'uncoolness' might ensue. About a decade ago Carrigan and Szmigin (1999*b*: 224) drew to the industries' attention that 'older people also want to see images which are aspirational in their terms; healthy, fit-looking people in their age group'. However, few agencies have heeded this advice. If carefully managed, however, the successes for this strategy are significant: improved sales, increased market share, high levels of brand awareness and consumer loyalty.

Case studies: Tesco Dotty campaign and M&S Twiggy campaign

This paper now turns to the case studies of Tesco and M&S. The rationale for selection resides in the choice of celebrity used and the contrasting image of the older consumers they represent: the Twiggy campaign for M&S has the potential to communicate, we would argue, a more positive representation of the older consumer whilst Tesco's Dotty campaign portrayed the image of

older people as annoying, forgetful and bossy. It will then explain why in practice creatives have traditionally shied away from the representation of the over-fifties in advertising campaigns through demonstrating how advertising consistently draws on what has been successful in the past to take creative strategy on into the future. In view of this, with few positive role models of older people available to date, creatives (and indeed, clients) do not see this as a tested formula. To contest such a point we would, however, like to evidence the role that the psychoanalytic concept of phantasy plays in everyday life, especially in relation to consumer life, and its potential for use in advertising beyond the targeting of the youth market.

In a recent survey by McCann Erickson Communications House and the Future Foundation (2009), 67 per cent of the over fifties stated that advertising does not reflect their lives and 62 per cent said that they find a great deal of it patronising. The limited research conducted has demonstrated a very narrow repertoire of images of older people in the media. One survey indicated that on television older people are negatively stereotyped as 'dependent, frail, vulnerable, poor, worthless, asexual, isolated, grumpy, behind the times, stupid, miserable, ga-ga, pathetic and a drain on society' (Healey and Ross 2002: 110). 'When shown in advertisements, older people are often presented in a stupid, feeble or amusing way' (Szmigin and Carrigan 2000: 132). Furthermore, 'the under-representation and limited value themes and product categories in advertising containing older characters communicates the idea that older adults are not important and not contributing much to society' (Zhang *et al.* 2006: 278). Indeed, a more recent US study worryingly concluded that 'these depictions reinforce stereotypes of older adults as being overly concerned with declining physical functions and financial/legal vulnerability' (Lees, Carpenter and Meyers 2007: 28). In a similar vein, an Australian study found that older people's description of the notion of 'oldness' consisted of an extensive list of negative terms including: "not trying, withdrawn, isolated, irritating, self-oriented, living outside the mainstream, unattractive, uninteresting, frail, silly, over the hill, narrow-minded, a burden, lonely, vulnerable, dowdy, and unproductive" (Minichiello, Browne and Kendig 2000: 259).

Tesco's Dotty campaign

Tesco's Dotty campaign from the 1990s is an apt example. Tesco's brand image has been transformed over time from having an unappealing 'pile it high and sell it cheap' reputation to becoming one of Britain's largest retailers. Advertising has played a crucial role in this transformation. Sharpe and Bamford (2000) contend that advertising, and in particular the 'Every Little Helps' campaign (launched in November 1993), was instrumental in

the improvement of Tesco's fortunes between 1990 and 1995 when they overtook Sainsbury's and became the market leader. From 1995 onwards, the Dotty campaign worked effectively in terms of consolidating their leadership. The structure of the TV campaign was a series of self-contained vignettes, drawn from a heightened version of everyday life, which demonstrated that Tesco's product and service offer could fulfil its brand promise (Pringle 2004*b*). Tesco and its advertising agency Lowe captured the real experiences of the Tesco staff – a combination of all their most awkward customers (Beale 2005). Research showed that consumers liked the campaign because 'Dotty frequently reminds them of a relative or acquaintances' and that 'consumers connect with Dotty, the archetypal old bag' (Sharpe and Bamford 2000). The three main characters involved were Dotty Turnbull (played by Prunella Scales), the fanatical shopper, the mother of all shoppers; her long-suffering daughter Kate (played by Jane Horrocks); and Kate's husband (played by John Gordon Sinclair) who drew upon the every-popular mother-in-law theme. Pringle (2004*b*) argues that the continuity of the three characters ensures campaignability and that together they created a depth of characterisation that was convincing. According to Iddiols (2002) there are five types of celebrity endorsement: 'testimonial', 'imported', 'invented', 'observer' and 'harnessed'. Analysing the use of celebrities in advertising, Pringle (2004*b*) categorises Tesco's Dotty campaign as an excellent example of a 'celebrity acting a part' based on an 'invented' character.

Within this campaign there is a straightforward concept which is encapsulated by the Dotty character and that is that Tesco is a helpful, proactive supermarket which delivers a satisfactory response to the most challenging and demanding shoppers (Heath 2002). Dotty appeared in 70 advertisements over ten years in one of the longest-running and most successful British brand campaigns (Nikkhah 2006). It had a significant impact on Tesco's fortunes with the company calculating that every £1 spent on the Dotty campaign generated £38 of turnover and £2.25 profit (Nikkhah 2006). In 2005, Tesco's fortunes reached the £2 billion barrier for the first time, which reports put down to the broad appeal of the Tesco brand familiarised and personalised through the character of Dotty (Whitehead 2005). Tesco is now the biggest supermarket chain in the UK, with 2,715 stores across the country (Tesco plc. 2011).

And yet despite this success, Dotty was dropped from Tesco's campaign in 2005 as Tesco sought to focus more on prices and value for money (Beale 2005). Whilst the Dotty campaign had an overall positive effect on Tesco's image and on its market share, one could argue that its representation of Dotty as an older consumer is in fact highly negative. Dotty has been criticised by the British feminist Professor Germaine Greer for being

'an absolutely repulsive older woman who puts on hats to go to the super-market' (Frean 2005). However, Tesco found that it was with the long-suffering daughter Kate and her husband that most consumers seemed to have actually identified with rather than the ever-challenging, difficult, demanding, interfering, annoying, bossy and fanatical Dotty. In this way, the campaign maps on to and exemplifies earlier research findings discussed above, whereby Tesco can be seen to be both perpetuating and reinforcing the negative stereotyping of older people.

The 'Twiggy Effect' and M&S

Of the very few studies that addresses the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement in relation to the purchasing habits of older consumers, Long (1998) found that those respondents in their seventies consistently criticised the use of media celebrities of a similar age (*e.g.* Bruce Forsyth, Bob Hoskins, Terry Wogan). This was because they judged that these per-sonalities had done little to acquire a position of respect. Moreover, they felt that there was something belittling about seeing them so willing to exploit their position by stooping to commercialism. In a poll carried out by YouGov on behalf of Senioragency, another specialist 50-plus marketing firm, an interesting 39 per cent were 'ambivalent' toward the use of celebrities in advertising but stated they might be swayed more positively based on the specific choice of celebrity featured (Thomas 2008). Thus as White (2008) advises: 'be careful about role models – pick them to fit the age group, but recognise that celebrities used superficially meet stiff resistance'. Thus in the cited YouGov poll, whilst 54 per cent of women said they did not have a specific role model, of those who said that they did Twiggy, who currently appears in the ads for M&S, featured on top (Thomas 2008).

The 'Twiggy Effect', as it has been labelled by those within the retail industry, is worthy of consideration in relation to the potential for advertising to engage with older consumers. The campaign, featuring a collective of famous models, was launched in September 2005 and featured Twiggy who would have been known first time around to the baby-boomer generation. Indeed, Twiggy first became involved in advertising for M&S back in 1967 when she appeared in a Spring/Summer fashion supplement as part of the 'St. Michael News', initially launched in 1953 (Chislett 2009: 43). And yet it was several decades later and the product of a 'chance meeting' in a pub with the Executive Director of Marketing that produced the 'eureka moment' to rekindle Twiggy's relationship with the brand (Chislett 2009: 46). The campaign that followed challenged the creative approaches seen as most suited to older consumers as suggested by Long (1998) and White (2008) in that rather than offer a narrative they are based on 'showmanship' and

'entertainment' (Binet and Field 2007: 60) with the models performing in womenswear recently launched by the brand. By May 2006 headlines announced that 'Twiggy helps boost M&S profits' (www.guardian.co.uk) and the press seemed to position the model in her late fifties as the saviour of the company. Indeed the press coverage that the campaign generated on launch was in itself equivalent to £2 million in advertising space (Thompson *et al.* 2006). It is worth quoting at length how the advertising agency behind the campaign defined their objectives and in particular how they dealt with the issue of synergy. The account team stated that the campaign sought:

to provide a fresh lens through which to view the clothes. The lens needed to be techni-colour enough to blow away the cobwebs of negative PR making women proud to wear M&S again. Supermodels were the perfect embodiment of M&S's growing confidence in product, but careful casting was key to finding a balance of women who could appeal to our broader church of customers. Twiggy, in particular, was the perfect metaphor for a national treasure making a spectacular comeback. (Thompson *et al.* 2006: 6)

By February 2006, one blouse that Twiggy wore in an ad 'sold more in one week than any other product in the history of M&S' (Thompson *et al.* 2006: 10).

Commenting on the campaign, Dick Stroud, managing director of specialist agency 20plus30, believes that age-neutral advertising that speaks to a spread of generations is a far more effective creative strategy (Simms 2008: 14). Locating Twiggy within a group of younger models indeed taps into the recognition that one can aspire to look one's best irrespective of age. In this context, we would argue, Twiggy represents a revised approach to celebrity endorsement: one that does not point to consumption as solution but rather positions consumption as process that specifically taps into the various lifestages of the seniors addressed here. Her appropriateness in the campaign for M&S comes not from her presentation of self as perfection, but rather through a sense of authenticity derived in part through the way in which she positively positions herself within the arena of consumption, using goods creatively and playfully, not only providing the entertainment value of the visuals but concomitantly generating an immediate point of identification with consumers around her age group. Such identificatory practices can be probed further psychoanalytically through the process of 'projective identification'. A Kleinian perspective positions the subject as relating and connecting to the external world through object-related unconscious phantasies and the difficulties often experienced in distinguishing between the two (Mitchell 1986: 23). Initially perceived as a defence mechanism pertaining to fears around the fragmentation of identity, 'projective identification', we would argue, can also be applied through its more communicative facets to explain the appeal of celebrity as part of an ongoing process

of unconscious identity construction that continues as one ages. It involves, through 'phantasy', the controlling of an object in the external world via the projection of the ego or parts of the ego into it (Hinshelwood 1991: 79). This external world is subsequently introjected or assimilated as part of the ego. Thus both the ego and its objects are constructed from varying degrees of mixture and integration of the self and the external world (Hinshelwood 1991: 182). Thus our interest in, and in some cases dependence upon, celebrities, in this case Twiggy, can be explained through 'projective identifi-cation'; namely we actually have parts of our egos invested in them. In this way, consumers of the baby-boomer generation will identify, consciously or unconsciously, with the ageing process as it is manifested through the figure of Twiggy herself. The era of The Beatles, Carnaby Street and mini-skirts represents a shared past between the celebrity and the consumer, but further-more Twiggy demonstrates how the on-going relationship between popular culture and identificatory practices can extend beyond youth culture through the critical role played by consumption in both her own current lifestage and those who identify with her.

Conclusion

In considering the role of celebrity within advertising, it must be recognised that whilst the production of celebrity as a democratic process is highly questionable, especially for older consumers, functioning as an aspirational consumer resource, it fares much better. An understanding of their ubiquity across campaigns covering all market sectors might be gained if we consider celebrities as points of connection rather than templates for replication. In this way, the object relations approach implies a more active model of consumption that can effectively be applied to seniors, for here consumption becomes a site for the active negotiation between the self and our ideals, a site for experimentation rather than a quest for perfection. Indeed, celebrities of all ages know this and ultimately derive their power in the 21st century from the realisation that what they represent is 'the active construction of identity in the social world' (Marshall 1997: xi).

In July 2011, M&S announced that it was once again looking to 'refresh its celebrity line-up' (*The Telegraph* 2011) but that Twiggy was expected to continue working with the retailer, appearing on billboards and in-store promotions. In view of this we would argue that whilst Britain remains in a state of economic uncertainty, and in retailing 'the squeezed-middle' fights for survival, the retention of Twiggy at the heart of M&S's advertising strategy demonstrates the recognition of the kinds of identificatory practices that this

paper has been documenting. By holding on to Twiggy, the brand is also holding on to the dreams and phantasies of its older consumers. This position taps into what can be deemed as a notifiable trend whereby at the upper end 'an increasing number of designer brands . . . turn to celebrities in their 40 s and 50 s to sell their exclusive lines' (Fisher 2009). Madonna now appears in Louis Vuitton's advertising campaigns, demonstrating that the aspirational qualities of luxury brands can still make an impact on those who have wealth, whatever their age.

While the limitation of this study lies in the fact that it has considered only two examples in the British context, the original contribution is the contrast between the two celebrities: the invented character Dotty and the aspirational images of Twiggy. This study shows that although both campaigns show effectiveness, the Dotty campaign (1995–2005) relied on the negative stereotyping of older consumers whereas more recently M&S's campaigns (2007 onwards) have embraced a more progressive approach, presenting aspirational images of the celebrity that older consumers can identify with. This example, however, remains isolated. Despite demonstrating its available spending power, the older consumer market remains an untapped resource across the advertising spectrum. As austere times prevail, advertisers, who continue to neglect the older consumer, do so at their and the client's peril.

NOTE

1 One of the rare examples of an advertising agency effectively reversing the dominant trend of representation that extends from patronising to exclusion was Bartle, Bogle, Hegarty's (BBH) campaign for Olivio (rebranded as Bertolli) in the UK (1996–2007). In it the 'traditional stereotyped images' gave way to 'more adventurous images that featured healthy, fit, active, modern and even sexual older people' (Williams, Ylänne and Wadleigh 2007: 18). It offered positive images of the elderly and sought to plant firmly in consumers' minds the relationship between longevity and diet and later the importance of activity too. Unlike the vast majority of advertisements aimed at older people, the campaign foregrounds the importance of consumer choice that lies at the heart of neo-liberalism and factors older consumers into this tradition. Choose to consume Olivio, the campaign proposes, and you are contributing to an engagement with a Mediterranean lifestyle, characterised by 'happiness, longevity, and better health' (Williams, Ylänne and Wadleigh 2007: 19). The idea that older consumers are perceived by an advertising agency as being at a lifestage where the construction of a particular lifestyle through consumption is still possible is illuminating on the basis of its irregularity. Studies have shown that the older consumer market responds to marketing efforts that reflect five key values: autonomy, connectedness, altruism, personal growth and revitalisation (Leventhal, 1997: 276; Wolfe 1990). The Olivio campaign has effectively incorporated all of these.

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