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## Representation of an Elderly Person in Polish Social Campaigns. A Case Study

### Reprezentacja osoby starszej w polskiej kampanii społecznej. Studium przypadku

#### Abstract

The article discusses the portrayal of the elderly in social campaigns, specifically in the campaign of the Polish Ministry of Digital Affairs. As most of the existing studies have focused on advertising, there is a research gap concerning the representation of the elderly in social campaigns that the present paper aims to fill. Combining insights based on critical discourse analysis and social semiotics, the study is grounded in multimodal discourse analysis, which allows one to perform a thorough investigation of various modes to determine how they form a coherent meaning. Overall, the portrayal of the elderly person was positive as they were shown as active and independent users of the Internet, which differs from the traditional representation of such people. Encouraging the audience to emulate the actions and behaviour of the protagonist appears to be a good solution regarding middle- and upper-class senior citizens as they have both social and financial capital to act like Barbara Bursztynowicz, who appears in the campaign. However, this might not be as effective regarding people who are digitally excluded. The discussed campaign successfully challenges stereotypical views on old age (i.e. senior citizens not being able to use modern technologies, or being dependent on younger family members), offering a different and positive perspective by emphasizing the agency of senior citizens.

**Keywords:** multimodal discourse analysis, representation in discourse, senior citizens, social campaigns, social semiotics

#### Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia wizerunek osób starszych w kampaniach społecznych na przykładzie inicjatywy polskiego Ministerstwa Cyfryzacji. Jako że większość polskich badań koncentrowała się na reklamie, w odniesieniu do badań nad reprezentacją osób starszych w kampaniach społecznych istnieje luka, którą niniejszy artykuł wypełnia. Łącząc spostrzeżenia z krytycznej analizy dyskursu i semiotyki społecznej, badanie jest ugruntowane w tradycji multimodalnej analizy dyskursu (MDA), co pozwoliło na dokładne zbadanie róż-

nych modusów w celu nakreślenia, w jaki sposób tworzą one spójne znaczenie. Wykazano, że przedstawienie osoby starszej było pozytywne, ponieważ pokazano ją jako aktywnego i niezależnego użytkownika internetu, co różni się od tradycyjnej reprezentacji takich osób. Warto jednak zwrócić uwagę, że zachęcanie odbiorców do naśladowania działań starszej celebrytki wydaje się dobrym rozwiązaniem w odniesieniu do seniorów z klasy średniej i wyższej, ponieważ ich kapitał – zarówno społeczny, jak i finansowy – pozwala im na wzorowanie się na Barbarze Bursztynowicz. Seniorzy wykluczeni cyfrowo mogą mieć jednak trudności z identyfikacją z osobą o takim statusie. Omawiana kampania społeczna kontestuje stereotypowe wyobrażenia na temat starości (tj. seniorów niezdolnych do korzystania z nowoczesnych technologii lub zależnych od młodszych członków rodziny), oferując inną i pozytywną perspektywę, która podkreśla ich sprawczość.

**Słowa kluczowe:** multimodalna analiza dyskursu, reprezentacja w dyskursie, seniorzy, kampanie społeczne, semiotyka społeczna

## **Introduction: Representation of Older Adults in Media and Advertising**

Recently, scholars have noticed the growing number of senior citizens in Poland and it is expected that the proportion of people aged 65 or older is going to exceed 25% (Leszko, Zając-Lamparska & Trempała 2015: 708). However, such a trend has been observed not only in Poland but also in Europe and North America (Kinsella & Velkoff 2002: 160). Therefore, one might expect that in the nearest future there may be more ads and campaigns directed at this age group. The point of this study is to analyse the representation on a senior citizen played by an older celebrity in a governmental social campaign.

The campaign *Seniorze, spotkajmy się w sieci* (Seniors, Let's Meet Online) was launched in 2020 as an initiative of the Polish Ministry of Digital Affairs, the National Research Institute NASK and the Warsaw Banking Institute. The topic of the campaign appears to be particularly significant given the prevalence of the Internet in everyday life and the aforementioned prognoses regarding the percentage of older people in future societies. Also, governmental social campaigns reflect the attitude of the authorities towards their targets. An inaccurate representation of senior citizens may result in their faulty public perception, leading to practices of discrimination. In order to describe 'the social practice of visually underrepresenting older people or misrepresenting them in a prejudiced way' (Loos & Ivan 2018: 164), the term *visual ageism* was coined although such representation of the discussed social group had been observed decades before the term was suggested.

The existing research suggests that while in the past senior citizens were usually portrayed as weak, fragile, dependent on younger family members, and generally underrepresented in the media (Barrick, Hutchinson & Deckers 1990; Harwood & Giles 1992), there has been a shift regarding that trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Loos and Ivan (2018) give an example of the 2007 Dove Pro Age campaign which featured several women aged 50+ who were not professional actresses or models. The discussed campaign showed their point of view and did not hide traditional traits of all ages, conveying the message that women of all ages are beautiful. The authors praise the campaign for its inclusivity and for not promoting an unrealistic image of old age. Regarding Poland, Badowska and Rogala (2016) investigated the portrayal of older adults (50+) in selected Polish print magazines with high readership (31 issues total). The results showed that the portrayal of people aged 50–59 was predominantly positive, whereas the elderly (60+) were hardly present in the research material. The authors conclude that there seems to be a division between the young old and mature old groups, with the former being shown significantly more often and in a more positive light.

It is worth noting that older adults have recently been rendered as physically attractive and staying sexually active after their retirement, which promotes the idea that the idealised view of attractiveness is closely connected with the features of young age (Clarke, Bennett & Liu 2014; Marshall 2014). In some cases, such portrayal of senior citizens might be ambiguous. In her analysis of L'Oréal's adverts, Kenalemang (2022) states that while on the surface the ads are positive (they highlight the agency and sexuality of an older celebrity – Helen Mirren), they suggest that only young women are socially acceptable, which is exacerbated by the sexual innuendos ('tone, tighten, unbutton, reveal a little more') and the stress on the physical attractiveness of the actress. Traditional images of ageing (e.g. wrinkled skin or grey hair) are valued negatively. Thus, L'Oréal's advertisements contest the standard vision of ageing but simultaneously in a way deny older adults' agency if they do not conform to the pattern promoted by the company.

Also, while there is sufficient research regarding the portrayal of older adults in advertising, social campaigns have not been properly investigated. There have been studies regarding the representation of obese people (Mulderigg 2017), mentally ill (Oute et al. 2015), or LGBT families (Mizelińska & Stasińska 2017), but the representation of older citizens in social campaigns has not been analysed in detail yet. Only recently have such campaigns began to be investigated by researchers: the few studies have shown that they many successfully challenge negative stereotypes and ageism

(Lytle & Levy 2022). As mentioned herein, the analysis of governmental social campaigns may reveal the way in which authorities perceive certain groups. Thus, the paper investigates the portrayal of senior citizens in a campaign that features an older celebrity.

## Materials

The campaign in question featured Barbara Bursztynowicz, an actress famous for her role in *Klan*, one of the most popular Polish soap operas. The audiovisual materials feature Bursztynowicz and her daughter Małgorzata. Bursztynowicz is primarily known for the role of Elżbieta Chojnicka (nee Lubicz) in *Klan*, the longest-running Polish soap opera. In *Klan*, Bursztynowicz's family is considered to be the model of a middle-class one, whose members respect tradition but are also able to adapt to change. Moreover, when faced with the choice of family or career, Elżbieta chooses to devote more time to the hearth of the home (Arcimowicz 2016: 9). *Klan* also is appreciated for its realism (Skorupska-Raczyńska & Rutkowska 2017). The discussed factors make Bursztynowicz's involvement in the role of a senior citizen in this campaign seem justified, as its target group (elderly people) has reasons to identify with her in some way or feel sympathy for the heroine played by the actress.

For the purpose of the present study, five short (up to 2:40) videos, six photographs on the official website of the campaign, and a photo depicting the face of the campaign were analysed<sup>1</sup>. It should be mentioned that there are other campaign materials such as brochures which describe in detail the potential threats related to Internet use. Due to space limitations, attention was be paid only to the videos and photographs.

## Analytical background and methods

The basis of the study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an interdisciplinary approach at the intersection of social sciences and humanities. Within this paradigm, the text is a product of ideology, which conveys a specific system of values. The approach considers discourse in terms of social practice, assuming a dialectical relationship between language

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<sup>1</sup> All images in the paper come from NASK-PIB copyright materials. The author obtained permission from the creators of the campaign to use them in the article. For full videos and illustrations, see Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji, 2020.

and society is assumed: the former both shapes and is shaped by the latter (van Dijk 2006: 115–116). Further, CDA is anti-discriminatory in its nature as researchers operating in that paradigm often investigate practices of misrepresentation of minorities.

A classic CDA approach involves deciphering discovering inconsistencies, hidden meanings and contradictions in the internal structures of discourse, as well as detecting the ideological, persuasive or manipulative nature of discursive practices (Wodak 2011). It is also grounded in the thought of the Frankfurt School (Forchtner 2011). While the present paper does draw some inspiration from CDA (conceptualization of discourse as social practice, focus on underrepresented and potentially discriminated groups), it also relies on social semiotics – an approach that does not restrict its scope to the verbal only, offering tools to examine other modes of communication (e.g. colour or image) as they, similarly to language, have their own grammars, i.e. rules regarding making meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Therefore, the paper does not intend to deconstruct ideologies underlying the analysed research material; rather, it closely investigates through which modes the meaning was created and discusses the representation of senior citizens therein.

Combining insights from both CDA and social semiotics results in an in-depth methodological approach which moves away from a logocentric approach in which the verbal text is the primary point of reference. Instead, a holistic perspective that integrates different aspects of communication (image, sound, etc.), in which all modes are treated equally and as bringing meaning to the text, is proposed. Such approach is referred to as Multimodal Discourse Analysis (O'Halloran 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Thus, relying on MDA as a relevant paradigm, the present study incorporates van Leeuwen's (2008: 137–141) framework for analysing multimodal texts which distinguishes between three dimensions of the image–receiver relationship. The discussed approach was first developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in their model of grammar of visual design. Inspired by Halliday's (see e.g. 1985) functional grammar the authors argued that the idea of grammar can be extended to other semiotic modes, developing a tool-kit in which compositional elements acquire symbolic meaning depending on their placement or their cultural representation (see e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 160–163).

It needs to be pointed out, however, that Kress and van Leeuwen's approach has not eluded criticism. Forceville (1999: 165–166) states that their

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<sup>2</sup> See Chen, Adolphs & Knight (2020) for an overview of qualitative and quantitative approaches to MDA.

model does not pay enough attention to genre conventions. In particular, the author discusses film frames, arguing that Kress and van Leeuwen do not sufficiently take into account the shot and the sequence in which they occur (or the whole film in general). This criticism is further echoed by McIntyre (2008: 316), who points out that disregarding the context of the scene leads to unsubstantiated interpretations. Also, Bateman, Delin, and Henschel (2004: 66–67) suggest that the conclusions drawn by social semioticians may be impressionistic and not applicable to all types of material. The above-mentioned Forceville (1999: 168–169) notes that the classifications and categorizations offered by Kress and van Leeuwen are often not unequivocal; rather than binary oppositions, they describe a continuum.

In order to address the critique of the discussed approach – in line with Forceville’s suggestions (1999: 173) – the present paper takes into account text-external factors (such as age, gender, or cultural background). Further, rather than make generalized claims, the author is aware of the fact that the present paper functions as a microanalysis, which investigates the social contexts of meaning making (cf. Jewitt & Henriksen 2016: 161–162). Also, even the critics of their approach state that it does have considerable merits (Forceville 1999: 175; McIntyre 2008: 315). Overall, the article does not investigate a long film, but a series of short videos and photographs. Thus, the risk of omitting important information by disregarding the context of other scenes is mitigated. If the author was to investigate a more complex piece, applying insights from Film Studies would be advisable.

The first dimension of van Leeuwen’s (2008) tool-kit, social distance, deals with interpersonal relationships in multimodal artifacts. Van Leeuwen (2008: 138) argues that people generally keep their distance from strangers, while simultaneously they try to be as close as possible with members of their own in-groups. Therefore, people shown in close-up are depicted as if they were an important part of their own group. Those shown at a distance, on the other hand, are treated as strangers.

The second dimension in van Leeuwen’s model involves social relations, where the angle from which the people depicted are seen plays an important role. Van Leeuwen (2008: 139–140) states that it communicates two aspects of the social relationship: power and engagement. He argues that the eye-level shot communicates an equal status between the viewer and the actors depicted on a given artefact. Hart (2014: 92) points out that the viewers are then “in the thick of things” and they may experience a sense of direct involvement in the issue. The vertical angle, on the other hand, is interpreted as a way of signalling power. Looking down on people from above is tantamount to

imposing symbolic power on them. Looking at someone who is above the viewer (worm's eye view) implies that the viewer has symbolic power over the person being observed.

When it comes to the third dimension of van Leeuwen's (2008: 140–141) model (social interaction), the way the depicted are looking at the audience is crucial. If they look right at the camera, they are then rendered as having agency and expressing their symbolic demand. However, if they avoid the viewer, they are then objectified and portrayed as devoid of agency and powerless.

In addition, attention was paid to other selected visual semiotic resources such as pose, colour, and settings (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 52–56). While MDA has offered many tools for investigating auditory modes of communication (see e.g. Machin & van Leeuwen 2016), in the discussed campaign sound and music play a minor role and were not, therefore, subjected to analysis. Rather, the paper focused on the interplay of verbal and visual modes.

## **Analysis**

### **Visual materials**

In relation to the photo advertising the campaign, it is important to pay attention to the visual layer. Starting with the colours, they are rich, saturated, and warm, making the picture more salient. In fact, Bursztynowicz is shown wearing a light green shirt in every photograph (and most of the videos), which shows that portraying her as elegant and warm was a deliberate strategy. Moreover, regarding gaze, she looks straight into the camera, which indicates that the person in the photo has equal status in relation to the audience and that she is addressing the audience directly, wanting to communicate something to them (cf. van Leeuwen, 2008: 139). Her pose is also relaxed and loose, which signifies openness and warmth (Machin & Mayr, 2012: 74–75). Also, the textual layer merges with the visual one – as if the senior woman was conveying the message 'Senior, let's meet online' to the audience, encouraging the viewers to emulate her. The use of the first person plural establishes a certain bond with the recipients, emphasised by the self-confident senior. Also, in the upper right corner of the photo, there is the campaign logo on the phone case. This suggests that the phone can be used without anxiety, as it has already been secured and positively verified by the Ministry.

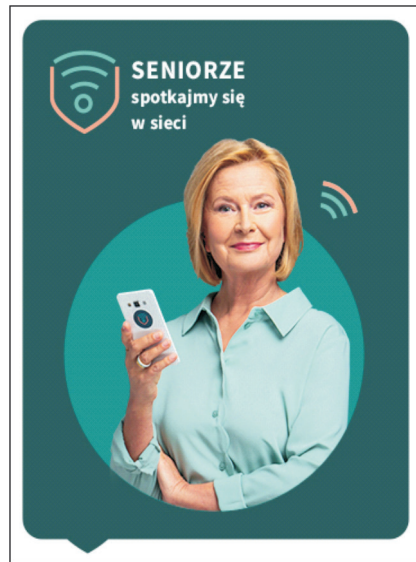


Fig. 1. A photograph marketing the social campaign

When it comes to the set of six photographs, the older celebrity is depicted with different devices. She clearly knows how to use them properly and she appears confident while looking right into the camera. Moreover, she is always accompanied by a young person. Similarly to the older celebrity, they are smiling, using the devices and looking at the viewers – their poses are relaxed and welcoming. Regarding the verbal component, the sentences in the upper right corner emphasise the aspect of safety. Further, they are emotionally laden as they consider the viewers' closest family members (parents and grandparents) and use exclamation or question marks<sup>3</sup>. Thus, young people are encouraged to help older adults. While the analysed sentences mostly use the imperative, the young people depicted in the pictures are shown as happy, which suggests that they are willingly spending time with their grandparents<sup>4</sup> and are not being forced to do so.

Interestingly enough, the older celebrity herself is not depicted as needing any help as she is portrayed as a confident and competent user of new

<sup>3</sup> Translations of the verbal component: I – Online series? Show the parents a safe environment on the Web!; II – Show the grandparents how to use instant messengers!; III – Show the grandparents how to shop safely online!; IV – Show the parents how to protect personal details in the Web!; V – Do your parents know what 'the grandparent scam' is?

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that while Burszytnowicz is usually depicted with teenagers, in Photograph IV – which mentions parents – she is accompanied by a woman appearing close to the age of her daughter Małgorzata.





Fig. 2. Six photographs on the official website of the campaign

technologies, which is identical to the representation of younger people. Thus, while the verbal component suggests that senior citizens need to be shown and taught how to use modern electronic devices, the visual representation of the older celebrity shows her as active, independent, and self-reliant.

Moreover, in the photographs, Barbara Bursztynowicz in many ways looks similar to Helen Mirren in the ads analysed by Kenalemang (2022). The Polish actress wears makeup and her hair is blonde. This represents a departure from the traditional portrayal of senior women, who are generally shown without makeup and whose hair is usually grey and not neatly combed. Her clothes also seem to differ from the standard pattern – the woman wears a shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and her cleavage is also visible. Such a representation of an older adult makes the campaign challenge the stereotypical model of old age, trying to show seniors as self-confident and resourceful.

### Audiovisual materials

All five videos have a similar structure. At the beginning of every video, a picture of the protagonist is shown. On the left, there is Barbara Bursztynowicz (she is in the same pose as in the previously discussed photographs, has the same shirt and wears the same make-up; the only difference relates to the equipment in her hands – there are different devices in different pictures: I and IV – laptop; II and V – smartphone; III – tablet). The right side of the screen displays the title of every video: I – *A play and a film, or **on safe entertainment on the Internet***; II – *The method for..., or **what a safe senior should watch out for on the Internet***; III – *E-mail and social media, or **on safe communication on the Internet***; IV – *Anti-virus and a camera cover, or **what to use to be safe online***; V – *Office and banking, or **about safe handling of everyday matters online***. It is then worth noting that a wide range of topics was discussed – not only aspects relating to bureaucracy but also leisure and everyday life. Moreover, the words related to the concepts of *safety* were emphasised, which suggests that the issue of online safety was of utmost importance to the authors of the campaign.

With relation to other modes, it is important to pay attention to the placement of visual elements in the materials. Spatial left signifies “given” information (what is already known to the audience), while spatial right signifies “new” information (what was previously unknown to the viewer) which is influenced by what is placed on the left (Kress & van Leeuwen



Fig. 3. A picture showing the celebrity shown at the beginning of each video

2006: 56–57). Consequently, it can be seen that this positive image of the senior woman is ensured by secure communication on the Internet. In other words, seniors are happy and confident because they use the Internet wisely.

It is also worth noting that in the videos the person played by Barbara Bursztynowicz is shown as active and making conscious decisions: she uses VOD services (I), has a social media account (III), uses e-mail (III), reads news on websites (II), goes on vacations (IV), takes a taxi (IV) or orders food via an application (V). Her activity is not limited to leisure time as she takes (on her own initiative) measures to ensure her online safety. Namely, she installed an antivirus program (IV), uses two-factor authentication (IV), does not open SPAM (III), effectively protects herself against a *grandparent scam*<sup>5</sup> (II), calls a friend to make sure that it was her who sent her a link, not a scammer (I). Thus, her agency is highlighted and the perspective of an active lifestyle among older adults is promoted. Moreover, this perspective is highlighted by the settings: every video takes place in a spacious living room, the large windows and high ceiling suggest a sense of luxury;

<sup>5</sup> The grandparent scam is one of the methods used by scammers to rob elderly people. In one of its most popular variants, a senior citizen receives a phone call from a person claiming to be related to him, her (usually a grandson or a granddaughter). The con artist claims to be in dire need of help as he or she has been involved in a complicated situation which needs to be solved quickly. Exploiting their naivety, the callers ask seniors to send them money (Yip & Schweitzer 2015: 216–220).

the woman does not live in a small cluttered flat but a stylish apartment. Also, the ubiquitous brightness signifies optimism and positivity (cf. Machin & Mayr, 2012: 52–53).

Moving on to the relations between the two women, heroine's daughter usually does not instruct her mother how to deal with appropriate security measures, because in many situations Barbara Bursztynowicz already made relevant preparations. While there are other seniors that were in need of help (the protagonist's friends or other family members), they are only mentioned in some of the videos but are not shown explicitly. Thus, regarding the visual component, senior citizens are not shown to be struggling with technology. Only in two videos can it be seen that young people helped Bursztynowicz beforehand or gave her new information. In Video IV, the older adult says to her daughter *I always ask you about everything that is connected with the computer and safe use of the Internet*, even though nothing of the sort occurs in any of the videos as Bursztynowicz seems to use the Internet just fine without any help. In Video III, on the other hand, the senior asks for her daughter's help in solving a crossword puzzle: 'false information, such as on social media, that is meant to mislead'. To this, the younger woman replies *fake news, because fake means not true in English*. Again, one can observe a certain inconsistency here, because in Video I it is the senior who explains the concept of phishing to her daughter (*well, when someone steals personal data and impersonates someone else, it is phishing*).

What is more, in Video V there is a dialogue between the women, which shows that the daughter – unlike the senior, who had done it much earlier – did not update her identity card. The older woman says: *I'll show you how to set up a Trusted Profile*. Therefore, one can see that the campaign presents an elderly person who not only does not need to be instructed how the Internet works but is able to teach younger people how to use it. Also, the younger woman expresses admiration towards the actions undertaken by the senior: *Mom, you're so watchful (I), I'm impressed, safety first (I), You did very well (II), You are a spam slayer (III), Rightly so (III), Mom, I think you know everything about online safety (III), Well, bravo! (IV), Well, you're impressing me (V)*. The senior's actions to increase online safety are thus approved by others. The fact that a younger person, who usually has better Internet literacy skills, praises the older one, suggests that being able to use the Internet properly and safely is an example of right behaviour. Moreover, it is the older woman that usually explains different aspects of the Internet to the younger one, not the other way around; she is also familiar with the vocabulary relating to the Internet and does not mispronounce any words. Therefore, the agency of the older adult is highlighted as she is the








Fig. 4. Visual relationship between the two women

one who instructs her daughter. Also, when it comes to the visual aspect, the women usually look at each other from eye level, which signifies their equal status (see van Leeuwen 2008: 139).

It should also be noted that in each video the senior woman addresses the audience directly at some point. Clearly, in these parts of the videos she addresses other seniors as they are structured as a form of advice to them. In the discussed excerpts, the senior woman draws attention to what to do in suspicious situations and how to defend oneself from online threats. She also encourages other seniors not to feel awkward while asking younger family members for help.

In such fragments, the camera shows only the actress as Bursztynowicz directs her words to the audience. This fact is particularly relevant as addressing the viewers directly suggests an equal relationship between the audience and the depicted (van Leeuwen 2008: 140–141). Therefore, it shows Bursztynowicz's confidence in the message the campaign wants get across. It is worth noting that this is realised not only by the verbal component but also by the visual one, given the angle and gaze. Moreover, the visual portrayal of Bursztynowicz as a self-reliant and self-confident person is consistent throughout the whole campaign, as evidenced by Figures 1, 2, and 3. Moreover, in these fragments Bursztynowicz speaks more slowly than she does when talking to her daughter, and a smile appears on her face. One may also note her vocabulary: in order to create a bond with the audience, the protagonist uses the first person plural, speaking from

**Table 1.** Fragments of each video in which the older celebrity talks directly to the viewers

Material	The visual	The verbal
I		'Sometimes all it takes is to browse an unsafe site to get your computer infected with a virus and then, unfortunately, you might pass it on, such as by emailing files to someone' (1:25–1:36)
II		'In the message, the scammers ask for a code with which you can normally confirm an ATM withdrawal or transfer of any amount. And then you realise you have an empty account. It's worth knowing that because scammers are getting more and more inventive. Dears, be vigilant on the Internet as in real life' (1:27– 1:51)
III		'If the content of the message or the sender's address seems suspicious to you, it's best to contact the institution in question to confirm whether they actually sent the message to you' (1:00–1:13)
IV		'You, too, should not be afraid to ask your loved ones for support' (1:40–1:44)
V		'There are so many everyday things we can do online easily and safely. I encourage you to do the same' (2:08–2:15)

the perspective of one of them. Moreover, the actress directly addresses the audience using the second-person forms (both singular and plural). Also, relatively intimate words (*dears, your loved ones*) also appear, which reduces the distance between Bursztynowicz and her viewers. Moreover, her message is augmented by her relaxed pose, which suggests openness and warmth. Taking into account these factors, the audience is invited to watch these fragments in a way that encourages a personal relationship rather than adopting the perspective of an observer (cf. Machin & Mayr 2012: 73–75). The medium close shot along with the relaxed casual voice suggests both intimacy and informality (van Leeuwen 1999: 15). Further, the advice is not communicated by an outside authority (e.g. by voiceover) but another older adult. Thus, the audience may feel that, rather than being told what to do, they are being given a piece of useful advice by one of them.

## Discussion and conclusions

The representation of a celebrity senior citizen in the discussed social campaign differs from the traditional portrayal of an older person and shares multiple traits with the representation of that age group in commercial advertising. The analysed campaign emphasises empowerment and physical attractiveness of the elderly person which is a departure from the traditional portrayal of old age. Moreover, the verbal and visual elements work together and form a relatively coherent whole. Overall, the materials do not show older adults as helpless, passive and in need of help at every step. Further, the protagonist's activity and agency are highlighted. In addition, younger people are also encouraged to help their family members – this is realised by showing them as smiling and enjoying spending time with senior citizens.

However, it seems that despite the participation of Barbara Bursztynowicz, an actress of similar age to the target group and known for her role in a popular soap opera, the audience may have some problems with identification with her. She lives in a modern and functional house, which does not seem to appropriately reflect the housing conditions of most older people. Furthermore, not once is Bursztynowicz shown in a situation in which she would have a problem with operating any equipment. Also, while the traditional qualities of old age are not stigmatised, as the benefits of maintaining an active lifestyle after retirement and safe use of the Internet are emphasised, the campaign might set unrealistic standards of old age, which is a similar issue that was observed in earlier studies (Clarke, Bennet & Liu 2014; Loos & Ivan 2018).

On the other hand, the appeal to likeability might be an important factor in the campaign – the target group of the campaign are seniors, and showing them a person of a similar age (whom they also know from a very popular soap opera) who is able to navigate the Web without any problems may motivate them to act and start using the Internet or – in accordance with one of the objectives of the campaign – ask younger people for help. Research confirms that if a famous person is considered trustworthy and worthy of emulation, it can have a positive impact on the audience's evaluation of the advertisement (Shimp 2017: 304–305). Overall, Bursztynowicz is presented therein more as a role model rather than a senior citizen that might need help. Also, the fact that a mother and daughter were involved in the campaign only adds to its authenticity and may make seniors more eager to ask their grandchildren or children for help. Thus, on the one hand, Bursztynowicz is shown as an authority figure given her fame and overall status; on the other hand, the audience sees her in everyday situations. Also, she does use the first-person plural while addressing seniors and identifies herself as an older person as well (not only is she referred to as mother, but she also has a grandchild). These aspects make the “advice parts” of the videos more effective as her message appears honest and genuine. It is worth mentioning that identifying with people similar to oneself may result in imitation of their behaviours and increasing one's self-efficacy (Bandura 1988: 285).

Still, research shows that while senior citizens in Poland use the Internet relatively frequently (a report by the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs indicates that in 2020 almost 60% of people aged 60–75 would do it; *Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej* 2021: 44), another report shows smartphone is used by 33.4% of the population aged 65+, and a laptop or notebook by only 13.8% of such age group (*Krajowy Instytut Mediów* 2022)<sup>6</sup>. This suggests that the scenes from the social campaign do not properly reflect the reality of most senior citizens. However, this seems understandable as they depict the life of a senior celebrity – she does not play a character, she is explicitly referred to as “Barbara Bursztynowicz” in different campaign materials. Thus, the audience probably expects that her life conditions and overall position is higher than an average senior; on the other hand, they might feel persuaded to try out new things. Overall, the campaign appears to be addressed at middle-class seniors, who have some experience with new technologies but can and want develop their skills. It seems that it would not be effective as regards digitally excluded senior

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<sup>6</sup> Although the same study indicates that a cell phone is used by 78,2% of the discussed population.



citizens who still comprise a relatively large portion of the population (cf. Czarnecka, Kelm & Koczur 2023).

The portrayal of senior women as weak and dependent might be more effective in the case of messages aimed at young people – showing the difficult life of seniors is supposed to make the audience reflect and encourage them to help older people. In a situation where the target of the campaign are seniors and its goal is to encourage them to do something specific, it may be better to show the elderly as active and capable, just like they are rendered in the discussed materials. It appears that the campaign was primarily aimed at senior citizens – they were encouraged to ask younger family members for help, use the Internet safely, and enjoy life. In other words, to emulate the actions of Bursztynowicz. While younger people are encouraged to help their parents and grandparents, the campaign hardly shows any need for their actions – the audience sees that Bursztynowicz is proficient at using the Internet. While she encourages the use of help from her loved ones, she does not usually need them to function online. This may also result in not fully conveying the message to a younger audience – given that the main character does not really need their help, they might get the impression that their actual family members are self-reliant as well. Showing a situation where the daughter actually helps the mother (with the latter not shown as helpless) might have been a more effective strategy. It is worth noting that while the benefits of new technology is promoted, the campaign does not propagate a technocratic utopia. Smartphones, laptops, or tablets are simply shown as tools used to help people communicate with their friends and relatives; they are not depicted as their substitute. The importance of relationships is strongly accentuated in every video.

Regarding further research, it might be beneficial to investigate the extent to which the portrayal of senior citizens (played by celebrities) is different from the representation of the discussed age group by unfamiliar actors (cf. Preiler et al. 2010). The present study suggests that campaigns featuring older celebrities rely on the aforementioned likeability effect. Hence, the portrayal of the senior citizen as self-reliant, physically attractive, and content with life might not be an example of setting unrealistic standards, but rather an instance of promoting a positive view of old age by a celebrity that the audience knows and respects. Certainly, it is not possible to draw definite conclusions from a case study; still, the present paper may serve as a point of reference for a larger, comparative study that would investigate the representation of older adults by both celebrities and non-celebrity actors. Further, another step would be to investigate the perception of such campaigns among the target group.

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