

Journal of Macromarketing Special Issue: Healthy Ageing in Marketing

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Abstract

In this introductory editorial, we briefly discuss the need for a deeper understanding and more meaningful engagement with older adults in marketing research, viewed through the lenses of identity, vulnerability, resilience, and meaning making. We then introduce the nine peer-reviewed articles that comprise this special issue and conclude by outlining directions for future research.

Keywords

healthy ageing, silver marketing, older consumers, wellbeing, macromarketing

Background

According to the United Nations World Population Prospects (2022), the number of individuals aged 65 years or older is rising rapidly from 771 million in 2022 to a projected 1.6 billion by 2050. For the first time in recorded history, the global population over the age of 65 has surpassed that of children under five. These figures signal not only a demographic shift but also a profound challenge to prevailing assumptions about ageing, value creation, and societal participation.

In response to this growing older population, the United Nations launched the “Decade of Healthy Ageing” (2021–2030), issuing a global call to reconsider how diverse disciplines, including marketing, can contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of older adults. This special issue of the *Journal of Macromarketing* arises from that call, recognising the importance of directing scholarly attention toward healthy ageing within the marketing discipline. With a strong sense of academic responsibility, we argue that marketing plays a critical role in shaping consumption patterns, social narratives, and overall quality of life. It is time for marketing researchers to fully engage with the complex realities of ageing populations.

Clearly, longevity alone is not a sufficient indicator of wellbeing. Healthy ageing encompasses the development and maintenance of functional abilities that enable older individuals to lead fulfilling lives (World Health Organization, 2025). This requires a holistic approach, achieving a balance between body, mind, and spirit (Yen et al., 2022a); that includes physical health, but also extends to psychological wellbeing, social connection, and ongoing engagement with the world. Increasingly, scholars across public health, gerontology, and the social sciences have advocated for an integrated and holistic approach to later-life wellbeing. However, marketing scholarship has yet to fully reflect this interdisciplinary momentum.

Much of the existing marketing literature on ageing has centred on segmenting older consumers as a market opportunity,

often with the primary aim of enhancing firm-level outcomes. While such efforts are important, they are insufficient for advancing the broader public good. There remains limited research that critically examines how marketing can support, enable, or indeed hinder healthy ageing. Prior studies suggest that portrayals of older adults in advertising are often limited or stereotypical (Eisend, 2022), while the marketplace continues to reflect widespread structural and symbolic exclusions (LaBarge & Pyle, 2020). Notably, research on the lived experiences, identities, and consumption practices of older consumers remains underrepresented in core marketing journals (Goldberg, 2009).

Against this backdrop, the impetus for the current special issue was both timely and necessary. It aims to foreground ageing not as a peripheral or niche concern but treating ageing consumers equal participants for marketing debates and practices in the twenty-first century. Inspired by Macromarketing’s broader societal lens, this issue brings studies to examine how marketing institutions, discourses, and systems interact with the ageing experience and how they could evolve to foster more inclusive, empowering, and healthy ageing futures.

We regard consumption practices as an important, yet underexamined arena for fostering healthy ageing. From food and mobility choices to digital participation and brand community engagement, the everyday actions of older consumers are shaped by and, in turn, shape their wellbeing. Thus, healthy ageing invites a reconceptualisation of consumption not merely as acquisition, but as a vehicle for autonomy, purpose, and social belonging.

This special issue provides a platform for scholars to engage with these urgent and multifaceted questions. We encourage

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marketing researchers to move beyond reductive age-based segmentation and instead explore ageing through the lenses of identity, vulnerability, resilience, and meaning-making. We also called for methodological pluralism, welcoming both conceptual and empirical contributions that draw on diverse epistemologies and interdisciplinary insights.

The articles that follow are at the forefront of current thinking about the connections between healthy ageing and Marketing, how to approach this relationship and its significance.

The Articles

This special section comprises nine double-blind peer-reviewed articles. The opening article, *"Ageing in the Digital Age: Public Beliefs about the Potential of Virtual Reality (VR) for the Ageing Population"*, by Ali Mahmoud, addresses the growing interest in how technology can support healthy ageing by examining public sentiment toward virtual reality as a tool for enhancing older adults' wellbeing. Responding to a gap in consumer research on naturally occurring public perceptions, the author employs a big data methodology to uncover how VR is perceived in the context of ageing. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Social Cognitive Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model, and Diffusion of Innovation, the study identifies three major public belief structures: empowerment and intergenerational learning; ethical and social considerations; and cognitive and physical engagement. The findings underscore not only the optimistic public outlook regarding VR's potential in elder care, but also the nuanced concerns surrounding its implementation. This study advances Macromarketing by offering a data-driven perspective on consumer attitudes toward emerging technologies in ageing societies.

The next article, *"Older People Are Not Allowed to Be Old Anymore: Representation, Stereotyping and Psychological Impact of Ageism in the Fashion Media"* by Aurore Bardey and colleagues, investigates how the fashion industry's narrow and idealised portrayal of ageing contributes to ageism and its psychological toll on older adults. While previous research has focused largely on youth and body image, the authors' work shifts the lens to older consumers, exploring how their invisibility in fashion media affects their fashion involvement, body esteem, and self-worth. Drawing on a three-part mixed-methods study, the paper uncovers that older individuals are both underrepresented and stereotyped in fashion imagery. Despite recognising the unrealistic beauty ideals portrayed, participants often denied the personal psychological effects of such portrayals, even as data revealed lower self-esteem and fashion disengagement. The authors argue that inclusive and authentic representation in fashion media could foster not only higher engagement among older consumers but also support broader goals for healthy ageing.

The third article, *"Healthy Ageing in the Skies: How Women Leaders Shape the Travel Experience for Older Passengers"* by Nor Aida Abdul Rahman and colleagues, explores the overlooked intersection of ageing, air travel, and gendered leadership in Southeast Asia. While the aviation industry

increasingly acknowledges the ageing passenger demographic, little attention has been given to how leadership, particularly by women, can shape age-friendly service innovations. Drawing on stakeholder theory and based on interviews with women leaders across the Malaysian and Indonesian aviation sectors, this study identifies empathy-driven strategies that improve travel experiences for older adults. The authors find that women leaders implement holistic, inclusive approaches ranging from wellness zones and ergonomic infrastructure to staff training and cross-sector health collaborations that foster wellbeing for ageing passengers. Importantly, the study reveals a contrast between female leaders' relational, care-focused strategies and their male counterparts' operational efficiency orientation. In doing so, the article contributes to the literature on healthy ageing, gender diversity in leadership, and inclusive service design, offering a conceptual framework that positions women's leadership as pivotal in creating dignified health-oriented air travel.

In the fourth article, *"Unlocking Healthy Food Preferences of Older Adults: A Fuzzy Clustering Approach"*, Elisabetta Savelli and colleagues address the increasing complexity of promoting healthy ageing through nutrition. While much attention has been given to the impact of socio-demographic and situational variables on elderly food choices, the authors' study challenges the tendency to treat older consumers as a homogeneous group. By extending the Health Belief Model to include emotional satisfaction and motivational constructs, and by applying an innovative fuzzy clustering technique to segment Italian older adults, the paper offers a nuanced picture of this demographic's dietary behaviours. The paper identifies three distinct clusters with varying sensitivities to barriers, benefits, and informational cues, revealing that emotional satisfaction is a critical driver across all groups. This research provides fresh theoretical and methodological insights that inform more precise, emotionally resonant marketing interventions aimed at fostering healthy eating and, by extension, healthy ageing.

In *"Aircrew Healthy Ageing and Its Influence on Ageing Aircrew's Consumption Behavior,"* Simarmata and colleagues investigate how ageing Indonesian commercial airline pilots navigate consumer choices related to health and wellbeing. Using the Health Belief Model as a framework and drawing from interviews with pilots from three major airlines, the study finds that occupational performance requirements, shifting life priorities, and personal values significantly shape their consumption behavior. These ageing professionals exhibit deliberate, value-conscious consumption, with a strong emphasis on health investments and product quality. This study uncovers the nuanced motivations that drive behavior in a less-examined population. Rather than reacting passively to ageing, these pilots strategically engage with the marketplace to support their roles, identities, and evolving lifestyles. This research adds a fresh dimension to ageing consumer studies, emphasising how specialised occupational contexts and self-perception drive health-oriented and socially influenced purchasing decisions among older adults.

In *"Ageing Consumer Engagement with the Mobile Food Planner Apps in Malaysia: Investigating Gender Differences,"*

Chatterjee and colleagues explore how older adults interact with technology in the context of food planning, offering a fresh perspective on digital adoption among ageing populations. Leveraging an extended Technology Acceptance Model alongside the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework, the study dissects the cognitive and affective pathways that shape elderly users' attitudes and behaviors. Data from 392 seniors reveals that subjective norms, app characteristics, and facilitating conditions strongly influence perceived usefulness and ease of use, ultimately enhancing word of mouth and intent to use meal planning apps. This study pushes beyond surface-level adoption metrics to examine *why* older users engage or hesitate in technology use. By highlighting emotional, social, and gendered influences, the authors offer actionable insights for app developers and public policy aimed at fostering inclusive digital ecosystems for older adults.

In their article "*Responsible and Sustainable Beauty Consumption for Wellbeing of Older Adults*," Daniels and Gupta explore how ageing consumers engage with beauty in ways that align with both personal values and broader ethical concerns. While much of the literature on beauty and ageing tends to focus on aesthetic motivations or the pursuit of youthfulness, this study highlights how older adults increasingly integrate sustainability and social responsibility into their consumption decisions. Through thematic analysis of interview data, the authors reveal that participants view ethical beauty practices not merely as trends but as meaningful extensions of their identity and moral frameworks. The study identifies key drivers of sustainable behaviour, such as a desire to leave a positive legacy, reduce environmental harm, and promote ethical labour practices. Daniels and Gupta shed light on a quieter, more nuanced form of consumer agency: one grounded not in resistance or rejection, but in conscious alignment. Their work broadens the discourse around ageing and consumption by illustrating that wellbeing for older adults increasingly includes the ethical dimensions of how products are made and used.

The article "*A Little Lipstick Never Hurts: How Luxury Cosmetics Influence Self-Esteem in Older Adults*" by Calestru and colleagues provides a critical and timely lens into the intersection of luxury consumption, ageing, and psychological wellbeing. While much of the consumer research has focused on motivations for purchasing luxury goods especially among younger populations, this study shifts the focus to an older demographic, unpacking how self-worth, ageing, and beauty rituals are interconnected. The authors employ both regression and cluster analyses to reveal how engagement with luxury cosmetics influences not just self-esteem but also subjective wellbeing and quality of life. Their findings challenge assumptions that luxury consumption is superficial or status-driven in older age, instead suggesting that for many, it serves as a coping mechanism and a tool for identity reinforcement in the face of age-related change. The authors interrogate a neglected population in luxury markets to understand how their purchases affect their lives, identities, and mental health. This perspective enriches our understanding of consumer behaviour by placing

wellbeing and ageing at the centre of luxury engagement analysis.

The closing article "*Beyond Companionship: Exploring the Role of Social Robots in Mitigating Emotional and Social Loneliness of the Elderly*" by Dang Ngoc and Bertrandias offers a timely and critical investigation into the emerging intersection of ageing, technology, and wellbeing. Drawing on empirical insights and human-robot interaction literature, the authors explore how social robots may extend beyond functional assistance to fulfil deeper emotional and relational needs among older adults. The study contributes to the discourse on technology-enabled ageing and raises important ethical and practical considerations. In doing so, it underscores the potential of marketing and service design to play a more active role in shaping compassionate and inclusive ageing futures.

Future Research and Acknowledgements

The contributions in this special issue initiate a reorientation of marketing scholarship toward engaging with the pressing global imperative of healthy ageing. However, for marketing to contribute meaningfully to the discussions in the Decade of Healthy Ageing, it must transcend conventional, firm-centred paradigms and critically reconsider its role in shaping older adults' wellbeing in later life. Analogous to the Macromarketing critique of the limitations of micro-level consumption analyses, research on healthy ageing must interrogate the foundational assumptions that construct older consumers primarily as passive recipients of market offerings. Instead, there is a need to recognise older adults as active and agentic participants who navigate complex intersections of identity, vulnerability, purpose, and evolving physiological and social conditions.

Future research is encouraged to continue this agenda by examining how broader marketing systems, where institutions, ideologies, and infrastructures co-contribute to the shaping of ageing experiences. It is essential for marketers to examine how existing marketing practices may reproduce ageist stereotypes, constrain participation, or alternatively, serve to empower older individuals to not only thrive but flourish. Situated between marketing's functional role in commercial strategy and its wider societal influence lies a rich and underexamined territory that warrants innovative theoretical and methodological approaches.

Healthy ageing should not be framed solely as a biomedical or physiological concern. Rather, it constitutes a cultural, psychological, and inherently social process. In response, marketing researchers are encouraged to adopt an interdisciplinary stance, working and contributing to the debate of healthy ageing, working together with insights from gerontology, public health, critical ageing studies, and related fields. This shift invites a reimagining of consumption away from paradigms of accumulation or indulgence and toward a conception of consumption as a series of meaningful, health-promoting practices: what individuals consume, how they move, connect, nourish, rest, and engage with both physical and digital environments

(Yen et al., 2022b). Understanding older consumer behaviours offers fertile ground for developing novel insights of consumer value and wellbeing in later life.

Technological developments, in particular, warrant more critical engagement within ageing research. Future studies are encouraged to address not only the adoption and sustained use of digital platforms and health technologies by older consumers but also how such technologies reshape perceptions of autonomy, care, and surveillance. Greater attention to the emotional and social dimensions of technology-mediated consumption in later life is essential.

In parallel, branding research must move beyond metrics of brand loyalty and purchase behavior to consider how branding can foster a sense of dignity, inclusion, and social belonging among ageing populations. There is a need to explore the roles of brand storytelling, community formation, and ethical branding in supporting the emotional and psychological aspects of healthy ageing.

As population ageing increasingly intersects with global challenges such as socioeconomic inequality, climate change, and digital transformation, marketing scholarship must remain attuned to the heterogeneity of ageing experiences across diverse cultural, economic, and geographical contexts. There is no universal model of “successful ageing”; future research must remain sensitive to this plurality in order to prevent the further marginalisation of vulnerable ageing populations.

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Dorothy A. Yen (PhD, University of Leeds) is a professor in Marketing at Brunel Business School, Brunel University of London. Dorothy takes on a consumer-centric approach to understand and discuss marketing, branding, and management matters, focusing on how culture affects human behavior, in both b2b and b2c domains. She is a pioneer in researching and promoting the Happy to Chat (<https://happytochat.uk/>) social movement, with the aim of increasing social connections amongst people in communities and societies, in order to reduce loneliness, especially among older people. Dorothy has published in esteem journals, such as *British Journal of Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of*

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