

Help the Aged

Marketing and advertising to older people

Report of a seminar held by Help the Aged on
19 September 2002 as part of its campaign against
age discrimination

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Missing the market?

Marketing and advertising to older people raises many issues and contradictions. The majority of wealth and assets are held by 50–65-year-olds yet 95 per cent of advertising revenue is aimed at under-35s. Companies' perceptions of older people are that they don't spend very much and are set in their purchasing habits, yet the ageing 'boomers', the new generation of 50–60-year-olds, have very different attitudes and purchasing patterns from preceding generations.

The advertising industry has historically focused its activities on the under-35s, traditionally for building markets and brand loyalty. However, as demographics change, those assumptions about commercial success are being challenged and perhaps a new business model is needed.

Advertising seems to be aimed at our aspirational age rather than our biological age and much of the advertising aimed at older people is stereotypical in its attitudes and the images it portrays.

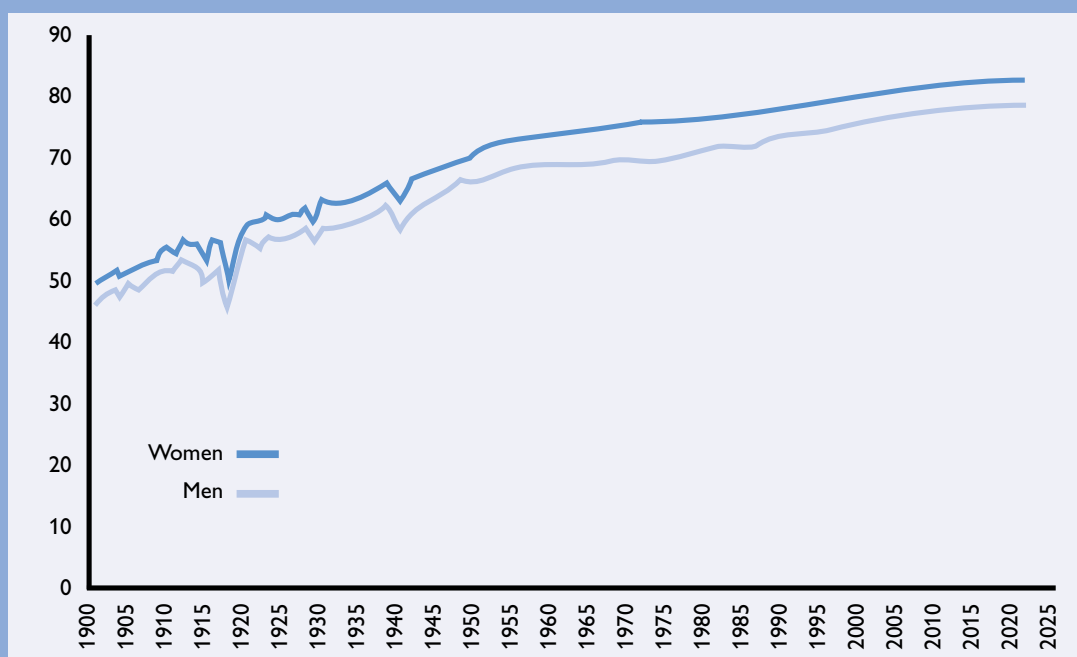
The seminar focused on three major points:

- What is the scale of the problem?
- What are the underlying causes and how can these be addressed?
- What role can Help the Aged play?

Longevity and new life courses

At the heart of the debate are changing demographics and, in particular, dramatic increases in longevity. Life expectancy nearly doubled during the last century and is forecast to continue. Some researchers are suggesting that scientific advances are taking us into a new era of longer healthy living. While it is not yet clear how far the longevity revolution can or will go it seems certain that it will have a dramatic impact in a variety of ways.

Life expectancy at birth in the UK by gender (2000-based forecast)



Source: Population Trends/ONS/nVision

What older people think about advertising

Sandra Chalmers, media consultant to Help the Aged, presented some anecdotal research that had been undertaken by a group of older people. They were asked to review television advertising across different television regions throughout the UK during August 2002 and pick out the best and worst examples, based on the following criteria:

- useful
- relevant
- clarity of communication
- memorable

or

- offensive
- patronising
- inappropriate
- ageist.

Among the commercials that were noted with approval was Saga Insurance, which presented an older couple in pleasant scenery with the words: 'Welcome to the time of your life.'

AMP commercials were felt to be positive and forward-looking and Cornhill Direct was perceived as giving straightforward information. Sun Life and Ocean Finance were appreciated for their calm reassurance and use of older models and Evian, with its images of diving and swimming, conveyed a clear message and a positive image of older people and their physical ability.

Among the worst commercials was Polygrip denture fixative, the most disliked advertisement in the survey. It was felt to be embarrassing and to make fun of older people, and was memorable only for its ageist perceptions.

Irn-Bru, which showed a grandfather removing his dentures to drink, was very much disliked. An advertisement for stair-lifts was felt to be patronising and ageist, while the message in the Denny's sausages advertisement, 'Sell your gran for a sausage', really raised hackles.

The older people who took part in the survey said they noted above all the paucity of older people shown in commercials, especially during the evening:

'Over the last two weeks, I watched 894 advertisements – with many repeats. The overarching impression was the relative invisibility of older people.'

'It seems that the older generation are completely ignored. Even Saga had a young person as the driver of a flashy car'

Why do older people feel excluded by advertising?

Ann Murray Chatterton, Director of Education at the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), had examined all 52 commercials shown during August. Her study showed that 35 per cent had included someone over the age of 50 and 20 per cent had featured someone over 50 as the main person. Twelve per cent of the 52 commercials portrayed someone over the age of 60. She said: 'Obviously a more scientific analysis might show different findings to this survey but, just as clearly, perceptions and reality are two different things.'

Contributing to older people's perceptions that they are ignored by advertising are the time of day when commercials are shown and the number of times they are repeated. The main complaint that emerged from the survey was about under-representation of older people in evening schedules.

In the discussion of daytime advertising Sandra Chalmers described this as ‘ageism by scheduling’. She also raised the question of whether the same production values applied to daytime advertising when the audiences are often very small and advertising rates are lower.

The Golden Pleasure Seekers

Annabel Purves and Thiru Raj of the BBC’s Audience and Consumer Research department presented research which had been compiled to inform the BBC about changing attitudes and audiences.

The impetus for the study was growing media attention to ageing issues and the need for the BBC to ensure it was continuing to serve all its audiences. It brought together a wide range of material including published articles and papers, focus group discussions, information gathered from people filmed in their own homes and qualitative research.

America has *Frasier*, we have *Victor Meldrew*

The traditional view of ageing is that 50 is getting old, 60 is getting pensionable, 70 is getting senile and 80 is getting dead, and the way that older people are portrayed on television in the UK has more to do with *Victor Meldrew* in *One Foot in the Grave* than the American series *Frasier*. As one respondent to the BBC’s qualitative research put it: ‘I get fed up of the dodderly old man, sweet old dear stereotypes. We are just not like that.’

Seventy-five per cent of people aged 60 and 65-plus feel the views of their age group are ignored by the media. Half of viewers aged 55-plus believe their age group isn’t portrayed in factual programming.

Magazine portrayal is predictable

Seventy-one per cent of over-55s feel advertising does not reflect their life nowadays. The researchers explained: ‘This issue is well recognised by older people, perhaps not surprisingly because we found that magazines were very predictable: if they covered ageing issues at all they didn’t reflect anything positive. And this is just not in step with how most older people feel.’

‘*Saga* is addressing this – it is a shining light in a dark place. It has the largest title in the entire magazine market with a huge circulation of 1.2 million. Interestingly, in the youth market circulations are dropping but the *Saga* [magazine] circulation seems to go from strength to strength.’

‘But even in *Saga*, the advertising doesn’t seem to have caught up with the editorial and generally, in magazines, examples of good practice were hard to find.’

Television and radio

The over-55s account for nearly 40 per cent of peak-time TV audiences and are the heaviest consumers of radio.

The part of the BBC research focusing on television and radio shows that the over-55s are discerning consumers who know what they want and are demanding that broadcasters keep up with them. ‘This trend is not going to go away. There is a new competitive agenda and we as broadcasters must rise to the challenge. We cannot take our older viewers and listeners for granted.’

A fresh look at the grey market

Across the media as whole, images of older people are hard to find. But changing demographics mean that over the next 10 years the 50-plus group will grow to the point where it represents 40 per cent of the population instead of the current 30 per cent.

The BBC team pointed out that today's consumers are statistically older, richer and wiser. And, in their attitudes, they are bolder, fitter and wilder.

Richer Over-50s in the UK spend £240 billion a year, 40 per cent of total consumer spending. Their personal disposal income per household is £205 per week and they are spending £2,761 per household per year on leisure services like cinema, sport, theatre, satellite television, the Internet, holidays and eating out.

Wiser Many people who are over 50 feel very positive about their age. A higher proportion than any other age group said they enjoyed life and did not worry about the future.

Bolder Increasingly, the over-50s are bold and adventurous people who love to travel and often want the sort of holidays traditionally associated with gap-year students, like safaris.

Fitter A positive attitude towards health and keeping fit is common among people of this age group.

Wilder This generation has lived through a period of changing attitudes to sex and a rise in individualism, and are likely to be more experimental and 'savvy' consumers.

The presenters concluded: 'Of course there is a wealth gap which continues to widen in all age groups and our research found that over one million pensioners are below the poverty line. But on the whole this generation is forward-looking, liberal in its attitudes and demanding about the quality of products and services.

'The press is focusing on the issue and looking for a new terminology to capture the new attitudes and changing behaviours of this market.

And while we in Europe are starting to look at these issues, the US media are very well versed in using positive images of older people.

'There is a real political impetus and commercially the penny is starting to drop. The commercial sector is beginning to realise that the over-50s could be their new best friend. It's catching on.'

Advertising to the seniors market

John Pickett is Head of Market and Media Research at the Saga Group, which provides services for people aged 50 and over, including travel, financial and health, and has its own radio station and magazine for the same age group. He outlined a range of research that had been undertaken into the seniors market.

A survey by Target Group Index (TGI) found that 50-plus, compared to people aged under-50, are more likely to find advertising a waste of time; to feel that advertising only generates superfluous needs and to be annoyed by nearly all TV advertising. They are less likely to feel that advertising helps them decide what to buy.

Functional age is more important

John explained: 'Ageing is a new phenomenon: with advances in science, medicine and health and changes in lifestyle, life expectancy is increasing by around two years every decade. Today's 60-year-olds are physically more like 45-year-olds were a generation ago. They are different mentally and physically and we need to think more about functional age rather than chronological age.'

Setting the social and historical context, he said that people aged 75 and over had lived through a period of huge political, social and technological change. Those in their mid-60s and early 70s would have had their experiences shaped by World

War II, which would have encouraged shared values of duty and patriotism while rationing and food shortages would have produced attitudes of 'waste not, want not.'

Baby boomers in their mid-50s had developed adult identities at a time when there was a spotlight on youth culture. They were the first real consumer generation.

Research by RDSi yielded two key findings:

- Senior consumers feel ignored by current advertising. They see a lot of commercials aimed at youth, as well as stereotypical and negative images of themselves. They feel under-represented.
- Older people respond best to advertising where clear benefit messages are communicated.

These could explain why older audiences are not attracted to certain kinds of advertising, with important consequences for advertisers. Advertising has evolved beyond simplistic structures but there is little reason for older people to develop skills of interpretation if most of it is aimed at younger audiences.

Seniors are not convinced about buying until they can identify a tangible benefit. History has taught them to look out for products that improve their lives in meaningful ways, for example, washing machines as replacements for mangles and central heating as a replacement for coal fires. Advertising needs to address this 'Prove it!' mentality.

John described two advertising campaigns which had been placed on Saga Radio, a station specifically aimed at older listeners. The first, for a Birmingham concert, led to all the seats being sold out in advance.

The second, for Motorcise, a series of exercise classes, prompted calls from more than 300 listeners over a four-week campaign. As John argued: 'The conclusion is that seniors will respond to advertising if it is effectively targeted. If the message is appropriate, they are the most discerning audience of all.'

Communicating with older audiences

Mike Waterson is Chairman of the World Advertising Research Center (WARC), the leading supplier of intelligence to the global marketing, advertising, media and research communities. It is an independent organisation that works closely with trade associations, industry bodies and blue chip companies around the world.

In his presentation, Mike described some of the challenges facing the industry: 'I thought advertising to older people was simply about targeting effectively but when I came to examine this issue, I found evidence of problems.'

'Although the over-50s and over-60s will become a major political and economic power some agencies are still saying that it is the under-35s that matter. They believe older people have fixed brand loyalties and can't manage new technology.'

'A campaign to educate advertising agencies about the grey market would be useful. Half of their staff are under 30: they may not share the same values as older people and there is an educational problem here.'

Older audiences are neglected

He quoted a recent article by Roderick White of WARC (reproduced as Appendix III): 'Advertisers and marketers are astonishingly neglectful of older audiences. This applies both generally and, more specifically, in the use of older people as models in advertising, even for products primarily sold to older people.'

‘The reasons for this neglect are complex but arise from a number of assumptions, including the theory that older people are unreceptive to new ideas and new products, that they are unlikely to try new brands and that they are not easily influenced by advertising.

‘Because they are not buying for large families they are felt to represent a small market. These are mainly fallacies but there is a lack of research and case studies relating to the older market.

‘It is important to note that the over-50s market is not homogeneous; it is segmented by age, life stage, health status and specific generational experiences. There is a range of lifestyles from cash-rich to impoverished pensioners.

‘In particular there is a fairly sharp break at around age 75, when a combination of declining health and diminished wealth makes old people more dependent and, in general, less attractive as a market.’

The need to target messages

The article continues: ‘The key lesson for marketers is to be very clear about who they are trying to reach and to select the appropriate messages, message style and media to reach them. Messages have to be carefully targeted. A particular risk is to rely solely on chronological age because this is a poor guide to either physical abilities or attitude to life.

‘There is (limited) research evidence that older age groups are perfectly willing to try new products and brands, and little to demonstrate that their brand loyalties are totally fixed from the age of about 30, which is what the practice of most advertisers would imply.

‘The younger end of the age group grew up in the heyday of mass advertising when commercial TV first came to dominate the media scene. They are less well disposed towards and more sceptical about advertisements, which they often find patronising and offensive to their age group. They recognise, however, that most advertising is not designed to appeal to them and few are concerned by this. When advertising is targeted at them, they object strongly to the more obvious stereotypes.’

Research suggests that advertisements can be tailored to older audiences, which:

- reflect their strengths, experience, acquired wisdom and flexibility;
- respect their problems (of eyesight, hearing, difficulty with quick-cut TV spots, etc); and
- encourage a positive outlook.

Consumer power

Paul Cann, Director of the Policy, Research and International Department of Help the Aged, drew an analogy with the increasing political power of older people, mobilised most clearly in opposition to the 75p pension increase.

He felt there could be a parallel in their approach to consumer power.

The seminar felt that the most crucial task was to make advertisers understand the purchasing attitudes and behaviours of older people, and therefore their commercial potential. They needed to see the evidence.

Anne Murray Chatterton said she did not believe that ageism was inherent in the industry: ‘All advertising agencies are trying to make their advertising work as hard as possible and any information would be welcome.’

She added that clients are not always so eager to include the over-50s in their agency briefings and education is required as much for clients as it is for agency staff.

Older people as models

Writer and broadcaster Katharine Whitehorn pointed out that most of us prefer the way we looked when we were younger and this is an important factor for agencies selling things like clothes and glamour products.

However, the seminar thought that role models could be identified, such as Goldie Hawn, Joanna Lumley and Catherine Deneuve, who combine glamour with age. Anti-ageing cosmetics are the biggest sellers and most expensive beauty products, and these, for example, could be effectively advertised by high-profile older women.

Steve Jones, Director of Communications and Marketing at Help the Aged, asked whether agencies were blinkered about using older role models or did they feel that using younger role models was simply the most effective way of selling their products.

This prompted a reminder from Tim Bull, Strategic Planning Director of Saga Group, that advertising was not about using role models or representing older people but was about selling products and services, and the first task in achieving change was to make advertisers realise that older consumers present important commercial opportunities.

One of the ways in which this could be achieved would be to collect more case studies demonstrating successful examples of where older audiences were specifically targeted and Ann Murray Chatterton said the IPA would be glad to

investigate the availability of these.

Delegates were reminded that the older market is more diverse and difficult to define than the younger market and that there is no such thing as 'the' grey market: there are many. It is particularly risky to rely solely on chronological age. 'Functional age' is a much more appropriate indicator.

Leon Kreitzman, Managing Director of the Maturity Marketing consultancy, voiced a concern that links between generations were continually being eroded by segmented approaches and this could lead to 'ghettoism'.

It was important to not to encourage further segmentation but to find ways to ensure that older people are represented in an inclusive way. Advertisers need to address this important and affluent market and find intelligent ways to reach it.

The way forward

'What can we do?' asked Help the Aged.

'Education, education, education,' answered the seminar.

Both advertising staff and media buyers tend to be relatively young and so are distanced from the experiences and attitudes of older people. They need information about the older market and case studies that demonstrate the success of both targeting older audiences as consumers and using them as models in advertisements.

The government, as an important advertiser through COI Communications, could be lobbied to take a lead in its advertising and Help the Aged could consider establishing a seal of approval, 'kitemark' or award scheme for effective advertising.

Appendix I

Advertising to the seniors market

Presentation by John Pickett, Saga Group Ltd.

Perspective

- Thoughts taken from research commissioned by Saga from ESP, Edgar-Galek, RDSi and observations from focus groups.
- Social research from MORI.

Different shared values

Blues

- Believe the world is God's creation
- Seek rules, order, protestant work ethic, morality and righteous living
- Make sacrifices to be rewarded later

Greens

- Believe the world is one community
- Seek to promote a sense of harmony
- Strive to explore the inner being (of self and others)

Fixed chronology

- We can no longer describe with any certainty the mental age of a 50-, 60-, 70- or 80-year-old
- The marathon runner in his 80s – fitter than me
- The actor in his 70s – better memory skills than me
- The golf nut in his 60s – better hand/eye co-ordination than me
- Most people in their 50s – more hair than me!
- If we practise skills throughout life we will not inevitably reach a certain state or condition at a certain age
- We cannot think of/pigeon-hole senior consumers by chronological age
- We need to think in terms of 'functional' age

- They [older people] have a past
- Chronological age brings with it its own experiences
- Important influence of cultural and social context within which they have grown up
- Impact on how they behave as consumers and relate to marketing communications

Snapshots

A 75-year-old today

- was born between the wars in the 1920s
- grew up as a teenage during the war – may have been in the armed services
- knew rationing as a way of life
- had a 'waste not, want not' philosophy – probably still retained

A 65-year-old today

- was born just before the start of World War II
- childhood was affected by war
- may have been evacuated – would remember rationing and doing without
- was part of last group to undertake National Service – nationhood and duty mean something

Post-war austerity

- experiences of war encouraged shared set of values
- not easy to conform to self-conscious consumerist way of living
- carefully consider worth of goods and services bought

A 55-year-old today

- born after the war
- new generation that enjoyed fully established welfare state
- developed adult identity in 1960s – youth culture (mods and rockers, etc)
- enjoying yourself and self-fulfilment were new shared values
- first consumer generation – mass market consumerism after the war

Seniors as consumers

Advertising

From the research, two key learning points emerge:

- senior consumers feel ignored
- seniors respond best to advertising where clear benefit messages are communicated

1. Seniors feel ignored

- they see commercials aimed at youth and younger generation
- they see stereotypical or negative images of their own age group

Implications

- those ignored and under-represented by ad-makers will, in return, ignore the advertising

2. Benefit-driven advertising

- Series of ads put into research
- Asked seniors to rate what they saw as strong, effective advertising

Advertising works best where it:

- has a strong, clear narrative structure
- has strong overt benefit messages
- is reinforced by mnemonic techniques

Advertising works least well where:

- it requires a strong element of involvement – having to work out the resolution oneself
- identification is promoted as primary benefit

Strong advertising: Marmite ad

- the message about Marmite comes through loud and clear – you either love it or hate it
- taken as a call to action among respondents (if they love it)

Less strong advertising: Renault Clio

Several distracting factors:

- extremely thin young woman – easy to switch off as ‘not for me’
- smashing up the house – puzzling and frustrating behaviour (‘Why would she do that?’)

- brand values of ad missed – Clio represents calm, tranquillity and control for strong, independently-minded women
- Those who did not understand the point of the ad:

- didn’t know what it was trying to sell them
- didn’t understand point of persuasion
- Consistent message from all ads:

- *clear-cut messages work best for this age group*

Why seniors respond to advertising in this way

- unwilling to engage in advertising with less conventional narrative structures
- advertising that demands that the viewer interact to decode the message
- in time, advertising has evolved away from simplistic structures
- little reason for seniors to develop skills of interpretation as ads are aimed at younger audiences

Other reasons

- less requirement to build their identity via brands
- sense of self built on what they do rather than how they seem
- educational background
- functional ‘3 Rs’ education = rational, straightforward approach to advertising
- ageing process
- decline in sight, hearing, etc makes it harder to ‘get’ some ads

Consequences for advertising

- seniors comprise the most discerning consumer group of all
- not convinced about buying until they identify a tangible benefit
- history taught them to look out for products which improve their lives in meaningful ways
- washing machine replaced mangle
- central heating replaced coal fires
- advertising needs to address this ‘Prove it!’ mentality

Appendix II

The New Golden Pleasure Seekers

Reproduction of an Insight Team Fact Sheet, BBC Audience and Consumer Research.

'The US has *Frasier* and we [UK] have Victor Meldrew ... that says it all about our pejorative perceptions of anyone over 50.'

Sandra Chalmers, former Director of Communications, Help the Aged

Society has a preoccupation with youth ... perhaps understandably the young are treasured and nurtured as our future.

'Youth' and connecting with this elusive group has become a media holy grail. But change is afoot ...

Ageing population

Demographically, people are living longer and birth rates are declining, to such an extent that within the next 30–40 years older people will out-number younger people for the first time in history.

- One in three people in the UK are aged 50+
- Over two-thirds are BC1C2
- Life expectancy will jump from 75.5 years to 78.9 years for men and 80.3 years to 83.2 years

Global issue

- By 2020 Japan will be the oldest country, with over a third of its population over 50
- Europe will be the oldest region with nearly a half of its population over 50

(Henley 2002/ONS/Future Foundation)

Wealthier

Over-55s are a society of two halves.

As with the rest of society the wealth gap is widening. Pensioners are over-represented in the lower income quartiles.

- 31 per cent of the nation's retired survive on less than £10k a year

However this group also contains some of the richest members of society

- Over-50s spend £240 billion a year, which accounts for 40 per cent of total consumer spending

They have a personal disposable income of £205 per week (cf average for 30–49-year-olds at £164 per person per week).

(Family Expenditure Survey (FES/National Statistics) 1999–2000)

'The new generation of fiftysomething Britons will be hedonists more likely to be out clubbing or climbing than sitting round the fireside wearing slippers and cardigans.'

Source: *Fit and Fifty*

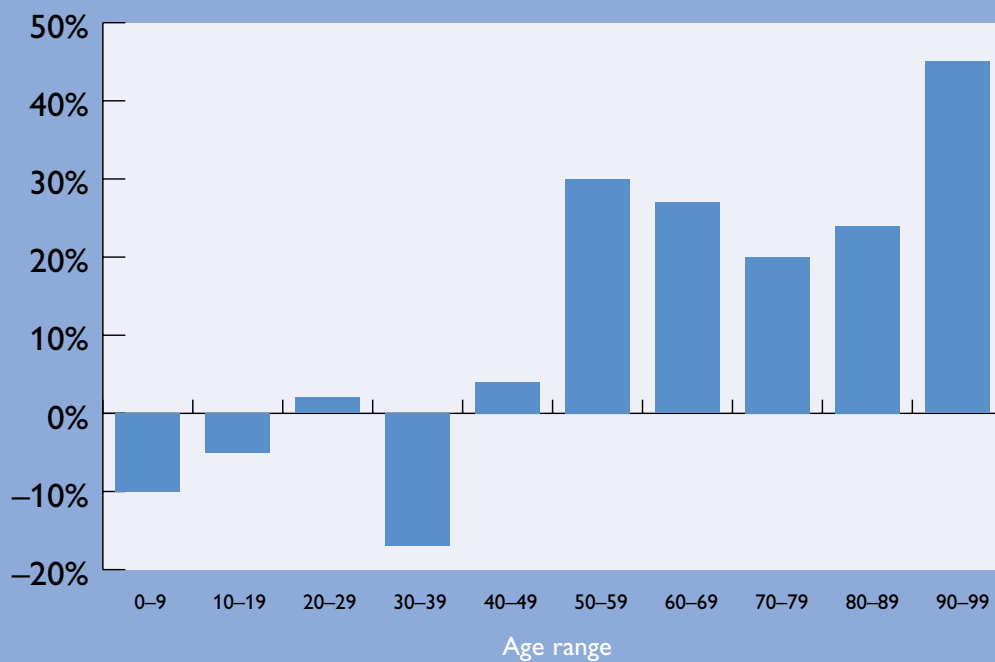
Attitudinally different

Attitudinally the 50–65s are a new older generation who are re-inventing the meaning of 'old age', characterised by a determination to lead independent, rewarding lifestyles for as long as possible. This is a generation that can no longer be defined as a homogenous mass or treated as if all over-50s are alike.

This is largely due to the sheer amount of change the 50–65s have experienced over their lifetimes

From Flower Power to peace, prosperity and consumerism, the 50–65s have adapted to many societal influences, making them more experimental and hedonistic than previous generations.

Percentage increase by number of people 1998–2018 ONS/The Future Foundation



Annual household spend on leisure services for 50–65s comes to the grand total of £2,761.20, whilst the under-30s leisure services* spend creeps behind at £1,679.60.

‘My social life is hectic, I do a lot of things, see a lot of friends.’ Source: 55–65 Manchester, People’s Panel

Pleasure-seeking attitude and behaviour

Since 1979 the numbers of over-50s in work has fallen by 20 per cent and the numbers of over-60s by 30 per cent. They both have the propensity to act differently and also the time (Association of Retired and Persons Over 50).

The rise of the well-off single older person has even led to Saga believing dating agencies are the next big money-pot as far as the over-50s are concerned.

*Leisure services includes cinema, theatre, sports admissions/membership, TV/satellite/internet, holidays, entertainment, eating/drinking, gambling, cash gifts/donations. (FES National Statistics 1999/2000)

55–65s in the UK are more likely than the average to own a new car – most frequently a Mercedes. (TGI Lifestyle 2002)

50–65s index very low on ‘I like holidays where activities are organised.’

50–65s index highly on ‘I prefer holidays off the beaten track’. (TGI Lifestyle Study 2002)

Mainstream in society, yet marginalised by the media

In fact, the over-50s buy 80 per cent of all top of the range cars sold, 50 per cent of face care cosmetics, 50 per cent of mineral waters, 50 per cent of food oils, 40 per cent of yoghurts and dairy products, 35 per cent of total travel and 80 per cent of total cruises . . . yet over 90 per cent of all marketing and advertising spend in Europe is dedicated to the under-50s. (SeniorAgency 2001)

The over-55s are the highest consumers of TV and radio, and more likely to read a newspaper every day.

- Average TV across all ages = 3 hours 38 minutes per day
 - Average TV 55–65 yrs = 4 hours 21 minutes per day
 - 55+ adults account for nearly 40 per cent of peak-time TV audiences.
 - Average radio across all ages = 3 hours
 - Average radio 55+ = 3.5 hours
- (BARB/RAJAR 2002)

How often are they represented as role models or presenters within the media? What does broadcasting offer them? What do they think about current programming?

Some thoughts from 55–65-year-olds on the state of current TV programming. (Source: People's Panel 2001/2)

- 'I just think of these programmes [cooking and DIY] as cheap TV. I mean, all you need is a kitchen and ingredients, and you're sorted. There's just so many of these programmes. You know it's 'cause they don't cost much to make.' 55–65 Less Well Off C2DE
- 'You've been concentrating all day, you don't want news and politics rammed down your throat, you just want music.' 55–65 C2DE
- 'It's a bit of fun (FA Cup trails). Footie adverts can sometimes be a bit serious.' Birmingham 55–65
- 'Channel 4's good for being more cutting-edge and controversial. It makes the subject matter more interesting to deal with . . . But I'm surprised by some of the programmes you've reminded me of there [*The Six Wives of Henry VIII*], because they're more serious programmes that I wouldn't associate with Channel 4.' 55–65 Less Well Off C2DE

- 'Floyd's great. He's pissed most of the time though – he's having fun with it.' Manchester, 55–65
- 'Stuff like *Popstars* is ok,' cause it's about competitions – it's like an extension of a talent show.' 55–65 Less Well Off C2DE
- '*Sex and the City*'s very funny. It's rude, but it's not coarse, just really funny.' 55–65 Less Well Off C2DE
- 'These shows that we're calling "participation" are about people playing up to the camera.'

They're cheap actors, and it's supposed to be real-life, but it's really the opposite.' 55–65 Less Well Off C2DE

- 'The BBC's not as original or inventive as it used to be – those old Dennis Potter one-off dramas were fantastic – there's nothing nearly as good as that any more.' 55–65 Birmingham
- 'I like Joanna Lumley as Patsy [in *Absolutely Fabulous*] – great-looking, got a great lifestyle, and a great attitude – she smokes and just doesn't care, and she's funny.' 55–65 Manchester
- 'I always watch *A Place in the Sun* – it's my dream to escape to a hot country one day.' 55–65 C2DE Manchester

Appendix III

The presentation by Mike Waterson, World Advertising Research Center (WARC), included part of the following paper by Roderick White.

Communicating with older audiences

Advertisers and marketers are astonishingly neglectful of older audiences – defined here, fairly arbitrarily, as those aged 50+. This neglect applies both generally and, more specifically, in the use of models in advertising – even for products primarily sold to older people¹.

The reasons for this neglect are complex, but tend to arise from some fundamental – and probably false – assumptions about older people:

- That they are unreceptive to new ideas and new products: the way to develop a brand is, therefore, to get its users young, and hang on to them – this has been called the ‘Jesuit fallacy’².
- That they are not easily influenced by advertising (in particular) or other marketing communications in general.
- That because they are not buying for large families (still erroneously assumed to be the younger norm, in spite of good demographic evidence to the contrary), they represent only a small market for most products or services¹.

Two further, major factors in the neglect are:

- The overall lack of research studies and of case studies that are focused on older age groups as a market¹.
- The fact that most marketers and advertising agency staff are relatively young, and distant in experience, attitudes and understanding from their elders: ‘How do I sell to my parents?’^{1,2,3}

A few selected facts

- The over-50s are coming to dominate the adult populations of westernised industrial societies, especially Europe and Japan (the US is different, but only slightly)⁴.
- The over-50s hold the vast majority of personal wealth: in the UK this is put at well over 70 per cent^{2,4}, and the situation is similar in the US and continental Europe.
- The over-50s have more disposable income than younger age groups, both in total and, at least among the younger sub-segments, per capita².
- Healthy and younger over-50s have both the money and the time to spend heavily in the growing markets for leisure, travel, etc².
- The over-50s account for a very substantial share of purchases of cars, especially the more expensive executive cars⁵.
- Existing evidence suggests that older people are just as likely to try new brands as younger people^{2,6}.

The over-50s market

This is clearly not a homogeneous market – any more than ‘youth’, which covers far fewer years, is.

It is segmented in particular by:

- Age (conventional breaks are 50–60/5, 60/5–75, 75+)⁷.
- Life stage¹, in particular by the presence/absence of dependent children, the need to care for even older parents, widowhood.
- Health status, whereby increasing numbers of us are healthier further into old age, but some deterioration is inevitable¹.

- *Specific generational experience* (at the top end of the age scale are people who grew up in the depression and lived through the deprivations of World War II; at the bottom end, the baby boomers. These cohorts may have rather different attitudes to life, based on differing life experiences⁸).

There is a range of lifestyles from cash-rich, time-poor senior executives and managers to genuinely impoverished pensioners. One study found that the prime characteristic of the elderly, in the eyes of UK marketers, was their (non) employed status⁷.

In particular, there is a fairly sharp break at roughly 75+, where a combination of declining health and diminished wealth makes old people more dependent and, in general, less attractive as a market⁴.

Marketers therefore have to be very clear exactly who they are aiming to reach, and to select the appropriate messages, message style and media to reach them. The rules of targeting apply even more than usual. A particular risk is to rely solely on chronological age, because this is a poor guide to either physical abilities or attitude to life.

The product and service ghetto

Talk to most people in advertising about the elderly, greys, seniors or the third age, and they think of stair-lifts, annuities, a range of pharmaceuticals and perhaps of cruise ships⁹. It is as if no one over 50 buys food, cars, domestic appliances, goes to the cinema or theatre, takes a package holiday, makes love, drinks alcohol, listens to music or cleans the house.

Clearly, greys represent important markets – indeed, sometimes the only market – for some products, but they are participants in most heavily advertised markets, often at a highly significant level. Yet it is rare to find them actively targeted, let alone shown in the ads (and, if so, in a positive manner)³.

Yet there is (limited) research evidence that older age groups are perfectly willing to try new products and brands², and little to demonstrate that their brand loyalties are totally fixed from the age of about 30, which is what the practice of most advertisers would imply.

What about advertising?

The younger end of the age group grew up in the heyday of mass advertising¹⁰, when commercial TV first came to dominate the media scene.

While they are not necessarily entirely *au fait* with the latest techniques, they understand ads and are well able to decode them – though there is evidence that they are somewhat slower to take in some messages, where technique overcomes communication, or the narrative is confused. Research has shown that they are somewhat more likely to be confused by, and hostile to, TV commercial clutter¹¹.

Certainly, as a whole, they are less well disposed to, and more sceptical about ads, which they often find patronising and offensive to their age group^{3,7}. They recognise, however, that most advertising is not designed to appeal to them¹², though few are concerned by this. When advertising is targeted to them, they object strongly to the more obvious stereotypes¹³.

Unsurprisingly, they prefer ads that they can understand, and that they can interpret as speaking to them – even if all the characters in the ads are clearly thirtysomething.

More positively, research suggests that ads can be tailored to older audiences which:

- Reflect their strengths: experience, acquired wisdom, flexibility (of life circumstances).
- Respect their problems (of eyesight, hearing, difficulty with quick-cut TV spots).

- Encourage a positive outlook².

Ads that are appreciated by older people, including some from mainstream campaigns, share the traits of narrative, character, humour and unhurried pace^{7,12}.

A further point to be borne in mind is that they tend to look for more or less rational ads – at least explicitly. It could be, however, that there are few or no brands that are aspirational for the grey market¹⁴, though a Canadian case shows how one brand achieved a strongly emotional response¹⁵.

When they do appear in advertising, older people are not usually very favourably portrayed¹; though there are clear exceptions to this, stereotypes abound. This situation is compounded by the belief that older models in ads will alienate the important younger market^{3,16}.

Elderly media

From surveys like Target Group Index (TGI), as well as from standard media research, it is clear that older people's media habits can be distinctively different from those of their younger compatriots. Combining media data with consumption and attitude data enables the segmentation of the over-50s into a number of distinct groups, each of which can be reached by specific combinations of media, and which represent different market potential for brands that may wish to sell to them¹⁷.

The way in which age-specific media are, in practice, used differently in their portrayal of older people is shown by one recent study³: even in grey-orientated media, however, it found half the models shown were well under 50.

In the UK at least, older people tend to be both relatively heavy TV viewers (this is especially true of the lower social groups), and also heavy readers of newspapers and selected magazines. They are particularly interested in news. They are less likely to go to the cinema, listen to commercial radio or be heavily exposed to posters.

Design and packaging

The elderly consume things.

Unfortunately, many of the things they consume are designed for fit, young 25-year-olds with strong fingers (to open the safety/security packaging) and 20–20 vision². This means that not only legislators, but development researchers need to think quite hard about who they ask questions to, and how they ask them.

Conclusions

Some marketers and researchers have been talking about the problems of marketing to older people for years: however, there remains an astonishingly small amount of case study material, as opposed to research, demonstrating success with these older target audiences.

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Appendix IV

Help the Aged survey of television commercials

Undertaken as part of the Help the Aged campaign against age discrimination.

The survey

One of the prime objectives of the campaign is to raise public awareness of age discrimination and equality. Help the Aged believes that age discrimination should be recognised more widely as a real issue and that there should be visible change in the way the media talks about ageing. The Charity is seeking innovations in advertising and in the long term wishes to challenge indirect age discrimination.

An essential part of the campaign is to review the way older people are portrayed in advertising. We need to investigate whether the adverts aimed at older people are appropriate with regard to the products, services and brands which older people buy, and also to identify whether the adverts aimed at younger people support ageist attitudes.

As part of this project, we asked a small group of older people drawn from across the UK to conduct an informal survey of television advertisements in August 2002. The reviewers had all attended a Help the Aged/ITC media workshop with an ITV company within the previous 12 months. They were asked to choose the five best television commercials and the five worst, according to the following criteria.

The five best commercials/
appropriateness for older people

- useful
- relevant
- clarity of communication
- memorable.

The five worst commercials/evidence of ageist attitudes

- offensive
- patronising
- inappropriate
- ageist.

Among the best commercials, noted with approval, were:

- **Saga Insurance** Commended: car insurance thought to be relevant and useful. A Saga Holiday commercial was also commended: it presented an older couple, probably in their 60s, in pleasant scenery with the words 'Welcome to the time of your life', a phrase thought to be memorable and useful.
- **AMP Bank** Commended for positive and forward-looking portrayal of older people. The information is clearly presented by well-known and trusted personalities. The AMP commercials embrace all age groups, without specifically singling out older people, and give a message that regardless of age, everyone has something to look forward to.
- **Sun Life (and Ocean Finance and AMP Financial Services)** Appreciated for their calm reassurance and older presenters including Frank Windsor.
- **Cornhill Direct** A straightforward exposition of information.
- **Evian** Diving and swimming: a clear message and positive image of older people and their physical ability. Visually memorable.
- **BT** The 'Safe in our hands' ad features different generations, young and old, one with a space watch and the other with a personal alarm: good dialogue between generations.

- **Inland Revenue** The self-assessment tax form ad was not specifically directed at older people but its emphasis was on reassurance: short, clear and memorable.
- **Go Walking** 'It is a pleasure to watch this ad' was one comment on this ad, which shows older people striding out looking healthy and positive: a good message for all, not only older people.
- **ASDA** A carer is shown shopping with elderly person. This ad was transmitted in the evening – quite a rare occurrence as older people rarely feature in ads shown during the evening.
- **Help the Aged Care-Line** Positive message of help at the touch of a button. Reviewers appreciated the use of an ordinary member of the older community rather than a hired actress. Older people are quite capable of taking part in ads and should be used more.
- **Churchill Relax Chairs and Adjustable Beds** Featuring Thora Hird: good communication and presentation relevant not only to older people but those with a disability.
- **Monarch Mobility** No ageism here, as people of all ages are shown using the products. Clear and honest message.
- **The Mobility Company** Straightforward and factual, not gimmicky; perhaps not memorable but very useful.
- **Seeboard** A clear, straightforward ad featuring pleasant-looking women, probably in their 50s; an ad that is useful and relevant to a wide range of ages.
- **Germaloid spray** Straightforward and useful with a clear message; probably memorable for older people as the brand is well established and familiar. (NB This ad also features among another reviewer's worst ads.)
- **Werther's Original toffee** These commercials, presented by an older and a younger actor together, were clear and memorable rather than earth-shattering and people liked the loving relationship between grandfather and grandson ('how it should be').
- **Classic Cars collection** Brief view of older male face and hand: models would be a good idea for present for older relative; option to glamorise resisted.
- **Premier battery aids** Older models are featured, there is no hard sell; ads are moderate, tasteful and convey an interesting message.
- **Farm Foods** Useful, clear, relevant, uncluttered ads.
- **Co-op (buy one, get one free)** Useful, clear and relevant.
- **Don't Drive Tired** Unusual, memorable and very relevant.
- **Peugeot cars** So older people are interested in new cars too?! They rarely feature in the arty ads for cars but in this one a wide range of ages are rushing to the lifeboat station – good for RNLI too!
- **IRN-BRU** Elderly lady on scooter ram-raiding. (NB IRN-BRU is also nominated among the worst commercials.)
- **Crown paint** Inclusive and useful.
- **Lloyds pharmacy** Collecting prescriptions – relevant to older people, useful.
- **KIA** Older people on a bicycle – being part of a positive economy. Useful antidote to ageism.
- **HSBC** Featuring the retirement of an older man and carrying sound advice. Links working with retirement – very relevant in current financial climate.

- **HSE-RSI** Features a mature female, well informed content, presents a dignified image of age with very clear message.
- **Sun Life over-50 Plan (from £6 per month)** This featured in the best and worst list, the message was clearly put by Frank Bough but the tone of voice sounds as though he is preparing us for our future deaths! 'Many ads directed at older people are connected with planning for death.'
- **DFL sofas** Noted as being among the best and worst although the people represented a wide age range. One reviewer said the ad was ridiculous and over-animated and made everyone look silly.

Among the worst commercials noted were:

- **Polygrip denture fixative** The most disliked advertisement in the survey: it makes fun of older people, is embarrassing ('Jolly funny situation – let's all have a good laugh'): only memorable in terms of ageist perception.
- **AOL** Very ageist, never shows older people but of course directed at the family.
- **IRN-BRU** Granddad taking drink from boy's can removes his dentures to drink making disgusting, repulsive, slurping noises. Overall memory of an old man behaving disgustingly and willing to cheat to get something free. (NB Other IRN-BRU ads were voted as being among the best.)
- **Direct Insurance** Replacement of radio with music centre: fine, but spoilt by poor image at the end of drinking mug – would they have had the same ending if it had featured younger people?
- **Typhoo tea** The board meeting – what is it about?
- **Cadbury's Flake** What relevance has girl in space ball? Just plain stupid.
- **Stannah stair-lift** Patronising and ageist. They even show a very mobile, active 'elderly' lady.
- **Alex from Big Brother** With Domestos bottle: don't wish to be reminded of bodily functions.
- **Phones 4 U** Gym changing room – guy stuffs socks down pants and girates suggestively, admiring his increased size. Nothing to do with phones until a brief moment at the end – just gratuitous sex.
- **Müller Light** Man strips off in aircraft waiting for girlfriend to join him for sex – you remember that, not the product!
- **Toilet bleach** Stream of liquid 'missing' the WC 'for all those little accidents'.
- **Bounty kitchen towels** A mini sitcom with two men dressed as women cleaners.
- **Yours magazine** Features inconsiderate older women making older man look foolish – offensive.
- **Denny's sausages** 'Sell your gran for a sausage' – offensive.
- **River Rock Water** Water is for life, the younger person is in the forefront with the elderly man shuffling along in the background. But water is for all life – does it not apply to the older person?
- **Alpen cereal** Cat litter is substituted for cereal. The older woman actually tucks into the cat litter, arousing feelings of revulsion.
- **AA** De-bunking of older, balding bank manager, removed from the requirements of the customer: why an older manager if it is really the inability of banks to compete with the AA services?
- **Citroen cars** Older sales manager being replaced by a savage-looking dog, but then most car adverts appear quite inane!

Conclusions

A number of general points were raised by those who had taken part in the survey.

1. The lack of representation of older people, particularly during evening viewing: 'This exercise has shown that elderly people are certainly not included as being important in matters concerning everyday life. Goods and services are of just as much interest to older people as to the younger generation, but not using older people in advertisements would appear to exclude them.'
2. Elderly people are rarely shown in advertisements concerning food issues. They always feature young, glamorous people.
3. Too few commercials portray older people, especially in the evening: maybe more products would be sold if the older generation was used more?
4. Car advertisements are frequently incomprehensible.
5. Many ads do not state clearly what is being sold. It helps if the ads give some idea of the actual products.
6. Adverts I have managed to see have featured almost exclusively young people. It almost seems that the older generation is completely ignored. Even Saga had a young person as the driver of a flashy car.
7. Advertisers obviously do not choose to portray an older person if they can feature a young one. Older people also use mobile phones!
8. Many products, eg throwaway cameras, Garnier hair colourants, Diamond (car insurance for women), Land of Leather, Nivea Visage, could

feature older people, but are always advertised by young model types.

9. This exercise has been difficult to stay with as ITV programmes across the appointed two weeks in August have been of poor quality.
10. Over the two weeks, I watched 894 adverts – with many repeats. The overarching impression was the relative invisibility of older people. Only 27 adverts seen included older people, of which perhaps 10 could fall in the 'good' category; 6 'bad'; 11 'neutral', insignificant or minor role in mixed-age advert. It could be that older actors are not available, not regarded as saleable, unwilling to participate. Cartoon characters often preferred!

The survey was conducted by 20 older people living in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Help the Aged thanks them for their time, commitment and tenacity.

Sandra Chalmers, September 2002

Appendix V

Seminar attendees

Speakers

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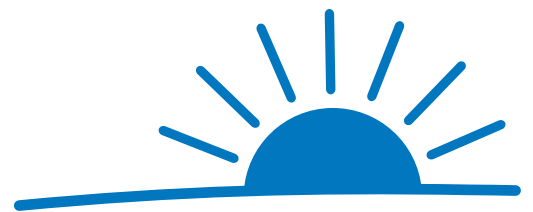
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Help the Aged

Working for a future where older people
are highly valued, have lives that are richer
and voices that are heard.

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