

THE UNWANTED SUPERPOWER OF INVISIBILITY: ADVERTISING THROUGH THE EYES OF OLDER ADULTS

Ana Cristina Antunes

Laboratório de Investigação Aplicada em Comunicação e Média, Escola Superior de Comunicação Social,
Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Sandra Miranda

Laboratório de Investigação Aplicada em Comunicação e Média, Escola Superior de Comunicação Social, Instituto
Politécnico de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

ABSTRACT

How do Portuguese older adults perceive advertising and the representations of aging it conveys? And how can advertising be more effective and age-inclusive, considering this demographic? To explore these questions, 25 individual in-depth interviews were conducted with Portuguese consumers aged 65 and above, using a qualitative approach to understand their experiences and perspectives. A particular focus was placed on uncovering the meanings of advertising for this audience and on what changes they believe are needed to make advertising more effective and engaging, while offering more authentic and respectful representation of later age. The findings indicate a generally negative perception of advertising among these older adults, many of whom actively avoid it. Senior-targeted advertising is frequently associated with deceptive practices and can, sometimes, lead these consumers to feel overlooked or invisible to brands. Moreover, most participants agree on a biased, negative, and stereotypical misrepresentation of older adults in advertising to which they don't identify. Drawing on these findings and the existing literature, a set of actionable recommendations is provided to guide advertisers in creating more inclusive, diverse, meaningful, and effective campaigns that better resonate with older consumers.

KEYWORDS

older consumers, advertising, perception, representation, stereotyping

O INDESEJADO SUPERPODER DA INVISIBILIDADE: A PUBLICIDADE ATRAVÉS DO OLHAR DOS SENIORES

RESUMO

Como percebem os adultos portugueses mais velhos a publicidade e as representações do envelhecimento que esta veicula? Como pode a publicidade ser mais eficaz e inclusiva, tendo em consideração este grupo demográfico? Para explorar estas questões, foram realizadas 25 entrevistas individuais em profundidade com consumidores portugueses com 65 anos ou mais, utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa para compreender as suas experiências e perspetivas. Foi dada particular ênfase à identificação dos significados que a publicidade assume para este público, bem como às mudanças que, na sua perspetiva, se revelam necessárias para a tornar mais eficaz e envolvente, ao mesmo tempo que promove uma representação mais autêntica e

respeitadora da idade avançada. Os resultados sugerem uma percepção globalmente negativa da publicidade entre estes seniores, muitos dos quais a evitam ativamente. A publicidade dirigida a seniores é percebida como estando frequentemente associada a práticas enganosas e leva por vezes estes consumidores a sentirem-se invisíveis para as marcas. Acresce que a maioria dos participantes reconhece a existência de uma representação enviesada, negativa e estereotipada dos seniores na publicidade, com a qual não se identifica. Com base nestes resultados e na literatura existente, apresenta-se um conjunto de recomendações práticas para orientar os anunciantes na criação de campanhas mais inclusivas, diversificadas, significativas e eficazes, que estabeleçam uma melhor ligação com os consumidores mais velhos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

consumidores mais velhos, publicidade, percepção, representação, estereótipos

1. INTRODUCTION

The global demographic shift toward an aging population represents one of the most profound social transformations of the 21st century. As noted by the World Health Organization (2024), by 2030, one in six individuals worldwide will be aged 60 or older, and by 2050, this demographic is projected to double, reaching approximately 2.1 billion. Considered as one of the wealthiest age cohorts in the world, older adults are now important players in the so-called “silver economy”. Nevertheless, older people are still seen as “invisible consumers” — being less relevant to marketing and advertising than other targets (e.g., Brodmerkel & Barker, 2022; Moschis, 2021).

A review of the extant literature reveals limited research on seniors’ perceptions and relationships with advertising, although the evidence suggests that older people (roughly 60 years old and above) are nearly invisible in advertising, particularly older women (Prieler, 2024). Additionally, the existing research focuses on the North American context (e.g., Eisend, 2022; Williams et al., 2010), making it difficult to extrapolate to the European reality (e.g., Zhang et al., 2006). In the last decades, “academics seem to have lost interest in this issue, and the inclusion of older people in advertising has become an underresearched topic” (Eisend, 2022, p. 308). This research gap becomes even more evident when compared with other issues that, historically and culturally, have been neglected, such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or physical abilities, but still generate further research (e.g., Eisend et al., 2023). So far, the empirical evidence suggests that advertising is not age-inclusive, as it does not sufficiently or adequately portray the diversity of older adults. Unlike gender or sexism, ageism is a much more subtle prejudice and, as such, often goes unrecognized, despite all its harmful consequences (e.g., Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018).

Given the relevance of examining older adults’ relationships with advertising and the gaps in the literature, this study analyzes advertising from the perspective of the senior population. It makes the following contributions: (a) to provide additional empirical

evidence on an outdated and underresearched topic, examining aspects such as the perception of older consumers on general advertising and senior-targeted advertising, how they feel represented, and how they identify with it; (b) to collect suggestions and examine older adults' concerns regarding age-friendly advertising and niche-targeted advertising. These suggestions are used to propose an actionable set of recommendations for advertising professionals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. ELDERLY REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING

Empirical evidence gathered through decades suggests that older adults are an underrepresented segment in advertising, neglected in advertising research and practice (e.g., Ji & Cooper, 2024; Roy & Harwood, 1997). While issues of gender, ethnicity, and disability have progressively entered the advertising agenda, age remains one of the least visible dimensions of inclusion (e.g., Eisend, 2022).

In discussing the reasons behind this finding, Eisend (2022) draws on Rogers' (2003) theory of the diffusion of innovations, underlining that innovators and early adopters are typically young people, even for products used by elderly consumers. While this finding makes sense for some products, namely those requiring high technological skills, in other cases, it represents an unfocused and biased view of the market. Indeed, the silver economy is evolving into a diverse and growing set of products and services for which early adopters are older consumers (Wolf & Seebauer, 2014).

Another reason is that youthfulness, attractiveness, and beauty in younger characters have a more positive effect on people's evaluations of advertising, and on consumers' intention to buy. As Foos and Clark (2011) stated, age is one factor that influences perceptions of attractiveness, and faces perceived as old are typically seen as less attractive than those perceived as younger. This assumption can be explained through media representation theories such as those of Hall (1997) and van Leeuwen (2008), who understand communication — and particularly advertising — as a process of meaning construction that plays a central role in shaping cultural perceptions of ageing. These representations often reinforce dominant social narratives that celebrate youth and vitality, while ageing is associated with decline and marginality. Similarly, Goffman's (1979) classic analysis of visual codes in gender advertisements provides a useful model to identify recurring symbolic patterns — such as infantilization, dependency, or humorous framing — that can also be applied to age-based representations.

The advertising industry has a hipster way of living (Eisend, 2022). This industry upholds the image of youthfulness as a “naturalized” norm and a prerequisite for creatives to fit into an agency's organizational culture (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2022). Besides,

advertising practitioners tend to choose endorsers with whom they can identify, thereby increasing the number of young people in advertising (Kohlbacher et al., 2014). At a time when the cult of youth and beauty is a core value in contemporary society, it is evident that practitioners make extensive use of younger people who embody ideals of attractiveness and beauty (Eisend, 2022).

2.2. STEREOTYPING OLD AGE IN ADVERTISING

In addition to the underrepresentation of older people (e.g., Prieler, 2024), negative stereotypes of old age have been prevalent in ads for decades (e.g., Festervand & Lumpkin, 1985; Williams et al., 2010; for a review, see Eisend, 2022). Recent studies reveal that senior consumers do not identify with older characters in senior-targeted advertising, considering them as inaccurate and oversimplified, often associated with images of decrepitude, decay, disease, and dependence. Antunes et al.'s (2014) study found that Portuguese older adults considered advertising to be not senior-inclusive, as older adults were portrayed as physically and intellectually diminished or even ridiculed. In Brazil, Rosenthal et al. (2021) found that older consumers reject stereotypical images of their cohort in advertising even when these images are positive, distancing themselves from these stereotypical social images of old age. In this sense, advertising grounded on tacit assumptions that older people are frail, incompetent, and needy risks being overlooked by most of the older population.

The presence of elderly negative stereotypes in advertising led Debert (2003) to warn about the possibility of what he calls the “reprivatization of aging”, with seniors being considered incapable of engaging in motivational activities, no longer adopting proactive and adequate forms of consumption and lifestyles to have an active and positive aging. The concept of “visual ageism” proposed by Loos and Ivan (2022) deepens this analysis, highlighting how symbolic and aesthetic choices sustain discriminatory attitudes toward ageing. Advertising often reproduces both negative ageism, depicting older people as frail or out of touch, and positive ageism, idealizing unrealistic, eternally youthful lifestyles (Zhou et al., 2017). Both contribute to a narrow vision of later life, excluding the diversity and authenticity of ageing experiences.

As an alternative to these portrayals, recent models of active and healthy ageing (Foster & Walker, 2021; Holstein & Minkler, 2007) offer a broader, more inclusive framework that promotes a critical, plural view of ageing and recognizes the diversity of trajectories among older adults. Integrating this framework into advertising analysis connects communication research with broader social agendas of equity, citizenship, and intergenerational solidarity, fostering more realistic and inclusive representations of older adults.

When studying stereotypical views of seniors and communication directed at them, Carstensen and Hershfield (2021) argue that one of the most pervasive misconceptions

in the literature — particularly in marketing segmentation is the tendency to treat this population as a homogeneous and watertight group. They believe that seniors must be studied as a heterogeneous group, taking into account both their diversity and a subjective perspective of age. This does not mean that older adults are denying their place in the life cycle or seeing themselves as young; instead, they distance themselves from negative stereotypes about older people to maintain a more positive, healthy, and vital self-view.

Advertising is important for seniors, who perceive it as an integral part of their daily lives and a prominent factor of socialization (Bieri et al., 2006). Thus, ads that promote stereotypes, including age-related stereotypes, can lead to negative reactions from consumers and reduce advertising effectiveness (e.g., Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; Rosenthal et al., 2021). Furthermore, negative representations of seniors in advertising can negatively impact self-esteem, self-image and self-concept of this segment, as seniors who perceive themselves as negatively stereotyped internalize these images (e.g., Robinson & Umphery, 2006), and this stereotypes activation appears associated with a lower propensity for risk-taking, more feelings of loneliness, more frequent help-seeking behaviors, and poorer subjective health (Coudin & Alexopoulos, 2010).

3. MATERIALS AND METHOD

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The rationale for choosing the research design departed from the notion that most research on older consumers' perspectives on advertising is outdated, while recent studies are scarce. Besides possible transformations over the last decades across many topics related to older people in advertising, due to technological, economic, social, and even societal changes, previous studies provided inconclusive results (Eisend, 2022). Considering all these aspects, a decision was made to use qualitative research to deepen knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative research provides richer, deeper insights into the subjects under study and is particularly well-suited to exploring the subjective meanings of a phenomenon in people's lives, as well as their representations, beliefs, and perceptions of it (Yin, 2011). As Pelsmacker (2021) noted, "if well done, qualitative research can lead to original research ideas or deepen our understanding of how real people feel, think and behave" (p. 843).

3.2. PARTICIPANTS

To answer the research questions, a series of in-depth interviews was conducted with 25 participants aged 65 and above in Portugal. Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants, a useful method for locating information-rich key participants

(Patton, 2014). After their identification, all potential participants were contacted and informed about the study. Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents before their enrolment.

This study involved 15 female and 10 male participants, with an age range from 65 to 84 years old ($M = 72$, $SD = 5.75$). A total of eight participants were aged 75 or older. Except for four interviewees, all are retired.

This sample size was considered sufficient for the current study, as it is large enough to yield useful and diverse evidence regarding any underlying beliefs, perceptions, and representations, yet small enough to enable an effective analysis (e.g., Dworkin, 2012; Rego et al., 2018). Furthermore, the interviews achieved data saturation, a redundancy signal indicating that data collection may cease (e.g., Faulkner & Trotter, 2017).

3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Individual in-depth interviews were chosen as the data collection technique because they allow access to participants' own perspectives and probe more deeply into how consumers regard advertising and what meanings can be drawn from it (Belk, 2017).

The interview guide was designed based on existing literature (e.g., Festervand & Lumpkin, 1985; Rosenthal et al., 2021) and was pre-tested for clarity and comprehension, as well as to ensure that the questions elicited the needed type of information. The interview guide comprised 11 questions related to older adults' perceptions and reactions to advertising (e.g., "what do you do when you come across advertisements?", "what is your opinion about advertising?"), advertising representations of the older adults (e.g., "what is your opinion about the amount of advertising aimed at seniors?", "in your perspective, how are seniors depicted in advertising in Portugal?"), as well as potential suggestions regarding advertising free of age discrimination ("thinking about senior-targeted advertising, what would you suggest to advertisers?").

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Ethical guidelines, such as "no harm", "no deception", and "anonymity and confidentiality" were thoroughly followed (e.g., Bryman, 2012). Their consent was obtained for the audio recording of the interview.

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Following the approach described by Bardin (2013), the data were first pre-analysed, then explored, and finally interpreted, to make inferences and draw conclusions. Pre-analysis involved carefully reading all the interviews and organizing the material for analysis. The exploration phase involved coding, with the choice of the units of analysis and their classification into themes, later divided into categories and subcategories, to allow data interpretation.

4. FINDINGS

In line with the focus of this study, three main themes emerged from the data analysis: perceptions of advertising, older people's representation and stereotypes in advertising, and advertising suggestions for practitioners.

4.1. PERCEPTION OF ADVERTISING

On this theme, two main categories emerged: one dedicated to advertising in general, and a second one focused on the perception of senior-targeted advertising.

4.1.1. PERCEPTION OF ADVERTISING IN GENERAL

When it comes to perceptions of general advertising, the negative outweighs the positive. Indeed, while the participants made a single reference to the perceived utility of advertisements for providing information about new brands, products, and services, they made 22 references to negative aspects. A relevant feature is that these older interviewees envisioned advertising as still presented under the interruption paradigm that, for decades, characterized advertising. As a 77-year-old male described: "sometimes I'm watching a movie or a soap opera, and they interrupt me, I don't know how many times, with advertisements about 10 minutes or more" (P8, 77, male, personal communication, October 16, 2023).

From their perspective, advertising is perceived as deceptive, unreliable, and exaggerated, leading them to be frequently sceptical about it. Its deceptive nature, mentioned by three participants, derives from advertised products' promise that is not fulfilled, as a 73-year-old female explained: "they always make a lot of promises about the product, but then it's not quite how they make it seem, they just want to sell" (P10, 73, female, personal communication, October 27, 2023).

Six participants distrust advertising for its focus on selling and for exaggerating products' benefits: "advertising is always very exaggerated, so I don't go after what I hear" (P7, 84, female, personal communication, October 6, 2023).

When asked about their perception of advertising, participants naturally and spontaneously addressed television ads, since this is the medium through which they are more exposed to advertising. Several participants reported that, especially when watching television, they are repeatedly exposed to the same ads, which they perceive as boring and intrusive. Additionally, the commercial breaks are excessively long and feature abrupt volume increases during ads. They sense that broadcasters are imposing advertising on older people, thus generating negative reactions toward advertising in general. This is exemplified by the following quotes: "the abusive way in which television imposes advertising on us, turning the volume of the television higher" (P3, 67, male, personal communication, September 12, 2023); "those infernal commercial breaks sometimes last longer than the program itself" (P12, 67, male, personal communication, November 8, 2023).

Both aspects contribute to the perception of an excess of advertising and lead to one of the most frequent reactions: active avoidance of advertising.

4.1.2. PERCEPTION OF SENIOR-TARGETED ADVERTISING: DECEPTIVE AND MAKING THE ELDERLY INVISIBLE

Many interviewees are particularly concerned about the limited number of advertisements aimed at older people and claim that there should be more senior-targeted ads. For some of them, this perceived scarcity seems to be associated with a sense of older consumers' invisibility, that they are not seen or heard by brands. The following excerpt addresses this worrisome invisibility: "I think that the number of advertisements aimed at older people is very rare, which makes me feel a little invisible in the face of advertising in general" (P19, 71, female, personal communication, January 16, 2024).

The most frequently mentioned aspect of senior-targeted advertising is its deceptive nature, with 20 references. Older consumers perceive themselves as an easier segment to deceive by an advertising discourse that provides the most compelling and persuasive arguments, exploring the needs, frailties, losses, expectations, and desires of the elderly in general, as observed: "advertising uses and abuses on the losses and difficulties typical of seniors' age" (P23, 71, female, personal communication, January 26, 2024).

Advertising is also described as deceitful for exaggerating product benefits since the promises made do not match what older consumers actually get from the products. Prices and promotions can also be deceptive, as advertised prices and product promotions sometimes do not correspond to those at the point of sale.

The bright side of senior-targeted advertising was mentioned by only two participants, who offered different perspectives. A 72-year-old male interviewee considers the advertisements' focus on elderly problems and the products' utility in addressing them to be positive (rather than on more trivial matters, such as fashion). A 72-year-old female participant defends that advertising can contribute to elderly development, as stated: "as long as it is good advertising, it can also promote the development of the mind. (...) It could show to the elderly what is there to be done, and how they can do it" (P15, 72, female, personal communication, November 22, 2023).

4.2. REPRESENTATION OF OLDER ADULTS IN ADVERTISING

This theme focused on how older adults are represented in advertising and encompassed two categories: (a) characteristics and valence of such representations in advertising; (b) identification with older characters in advertising.

4.2.1. CHARACTERISTICS AND VALENCE OF OLDER ADULTS' REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING: MAINLY STEREOTYPED, DUAL, AND NEGATIVE

Interestingly, this issue polarized the participants. Most of the interviewees agreed that ads presented a stereotyped portrayal of senior citizens, emphasizing negative aspects such as frailty, decay, weaknesses, lack of autonomy and dependency on others, disablement, and complaint behavior. This is a biased, negative, and myopic portrayal that devalues old age and does not acknowledge the diversity of health, physical, social, or even financial conditions of older adults in contemporary societies. As reported: “in the case of advertising for the elderly, I feel that, in addition to being limited in number, there is also a great devaluation towards us and neglect to see beyond the obvious, old age” (P20, 66, female, personal communication, January 18, 2024).

This biased, stereotypical perspective of advertising on what it means to be an older adult was also considered far from reality for two additional reasons. First, in advertising, older characters are frequently associated with these negative characteristics. Yet in some ads, when they use the advertised product, they appear rejuvenated, with the negative feature(s) drastically reduced or even disappearing. It is almost as if older people could surpass this stereotype, the only necessary condition being the acquisition and use of the brand's products. As a 73-year-old female claimed: “I don't feel well represented by the ads. (...) They make it seem that we are invalids and that after buying most products we are 20 years younger” (P10, 73, female, personal communication, October 27, 2023).

Second, advertising was criticized for depicting an extreme picture of older people, either as very active and well with life or, on the other end of the continuum, as totally inactive, disabled, or unhealthy. Neither extreme of the spectrum provides an adequate or accurate depiction of older people. As a 70-year-old male stated: “[advertising presents older people] in extremes, either doing very well or very badly” (P16, 70, male, personal communication, November 24, 2023).

However, the perception of a negative portrayal of seniors in advertising was not shared by all the interviewees, as four participants argued that ads portray older people in a natural or even positive manner. In their perspective, older adults are depicted in ads as active, happy people with a social life, as observed by a 65-year-old female: “it is not very far from the reality of what it is to be a senior today, they are represented as active, they dance, and they do exercise” (P2, 65, female, personal communication, September 7, 2023).

4.2.2. IDENTIFICATION WITH OLDER CHARACTERS IN ADVERTISING: TENDENTIALLY A LACK OF IDENTIFICATION

A vital element for consumers to be meaningfully involved with advertising is identification. According to the findings, a lack of identification with older adult characters in advertising predominated. This is exemplified by the following quote from P16 (70, male, personal communication, November 24, 2023): “I do not identify myself [with the way seniors are represented in advertising]”.

However, two female interviewees, aged 72 and 83, disagreed. Despite identifying with elderly characters in advertisements, specificities and differences are noted in their degree of identification. While the 83-year-old interviewee specifically identified with older characters in ads for hearing devices, the 72-year-old only identified with ads that present older characters as active and independent. This suggests that identification occurs when ads characters present the same characteristics, conditions, or problems as the older receivers.

4.3. SUGGESTIONS TO ADVERTISING PRACTITIONERS

This theme presented a set of suggestions to practitioners and encompassed two categories: senior-targeted advertising and elderly representation in advertising.

4.3.1. SUGGESTIONS REGARDING SENIOR-TARGETED ADVERTISING: SIMPLER, ENTERTAINING, CREATIVE, AND ENCOMPASSING A WIDER SET OF PRODUCT CATEGORIES

The older adults interviewed crave simpler, easier-to-understand advertisements. During the interviews, participants acknowledged some difficulties with ad comprehension. These difficulties seem to be fuelled by the ad's complexity, the speed of the narrative, or the nonexistence of a logical structure in the ad. These factors increase confusion and hamper comprehension of ads, which in turn can lead to misunderstandings, greater resistance to persuasive attempts, and lessened advertising efficacy. The following excerpts address the referred problems: "there are things [in ads] that I find funny... but there are also others that I don't understand very well" (P5, 77, male, personal communication, September 27, 2023); "other times on television we only see half an ad because the footer disappears and we don't finish reading" (P8, 77, male, personal communication, October 16, 2023).

When asked for suggestions regarding senior-targeted advertising, they immediately compared today's advertisements with those from decades ago. Ancient ads were described as entertaining, with straightforward storytelling, memorable (despite stereotyped) characters, and a direct message. These simpler, fun, and entertaining ads were considered more attention-catching and memorable. An 83-year-old female participant revealed when comparing old and today's ads: "ads used to be very funny (...). Advertising was very different. It was much simpler and more direct, you know? (...) They said this is for this, that is for that" (P14, 83, female, personal communication, November 20, 2023).

Besides the expectation, extended to other age segments, that ads should be engaging, funny, easy to understand, and informative (Birknerová et al., 2018), these older participants want creativity. A key issue in keeping these older consumers attentive and involved seems to be communicating with creativity. The following quote is illustrative: "advertising has to be different and obviously creative because if it is not, it's just another ad" (P20, 66, female, personal communication, January 18, 2024).

A final suggestion highlighted the need to communicate a broader range of product categories to older consumers. A recurrent complaint is that ads aimed at older people present only products for age-related problems, emphasizing aging losses, deficiencies, and handicaps (e.g., reduced mobility, health problems). This reinforces a biased and negatively stereotyped portrayal of older people and fails to persuade the participants. Instead, they value more inclusive advertising — advertising that positions older adults as any other members of society, seeking information about new brands and products across a wide range of categories. As a 76-year-old female participant mentioned: “in my opinion, it would be insightful to create advertisements in a different, more positive, and broader way, in terms of product diversity” (P11, 76, female, personal communication, November 6, 2023).

4.3.2. SUGGESTIONS ABOUT ELDERLY REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING: HIGHER ADHERENCE TO REALITY, RESPECT FOR SENIORS’ PERSPECTIVES, AND ENHANCING THE BRIGHT SIDE OF AGING

To assess older adults’ perspectives on potential improvements, respondents were asked to discuss how older people should be portrayed in advertising. Interestingly, they initially focused on what they do not want in the representation of older adults in advertising. They do not want to be portrayed as a distinct group, apart from other age groups. They do not want to be pictured only by their losses, lack of skills or competencies, or their difficulties (e.g., health, mobility, social, financial), which are sometimes shown as miraculously overcome through the use of the advertised products. Also, they do not want to be depicted only in the extremes of a continuum, either very young or as very old, very good or very bad.

A vital element for adequately representing senior citizens in advertising appears to be greater adherence to reality. Representing older characters not as unidimensional but in more complex, nuanced ways, or by enhancing their positive features, can help overcome stereotypes. Acknowledging that older age encompasses a diverse set of people with different needs, skills, knowledge, values, and backgrounds, as well as different physical, health, and social conditions. Respecting this diversity is fundamental for the identification mechanism with older characters in advertising and for overcoming stereotypes. As exemplified: “they could show people, usually old people like me, but active, not those poor people who can barely get off the couch, bed, or chair” (P8, 77, male, personal communication, October 16, 2023).

P15 (72, female, personal communication, November 22, 2023) asked for more respect for older people’s perspectives, which sometimes do not resemble the viewpoints of their younger counterparts: “I like when they [ads] talk about culture and our older vision. Because young people already have another way of seeing things”.

As a final suggestion, advertising should highlight the bright side of aging. Old age can be a synonym for maturity, accumulated competencies, experience, and wisdom. Two

participants, aged 71 and 66, asked for a shift in advertising, so that ads present and enhance the positive side of these golden years: “I am sure that, if advertising were less negative and wrapped in the preciousness that aging can be, it would be much more effective” (P19, 71, female, personal communication, January 16, 2024).

Annihilating the negative connotations associated with older adults (...) and considering old age, which are effectively the golden years of our lives (...), the public would view advertising in a more luminous, intelligent, and optimistic way and would certainly become involved with the brand. (P20, 66, female, personal communication, January 18, 2024)

5. DISCUSSION

This research examined how older people perceive and respond to advertising and to elderly representation in advertising, and has offered suggestions for non-age-discriminatory advertising.

Globally, the findings suggest that older adults have a negative perception of advertising, driven by its omnipresence, excess, and deceptive practices, as well as by inaccurate and stereotyped portrayals of older characters. Although this biased representation is not consensual, most participants agree that older people are often inaccurately or stereotypically portrayed in ads that emphasize the negative side of aging, such as decay, incompetency, dependency, disempowerment, and vulnerability. Media representation theories (e.g., van Leeuwen, 2008) suggest that these portrayals can act as meaning-making practices that actively construct ageing as a culturally devalued stage of life. By framing older adults through reductive codes of decline, advertising may contribute to the normalization of ageist narratives that shape how ageing is understood and experienced.

These findings align with a substantial body of research examining perceptions and portrayals of older adults in advertising, revealing persistent age-based stereotyping (e.g., Festervand & Lumpkin, 1985; Kohlbacher et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2010; for a comprehensive review, see Eisend, 2022). However, they stand in contrast to Prieler’s (2024) recent review, which suggests that older individuals are frequently depicted alongside other age groups and are generally portrayed in a positive light. These dissimilar results may be due to cultural issues, as they align with findings from Rosenthal et al.’s (2021) Brazilian study, in which older participants reject the stereotypical images of their cohort in advertising, leading to a lack of identification with older characters in ads.

Today, later life is characterized by variety. There is no “typical” older adult, but a “tremendous heterogeneity in functional and demographic characteristics of the over-65 age group” (Carstensen & Hershfield, 2021, p. 327). This requires, as Givskov and Deuze (2018) claim, a nuanced perspective when addressing older adults, one that focuses on their differences. Yet, according to this study’s findings, advertising does not

entirely grasp this diversity. Ads are perceived as not accurately or adequately representing the different subsegments within the 65+ age group. This suggests that, far from inclusive, today's Portuguese advertising is still perceived as providing an objectified, distorted, and myopic portrayal of older people. While doing so, this de-individualizing, devaluing, and stereotyped depiction of older people produces, reproduces, and reinforces ageism and the manifestation of ageist discourses in media, with all its harmful consequences for older individuals and for society as a whole (a discussion on these consequences can be found in Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018).

Another major concern for older adults is their perceived invisibility in brands' advertising. This sense of invisibility or even exclusion is grounded in the perception of a limited number of senior-targeted ads and the realization that brands do not usually target or communicate to the 65+ age group. This worrisome invisibility has already been identified, through different perspectives, in previous research. When examining how older consumers understood advertising communications in Portugal, Antunes et al. (2014) identified a sense of invisibility stemming from the awareness that older characters had a very low presence in advertising. From another angle, studies analyzing ads have found, for decades, substantial evidence indicating that older characters are underrepresented in mainstream media advertising compared to population figures (e.g., Dianoux et al., 2007; Ji & Cooper, 2024).

Taken together, this study's results suggest a disenchanting view of the role of seniors in advertising, resulting from these unrepresentative, biased, oversimplified, unidimensional, and negative portrayals of older adults depicted in advertising, but also derived from seniors' invisibility for brands and from the very limited number of product categories usually present in senior-targeted advertising. If these issues are not addressed, advertising risks being overlooked and losing its impact on the consumer journey of the older population.

Building on the findings and informed by theories and insights from gerontological, media, cognitive, and emotional aging research, a set of actionable recommendations is proposed to guide the development of more inclusive and diverse senior-targeted advertising. These guidelines aim to foster realistic, respectful, and positively framed representations of older adults while enhancing the processing and reception. In doing so, they can support more effective communication strategies and also bring personal and societal benefits to ageing populations.

5.1. RECOMMENDATION #1 — CONSIDER DIVERSITY WHILE DEVELOPING THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Later life is highly diverse in terms of health, lifestyles, identities, and consumption patterns, as shown by the gerontological research on ageing (e.g., Foster & Walker, 2021; Holstein & Minkler, 2007; Moschis, 2021). Practitioners should strive to develop

strategies that are more inclusive of diverse age groups, ethnicities, genders, abilities, sexual orientations, and other aspects of diversity. For example, the strategy may involve featuring characters from diverse backgrounds, including different ethnicities, ages, and religions, to demonstrate commitment to inclusivity. Or it may encourage customers to share their stories and experiences with the brand, highlighting the diversity of people who use the product. Striving for diversity and inclusivity in advertising can have favorable brand and social effects (e.g., Eisend et al., 2023), such as increasing the audience connectedness (Burgess et al., 2024). Thus, while strategizing, practitioners can consider multiple older segments and create a campaign featuring diverse representation of seniors across ages, genders, backgrounds, needs, and/or health, physical, emotional, and socioeconomic conditions. Everyone, including older adults, should be seen and respected by the brand.

5.2. RECOMMENDATION #2 — STRIVE TO OVERCOME ELDERLY UNDERREPRESENTATION AND INVISIBILITY IN ADVERTISING

Older adults have been systematically underrepresented in advertising (e.g., Eisend, 2022). Increasing the visibility of older adults in mainstream advertising can have beneficial social and personal effects on older segments of the population (e.g., Gantz et al., 1980). Featuring intergenerational relationships or adopting a life-course perspective, where older people naturally have their place, can be useful and promote a plural view of ageing, which, according to active ageing models (e.g., Foster & Walker, 2021), can provide a more realistic and inclusive representation of older adults. Forcing inclusion can lead to negative perceptions and evaluations of the ad and the campaign, as a study by Fried and Oprea (2023) on LGBT-inclusive advertising suggests.

5.3. RECOMMENDATION #3 — AVOID STEREOTYPING AND CLICHES

According to the stereotype embodiment theory, stereotypes can become internalized across the life span, operate unconsciously, and gain salience from self-relevance. This psychosocial approach to aging suggests that negative age stereotypes can have detrimental effects on a variety of cognitive and physical outcomes (Levy, 2009). Stereotyped and reductive portrayals of older adults in advertising can undermine both message credibility and self-perceptions (e.g., Carstensen & Hershfield, 2021; Coudin & Alexopoulos, 2010; Rosenthal et al., 2021). In this regard, practitioners can prioritize using characters in ways that accurately, realistically, and positively represent their targets, rather than relying on stereotypes, cliches, or caricatures. If in doubt, practitioners can reach out to members of underrepresented communities for feedback on ideas before launching any campaigns, to ensure that these groups are accurately portrayed and respected in the messaging. Advertisements can celebrate the wisdom, experience, and vitality of older adults. Advertising can enhance what is positive in the golden age and acknowledge

individual strengths and personal resilience, factors especially appealing to older people (e.g., Carstensen & Hershfield, 2021; Robinson et al., 2008). Rather than focusing on limitations, ads can showcase older people in a variety of roles and activities and using all sorts of products, while portraying them as active, autonomous, and capable individuals. This does not imply portraying them similarly to their younger counterparts; as the findings in this study and Rosenthal et al. (2021) suggest, older adults tend to perceive themselves as not too old, yet no longer young. To better reflect reality, ads can feature older characters engaged in physical or digital activities, representing them as mature, healthy, independent, and integrated adults leading full lives. Additionally, ads can highlight their contributions to society, whether through volunteering, supporting family and friends, or philanthropic work, portraying them as active members who continue to make a positive impact on their communities.

5.4. RECOMMENDATION #4 — INVEST IN EMOTIONS AND CREATIVITY

To develop senior-inclusive campaigns, practitioners should be aware of the central tenets of the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 2003). This theory holds that as people age and increasingly perceive future time horizons as limited, they attach greater importance to emotionally meaningful goals. For older adults, ads are preferred and better remembered when they promise to help realize these emotionally meaningful goals. Also, products that help older people savor the moment are preferred over those that bring long-term benefits (e.g., Carstensen & Hershfield, 2021).

In tandem, the strategic use of creative storytelling can further enhance the emotional effectiveness of senior-targeted advertising. Storytelling heightens narrative engagement and amplifies affective impact (Kang et al., 2020), a finding echoed in these results, which show that emotionally resonant and creatively crafted messages capture seniors' attention and foster involvement. This aligns with broader evidence indicating that creative advertisements elicit more favorable evaluations and stronger attitudinal responses (Jin et al., 2022).

5.5. RECOMMENDATION #5 — RECOGNIZE SKILLS AND ABILITIES WHILE RESPECTING THE LIMITS OF OLDER ADULTS

The active and healthy ageing framework (e.g., Foster & Walker, 2021; Holstein & Minkler, 2007) proposes a critical and plural view of ageing, acknowledging their diverse skills while respecting their limitations. Practitioners can develop age-friendly advertising campaigns that acknowledge older adults' physical and cognitive limitations. For instance, print advertisements can be designed with larger fonts to ensure readability, and videos can include captions. Online advertising must consider that text style and its visual presentation can make it easier or harder for people to read, especially older people with visual problems. Also, color perception may change for older people, and they

lose contrast sensitivity. Attending to and respecting older adults' limitations can have a profound impact on their perception of advertising campaigns.

6. CONCLUSION

Aging consumers are the fastest-growing consumer group in developed countries, have the highest level of spending power, and spend more on products and services than ever before (e.g., Longman, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that they are increasingly relevant for marketers. Yet, older people's relationship with advertising and marketing remains underresearched (e.g., Eisend, 2022; Hart et al., 2022). This study aims to highlight the varied perceptions, concerns, and experiences of this minority group with advertising in general and senior-related advertising in particular.

Overall, the findings indicate that older adults tend to hold a predominantly negative view of advertising in general and of senior-targeted advertising in particular. They frequently perceive such communications as limited in scope, confined to a narrow set of product categories, and at times even deceptive. It also emerged a perceived scarcity of advertisements aimed at older people, which seems to be associated with a sense of older consumers' invisibility, as though older consumers are neither acknowledged nor genuinely understood by brands. Nonetheless, some interviewees recognized that well-designed senior-oriented advertising has the potential to support healthy ageing, raise awareness of products that address age-related challenges, and contribute meaningfully to older adults' well-being.

Regarding seniors' representation, the study reveals a largely disenchanting perspective on how ageing is portrayed in advertising: older adults are often depicted as unrepresentative, biased, overly simplified, and predominantly negative. A widespread difficulty in identifying with older characters emerged, reflecting dissatisfaction with portrayals that oscillate between unrealistic vitality and exaggerated frailty. Such polarized imagery fails to capture the diversity, complexity, and authenticity of later life, ultimately undermining the relevance and resonance of advertising for older audiences. Pelsmacker (2021) advocates that advertising research "should use insights and theories from other disciplines to develop actionable recommendations for contemporary advertising practice" (p. 835) and substantiate these recommendations "by means of adequate research methods" (p. 837). Adopting a qualitative approach allowed this research to gather suggestions for developing a more positive, realistic, diverse, and inclusive senior-targeted advertising. Building on this and the extant literature, using theories such as socioemotional selectivity theory and stereotype embodiment theory, which were reconciled with gerontological research, several recommendations are offered for practitioners to communicate inclusivity in advertising to engage with older consumers.

6.1. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Researchers have already examined older adults' perception of advertising and elderly representation in advertising (e.g., Kohlbacher et al., 2011; Prieler, 2024; Rosenthal et al., 2021), although this remains a neglected topic. This study supports some previous results, suggesting that there has been limited progress in Portuguese advertising on these matters.

The current study also extends the existing literature by examining older consumers' reactions to advertising and their viewpoints and suggestions on senior-friendly advertising, one that fosters their inclusion while respecting their specificities, abilities, and limitations. Its major contribution lies in this analysis, which advances the current knowledge of older people and inclusive advertising. Insights from this study can help marketers and advertisers gain a deeper understanding of how the elderly experience advertising and the meanings they attach to it, how they relate and react to ads, and what they want from advertising to feel more included.

The findings of the current study can inform the development of more senior-inclusive communication strategies and advertising campaigns free of age discrimination, for the benefit of older consumers' well-being and advertising effectiveness. These findings can have significant implications for marketers and advertisers, suggesting that it is essential to address older consumers' demands for more realistic and accurate elderly representation in advertising, while creatively communicating with them.

Additionally, practitioners should be aware of potential ethical implications when crafting their messages — such as avoiding greenwashing or other deceptive practices, as older adults already perceive advertising as negative and associated with deception. Finally, there is a need to address older people's apparent invisibility in brands and brand communication, as this can significantly shape older consumers' decision-making processes and consumer journeys, as well as undermine older adults' self-perception.

6.2. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of the present study include the use of a qualitative approach and a limited sample size, which restrict the generalizability of the findings. Also, the qualitative findings from in-depth interviews do not allow for establishing causal relations. Future studies could employ larger samples and adopt a quantitative approach to examine causality. Future research could compare how different generational cohorts perceive older people's inclusion in advertising and examine their suggestions on this subject. Considering intersectionality can also yield deeper insights into older consumers' diversity and their inclusion in advertising. Also, data and/or method triangulation involving older people and practitioners can be useful. Being able to identify seniors' current views on what senior-inclusive advertising means and how it can be developed

may represent an effective means to better communicate with this target audience, for the benefit of older consumers' well-being and advertising effectiveness.

REFERENCES

- Antunes, A. C., Miranda, S., & Teixeira, M. (2014). O segmento esquecido! Os seniores e a comunicação publicitária. *Comunicação Pública*, 9(16), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.4000/cp.850>
- Ayalon, L., & Tesch-Römer, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Contemporary perspectives on ageism*. Springer.
- Bardin, L. (2013). *L'analyse de contenu*. PUF.
- Belk, R. W. (2017). Qualitative research in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 46(1), 36–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1201025>
- Bieri, R., Florack, A., & Scarabis, M. (2006). Der Zuschnitt von Werbung auf die Zielgruppe älterer Menschen. *Zeitschrift für Medienpsychologie*, 18(1), 19–30. <https://doi.org/10.1026/1617-6383.18.1.19>
- Birknerová, Z., Frankovský, M., Zbihlejšová, L., & Parová, V. (2018). Perception of advertising and expectations of advertising in terms of gender differences. *Marketing and Branding Research*, 5(2), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.33844/mbr.2018.60294>
- Brodmerkel, S., & Barker, R. (2022). Making sense of 'ambiguous ageism': A multi-level perspective on age inequality in the advertising industry. *Creative Industries Journal*, 15(2), 121–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2021.1911536>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Burgess, A., Wilkie, D. C. H., & Dolan, R. (2024). The power of beliefs: How diversity advertising builds audience connectedness. *European Journal of Marketing*, 58(9), 1969–1994. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-01-2023-0051>
- Carstensen, L. L., Fung, H. H., & Charles, S. T. (2003). Socioemotional selectivity theory and the regulation of emotion in the second half of life. *Motivation and Emotion*, 27(2), 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024569803230>
- Carstensen, L. L., & Hershfield, H. E. (2021). Beyond stereotypes: Using socioemotional selectivity theory to improve messaging to older adults. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(4), 327–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214211011468>
- Coudin, G., & Alexopoulos, T. (2010). 'Help me! I'm old!' How negative aging stereotypes create dependency among older adults. *Aging & Mental Health*, 14(5), 516–523. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607861003713182>
- Debert, G. G. (2003). O velho na propaganda. *Cadernos Pagu*, (21), 133–155. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-83332003000200007>
- Dianoux, C., Kettnerová, J., & Linhart, Z. (2007). Advertising in Czech and French magazines. *Journal of Euromarketing*, 16(1–2), 139–152. https://doi.org/10.1300/J037v16n01_10
- Dworkin, S. L. (2012). Sample size policy for qualitative studies using in-depth interviews. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41(6), 1319–1320. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-012-0016-6>

- Eisend, M. (2022). Older people in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 51(3), 308–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2022.2027300>
- Eisend, M., Muldrow, A. F., & Rosengren, S. (2023). Diversity and inclusion in advertising research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 42(1), 52–59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2122252>
- Faulkner, S. L., & Trotter, S. P. (2017). Data saturation. In J. Matthes, C. S. Davis, & R. F. Potter (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp. 1–2). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0060>
- Festervand, T. A., & Lumpkin, J. R. (1985). Response of elderly consumers to their portrayal by advertisers. *Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 8(1), 203–226.
- Foos, P., & Clark, C. (2011). Adult age and gender differences in perceptions of facial attractiveness: Beauty is in the eye of the older beholder. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 172(2), 162–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221325.2010.526154>
- Foster, L., & Walker, A. (2021). Active ageing across the life course: Towards a comprehensive approach to prevention. *BioMed Research International*, 2021(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/6650414>
- Fried, M., & Oprea, S. J. (2023). Advertising has come out: Viewers' perception of the portrayal of lesbian, gay, and transgender characters in advertising. *Poetics*, 96, Article 101761. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2023.101761>
- Gantz, W., Gartenberg, H. M., & Rainbow, C. K. (1980). Approaching invisibility: The portrayal of the elderly in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 56–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1980.tb01769.x>
- Givskov, C., & Deuze, M. (2018). Researching new media and social diversity in later life. *New Media & Society*, 20(1), 399–412. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816663949>
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender advertisements*. Harper & Row.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE.
- Hart, B., Ferguson, G., & Shabnam, S. (2022). Editorial. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 34(1), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-01-2022-923>
- Holstein, M. B., & Minkler, M. (2007). Critical gerontology: Reflections for the 21st century. In M. Bernard & T. Scharf (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on ageing societies* (pp. 13–26). Policy Press.
- Kang, J., Hong, S., & Hubbard, G. T. (2020). The role of storytelling in advertising: Consumer emotion, narrative engagement level, and word-of-mouth intention. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 19(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1793>
- Kohlbacher, F., Prieler, M., & Hagiwara, S. (2011). The use of older models in Japanese TV advertising: Practitioner perspective vs. consumer opinions. *Keio Communication Review*, (33), 25–42.
- Kohlbacher, F., Prieler, M., & Hagiwara, S. (2014). Japan's demographic revolution? A study of advertising practitioners' views on stereotypes. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 20(2), 249–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602381.2013.841451>
- Ji, H. & Cooper, A. (2024). “Distorted mirror”? 20 years of elders' images in *Time* magazine advertising. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 32(2), 198–213. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2022.2117814>

- Jin, H. S., Kerr, G., Suh, J., Kim, H. G., & Sheehan, B. (2022). The power of creative advertising: Creative ads impair recall and attitudes toward other ads. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(8), 1521–1540. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2045817>
- Levy, B. (2009). Stereotype embodiment: A psychosocial approach to aging. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(6), 332–336. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01662.x>
- Longman, P. (2021, October 12). *Think again: Global aging*. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/12/think-again-global-aging/>
- Loos, E., & Ivan, L. (2022). Visual ageism in the media: A review of literature. *Societies*, 12(3), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc12030077>
- Moschis, G. (2021). The life course paradigm and consumer behavior: Research frontiers and future directions. *Psychology & Marketing*, 38(11), 2034–2050. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21586>
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. SAGE.
- Pelsmacker, P. (2021). What is wrong with advertising research and how can we fix it? *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(5), 835–848. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1827895>
- Prieler, M. (2024). Representations of older people in advertising: A review. *Advertising & Society Quarterly*, 25(1). <https://doi.org/10.1353/asr.2024.a924348>
- Rego, A., Cunha, M. P., & Meyer, V., Jr. (2018). Quantos participantes são necessários para um estudo qualitativo? Linhas práticas de investigação. *Revista Portuguesa e Brasileira de Gestão*, 17(2), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.12660/rgplp.v17n2.2018.78224>
- Robinson, T., Gustafson, B., & Popovich, M. (2008). Perceptions of negative stereotypes of older people in magazine advertisements. *Ageing & Society*, 28(2), 233–251. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X07006605>
- Robinson, T., & Umphery, D. (2006). First- and third-person perceptions of images of older people in advertising: An inter-generational evaluation. *International Journal of Aging & Human Development*, 62(2), 159–173. <https://doi.org/10.2190/2CXV-oLTM-2MJJ-NPEU>
- Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations*. Free Press.
- Rosenthal, B., Cardoso, F., & Abdalla, C. (2021). (Mis)representations of older consumers in advertising: Stigma and inadequacy in ageing societies. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 37(5–6), 569–593. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1850511>
- Roy, A., & Harwood, J. (1997). Underrepresented, positively portrayed: Older adults in television commercials. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 25(1), 39–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909889709365464>
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Williams, A., Ylänne, V., Wadleigh, P., & Chen, C. (2010). Portrayals of older adults in UK magazine advertisements: Relevance of target audience. *Communications*, 35(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1515/comm.2010.001>
- Wolf, A., & Seebauer, S. (2014). Technology adoption of electric bicycles: A survey among early adopters. *Transportation Research: Policy and Practice*, 69, 196–211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2014.08.007>

World Health Organization. (2024, October 1). *Aging and health*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford.

Zhang, Y. B., Harwood, J., Williams, A., Ylänne-McEwen, V., Wadleigh, P. M., & Thimm, C. (2006). The portrayal of older adults in advertising: A cross-national review. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 25*(3), 264–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X06289479>

Zhou, L., Chen, G., Dong, L., & Yao, Y. (2017). Is there a paradox of aging: When the negative aging stereotype meets the positivity effect in older adults. *Experimental Aging Research, 43*(1), 80–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0361073X.2017.1258254>

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Ana Cristina Antunes has a PhD in Psychology. She is an integrated researcher at the Laboratory of Applied Research in Communication and Media. Her research interests encompass aging, social media communication and engagement, consumer behavior, influencer marketing, positive organizational behavior, and user experience. Her research bridges psychological science and applied communication studies, with particular attention to digital environments and societal well-being. She has served as a coordinator and team member on funded research projects on aging, gambling behaviors, and social media communication. Besides publishing in international journals, she also contributes to scholarly dissemination through her membership on the editorial boards and scientific commissions of several scientific journals. Alongside her research, she serves as an adjunct professor at the School of Communication and Media Studies.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8983-2062>

Email: aantunes@escs.ipl.pt

Address: Campus de Benfica do IPL, 1549-014 Lisboa

Sandra Miranda is a lecturer and associate dean in the School of Communication and Media Studies; vice-president and integrated researcher at the Applied Research Laboratory in Communication and Media. She has a PhD in Social Communication and a master's degree in Human Resource Management. She is the coordinator and principal investigator on several funded research projects. Her academic interests are aging and consumer behavior, hate speech on social media, activism and social responsibility, and theory and organizational behavior. She is a member of the editorial and scientific boards of international journals. She was awarded several scientific prizes, the most recent being the Excellence in Social Sciences (IPL - Caixa Geral de Depósitos). She is the author of books and scientific articles in international journals.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5544-5942>

Email: smiranda@escs.ipl.pt

Address: Campus de Benfica do IPL, 1549-014 Lisboa

Submitted: 22/04/2025 | Accepted: 21/01/2026



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.