TRUTH ABOUT AGE

McCANN
TRUTH CENTRAL

INTRODUCTION

"Aging" is a theme that extends well beyond the older generation. Aging and attitudes toward aging affect people at every life stage and in every country around the world. In some regions, it means a population aging out of the work force, whereas in others, it means a population aging into the work force. In Japan, for example, 40% of the population will be 65+ by 2060, whereas in Bolivia, the average age is 24. Given these global dynamics, we believe it's time to expand the definition of aging and study the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards the concept of "age" more broadly.

As a result, this isn't a traditional 'aging' study that focuses on the 65+ audience. The *Truth About Age* is a piece of comprehensive global research that explores aging throughout the ages.

WHY?

Because aging isn't just for the old and living isn't just for the young. In fact, according to our data…

- People who fear death the most are in their 20s
- People who think about aging most are in their 30s
- People who worry least about aging are in their 70s

And when it comes to the "living" part, two thirds of people over the age of 70 believe "you're never too old to casually date romantic partners" (vs. just over half of 20 year olds).

All of this indicates that we're at a pivotal moment in human history, where traditional age norms are being challenged across every age group.

As uncovered in our last global study, the Truth About Youth, the concept of becoming an adult has become increasingly fluid and flexible. The term "adulting" has been used to describe a millennial generation who refuse to abide by the expectations traditionally associated with their lifestage, deciding "to adult" only on days and in moments when it suits them.

But what of those at the other end of age spectrum? In many ways we find mirror behaviors. For those older individuals, there may be days when this generation decides "to senior" but for the most part they are mirroring their younger counterparts by refusing to meet the expectations traditionally associated with their lifestage. 65+ parents in China are asking their children if they can spend their funeral money on travel, grandparents in Australia are too busy to see their grandchildren and Filipino retirees are starting businesses from home.

So just as young people age into adulthood in a profoundly different way than they ever did in the past, so too are people choosing to age across their entire lives in a novel and flexible way (think adulting, midulting, senioring!).

However, if we look at culture at large, from media to politics to advertising, traditional age-led stereotypes are still rife. In fact, only 24% believe the fashion industry understand the aging population and only 30% believe media or news organizations understand the aging population.

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HOW SHOULD MARKETERS RESPOND?

Marketers need to completely rethink the rulebook with regards to the way they approach age across the spectrum (not just when it comes to marketing to "seniors").

McCann Worldgroup has developed four principles to guide marketers as they rethink age-led demographics:

1. START YOUNG:

Traditionally, the "aging" conversation is reserved for the over 50s but our data indicates that brands maybe missing a trick. Young people constantly reflect on the process of aging and the passage of time. Given the level of anxiety and misunderstanding experienced by those in their 20s and 30s, smart brands will find ways of beginning and reframing the age conversation much earlier.

2. CELEBRATE THE GAINS

Too often the broader cultural conversation focuses on the "losses" associated with age (from reduced cognition to limited physicality) and aging is primarily framed as a negative process. And yet our data indicates that lives mostly get richer and happier over time. There is an opportunity for brands to rewrite the narrative and focus on the gains at every age. This could come by developing new language and imagery to connect with different age groups. The loss-oriented language associated with the second half of life; "retirement," "empty nest," and "downsizing" is particularly in need of a re-think.

3. GO BEYOND THE NUMBER

In general, age has become a less useful predictor of behavior. The fact of the matter is that everyone thinks about aging differently, regardless of their numerical age. We've created an attitude-led segmentation that explodes generational thinking. Moreover, once we explore market differences through the lens of this segmentation, the story becomes even more interesting. Brands need to interrogate their own consumer segmentations in new ways to ensure that they are consistently going beyond the "number."

4. PROMOTE INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

When we compare across markets, individual cultures prioritize different things in the pursuit of healthy aging. For example, whereas the people of India are more likely to believe that being respected by society is the key to aging well, the British stress the importance of a good sense of humor. However, there is one consistent theme that transcends markets when it comes to aging well; spending time with people of different ages. We see in our data that the old consistently misunderstand the young and vice versa. There is a rich opportunity for brands to build connections between the generations and co-create an age-positive future.

Our hope is that the research has presented a clear argument that brands must develop an Age Philosophy. It doesn't mean brands shouldn't talk about age, but it should be informed by their category, and, most importantly, the meaningful role that the brand wants to (or has an opportunity to) play in people's lives.

In the future, it will be appropriate for brands to talk about age in a more or less overt way. For example, brands in the beauty and pharmaceutical industries cannot operate in an age-agnostic way because they're dealing with problems that are correlated with age. The challenge for brands is then to strike a healthy balance between age-awareness without tipping over into age-obsession.

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This study is one of our largest studies to date: 28 quantitative markets with nearly 24,000 respondents globally (Canada, US, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Sweden, Norway, UK, France, Spain, Portugal, Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Germany, Turkey, Lebanon, South Africa, India, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, China, Japan, Philippines, Australia) and 36 qualitative markets (Canada, US, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Sweden, Denmark, UK, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Latvia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Nigeria, South Africa, Russia, South Korea, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, Philippines, Australia).

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