

THE 25 EFFECTS OF AGEING

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Physical ageing

We define physiological ageing as:

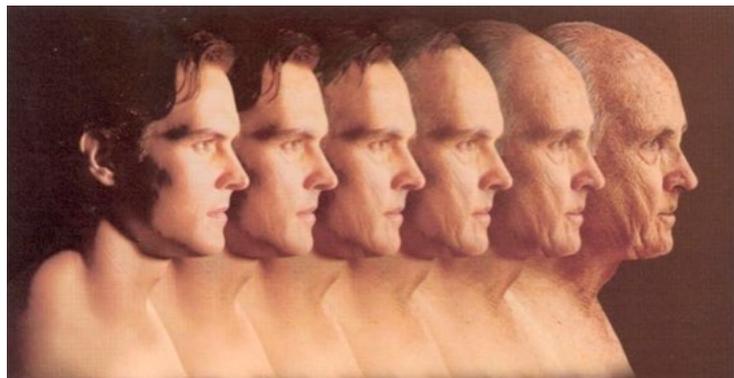
'The systemic change to the body's ability to function caused by age-related changes to the mind, body and senses.'

Some 70-year-olds run marathons, read without glasses and climb mountains. Others are frail, have limited mobility and suffer the onset of dementia.

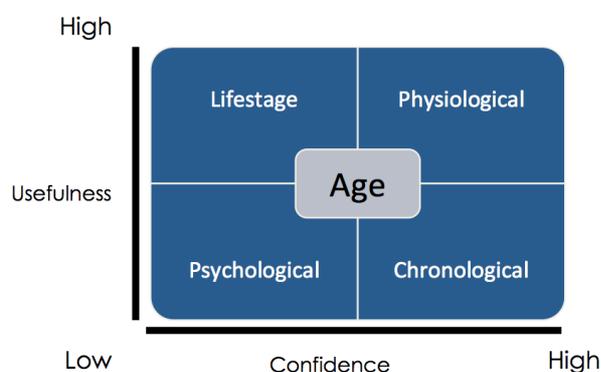
The challenge for marketers is to adapt their customer experience to accommodate the needs of the active, the frail and the vast majority in-between.

Why physical ageing?

There are four aspects of age that affect customer demand and the customer experience. Each of these can be used by marketers, but it is a customer's *physiological* age that is the most important since it has the unique combination of being both useful and predictable.



Understanding physiological ageing is critical when creating age friendly environments for where older people live, work and receive healthcare services.



Three areas of physiological ageing

Sensory – This describes the changes to the capabilities of our senses that affect numerous customer touchpoints (for example, reading packaging, using products and talking to sales staff).

Cognitive – This relates to the changes in how we respond to and process information (for example, using a website and understanding promotional material).

Physical – This describes the remaining physical changes that occur during ageing (for example, the ability to open packaging and the skeletal changes that affect how we look and move).

See the 'Summary of the types of ageing' later in this document, for details of these types of ageing.

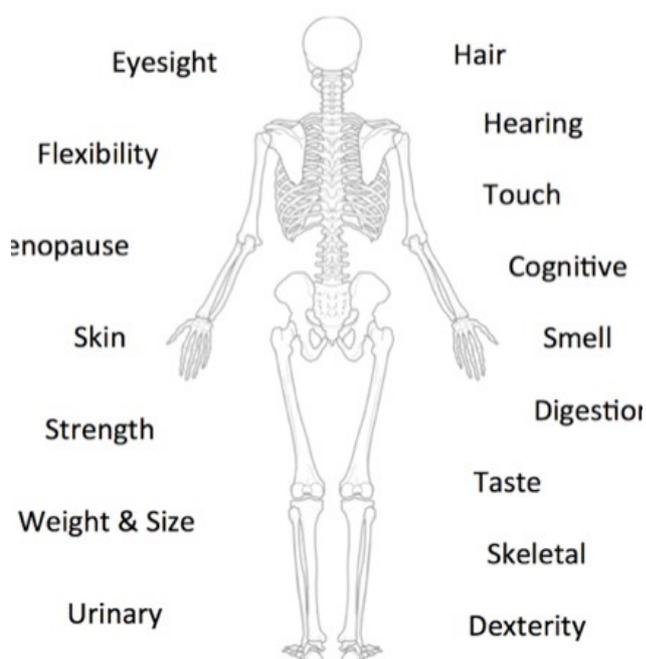
Physiological ageing applies to all types of older people, irrespective of their backgrounds. Most important, it is a factor that can be isolated, studied and applied to improving business performance.

Most company's customers include a mix of all types of older people with various combinations of physical ageing. Few companies have the luxury of dealing only with older people with 20/20 vision and perfect hearing. For this reason, companies need to plan for the median state of physiological ageing and its consequences.

Inevitable. Universal. Relentless.

Growing older and suffering from physiological ageing is not an option; it is our destiny. There is an established body of knowledge that explains why and when physical ageing occurs and its effects. We have used this knowledge and applied it to the process of marketing.

To understand physiological ageing and its relevance to business it is necessary to divide it into its constituent parts. There are at least 25 effects that have an impact on business. Some of these listed in the diagram.



Primary Effects

Sensory

Eyesight - Clarity
Eyesight - Illumination
Hearing - Clarity
Hearing - Volume
Touch

Cognitive

Complexity
Comprehension

Physical

Dexterity
Flexibility - body
Flexibility - peripheral
Muscle strength
Weight & body size
Urinary

Secondary Effects

Sensory

Smell
Taste
Oral

Physical

Hair - colour
Hair - volume
Skin - pigmentation
Skin - Elasticity
Menopause
Nutrition

Business Opportunities

Most of these types of ageing generate a demand for existing products and new product opportunities. These will predominately be products designed for and sold to older consumers. Some of these products will also be sold to younger age groups. For example, muscle-building supplements. Other examples of multi-age products are eye-glasses, anti-ageing cosmetics and hair treatments.



The primary reason for detailing these ageing effects is to enable them to be matched to customer touchpoints.

We've divided them into two groups – primary and secondary - as shown left. The primary ageing effects are those that alter the consumer's experience of one or more touchpoint. For instance, *hearing volume* is associated with multiple touchpoints including product design, retail check-out and face-to-face support. *Cognitive* abilities affect numerous touchpoints including web site design, advertising creative and product interface design. Aspects of marketing that are not overtly affected by biological ageing, such as the tone and style of advertising, are grouped as being 'sensory – independent'.

The subject of the interaction between physiological ageing and marketing is highly complex and this document provides the briefest of explanations of the dynamics.

Summary of the types of ageing

Sensory ageing

Eyesight

There are multiple ways that ageing affects our eyes' comfort. The two most important for business are the deterioration in the ability to focus on close-up objects and the requirement for increased levels of illumination to see. The consequences affect almost every customer touchpoint. From retail lighting, signage, product labelling website design and so on.



Hearing

Age-related hearing loss affects over half of all people over 60 years old. The symptoms are difficulty hearing higher-pitched consonants in speech and understanding a voice when there is background noise. Hearing loss has implications for all of the touchpoints where customers are in a spoken dialogue with a company or its representatives.

Touch

The sense of touch includes the ability to perceive pressure, temperature, pain and vibration. The sensitivity of all of these abilities can start to decrease from the age of 50. Some of the effects are little more than a nuisance but the loss of the ability to feel pain can result in serious injury. Product design and packaging are the most obvious areas in which the loss of touch becomes an important issue.

Smell

The ability to distinguish a smell declines with age, as does the ability to differentiate between smells. The senses of taste and smell are closely interrelated. Most of the experience of a food's taste results from its odour. This form of physical ageing has obvious implications for the design of food products. The inability to smell toxic substances has obvious safety considerations.



Taste

As we age, the number of our taste buds declines. This change starts around the age of 60 and begins earlier for women than men. Typically, salty and sweet are the tastes that diminish first, followed by bitter and sour tastes. As with smell, the changes to the experience of taste have implications for food design.

Oral

Ageing of the mouth can result in the creation of less saliva, which can in turn affect the quality of speech. The gums can start to recede and the tooth enamel becomes discoloured. Ageing might result in an increased incidence of tooth loss, but this is a secondary factor caused by older people taking less care of their teeth. These results of ageing, in particular the discolouration of the teeth, have created a large market for oral cosmetic products and services.

Cognitive ageing

Processing complex information

Older people appear to find it harder to retain newly acquired information that is required to undertake a task. This can result in difficulties with following complicated written instructions or using new menu systems.



Another aspect of ageing that is associated with this factor is increased difficulty in retaining attention and not becoming distracted by salient events. This has major implications for the design of digital channels.

Comprehending new concepts

Older people appear to find it harder to understand and act on language that requires them to make new inferences. This might be a result of the degradation of short-term memory but, whatever the reason, it suggests that it is best to use familiar terms and to be explicit about the connections between concepts.

A more obvious problem of comprehension results from the difficulties older people can have in understanding the language and visual references that are used in 'youth' culture. This can result in feelings of annoyance and of being excluded or just a lack of understanding of the message.

Physical ageing



Dexterity

Ageing can affect a person's dexterity in multiple ways. The most obvious is the reduced ability to grip objects. Other effects can include a reduction in the fingers' ability to react to an external stimulus and an increase in the time taken to reach and grasp.

The age-related reduction in torque strength, the movement for opening jars, starts as early as 40 and declines for women at a much steeper rate than it does for men.

Flexibility

There are two types of age-related flexibility issues. Body flexibility refers to the limitations in physical movement resulting from back and hip problems. Peripheral flexibility concerns the age-related problems in the arms and the legs. In many cases the two types of flexibility conditions are interrelated. As muscles become shorter and lose their elasticity they can cause the body to distort its stature to compensate. This in turn creates further joint and muscle problems that can aggravate old skeletal injuries.

Body weight and amount of exercise determine the level of flexibility problems caused by ageing. Imagine the difficulty an older person may have in a conventional changing room in a retail store.



Muscle strength

'Sarcopenia' is the technical name for the progressive and generalised loss of muscle mass and strength that occurs with ageing. The loss of muscle function causes the obvious issue of being unable to cope with heavy objects but, more important, it leads to a reduction in the strength of the body's core muscles. This can lead to a vulnerability to falls and accidents. Companies are

already turning their attention to products that will combat the effects of muscle mass decline.

Weight and body size

It is believed that ageing results in a decrease in basal metabolic rate. This is a measure of the minimum amount of calories the body consumes in a resting state. Gender, height and weight also affect this rate. A decrease in the body's requirement for calories means that unless there is a reduction in the quantity of food consumed or more calories expended through exercise, the body size and weight will increase. This has obvious implications for clothing designers among others.

Digestion

The digestive system loses its efficiency as we age.

Ageing has little effect on the functioning of the gastrointestinal tract, but it does affect other parts of the digestive system. For instance, the stomach decreases production of the enzymes that are necessary for the digestion process. This can result in anaemia.

The result of ageing on the digestive system doesn't directly affect any of the touchpoints but it does generate demand for a wide range of products to reduce its adverse effects.

Hair

Of all the features of ageing, the changes to the hair, both its volume and colour, are the most obvious and for this reason give the impression that they happen the earliest.

About a quarter of men have signs of baldness by the time they are 30 years old. By the age of 60 about two-thirds of men have significant baldness. The market for hair products and treatments is already well established and will increase with the rising numbers of older people.

Skin

The skin begins to age from the mid-20s onwards, both in colour and elasticity, but its effect is not visible for another two to three decades. As with so many ageing factors, a person's genetic make-up is an important determinant of the timing and extent of skin ageing.

The authors have grouped the effects of skin ageing into two categories – the changes to its colour and elasticity.

Ageing skin can develop fine wrinkles, lose its form and 'sag', change in colour and become thin and transparent.



Menopause

The timing, types and intensity of a woman's menopause will vary but the effects are likely to include 'Hot flashes' – a sudden feeling of heat in the upper part of the body and mood changes – the reason for this symptom is not understood and could be either a biological process or a reaction to change in lifestyle, or a combination of the two.

Understandably, there is a large market for medication, both traditional and alternative, to try and minimise the impact of the menopause on a woman's life.

Nutrition

Achieving the correct nutritional intake is important at every stage of life but especially so during childhood and the older years.

Changes to eating habits, resulting from altered lifestyles and reduced mobility, especially among the older-old, are often the reason for nutritional problems. The desire to maintain their wellness and a greater awareness of the physiology of ageing has contributed to the rapid increase in the market for 'nutraceuticals'. This is a category of products, positioned between nutrition and pharmaceuticals products, that claim to provide health benefits.



Urinary incontinence

Urinary incontinence is the involuntary leakage of urine. There are many main types. Stress incontinence – results from the muscles becoming too weak to prevent urine leaking when the bladder is under pressure. This typically occurs when coughing or laughing.

Urge incontinence – occurs when the person has an urgent desire to pass urine, resulting in leaking before reaching the toilet.

There is already an established market for the drugs, diagnostic and therapeutic products that help with this condition. In Japan, the world's oldest country, the sale of diapers for adults has now exceeded those for babies.

The increasing number of older consumers will both drive the market for products to help with the problem and increase the quantity of toilet facilities that retailers need to provide.

Sexual



Erectile Dysfunction is the inability for a man to maintain an erection of the penis during sexual intercourse. The primary reason why this happens is a drop in the levels of the steroid hormone Testosterone; however, there are many other physical and psychological factors that can also contribute to it

More information

More details about the effects of ageing can be found by downloading the free iPad app and in the book Marketing to the Ageing Consumer



Brands

The free version includes a simplified set of questions covering the customer journey including communications, online, retail, product and sales support. [Download the free AF Brands app.](#)

Marketing to the Ageing Consumer provides the tools and knowledge to profit from population ageing. Learn more about the book [here](#).

