

Generation X women experience age in seven ways, study finds

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Generation X women experience age in seven different ways according to a new study by Nottingham Business School (NBS), part of Nottingham Trent University.

Defined as those born between 1965 and 1980, the research explored how GenX women perceive their age and whether they experience aging in a chronological sense.

This was analyzed in relation to the implications for marketers, with GenX positioned as an important generational cohort due its close alignment with [consumer culture](#) and increased disposable spending power.

Over a period of three weeks and using online diaries, 19 women with varying [life circumstances](#) (aged between 41 and 55) reflected and reported on day-to-day incidents of personal age-related significance.

Analysis of more than 250 [diary entries](#) revealed seven intersecting, overlapping, and coinciding "frames" of aging that the researchers named Affective, Protest, Acceptance, Camouflage, Life-Stage, Inequities, and Inconsequence.

These age frames range from considering age as just an attitude, to outright rejection of age as a culturally imposed label. Some diarists did accept their [chronological age](#) but others used [beauty products](#) and clothing to camouflage theirs.

Looking after [young children](#) and/or aging parents strongly affected personal age perception as did the menopause, present or as a looming event. This generation also felt the weight of inequalities, unfairness, and bias that implied they were comparatively less valued—either than men of all ages and/or women younger than they.

Lastly, some diarists professed to regularly forgetting their chronological age, regarding this as irrelevant or unrelated to their personal identity.

Sharon-Marie Gillooley, principal lecturer in Marketing at NBS and

research lead, said, "It's becoming increasingly difficult to pin down the age of a GenX woman. This generation feels that it does not need to conform to age and gender related roles/rules like their parents, and therefore they are all experiencing and dealing with aging in different ways—some are 'happily old,' others are 'young at heart'; for some lives are full of possibility, whilst others feel [family responsibilities](#) weighing heavily on their shoulders."

This research suggests that marketing to GenX women presents a particular challenge for companies, as traditional demographic age-informed targeting is unlikely to work—particularly as the research also suggests these age frames "may apply to all of these women all of the time; all of these women some of the time; some of these women all of the time; or some of these women some of the time."

As a sizeable demographic group, with increasing [disposable income](#), GenX women are an increasingly attractive market. While this is a cohort that marketers should consider, the evidence suggests a chronological model of age categorization is not appropriate for their understanding of Gen X females. Rather, they are distributed and dispersed across many groups—a moving, rather than fixed and predictable target.

The study, now published in the *European Journal of Marketing*, suggests generalizing, or stereotyping, GenX women using an age-related appeal poses a major risk for brands that are in danger of distancing, not reaching, their target market.

More information: Sharon-Marie Gillooley et al, The self-perceived age of GenX women: prioritising female subjective age identity in marketing, *European Journal of Marketing* (2023). [DOI: 10.1108/EJM-04-2022-0267](#)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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