

Retiring Ageism

At SunLife, we celebrate life after 50. In our 2020 report, we're shining a light on the misrepresentation of the over 50s in Britain, in the hope we can retire ageism once and for all.



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The findings in this report are based on our research activity, which explored advertisements that are available for public viewing (in magazines, TV and Instagram) and the questionnaire responses of 2,000 Brits over 50.

Foreword

At SunLife, we celebrate life after 50. Last year, we showed that countless areas of society ignore people over 50 in favour of those who 'act', 'look' and 'seem' younger – whether intentional or not.

This is particularly prevalent in the workplace, advertising and the world of entertainment. And, unsurprisingly, it can have lasting effects on the mental health of those over 50 who feel misrepresented.

This year, we want to keep shining a spotlight on the issue of ageism – specifically, on the misrepresentation of the over 50s in society and the media.

Building on our findings in the 2019 Ageist Britain? report, and using additional evidence from the Centre for Ageing Better, we hope our research goes even further towards our ambition of retiring ageism once and for all.

To this aim, we asked people over 50 when they began to feel neglected and invisible in society, which brands they feel cater for them, and who or what neglects them the most – from advertising, employers, their community, and media such as films and television.

We also researched the best examples of over 50s' representation across certain brands, with some interesting (and perhaps surprising) results. Plus, we've included three real-life case studies of people over 50, all of whom prove that life after 50 is anything but boring!



A photograph of an elderly couple smiling and looking to the right. The man is on the left, wearing a dark blue t-shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a white top. They are outdoors with green foliage in the background. A semi-transparent white box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text.

Retiring Ageism in Britain

What's Retiring Ageism about?

We're highlighting the misrepresentation of the over 50s and the impact it has on people's health, both mentally and physically. We want to encourage people and brands to reconsider how they represent people in this age bracket – challenging outdated stereotypes about what it means to be over 50. By doing this, we hope to get one step closer to finally retiring ageism in the UK.

How prevalent is the misrepresentation of the over 50s in the UK?

Ageism is everywhere. Try flipping through a lifestyle magazine and counting the number of people over 50 you see in the advertisements. Chances are, there won't be many.

The fact is, even in 2020 very few brands actively champion the over 50s. They still often fail to recognise this age bracket at all. Young models are at the forefront of almost every magazine, TV and social media campaign.

And, if over 50s are included in an advertising campaign, it's often at their expense. Just think of negative phrases, such as 'anti-ageing' and 'anti-wrinkle'.

Our research focuses on **two** areas:

- 1** **Consumer research of 2,000 UK adults over 50** to find out when people feel they started to become invisible or neglected in society, who or what neglects over 50s the most, which brands champion the over 50s (and which ones don't), and how all this makes the over 50s think, act and feel, both physically and mentally.
- 2** **An analysis of some of the UK's biggest brands** representation of over 50s in marketing communications.

Key Findings

1. Over a third (35%) of Brits revealed they began to feel neglected or invisible in society at age 50. On average, Brits said they began to feel neglected or invisible at age 57.
2. People over 50 who feel neglected or invisible in society said this made them feel underappreciated (67%), let down (39%) and even depressed or anxious (36%). Almost one in ten (9%) also said it affected them physically and made them feel unwell.
3. Brits over 50 said the top three reasons for them feeling neglected or invisible in society were:
 - feeling as though brands don't advertise to people their age (36%)
 - feeling as though they can't apply for jobs due to their age (35%)
 - feeling as though there's no one their age featured in magazines (21%)
4. Over a quarter (29%) of Brits over 50 admitted this feeling of neglect made them less inclined to try new things and caused them to stay home and miss events (26%). 21% also said it made them less inclined to keep fit, active and healthy.
5. Brits over 50 don't feel they are positively represented in the media, with just 15% saying they felt national newspapers represented their age bracket well. Only 13% felt well-represented in lifestyle magazines, with this falling to just 12% for local newspapers.

35%

OF BRITS BEGAN TO
FEEL **NEGLECTED OR
INVISIBLE IN SOCIETY
AT AGE 50**

21%

OF BRITS OVER 50
FEEL **THERE IS NO ONE
THEIR AGE FEATURED
IN MAGAZINES**

6. In 2019, Dove's Instagram feed included someone over 50 in 15% of their posts that feature people – which equates to just 7% of their total posts.
7. In 2019, No.7 featured someone over 50 in three quarters (75%) of their TV advertising.
8. Across John Lewis' entire 2019 Instagram feed, which contained 652 posts, only one post featured someone who appeared to be over 50.
9. This was even more prevalent with Next, which posted 907 times on Instagram in 2019 – and yet never featured a single person who appeared to be over 50.
10. In 2019, L'Oréal worked with Vogue to produce a special edition magazine dedicated to normalising ageing and tackling ageism – the cover of which featured Jane Fonda, aged 81.

75%

OF PEOPLE IN 2019
FEATURED IN
**No.7 TV ADS
WERE OVER 50**

15%

OF PEOPLE IN 2019
FEATURED IN
**DOVE'S INSTAGRAM FEED
WERE OVER 50**

Why is **misrepresentation** of the over 50s an issue?

In our 2019 report, we found that ageism can have real-life consequences, from memory loss, to a shorter lifespan.

From as young as the age of six,* society starts telling us that growing old is a bad thing. So it's no wonder this negative attitude is reflected in almost all our media, including television, films, magazines, newspapers and advertising.

Just look the phrase 'anti-ageing'. Even if you do see someone over 50 in an advert, they are often accompanied by this or a similar term.

It's easy to see how a lifetime of exposure to this misrepresentation can undermine someone's sense of self-worth, with the attitude towards

ageing permeating not only people's personal lives, but their work lives too.

With 35% of over 50s feeling as though they can't apply for jobs due to their age, there is also evidence from the Centre for Ageing Better that those who are in the workplace feel as though their age has caused them to be overlooked for a promotion (9%), and limited their training opportunities (32%).*

In fact, 35% of people said they began to feel neglected or invisible in general society when they were just 50 years old. And 67% of these people felt underappreciated, 39% felt let down, and 36% even felt depressed or anxious.



35%
of over 50s feel
they can't apply
for jobs

*<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/Age-friendly-employers-stats.pdf>

Moreover, 9% said it affected them physically, and made them feel unwell. The Centre for Ageing Better describes this effect as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', with ageist stereotypes and misrepresentation leading older people to internalise society's views of their age and affect their own capabilities.* Furthermore, there has been evidence that age discrimination has been associated with increased odds of poor self-rated health and risk of serious health problems.*

Add to this the fact that 10% of people over 50 say they feel neglected and invisible because their family doesn't invite them out due to their age.

It all contributes to the ongoing belief that people above a certain age are somehow incapable, or not worth our time.

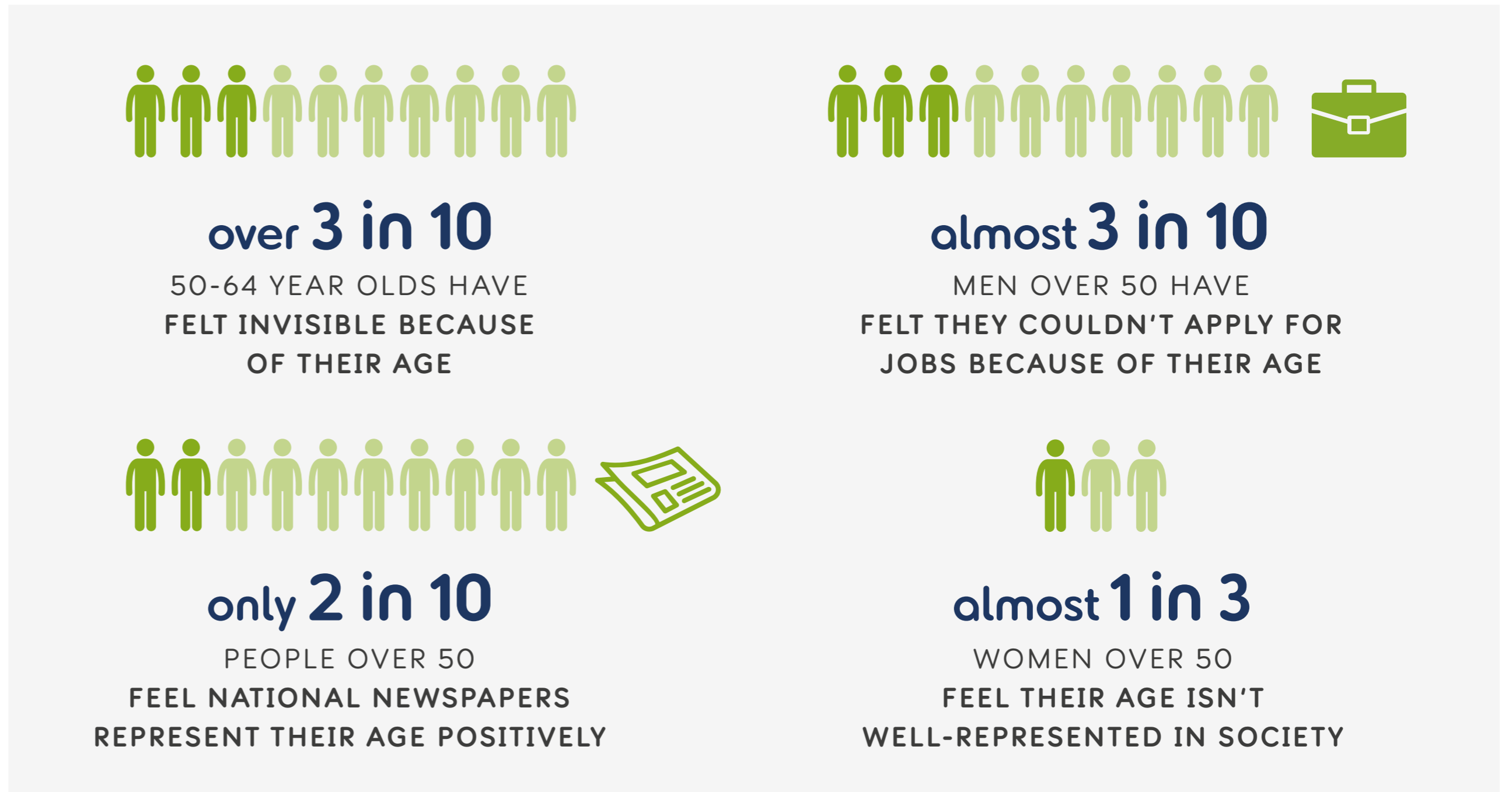
This means we're likely to keep applying these misconceptions to ourselves as we age. And that makes us more susceptible to negative health outcomes, such as breakdown of physical function and increased risk of dementia.*



*<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/Age-friendly-employers-stats.pdf>

The scale of the problem for people over 50

- 32% of 50-64 year olds say they've felt invisible in society because of their age, as well as 30% of over 65 year olds.
- People over 50 don't feel they are positively represented in the media. Just 15% say they feel national newspapers represent their age bracket well, and only 13% feel that lifestyle magazines represent them well – dropping to 12% for local newspapers.
- 36% of men over 50 felt like they couldn't apply for jobs because of their age, making them feel neglected or invisible in society.
- Just 7% of women over 50 completely agree their age is well represented in society, alongside just 9% of men in the same age bracket.



Retiring ageist stereotypes: why life over 50 is great

John Parkinson

When **John Parkinson** retired from teaching, he had no intention of slowing down. Retirement was just what he needed to tick off everything on his bucket list.

The 65-year-old launched a picture-framing business with his wife. He also used his new freedom to try the hobbies he'd never had time for before.

He learnt to snowboard, climbed the Delago Tower in the Italian Dolomites, and travelled all over the world.

And he didn't stop there – John also qualified as a Bob Ross landscape and floral artist. So, his new passions are keeping him busy.

“ I was surprised at people's reactions when I decided to pursue new skills, such as snowboarding, after I turned 50. I was just doing what I wanted to do! To me, age is just a number. ”





Cathy Wassell

When **Cathy Wassell**, 50, noticed her 14-year-old daughter was anxious, she had an idea – why not put together a box of activities and items to help her daughter keep busy?

Cathy grew the idea into Teen Calm, a subscription box to help other young adults in need.

Her idea has become a thriving initiative and received glowing feedback from grateful parents and teens.

Even though Cathy sometimes felt like an outsider in past companies that focused on a younger culture, she didn't let that stop her.

Having launched a digital marketing company five years earlier, she was confident her age wouldn't hold her back from trying something new.



The older I get, the less I'm bothered about other people's opinions of me unless they are people I love. I tend to have a down-to-earth approach to life and would never let people's view of my age hold me back!



Jill White

Jill White, 59, worked in the corporate world for 30 years. After retiring, she decided to take a leap of faith and turn her hand to fashion.

The idea first came to Jill in her previous job, when she was made to feel as though she'd reached a glass ceiling due to her age.

Then, when she was applying for new roles after an unexpected redundancy, she just couldn't find the right outfit. The kind of clothes she wanted didn't exist.

So, she launched Distinctively Me – now a successful clothing business fuelled by her passion for made-to-measure womenswear.

Her aim was (and still is) to remove ageism from the clothing industry.

“ My original retirement plan was to travel and volunteer, as I felt as though my 'useful life' was over after I turned 50. But being made redundant encouraged me to take a risk and start something new. I feel lucky that it has paid off and that Distinctively Me is able to offer clothes that inspire style and elegance for women of every age, shape or size! ”



**When and why do
we begin to feel
misrepresented?**





When do we begin to feel invisible or neglected by society?

Over 3 in 10 Brits say they felt neglected or invisible in society when they were just 50 years old. As we go on to explore, this is in no small part down to industries and brands either ignoring or misrepresenting the over 50s.

- Over a third (35%) of Brits say they began to feel neglected or invisible in society at age 50, with 15% citing age 60 and 11% saying age 55.
- 28% of 50-64 year olds say they've felt neglected in society because of their age, as well as 26% of over 65-year olds.
- 32% of 50-64 year olds say they've felt invisible in society because of their age, as well as 30% of over-65 year olds.

57

THE AVERAGE AGE
BRITS BEGIN TO
FEEL NEGLECTED OR
INVISIBLE IN SOCIETY

Who is **misrepresenting** the over 50s?

Some brands don't just misrepresent the over 50s – they ignore them entirely. The Centre for Ageing Better describes this sort of attitude towards older people as 'benign indifference', with ageism tending to manifest indirectly as a lack of respect* – possibly resulting in this age bracket being neglected or excluded entirely.

Over three quarters (78%) of Brits over 50 told us they haven't seen an accurate representation of their age bracket from companies or celebrities in the past year.

Overall, Brits over 50 said they felt most misrepresented by the fashion industry (56%), the sports industry (52%) and the employment/business industry (43%).

Even companies that represent the over 50s well in some areas do poorly in others.

3

BRANDS THAT BRITS OVER 50 FEEL
MISREPRESENT THEIR AGE THE MOST:



next



Brands cited were identified unprompted by survey respondents and independent analysis of their marketing activity accessible to UK consumers aged over 50.

For example, half (50%) of John Lewis TV adverts feature people over 50. But in their entire 2019 Instagram feed, containing 652 posts, only one featured someone over 50.

L'Oréal only featured one person over 50 in their Instagram feed – their CEO. And they promoted products that 'fill in wrinkles' and 'reduce fine lines'.

And while No.7 featured someone over 50 in three quarters (75%) of their TV adverts, some of their social media posts used anti-ageing language, such as 'fight signs of ageing' and 'discover best age defying results'.

[*https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Doddery-but-dear.pdf](https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/Doddery-but-dear.pdf)

How does it make people feel?

- Of the Brits over 50 who feel neglected or invisible in society, 67% say it makes them feel underappreciated, 39% say they feel let down, and 36% say it makes them feel depressed or anxious. 9% also said it makes them feel physically unwell.
- This makes over a quarter (29%) of Brits over 50 less inclined to try new things, with 26% saying it's caused them to stay home and miss events.
- This feeling of neglect and invisibility is more likely to make men over 50 feel let down (41%) than women (37%), with women more likely to feel upset (27%) than men (22%).

“ I find women my own age can sometimes be more ageist than society itself – some will tell me I’m ‘mad’ or ‘you shouldn’t be doing that at your age’ for doing certain activities or wearing certain clothes. I think that’s probably a result of most brands not promoting an older audience and the message that older people should stop doing certain things at a certain age. ”

Annie Bath, aged 63
Customer Service Manager



almost **7 in 10**

OF BRITS OVER 50 SAID THEY FELT UNDERAPPRECIATED



only **1 in 3**

SAID THIS MADE THEM FEEL DEPRESSED



only **1 in 5**

SAID THESE FEELINGS MADE THEM LESS INCLINED TO KEEP FIT AND HEALTHY

Is representation getting worse, or better?

1 in 4

BRITS OVER 50 SAY
REPRESENTATION
OF THEIR AGE
HAS IMPROVED

Despite over three quarters (78%) of Brits over 50 saying they haven't seen accurate representation of their age by companies and celebrities in the last year, over 1 in 4 (29%) say representation of their age has actually improved over the last five years.

So, while there's still lots of work to be done to tackle negative stereotypes about ageing, things are looking up. Let's take a look at the industries and brands that are playing their part...



Retiring Ageism for good



Who's representing the over 50s and how?

Here we explore the companies helping to retire ageism for good through fair representation and marketing campaigns.

When we asked Brits over 50 where they saw a positive representation of their age most, the clear winner was television – with 56% saying TV programmes represented their age well. (This dropped to just 25% for films.)

Regarding industries, 42% felt the travel sector best represented their age. Then the finance and insurance industry (40%), followed by the food and drink industry (34%).

And over a third (34%) of women over 50 felt the cosmetics industry represented their age well.

WHERE BRITS OVER 50 SAW A POSITIVE REPRESENTATION OF THEIR AGE:

Television
56%

Films
25%

Travel sector
42%

Finance and insurance sector
40%

Food and drink industry
34%

Cosmetics industry
34%

3

BRANDS THAT BRITS OVER 50 FEEL CHAMPION THEIR AGE THE MOST:

M&S
EST. 1884

L'ORÉAL®



Best practice brands

“ Ageing is a gift, so we think it’s about time it’s celebrated ”

Dove



- Apple featured people over 50 in 14% of their 2019 Instagram posts that contained people.
- They used more than one over 50s model, instead of just one across all posts.
- Almost half (46%) of their TV adverts featured someone over 50.



- Barclays featured people over 50 in 11% of their 2019 Instagram posts – which we felt was a good reflection of their customer base.



- No.7 featured people over 50 in three quarters (75%) of their TV advertising – the highest of all the brands we looked at.
- Their adverts showed both older and younger women using products and looking equally glamorous and beautiful, challenging a range of negative stereotypes.



- Dove included people over 50 in 15% of their 2019 Instagram posts that feature people – 7% of their total posts.
- They were the only brand of those we investigated to bring age into the conversation, while also using positive and celebratory language.
- Their television advert used the phrase ‘where grey looks ravishing in red’, as a stylish older woman appeared on screen.
- All this garnered Dove lots of positive consumer comments on social media.



- The DIY chain and department store included people over 50 in half (50%) of their TV adverts in 2019.
- B&Q are also well known for employing people over 50 and for embracing age as an asset, thanks to the knowledge and experience it can bring.

A league table of brands

To find out how well certain brands represented over 50s, we collected metrics from their social media posts, advertising and UK media coverage between 1st January-31st December 2019. Then we gave each metric a weight, which allowed us to create an index score for each brand.

This revealed how the brands performed against one another, so we could see which ones represented the over 50s positively, and which ones didn't.

Opposite is a league table showing how well these brands represent the over 50s, according to their index score.

INDEX SCORE	BRAND
1	
2	
3	L'ORÉAL®
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	ESTÉE LAUDER
9	next
10	M&S <small>EST. 1884</small>

A breakdown of the league table

Scoring the highest on our index, **Dove** often featured a wide range of people over 50 in their media, and didn't shy away from bringing age into the conversation as something to be celebrated rather than fixed.

No.7 ranked second, thanks to the high volume of people over 50 in their media campaigns. Although their Instagram did use anti-ageing language, like 'fight signs of ageing'.

L'Oreal's high score is thanks to age-positive media coverage. But, like No.7, they also used anti-ageing language like 'fill in wrinkles'.

Barclays doesn't intentionally bring age into the conversation, but their Instagram featured people of all ages, including those over 50. And, like Barclay's, **Apple** reflected their broad customer base on their Instagram.

Our research showed that **B&Q** are still well known for employing people over 50 – something that could have been highlighted much more in their media communications.

John Lewis ranked sixth, thanks to their lack of over 50s representation on platforms such as Instagram. But they did feature over 50s in half their TV adverts.

Next had no representation of the over 50s at all across their advertising, resulting in an alienation of the entire age bracket.

But perhaps the most surprising result is **M&S**, who scored lowest overall. Only five of their 1,068 Instagram posts in 2019 included people over 50. And in the 6% of TV adverts where they did feature someone in this age bracket, they were shown taking a nap while younger people socialised around them.

This hasn't gone unnoticed, with one person leaving the following comment on one of M&S's Instagram posts:

“ Take M&S, which steadfastly refuses to accept who its market is, partly due to ageism and partly buyers being too young to understand the market. I may be M&S's target shopper, but I don't want to dress as a 16-year-old or like my granny. There is a marketplace for me but, sadly, currently, it is on the internet. ”



A photograph of a woman and an older man walking together in a field. The woman is on the left, wearing a grey sweater, and the man is on the right, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards each other. The background features a vast field of tall grass, scattered trees, and rolling mountains under a bright sky.

Conclusions and methodology



What can we do to retire ageism?

Ageism may be everywhere, but that doesn't mean it has to stay this way.

To really make a difference, we need to change the way we think about ageing. Growing older isn't a scary monster that we should try and prevent at all costs. In fact, it can be quite the opposite – as our three inspiring case studies show.

But how can we change people's preconceptions about ageing? A good start would be changing the way we represent people over 50 in the media.

Endless adverts, images, articles, programmes, films and social media posts have been reinforcing the idea that 'young' is 'better' for years. How? By either excluding the over 50s from

their content completely, or by only showing them alongside anti-ageing products and language.

So, let's start by getting brands to not just ignore life after 50, but celebrate it. We want all ages to be represented equally in the media, the workplace, the entertainment industry and our communities.

After all, with age comes experience, confidence and knowledge – something often overlooked by the UK's biggest brands. And this negative attitude to ageing is making countless people feel undervalued.

Growing older is inevitable for all of us. Let's champion the fact that age is just a number. Together, we can retire ageism for good.

let's start by getting brands to

not just ignore life after 50, but celebrate it

Our pledges for 2020

This year we want to go further. That's why we're making three pledges to help retire ageism once and for all. Through these pledges, we want to encourage brands to celebrate life over 50 and help all ages feel represented, heard and championed.

1

We'll present the findings in this report to the leading advertising and public relations bodies in the UK, including the ASA, CIPR and PRCA, with our aim to help inform their guidance to brands in the UK.

2

We will develop a series of best practice guidelines for brands and media who market to the over 50s. These will be made available for free online and will include a series of toolkits for brands and media to use and refer to in their future campaigns.

3

And, in conjunction with the Centre of Ageing Better, we'll issue our research findings and share our image libraries with leading mental health charities across the UK, including Mind and Samaritans. By doing this, we will aim to inform their approach to supporting those aged over 50, highlighting that we've found they often feel underappreciated, let down and neglected by society.

Methodology

The research in this report is based on two areas: (1) consumer research of people aged 50 and above (2) research into the best examples of over 50s representation of brands in the UK, based on publicly available marketing activity.

Consumer research

A nationally representative survey of UK adults over the age of 50 (2,000) was carried 17th March to 26th March in 2020. Research was conducted by Critical Research and analysed by Citypress.

Research cited by the Centre for Ageing Better was conducted by YouGov. The total sample size was 4,064 adults aged 50+. Fieldwork was undertaken between 19th July-3rd August 2018, and the survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults aged 50+.

Brand research

Brand research was collected from a range of sources, including the selected brand's social posts, advertising, and UK media coverage between 1st January-31st December 2019.

This data was then collated into an index or 'league table' according to the following metrics, which were then analysed and combined by Citypress to create an index score for each brand:

Instagram: from the selected brand's Instagram account

- % of posts that feature people over 50 over the amount of overall posts (8%)
- % of posts that feature people over 50 over the amount of posts that feature people (8%)
- % of posts featuring people that feature people over 50 where being older 50 is celebrated (10%)
- More than one person over 50 featured in posts overall (i.e. different actors) (6%)

- Sentiment (positive or negative) for top 5 consumer comments made on the posts that are feature people over 50 (8%)

TV advertising: from the selected brand's YouTube channel and/or Google search

- % of ads that feature people over 50 over the amount of overall ads (12%)
- % of ads featuring people over 50 over the amount of ads that feature people (12%)
- % of ads featuring people that feature people over 50 where being older 50 is celebrated (16%)

UK media coverage: From media monitoring tool Factiva

- Number of articles positively mentioning the selected brand and "ageism" (10%)

Number of articles positively mentioning the selected brand and "discrimination" (10%)

If you have any questions about the SunLife Retiring Ageism 2020 Report or any of our past reports, contact:

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