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Biological Age and its Value to Marketing Theory and Practice

ABSTRACT:

Aging has profound effects on how we consume, yet, marketers too often simplify aging to the mere passage of time (chronological age; ChronAge). This simplification overlooks fundamental biological and psychological aspects of the aging process, and ignores meaningful variation within ChronAge segments. In this paper, we pioneer a comprehensive framework that integrates biological aging into consumer behavior theory. In doing so, we emphasize and discuss the need for studying the aging consumer using multi-dimensional approaches. We also introduce a measure of biological age (BioAge), derived from epigenetic data, to the field of marketing. Using data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), we demonstrate empirically that BioAge contains distinct information from ChronAge, and explains a substantial share of variation in consumer activities and spending above ChronAge. We observe BioAge to be most useful for predicting social activities performed out of the home (e.g., volunteer work) and spending on nondurables, charitable giving, and recreation (e.g., vacations). We conclude by discussing implications and best practices, such as how BioAge may enhance segmentation and customer lifetime value optimization, as well as the unique ethical and legal considerations facing researchers and practitioners aiming to incorporate BioAge into their methodological arsenal.