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Editorial

Culture and Aging. Exploring older generations through the lenses of shifting patterns

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Worldwide, the phenomenon of population aging has been acknowledged by statistics, and the irreversible rate of aging presents exceptional challenges. In 1950, only 22% of the European population belonged to the age group of 50+. In 2019, the same age group accounted for 38% of the European population. In the next 30 years, the percentage of older adults (+50 and above) is projected to reach 46% of the population (Rogelj & Bogataj, 2019). However, despite the significant demographic shift, only recently academic researchers and policymakers have begun to recognize the importance of the rapidly growing silver segment within the population structure and its implications for the social and economic development of society for the coming decades. In response to the rapidly growing older market, the business world has reacted differently (Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2011) to the demand of population aging: some appear to be unaware of the existence of this phenomenon; others are considering it loss-making; while few are actively seeking for solutions to be age-friendly pioneering by developing and promoting innovative products aiming to silver consumers.

The common public discourse surrounding population aging has emphasized economic challenges, such as increasing strain on pension systems, rising healthcare costs, and potential workforce decline. However, the need to overlook the economic opportunities that can arise from an aging population and address the societal challenges of the current demographic transformation led to a valuable new paradigm that has been called the "silver economy". In a broader sense, the silver economy has been defined "as the sum of all economic activity that serves the needs of people aged 50 and over, including the products and services they purchase directly and the further economic activity this spending generates. Thus, silver economy encompasses a unique cross-section of economic activities related to production, consumption and trade of goods and services relevant for older people, both public and private, and including direct and indirect effects" (European Commission, 2018, p. 3). Unfortunately, the silver economy concept has been scarcely addressed in the management and marketing peer review journals, most of the data being provided mostly by social science.

As the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Ageing Society (2016) acknowledged, the silver economy recognizes that older consumers represent an increasingly economically influential market segment with distinct demands and purchasing power, a driver of the mainstream policy frame and strategies in the developed as well as emerging economies. In the same fashion, a relatively recent European report – *The Silver Economy* (2018) – has revealed that the silver economy can play a crucial role in supporting various sectors across the EU member states. The report on Silver Economy (2018, pp. 5-6) showed that housing, food, and transportation accounted for the largest share of expenditure, amounting to approximately €1.6 trillion or 53% of the total private consumption by 50+ population. In 2015, the Silver Economy is believed to have made a substantial contribution, of over €4.2 trillion to the GDP and supporting more than 78 million jobs within the broader EU economy. As the elderly population becomes the fastest-growing demographic group in Europe, their influence on the demand for products and services is expected to shape the market landscape.

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Consequently, there will be an increased focus on producing goods and providing services tailored to the needs of older adults. Despite this new dynamics of later-life consumption, aging consumers have been the 'invisible majority' in marketing strategies (Yoon & Powell, 2012) in the first decade of the Millennium. While media advertising has often exemplified visual ageism (Loos & Ivan, 2018), there has been a shift in recent advertising practices towards a more inclusive and age-friendly approach. For instance, campaigns like Gillette's *Handle with Care*, Dolce & Gabbana's spring-summer 2015 ads, and Adidas' campaign have employed older models to promote the concept of embracing aging bodies and advocating for intergenerational equity and care for older individuals. In line with the silver economy paradigm, there is increasing recognition of the importance of targeting and appealing to older adults as a significant consumer group. The mature segment of marketing (50+) is often characterized by a higher level of disposable income and a strong willingness to spend on products and services. Moreover, the research also indicates a shift in advertising strategies (Moody & Sood, 2011; McCann, 2017) towards more inclusive and positive portrayals of older adults. Advertising messages are now framed as promoting active and independent lifestyles, challenging stereotypes associated with aging. This age-friendly advertising approach resonates with the silver consumer's needs, aspirations, and diverse interests. By featuring older individuals in a variety of roles and contexts, advertisers are attempting to reflect the diversity and complexity of the aging population. Furthermore, researchers and policymakers are encouraged to avoid stigmatization of older adults and negative assumptions about aging, focusing instead on portraying them as being active members of society.

The current issue is the result of the growing preoccupation of academia with exploring older audiences from the viewpoint of their current position within the larger body of society: as behavior and consumption patterns are changing across different age groups, the older generation is increasingly scrutinized to acquire a better understanding about their interactions with technology and devices, with accessing services, and with cultural and sustainable practices.

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Guest editors' biographies

Alina DUDUCIUC is currently an associate professor at the College of Communication and Public Relations within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania, where she teaches *Social Psychology* and *Social Psychology of Advertising* at BA and MA levels. Since she received her Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Bucharest (2010), her research interests revolve around analyzing health communication using ICTs and advertising with a social psychology approach.

Monica BÎRĂ is currently a senior lecturer at the College of Communication and Public Relations within the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania, where she is teaching BA and MA level courses on social media listening methods and techniques and takes an interest in creative industries. She has also been involved in research related to technology usage and digital communication later in life.

Loredana IVAN is an associate professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania. She has a Ph.D. in Sociology and a post-doctorate in Social Psychology. She is currently the chair of the European Network of Aging Studies (ENAS). Her areas of interest include: interpersonal communication mediated by technology; fake news & generations; family communication. She has led several special issues in the area of aging and communication technology ("Fighting Fake News: A Generational Approach", *Societies,* 2021; "Ageing and Interpersonal Communication", *Societies*, 2020; "Ageing and Digital Communication", *ESSACHESS - Journal for Communication Studies)* and she is the author and co-author of several book chapters that draw on ageism and digital communication later in life.

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