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### **What middle-aged and older women really want!**

**Background:** The fashion and media industries target women with the notion of eternal youth in the assumption that this is what they aspire to. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. For older women, underrepresentation or misrepresentation in fashion and media advertising results in negative attitudes towards the product and often towards themselves.

**Method:** 509 females (40- 89 years) were surveyed on make-up use, reasons for following adverts for beauty products aimed at their age group, perceptions and impact of these, and preference for use of older models. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis are presented.

**Findings:** While more than half the sample wore make-up to look good, and 75% to feel confident, less than 3% wore make-up to look younger. The majority paid attention to advertising for beauty products aimed at their age group to obtain information about new products, but more than half thought they were not represented accurately or sufficiently and 20% felt they were ignored. Almost all liked seeing older models in adverts and wanted to see older models used more frequently in all types of advertising especially for beauty products aimed at their age group. They claimed a realistic representation would increase attention to the advert, trust in the product and likelihood to purchase the product. Perceptions of invisibility seemed due to the constant messages that older women have little to offer, that ageing is negative and should be fought at all costs. Participants wanted to see older models used more in advertising to make them feel better about themselves, more confident, more accepting of their changing bodies and more willing to make an effort to look good.

**Discussion:** Although two thirds of our participants liked the information in adverts for beauty products aimed at their age group, the majority disliked the use of models who were young or digitally altered as this gave an unrealistic picture of them and what the product could do. Middle-aged and older women use beauty products generally to increase confidence and make them feel good, not young. Some participants mistrusted and had negative perceptions of the adverts and as a result were less likely to purchase the products. Such strategies could help these women relate to the models, pay attention to and trust the adverts, and ultimately purchase the products being aimed at them.