

Advertising and Middle-Aged and Older Women: An Online Survey

Objectives: To investigate the influence of advertising in general and beauty products in particular on middle-aged and older women.

Design: The study used a cross-sectional design.

Methods: Ethical approval was obtained prior to 509 women aged 40 to 89 years being recruited. The participants completed an online study containing items on the representation of middle-aged and older women in advertising in general and in beauty products in particular and the impact of this on their self-perceptions. Descriptive statistics were obtained for closed-ended questions; responses to open-ended questions were content analysed.

Results: Between 90.4 and 91.4% of participants believed that they are not represented accurately or sufficiently in different kinds of advertisements. A large majority (93.5-97.8%) indicated a desire to see older models in advertisements giving reasons such as “it would reflect society more accurately” and would make them feel better about themselves, less invisible, and more valued by society. Approximately one third indicated that the representation in advertisements for beauty products in particular has a negative effect on their confidence, sense of self-worth, and perception of appearance.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that middle-aged and older women are discontent with their representation in advertising. This has a negative effect on self-confidence, self-worth, and perception of appearance. These findings are important and timely because they highlight the need for psychologists and the fashion and beauty industries to pay greater attention to the influence of advertising on older women’s needs and well-being.