

June 2024

The *New* Middle Age

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The Situation

Society's definition of middle age is experiencing a *renaissance*.

Historical milestones like first-time homebuying and parenthood are being postponed to older ages while breakthroughs in technology and medicine are extending lifespans. At the same time, cultural depictions and perceptions of midlife have transitioned from stereotypical tropes to more nuanced, and sometimes glamorized, portrayals. But there's still more that can be done to shine a light on the full glory, wisdom, and power of this cohort.

As marketers continue to invest significant time and money in a youth-focused culture — where many are financially dependent on their parents for longer — it's essential that brands focus on the cohort that has the most power to spend: middle-agers with \$2 trillion. When expanding this group to include those who *feel* middle-aged, we uncovered an even bigger untapped spending power: \$4.5T.

This study explores how different demographics perceive midlife and how those who identify with this group experience it. We dug deep to better understand the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes surrounding this life stage.

Our inquiry delves into several key aspects: What age range is typically considered middle age? Are the experiences and perceptions of middle age similar for men and women? What are the definitive markers of middle age beyond age numbers, and do individuals approach this stage with acceptance or apprehension?

This report examines whether midlife affects brand preferences and spending habits, and what cultural tensions are most prevalent for middle-agers. We've also evaluated the effectiveness of brand communications targeted at this specific cohort, revealing insightful patterns and distinctions for marketers to embrace.

Findings

Perception Disparity:

Middle age is generally defined as being between the ages of 40 and 60. But people's perception of where this life stage starts and ends varies depending on their age. Younger people tend to think it starts earlier, while older people think it starts later.

Middle Age Isn't a Demo, It's a *Feeling*:

Brands would be remiss to think that the current middle-aged audience begins and ends with Gen X when portions of Millennials, Boomers, and even Gen Z say they feel middle-aged. Those who frequently disregard these perspectives and fixate on conventional demographics are neglecting a substantial segment of potential customers who identify with this cohort. Including them nearly doubles the population of midlife adults, from 48M to 92M.

By solely targeting Gen X as a demographic representing all middle-agers, approximately \$2T in spending power is left on the table.*

Stress Aging vs. Renewed Energy:

- Younger people who feel middle-aged tend to be parents (64%) and have lower incomes and fewer assets; they're stretched thin on resources and that stress is aging them prematurely.
- Older people who see themselves as middle-aged are more often empty nesters (57%) who have renewed energy and resources to focus on themselves for the first time in a long time. For them, middle age is the start of a new beginning.

Findings

Gendered Anti-Aging Language:

Despite society's evolved mentality around the power of getting older, 70% say they feel pressure to look and act younger than their age. Traditional tropes surrounding anti-aging efforts remain, and they differ based on gender, with distinct approaches for men and women. Our analysis of the most common words and phrases used in media headlines reveals a gendered discrepancy in language. While both genders are told to prioritize anti-aging, messaging aimed at women often carries an underlining sense of shame and equates youth with attractiveness, while men are urged to adopt an aggressive stance with terms like "fighting aging" and "biohacking."

Middle Age (Still) Has a Visibility Problem:

Middle-aged spending makes up roughly 40% of all spending in the US. However, our audit of commercials from Interbrand's Most Valuable 100 Brands shows that fewer than 20% prominently feature middle-aged people. Even fewer reflected the real-life experiences of middle-aged Americans (vs. simply featuring a middle-aged spokesperson).

Social Media Influence:

With a whopping 92% of middle-aged people using social media daily, the perception and experience of this life stage are heavily influenced by platforms like Facebook and even youth-led platforms like TikTok. Despite this, there's a noticeable gap in strategy as many marketers fail to tap into the massive influence middle-aged content creators hold. As a result, they're losing out on an opportunity to authentically engage with this audience.

Loyalty is Up For Grabs:

Over 2/3 of middle-aged people say they change brands once they reach midlife, and 79% told us they are faced with an overwhelming number of brands to choose from. With half saying that advertising is out of touch, brands will need to work harder to get this fickle, less impulsive group to part with their money.

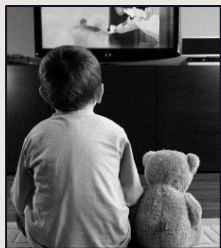
01

Modern **Middle Age**

Historical events shaping today's middle age

Contextualizing the values and behavior of those currently in midlife requires a look into the past. The pivotal cultural moments below, spanning from groundbreaking technological innovations to high-profile world events and memorable pop culture phenomena, have been critical in shaping the habits, attitudes, and beliefs of today's middle-agers. These shared cultural touchpoints unify people across geography, race, gender, and class.

Saturday Morning Cartoons



This ritual is a core memory for today's middle-agers. Many are nostalgic for its representation of a simpler time.

1960s – 1990s

Sally Ride



As the first American woman traveled to space, an entire generation on the ground felt gender equality was one step closer.

1983

Berlin Wall Falls



This event, which united East and West Germany, cemented Western Capitalism as the prevailing ideology over Communism.

1989

Facebook Goes Broad



Facebook opens its app beyond college students, and many now middle-agers flocked to the platform to document and share their lives.

2006

Jennifer Lopez



At age 50, JLo re-wears her iconic dress from the 2000 Grammy Awards during the Versace runway show, creating a full-circle cultural moment.

2019

1977

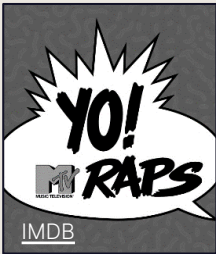
Video Games



The first generation to have console video games, they developed a keen sense of playfulness that carried into adulthood.

1988

Yo! MTV Raps



This show's launch ushered in the mainstream adoption of hip hop culture, music, fashion and ideology.

1995

Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal



Today's middle-aged people had a front-row seat to a scandal that defined a generation just as they were coming of age.

2008-2016

First Gen X President



Obama's presidency was duly significant as both the first Black president and the first of the current middle-aged generation.

2024

Radical Candor



More open conversations about menopause amidst rising search interest, product developments and influencer conversation.

Middle age isn't what it used to be

Today's middle-aged population faces more challenges than those just one generation ago.

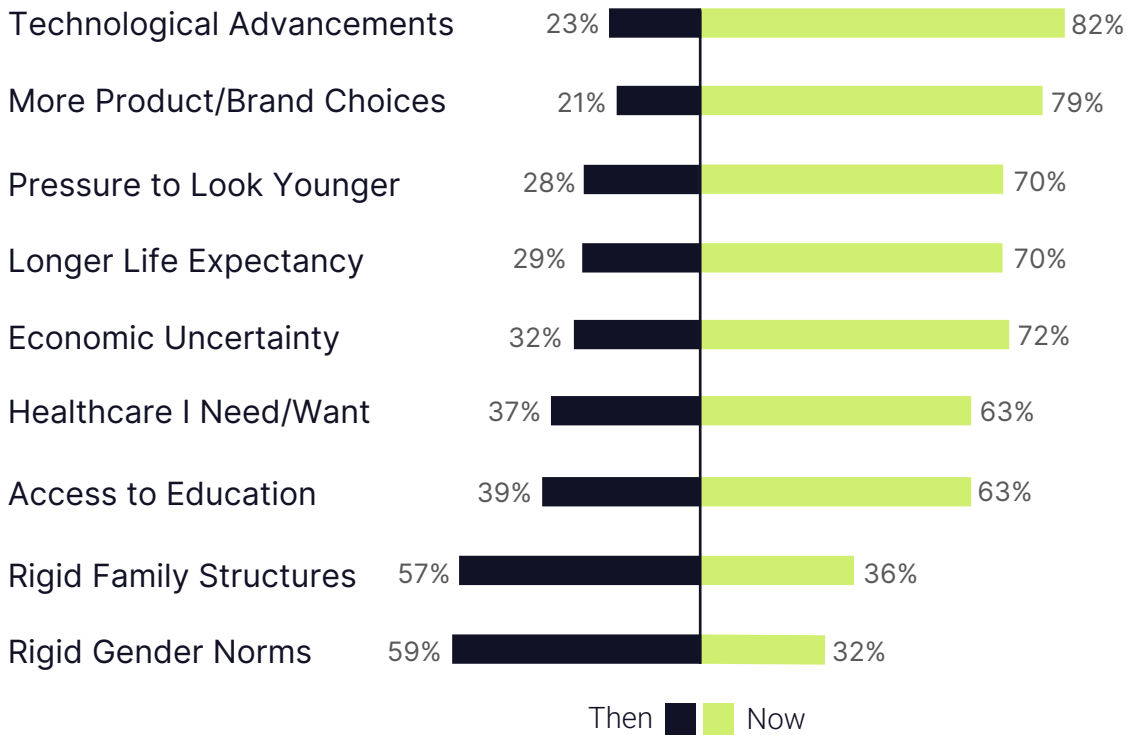
We asked all our respondents which issues they felt were more of a factor in the lives of middle-aged people now vs. those in the generation prior. The results showcase a significant increase in areas across the board — things as varied as tech advancements, choice paralysis, pressure to maintain a youthful appearance, and economic uncertainty. And with increasing life expectancies, today's middle-agers will have to manage these issues for a longer stretch of their lives.



Debbie Dujanovic
@debbieksl

You don't know how good it feels to be 55 years old, install a ROKU, add all the apps, hear the Netflix ta da and not speed dial my son. He doesn't even know I did this on my own yet. [#Sundayvibes](#)

Uniquely a Factor of Middle-Aged Lives



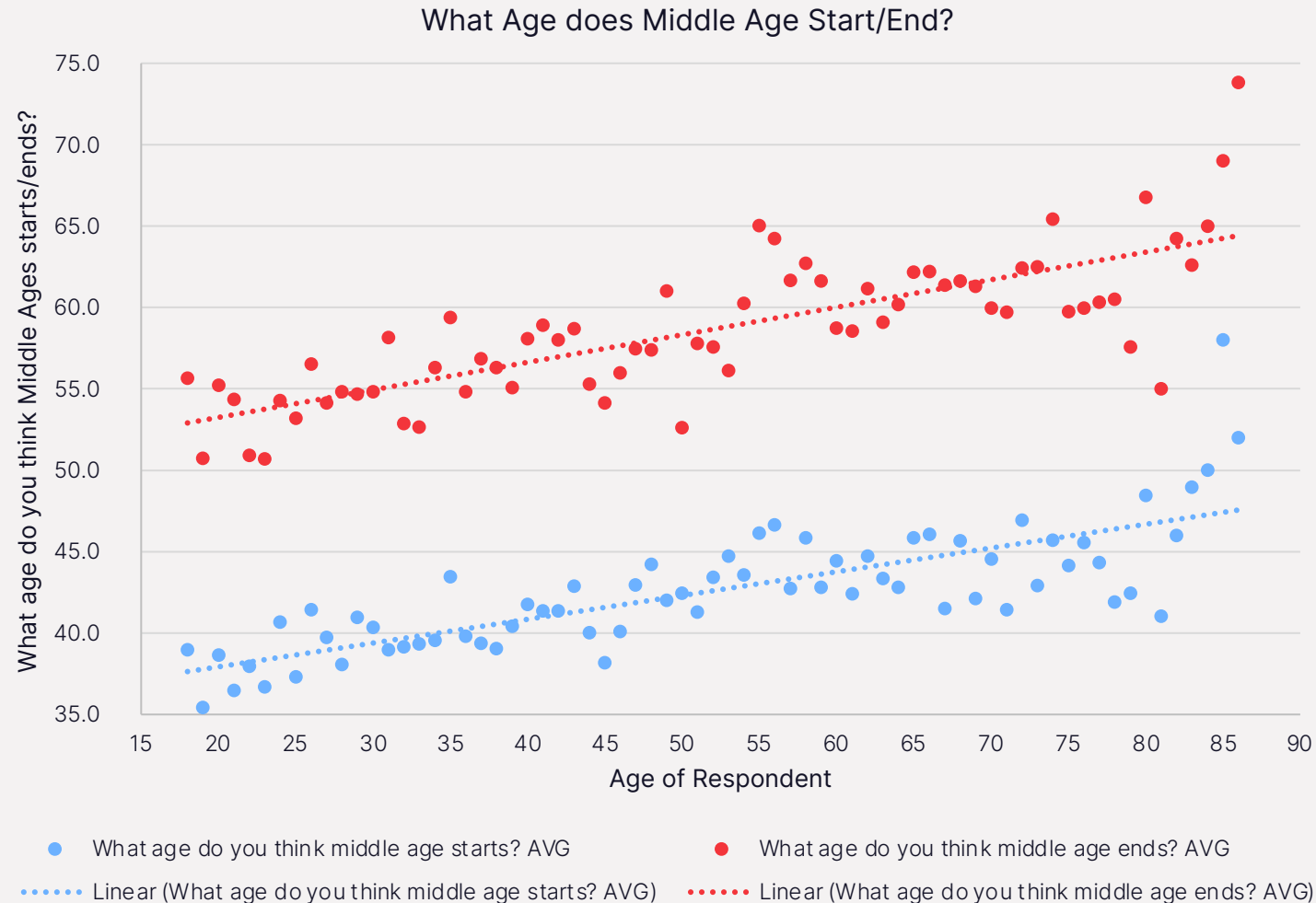
It extends across a wider age range than typically defined, expanding its size and market potential

We asked our respondents: at what age does middle age begin and end?

The median response is in line with the common definition, ranging from age 40 to 60 — meaning that most middle-aged people are part of Gen X, with a few “elder millennials” at the younger end of the age range and a few boomers at the older end. But looking deeper at their answers shows how people of different ages responded uniquely. Younger respondents said middle age starts and ends earlier, while older respondents said middle age starts and ends later.



For brands, this means understanding that middle age isn't a fixed demographic. Perceptions vary wildly — knowing what your audience thinks middle age is, when it starts, and what it looks like will be key to resonating with them.



For some, it starts when the optimism of youth fades

The Aging Effects of Stress

For an entire generation that feels failed by the social contract of the American dream — the promise of achieving a better life than your parents — faced with things like increased anxiety and skyrocketing housing prices, it's no wonder many young people are starting to feel like youth is a distant memory.

Among our <40 respondents:

1/2

who *feel middle-aged*
have <\$50k HHI

57%

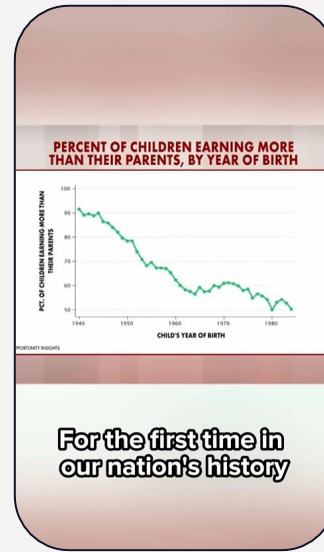
are concerned with
balancing *financial stability*
and *retirement*
planning



Underwater working two jobs.



Stress widens the middle-age gap. This creator talks about how a midlife crisis can happen at any age due to fears and anticipation for the future.



This video by NYU Professor, entrepreneur and author of the newly published book *The Algebra of Wealth*, explains the financial well-being of young people is deliberately being sacrificed to keep older generations wealthy.



For brands, this means creating simple programs where the value exchange focuses on hard currency more than things like community or influence.

For others, it's when they begin to settle down

Under 40 and Over the Hill

Why would people under 40 feel middle-aged arguably ahead of their time? The answer is part social and part cultural. For those under 40 who feel middle-aged, nearly 2/3 (64%) are parents.

Parents under 40 (Millennial parents) are perpetually exhausted, making them feel like they're aging faster. This group is also more likely to associate middle age with things like obligations, less free time to spend as they want, and increased family demands — all defining aspects of life as a parent. Millennial moms are still doing a large part of the domestic work and most of the household worrying.



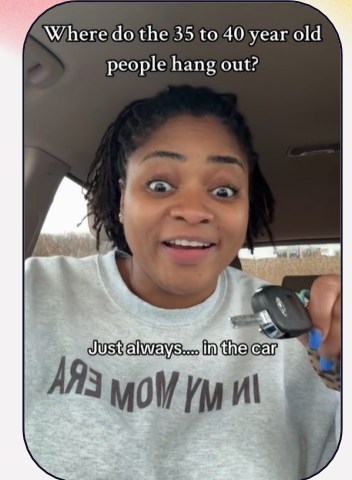
Marketers should focus messaging on acknowledging middle-aged parents' exhaustion around maintaining a façade. Give them safe spaces to vent, connect and ultimately relieve pressure.

2/3

Of <40 respondents who say they *feel middle-aged* are parents



Following TikTok's "We're ___" trend, we're middle-age moms, we uber our kids all day without pay; we're 38 but still think we're 28.



Car for eating, crying, lunch breaks, crying, transporting. Always in the car.



The New York Times
The Millennial Mother Midlife Crisis

"Call it the millennial mother midlife crisis, or M.M.M.C...is about maintaining a chipper facade, the appearance of having it together while quietly imploding...like a swan, an animal gliding easily on the surface while paddling furiously beneath the water."
– Hannah Seligson

For many, the body shows the first signs

Middle age begins when the body stops functioning smoothly

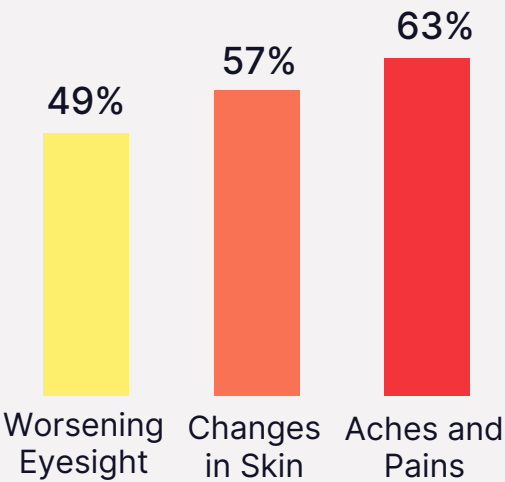
When asked what life markers indicate that you've hit middle age, respondents of all ages reported physical changes. Whether a person feels middle-aged or not, the physical symptoms that usher in midlife can take a person by surprise and jolt them into focusing on health and longevity.

For women, the biomarkers include perimenopause and menopause. For men, the focus is more on hair loss (or hair growth in odd places like eyebrows, ears and nose).



This transition prompts not only shifts in spending habits but also a reevaluation of priorities, with an emphasis on injury prevention and overall well-being. Marketers must recognize the emotional impact of these physical changes and connect empathetically, aiding individuals in rebuilding confidence and embracing this new chapter of life.

How do you know when you've hit middle-aged?



Electra310
@NewElectra310

Best part of perimenopause is "is this a symptom or is this just my body hitting middle age?"



Investments in and research around women's health at middle age is just now starting to get attention and financial traction.

Relevant brands who support these efforts may stand out in a crowded field of products promising to help.

Middle age can also stretch further than expected

Middle Age is a Starting Line for the Not-Quite-Retirement Ready

The older outliers — those over 60 who still see themselves as middle-aged — have an entirely different set of reasons for feeling middle-aged years after they've surpassed the traditional cutoff.

Nearly two-thirds are empty nesters living with a spouse but with no kids under 18 at home. And 75% own their homes, likely giving them some financial stability. 40% of them have a HHI of \$100k+, meaning they have some disposable income. Nothing is standing between them and living a life of leisure and pleasure.



Marketers need to think differently when targeting those over 60. Focus on their lifestyle and the sense of rebirth they're experiencing. Help them discover what makes them happy after a life dedicated to others — whether a partner, kids, or a job — by encouraging them to live for themselves. They share a similar independent spirit with younger, responsibility-free individuals; marketers can tap into this energy, provided they do so in age-appropriate ways.

*"I'm living **like my kids** — sleeping in, staying up late, eating cereal at midnight and binge-watching whatever I want! I don't feel like my age at all."*

— Female, 65

57%

Of middle-aged people age are *empty nesters*



What we thought empty nesting would be like...



vs. what it's really been like 🍷

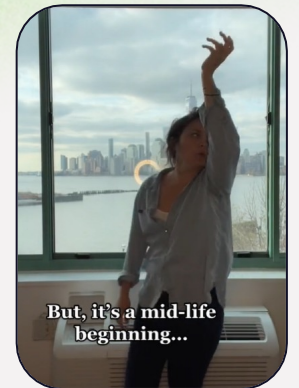
Empty nesters traveling the world.

91%

Feel *younger* than their age



Grandparents are opting for younger-sounding monikers.



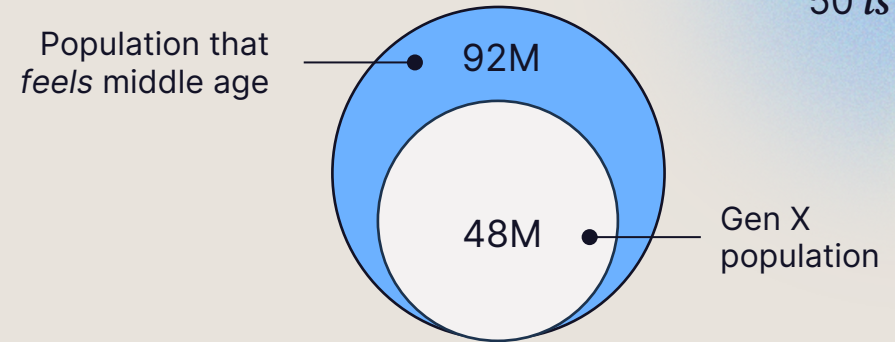
But, it's a mid-life beginning...

This creator is midlife-ing and empty-nesting her way through NYC with videos about the phase in life where you get to choose yourself for the first time. "On a Living Spree"

Self-identification doubles the size of the middle-aged market

While overall responses indicated that middle age runs from age 40-60, when we asked people if they considered themselves to be middle-aged, roughly 1 in 5 people *under* 40 said yes. 1 in 5 over 60 said they still see themselves as middle-aged.

Taking this extended audience into account increases the middle-aged population by 42%. Brands looking to expand their appeal should consider targeting the middle-aged *mindset* rather than a particular demographic.



65%
Agree that
40 is the new 30 and
50 is the new 40

Who sees themselves as middle-aged?



1 in 4

**Millennials
and Under**



8 in 10

Gen X



1 in 5

Over 60

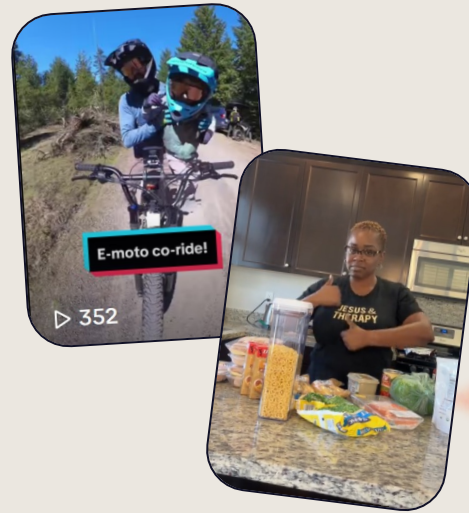
Values and virtues they live by:

“Work Hard, Live Well, No BS”

They Value:

Finding a balance between fun and personal obligations.

They're honest, work hard (sometimes too hard) and seek stability while priding themselves in their ability to provide for and protect others.



What's Trending

#LifeAfter40
#MidlifeJourney
#FiftyAndFabulous
#AgingGracefully
#MidlifeAdventure
#MidlifeMoments
#MidlifeMagic

Their Virtues:

- Trustworthiness
- Honesty
- Practicality
- Kindness/Caring
- Empathy
- Intelligence
- Joy



They Reject:

Overt status-seeking behaviors like putting their interests before others, seeking social recognition, or having power over others.



They Prioritize:

- Healthy choices
- Teaching Independence to their children
- Leaving a legacy
- Being together as a family
- Exploring through travel and food
- Financial stability
- Heritage



02

Spending **Habits**

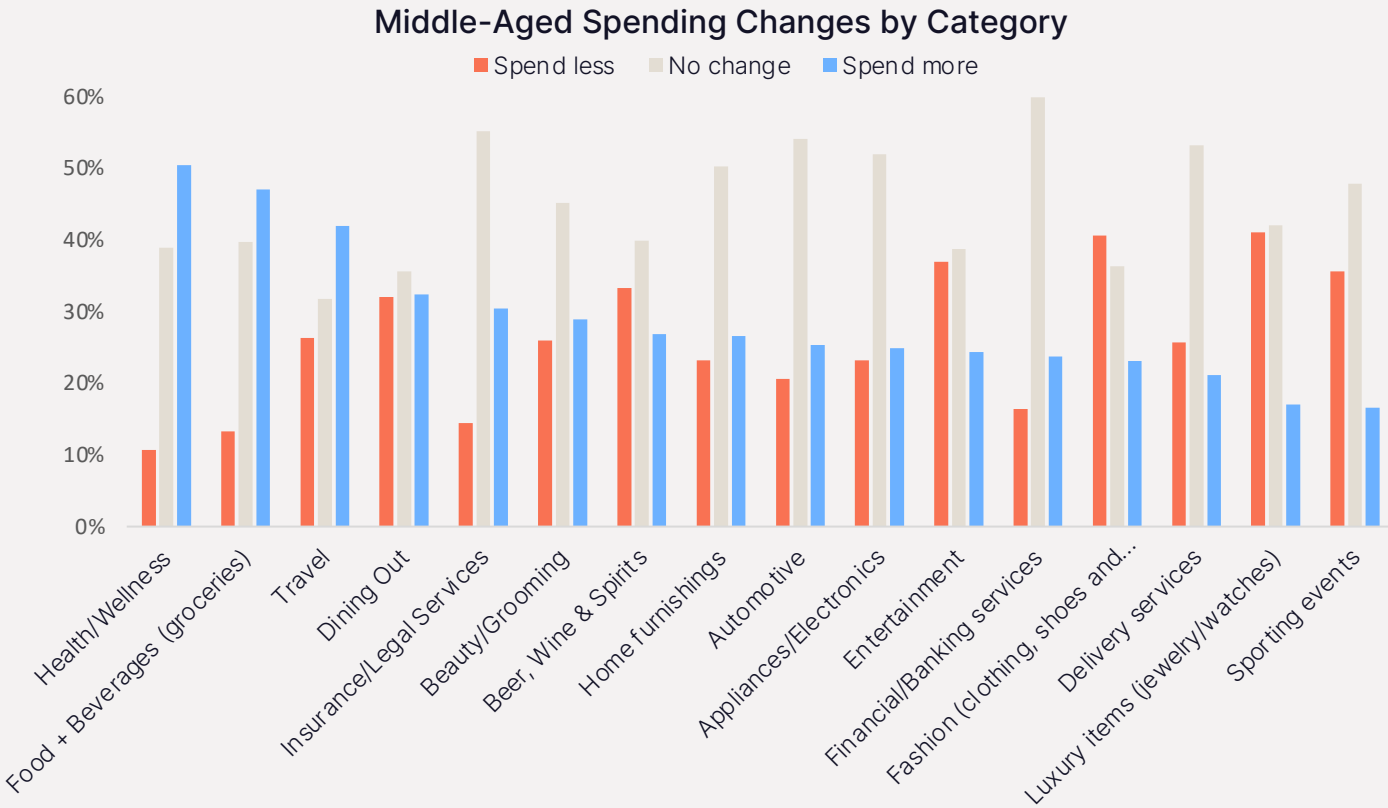
Spending habits change at middle age

We set out to understand how aging into or being middle-aged changed people’s spending habits and brand preferences. This chart shows different product and service categories and whether people spend less (orange), spend more (blue) or spend the same as they did before entering this life stage.



Knowing where people spend more indicates the things that matter most to them as they go through middle age: health + wellness, food + beverage, and travel. Their focus on experiences (or the good health that promises you’ll get to have those experiences) over material goods is noteworthy for brands trying to attract the spending power of this cohort.

Even non-endemic brands can find ways to offer products, services, and experiences that contribute to overall wellness, longevity, and enrichment.



Categories are listed left to right in descending order from which people said they spent more

Middle-agers are experiencing an awakening, choosing quality living over instant gratification



2/3

Of middle-aged people
**change the products they
buy** once they reach
middle age.



60%

Of middle-aged people
say they **buy higher
quality items** now.



73%

Of middle-aged people
say they **focus on long-
term investments** over
instant gratification.

Middle-aged individuals are reevaluating what holds meaning in their lives. They're reconsidering their investments, values, and priorities, often opting for a more YOLO mentality tempered with caution, unlike the frivolity of youth.

With the freedom to make smarter choices, they seek high-quality products and prioritize long-term satisfaction over instant gratification, favoring brands that demonstrate quality and value.



Brand messaging that highlights their wisdom in making the right choices, alongside their freedom to live a little and take strategic chances on life, will go a long way.

Rethinking spending and life priorities

“One of my greatest aspirations now is to travel as much as possible. As I get older, I realize that my time is running out, and that motivates me to *see more of the world now.*”

– Male, 48

“Now that I am older, I believe in saving for the future and *no longer look for instant gratification* like I did when I was in my twenties and early thirties! I also feel that my values have matured as I have matured, which I consider to be a blessing.

– Female, 50

“My wife and I decided, after speaking with our financial advisor, that we could afford to spend 10% of the money we were putting into savings on “fun stuff” for our family. We are very conservative with our funds, but since being middle-aged, we realized that we just don’t have much time left and *we don’t want to be waiting until we’re 70 to enjoy it.*”

– Male, 55

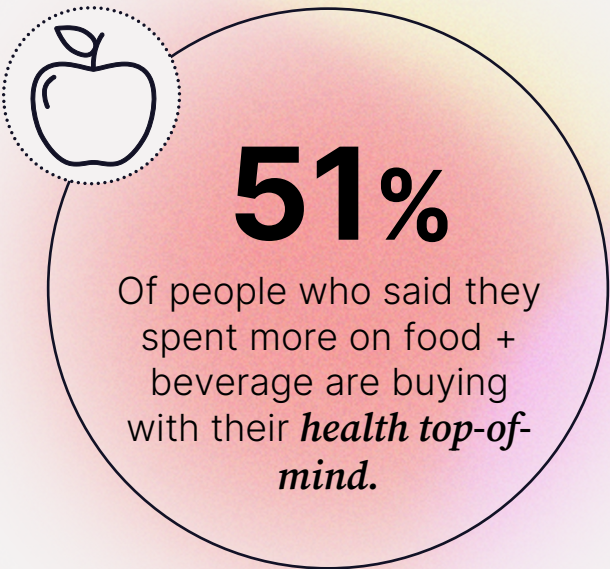
Spending more to live longer

We looked into the top categories where people said they were spending more in middle age: Health + Wellness, Food + Beverage, Travel and Beauty + Grooming.

*"I research products now to see what is **actually in them.**"*
– Female, 58



People are making vitamins + supplements part of their longevity plan by addressing any deficiencies in key micronutrients like iron, fiber, and omega-3.



Another 19% are shopping with cost saving in mind, looking to store brands.

An increased focus on longevity informs grocery choices with a focus on lower sugar, higher protein, plant-based options and organic produce.

Recent brand purchases ➔



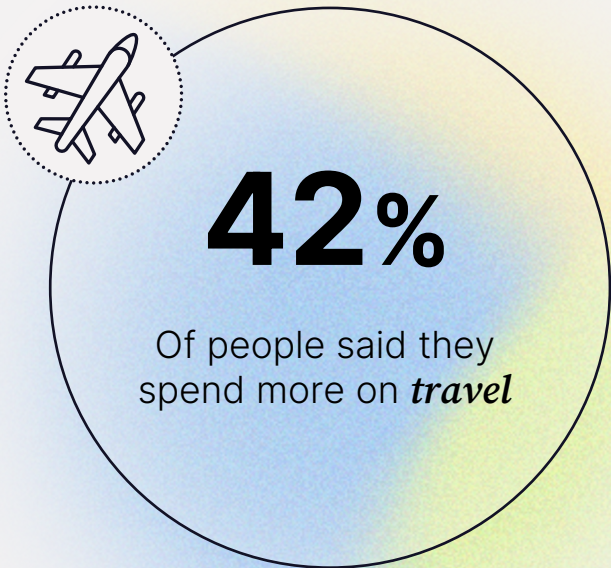
Spending more to look good and enjoy life

*"My focus is just to **slow aging a bit**,
not to stop it or reverse it."*
– Female, 57



Spending more on beauty and grooming overall doesn't necessarily mean purchasing luxury-tier items, but instead paying more attention and buying products that serve new needs.

*"I focus on **luxury but with rewards** — Marriott, Hilton, United. I enjoy luxury but functional and prefer quieter destinations"*
– Female, 51



With the travel sector, there was no clear brand consensus, suggesting loyalty is up for grabs. Several booking sites as well as airline and hotel brands were mentioned.

Recent
brand
purchases →



03

In *Media*

Despite shared pressure, media approaches to “aging well” are gender-coded

At odds with the embrace of over-60 vitality, a cultural double standard around aging remains, and it more negatively impacts and puts pressure on aging women.

We found that both men and women feel pressure to maintain a youthful appearance almost equally. But when we used our social listening tools to conduct a language analysis, we found that the media’s role in defining youthful appearances differs greatly across genders.

For men, having a youthful appearance is about showing up in the world with the vigor, vitality and swagger of a younger man — all achievable via biohacking.

For women, emanating youth often entails striving to replicate the dewy, glowing skin of their younger years to appeal to the male gaze — presented as achievable through a pricey multi-step skincare regimen.

72%

Of men care about maintaining a *youthful appearance* — not vastly different from 77% of women.

Men are told to treat aging like a battle against nature


Man vs. Nature is a battle as old as time. In today's modern world, this battle is being fought on the front lines of human biology. Men in particular treat the natural process of aging as something to be dominated and mastered. With the right tools: supplements, saunas, wearable tech, and the right habits: sun, sleep, meditation, and fasting, the aging process can be slowed or even reversed.

While the concept of biohacking isn't new, Google search interest has sharply increased in recent years. Editorial and influencer content use a more aggressive tone and language, perhaps to create a greater sense of urgency. Time, after all, is our greatest resource.


Brands looking to win over biohackers should emphasize the long-term benefits of their products and seek to partner with wearable tech brands to integrate their data for more streamlined data tracking.

On Social

Social influencers use their platforms to generate interest and sales of longevity-promising products.



r/Biohackers: 196k members
r/Longevity: 172k members



Tags

Supplements: 10.6M, Intermittent Fasting: 5.2M, Biohacking: 1M, Wearable Tech: 249k Sauna: 500k, Cold Plunge: 300k

Active online communities, along with social media, share articles, product and regimen recommendations and ask/answer questions.

In Media

Editorials aimed at men use biohacking language for skin care, rather than anti-aging language often aimed at women.



Middle-aged tech millionaire Bryan Johnson spends \$2M a year on his team of 30 doctors to reboot his body.

While women are told to look younger or face shame and ridicule

Despite how women feel about their age, there's an evergreen struggle to balance prioritizing physical and mental health with concerns about the aesthetics of aging.

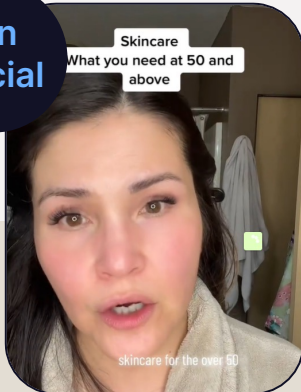
This tension is further reinforced by social media that algorithmically promotes anti-aging content and comment sections that are rife with judgment and criticism that could chip away at the self-esteem of even the most confident adults.

Brands should highlight the value and wisdom that come with age rather than prioritize youth. Use positive language that emphasizes aging as a strength: replace “anti-aging” with terms like “age-empowering” or “slow aging.”

57%

Of middle-aged women find themselves torn between *prioritizing their health* and *preserving their physical appearance*.

On
Social

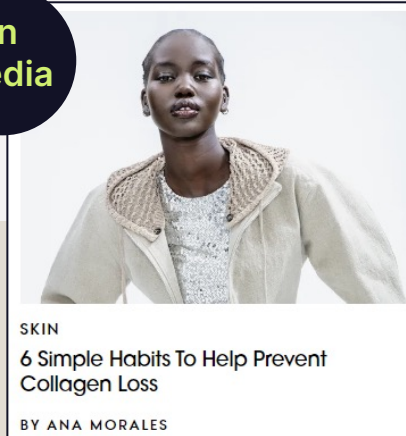


@Lila50isthenewfword (153k followers) showcases tips and tricks for caring for aging skin with an emphasis on “aging well,” aka looking younger.

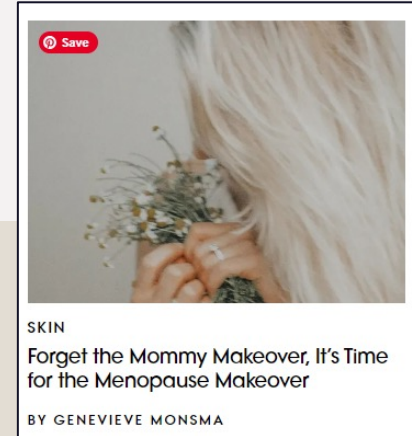


A wholesome photo of Julia Roberts and her niece sparked discussion on beauty and aging after negative comments suggesting Julia hasn't “aged well” prompted a disheartened but empowered response from the 56-year-old actress.

In
Media



Beauty editorial headlines perpetuate fear and promote new tasks, habits and products rather than self-acceptance. While the language may have softened over the years, the message is the same. The “Menopause Makeover” article fails to even show the woman’s face, creating a sense of shame.



New portrayals lead to new aspirations

While media headlines and click-bait content follow gendered aging tropes that over-emphasize physical appearance, new cultural portrayals — and the words people chose in our study to define middle age — show signs of change.

The portrayals of people in midlife have evolved from a more austere version of affluence that depicts comfort and fitting in, to those rich with color, texture, and fearlessness about standing out.

Today, we have more high-profile examples of middle-aged people living as their most fully realized selves. Brands have the opportunity to enable people to not only be their most authentic, prismatic selves but can give them tools to evolve at every life stage.

*"I aspire to do something that is solely for enjoyment and purposeful at the same time. I have **acquired skills over the years** that will be useful. When I was younger, I wanted a steady career. Now, I want to do something that **brings me more joy.**"*

- Female, 52

Then



What does “middle age” mean to you?

*“I think of someone who is in the **prime** of his life”*

*“Someone who has established a **career** and a **family**”*

*“A person in 40s **sandwiched** between kids and elderly parent”*

*“A working **professional** with a family and a career”*

Now

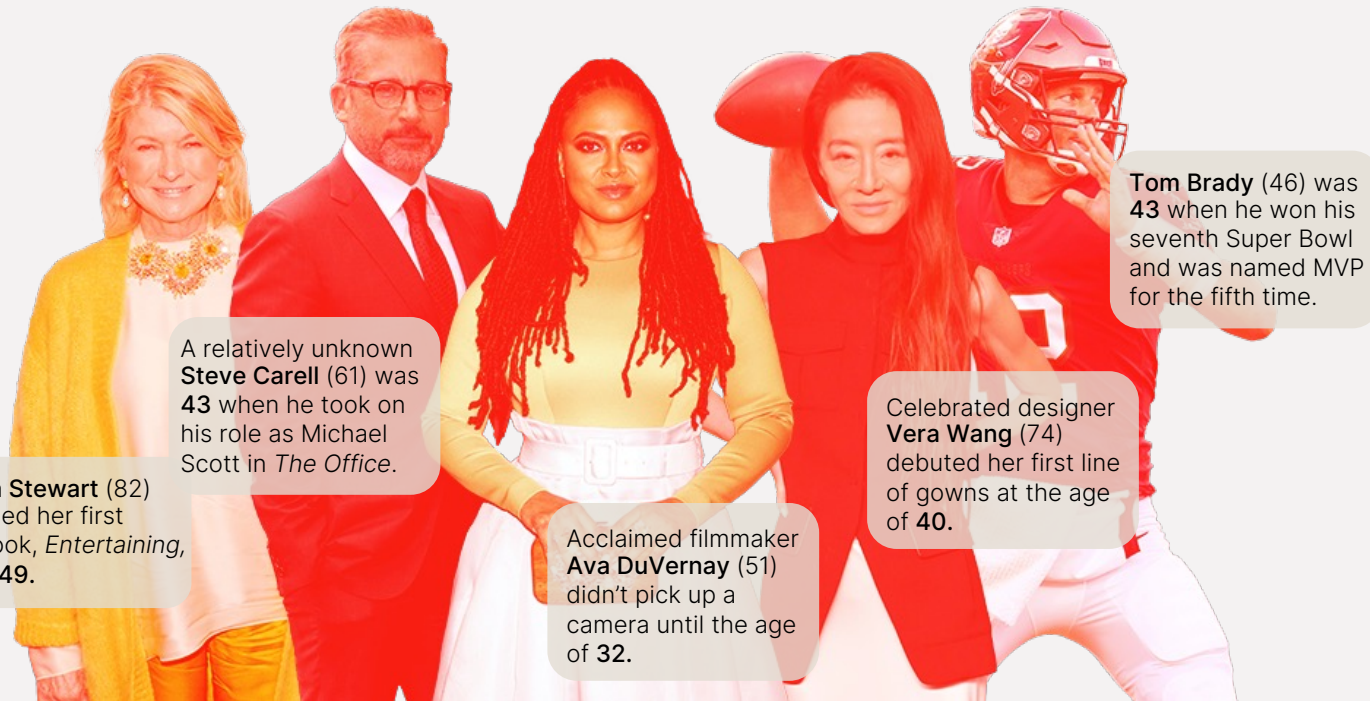


Beyonce, 42 and Jay Z, 54

Celebs and businesses inspire more to re-wire, not retire

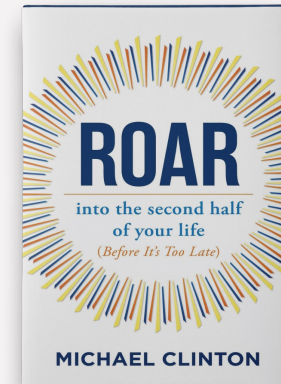
In defiance of the media's focus on youth, many middle-agers find fulfillment in new ventures inspired by celebrities and peers. Most over-60s feel younger than their age, with 91% identifying as middle-aged compared to 72% of 40-60-year-olds and 56% of under-40s.

Notable figures who pivoted careers or found late success normalize the idea of contributing life experiences to valuable new ventures.



86%

Of people over 60 who feel middle-aged, agree *50 is the new 40*.



Roar Forward is a membership and business intelligence platform for the new 50+ demographic of age innovators who reject ageist stereotypes, founded by author and longevity expert Michael Clinton.



Harvard University's Advanced Leadership Initiative aims to unleash the potential of experienced leaders to help solve society's most pressing issues. Participants become part of a vibrant community of changemakers innovating for impact.

Acting their age: redefining midlife on screen

For decades, movies and TV shows have been influential in shaping societal standards, expectations, and aspirations.

To help marketers tap into the cultural pulse of today's middle-agers, we conducted a semiotics analysis to explore evolving norms in entertainment. This analysis decoded the characters, narratives, and storylines that are reshaping the modern middle-ager.

Pains and Gains on the Path to Self-(Re)Discovery



Frances McDormand and Michelle Yeoh each earned recent Best Picture Oscars, at ages 61 and 60 respectively, for their portrayals of complicated women reckoning with major life choices.

Whether in the multiverse or rural American West, recent on-screen depictions of the difficult but rewarding process of self-discovery have tenderly approached the reality that mid-life is just the beginning.

Getting Real About Marriage and Divorce



The 2021 remake of the 1973 miniseries *Scenes From a Marriage* reversed the plot, making Jessica Chastain's character the breadwinner and the one who has an affair.

Middle-aged storytelling has normalized exposing the ins and outs of marriage and divorce, like Catherine Ritter's emotional on-screen separation with real-life husband and co-star Philip Sternberg in *Workin' Moms* S3.

Acting their age: redefining midlife on screen

Reflecting on Mid-Career Struggles and Gains



Another mid-life tension getting a raw makeover is career and identity, where characters like Nicolas Cage in *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent* explore their professional failings and renew with a new sense of purpose and direction.

Exploring Passion Projects and New Beginnings

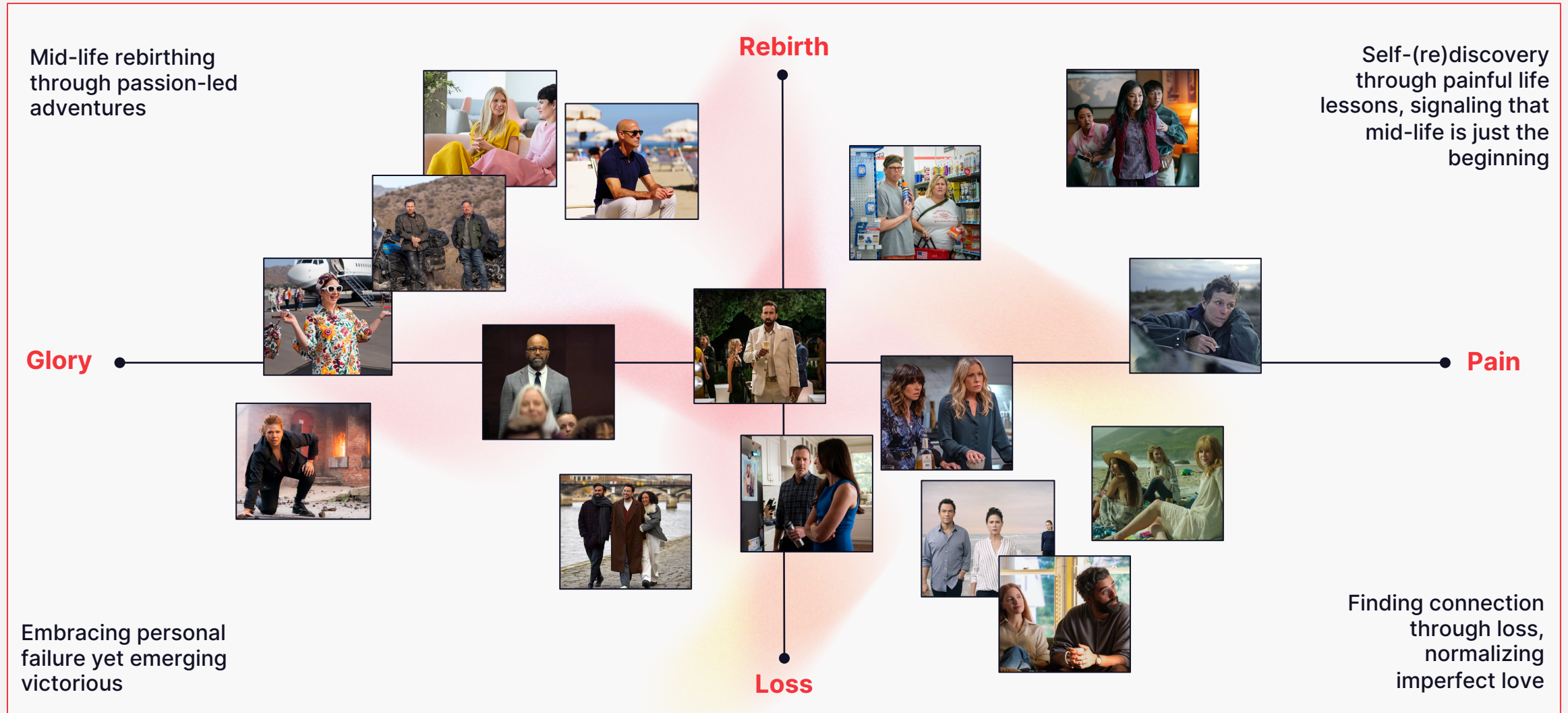


Unlike the “mid-life crises” of sitcoms’ past, today’s stories highlight mid-life rebirthing through passion-led adventures, new businesses and travel.

Finding Connection Through Loss



The friendship tropes of middle age highlight life’s bittersweet pendulum, where grief makes room for connection – as in the unlikely pairing of widows Jen and Judy played by Christina Applegate and Linda Cardellini in *Dead to Me*.



We've identified a spectrum of key content pillars centered around four tensions: Pain, Glory, Loss, and Rebirth. Uniting them is the act of self-discovery, whether through overcoming challenges to find triumph and a renewed identity or embarking on new life chapters with complexity and dynamism, devoid of traditional mid-life crisis tropes.

To build cultural relevance and brand resonance among this cohort, marketers should integrate these narratives — however dark they may be — into their communication strategies and ad campaigns to craft compelling, authentic, and emotionally resonant messages.

04

Brand *Effectiveness*

Brands have a relevance problem

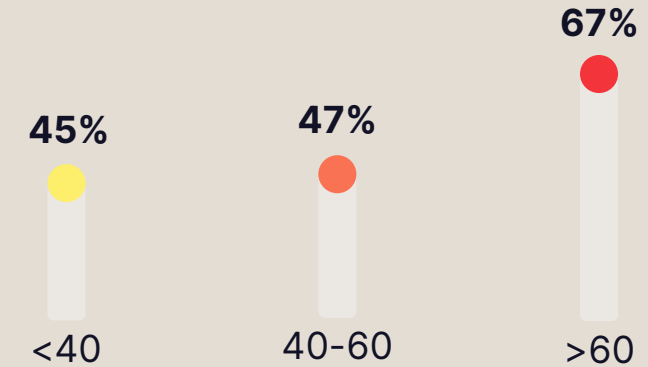
We asked everyone who felt middle-aged whether the advertising they see feels relevant and relatable.

For those over 60 who still feel middle-aged, it's a hearty no. Furthermore, over 2/3 (68%) of all middle-aged people say they no longer buy certain products/start buying other products as a result of reaching this life stage.

Middle-aged consumers make up roughly 40% of all spending in the US, but we wanted to understand why half of middle-aged people feel ads aren't relevant to them. To do this, we conducted an audit of commercials from Interbrand's Most Valuable 100 Brands. We evaluated them based on a few criteria:

- Do they prominently feature middle-aged people?
- Do they depict or speak to any of the life stage circumstances unique to this group of people? (e.g., caring for aging parents, empty nesters, raising teenagers, etc.)
- Do they tonally or thematically include any elements that might resonate with middle-aged people (e.g., nostalgic music, technological advancements, brand choice overwhelm, etc.)
- Is there a spike in social conversation about the ad/brand?

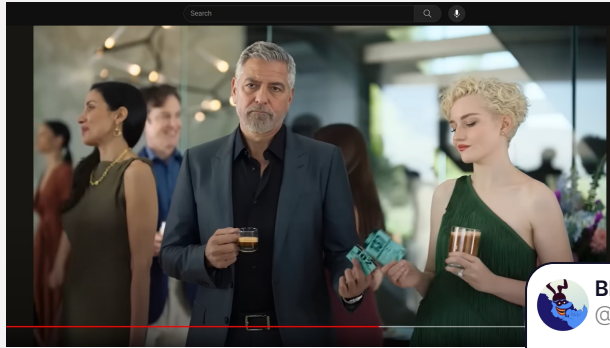
Most advertising is inauthentic and out of touch



Representation vs. resonance

Our brand audit revealed fewer than 20% of the ads prominently feature middle-aged people. Even fewer reflected the real-life experiences of middle-aged Americans (vs. simply featuring a middle-aged spokesperson). Below are two examples of ads that feature representation but fall flat thematically and in social conversation, and two that hit the mark.

○ Missed the Mark



George Clooney stars in this Nespresso ad called “The Bet” where two younger women con him and make him look foolish.



Blue Meanie
@Bluemeanie059

Am I the only guy who doesn't get those George Clooney “Nespresso” commercials? Like, did he lose his car in a bet and now he has to ride a motor scooter home?



The Citi Custom Cash Card ad with Rashida Jones, 47, mostly focuses on the product features and is arguably missing an emotional connection that speaks directly to the lives and circumstances of middle-aged shoppers.



Danise
@danice_danis

Why are credit card companies transfixed upon using female actors acting like brainless female stereotypes in their tv ads? As a woman--this is not ok.

○ Hit the Mark



This Sephora “We Belong to Something Beautiful” ad shows different groups of women of varying ages playfully bonding, giggling, and touching up their makeup in a public bathroom. The older women shown are just as energetic as the younger women.



Monique Y. Wells
@MoniqueinParis

We Belong to Something Beautiful
I thought this Sephora ad was a particularly tasteful appeal to women of color of a “certain age.”



Kia's heartwarming Super Bowl ad features a dad at his daughter's ice skating performance who notices her sadness at the absence of her grandfather. A challenging life stage most middle-agers face involves balancing parenthood and caring for aging parents.



Beth
@BethHoller

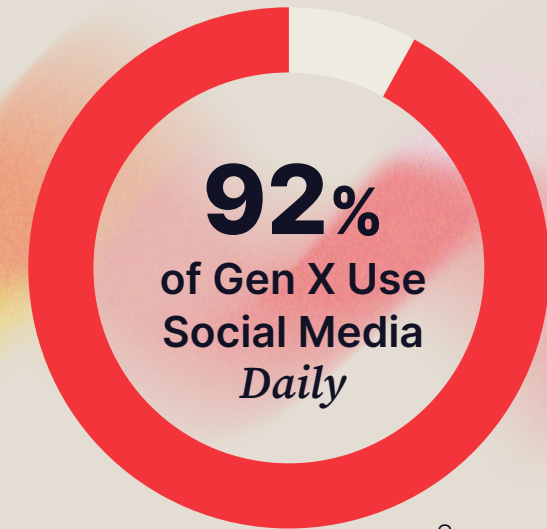
The Kia ice skating ad 🥹🥹. She skated at the rink at home for her grandpa who couldn't go to her performance. I'm crying. #SuperBowl

Missed opportunity: social ads + influencers

8 in 10 middle-agers are Gen Xers, and almost all are avid social media users. Yet only 13% of people between the ages of 41 and 56 feel represented in the social media ads they see, exposing the bias brands have toward people over the age of 45, as most use popular platforms such as TikTok to primarily target Gen Z*.

Top content creators among the middle-aged demographic are reshaping perceptions of this life stage, extending their influence beyond their peers to impact older Gen Zers and millennials who seek emotional insights into adulthood, like how to “live your best life.”

Brands aren’t leveraging these types of content creators enough; they must capitalize on the authenticity and community engagement of these influencers, as they play a pivotal role in guidance and self-discovery across generations.



Source: [wavemaker](#)



75%

Use
Facebook Daily

Source: [Zipdo.co](#)



50%

Use
TikTok Daily

Source: [wavemaker](#)



47%

Use
Instagram Daily

Source: [eMarketer](#)

*Source: [“Finding the Gen X Factor”](#) report.



Influencers revamping middle-age

Verified Expert in Beauty, Cosmetics, Personal Care



Erica Taylor

This L'Oréal Paris 25+ year beauty expert offers beauty tips for mature skin.

 **1.5M**
 **855K**



Nikki Thomas I love your posts. I hit 50 this year, never been any good at makeup, you def give me confidence.

#MrStealYourGrandma



Irvin Randle

Silver fox squad, style influencer, educator, fashion model and actor from Houston, Texas; has his own line of shoes.

 **1.4M**
 **1M**



Sanobias Confidence shows thru the lens. Nothing sexier than confidence. 🥰🥰🥰

Bonafied #ProAger



Arlinda MacIntosh

Pure positivity, a 66-year-old maximalist.



 **2.2K**
 **24K**

Midlife Muse



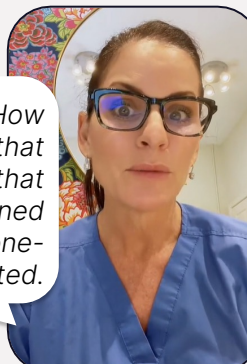
Dr. Amanda Hanson

This psychologist and public speaker invites dialogue about life after 50 from her followers, many of whom are Gen Zers and Millennials.

 **500K**
 **441K**



@melholden1: How validating to hear that my symptoms that started when I turned 40 are hormone-related.

New Menopause Empowerment

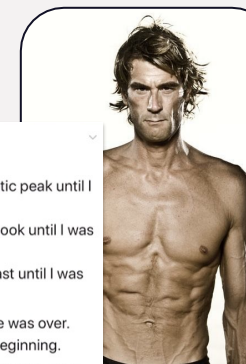


Dr. Mary Claire

An OBGYN Medical expert, myth-buster and author, she educates and informs women entering this life stage.




 **2.1M**
 **1.4M**

Vegan Athlete + Wellness Advocate



Rich Roll

Ultra-endurance athlete, bestselling author of *Finding Ultra*, and host of *The Rich Roll* podcast.

 **143K**
 **178K**
 **1.4M**

 **richroll** @richroll
I didn't reach my athletic peak until I was 43.
I didn't write my first book until I was 44.
I didn't start my podcast until I was 45.
At 30, I thought my life was over. At 52 I know it's just beginning.
Keep running. Never give up. And watch your kite soar.
🌱

05

Strategic *Opportunities*

Strategic Opportunities



Expand and redefine the middle-aged audience

Middle age is no longer simply an age range or demographic of adults at midlife — for some, it's a mindset, and for others, it's a lifestyle. Don't limit your middle-aged target to Gen Xers: expand your prism of age targets based on how they *feel* and *experience* middle age. Knowing the particulars of your audience will help you not only to speak to a broader cohort but have a greater impact on them.



Embrace the good, the bad, the ugly and all its glory

Today's mid-lifers don't hold back — they're daring and adventurous and aim to keep it real when things get tough. Ensure that brand communications reflect realistic narratives about their life stage, leveraging our narrative content pillars to maintain message relevance. To foster brand affinity and ensure recall, prioritize middle-aged individuals as *central* characters rather than supporting roles, and actively engage with social media content creators who inspire.



Rally influential social voices to galvanize support

This generation of middle-agers grew up on the front lines of new technologies and was at the heart of the OG tech boom (and bust). Their ability to adapt to and adopt tech means they're often found on the same social media platforms as their younger peers. *Find them.* Find the people they follow for entertainment and advice and help create the stories that make them lean in to hear more.



Focus on *strategic gratification* to win brand loyalty

Balance caution and adventure. Acknowledge the measured "YOLO" mentality that many middle-aged individuals embrace. Offer products or experiences that provide a sense of adventure while also addressing their need for security and practicality.



Celebrate the wisdom that comes from life experience

Despite progress toward greater age-based inclusivity, youth culture still dominates. Many middle-agers spend a significant amount of time and money on products and projects to slow aging. Help them take a different tack by reminding them of what they have to offer *because* of their age, rather than despite of it.

06

Brand *Inspiration*

On the following pages, we present three ideas that demonstrate how the information in this report can be levered to forge new pathways for brands to connect with various factions in the middle-aged cohort:

- 01** Move-to-earn monetary rewards for the cash-strapped and highly stressed
- 02** Media content that gets empty nesters excited about beginning anew
- 03** A Personalized, data-informed subscription service for those looking to optimize their lives and slow down aging

These ideas are *just the beginning*.

Wellness Rewards

In this collaboration between a well-known retail chain (e.g., Sprouts) and an innovative digital health platform (e.g., FitBit) tailored specifically for middle-aged consumers, participants would have access to discounted wearable technology that tracks physical activity, sleep patterns, and dietary habits, helping them monitor and enhance their wellness.

- As users hit predetermined health milestones, a point system could be redeemed for discounts and exclusive offers at the retailer's stores.
- The program could also feature a range of virtual workshops and personalized health plans based on individual health data and lifestyle preferences.
- Encourage a healthier lifestyle while fostering community among participants through social features and regular health screenings, integrating daily health management with rewarding shopping experiences.

Perfect for:

Younger people who feel middle-aged and are stressed/cash-strapped. Those who respond to external motivation or enjoy the gamification of rewards programs.



02

Unfeathered and Untethered: Empty Nesters Me-Launch

A travel brand could create a unique initiative designed for empty nesters encouraging them to embark on new adventures with the freedom their new life stage affords. The “Unfeathered and Untethered” campaign embraces a holistic marketing approach: Through captivating mini-documentaries shared on digital media, the campaign tells the real-life travel stories of empty nesters, enriched by social engagement via the hashtag #UnfeatheredAndUntethered.

- The strategy also includes a custom online itinerary builder and VR previews that allow potential travelers to experience destinations before booking.
- Complementing these digital efforts is a podcast series with stories from and interviews with empty nesters who successfully navigated their life transition, experts in the travel sector, and psychologists who help patients deal with making this life transition.
- Influencer partnerships would broaden reach, and a loyalty program would reward travelers for booking trips and experiences as well as sharing their stories + photos.

Perfect for:

Helping empty nesters embrace their newfound freedom by exploring their interests and needs.



03

The Biohacker's Dopp Kit

The "Biohacker's Dopp Kit" is a revolutionary grooming program designed specifically for the biohacker community focusing on personalized face, hair, nails, and skin-care solutions driven by scientific data and advanced technology. This program allows users to tailor their regimen based on detailed personal assessments, including factors like diet, lifestyle, health, and environmental conditions. Featuring cutting-edge ingredients, each product in the kit is engineered to deliver measurable improvements in skin, hair, and nail health.

- Subscribers receive monthly kits, complete with the latest skincare innovations and access to an exclusive app that tracks their progress and adjusts recommendations in real-time.
- Integrate community engagement and educational content to not just enhance health but foster a community of like-minded individuals dedicated to personal optimization.

Perfect for:

Middle-aged men who want to use data, tools, and technology to optimize living and combat aging.



Want to *dig deeper* for your brand?

WHY can help:

- Provide **custom consultations** on how to reach middle-agers for specific business goals.
- Design **bespoke research** and **unpack culture** for your brand.
- Map **brand values to cultural opportunities** with statical rigor via our **Culture Quotient** tool.

Methodology

Our Approach:

In April of 2024, we surveyed 1,000 people, balanced to the US General Population by age, gender region and income, to understand the impact of being middle-aged on attitudes, behaviors, spending and brand preferences.

We also conducted an extensive semiotics analysis on entertainment properties and advertisements to identify coded themes and narratives.

Cultural Intelligence was used to identify relevant signals while published reports, editorial content, and influencers were used to contextualize our findings and deepen our understanding of middle-aged Americans. Social intelligence, in addition to open-ended survey questions, illuminated the voice of the consumer and enriched our understanding of experiences through people's own words. Social intelligence also enabled us to audit and analyze media focused on aging.

Throughout this report, external sources are cited through live hyperlinks; any stat not linked to an outside source comes from Horizon Media's proprietary data.

Study fielded: 4/1/2024 – 4/8/2024.

Thank you

To learn more, contact:

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