

# **From Functional Satisfaction to Emotional Resonance: Reflections on Marketing Strategies in the Elderly Care Industry**

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of accelerating aging population and evolving consumption patterns, the silver economy has become a critical driver of high-quality economic growth. Given the distinctive nature of the elderly care market, firms are required to move beyond conventional marketing approaches and develop strategies that align closely with the specific needs of older adult consumers. Drawing on the 4C framework, this study systematically examines prevailing marketing practices in the elderly care industry across four dimensions—Consumer, Cost, Convenience, and Communication & identifies key challenges, including limited precision in demand identification, mismatches between cost control and price sensitivity, insufficient integration of online and offline service channels, and weak brand engagement with consumers on an emotional level. To address these issues, this paper proposes that firms in the sector should strengthen data-driven personalization, adopt tiered cost management along with flexible pricing mechanisms, expand integrated online-to-offline service networks to enhance convenience, and leverage interactive approaches via new media to establish closed-loop communication systems. These measures are intended to support the development of sustainable competitive advantages within the expanding silver economy.

**Keywords:** Silver Economy; Elderly Care Industry; Marketing Strategy; 4C Marketing Theory; Aging Population

## **1. Introduction**

Population aging represents one of the most significant demographic trends of the 21st century worldwide. Data from the Seventh National Population Census indicate that the

number of people aged 60 and above in China has reached 264 million, accounting for 18.70% of the total population—an increase of 5.44 percentage points compared with 2010, reflecting a marked acceleration in the aging process [1]. Actively responding to population aging has been elevated to a national strategy, with relevant policy directives explicitly calling for the development of the silver economy and the creation of diverse, personalized employment opportunities suited to older adults [2]. In early 2024, the first official policy document explicitly named after the “silver economy” was formally issued, signaling a new phase in the transformation of the elderly care industry from a social welfare undertaking toward marketization and industrialization [3].

The rise of the silver economy is driven not only by the expanding population of older adults but also by profound shifts in their consumption needs. The current older adult population exhibits marked intergenerational differentiation. The younger cohorts of older adults—those born in the 1950s and 1960s—possess higher levels of educational attainment, more diversified income sources, and more open consumption attitudes. Their needs are transitioning from basic survival-oriented demands toward developmental and enjoyment-oriented demands, including health management, cultural entertainment, and emotional socialization. According to forecasts, the market size of China’s elderly care industry is expected to exceed 20 trillion RMB by 2027. This vast market potential has attracted capital from various sectors, prompting a diverse range of actors—such as elderly care facility providers, smart aging technology firms, and wellness service organizations—to enter the market, thereby rendering the competitive landscape increasingly complex [4].

Nevertheless, marketing practices in the elderly care industry continue to face considerable challenges. On one hand, traditional marketing

models, which are enterprise-centric, struggle to precisely capture the increasingly personalized and emotional needs of older adult consumers. On the other hand, consumption among older adults exhibits unique characteristics, including lengthy decision-making cycles, differentiated information processing capabilities, and a high degree of reliance on trust. Simple price competition or traffic-driven tactics are therefore unlikely to prove effective. Consequently, developing a marketing strategy system that aligns with the distinctive features of the silver economy has become a critical issue for elderly care enterprises seeking to overcome growth bottlenecks and achieve sustainable development. Drawing on the 4C framework, this paper systematically analyzes the prevailing marketing models and practical difficulties confronting the elderly care industry, and proposes targeted optimization pathways, with the aim of offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for marketing innovation in elderly care enterprises.

## **2. Analysis of Marketing Characteristics in the Elderly Care Industry under the Silver Economy**

The essence of the silver economy lies in an economic form centered on the needs of the older adult population. This defining feature necessitates that marketing in the elderly care industry move beyond traditional product-selling logic and instead embrace relationship marketing oriented toward value co-creation. At present, elderly care enterprises are increasingly leveraging technological innovation and channel integration to develop a range of marketing models with distinct industry characteristics.

### **2.1 Demand Stratification and Contextual Matching**

The consumption needs of older adults have shifted from homogeneity to a high degree of stratification [5]. In terms of physical condition, significant differences exist in the functional requirements for age-friendly products among independent elderly, assisted-living elderly, and nursing-care elderly. From an economic capacity perspective, low and middle income groups prioritize basic security and cost effectiveness, whereas high net worth individuals seek intelligent convenience and premium quality experiences. Considering lifestyle, active seniors tend to favor developmental consumption such

as travel and tourism, as well as education for older adults, while home-bound elderly focus more on daily care and health monitoring. In response to this stratified pattern, leading elderly care enterprises have begun adopting a “contextual product matrix” strategy, embedding age-friendly furniture, smart monitoring devices, and rehabilitation aids into three primary care scenarios home-based, community-based, and institutional-thereby addressing differentiated needs through modular combinations. In the home-based care context, companies offer “smart aging packages” that integrate emergency call devices, smart mattresses, and age-friendly grab bars, complemented by online health management services, forming a bundled “product plus service” solution [6]. This model transforms consumers from passive product recipients into value co-creators, enabling iterative demand refinement through continuous data feedback.

### **2.2 Lifecycle Value Transfer**

Older adult consumers are highly price-sensitive, yet their cost perception encompasses not only the purchase price but also usage costs, maintenance expenses, and even psychological costs [7]. Marketing in the elderly care industry is gradually shifting from “price competition” toward “whole-lifecycle cost transfer.” On the one hand, enterprises reduce raw material costs through supply chain integration, establishing long-term strategic partnerships with suppliers of age-friendly materials and gaining bargaining power through economies of scale. On the other hand, they leverage lean production and intelligent manufacturing to lower production costs, while designing products for durability to reduce the frequency of replacement for users. In terms of pricing strategies, firms commonly adopt tiered pricing: penetration pricing for basic products to cover the mass market, and skimming pricing for smart products to capture a technology premium. These are complemented by flexible approaches such as trade-in programs and rental-sharing models to lower users’ initial investment [8]. Notably, some enterprises have begun exploring a “pay-as-you-need” model, bundling smart nursing beds with remote monitoring services, whereby users pay a monthly service fee to gain access to the equipment. This approach effectively mitigates older adults’ resistance to high-priced products.

### **2.3 Omnichannel Reach and Service Decentralization**

Convenience is a critical variable influencing older adults' consumption decisions [9]. The elderly care industry is currently accelerating the construction of integrated online-offline omnichannel service systems. On the online front, enterprises develop age-friendly e-commerce platforms or open flagship stores on general e-commerce sites, lowering operational barriers through features such as large-font interfaces, voice search, and video shopping guides. Some platforms further embed health education content and product evaluations to enhance user engagement. On the offline front, in addition to establishing experience centers in central cities, enterprises are decentralizing into communities by setting up "micro-exhibition halls." They collaborate with community-based elderly care service centers and community health stations, combining product displays with health check-ups and age-friendly renovation consultations to achieve last-mile reach. Moreover, for frail elderly living alone, companies have piloted a "service broker" model, in which trained specialists provide end-to-end companionship services—including on-site measurement, installation and commissioning, and usage guidance—extending convenience from the purchase stage to the entire usage lifecycle [10].

### **2.4 Emotional Bonding and Social Word-of-Mouth**

Traditional marketing in elderly care has primarily relied on one-way information transmission, which struggles to build trust. The new generation of elderly care marketing places greater emphasis on emotional resonance and community interaction. Content marketing has become a mainstream approach. Enterprises produce native content on short-video platforms—such as diaries of age-friendly home renovations and guides to avoiding pitfalls in elderly care—using real-life scenarios to demonstrate product functions and evoke emotional identification among older adults and their adult children. Live-streaming e-commerce has emerged as a notable force in the elderly care sector. Unlike fast-moving consumer goods, however, live streams in this domain place greater weight on expert endorsement and in-depth explanations. Geriatricians and rehabilitation specialists are invited to interact

with hosts, embedding product knowledge into health education to alleviate users' concerns about product efficacy [11]. Community operations also serve as an important instrument. Enterprises establish "silver experience officer" communities, inviting seed users to participate in product beta testing, encouraging them to share usage insights in WeChat groups and on social media feeds, thereby leveraging social networks to generate word-of-mouth diffusion. Some companies additionally engage in "filial piety economy" marketing, launching filial piety packages on occasions such as Father's Day and the DoubleNinth Festival, targeting adult children as communication recipients and driving purchase decisions through emotional appeals [12].

## **3. Practical Dilemmas in the Marketing of the Elderly Care Industry**

Despite the continuous emergence of marketing innovations in the elderly care industry, the sector still confronts multiple dilemmas when measured against the strategic requirements of the silver economy and the genuine expectations of elderly consumers.

### **3.1 Insufficient Accuracy in Demand Identification and Lagging Customized Services**

The heterogeneity of the elderly population mandates enterprises to possess sophisticated capabilities for demand insight. Nevertheless, most elderly care enterprises still rely on traditional questionnaire surveys or empirical judgments, lacking systematic collection and analysis of user behavior data. On the one hand, the low penetration rate of smart devices makes it difficult to obtain real-time dynamic data such as the health indicators and living habits of the elderly, resulting in product iteration lagging behind changes in demand. On the other hand, even if enterprises recognize the importance of personalized customization, it is often difficult to implement due to the lack of flexible production capacity. Elderly-friendly furniture has distinctly different requirements for seat height and armrest angle for the elderly with varying heights and disability levels; however, most enterprises still adopt unified molds for production and can only provide limited size adjustment options [13]. Personalized services inevitably involve the collection of a large amount of personal privacy data, while the

industry generally suffers from weak awareness of data security and the absence of protective measures, and the risk of data leakage may trigger a trust crisis.

### **3.2 Structural Contradiction between Cost Control and Price Sensitivity**

The high price sensitivity of elderly consumers sharply conflicts with the high cost of elderly care products. The large R&D investment, long certification cycle, and insufficient release of market scale effects of elderly-friendly products lead to persistently high production costs. With limited income sources, the elderly hold a conservative psychological account for prices and are prone to the cognitive bias of "low cost performance". This contradiction is particularly prominent in the field of smart elderly care devices: smart watches equipped with fall detection and vital sign sensing functions cost over 1,000 yuan, while the willingness to pay of most elderly people and their children is concentrated in the range of several hundred yuan. To balance costs and prices, enterprises are often forced to cut functions or reduce quality, falling into a vicious circle of low prices and inferior quality [14]. In addition, the insufficient inclusiveness of policy subsidies has exacerbated the mismatch between supply and demand. At present, government-purchased services are mostly targeted at the extremely poor elderly, failing to cover the large middle-income elderly group, which is precisely the core target market of the elderly care industry.

### **3.3 Discontinuity in Channel Coverage and Fragmented Online and Offline Experiences**

Although elderly care enterprises have actively deployed online and offline channels, the fragmentation between channels remains prominent. While online platforms can realize information display and transactions, the elderly generally hold the mentality of "seeing is believing" and lack trust in virtual products, resulting in a low conversion rate of online traffic. Although offline experience halls can provide physical experiences, the number of outlets is limited, requiring most elderly people to travel long distances. Furthermore, some experience halls have been reduced to "sample showrooms", lacking professional explanations and dynamic demonstrations, making it difficult to form in-depth interaction. More critically,

there is a gap in the "last mile" of after-sales service. Elderly-friendly products often require installation and commissioning, yet it is costly for enterprises to build their own service teams, and relying on third-party logistics cannot guarantee service quality. Slow maintenance response and difficulty in accessory replacement when users encounter problems have greatly damaged the consumption experience. Rural and remote areas are even blind spots for channels, where elderly care products and services are almost non-existent [15].

### **3.4 Homogenized Brand Communication and Weak Emotional Connection**

Brand communication in the current elderly care industry shows an obvious tendency of homogenization [16]. Most enterprises focus their publicity on product functional parameters or technical indicators with stereotyped copywriting, which is hard to arouse emotional resonance. In social media operation, the content is mostly corporate news or hard advertising, lacking storytelling and interactivity, leading to slow fan growth. Compared with young consumer groups, the social networks of the elderly are more closed and trust-dependent, and word of mouth has an extremely high weight in purchase decisions. However, enterprises lack the systematic cultivation of word of mouth among seed users and fail to form effective fission communication. In addition, brand communication is mostly limited to the purchase stage, with almost no interaction in the after-sales stage. Users lose contact with enterprises after purchase, making it difficult to accumulate brand loyalty and improve the repurchase rate. In the scenario of purchase by children on behalf of the elderly, enterprises lack precise access methods for young family members, missing the key entry point for intergenerational decision-making.

## **4. Optimization Suggestions for Marketing Strategies of the Elderly Care Industry**

Faced with the current dilemmas, elderly care enterprises should take the 4C theory as the guidance to systematically reconstruct marketing strategies and seek a dynamic balance between efficiency and warmth, as well as technology and humanity.

Deepening data-driven personalized service capabilities is the fundamental path to solving the problem of demand identification.

Enterprises should strive to build a complete closed loop for user data collection and analysis, accelerate the popularization of intelligent terminal devices, obtain real-time health indicators and behavior trajectories of the elderly through wearable devices and smart home sensors, and establish dynamically updated customer health files. Big data analysis technology is adopted to construct accurate user portraits, stratify users according to dimensions such as self-care ability, health status and lifestyle, and develop differentiated product portfolios and service solutions for different levels. For semi-disabled elderly people, an integrated package including transfer aids, anti-pressure sore mattresses and remote rehabilitation guidance can be provided; for elderly people with cognitive impairment, it is necessary to focus on configuring anti-lost devices, reminiscence therapy products and cognitive training services. Meanwhile, data security must be given top priority. Enterprises should establish a strict hierarchical authority management system for customer information, adopt national-level encryption technology to protect data transmission and storage, conduct regular privacy protection training for employees, and proactively publicize the scope of data use to users, so as to gain trust through transparency.

Refined cost and price management is the key measure to resolve the contradiction of consumer payment. Enterprises should abandon the one-size-fits-all pricing thinking and implement a multi-level pricing strategy instead. For high-income elderly groups, intelligent products equipped with the latest technologies can be mainly promoted, emphasizing quality and experience, and expanding the premium space through value-added services; for middle-income groups, cost-effective series with high standardization and simplified functions can be developed, and costs can be diluted through large-scale production; for low-income groups, basic products can be launched, and enterprises should actively connect with policy resources such as government subsidies for elderly-friendly renovation and long-term care insurance to reduce users' actual expenses through subsidies. In terms of cost control, efforts should be made across the entire chain: at the R&D end, modular design should be promoted to reduce development costs through the reuse of general components; at the

procurement end, a joint procurement alliance should be established with core suppliers to reduce raw material costs by virtue of centralized procurement advantages; at the production end, lean production and automated equipment should be introduced to improve the first-pass yield and reduce rework waste. In addition, enterprises can explore flexible business models such as subscription systems and leasing systems, converting one-time high-cost purchases into installment service fees to reduce users' current payment pressure.

Expanding a convenient service network with in-depth online and offline integration is a core initiative to enhance user convenience. Online channels must complete elderly-friendly transformation and launch an exclusive mode for the elderly, with designs such as large fonts, high contrast, voice navigation and one-click help to lower the usage threshold. Meanwhile, AR virtual trial functions should be embedded to allow the elderly to preview the placement effect of elderly-friendly furniture without leaving home. Offline channels need to accelerate the sinking pace, cooperate with existing facilities such as community elderly care service stations, community health service centers and universities for the elderly to set up mini experience points, and embed product displays into the daily life scenarios of the elderly. More critically, it is essential to connect online and offline data to realize the integration of users' behavior trajectories across different channels. When an elderly person browses a certain wheelchair online and then enters an offline experience hall, the staff can timely retrieve their preference information to provide targeted explanations; after completing an offline purchase, the online platform automatically pushes usage tutorials and maintenance reminders. After-sales service should establish a "15-minute response circle", ensure the timeliness of installation and maintenance by recruiting part-time community service personnel and signing contracts with local maintenance points, and introduce a service evaluation system to force the improvement of service quality through user supervision.

Innovating new media communication with emotional resonance and a closed-loop feedback mechanism helps to build in-depth brand stickiness. Enterprises need to shift their communication perspective from "product promotion" to "content co-creation". On short

video platforms, a series of "Stories about Elderly Care" can be planned to show the pain points and solutions in the life of the elderly in the form of situational short plays, with product information naturally embedded in the plot; in live streaming scenarios, doctors, nursing experts and silver-haired internet celebrities can be invited to cooperate to deliver professional value through the "knowledge-based live streaming sales" model. For the decision-making group of adult children, emotional short videos themed "Love for Parents" can be produced and accurately launched on festivals such as the Double Ninth Festival and Mother's Day to stimulate intergenerational emotional resonance. Communication is not one-way output but must form a two-way closed loop. Enterprises should set up convenient feedback entrances at each touchpoint, such as real-time comments in live streaming rooms, voice messages on official WeChat accounts, and QR codes on product packaging. After collecting user opinions, dedicated customer service shall respond within 24 hours and inform users of the improvement results, making them feel "being heard". Meanwhile, a core user community should be established, and active users should be regularly invited to participate in new product internal testing and shoot experience videos, transforming them into brand spokespersons and realizing fission communication through acquaintance social chains. When every communication can deepen emotions and accumulate trust, the brand can take root and grow among the elderly group.

## 5. Conclusion

The surging silver economy has opened up a broad prospect for the elderly care industry, yet behind the opportunities lies an in-depth reflection on marketing models. This study demonstrates that the marketing of the elderly care industry is shifting from extensive promotion to consumer-centered refined operation, forming typical models including hierarchical demand matching, whole-life-cycle cost transfer, omni-channel convenient services and emotional communication. Nevertheless, there are still shortcomings in the accuracy of demand identification, the matching of costs and prices, the integration of channel experiences, and the emotional connection of brands. Looking ahead, elderly care enterprises should take the 4C theory as the framework, strengthen

data empowerment and flexible services, refine cost and price stratification, integrate seamless online and offline convenient experiences, and innovate emotional communication and closed-loop feedback mechanisms. Only by integrating technological rationality with humanistic care and enabling marketing to truly serve the better life of the elderly can the elderly care industry achieve steady and long-term development in the silver economy era, and contribute commercial strength to actively responding to population aging.

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