



Background

The World Health Organization's (WHO's) Global Campaign to Combat Ageism began in 2021 and is on-going. They define ageism as a “multifaceted social phenomenon that categorizes and divides people, based on their age, in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage, and injustice, and erodes solidarity across generations” (WHO, 2021).

In 2016, The World Health Assembly recognized “ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences for people’s health, well-being and human rights and costs society billions of dollars” (WHO, 2021). To create effective strategies for confronting ageism, the Combat Ageism campaign was launched in 2021.

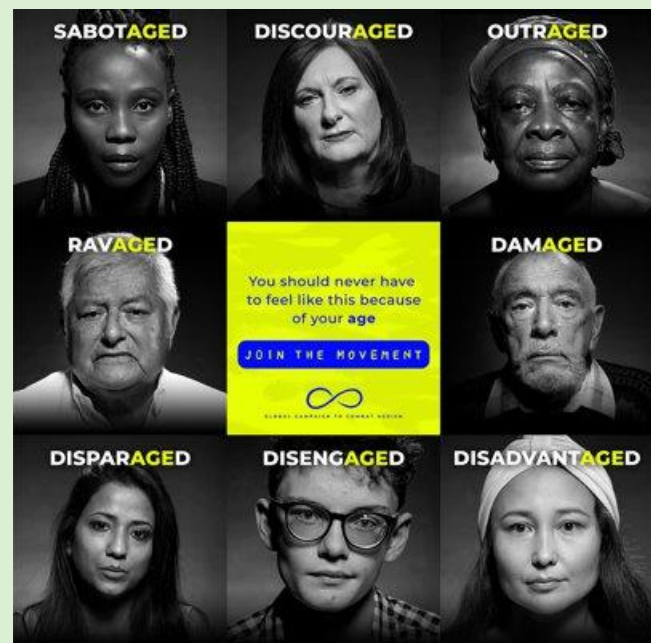
Target Audience

The Combatting Ageism campaign worked to increase the narrative surrounding ageism—including both the young and old—on a global scale.



Formative Research

A conceptual framework for ageism was developed initially by a systematic review of peer-reviewed research on ageism in English, Spanish, and French. The campaign reviewed prior and existing global, national, and local campaigns, and conducted personal interviews. They explored “factors that increase the risk of perpetrating” ageism, and those that increased “the risk of being a target” of ageism. They met with researchers from several universities “to outline the methods for conducting a global set of systematic reviews on ageism” (WHO, 2021).





	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Awareness Potential wide audience & unified awareness about the negative impacts of ageism across different cultures & societies. • Diverse Perspectives Gathered insights from peer-reviewed literature in English, Spanish, & French across a variety of cultures and ages for a holistic approach • Media Engagement Widespread dissemination of messaging & fostering public engagement. • International Collaboration Partnership governments & international organizations. Encourage local, national, and global involvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Sensitivity Global campaign to combat ageism requires intimate knowledge of a variety of cultures that can be difficult to genuinely understand. • Resource Intensive Messaging on global scale in multiple mediums & on multiple platforms requires enormous resources. • Institutional ageism Manifests across different institutions: healthcare, social care, the workplace, media, and legal system making campaign design & impact difficult. • Language Barriers A global campaign is hindered if unable to communicate in a multitude of languages.
External	Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy & Law Reduce ageism as a human rights initiative & create or strengthen existing policies & legislation. • Educational Interventions Across all levels & types: primary school to university, informal & nonformal to “enhance empathy, dispel misconceptions & reduce prejudice & discrimination.” • Intergenerational Invest in and foster contact interaction between people of different generations. • Digital Platforms Create high quality website with links to videos & graphics with meaningful content 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backlash & Resistance Some individuals, cultures, and organizations may have deeply entrenched ageist beliefs that are difficult to impact & may create backlash. • Competing Priorities The campaign may have limited impact depending on other global events occurring during the campaign run. • Stereotyping There is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes if messaging and materials are not carefully designed. • Economic Disparities Most ageism research conducted in and by high-income countries limiting insight & opportunities from low-income countries.
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>

Main Campaign Message

The campaign’s vision was “a world for all ages,” and the campaign goal was to “change the way we think, feel and act towards age and ageing” (Officer, A. & de la Fuente-Nunez, V., 2018). Publications were hash tagged #AWorld4AllAges.

Goals of the campaign included: generating an evidence base, building a global coalition and raising awareness. The call-to-action includes efforts to promote, protect and intervene anywhere ageism occurs.



Project Evaluation

The WHO sought to compare the effectiveness of this campaign on ageism with other ageism campaigns. Because there was no previous history of evaluating previous ageism studies, the campaign used strategies of similar health campaigns to evaluate its effectiveness using the following criteria:

Key Characteristic of Effectiveness	Health Campaign Recommendation	Combat Aging Campaign
Dose (duration and greater the intensity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-8 months for “awareness” 12-18 months to establish themes & impact attitudes. 18-24 months to impact behavior 	Yes, campaign began in 2021 and is on-going.
Framing: refers to how an issue is communicated	Balanced explanations & message perceptions	Yes, messaging is sensitive to language, culture, and social context
Types of Messaging Denormalizing Behavior	Simple messages about achievable actions & images; increase social unacceptability; ageism is neither mainstream nor normal	Yes, uses verbiage “combat” & negative framing
Interactive & social media channels	Interactive components; personalized messaging	Yes, users encouraged to engage in videos, access materials, add findings
Community Engagement	Include younger & older representatives	Yes, campaign featured both young and old people
Funding and Partnerships	Combine mass media campaign efforts with local organizations	Yes, actively invited multi-level local & governmental agencies
Cultural Appropriateness	Involve local community, faith-based leaders, traditional elders as entry points for collective dialogue & agents of change	Yes

Based on the criteria used in other health campaigns, Combat Ageism met its goals and effectively impacted the negative consequences of ageism on a global scale.

Theoretical Application

Despite the challenges, global campaigns are valuable in revealing common health behaviors consistent with human experience. The Social Cognitive Theory states that “learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior” (LaMorte, W., 2022). This campaign gave communities and organizations a framework and methodology for recognizing and confronting social disparities caused by ageism. They identified three key strategies to tackle ageism across the world: making changes in policies and laws and intervening through educational activities and intergenerational contact” (WHO, 2021).



Resources:

- LaMorte., W. (2022, November 3). Behavior Change Models. *Boston University School of Public Health*. <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/sb/behavioralchangetheories/>
- World Health Organization. (2024). Combating Ageism. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism>
- World Health Organization. (2021, March 18). *Global report on ageism*. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>
- World Health Organization. (2021, March 18). *Global Campaign to Combat Ageism—Toolkit*. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/global-campaign-to-combat-ageism-toolkit>
- Officer, A., & de la Fuente-Nunez, V. (2018). *A global campaign to combat ageism*. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 96(4), 295-296. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.17.202424>
- UN Decade of Healthy Ageing. (2021, March 18). *Global Campaign to Combat Ageism—#AWorld4AllAges* [Video]. <https://youtu.be/7tThSqTWsCs?si=CW4qPW5RmQAUrpKB>