

# TRICKER

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**PIONEERING  
HEALTH  
INNOVATIONS**





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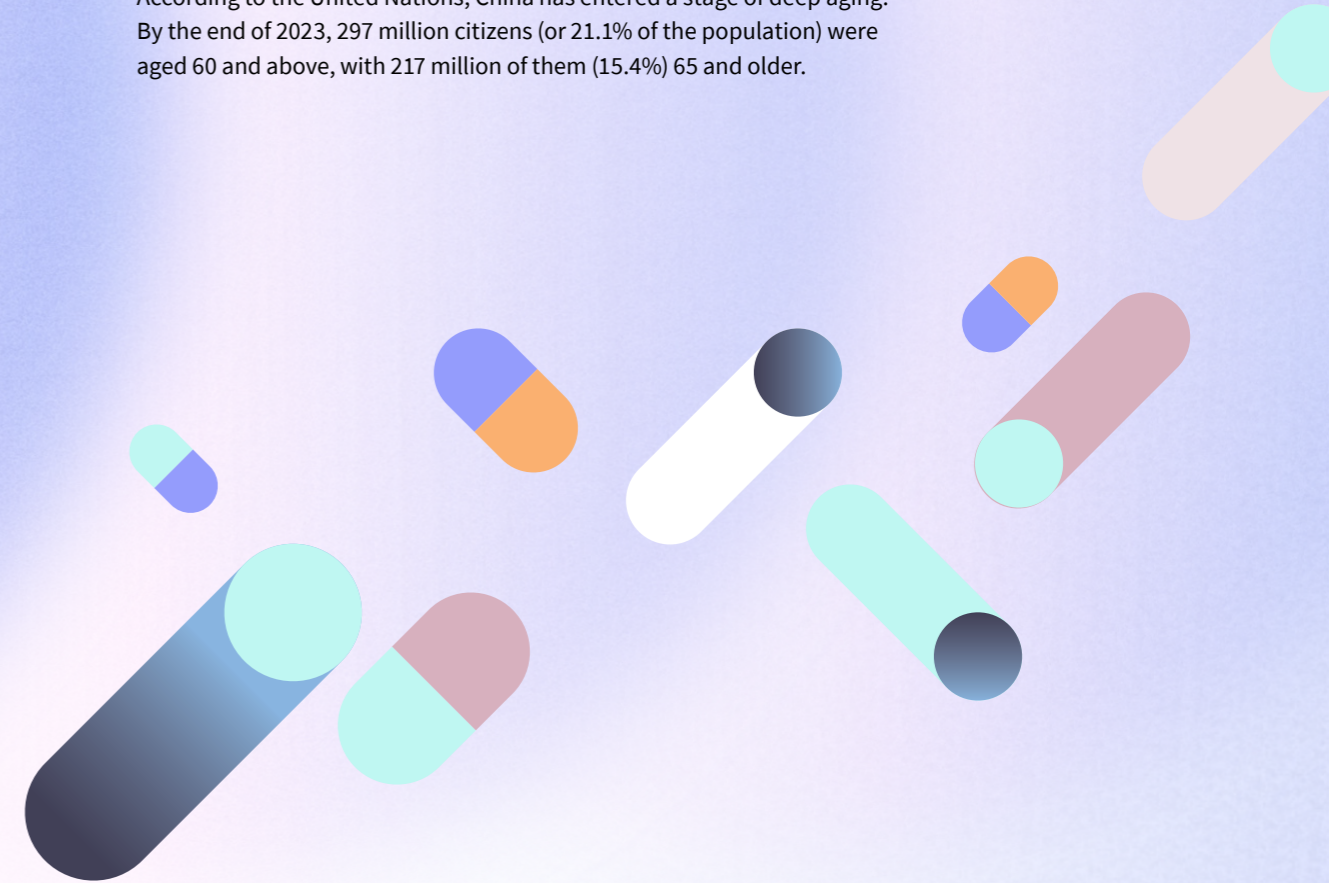
# COMMUNICATING WITH THE CHINESE ELDERLY

*'Energetic Elders' Are Changing the Way Brands and Businesses Communicate with China's Older Population*

In China, where the population is aging rapidly, a new cohort of “energetic elders” is shaking up the way businesses engage and communicate with senior audiences. Understanding this growing demographic (a subset of those aged 60 and older), along with the characteristics of other segments of an aging China, are key to communications that win over senior consumers.

#### **Current Status and Trends in China's Elderly Population**

According to the United Nations, China has entered a stage of deep aging. By the end of 2023, 297 million citizens (or 21.1% of the population) were aged 60 and above, with 217 million of them (15.4%) 65 and older.



*Dynamic and sociable, “energetic elders” blur the boundaries between online and offline: They build WeChat groups based on niche interests, shop online, and put quality first. They socialize, entertain, and get peers together for “senior university” classes.*

As one of the world’s fastest-aging countries, China exhibits unique characteristics compared to other societies:

- **Massive population:** One in four older adults worldwide is Chinese.
- **Rapid aging:** While the aging rate accelerates over the next 30 years, the number of workers supporting older people is projected to fall.
- **High proportion of “super seniors”:** The number of people aged 80 and above is projected to exceed 10% of the total population by 2050.
- **“Getting old before getting rich”:** China’s per capita GDP nears the lower end of high-income countries, yet its aging rate surpasses that of most developed nations.
- **“East high, West low”:** Recent population figures show that, out of China’s 31 provincial-level administrative divisions (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) in 2022, 20 have entered deep aging, with Liaoning and Shanghai reporting the highest aging level. In contrast, Tibet and Xinjiang were the “youngest” provinces.

**Deep Dive Into China’s Aging Population**

Effective communication strategies for China’s aging society start with a clear understanding of the variation among different age groups, their pain points, and their motivations. In China, conversations around aging tend to pick up before age 60, as people approach retirement age (63 for male workers, 58 for female office workers, and 55 for female blue-collar workers, per recent proposals approved by the

government to gradually raise the statutory retirement age from January 2025).

Pressures from work, family, and health prevention become gradually more common among the 45- to 55-year-old cohort. Children’s education and elderly kin care stand out as pain points, as this age group seeks to lead a healthy lifestyle and create stability for the later years.

**55-75 years old:** Mostly retired seniors, high in vitality and active in family, community, and even global affairs:

- **Pain points:** Emerging health issues, adapting to retirement, and related life changes.
- **Motivations:** Maintaining good health and a positive outlook, especially through travel, fitness, and lifelong learning.

**75 years and above:** Despite increased morbidity rates, people aged 75 and older generally keep a positive outlook. Their lives primarily revolve around relatives, tight-knit communities, and nursing homes:

- **Pain points:** Various health problems associated with the ability to self-care. These include concerns about loss of mobility, memory or thinking skills, hospitalization anxiety, underlying health complications, feelings of helplessness, and sleep disturbances.
- **Motivations:** Comfortable living environment, supportive care delivered in the comfort of one’s residence through community engagement and personalized healthcare services. Opportunity

for home care with companionship assistance, meal preparation, and basic housekeeping.

**“Energetic Elders”: Beating Stereotypes Around Aging**

A new cohort of “energetic elders” is emerging among older Chinese that defy misconceptions about aging in the country. As this group grows, it challenges perceptions that senior citizens are hard to engage or resistant to new offerings and experiences. New energetic elders are a subset of people over 60 who lived through the reform and open-up period — China’s “economic miracle.” They’ve benefitted from remarkable economic development, earning stable incomes and pensions.

They are:

- Quick learners and open to new experiences
- Independent decision-makers
- Influencers among social groups that follow trends and hot topics
- Savvy smartphone users, proactive online searchers

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China’s “energetic elders” are carving a unique space in the target market of consumer brands, which opens up opportunities for German businesses to align their services and product marketing with the needs and behaviors of this growing

demographic. With more “energetic elders” now active on Chinese social media and e-commerce platforms, German companies can leverage digital channels like WeChat and Douyin to reach older audiences through product reviews, live-stream demos, and collaborations with key opinion leaders who often influence the purchasing decisions of senior users.

**Case Study: GSK Markets Shingles Vaccine in China**

When global biopharma company GSK sought to launch the first shingles vaccine for citizens 50 and older in China, the brand resolved to first fill knowledge gaps about the benefits of immunization and shingles as a vaccine-preventable disease among vulnerable seniors. GSK’s awareness campaign then leveraged credible third-party healthcare professionals with significant reach among digitally-savvy seniors to educate older people about the viral disease, its signs and risk factors, as well as the value of prevention.

To reach as large a cross-section of Chinese seniors as possible and tap into the new cohort of “energetic elders,” GSK disseminated its campaign through television and short video formats. For increased credibility, the biopharma company conducted interviews with patient influencers whose personal stories and experiences helped shape public perceptions of the urgency and importance of getting vaccinated. This multichannel approach, coupled with word-of-mouth marketing, led to a positive pickup in vaccinations among GSK’s target elderly demographic.

The national interest in shingles prevention sparked by GSK's campaign resulted in a 780% YOY increase in the media index for "shingles" on Baidu, China's leading search engine, while "shingles vaccine" became the suggested search keywords. Support from local health authorities further validated GSK's call to action and led to the first inoculation events, making headline news and trending as a "hot topic," especially on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, where they hit over 10 million views.

Besides underscoring the value of multichannel communications as an effective campaign tactic for healthcare brands, GSK's shingles case demonstrates the impact that extensive research, evidence-based content, and careful audience segmentation have on a company's ability to influence the healthcare conversation at the industry level. Through this campaign, GSK not only gained share of voice across China's main social channels but was also able to reaffirm its reputation as an authoritative biopharma company, ultimately broadening the brand's stakeholder relations and audience reach in China.

**Suggestions to Brands**

- **Deep understanding of elderly needs:** Conduct extensive research to segment the needs and break down the preferences of China's multifaceted elderly population.
- **Multichannel communication:** Combine social media campaigns with offline community activations to reach older consumers across the whole spectrum of touchpoints.

- **Reliable content:** Earn the trust of elderly audiences by producing content that is authoritative, trustworthy, and practical.
- **Partnerships with the "energetic elderly":** China's most active and open-minded elderly citizens often serve as opinion leaders within their communities, so much so that they're able to alter the consumption patterns and preferences of peer groups.

Despite the socioeconomic challenges it presents, China's demographic shift also affords sizeable opportunities. Understanding the nuances of a fast-aging population and catering to the needs of older citizens will prove essential for all businesses — and healthcare brands in particular — and will help forge deep emotional connections with elderly consumers.

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# BUSINESS CONFIDENCE SURVEY REPORT

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