

Finding joy in caregiving: Baby boomers find purpose in shopping for those they look after

June 25 2024, by Zachary Robichaud, Hong Yu and Osmud Rahman



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Canada is on the verge of becoming a "super-aged" nation—a term that refers to nations where [21 percent or more of the population is aged 65 or older](#). At present, [Japan, Italy, Finland and Germany](#) all meet this

criteria, and Canada is expected to reach this milestone [by early 2030](#).

This demographic shift has various societal implications, particularly when it comes to caregiving. [More than eight million Canadians](#) provide some kind of caregiving support to [family members](#) and friends, and [28 percent](#) care for loved ones with age-related conditions.

Since [clothing can be a reflection of one's personal identity](#), supporting successful aging should include shopping well-being. [Our forthcoming study](#) looked into the experiences of [caregiver](#) baby boomers who shop for the elderly, and how these experiences impact their well-being.

We examined how factors like fashion interest, shopping involvement and price sensitivity influence baby boomers' shopping satisfaction and well-being. By understanding these influences, we aim to better support caregivers by improving the [shopping experience](#) for [older adults](#) and the ones who care for them.

The baby boomer caregiving experience

Elderly individuals often have difficulty moving around and rely on family members and friends for many [daily activities](#), including shopping. In Canada, [40 percent of seniors](#) experience physical or mobility impairments, which increases their dependence on caregivers.

For boomers, caregiving is not merely about running errands—it's also a meaningful activity that impacts the quality of life of their aging family members and friends.

Shopping for clothes, in particular, can be challenging for caregivers because it involves considering personal preferences, physiological needs and the emotional expression of an individual and their identity through fashion.

Adult children may find themselves more emotionally engaged when shopping for their parents than when shopping for themselves. Our study found that shopping for others, especially in a caregiving context, involves greater accountability and effort.

When boomers pick out an article of clothing for the elderly, they consider not only the practical aspects like comfort and ease of care, but also how the item will make them feel.

Shopping as a bonding experience

Our study reveals that boomers' enjoyment and satisfaction during these shopping trips are driven primarily by their fashion sense and the pleasure derived from selecting stylish, yet suitable, clothes for the elderly people in their lives.

Practical considerations, like price sensitivity, appeared to take a backseat when shopping for a loved one. As such, caregiver baby boomers are willing to spend more money to ensure their elderly family members' and friends' happiness and comfort, indicating that the emotional reward outweighs the financial cost.

Our study found that baby boomers who are quick to adopt new fashion trends and influence others' style choices perceive higher social value when shopping for others. This suggests that, by choosing clothes that look and feel good, boomers feel a sense of accomplishment and social validation.

This social connection is essential for caregivers. [Shopping can be a social activity that fosters connections and reduces feelings of loneliness.](#) For boomers, discussing fashion with their parents or friends, getting feedback and seeing their joy in wearing a new outfit provides emotional fulfillment. It transforms a mundane task into a bonding experience that

boosts their well-being.

What this means for retailers

Given our research findings, there are several practical implications for retailers. Understanding that emotional and social values are significant to older caregivers, retailers can create more engaging and supportive shopping environments.

For instance, providing personalized shopping assistance, offering products that cater to both comfort and style and creating a welcoming atmosphere can significantly enhance the shopping experience for caregivers.

Retailers can also implement initiatives that focus on the emotional aspects of shopping. This might include fashion shows or [marketing campaigns](#) featuring elderly models, special discounts for caregivers or the elderly and community events that bring caregivers and their loved ones together in a social setting.

Recent examples of this include [Dove's "Real Beauty" Campaign](#), [Shoppers Drug Mart senior's day](#), [Cadillac Fairview's mall walking program](#) and advocacy groups like [the Canadian Association of Retired Persons](#). These efforts can help build a loyal customer base while also addressing the unique needs of this demographic.

The shopping experiences of [baby boomers](#) as caregivers are multifaceted, involving emotional, social and practical dimensions. By acknowledging and addressing these aspects, we can better support caregivers, enhance their well-being and create a more inclusive and empathetic retail environment.

For caregivers, shopping is more than just a task; it's an act of love and

care that significantly impacts their quality of life and the lives of those they care for.

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