

Exploring Optimization Strategies for Exhibition Services Targeting the "New Elderly": A Case Study of Shanghai AID

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Abstract: By the end of 2024, China's population aged 60 and above reached 310.31 million, accounting for 22.0% of the total population, as the process of moderate aging continues to accelerate. Among them, the younger elderly population aged 60–74 numbered approximately 207 million, constituting 65.7% of the total elderly population and forming the main body of the current elderly demographic. This cohort, mostly born in the 1950s and 1960s, is characterized by relatively higher educational attainment, more stable income, ample leisure time, and stronger demands for spiritual enrichment, social networking, and self-actualization. The industry commonly refers to them as the "New Elderly." This paper takes the New Elderly as the research subject and Shanghai AID (Shanghai International Exhibition on Aging, Assistive Devices and Rehabilitation Medical Expo) as a single case study. After defining the two core concepts of "New Elderly" and "exhibition and convention services" and reviewing three theoretical frameworks—Active Ageing, Hierarchy of Needs, and Experience Economy—it analyzes the exhibition service demand structure of the New Elderly. It then uses AID as a lens to identify common shortcomings in current elderly-oriented exhibition services across four dimensions: information accessibility, on-site experience, content design, and intelligent interaction. Finally, optimization recommendations are proposed from five aspects: content, scenarios, facilities, information, and operations. The study concludes that elderly exhibition services need to shift their value orientation from "elderly care services" to "quality of life," regarding the New Elderly as co-creators of participation rather than mere service recipients, thereby achieving sustainable supply-demand matching.

Keywords: New Elderly; Exhibition and Convention Services; Age-Friendly Adaptation; Shanghai AID; Service Optimization

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Population aging is a long-term challenge for China's social and economic development. According to the Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2024 National Economic and Social Development issued by the National Bureau of Statistics, by the end of 2024, the national population aged 60 and above reached 310.31 million, accounting for 22.0% of the total population; those aged 65 and above numbered 220.23 million, representing 15.6% [1]. Related statistics published by the China National Committee on Aging in 2025 also indicate that among the population aged 60 and above, the younger elderly (aged 60–74) number approximately 207 million, accounting for 65.7% [2].

The younger elderly have become the dominant group in terms of numbers and differ from previous elderly cohorts due to their distinct life stage and generational background. Having generally experienced the Reform and Opening-up era in its entirety, they received basic to relatively complete education and, upon retirement, possess fixed incomes or savings. They have more articulated aspirations for cultural enjoyment, interpersonal connections, and the fulfillment of personal meaning. This group is now frequently referred to as the "New Elderly" in industry observations and media coverage [3,4].

From a policy perspective, the "Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy to Enhance the Well-being of the Elderly," issued in January 2024, identified "enriching the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly" as a priority and proposed promoting the integration of culture,

tourism, exhibitions, and elderly care services. Shanghai subsequently supplemented these measures with the "Several Policy Measures of Shanghai Municipality on Promoting High-Quality Development of the Silver Economy," incorporating the Shanghai AID into the list of supported projects [5]. The exhibition format—encompassing information dissemination, product presentation, cultural exchange, and social connection—is well suited to meet the New Elderly's evolving expectations from "elderly care" toward "elderly enjoyment and elderly contribution." However, in practice, relatively few exhibitions are designed with the New Elderly as the target audience for content planning or service arrangements; age-friendly configurations at exhibition venues remain inadequate, and information access and communication frequently encounter significant "digital divide" challenges [6].

Given the above background, selecting an exhibition with industry representativeness and data accessibility as the research entry point is of great significance for the depth of this study. The Shanghai International Exhibition on Aging, Assistive Devices and Rehabilitation Medical Expo (abbreviated as Shanghai AID) was founded in 2000 and has been held for 25 consecutive sessions. In 2025, the exhibition area reached 50,000 square meters, with 519 exhibitors and 76,591 visitors. Certified by UFI—The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, it is one of the largest and most internationalized elderly industry exhibitions in China [7]. This paper takes AID as the research subject, analyzing its replicable practices and remaining common shortcomings, and then discusses the optimization direction of exhibition services targeting the "New Elderly."

1.2 Research Significance

From a theoretical perspective, this paper applies the concept of Active Ageing, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and insights from Experience Economy to examine the practical situation of elderly exhibition services, incorporating the intersection of the Silver Economy and the exhibition economy into the analytical scope, and proposing a preliminary conceptual analytical framework for reference. From a practical perspective, the findings offer specific guidance for organizers on content arrangement, environmental design, equipment and information provision, and service

operations. They also provide case materials and analytical insights for government bodies and industry organizations in formulating policies and establishing age-friendly standards for Silver Economy exhibitions.

1.3 Research Methodology

This study combines a literature review with an in-depth single-case analysis. The review synthesizes data from National Bureau of Statistics communiqués, central government policy documents, and CNKI core journals related to the silver economy, age-friendly design, and exhibition services. Focusing on AID as the primary case, the research cross-references public data from organizers, official profiles, media coverage, and stakeholder feedback to verify findings. This approach distills actionable best practices while identifying persistent gaps requiring further attention.

2. Key Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Defining the "New Elderly"

The term "New Elderly" is not a rigorous statistical category but rather a generational descriptor used by academia and industry to refer to cohorts born around the Reform and Opening-up period who are approaching or have just entered old age. This paper draws on the definition presented in the 2021 article "New Social Networks of the New Elderly in the Internet Era" published in People's Tribune, understanding the "New Elderly" as a group predominantly composed of younger elderly individuals (mostly born in the 1950s and 1960s) who have relatively complete life experiences spanning the Reform and Opening-up era, possess higher educational levels and stable economic foundations, and demonstrate strong willingness for social interaction and self-expression [4].

Teng Yilin and Shen Jie, in their article "Research on Product Design Trends for the 'New Elderly' from the Perspective of Successful Aging," also pointed out that the New Elderly exhibit distinct demand characteristics at physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual levels compared to traditional elderly groups. Age-friendly design premised on the assumption of "care recipients" fails to address their pursuit of an "active life" [8].

Building on existing research, the main

characteristics of the New Elderly can be summarized as follows: (1) The age range is predominantly 60–74 years, classified as younger elderly; (2) They possess stable income available for cultural activities, such as pensions; (3) They hold a clear psychological orientation toward "living for oneself," seeking fulfillment through personal interests and interpersonal relationships; (4) In media usage, they have not entirely abandoned traditional channels while being open to adopting smart products. These four characteristics form the conceptual foundation for the demand analysis that follows.

2.2 The Connotation of Exhibition and Convention Services

Exhibition and convention services can be divided into narrow and broad definitions. In the narrow sense, services are limited to on-site provisions such as guidance, consultation, catering, ticketing, security, and medical assistance. In the broad sense, they encompass the entire process from pre-exhibition planning, exhibitor recruitment, marketing, on-site management, to post-event feedback—constituting a systematic service system serving exhibitors, professional visitors, and general attendees alike [9]. This paper adopts the broad definition, understanding "exhibition and convention services" as a holistic service system surrounding each stage of value exchange at exhibitions, jointly delivered by organizers, venue providers, exhibitors, and third-party service providers, encompassing information, people, materials, and experiential elements. Accordingly, the demand analysis in subsequent sections addresses both "on-site experience" and "participation throughout the entire process."

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

Active Ageing Theory. The World Health Organization proposed three pillars—"health, participation, and security"—in Active Ageing: A Policy Framework, emphasizing that old age remains an important life stage for social participation and value creation [10]. This theory provides the core basis for repositioning the New Elderly from "passive care recipients" to "active participants and co-creators," consistent with the national strategic direction of "implementing a national strategy to actively respond to population aging."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. This theory categorizes human needs into five

hierarchical levels: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. Traditional age-friendly design has largely addressed the first two categories (i.e., accessibility and medical care); however, modern elderly individuals increasingly seek social and self-actualization fulfillment. Exhibitions, as typical "third spaces" outside home and work, provide an ideal setting for actualizing the upper three levels of needs.

Experience Economy Theory. Pine and Gilmore, in *The Experience Economy*, proposed that experiences are created by enterprises using services as the stage and goods as props to deliver memorable activities for consumers [11]. For elderly exhibitions to genuinely enhance the New Elderly's sense of gain and repurchase intention, a shift is needed from selling "age-friendly products" to creating "age-friendly experiences," incorporating social interaction, emotional resonance, and self-expression during the exhibition process into the core service content.

3. Analysis of Exhibition Service Demands of the New Elderly

Drawing on AID's 2025 visitor structure data, AgeClub's "2024 Marketing Guide for Interest-Based Education Courses for the Middle-Aged and Elderly," and publicly available industry reports, the exhibition service demands of the New Elderly can be categorized into the following four types [7,12].

3.1 Information Acquisition Needs: Equal Emphasis on Traditional and Digital Channels

AID's 2025 visitor statistics indicate that visitors aged 60–69 account for approximately 44%, those aged 70–79 constitute about 36%, and the "pre-elderly" group aged 50–59 represents 12% [7]. This suggests that the New Elderly are not entirely composed of digital natives. AID's related survey also shows that for visitors aged 60 and above, the primary channels for initially obtaining exhibition information are currently "recommendations from family and friends" (approximately 33%), "community or senior university notifications" (approximately 24%), and "television or radio" (approximately 12%), with online channels including WeChat official accounts and short video platforms collectively accounting for only 28% [7]. This distribution of channels means that reaching the New Elderly with exhibition information cannot rely on a

single approach; both traditional and digital channels must be employed simultaneously.

3.2 On-Site Experience Needs: From "Viewing Exhibits" to "Exploring Scenarios"

AID's 2025 survey on visitors' purposes of attendance shows that "purchasing age-friendly products or services" accounts for 41.66%, "understanding industry information" for 36.79%, and "seeking cooperation and experiences" for 33.41% [7]. These data precisely demonstrate that the New Elderly's motivations for attending exhibitions have moved beyond merely "viewing products and inquiring about prices" to encompassing on-site trials and interactive experiences. The "Silver Hair Life Festival" newly established at AID 2025 achieved total retail sales exceeding 100 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of nearly 100%, with items enabling on-site experience—such as nursing beds, mobility aids, and elderly-friendly shoes—selling particularly well [8]. This represents a direct manifestation of the aforementioned demand structure within the exhibition context.

3.3 Social Interaction Needs: From "Spectators" to "Participants"

Based on AID's 2025 on-site observations and AgeClub's surveys, the New Elderly exhibit a collective characteristic of "prioritizing social interaction over exhibit viewing" in their overall attitude toward exhibitions. Most interviewees acknowledged that they are more willing to attend when visiting with former colleagues or old friends, while their motivation to visit alone diminishes significantly. Some also noted that after meeting like-minded individuals at AID, they often maintain contact and establish informal groups (sometimes with regular gatherings) [12]. From current observations, the fact that the New Elderly acquire social connections through exhibitions precisely embodies what Active Ageing Theory refers to as "social participation" in a new context.

3.4 Content Preference Needs: Interest-Oriented and Quality-of-Life-Oriented

The content sections of AID 2025 reflect a structural representation of the New Elderly's preferences. Examining the exhibition's eight major sections, those related to elderly care, rehabilitation, and age-friendly housing constitute "essential needs" as basic sections,

while the newly added "Silver Hair Life Festival" in 2024—focusing on "food, housing, and travel" as pillars of life quality—serves to attract visitors into the exhibition [7]. AgeClub's surveys of the New Elderly indicate that their top five areas of interest are, in order: interest-based training (such as calligraphy and painting, gardening, photography, dance, and cooking), cultural activities (intangible cultural heritage, traditional opera, nostalgia-themed events), health care, consumer-oriented quality of life, and intergenerational communication [12]. The elderly's expectations for exhibition content have shifted from solely "how to age" to "how to live well."

4. Common Problems in Current Elderly Exhibition Services: A Case Study of Shanghai AID

As a representative elderly exhibition in China, AID has accumulated replicable practical experience while also exposing common shortcomings in elderly exhibition services through visitor feedback. This chapter uses AID as a lens to identify these issues from four dimensions.

4.1 The "Last Mile" of Information Accessibility Remains Unresolved

While AID's information from its official website to official social media accounts is essentially complete, visitor feedback from 2024 reveals that approximately 15% reported "only learning about the exhibition upon arriving at the venue" [12]. The problem primarily lies in offline outreach: traditional channels such as community bulletin boards, street-level organizations, senior education institutions, and broadcasting media have not been adequately utilized. Meanwhile, online channels present a new issue—WeChat official account articles tend to be excessively long, with numerous embedded links, QR codes, and animations, which may not be convenient for elderly users. The combination of these two tendencies results in information fragmentation across both the "offline-to-online" and "online-to-offline" transitions.

4.2 Age-Friendly Details in On-Site Experience Require Further Improvement

AID has arranged seating along main aisles, near restrooms, and in designated rest areas within the halls; barrier-free facilities and AED

emergency equipment have been fully deployed; and relevant contingency plans are essentially complete [7]. Current visitor feedback mainly concerns three categories of detail issues: (1) insufficient seating during peak traffic periods; (2) certain wayfinding signage failing to accommodate distant viewing or low-light conditions; (3) despite the presence of medical stations, their locations are difficult to identify, with some elderly visitors unable to find them. Although these issues require specific hardware solutions, their common deficiency is the failure to adequately address "last meter" details.

4.3 Confusion between "For the Elderly" and "Adapted for the Elderly" in Content Design

AID's core content focuses on B2B industry chains including elderly care services, rehabilitation aids, age-friendly home furnishings, and smart technology—a positioning consistent with its trade function and documented in Shanghai's relevant policy documents [5]. However, many on-site visitors reported that the exhibition is "highly professional but weak in consumer-oriented experience"—with more product presentations and fewer hands-on experiences; more exhibitors of health supplements and rehabilitation equipment and fewer in entertainment, hobbies, and fashion; more professional visitors and fewer general family visitors. For New Elderly visitors who wish to "browse, enjoy, and shop," this content structure creates a form of invisible exclusion.

4.4 The "Digital Divide" in Intelligent Interaction Has Not Been Adequately Bridged

AID 2025 has adopted electronic tickets, facial recognition turnstiles, APP-based agenda queries, and self-service check-in services [7]. However, reports from on-site volunteers indicate that approximately 30% of visitors aged 60 and above required assistance when first using electronic tickets, and some elderly visitors missed sub-forum information due to an inability to navigate self-service check-in. Wang Ying and Liu Chang, in their article "Research on the Age-Friendly Transformation Path of the Exhibition Industry in the Context of the Silver Economy," similarly argue that while digitalization is the trend, "manual backup" should be retained; otherwise, those unable to operate smart devices among both older and newer elderly cohorts risk being excluded [6].

5. Optimization Recommendations for Exhibition and Convention Services Targeting the "New Elderly": The Practice Path of Shanghai AID

Addressing the aforementioned issues and drawing on AID's existing practical explorations and industry research, this paper proposes optimization recommendations from five dimensions: content, scenarios, facilities, information, and operations.

5.1 Content Optimization: From "Elderly Care Services" to "Quality of Life"

AID's "Silver Hair Life Festival" should serve as a reference point. Building upon the existing B2B industry chain exhibitions, greater consideration should be given to interest-based training, cultural programs, silver hair tourism, and fashionable lifestyle content. Thematic exhibitions can be designed around the life experiences or memories of contemporary elderly individuals, including nostalgia-themed exhibitions, heritage craft exhibitions, silver hair fashion shows, and retirement lifestyle proposal zones. In terms of practical format, the potential for intergenerational connection should be leveraged (such as having elderly artisans teach crafts or enabling grandchildren to participate alongside grandparents), promoting natural emotional bonding through shared activities and collaboration.

5.2 Scenario Optimization: Transforming "Exhibitions" into "Life Experiences"

AID 2025's approach of integrating with Shanghai's "May 5th Shopping Festival" consumer subsidies and establishing a dedicated "Silver Hair Life Festival" themed pavilion is worth promoting [8]. It is recommended to create dedicated social spaces at exhibition venues, equipped with sofas, coffee tables, water facilities, and age-friendly lighting. Planned thematic salons, tea parties, expert sharing sessions, and interest group meetups should be organized with dedicated hosts to facilitate natural ice-breaking among strangers. Linkages with local life services, cultural tourism experiences, and festive events can also be established, leveraging the composite scenario of "exhibition + life + consumption" to extend visitors' duration at the venue and surrounding areas.

5.3 Facility Optimization: Delivering Thoughtfulness at the "Last Meter"

In addition to existing basic barrier-free facilities, rest seating should be supplemented along main aisles at a density of one station per 50–80 meters; signage should use large, high-contrast fonts with voice announcements at key locations; on-site medical stations (equipped with blood pressure monitors and first-aid supplies) and AED devices should be set up with the assistance of professional medical institutions in clearly identifiable and easily accessible locations; and restrooms should be equipped with emergency call devices and designed to accommodate wheelchair passage. When renovating various facilities, both elderly and younger users should be actively invited to test and verify practical usability.

5.4 Information Service Optimization: Integrating Online and Offline Channels While Retaining Manual Backup

For online channels, WeChat official accounts should be appropriately simplified with larger font sizes, voice search and broadcast features enabled, and avoidance of multiple concurrent links. Key information such as time, ticket prices, and registration procedures should be prominently displayed. For offline channels, proactive collaboration with communities, senior universities, neighborhood committees, and elderly care institutions is recommended, using posters, brochures, and community broadcasts to deliver information to the target audience. Meanwhile, traditional means such as telephone, printed tickets, and on-site information desks should not be entirely abandoned, ensuring that elderly users unable to use smart tools still have convenient avenues for assistance or verification.

5.5 Operational Mechanism Optimization: Transforming the New Elderly from "Audience" to "Co-Builders"

The New Elderly should not be regarded merely as observers of exhibitions but also as co-builders. Consideration should be given to facilitating multi-dimensional participation through "elderly volunteers + elderly spokespersons + elderly advisors": utilizing the skills and knowledge of elderly individuals as volunteers, docents, or "Silver Hair Experts"; incorporating elderly representatives into thematic discussions, exhibit arrangement, and the design of interactive content; and providing

elderly visitors with feedback opportunities to make necessary improvements to the exhibition based on their input. AID Talk's existing industry format can be extended through "elderly-specific sessions." The proposed co-creation approach can both improve the age-friendliness of exhibitions and provide the New Elderly with a sense of recognition and purposeful engagement.

6. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the New Elderly, using AID as the analytical entry point to examine the group's fundamental exhibition demands, the common deficiencies in current elderly exhibition services, and directions for improvement. The conclusions are as follows: the exhibition needs of the New Elderly are not merely general elderly care issues but rather diverse demands driven by social interaction, personal interests, and quality of life. Current elderly exhibition services still exhibit significant age-friendly deficiencies in terms of information, facilities, content, and digital tools. AID's experience demonstrates that designing content from an interest-based perspective, organizing activities through social formats, ensuring complete and convenient facilities, integrating online and offline information channels, and enabling multi-party collaborative operations all contribute to higher levels of participation and satisfaction among New Elderly visitors.

This study has two limitations: (1) the data are largely drawn from existing publicly available materials or individual cases, without utilizing primary data from questionnaires or similar instruments; (2) only AID was examined as the observation subject, leaving analysis of other exhibition formats and regional exhibitions incomplete. Future research should employ broader on-site surveys to characterize elderly exhibitions, conduct comparative analyses across different types of exhibitions, and employ longitudinal approaches to examine how exhibition activities contribute to the New Elderly's improvement of life quality, acquisition of social recognition, and sense of belonging.

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