



1. Introduction: Longevity, Life Science and a new health narrative

The desire to live longer, stay healthy, and postpone aging is as old as humanity itself. Throughout history, people have searched for the fountain of youth, dreamed of immortality, and sought ways to overcome disease and physical decline. Today, this ancient aspiration has re-emerged with renewed force, not through myths or religion, but through advances in science, technology, medicine, and a rapidly expanding global health economy.

Within the broader field of life sciences, longevity has become one of the most visible areas of scientific research and public attention in the media. Advances in aging research, neuroscience, molecular biology, genetics, preventive medicine, biotechnology, and precision health have transformed aging into an object of scientific investigation. Increasingly, researchers are not only asking how people can live longer, but how they can live healthier for longer by extending what researchers call healthspan: the number of years lived in good physical, cognitive, and social health.

Research into aging, prevention, chronic disease, brain health, regenerative medicine, and personalized healthcare all contribute to the growing scientific understanding of how human health develops across a human's lifespan.

This report originates from my fellowship at Constructive Institute focused on Life Science. The original ambition was broad: to explore the latest basic research, collaborations across scientific disciplines, and public perceptions of the opportunities and challenges within Life Science, with particular attention to how these developments are covered in the media. Another key objective was to investigate how advances in Life Science are translated into tangible societal solutions from new treatments and personalized medicine to technologies that can improve quality of life.

As the project evolved, however, one particular field repeatedly emerged at the intersection of many of these questions: longevity. Few areas of Life Science bring together cutting-edge research, technological innovation, commercial interests, hype, public fascination, ethical dilemmas, and media attention to the same extent. Longevity exists under many names and manifestations: health optimization, biohacking, personalized health, biological age testing, self-tracking, wellness culture, and various forms of “maxxing” culture centered on optimizing the body and mind. Together, these trends have become a highly visible

expression of how Life Science is translated, interpreted, commercialized, and debated in contemporary society in the media and on social media.

My interest in longevity is also personal. Following a prolonged and life-altering concussion, I became deeply engaged in understanding my own health and recovery. What began as a search for healing gradually evolved into an intense focus on monitoring symptoms, tracking bodily functions, testing interventions, and searching for ways to regain control. Like many others navigating chronic health challenges, I found myself increasingly viewing the body as a system that could be measured, managed, and optimized.

Over time, this experience raised broader questions. Why has personal health become such a dominant cultural preoccupation in the media and on social media? Why are so many people drawn to narratives of optimization, control, and self-improvement?

Longevity therefore emerged not only as a scientific topic, but as a uniquely revealing case through which to explore how Life Science is communicated, understood, commercialized, and integrated into everyday life.

Longevity has become a powerful media phenomenon, a commercial market, and a cultural movement. Concepts such as health optimization, biohacking, biological age, wearable technologies, personalized nutrition, sleep tracking, supplements, and self-monitoring have moved into mainstream journalism, podcasts, newsletters, documentaries, influencer culture, and social media feeds.

This development reflects a broader societal shift. According to Joakim Quorp Matthiesen, Project Director at Folkeuniversitetet, some of the institution's most popular lectures and educational programmes increasingly focus on health, the body, the mind, personal development, and self-optimization. In contemporary society, health has become not only a biological condition but also a marker of identity, self-realization, responsibility, and success.

The growing fascination with longevity is closely connected to profound changes in the information ecosystem. Increasingly, citizens encounter health information through social media platforms, influencers, podcasts, and digital creators rather than exclusively through healthcare institutions, researchers, or traditional news organizations. [According to a 2026 Pew Research Center study](#), 40 percent of U.S. adults report receiving health and wellness information from social media influencers or podcasts. The findings suggest that health

information is increasingly encountered through algorithm-driven media environments rather than exclusively through traditional expert institutions.

For journalists, this development raises important questions. Journalism has traditionally functioned as a bridge between scientific expertise and public understanding, but now they operate alongside influencers, health entrepreneurs, technology companies, wellness brands, and content creators who often command larger audiences and stronger emotional relationships with users than traditional media institutions.

A challenge in studying longevity as a media phenomenon is that it is dispersed across a variety of concepts such as health optimization, biohacking, wellness, self-tracking, and body optimization. Because these overlapping trends are difficult to capture through a single quantitative measure, this report adopts a qualitative approach to the phenomenon through interviews with journalists and experts.

The purpose of this report is therefore to explore how different Danish media outlets cover and understand longevity and to examine how journalism can contribute to a more nuanced and constructive public conversation about health.

1. Navigating the Longevity Trend in the Danish Media Landscape

The surge in longevity and self-optimization in the Danish media and health journalism is characterized by a fundamental tension between commercial survival and public service obligations. Based on my interviews with health editors and journalists at Denmark's leading newsrooms, Berlingske, Jyllands-Posten, Politiken, and DR, several takeaways emerge regarding the media's coverage of this "near-health" trend, including: Longevity as a commercial engine, the media as scientific corrective to health misinformation on social media and among health influencers, the dilemmas of "me-journalism" and individual self-improvement and the displacement of the coverage of structural health inequality and market demands versus public service.

The business of living longer: Berlingske's health and lifestyle laboratory

In January 2025, the Danish daily Berlingske established a dedicated editorial desk titled "Vores Liv" to cover health and lifestyle. According to editor Nina Brorson, the vision was to create a space for reader-centric content as opposed to the relentless pace of the news: *"The whole idea around making 'Vores Liv' was to create a form of break from the news, where we didn't necessarily follow the news agenda, but wanted to be something for our readers and be relevant to their lives"*.

The target group for this health and lifestyle content is the core Berlingske demographic: individuals aged 30 to 59 who identify with *"bourgeois values"*. Brorson defines this not as a political affiliation, but as a lifestyle philosophy: *"It is about valuing personal freedom, taking responsibility for your own life and choices, and actively contributing to the society we are part of."*

She notes that this audience is particularly interested in taking personal responsibility for their own health. Brorson acknowledges the popularity of longevity and health content among their readers, but clarifies that it is not the paper's only commercial driver, and that the coverage of longevity and self-optimization has not displaced structural health reporting at Berlingske, as the two approaches are complementary.

Beyond reader relevance, the desk *"Vores Liv"* serves as an internal *"little laboratory"* for the newspaper. By separating these journalists from the news-driven desks, Berlingske aims to create an environment where there is *"room to play with formats and storytelling techniques"*. This includes experiments with digital formats such as the *"Hack Your Age"* newsletter, which Brorson notes was difficult to achieve within a traditional newsroom structure because the competing demands of news and lifestyle features often *"point in too many directions"*.

She also views the desk's role as a necessary *"scientific corrective"* to the unregulated health advice found on social media: *"It must be scientific and evidence-based. We always go after the most knowledgeable people in a field, and it is also communicatively important for us to show the readers that these are some of those who really know their field"*.

This approach is used to "cut through" the noise of influencers. For instance, when Danish influencer Emil Thorup made claims about oatmeal, Brorson's team consulted researchers to determine if the claims were true or *"misinformation"*.

A recurring feature of "*Vores Liv*" is the use of experts' describing their own lives. Brorson argues that showing what a professor does in their own life provides a higher level of authenticity than traditional reporting: *"It gives a lot of authority to the story that it is not just advice from the experts, but it actually also something they themselves live by. It has a greater value for me as a reader that it is a person who is knowledgeable, but also lives according to that knowledge"*.

The ultimate goal of this identification-based reporting is to be "*action-oriented*". In an uncertain world of war and crises, Brorson believes the media can help readers "*navigate*" their own lives and make "*better decisions*" for their daily health.

This editorial focus is visible in some of the desk's most read articles, such as the following three articles:

- Efter massevis af slankeure, gik hun anderledes til værks. Nu har hun et råd til alle, der vil ned i vægt: This article provides practical weight loss advice and translating individual experience into advice for the reader's own life.
- I 2025 blev han klogere på bmi og protein. Nu har han et budskab til alle, der ønsker at opbygge muskelmasse i 2026: This article targets individual health optimizers by delivering evidence-based insights into BMI and protein intake for building muscle mass
- Det blev den største øjenåbner i hendes karriere. Nu peger forsker på tre ting, hun ville ønske, alle vidste om kræft: This article utilizes a scientific expert to provide readers with knowledge about cancer prevention and awareness

Testing the hype: Jyllands-Posten's investigative approach to longevity and health journalism

For Jyllands-Posten (JP), the move into the world of longevity and health optimization was a strategic response to a changing media landscape, explains Thomas Vibjerg with 14 years of experience at JP. Having spent years in JP's investigative "gravegruppe" and covering the bureaucratic structures of the Danish healthcare system, Vibjerg was part of an editorial pivot three years ago that redefined how the newspaper engaged with its audience.

The motivation was rooted in the reality of the newspaper's aging print demographic. Vibjerg notes that *"the average age for print readers rises by a year every year,"* a trend that necessitated a move toward younger, digital-first audiences. JP identified a target segment labeled *"career families"*: individuals younger than the typical subscriber seeking content directly applicable to their high-performance lifestyles.

Therefore, the team began producing content centered on *"health in a more practical sense: exercise, nutrition, training"*. The goal was to provide *"inspiration for people's own health and training lives"*. This practical approach has proven successful, as Vibjerg observes that *"this type of material hits more than the average"* and shows strong performance in subscriber conversion.

A defining characteristic of JP's current approach is its departure from the traditional Danish *"omnibus"* ideal: the idea that a newspaper should be a generalist publication for all citizens. Vibjerg is clear that the newsroom has strategically *"moved away from the omnibus mindset"*.

By focusing on *"resource-strong"* and *"affluent, perhaps upper-middle class"* readers, JP has leaned into a niche where health is viewed as a form of self-optimization. While some might view this as elitist, Vibjerg suggests it reflects the audience that pays for digital journalism. *"Everyone who subscribes to a newspaper is probably quite affluent,"* he remarks, and data suggests these readers have a voracious appetite for guides that help them *"succeed"* in personal health goals.

What distinguishes Vibjerg's work from other lifestyle content is the application of investigative skepticism to commercial health claims, so the newspaper serves as a skeptical filter, helping readers navigate a marketplace of *"miracle"* cures with data-driven, practical advice. Vibjerg and his colleagues do not just report on trends; they test them. *"In its basic substance, this is a critical approach,"* Vibjerg explains: *"Instead of just writing that many people use it and everyone is advertising for it, we ask: 'But does it actually work?'"*.

This skepticism manifests in rigorous *"journalistic experiments"*. The following articles serve as primary examples of JP's coverage of longevity and health optimization. According to

Vibjerg, these specific pieces have performed well, generating high engagement, significant click rates, and reader feedback:

- [Måler du søvn og kalorier med et smartur? JP købte tre ure for at teste, om de måler rigtigt](#): Recognizing that millions of Danes use wearables, JP purchased and tested several devices against professional data to see if they actually measure correctly, when tracking sleep and calorie expenditure.
- [Virker kollagen mod rynker? 12 personer har testet det, og svaret er klart](#): The article "Does collagen work against wrinkles? 12 people have tested it, and the answer is clear," provides a critical look at the supplement's actual efficacy. A consumer test utilizing 12 test subjects and professional photography to challenge industry claims about wrinkle reduction. When the newsroom noticed the massive push for collagen, they recruited 12 test subjects and used professional photography to measure wrinkle depth before and after an eight-week period. Vibjerg explains their philosophy simply: *"Instead of just writing about more people taking collagen, can we also try to test it ourselves?"*.
- [Det gik, som forskeren havde frygtet, da en måneds faste var overstået](#): In collaboration with the Institute of Sports Science in Aarhus, JP scanned test subjects to measure changes in muscle mass and body fat after a month of fasting. The results were documented in the article and highlighted the physical toll of extreme dieting.
- [Masser af motion og sund kost? Nej, det er noget helt andet, som Chris MacDonald vægter højest](#): A feature focusing on the holistic lifestyle priorities of the health expert Chris MacDonald. The article "Lots of exercise and a healthy diet? No, it's something completely different that Chris MacDonald values most" provides a roadmap for applying high-performance science to daily life.

Another pillar of JP's strategy is the *"translation"* of elite performance for the layperson. Vibjerg's team often interviews professional athletes, from cyclists to footballers, not to discuss match results, but to deconstruct their training and recovery protocols and use them as practical case studies for optimization. *"We use professional athletes to show their training programs and try to translate them into what ordinary readers can get out of them or learn from the way they train"*.

Furthermore, Jyllands-Posten has moved beyond the digital page to create physical communities. This includes hosting health-focused lectures and organizing interactive events and taking readers out for runs and bike rides. This hands-on engagement reinforces the newspaper's role as a partner in the reader's health journey. *"We have had the reader out running and the reader out cycling. There is an increased focus on interacting with the people"*, Vibjerg says.

Through these initiatives, Jyllands-Posten's coverage of longevity represents a blend of critical consumerism and practical inspiration, engaging a younger, resource-strong demographic through investigative rigor. For further examples of this work, the full series is available at ["Motion and Health at Jyllands-Posten."](#)

Being the 'Adult in the Room': Politiken, the social media influencers and the dilemma of "me-journalism"

At Politiken, the approach to the longevity and health optimization trend is defined by a persistent tension between providing popular "near-health" content and maintaining a traditional commitment to structural health reporting. Lars Igum Rasmussen, a health journalist at the paper since 2014 and now the paper's health editor, explains that the editorial strategy has undergone a significant shift away from acting as *"postmen for the Cancer Society or the Heart Foundation"*.

Instead, the newsroom prioritizes self-selected themes and series, such as their deep dives into ultra-processed foods and adult ADHD. *"We have turned down the volume on what comes from the outside,"* Rasmussen notes, *"and turned up the volume on themes and subjects that we personally find important"*.

Rasmussen categorizes Politiken's health coverage into three distinct editorial pillars:

1. Essential substance: Major news that belongs on the front page, such as new government cancer plans, regardless of expected click rates.
2. Audience engagement: Content specifically designed for high readership, such as the popular series *"What the Doctor Does Themselves,"* where top specialists share their personal health habits.

3. Journalistic passion: Projects the writers themselves find fascinating, such as niche explorations of placebo effects or vaccines, which often resonate with readers because of the writer's evident engagement.

In a landscape where health advice is dominated by TikTok and influencers, Politiken also positions itself as a necessary *"scientific corrective to social media"*, says Rasmussen.

Rasmussen views the newspaper's role as being the *"adults in the room"* who challenge viral trends on social media and advice from influencers with scientific skepticism.

"You've seen on TikTok that this is good, but what does science say?" he asks. This stance is a direct response to the *"megatrend"* of self-optimization, which Rasmussen argues is often driven by a commercial desire for *"quick fixes"* that lack scientific backing, such as unnecessary protein supplements or collagen. *"It is total bollocks, most of it,"* he says, noting that while the most vital health factors, smoking, alcohol, and exercise, are *"boring,"* readers are magnetically drawn to experimental *"hype"*.

A core ethical concern for Rasmussen is the rise of *"me-journalism"*: health reporting focused exclusively on the individual reader's self-improvement. He warns of a *"massive risk"* that this focus on *"near-health"* displaces the coverage of those in greatest need, such as the severely mentally ill or socially vulnerable groups who die significantly earlier than the average: *"Health journalism about 'the others' [the socially vulnerable] is not something that many people want to read about, compared to: 'Should I now not eat oatmeal because influencer Emil Thorup says it's damn dangerous?'. This 'near-health' and 'me-focus' in health journalism clearly carries a risk of shifting the focus away from what is societally important"*, Rasmussen admits, while simultaneously critiquing the sensationalist claims on social media and among health influencers, who are often inspired by trends in the US.

This creates a daily internal struggle: balancing the commercial necessity for clicks with the public service obligation to highlight structural inequality and the *"cracks in the healthcare system"*.

To ensure that essential health information actually reaches the audience, Politiken has mastered the art of *"melting the case story into the substance story"*. Data consistently shows that readers flock to personal narratives but ignore abstract scientific analysis. By integrating relatable human cases with expert guidance, the paper maintains high engagement without sacrificing substance.

The effectiveness of this strategy is evidenced by the internal data shared by Rasmussen for several high-performing articles focused on health optimization and individual guidance:

- [Hun er ked af at sige det, men fysisk træning er nøglen til en sund alderdom](#): This article about how physical training is key to a healthy old age reached 64,021 readers with an average reading time of 1:45. Crucially, 51% of readers scrolled to the bottom, and it was shared 226 times on social media.
- [Trin for trin: Sådan afklarer fagfolk, om voksne har adhd](#): This article about how professionals determine if adults have ADHD is a service-oriented guide that attracted 33,731 readers, with an average reading time of 1:44 and a 53% completion rate.
- [»Det gav så meget mening«: Line Lindahl forstod ikke, hvorfor hun blev ved med at tage på. Et foredrag fik alt til at falde på plads](#): An article about weight gain during menopause with 71,821 readers. It boasted a high engagement rate with 67% reaching the end and an average reading time of 1:27.
- [Video: Se, hvordan simple øvelser kan træne din ryg stærk – og dine smerter væk](#): This article and video with simple exercises to train the back and stop the pain performed well, with 21,689 readers and an impressive 67% completion rate, proving the strong demand for practical, actionable health advice.

By navigating this balance, Lars Igum Rasmussen and Politiken aim to serve as a reliable guide for the affluent, health-conscious reader while continuously fighting to keep the broader societal health crisis on the editorial agenda.

Public service versus the optimization trend: DR's Peter Qvortrup Geisling's critique of the longevity trend and modern health journalism

The current media obsession with longevity and self-optimization represents a troubling departure from the core mission of the media and especially public service, says Peter Qvortrup Geisling, a journalist and medical doctor who has spent 30 years at Danmarks Radio (DR). DR has also produced several programs focusing on longevity, including the science podcast "[Jagten på det evige liv](#)," which investigates the biological aging process, or TV programs such as "[Sådan lever du evigt](#)" or "[Zonen](#)", which experiments with anti-aging trends.

Geisling, widely known for his program *Lægens bord*, views the rise of "near-health" and individualized optimization through a lens of structural inequality and clinical necessity. He argues that while private media outlets may focus on the healthy and wealthy, DR's primary duty is to address the most urgent health crises facing the Danish nation: *"It is not DR's responsibility to increase the average life expectancy in Denmark, but I believe it is our duty to equip all citizens equally well to make their own informed decisions. And that requires communicating differently to people with high versus low levels of education."*

Geisling's primary concern is the staggering rise in health inequality in Denmark, a topic he believes is often overshadowed by lifestyle trends. He points out that the nation is failing to utilize its resources effectively compared to its neighbors. *"The rich live an average of 10 years longer than the poor in Denmark. 25 years ago that difference was only five years. The health inequality has doubled in 25 years in Denmark,"* he states.

This inequality is a direct challenge to the state's multi-billion kroner investment in public broadcasting. Geisling advocates for a coherent health strategy that reflects the real-world health challenges outside of DR, enabling all Danes to make informed choices about their own health, should they wish to do so: *"We receive 4 billion DKK each year, because we have a public service responsibility. Yet, Danes are the ones in Western Europe who die first,"* he notes, criticizing the reactive nature of the industry: *"That is the way journalists work. It is from day to day"*.

While outlets like Berlingske have pivoted toward longevity as a sales driver, Geisling remains skeptical of prioritizing content for the resource-strong at DR. He finds it most meaningful to communicate with the segments of the population facing the greatest health challenges: *"It doesn't ignite me to do health journalism for people who are healthy and well or for those who are resourceful,"* he asserts. *"The first have no need for it, and the latter will manage"*.

He is critical of the "hype" surrounding various diet and optimization trends that cycle through the media. *"At one point there was a focus on an anti-inflammatory diet, now there is a huge focus on longevity. It is fair enough. But there is a need for someone who keeps the big picture in mind and keeps things in perspective"*.

For Geisling, the obsession with individual "quick fixes" is disproportionate to the actual causes of death in Denmark. He points out that while longevity and obesity dominate the

headlines, they represent a small fraction of annual deaths compared to smoking and chronic illness in Denmark: *"1.4% of the Danish population died from severe obesity last year, but look how much space it takes up in the media"*.

Geisling highlights a significant tension within DR's current digital strategy, which aims to attract younger audiences under the age of 45. He argues that this focus systematically ignores the demographic with the highest health risks. *"The problem is that those who deal with various illnesses are almost all over 45. The problem is also that those who stream the least, it is those who have a short education"*.

By chasing streaming metrics and younger users, he warns that public service media may inadvertently exacerbate the very inequalities it is tasked with solving. *"We are actually creating inequality for the license money, at least from my perspective"*, he says. He advocates for a *"solidarity-based"* approach to health communication that provides tools to those who need them most, regardless of their education or socioeconomic status.

Geisling is also a proponent of constructive journalism that offers practical solutions. He believes a good health story must be *"relevant, concrete, and well-communicated"*. However, he cautions against a culture where health becomes a competitive pursuit or an end goal in itself. He emphasizes that health should be a means to a good life, not the sole objective: *"If your whole life goal becomes being healthy, it is completely crazy"*.

Ultimately, Geisling views his role as a corrective to a media landscape that he feels has become distracted by commercial *"clicks"* and elite optimization. For him, the media's highest calling is not to help the rich live to age 92 instead of age 89, but to provide the tools for those at the bottom of the society to survive and improve their health and navigate the healthcare system: *"The important thing is that people get the same out of our healthcare system in Denmark,"* he explains and adds: *"On the other hand, I understand that media which do not just get served a big pile of license money every year have to prioritize differently in their health coverage. Then a large number of clicks is sometimes a vital necessity. I respect that."*

The paradox of modern health journalism

The coverage of longevity and health optimization in Denmark reveals the paradox of modern health journalism and a media landscape divided between market-driven individualization and a public service-driven focus on inequality. The key takeaways from the

editorial strategies of Berlingske, Jyllands-Posten, Politiken, and DR can be summarized in four pillars:

Longevity as a Commercial Engine: For private media outlets longevity is a high-performing "commercial high-jumper". Data-driven strategies have shifted the focus toward affluent "career families" and "resource-strong citizens" who seek actionable inspiration to optimize their own lives.

The Media as a Scientific Corrective: In response to the explosion of health misinformation on social media, professional newsrooms are positioning themselves as "the adults in the room". Whether through rigorous investigative experiments at Jyllands-Posten or reliance on high-level academic experts at Berlingske and Politiken, the media aim to provide a scientific corrective to the "quick fixes" promoted by influencers.

The Dilemma of "Me-Journalism": There is a growing editorial concern regarding "me-journalism": content focused exclusively on individual self-improvement. Critics like Peter Qvortrup Geisling (DR) and Lars Igum Rasmussen (Politiken) warn that an obsession with making the healthy even healthier risks displacing the coverage of structural health inequality and those in greatest need.

Public Service vs. Market Demand: While private media lean into success stories and personal identification to drive subscriptions, the public service mission at DR prioritizes a "solidarity-based" approach, focusing on the demographics with the highest health risks rather than those with the most resources.

3. Longevity fever on social media: The rise of the health influencers, Silicon Valley gurus and the "blind partner" of youth

The landscape of health information has undergone a fundamental transformation, shifting power from traditional legacy media to a decentralized world of online influencers. This digital ecosystem has birthed a global "longevity fever," where self-optimization has become a viral commodity driven by algorithms that prioritize engagement over evidence. These movements are often fueled by trends born in Silicon Valley, which quickly ripple across the globe. In the following section, I have interviewed various experts and thinkers to gain their

perspectives on this shift and its consequences for public health and the democratic discourse surrounding the topic of longevity and self-optimization.

The American epicenter: The business of attention and the longevity fever

There is a structural truth crisis rooted in the technological infrastructure of the internet, designed by U.S. tech giants, argues American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, whom I met in Aarhus. Having witnessed how these dynamics accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fukuyama contends that this transformation has effectively dismantled traditional journalistic standards: *"The old media universe is based on certain journalistic standards, and the internet destroyed that, really allowed anybody to be their own publisher,"* Fukuyama explains, noting that without incentives to uphold quality, *"anybody could say anything and you could actually create a world, a sort of fantasy world, in which the facts were different from what they were"*.

He points out that Silicon Valley tech giants and their platforms are largely indifferent to truth, focusing instead on the business of attention: *"The internet companies don't care about content. They care about clicks and views,"* Fukuyama notes.

Deepening the analysis of the media's role, Fukuyama argues that journalists themselves have contributed to the crisis through a loss of perceived impartiality. He points to the *"Twitter effect"* starting around 2010, where journalists in the US began expressing personal opinions: *"they actually then dropped that journalistic standard, and it turns out that they're almost uniformly on the left"*. This shift did a lot to discredit journalists, he asserts.

This bias often manifests as an editorial blind spot regarding social class. Fukuyama cites the opioid crisis as a case study in the media's blind spots. The US opioid crisis is the deadliest public health emergency in American history, but the American media did not cover it enough, says Fukuyama: *"If you read the New York Times or the Washington Post, you wouldn't really know that this was happening"*. He argues this reflects a profound social division between *"educated professionals that live in big cities"* and *"less educated people that live in rural areas"*.

Furthermore, Fukuyama highlights the work of his Stanford colleague Renee DiResta, specifically her book *Invisible Rulers*, which deconstructs how power has shifted to

influencers who have mastered the art of capturing attention. DiResta's research into *"vaccine denialism"* demonstrates how fringe ideas are amplified into major movements through these digital nodes. Fukuyama explains that *"there's just this inherent dynamic if you are trying to build an internet audience towards saying more extreme things and more uncivil things"*.

The result is the creation of *"alternative information universes"* where facts are secondary to engagement. Fukuyama notes that while a *"crackpot opinion"* used to be confined to a local bar, the internet now allows it to find an international audience.

This is further complicated by the fact that *"freedom of speech is a double-edged sword"* in the digital age; while it protects voices, it also allows *"rich oligarchs"* to buy platforms and *"amplify certain other opinions that then sort of drown out everybody else's"*.

Despite his critique of the media, Fukuyama maintains that high-quality journalism is a vital necessity: *"It's not a dying profession because there's always going to be a demand for high quality information,"* he asserts and suggests that reality eventually forces a return to facts:

"If you're going to believe that the COVID vaccine is actually going to kill you and you don't take it and you die of COVID, then presumably, you're going to say, 'Well, you know, maybe I should listen to higher quality information'". For Fukuyama, the primary challenge is not a lack of demand, but the survival of the industry's infrastructure: *"The trouble is that we still need to figure out a business model by which you know that gets supported"*.

Furthermore, there is a *"manic quality"* of American culture, where everything *"has to be taken to excess"*, says Fukuyama.

This also creates the perfect breeding ground for the current longevity trends. The wave of self-optimization on social media and in the press are heavily influenced by the United States, say Danish media professionals and point out that when a health trend gains traction in the US, it is only a matter of time before it hits the Danish media landscape, manifesting in everything from *"looksmxing"*, an online self-improvement practice focused on the process of maximizing one's physical attractiveness, to biohacking tips and dietary shifts.

Similarly, American health influencers provide significant inspiration, most notably Bryan Johnson, the Silicon Valley tech entrepreneur behind the "Don't Die" movement. His long-term mission focuses on radical life extension and human optimization, and he has openly stated a goal of making humans essentially immortal. Johnson treats his own body as a high-tech optimization experiment, reportedly spending millions of dollars in an attempt to reverse his biological age, and his lifestyle has garnered a big following on social media.

Johnson has spawned "*small clones*" globally who also practice body and health optimization, including the Danish influencer Emil Thorup. However, Emil Thorup has sparked significant debate and criticism among Danish health experts by spreading what are described as misinformative and controversial claims. Specifically, Thorup has warned against eating oatmeal, arguing that it causes blood sugar to spike to dangerous levels, and has claimed that exposure to midday sun without sunscreen is beneficial to one's health.

The truth crisis as a health crisis: The power of influencers

For media analyst and author Camilla Mehlsen, the current landscape represents a "*truth crisis*" that has morphed into a public health challenge.

"This truth crisis is a health crisis because misinformation about health-related knowledge can spread so widely, which can have enormous consequences for human health," Mehlsen states, emphasizing that this transition affects both physical and mental well-being.

The magnetic pull of health influencers is rooted in what Mehlsen describes as a "*parasocial relationship*": an asymmetrical emotional bond where followers feel they "*know*" a creator intimately. This sense of intimacy makes an influencer's recommendation feel like advice from a close friend or a "*big brother*" which carries more weight than institutional authority. *"It acts as a personal recommendation from a human being you actually look up to. The perceived emotional relationship has a much larger influence on behaviour compared to factual communication from a scientific report or, for that matter, a newspaper,"* she explains.

This has led to the rise of "*health gurus*" who often become religious or normative figures for their followers. While the 2010s were dominated by broad lifestyle trends like "*eating healthy*" the 2020s have seen the emergence of extreme niches, such as "*fitfluencers*" obsessing over protein and bulking, or longevity influencers like Bryan Johnson.

Drawing parallels to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mehlsen describes how the "*infodemic*" was driven by large profiles on social media that rapidly disseminated unverified claims: "*We can actually regard influencers as superspreaders,*" she notes, pointing out that their ability to reach specific demographics makes them more effective at spreading information, and misinformation, than any traditional health campaign.

To counter this, Mehlsen suggests that traditional media and universities must rethink their communication strategy. Instead of trying to "*out-compete*" influencers, they should consider strategic alliances. She points to a collaboration between Harvard School of Public Health and the New York Times as a benchmark:

"How can we ensure that the public conversation about health is more evidence-based? That is by forming partnerships allying with some of these large social media influencers who share lots of mental health content," she suggests.

The "Blind Partner": Youth and health content on social media

While Camilla Mehlsen outlines the systemic power of influencers as "*superspreaders*", the most acute impact of this shift is felt by the generation that consumes the majority of its information through social media, where the "*truth crisis*" also meets a critical literacy gap.

According to Stine Liv Johansen, Associate Professor at Aarhus University, the "free" nature of the social media platforms hides a deeper cost: "*If something is for free, you are the product.*". This vulnerability is documented in the [Nordic Media Literacy Survey 2025](#), which highlights a paradox among youth aged 9-15: While social media is the primary news source for youth aged 9-15, only one in five find it easy to tell if information is genuine.

Furthermore, a new study titled "[Children and Youth Mirror Themselves in Narrow Body Ideals on Social Media](#)" from Børns Vilkår among Danish 6th and 9th graders documents a relentless algorithmic pressure where young people view the body as something to be continuously modeled to perfection to the extent that some girls feel "*appearance is more important than personality.*"

The data reveals a direct correlation between digital health content and body dissatisfaction: among 9th-graders exposed to daily training content, 78 percent of girls frequently or very frequently think about their body appearance, while two out of three 9th-grade boys who view training content on social media daily frequently or very frequently think about their body appearance. Furthermore, half of the 9th-grade boys who consume daily health-related content frequently or very frequently think about their weight or body size.

The massive, unregulated stream of health content on social media has become a "*blind partner*" in the development of children and youth, says Annegrete Juul, director of "Center for Sundt Liv og Trivsel".

While public debate often focuses on the physical effects of screen time, Juul argues that the content itself is a massive, overlooked variable: "*We talk about screens in relation to children being inactive or bullying, but we don't talk about the health content they are presented with. And it is massive,*" she points out and criticises the unregulated access to the "Children's Room".

The digital shift has eliminated the traditional filters that once protected children from aggressive marketing. Juul compares the current reality to her own childhood, where commercials for toy catalogs were banned before children's programming. Today, that boundary has vanished. "*Now, all these people who want something regarding health, bodies, and training have full access to the children's room. There is no brake at all,*" Juul explains

This lack of regulation is particularly problematic because younger generations have largely abandoned public service media. "*Children and youth are not on public service channels at all. Who is there when official authorities give their advice? It's you and me and those who are even older,*" she notes.

Consequently, there is no counterweight to the "*extremely attractive presentations of health advice*" that reach children through their favorite influencers.

A central theme in Juul's critique is the shift in how authority is perceived by younger generations and even new parents. In the digital ecosystem, professional expertise is often

outcompeted by perceived authenticity: *"Authenticity trumps, or is the new, authority,"* Juul argues.

This shift is visible in the work of health visitors (*sundhedsplejersker*), who now find themselves competing with *"mom-influencers"* for the trust of new mothers: *"The health visitor comes out to the new mothers to orient them about baby food and sleep, but they find it hard to get through because many mothers have already formed their opinions via social media and mom-influencers,"* Juul explains.

The result is that official, evidence-based guidance is sidelined by personal trends that are *"communicated at eye-level, making it fun and relatable"* in a way that authorities cannot match

Juul expresses deep concern over how the optimization culture transforms the human body into a project. For children, this means moving away from a natural, joyful relationship with their bodies toward viewing their bodies as an instrument to be optimized: *"Your whole goal with life becomes being healthy, as if that's what you have a life for,"* she says.

To counter the unrealistic ideals found online, Juul's center has shifted its focus from *"body joy"* to *"body satisfaction"*. She explains that while *"joy"* can feel like another unrealistic expectation to be happy all the time, satisfaction is a more achievable, grounded goal.

"If you can have a certain satisfaction most days, that is a good goal to have," she notes, adding that it is vital for children to see diverse bodies, like those in a public swimming pool, to realize that *"it takes half a year before you see a model body; everyone else is just normal"*

Finally, Juul also warns that the media's obsession with individualized *"age-hacking"* and *"me-journalism"* risks exacerbating social inequality. Digital health literacy is socially skewed, and the most vulnerable groups and young people are often the most exposed to unregulated content without the resources to decipher it. She is critical of the media's role in amplifying influencers like Emil Thorup, even when they aim to be critical. *"The established media reinforce the message by saying, 'Look how crazy this is,' but they still give him airtime and the opportunity to elaborate. They are essentially just reinforcing: 'Well, here is someone you can listen to,'"* she argues.

Juul maintains that if the goal is to combat rising inequality, the solution must be structural, not individual. "*It has long been documented by research that individual advice does not change inequality. It takes a structural answer,*" she concludes.

4. The engine of acceleration and resonance: Sociological and ethical perspectives on longevity

To understand why the global "longevity fever" has gained such a powerful grip on the modern psyche, we must look beyond technology to the sociological and philosophical underpinnings of our era. The drive for self-optimization is not merely a personal choice but a symptom of a society built on relentless speed and the fear of falling behind. In the following section, I have interviewed different experts and thinkers to explore the sociological perspectives of this shift and its consequences for public health and democratic discourse.

To understand why the drive for self-optimization has gained such a powerful grip on the modern psyche, we can look to the theories of leading German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, whom I heard speak at Musikhuset in Aarhus. Rosa argues that modern society can only maintain its status quo through constant growth, innovation, and speed: a process he calls "*dynamic stabilization*". In this environment, the world is increasingly viewed in parametric terms: available, accessible, and attainable. However, this attempt to control every aspect of life leads to a "*points of aggression*" mentality, against the planet, against others, and ultimately against oneself.

This turns the human body into a machine that must be visible, comparable, and infinitely improvable. Rosa warns that when we lose our "*Fingerspitzen-gefühl*" (instinctive feel) to electronic gadgets and AI-driven health optimization, we risk falling into alienation. The world, and even our own bodies, stop "*speaking*" to us, leading to a state of "*collective burnout*" where the connection between emotion, action, and situation is severed.

The Three Dimensions of Longevity: Political, Moral, and Ethical Dilemmas

Morten Dige, Associate Professor of Ethics at Aarhus University, builds on Rosa's sociological diagnosis and provides a vital philosophical context. He notes that the quest for longevity is the latest iteration of a timeless human pursuit. *"It is a dream that is as old as humanity itself,"* Dige explains, noting its roots in ancient Egyptian traditions and the philosophical teachings of Plato, who famously explored the *"immortality of the soul"* and the dream of *"eternal youth"*.

Dige categorizes the current trend into three distinct types of normative questions: the political, the ethical, and the moral.

First, Dige observes a significant political shift in how health research is directed. While medical priorities were once a matter of public policy, democratic debate, and government regulation, the longevity field is increasingly being driven by private capital. *"What is new about this field is that it used to take place in a kind of political public sphere. But there is a lot of this that is becoming more and more privatized,"* Dige notes. *"And those who are really pushing for longevity, well, they are Silicon Valley fantasists."*

Dige links this surge to Rosa's diagnosis of acceleration, noting that *"you can only stay where you are if you run faster all the time,"* leading to an *"enhancement ideology"* driven largely by private interests rather than public policy. He warns that this allows a small elite to define what is considered a *"relevant problem"* for the rest of humanity.

Second, Dige addresses the deeply ethical questions regarding the essence of a good life, challenging the fundamental premise of radical life extension. *"Is a 500-year-long life five times as good as a 100-year-long life? It raises questions about what it is that makes a life worth living,"* Dige explains.

Dige contrasts the modern high-tech *"immortality narrative"*, the Silicon Valley dream, with this ancient *"wisdom narrative."* In the ancient wisdom narrative, the goal of a good life was not to maximize time for oneself, but to transition from self-interest to contribution.

"What makes a life good, when it comes down to it, is perhaps that you gradually learn to think less about yourself and a little more about what you can give," he states, noting that this ancient philosophical insight is often lost in the noise of high-tech optimization.

Furthermore, this technological optimization introduces a unique psychological risk: the "versioning" of human nature. Because biological hacks operate on planned obsolescence, *"the latest optimization is not the last. There will always be a new one, which is even better. Therefore, it will only be an improvement for a relatively short time, and then it will quickly become outdated,"* Dige warns.

If human beings begin to undergo radical leaps in ability every few years, it could lead to a "psychological discontinuity" that is fundamentally traumatic.

Third, Dige points to a dangerous moralization of health that accompanies the longevity trend, where both his and Rosa's perspectives converge. When health is transformed into an individual project of endless choices and "hacks" illness is no longer viewed as fate or bad luck, but as a personal shortcoming.

"In a more old-fashioned understanding of life, it was out of one's hands, it was up to God or the gods or fate. But when it becomes this individual project, if you then fail, it is because you have failed," Dige states.

To find a path out of collective burnout and the "me-focus" of modern health, Dige suggests that health journalism and public discourse must move away from helping the elite reach extreme ages and instead focus on solidarity and structural inequality. He cites the stark reality in Aalborg, where there is a 13-year difference in life expectancy between two neighborhoods just five kilometers apart:

"Instead of saying, 'how can we get those in Hellerup and other rich municipalities who reach 100 years to reach 110,' try to look at how to lift the bottom instead," he concludes.

Rather than chasing immortality for a few, Dige advocates for a "community-oriented" public conversation that moves beyond "miracle" stories to discuss what kind of political and human community we actually want to build. The goal, drawing back to Rosa, should be resonance: a way of being in the world where we remain open to others and the community, rather than being locked in an individualistic struggle for self-optimization.

5. The way forward: Reimagining longevity through constructive journalism

Despite the challenges of the digital era, traditional Danish media outlets are already employing several constructive strategies to cover longevity and self-optimization. Berlingske and Politiken both position themselves as vital "scientific correctives" to social media misinformation, with Berlingske relying exclusively on high-level experts like professors and chief physicians to vet claims. Jyllands-Posten has moved beyond mere reporting to conduct "journalistic experiments," such as testing the actual efficacy of collagen supplements or the accuracy of smartwatches against professional data. Furthermore, many newsrooms have mastered the art of "melting the case story into the substance story" using personal narratives and "identification", such as exploring what doctors do in their own lives, to make complex evidence-based information relatable and engaging for the public.

However, the current media coverage of longevity and health optimization also stands at a crossroads. As power shifts from traditional legacy media to a decentralized world of online influencers, the public is increasingly caught between commercial "miracle" cures and evidence-based science. To navigate this landscape, health journalism must still move toward a constructive framework that prioritizes the collective good and democratic discourse.

Current Challenges in Longevity Coverage

The sources highlight several critical challenges in how longevity is currently covered in both traditional and social media:

The "Truth Crisis" and "Infodemic": Health information is increasingly weaponized in "alternative information universes" where algorithms prioritize engagement and clicks over scientific accuracy. Influencers act as "superspreaders" of misinformation, forming "parasocial relationships" with followers that often carry more weight than institutional authority

The Rise of "Me-Journalism": There is a massive risk that the media's obsession with individualized "age-hacking" and "near-health" displaces coverage of structural health inequality. This hyper-individualization turns health into a "competition parameter" and a personal life goal, often making illness feel like a personal failure rather than a matter of fate

Commercial Hype vs. Foundational Health: Readers are drawn to experimental "quick fixes" like collagen or supplements or more extreme methods, while the vital, but "boring," factors, smoking, alcohol, and exercise, are overlooked.

The Vulnerability of Youth: Younger generations have largely abandoned public service media, leaving them exposed to unregulated health trends in the "children's room" without the critical readiness to distinguish genuine advice from marketing

The three pillars of constructive journalism:

To address these challenges, journalists can apply the [three pillars of constructive journalism, we have learned at the Constructive Institute](#):

1. Focus on Solutions: Constructive journalism is rigorous and critical, but it shifts the focus from the problem to potential solutions. It highlights efforts to solve documented issues rather than merely dwelling on the problems themselves.

2. Cover Nuances: This pillar returns reporting to its core values: balanced, fair, and non-sensational. By embracing complexity, journalists help the public develop an accurate understanding of the world rather than a simplistic, black-and-white version.

3. Promote Democratic Conversation: This pillar seeks to strengthen the democratic conversation by engaging audiences and building trust in the media. Its purpose is to enable critical but constructive democratic debate about potential solutions so progress can be made. In longevity, this could mean creating democratic spaces for dialogue, where journalists can facilitate engaging debates at eye-level between researchers and citizens.

Constructive Media Models: The Conversation

A prominent example of a media outlet successfully applying these principles is [The Conversation](#), a global, independent media network, which pairs academic experts and researchers with professional journalists to publish evidence-based news, explanatory journalism, and thoughtful commentary. The four main types of stories The Conversation publishes are: 1) They make an analysis of news/current affairs 2) They cover new research, often tied to a journal article, 3) They answer a question and bust a myth, 4) Make book reviews & essays.

This model ensures expert authorship and high editorial standards. On the topic of longevity, The Conversation also provides a scientific corrective to viral trends; for instance, in response to the TikTok "nonnamaxxing" trend, they published an article explaining [how the lifestyle habits of Italian grandmothers, such as community engagement and traditional diets, can benefit health and well-being](#), grounding a social media trend in empirical research.

Putting Theory into Practice: The Public Forum at Folkeuniversitetet

The third pillar, promoting democratic conversation, is actively practiced by institutions like Folkeuniversitetet in Aarhus. Their festival Hearts & Minds serves as a platform to reach a broad audience and "*demystify research*", explains Anne Marie Sorgenfrei, project manager for the Hearts & Minds festival. By hosting public conversations, the university allows citizens to meet researchers directly and hear the evidence from the source. Sorgenfrei emphasizes that in an age of "*fake news*" and internet myths, the oral, face-to-face conversation is vital: "*Here stands a person of knowledge telling it, you can hear it from the researcher yourself*," she notes, adding that this format can reach people who might be initially interested in "*self-optimization*" but then receive a necessary "*scientific corrective*".

To bridge the gap between scientific evidence and the public's quest for optimization, I will be moderating an upcoming public event: "*Longevity - hvad er op og ned i jagten på det evige liv?*" at the festival in September 2026. This conversation will explore both the biological frontier and the existential questions in the quest for life extension. By bringing together Morten Scheibye-Knudsen, Associate Professor at University of Copenhagen and a leading aging researcher, and Morten Dige, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Aarhus University, we aim to provide a scientific corrective to current myths while addressing the fundamental question: In our pursuit of a longer life, do we risk losing sight of what makes life worth living? Through this forum, the reporting moves from the page into a living dialogue, fostering the resonance and solidarity required for a healthy society.

5 Best Practices for Future Health Journalism

To conclude, journalism currently finds itself at a critical crossroads between commercial necessity (generating clicks through individual optimization) and publicist responsibility

(safeguarding public health and addressing inequality) when covering a topic like longevity. Drawing on the insights of experts and journalists, the following recommendations offer a roadmap for a more constructive and societally responsible coverage of the longevity trend.

1. Shift the focus from individual "hacks" to structural inequality

Journalism must actively counter the moralization of health that treats illness as a personal failure. Rather than exclusively profiling wealthy individuals chasing extreme ages, newsrooms should focus on solidarity and the social determinants of health. Constructive journalism should address structural inequalities and investigate systemic solutions to lift the health standards of the entire population, rather than optimizing a privileged elite.

2. Act as a rigorous filter against commercial trends

Journalists must serve as a skeptical filter for the expanding marketplace of wellness trends and "miracle cures." This involves not just reporting on popular phenomena like collagen, selective fasting, or protein supplements, but asking: "Does it actually work?" Newsrooms must be transparent about the limitations of scientific data, clearly distinguishing between preliminary studies and robust clinical trials.

3. Frame health as a means, not an end

Media coverage should challenge the high-tech "immortality narrative" and the cultural notion that maintaining health is the ultimate purpose of human life. Instead, journalism could revive a "wisdom narrative," emphasizing that health is merely a tool to enable a meaningful life, one defined by contribution, community, and social resonance, rather than a manic obsession with personal biological metrics.

4. Form strategic alliances and use identification

To counter the "blind partner" of unregulated social media content, traditional media and academic institutions must abandon the idea of trying to out-compete digital creators on their own turf. Instead, they should pursue strategic partnerships with credible creators and institutions to disseminate evidence-based health information "at eye-level" where younger demographics are actually present.

5. Avoid amplifying misinformation

Newsrooms must be careful not to give a platform to unauthorized actors or influencers spreading scientific misinformation, even when the editorial intent is critical. Providing airtime to unscientific and debunked claims, such as the dangerous demonization of dietary staples like oatmeal or the rejection of sunscreen, often serves only to reinforce the influencer's public authority and digital reach. Constructive journalism requires media outlets to maintain a strict baseline of scientific consensus.