



Perspective

A Conceptual Vector-Based Perspective on Progressive Facial Aging

Lucio Tunesi

W.A.M LUCIO TUNESI, Via Aristide de Togni, 28, 20123 Milan, Italy; mail@luciotunesi.com

Abstract

Facial aging is a multifactorial process characterized by progressive structural and functional changes involving skin, soft tissues, muscles, and skeletal support. Current conceptual models primarily rely on static anatomical descriptions and regional assessment scales that evaluate visible signs such as wrinkles, folds, and volume loss. Although these approaches provide useful clinical reference points, they may only partially capture the dynamic interactions between muscular activity, tissue aging, and gravitational forces that shape facial morphology over time. In this article, we propose a conceptual framework for interpreting facial aging based on the vectorial dynamics generated by facial mimic muscles. Within this perspective, facial muscles can be considered sources of contraction vectors that exert mechanical influences on facial tissues throughout life. Under physiological conditions, facial appearance reflects a dynamic equilibrium between opposing vectorial influences. However, progressive tissue weakening combined with repetitive muscular activity may gradually alter this balance. This hypothesis-generating, vector-based model integrates muscular dynamics with tissue aging and gravitational effects to offer a complementary interpretative framework for facial aging. It is not intended as a validated biomechanical theory, but rather as a conceptual tool to stimulate further anatomical, imaging-based, and clinical investigation.

Keywords: facial aging; facial anatomy; mimic muscles; vector dynamics; aesthetic medicine; conceptual framework

1. Introduction

Facial aging is a complex, multifactorial process involving progressive structural, functional, and aesthetic changes across multiple tissue layers [1,2]. Current clinical and aesthetic approaches typically describe facial aging through static anatomical models, such as the subdivision of the face into thirds or regional aesthetic units, and through localized grading scales focused on discrete signs such as wrinkles, volume loss, or tissue ptosis. While these models provide valuable tools for standardized assessment and treatment planning, they may only partially capture the dynamic and integrative nature of facial aging as a continuous process. In particular, existing approaches effectively describe the anatomical distribution of aging signs but less explicitly address how repetitive force directionality and long-term muscular balance may contribute to their spatial patterning and temporal progression.

The human face represents a highly coordinated physio-anatomical system (Figure 1) in which skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscles, and skeletal support interact dynamically [3–7]. Facial mimic muscles, in particular, play a central role in shaping facial appearance over



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time, not only through voluntary expression but also through their baseline tone and repetitive activation patterns. Increasing evidence from anatomical, functional, and electromyographic studies suggests that muscular activity contributes to long-term tissue remodeling and to the spatial distribution of age-related facial changes [8,9].

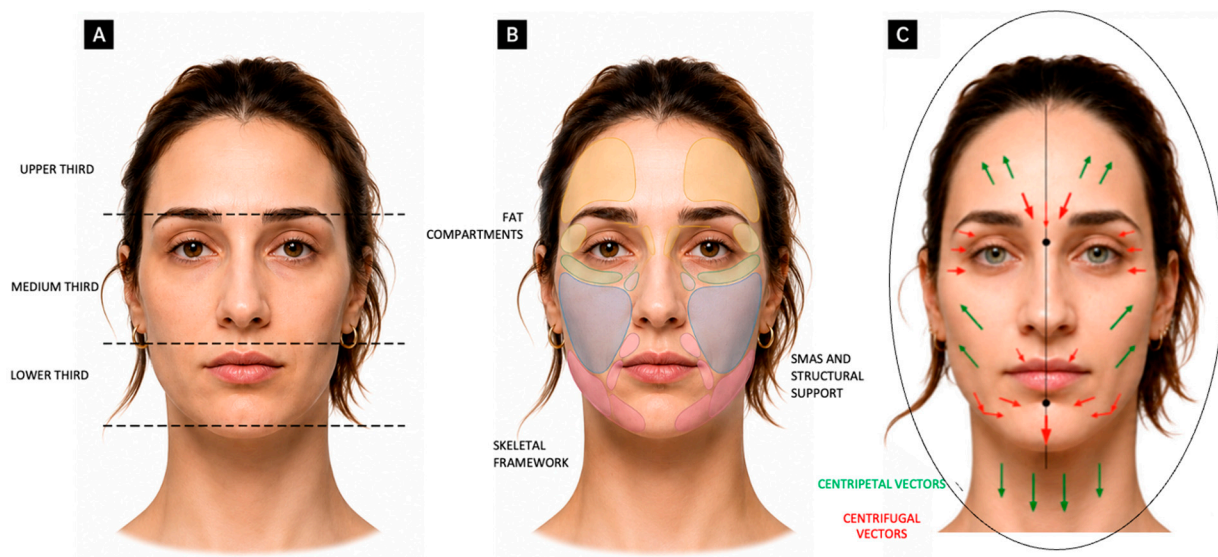


Figure 1. Evolution from regional to integrated interpretations of facial aging. (A) Traditional division of the face into upper, middle, and lower thirds, a widely adopted approach for facial analysis. (B) Compartmental and structural concepts, including fat compartments and supporting anatomical structures. (C) Proposed concept, in which the face is interpreted as a functionally interconnected unit influenced by continuous force transmission and vectorial interactions across anatomical regions.

Experimental investigations of facial skin mechanics further support the importance of these dynamic interactions [1,10]. In vivo studies using digital image speckle correlation have demonstrated that the displacement of facial skin during natural movements follows the direction and magnitude of the forces generated by the underlying facial muscles (Figure 2) [1,10]. Moreover, the mechanical response of the skin becomes increasingly localized with aging, reflecting a progressive reduction in tissue elasticity and a more condensed distribution of mechanical stresses across facial regions [5]. These observations suggest that facial skin behaves not merely as a passive covering but as a mechanically responsive structure capable of transmitting and redistributing forces generated by muscular activity, potentially influencing the development and localization of wrinkles and other visible signs of aging (Figure 3).

Although existing models provide essential anatomical and structural insights into facial aging, they are primarily focused on regional morphology, volume redistribution, ligamentous support, SMAS-related mechanisms, or skeletal remodeling. The directionality, balance, and cumulative effects of facial muscle contraction forces are less frequently addressed as an integrated component of facial aging assessment [11–16]. Accordingly, a functional perspective focused on muscle-generated force transmission may complement established structural models by helping to explain how dynamic muscular activity interacts with tissue aging over time. This additional layer of interpretation may contribute to the understanding of the variability in aging patterns observed among individuals and the incomplete predictability of aesthetic outcomes based solely on static anatomical landmarks or volumetric assessments [15,17].

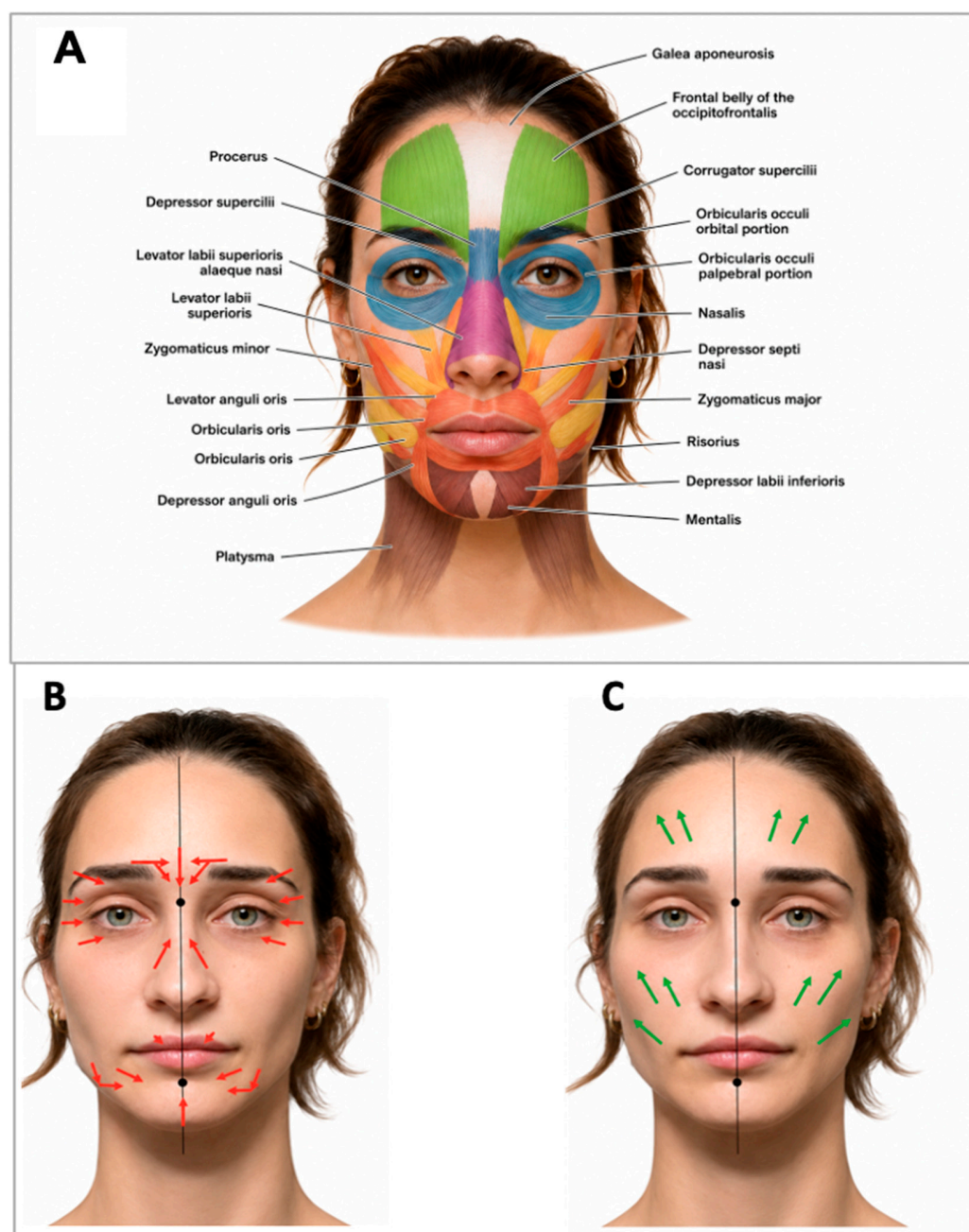


Figure 2. Vectorial dynamics of facial mimic muscles: definition of centripetal and centrifugal vectors. (A) Anatomical map of principal facial mimic muscles. (B) Example of centripetal (inward-directed, red vectors) vectors produced by muscles whose contraction moves soft tissues toward the midline or inferiorly. (C) Example of centrifugal (outward-directed, green vectors) vectors produced by muscles whose contraction moves soft tissues laterally or superiorly, away from the midline. Note: Most facial muscles generate complex, multidirectional vectors; the arrows indicate the predominant vectorial tendency considered within this framework.

In this context, conceptual frameworks that integrate facial anatomy with functional dynamics and temporal progression may provide a complementary perspective to existing models [18–21]. A vector-based interpretation of facial aging focuses on the interaction between convergent and divergent muscular force tendencies acting over time, emphasizing the balance between opposing muscle-generated vectors and their progressive disequilibrium as a potential contributor to visible signs of aging.

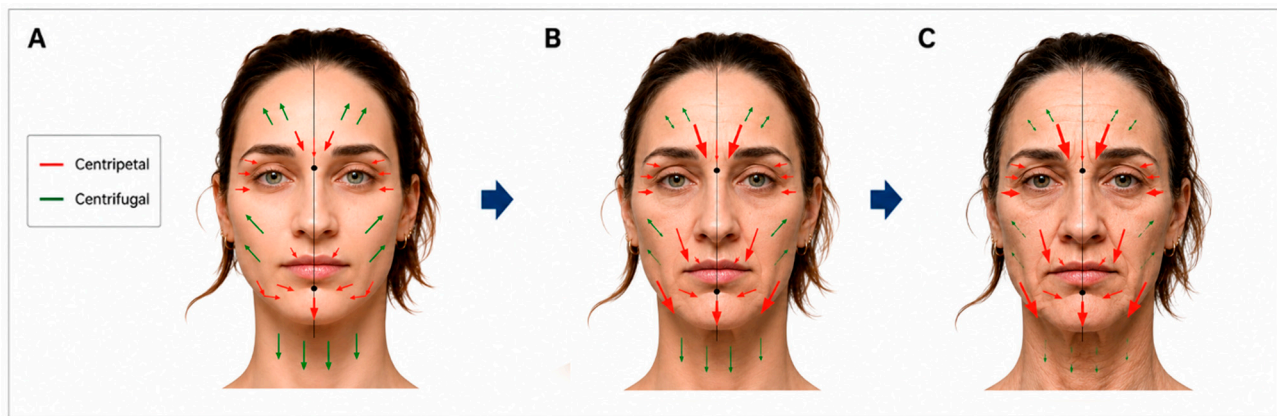


Figure 3. Age-related evolution of vectorial balance in the face. (A) In the youthful face, centripetal (red) and centrifugal (green) vectors are in dynamic equilibrium, contributing to stable soft tissue position and smooth skin. (B) With the onset of aging, progressive weakening of skin, fat compartments, and supporting structures reduces resistance to inward-directed (centripetal) vectors, leading to early imbalance and the appearance of dynamic then static lines and folds. (C) In advanced aging, centripetal vectors predominate over centrifugal forces, resulting in persistent tissue descent, deep facial folds, and loss of facial contour. Dashed lines indicate key horizontal reference levels commonly used in clinical assessment (brow, midface, oral commissures/chin).

The aim of this article is to propose a conceptual, vector-based framework for understanding progressive facial aging, grounded in anatomical organization, muscle function, and clinical observation. This framework should be read as an interpretative overlay to established structural models of facial aging, rather than as a competing explanation of aging mechanisms. By viewing facial aging as a dynamic process influenced by long-term vectorial interactions, this perspective seeks to offer an integrative, hypothesis-generating approach with potential implications for facial assessment, preventive strategies, and aesthetic treatment planning.

2. Limitations of Current Facial Aging Models

Current models of facial aging are primarily based on static anatomical descriptions and regional classifications [15,20,22,23]. Commonly used frameworks include the subdivision of the face into thirds or aesthetic units and the application of validated clinical grading scales that assess wrinkles, folds, and volume loss within predefined facial areas. While these approaches provide standardized reference points and facilitate communication among clinicians, they inherently simplify the complex and dynamic nature of facial aging [10,24–28].

One major limitation of these models is their reliance on artificial anatomical boundaries. The division of the face into upper, middle, and lower thirds, although practical, does not reflect true anatomical or functional discontinuities. Facial tissues are structurally and functionally interconnected, and changes occurring in one region often influence adjacent areas [29–32]. Consequently, compartmentalized assessments may fail to capture the global and progressive redistribution of forces and tissues that characterizes facial aging over time.

Another critical limitation lies in the predominantly morphological focus of current assessment tools. Most grading scales quantify visible outcomes—such as wrinkle depth, fold severity, or volume displacement—without explicitly considering the underlying functional drivers of these changes [25,33–38]. Muscular activity is generally regarded as a secondary or localized contributor, primarily in the context of dynamic wrinkles, rather than as a continuous force shaping facial architecture throughout life.

Existing models rarely account for the directionality and balance of facial muscle forces [8,39]. Facial mimic muscles generate vectors of contraction with defined orientation and magnitude, acting repetitively on skin and deeper tissues. The cumulative effects of these vectors, particularly when opposing muscular groups exert asymmetric or unbalanced forces, are not integrated into conventional aging paradigms [13,15,20,40–43]. As a result, facial aging is often interpreted as a passive consequence of tissue degeneration and gravity, rather than as the outcome of long-term dynamic interactions between muscular forces and progressively less resilient tissues. The temporal dimension of facial aging is insufficiently addressed in most current frameworks. Aging is frequently assessed at isolated time points, offering a snapshot rather than a longitudinal interpretation of facial change [41,44]. This static approach limits the ability to understand how early functional imbalances may precede and contribute to later structural alterations, and it may partially explain the variability in individual aging trajectories and treatment responses.

Taken together, these limitations highlight the need for integrative models that move beyond static regional analysis and incorporate functional dynamics, vectorial interactions, and temporal progression. Addressing these gaps may enhance both the conceptual understanding of facial aging and the clinical strategies used to assess and manage age-related facial changes.

3. A Vector-Based Conceptual Framework for Progressive Facial Aging

The human face can be conceptualized as a dynamic system governed by the interaction of multiple muscular forces acting across interconnected tissue layers [31,39]. Facial mimic muscles produce force transmission patterns that can be described, for conceptual purposes, as vectors characterized by a predominant direction and relative magnitude. In this context, the term “vector” is used as a simplified functional descriptor of muscle-driven force orientation rather than as a direct quantitative biomechanical parameter [45–47].

Through repeated activation over time, these muscle-generated force patterns act on the skin, subcutaneous tissues, and deeper anatomical structures, potentially contributing to tissue remodeling and progressive changes in facial morphology. The proposed framework does not aim to replace established anatomical or structural models of facial aging, but rather to provide an additional functional layer focused on directionality, balance, and temporal accumulation of muscle-generated mechanical influences.

3.1. Definition of Vectorial Tendencies in Facial Mimic Muscles

To improve conceptual clarity, the main terms used throughout this framework are summarized in Table 1. In the present article, these terms should be interpreted as simplified functional descriptors rather than as directly measured biomechanical parameters.

From a functional standpoint, facial muscles may be broadly interpreted according to their predominant tendency to direct force transmission either toward or away from the facial midline. For conceptual clarity, these tendencies may be described as centripetal or centrifugal. In this framework, centripetal vectors refer to predominantly inward-directed force tendencies, generated by muscle contractions that tend to move or compress tissues toward the central facial axis; centrifugal vectors refer to predominantly outward-directed force tendencies, generated by muscle contractions that tend to move or tension tissues away from the central facial axis.

This distinction is intended as a simplified heuristic model. Most facial mimic muscles generate complex, multidirectional forces influenced by anatomical insertions, tissue interactions, neuromuscular activation patterns, and individual anatomical variability [45–49]. The proposed centripetal/centrifugal classification should not be interpreted as

a strict anatomical categorization, but as a conceptual tool to describe predominant functional tendencies.

Table 1. Terminology used in the proposed vector-based framework.

Term	Definition Within the Proposed Framework
Vector	A simplified functional descriptor of the predominant direction of muscle-driven force transmission, rather than a directly measured biomechanical quantity.
Muscle-generated vector	A directionally oriented mechanical influence produced by facial mimic muscle contraction and transmitted to the skin, subcutaneous tissues, and deeper facial structures.
Force transmission	The propagation of muscle-generated mechanical influences across interconnected facial tissue layers.
Vectorial balance	The dynamic relationship between opposing or complementary force tendencies acting on facial tissues under physiological conditions.
Vectorial imbalance	A relative predominance or loss of balance among force tendencies, particularly in the setting of progressive tissue weakening and reduced mechanical resilience.
Centripetal vector	A predominantly inward-directed force tendency, moving, compressing, or folding tissues toward the central facial axis.
Centrifugal vector	A predominantly outward-directed force tendency, moving, tensioning, or supporting tissues away from the central facial axis.

Under physiological conditions, facial appearance at rest may be viewed as reflecting a dynamic equilibrium between these opposing functional tendencies, maintained by baseline muscle tone, neuromuscular coordination, and tissue resilience [45–47] (Table 2).

Table 2. Hypothesized predominant functional tendencies of selected facial mimic muscles within the proposed conceptual framework.

Muscle	Anatomical Function	Predominant Functional Tendency	Facial Region
Corrugator supercilii	Brow depression and medial contraction	Tendency toward inward-directed force transmission	Glabellar region
Procerus	Nasal bridge depression	Tendency toward inward-directed force transmission	Upper midline
Orbicularis oculi	Eyelid closure	Predominantly concentric/circular force pattern	Periorbital region
Orbicularis oris	Lip closure	Predominantly concentric/circular force pattern	Perioral region
Depressor anguli oris	Downward movement of mouth corner	Tendency toward inward and downward-directed forces	Lower face
Mentalis	Chin elevation and lower lip protrusion	Complex multidirectional force pattern	Chin
Zygomaticus major	Elevation of mouth corner	Tendency toward outward and upward-directed forces	Midface
Zygomaticus minor	Upper lip elevation	Tendency toward outward-directed forces	Midface
Levator anguli oris	Elevation of mouth angle	Tendency toward outward and upward-directed forces	Midface

Table 2. *Cont.*

Muscle	Anatomical Function	Predominant Functional Tendency	Facial Region
Risorius	Lateral movement of mouth corner	Predominantly lateral force transmission	Lower midface
Frontalis	Eyebrow elevation	Tendency toward upward and outward-directed forces	Upper face

The functional tendencies reported in this table represent simplified, conceptual descriptions of predominant force directions for heuristic purposes. Facial mimic muscles generate complex, multidirectional force patterns influenced by anatomical insertions, tissue interactions, and neuromuscular activation, and therefore should not be interpreted as producing strictly unidirectional vectors.

3.2. Relationship with Existing Models of Facial Aging

Facial aging has traditionally been interpreted through several complementary anatomical and structural models, each emphasizing a specific component of age-related facial change. Volumetric theories focus on the redistribution and deflation of facial fat compartments [3,10,18,42]; ligament-based models emphasize the progressive laxity of retaining structures [4]; SMAS-related interpretations highlight the role of superficial musculoaponeurotic support and soft-tissue transmission [19,37]; and skeletal remodeling models describe age-related changes in the underlying bony framework [39,50–60]. These approaches have substantially contributed to the current understanding of facial aging and remain essential for clinical assessment.

The vector-based framework proposed in this article is not intended to replace these established models. Rather, it should be read as an interpretative overlay to established structural models of facial aging, rather than as a competing explanation of aging mechanisms. Its purpose is to integrate the anatomical substrate described by existing models with a functional perspective focused on directionality, balance, and temporal accumulation of muscle-generated mechanical influences [16,30,44,45,56,57]. In this context, muscle-generated vectors may help explain how repetitive functional forces act over time on facial fat compartments, retaining ligaments, the SMAS, skeletal structures, and overlying soft tissues [1–5,45,56,57].

In this perspective, facial aging may be understood as the result of an interaction between structural vulnerability and functional loading. Loss of volume, ligament attenuation, reduced dermal elasticity, SMAS-related weakening, and skeletal remodeling may progressively reduce the ability of facial tissues to resist repeated mechanical forces [1,18–20,37–39,53,54,60–67]. As tissue resilience declines, the same muscular contraction patterns that are well tolerated in youth may produce more visible and persistent effects, including wrinkles, folds, contour changes, and tissue displacement.

Accordingly, the proposed model should be considered complementary rather than alternative to existing theories. Its potential value lies in integrating the anatomical “where” of facial aging with the functional “how” of progressive force transmission. This interpretation may help bridge static anatomical assessment with the dynamic and longitudinal nature of facial aging, while acknowledging that the proposed framework remains conceptual and requires future validation through imaging, biomechanical, and clinical studies.

3.3. Progressive Loss of Vectorial Equilibrium During Aging

The balance between centripetal and centrifugal functional tendencies should not be considered static. Throughout life, repeated muscular activation acts on tissues that progressively lose elasticity, regenerative capacity, and structural resilience [49,50,68]. As tissue quality declines, the same muscular forces may exert a greater mechanical impact, amplifying their long-term effects on skin folding, crease formation, and spatial redistribu-

tion of facial features [46]. Within this context, even subtle imbalances between centripetal and centrifugal vectors may gradually translate into visible signs of aging.

Within this conceptual framework, facial aging may be interpreted as a progressive shift in dynamic equilibrium. Rather than representing a unidirectional process, aging can be viewed as a gradual loss of balance between opposing muscle-generated force tendencies, with a relative predominance of inward-directed mechanical influences in selected facial regions. This interpretation does not imply a uniform or universal pattern, but rather a tendency that may emerge in the context of declining tissue resilience and repeated functional loading. The resulting morphological changes may therefore reflect the cumulative interaction between muscle activity, tissue properties, structural support, and gravitational forces over time.

This framework does not attribute facial aging to a single dominant mechanism. Instead, it integrates muscle-driven force dynamics with established biological processes, including reduced cellular turnover, extracellular matrix degradation, and loss of tissue elasticity. Within this perspective, muscular forces may act as modulators that influence how these biological changes manifest spatially on the face, contributing to the localization and progression of wrinkles, folds, and contour alterations. By emphasizing directionality, interaction, and temporal accumulation of mechanical influences, the proposed model offers a complementary interpretative framework that integrates functional and structural aspects of facial aging, rather than replacing existing anatomical and morphological approaches.

4. Phases of Facial Aging Reinterpreted Through a Vector Model

Within the proposed framework, facial aging can be interpreted as a progressive process in which biological tissue changes interact with long-term vectorial dynamics generated by facial muscle activity. Rather than occurring as a single event, aging may be conceptualized as a sequence of interconnected phases in which tissue properties, muscular forces, and gravitational effects progressively interact. For conceptual clarity, three major stages can be described (Table 3).

Table 3. Conceptual Phases of Facial Aging in the Vector-Based Model.

Phase	Main Biological Changes	Vectorial Dynamics	Clinical Manifestations
Phase 1	Reduced cellular turnover, ECM alteration, early loss of elasticity	Vector equilibrium largely preserved	Minimal visible aging signs
Phase 2	Progressive decline in tissue resilience	Gradual predominance of centripetal vectors	Formation of expression lines and wrinkles
Phase 3	Structural weakening and gravitational effects	Interaction between vector imbalance and gravity	Tissue ptosis, folds, volumetric redistribution

4.1. Phase 1: Metabolic and Tissue Aging

The earliest stage of facial aging is characterized primarily by gradual changes in tissue metabolism and structural maintenance [41,52,53]. Cellular turnover slows over time, particularly within the epidermis and dermis, and the capacity for repair and renewal of extracellular matrix components becomes progressively reduced. Alterations in collagen organization, elastin integrity, and hyaluronic acid content contribute to decreased tissue elasticity and resilience [54–56].

At this stage, facial morphology remains largely preserved, and visible structural alterations are generally limited [20,54,57]. However, the progressive decline in tissue quality creates a biological substrate that increases the susceptibility of facial tissues to mechanical forces. In this context, muscular contraction vectors that previously produced

minimal structural effects may begin to exert greater mechanical influence on the skin and underlying tissues [49,57,58].

Thus, Phase 1 can be understood as the biological foundation upon which subsequent vector-related and structural changes develop.

4.2. Phase 2: Vectorial Imbalance and Expression-Related Structural Changes

As tissue resilience decreases, the repeated action of facial mimic muscles progressively contributes to the development of visible aging signs [20,35,54]. Within the proposed vector-based model, this stage is characterized by a gradual imbalance between centripetal and centrifugal muscular forces. Under physiological conditions, facial muscles generate opposing vectors that maintain a dynamic equilibrium at rest. Over time, however, the cumulative mechanical effects of repeated contraction-acting on tissues with reduced elasticity-may favor centripetal vectors that converge toward the facial midline. This progressive shift in vectorial balance can lead to localized folding of the skin, crease formation, and the emergence of expression-related wrinkles [8,45,47,59]. In this phase, aging signs such as glabellar lines, nasolabial folds, or perioral wrinkles can be interpreted not only as localized structural changes but also as the visible manifestation of long-term vectorial interactions between muscular activity and tissue mechanical properties [60,61].

4.3. Phase 3: Gravitational Interaction and Structural Redistribution

In later stages of facial aging, the combined effects of tissue degradation and prolonged mechanical stress interact with gravitational forces. As elasticity and structural support decline further, facial tissues become increasingly susceptible to downward displacement and volumetric redistribution [62–64]. Within this stage, gravitational forces progressively influence facial architecture, contributing to ptosis of soft tissues, contour alterations, and changes in facial proportions. Importantly, gravitational effects do not act in isolation but interact with the previously established vectorial imbalances generated by muscular activity [65,66]. The result is a complex remodeling process in which centripetal muscular vectors, reduced tissue resilience, and gravitational displacement collectively shape the advanced morphological features of facial aging.

5. Clinical Implications for Aesthetic and Dermatologic Practice

The proposed vector-based interpretation of facial aging may have several implications for clinical evaluation and treatment planning in aesthetic and dermatologic practice. By considering facial aging as the result of interacting vectorial forces acting on progressively weakened tissues, clinicians may adopt a more integrative approach to facial assessment that extends beyond static anatomical subdivisions or isolated aging signs.

5.1. Integrative Facial Assessment

From this perspective, visible aging signs may be interpreted as the cumulative outcome of long-term interactions between muscular activity, tissue properties, and gravitational effects [27,33,34,37]. Beyond the assessment of isolated features, clinicians may consider the distribution, orientation, and relative dominance of muscle-driven force patterns across the face [23,49,67–69].

For example, in the upper face, the interplay between corrugator, procerus, and frontalis activity may influence not only the presence of glabellar lines, but also their depth, orientation, and persistence at rest. Similarly, in the lower face, the interaction between orbicularis oris, depressor anguli oris, and mentalis activity, combined with declining tissue support, may contribute to perioral wrinkles, marionette lines, and alterations in lower facial contour.

Observing facial expression patterns, baseline muscle tone, and asymmetries in muscular activation may therefore provide additional insights into the underlying mechanical dynamics shaping facial aging.

5.2. Implications for Preventive Strategies

Within this conceptual framework, preventive interventions may be viewed as acting at multiple interconnected levels: preservation of tissue quality, modulation of excessive or unbalanced muscular activity, and maintenance of structural support [23,48,70–73]. In early stages, strategies aimed at preserving extracellular matrix integrity and skin elasticity may help maintain the capacity of tissues to withstand repeated mechanical stress. From a functional perspective, interventions that reduce excessive or asymmetric muscle activity may contribute to maintaining a more balanced distribution of force transmission over time [74–76]. Accordingly, preventive approaches may be conceptualized not only as targeting individual aging signs, but as aiming to preserve the dynamic equilibrium between interacting structural and functional components of the face (Figure 4) [77,78].

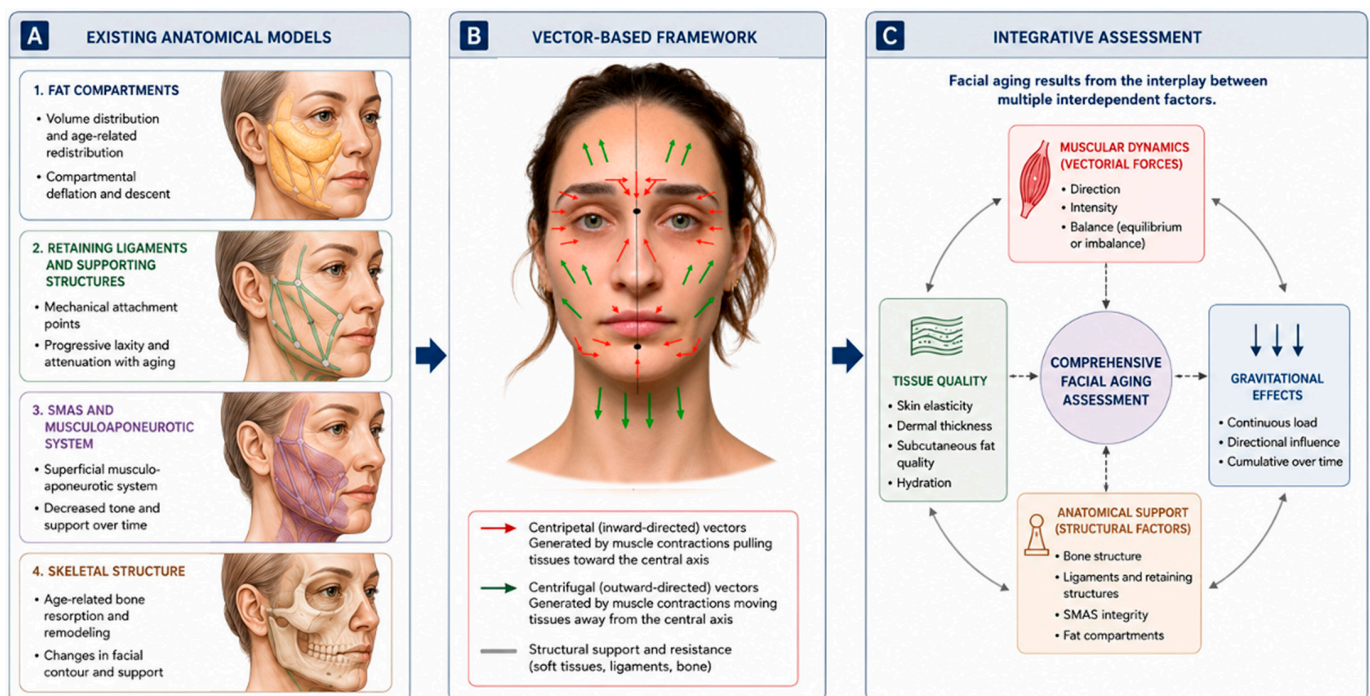


Figure 4. Integration of the proposed vector-based framework with established concepts of facial aging. (A) Established anatomical and structural models contributing to current understanding of facial aging, including facial fat compartments, retaining ligaments, the SMAS, and skeletal remodeling. (B) Conceptual representation of the proposed vector-based framework. Facial mimic muscles generate force transmission patterns that may be broadly interpreted as centripetal (inward-directed) and centrifugal (outward-directed) tendencies. Under physiological conditions, these opposing tendencies contribute to a dynamic equilibrium. (C) Integrative interpretation of facial aging. Within the proposed framework, vectorial dynamics interact with tissue quality, structural support, and gravitational influences, contributing collectively to the visible manifestations of facial aging.

5.3. Implications for Treatment Planning

In later stages of facial aging, when alterations in force balance and structural support become more pronounced, clinical reasoning may benefit from considering the relative contribution of different underlying mechanisms [79–82]. Features predominantly associated with repetitive muscle-driven folding may reflect a stronger dynamic component, whereas those related to tissue weakening, volume redistribution, or support loss may reflect a

greater structural component. A vector-oriented interpretation may therefore assist clinicians in distinguishing whether a given aging feature primarily reflects dynamic muscular influences, structural tissue changes, gravitational displacement, or the interaction of these factors. This perspective does not replace existing diagnostic or therapeutic strategies, but may provide an additional conceptual layer to guide more individualized and integrative facial assessment.

5.4. Illustrative Clinical Reading of Vectorial Patterns

To clarify the potential clinical relevance of the proposed framework, selected facial regions may be interpreted through a vector-oriented perspective. These examples are intended for illustrative purposes only and should not be considered treatment algorithms. In the glabellar region, vertical and oblique lines are commonly interpreted as localized expression wrinkles. Within the proposed framework, these changes may also be read as the visible expression of repeated inward-directed force tendencies generated by the corrugator supercilii and procerus muscles acting on progressively less resilient tissues. This interpretation shifts the clinical reading from an isolated wrinkle-based assessment to a broader evaluation of muscular predominance, tissue resistance, and persistence of lines at rest. In the perioral region, radial wrinkles and contour changes may reflect the interaction between concentric force patterns generated by the orbicularis oris, reduced dermal elasticity, and progressive loss of structural support. Rather than interpreting these signs exclusively as skin surface alterations, the vector-based framework encourages consideration of the dynamic relationship between repetitive muscular activity, tissue quality, and local mechanical folding. In the midface and nasolabial region, the development of folds may result from the combined effects of soft-tissue descent, volume redistribution, ligamentous support changes, and repeated muscular activity. From a vectorial perspective, nasolabial fold formation may therefore be interpreted not as the result of a single mechanism, but as the visible outcome of interactions between structural vulnerability and functional loading across adjacent facial regions. In the lower face, marionette lines and mandibular contour changes may be read as the result of progressive tissue weakening interacting with inward- and downward-directed muscular tendencies, gravitational displacement, and reduced support from deeper anatomical structures. This interpretation emphasizes the need to assess facial aging as a dynamic continuum rather than as a series of isolated regional defects.

These examples illustrate how the proposed framework may complement conventional anatomical and morphological assessment by adding a functional layer focused on directionality, balance, and temporal accumulation of mechanical influences. Further clinical and imaging-based studies are required to determine whether such vector-oriented interpretation can improve reproducibility, patient stratification, or treatment planning.

6. Limitations of the Proposed Framework

The vector-based interpretation of facial aging presented in this article is intended as a conceptual framework rather than a validated mechanistic model. As such, several limitations must be acknowledged. The proposed classification of facial muscular influences into centripetal and centrifugal vectorial components represents a simplified functional interpretation of complex anatomical and biomechanical processes. Facial mimic muscles often generate multidirectional forces, and their mechanical effects depend on anatomical insertions, patterns of activation, and interactions with surrounding tissues. Consequently, the vectorial categories described in this framework should be interpreted as predominant functional tendencies rather than strict anatomical classifications. The model has not yet been validated through quantitative biomechanical or imaging-based studies. The hypoth-

esis of a progressive imbalance between opposing vectorial forces during aging is derived from anatomical considerations and long-term clinical observation but requires further investigation using objective methods, such as three-dimensional imaging, biomechanical modeling, or electromyographic analysis. Facial aging is a multifactorial process influenced by numerous biological, environmental, and behavioral factors. Genetic predisposition, hormonal changes, lifestyle factors, and cumulative environmental exposures all contribute to tissue aging and may interact with muscular dynamics in complex ways. The vector-based model proposed here therefore represents only one interpretative layer within a broader biological context. Individual variability in facial anatomy, muscle activity, and aging patterns must be considered. The relative contribution of muscular vectors, tissue aging, and gravitational effects may differ substantially between individuals, limiting the applicability of a single explanatory model to all patients.

Despite these limitations, conceptual models can provide useful frameworks for integrating existing knowledge and generating new research questions. The present hypothesis should therefore be regarded as a starting point for further investigation rather than a definitive explanation of facial aging mechanisms.

7. Future Directions

Future studies are needed to validate and refine the proposed vector-based framework. Imaging-based approaches, including three-dimensional facial analysis and dynamic imaging techniques, may help quantify tissue displacement, wrinkle progression, and regional changes in facial morphology over time [33,72,79,80]. Biomechanical modeling could further clarify how muscle-generated force tendencies interact with tissue elasticity, structural support, and gravitational loading [1,5,63]. Electromyographic studies may also provide objective information on facial muscle activation patterns and their relationship with specific aging phenotypes [45,56,57]. Longitudinal clinical studies combining standardized photography, functional assessment, and imaging-based measurements would be particularly useful to determine whether vectorial imbalance contributes to the development or progression of selected facial aging patterns [33,41,72]. Future research should investigate how this conceptual framework may be integrated with established anatomical and volumetric models of facial aging [18,37,39,61,78]. Such multidisciplinary validation may help determine whether a vector-oriented interpretation can improve the reproducibility of facial assessment, patient stratification, and hypothesis generation in aesthetic and dermatologic practice.

8. Conclusions

Facial aging is a complex process resulting from the interaction of biological tissue changes, muscular activity, and gravitational forces. While current models often describe aging primarily through static anatomical alterations or localized clinical signs, the dynamic contribution of muscular vector forces remains less frequently addressed.

The conceptual framework proposed in this article suggests that facial aging may partially reflect a progressive imbalance between opposing muscular vectors acting on tissues that gradually lose structural resilience. Within this perspective, visible aging signs may be interpreted as the cumulative outcome of long-term interactions between muscular dynamics, tissue aging, and gravitational effects.

Although this vector-based model remains hypothetical and requires further validation, it may offer a complementary way to interpret facial aging as a dynamic and integrated process rather than as a series of isolated structural changes. By emphasizing the interaction between functional and structural factors, this perspective may contribute

to a more comprehensive understanding of facial aging and support the development of more individualized approaches in aesthetic and dermatologic practice.

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