ARTICLE

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Female Instagram elderly influencers countering the ageing narratives

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Influencers are usually associated with young people creating waves on social media. However, there are "Influencer" at age 60 and beyond. This study unveils 'Female Instagram Elderly Influencers' who inspire every generation through appeal and presence on the platform. This study explores how older women influencers on Instagram promote themselves online and how they challenge the stereotypes about ageing. In an era defined by the growing influence of digital media, this study reveals the unique perspectives these women use to challenge the social assumptions about ageing. In particular, this study proposed new ways of ageing, defying gender and setting newer perspectives on old age and ageing. By using a netnography technique, an extensive investigation of the online identities and discussions of eight senior female Instagram influencers was conducted. Netnography has allowed to delve deeper into their public profiles, observing their virtual communities and providing insights into their online identity. The results draw attention to a few key characteristics that characterise the online personas of these "older female influencers" on Instagram. These influencers challenge preconceived notions about ageing through their profiles by projecting an image of themselves as vibrant, engaged and active. They portray a colourful, opportunity-filled life full of self-expression through their carefully chosen texts and videos, which showcase their love for everything around them, like food, travel, fashion, quick tips, etc. Furthermore, the findings suggest that these influencers provide their followers with a sense of empowerment. By sharing their personal day-to-day experiences, wisdom and advice, they interact with a broad audience and uplift and reassure those going through difficult times. People of all ages engage with their content, showing how this sense of community is 'ageless'. The critical role older female Instagram influencers play in eradicating age-related stereotypes and creating a welcoming community is revealed through this netnography investigation. Their experiences and online persona offer a nuanced viewpoint on ageing, encouraging individuals to take advantage of life's opportunities at any age.

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Introduction

Ageism refers to stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against people based on age. It is often seen as a social problem that needs to be tackled. The World Health Organisation (WHO), in line with the United Nations (UN), has taken massive steps and devised global strategies and action plans for ageing and health. The UN initiative of 'UN Decade of Healthy Ageing' (2021–2030) focuses primarily on the area of – how society thinks, feels and acts towards ageing, ensuring that communities around us foster the abilities of older people, delivering person-centric integrated health care services to the older and provide them long-term access to caregiving who need it (World Health Organization, 2021; United Nations, 2016; Officer and de la Fuente-Nunez, 2018). Ageism is pervasive and tackling ageism in the present time is an important issue concerning policy and advocacy. While discussing or implementing any policies, it is noticed that counting the elder's contribution to family, community and society is the conceivable way the narratives were built to combat ageism (United Nations, 2016).

Around 600 million people aged 60 and over worldwide will double by 2025 to reach 1.4 billion by 2030 (World Health Organisation, 2021). The number of persons aged 80 or over is also growing at the fastest rate – indicating considerable gains in longevity. This is a remarkable feat that can contribute significantly to the development process. However, ageist attitudes and age discrimination rob society of this opportunity, rendering older persons devalued, marginalised and isolated, considering them frail, vulnerable and non-contributor (Swift and Steeden, 2020; United Nations, 2016). On the contrary, there are also some segments where the older were even represented as 'resource-rich and productive' in an excessively positive light, especially in entertainment media and irrespective of such representations, older people in general and social context have always been an undervalued subject and insufficiently studied (Makita et al. 2021).

With the advancements in technology, social media and especially social networking and video sharing platforms, could have possibly been the most significant contributors in shaping the 'image of older' online and setting some newer benchmarks, yet social media is immensely found to be the creator and distributor of age stereotypes (Leist, 2013; Levy et al. 2013; Makita et al. 2021). Oro-Piqueras and Marques (2016) argued in their work that social media could dominate and confront the negative representations of old age as the platform allows individuals to share the individualised experience of growing and being old. However, it is indisputable that the older, especially older women, face the brunt of ageism more along with the combined effect of ageism and sexism, leading to multi-fold inequalities also because women tend to outlive their spouses, so in those cases, they have to rely on others for their needs and help (North and Fiske, 2012; Hsu, 2015). Although the older generations have their presence online, they are often related to someone who engages in social media but more often to maintain social connectivity and combat isolation (Chen and Schulz, 2016; Sen et al. 2022).

This conversation will reveal a very different notion about "old age". This study presents how "Older Women Influencers" use social media to portray or represent themselves, particularly on Instagram, through their posts' visual and textual content. The discussion further will give an essence of how societal expectations and stereotypes related to age and gender influence are challenged through their presence on social platforms and how they are creating more inclusive and truthful perspectives on ageing and also garnering audience attention and love, creating a picture that old age is not about feeling helpless or being vulnerable.

The researcher will look through these research questions to delve deeper and understand the facets of the new-age Instagram Influencers.

RQ1. How these Old Women Influencers build and manage their online interactions, essentially the kind of content and the messages that they put (i.e., comments, hashtags and posts on Instagram) to interact with their audience and

RQ2: What are the possible communication strategies they adopt while engaging with their audiences that amplify their popularity on Instagram?

The information is collated as guided by Kozinets (2010) indicators and categories, such as

a. Their Instagram accounts, such as their bio, number of followers and the accounts that they follow, which are their details and
b. The associated followers, hashtags, captions, number of likes, comments, comment texts, etc., are primarily social.

The research paper will follow the given structure. First, it explores the nitty-gritty of the older's association with technology and social media, further mapping through the lens of some contemporary theories. Second, it discusses the journey of older and older women in social media and technological platforms in detail. The following section describes the detailed methodology adopted for this research; it elaborates on the findings evolving from the analysis and concludes and offers some future propositions that can be adopted to expand this study further.

Olders' association with social media and technology

Technology and the older are no longer an antonym in recent times. Older people are connected to the internet or digital platforms for varied reasons. They do online shopping, book travel tickets, buy groceries, order food, book movie tickets and cabs, purchase medicines, track their investments and finances online and use maps for navigation and commutation (Peek et al., 2015). They are far more proactive and eager toward technology adoption. However, they have some physical and cognitive challenges that crop up with the growing age that may sometimes act as hindrances/barriers to technology adoption (Golant, 2017). However, the Baby Boomer generation is enthusiastically overcoming these physical and technological barriers (Petalla, 2022). The presence of older adults on social media platforms is also huge, and they initially developed this relationship with technology, the internet and digital platforms to combat loneliness (Leist, 2013). Many have recently stayed alone as they do not have kids or are widows or widowers, so they are bound to remain alone and manage themselves (Dickinson and Hill, 2007).

Additionally, few have limited physical mobility owing to old age or some ailments. In such cases, the technology in their lives is a socialising source. They prefer to go online to reach out to people and be around some community (online) to beat the loneliness and feel the presence of someone around them (Vines et al. 2015; Haase et al. 2021). The primary drive motivating them toward social media is the enjoyment during the use and the social connection built (Leist, 2013). The Positive Ageing Report (2021) highlighted that individuals over 60, primarily women, are the more tech-savvy gender. 34% of senior women spend more than four hours daily on social media platforms compared to only 11% of older men. This disparity is seen because women strongly believe in technology's practical benefits and use it more frequently. In addition, compared to only 21% of men, 37% of women 'strongly agree' that technology helps with their mental health and tranquillity. Even though both genders believe in the

benefits of technology, it is safe to conclude that older women are more convinced of the benefits of a tech-enabled lifestyle than men. Thus, the older generations, especially older women, are shifting their base towards exploring diverse social media platforms where the platform offers the liberty and joy of posting their content. Although the move and the shift are not massive, Instagram acknowledges the baby boomers' presence more and more (McFarlane and Samsioe, 2020). Recent reports claimed that although YouTube is the most popular platform among the older, twenty-three percent of Babyboomers prefer to use Instagram too, considering its versatility (Suciu, 2020).

In their study, Sheldon et al. (2021) discussed that the older generation often uses Instagram for documentation and inspiration needs, to list events and positive memories that promote life satisfaction. They start liking Instagram as a platform because they can easily inspire themselves via that platform. They can frequently monitor their friends' activity on the platform and use it to document and show off their stories. They feel delighted and gratified, hence this generation's steep rise in the forum, especially women (Kamal and Rahmani, 2020; Simoes et al. 2021). A few discussions in the past also stated that older women are getting more inclined towards Instagram as they feel that the platform gives them more visibility and, more importantly, self-identity (McGrath, 2018; Birnstengel, 2018). The intertwining of these concepts of being online is becoming synonymous with age. Also, with time, the usage of technology and social media by the older has changed, and the recent pandemic has already changed many narratives of going digital; hence, the need for research in this segment has heightened with the increased inception of digital media, there is a new phenomenon of being online and thus an increase in the rate of adoption among this generation (Soto-Acosta, 2020).

Theoretical background
Ageism is a compelling concept; hence, reviewing and redefining ageism has garnered increasing interest among researchers (Ayalon et al. 2019; Makita et al. 2021). Butler (1969) offers the original definition, viewing ageism as a group's prejudice against another group. Later, he defined ageism as a practice of systematic stereotyping and prejudice directed at particular persons just because they are "aged" (Butler, 1969). In this context, stereotypes and prejudices are heavily influenced by a person's past interactions with various racial and ethnic minority groups and other social groups. This is also a premise of intergroup contact theory, first put forth by Allport (1954). The intergroup contact theory is frequently identified as a leading theory to explain how younger adults feel towards older people. Age-based segregation is relatively frequent in modern society and is made worse by social media (Pettigrew, 2021). From an early age, people usually exclusively interact with people who are similar to them. Even though group interactions may be one of the most effective methods for dispelling prejudices, each generation has little opportunity to learn from the experiences of older generations (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008). While contact frequency does not have a similar effect, contact quality is linked to young people's behavioural intentions and attitudes toward older people (Drury et al. 2016; Visintin, 2021). Therefore, we conclude that while frequent interactions may not be enough to alter preconceptions, the nature of such interactions has the tremendous potential to do so.

Ageism is also frequently examined via ageing concerns. Ageism describes how society (young people) views a particular age group (older adults). In contrast, ageing anxiety reflects people's perceptions of themselves and their future and is linked to lesser optimism and fear of death (Barnett and Adams, 2018). Ageism is

also a coping mechanism for those anxious about getting older; hence, it is easy to judge older adults and ageing negatively and establish psychological distance (Cooney et al. 2020, p. 35).

Generations were also duly acknowledged as social constructions that help explain the complexities and subtleties of ageing and human growth in shifting cultures. Studies have also shown generations as a helpful heuristic in making social sense (Campbell et al. 2017; Levy et al. 2022). According to the social constructionist perspective, the prevalence of generational stereotypes and the social acceptance of using these labels to describe people of various ages help to construct generations and the disparities between them (Rudolph et al. 2020). The social constructionist perspective also addresses and elucidates why generations are so pervasive. The social constructionist perspectives provide different avenues for exploring age and age-related processes at work without relying on generational explanations. Thus, as will be further explained below, these perspectives also provide practical and theoretical advice that may be put into practice for identifying the challenges associated with understanding age and ageing representations in social media.

Thus, from the discussion above, it is clear that ageing is challenging at many levels, especially when society already has some pre-set notions about old age. These notions impact not only older adults but also the younger generations. This research aims to address this gap where these new-age Instagram Influencers are not only helping in coming over with these ageing labels but also creating stronger bonds with their audiences, defying the generations' discussions and challenging societal stereotypes.

Methodology
Considering the issue's freshness and scarcity of prior research within the area, and also to understand in-depth this new trend of the rise of Older Women Instagram Influencers, the researcher selected a qualitative approach using netnography to analyse the online content (Miles et al. 2018; Silverman, 2015). The focus of the study is Instagram, as this is one of the most popular platforms (Dixon, 2022), and social media users devote and use this platform mainly to visual storytelling, which is also a reason for the popularity of this platform among influencers and people of all ages. Apart from its visual appeal, the platform also has specific operational capabilities such as tenacity, prominence, easy access to content (Byod, 2010) and better expressibility from the data analysis standpoint, making Instagram a preferred social media site for digital research (Laestadius, 2017). For this study, the search option of Instagram allowed for conducting some essential investigation of some age-related hashtags, like #olderwomen and #olderinfluencers. These labels acted as explicit indicators to categorise the content suitable for the study and to trace out and segregate the profiles of those who appeared suitable. The first stage happened to be the collation of all Instagram profiles of older women that emerged from the hashtags and related searches. Then, a few accounts were identified, considering the point of selecting a smaller sample.

Several inclusion/exclusion criteria guided the selection. The inclusion criteria were women over 60, particularly those with no fame or any prior recognition or celebrity identity before they appeared on Instagram or before their social media journey and whose presence and followers were created on social media by their persuasion power and original and fascinating content. The research also focused on specifically Indian Women Influencers above 60 years of age. Considering this, the exclusion criteria indeed become those profiles of celebrities, professional artists or any other who have certain fame in the mainstream media were ignored and eliminated from the study. Considering the ethical

guidelines, we only considered and analysed public profiles (Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002). Eight of the final profiles that met our basic inclusion criteria emerged. Since the study is exploratory, no additional filters were applied, and these selected profiles were studied for thirteen weeks, from September 2022 to mid-December 2022. For this study, the researcher studied their Instagram posts, the images and the captions they post, and the videos they post. The study also looked into the comments they get on the posts and how they engage with their audience through their content and their replies to the comments they received. The study used a netnography approach (Bartl et al. 2016; Lenihan and Kelly-Holmes, 2015), where the content is then thematically coded (Guest et al. 2014; Song et al. 2020) with an inductive process to detect the most pertinent and meaningful categories that will help recognise this new phenomenon. Based on Gomez's (2019) classification of influencers on the number of followers, the study identified four of them as macro influencers (where their followers range between 100,000 and 1 million) and four as micro-influencers (where the followers are between 1000 and 100,000). These older women are from diverse backgrounds and areas of interest. They have lured their audience through their interest and passion for their hobbies and work and made their audience realise that there is nothing called 'age' or 'ageing', and you can be equally interesting and relevant at any age. The study will use a qualitative approach and conduct a netnography of eight Older Women's Instagram Influencers, finally selected and finalised after thorough scrutiny, considering the posts (pics and videos) they share and how they engage with their audience (the comments on the post and their replies to the comments) through their content. First, a brief detail is given below for all the considered Older Women Influencers to understand their diversity and the newness they bring through their presence and content on the platform.

Dr. Seema Anand. At 61, mythologist Seema Anand, a practising storyteller, broke the stereotypes around physical intimacy through her Instagram account. She gives her insights on sex, virginity and pleasure, educating her followers simply and interactively. Her reels often bust several myths around the taboo topic of sex and encourage people to unlearn and let go of their misconceptions. She also talks about how older people can have a good sex life and openly discusses all the taboos we have while discussing sex and our bodies. She was featured in Vogue in May 2022, emphasising how older people can have good sex. She usually uses stories to spread awareness of relevant issues, especially women's. She believes stories have many aspects and functions that can be told uniquely to the tellers or the audience. Her following on social media is enormous, and she engages with them thoroughly.

Ravi Bala Sharma. She is famously known as Dancing Dadi, which means Dancing Grandmom on Instagram! She describes herself as someone who still makes birthday wishes. Her Instagram page is full of her dancing videos. She grooves on many dance numbers, ranging from fast-paced numbers to melancholic songs. Her total of grace and effortless movements have caught the attention of many well-known choreographers. She is a retired teacher who is now pursuing her passion with energy and zeal. Her seamless and lively performances are a distinct reflection of her personality and signify that you can set any milestone for yourself until you believe in yourself. She is also influencing many of her age and many from the younger cohort.

Manjri Varde. Manjari is an independent artist and designer. The 66-year-old creates a range of abstract, divine and traditional arts and showcases them on the platform. She has her label, "Samanjari", which promotes "wearable art", a comfortable combination of delicate and vibrant fabrics, calligraphies and poetic chants. Shattering more than tons of stereotypes, she flaunts Western attires with confidence, does a photo shoot with Vogue alongside her daughter-in-law, and creates funny videos, dance videos and mimicry, showing an unusual camaraderie in the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. She also voices her relationships with her parents, in-laws, kids and daughter-in-law and how she looks at them differently. She talks about her aspiration and how that weaved in via her label "Samanjari". Her Instagram account is full of actual colour, vibrancy and youthfulness. She defied every norm, broke every set of rules for her age, and beautifully displayed the unsung power of living a true self at any age and time.

Poonam Sapra – MotherwithSign. Poonam Sapra is a mother with an unconventional sign for the online audience on Instagram. She rules the platform with her quirky tips and subtle Gyan! Her Instagram profile is full of advice or what we call 'Gyan' (preaching) presented uniquely. She shows it displayed on the whiteboard and holds it as a placard. Each display is very similar when you see it, but the messages displayed are different! Some are motivational, some excellent and supportive, and some are motherly advice. Her followers enjoy the uniqueness of presenting not-so-preachy messages, which makes them feel good about themselves and instils acceptance and positivity among the youths. Her humorous posts quickly created a special place in the Instagrammers' hearts.

Kanan Bala aka Mama- K. She is a food wizard on Instagram. Her account is full of delicacies of every kind and type. The page is full of feeds that appear as a culinary heaven. It displays an extensive range of assortments in both stylish and homely ways. Her unique sense of the exhibition hooks her followers. She grows her veggies on her residential premises and prefers following the organic route. Mama-K is also learning food art and displaying it to her audience. She considers the Instagram community her extended family and loves to share whatever she prepares. She feels this community is beautiful and positive, with more acceptance and positivity everywhere.

Sheela Bajaj. Sheela Bajaj, a 78-year-old from Delhi, rekindled her passion for crochet during the lockdown and turned it into a business through Instagram. Her granddaughter's idea was to start a business showcasing her skills in knitting incredible art pieces. The duo launched their crochet business through Instagram and received a warm reception. Sheela makes a wide range of crocheted products like sweaters, accessories, earrings, pouches, toys and home decor items. She showcased them to the Insta audience and garnered many followers with her knit work.

Shanthi Ramachandran. A banker-turned-Instagram food influencer, Shanthi Ramachandran began her social media stint in 2015 after retirement. Her daughter insisted she create an Instagram account to showcase her recipes, cooking tips, etc. In no time, Shanthi was receiving praise online for her simplistic and authentic Indian dishes — thokku, sambar, rasam, one pot rajma, and so on and with her unique sense of display of the recipes with a very personal story.

Rajini Chandy. A 72-year-old homemaker just took Instagram on sway with her influential posts. She posts her pictures from wearing sarees to ripped jeans, denim dresses and jumpsuits. She believes in doing what she loves and gives her pleasure. She made

her debut in Malayalam films at age 65, and from then till now, she is just unstoppable! She creates numerous content on the platforms where you will find her working out in a gym, learning to dance, and pursuing her other hobbies. Her posts and graceful online presence break many typecasts and showcase that age is not a barrier to following a passion and motivating others to follow the same.

This research focuses on Older Women as 'Instagram Influencers', exploring how they have operated on the social platform of Instagram and reshaped their social representations and the notions around age and ageing.

Findings

Investigating Instagram profiles on various aspects generated a unique understanding of older female influencers. Here in this study, the four most meaningful findings were presented and decoded while segregating them as themes and answering the research questions framed for this study.

Exclusive depiction of self-online. The first noteworthy findings are the self-representation online, personal appearance management and style statement projections, and the imprint of their online profiles (Lennon and Rudd, 1994). For them, Instagram signifies a platform that offers them the space to be lively and innovative and also a place from where they derive their identity from their work, passion, and hobbies. Drawing on an assortment of semiotic resources from their posts, the older women influencers were often seen having fun playing with their self-portrayal online, where they demonstrated immense bravery to portray themselves and their choices against any ageist stereotypes. Moreover, the analysis of the content and the post resources specified that these older influencers hold unique and authentic styles that seem honest and appealing to their audiences. They shaped their content and posted to develop what can be considered personal branding, making them visible and distinguishing them from one another. Each represents a distinctive look and style, making its profile unique. So, for example, Manjri Varde's Instagram page is full of colour and vibrancy. The vibrancy comes from her art, calligraphy, and her jazzy style statement. Her vibrant clothing, accessories and funky expressions on her reels make her attractive among her followers and help her stand out unconventionally. She often wears outfits that highlight opposites: sneakers with skirts paired with flowers, funky accessories, and scarves. She represents a unique style statement. The portrayal of her art piece and the calligraphy she does is also very well appreciated by her followers. However, what makes her stand out among the audience is her carefree style statement and the witty style by which she connects with her audience.

In one of her videos, she posted to endorse the brand "Raasa." She is wearing a bright pink cord set with a cute hand-woven sling and funky accessories. In this video post, she put up a hashtag of #honouringmyself and tells the audience how she likes the bright colours and how she looks pretty in such colours. The audience engagement in this post is also massive, where the post received 2951 likes and 190 comments where her audience is just praising her, showering her with love and commenting with comments like "Age is just a number", "You are redefining age", and many more.

If we look at the other profiles, like that of Dr. Seema Anand, we can see how deeply she is connected with her followers through her posts, videos and comments on her post. There is a particular video in her post named "The shitty stories in our lives" where she narrated a story of the pea and the princess and how all these wrong narrations and stories can have a more profound impact on our lives for a significantly more extended period and how these can impact our relationships. She discussed all the norms created by our society, the standard body type, women's normal behaviour, and how they should be. In this video, she urges us to create powerful stories so that women around us get better stories to relate to – "No body shaming, no shitty stories". That particular video has garnered 28.5k likes and 401 comments, and each comment praised her compelling storytelling abilities, giving consent to her views and sharing their personal stories where they also got impacted in their teenage or childhood by this pea and the princess story. The connection of Dr. Anand with her followers is so strong that every comment has a personal touch, and she also reciprocated her feelings to a few of the comments.

Ravi Bala Sharma and Rajni Chandy can see the same vibrancy in their clothing and styling, which are distinctively unique. Although each of them has contradicted the notion of old age and flaunted their vibrant and jovial side to connect with their followers, we can easily identify their style statement and a unique appeal to lure their audiences where these older influencers' online self-representation, deliberately exhibit a reliable personality (Carrasco et al. 2018; Caldeira et al. 2021). The content examination further revealed a few interesting insights; one of them is their 'authenticity.'(Audrezet et al. 2018) which is integral in creating and establishing them as personal brands and helping them be true to themselves. This gained them many followers as the choices that they considered appeared very pertinent and honest to their followers and their content, and the posts also allowed their followers and the audiences to get a glimpse of their daily lives. Their posts displayed numerous photos and videos of their daily lives, work, chores and fun activities with their families. The snippets of their daily lives also include funny, witty captions showing their deep inner feelings. One such example is a post by Poonam Sapra, aka motherwithsign shows, "Remember that Embarrassing Childhood pic of yours that your Mom wants to show Everyone?" with a note "Let her once in a while 😊" This post got 18.4 K likes with loads of comments each validating that yes, they have such pic and even her son, Pranav Sapra commented – "Mom, No, Please 🙈" requesting her not to share his pics with her followers! These posts' openness and personal touch connected them to their audiences. Each of their self-representation was real and true to self, and they got connected with their audience fast because their audience also related to all these conversations in their own lives. Not only do they share the content, but sometimes they also pose questions, dilemmas or concerns to their followers as " Shanthi Ramachandran, aka Shaanthram", posted a screenshot of a fake profile alert by her name and her pics and urged her users to report that account and she has only one account, that account is fake! This helps them bond emotionally and foster closeness with their followers, strengthening the sense of a closed community via authenticity and loyalty (Zulli, 2017).

Since they appear authentic in their online representation, they are gaining more and more traction. Their online narrative of 'being ordinary' and 'authentic' persona has amplified their credibility among their followers, thus garnering them a vast following. Their content acts powerful as they revolve around positive ageing and higher self-acceptance. The originality with which they challenge the notion of ageing, the optimistic attitude towards later life, and an acceptance-oriented boldness towards ageing contributed massively to a shift in how ageing or old age is viewed. Further, it encouraged other older women to express their imagination fiercely as all these elderly influencers in every content flaunt their age and openly accept the ageing process. They convey to their audience the authenticity attached to "growing old."

Blend of texts along with visuals in reciprocating the emotions.
The subsequent significant finding while analysing their profiles is
the importance of texts or the textual content. Although Insta-
gram is a platform where visual content creates more appeal, the
significance of the textual content cannot be ignored. While
scrutinising the profile, it was noticed that the textual notes
posted along with the content by these elderly influencers are also
very powerful. Along with the photos and the videos, they are
equally gaining much attention from their audiences. The audi-
ence relates to them on an emotional front when they also pour
their emotion along with the pic or the video. The small note as
the textual content, making it a blend of visual and textual, creates
that extra mark to their posts or the content they post. The
representations of a photo with a text or text play a predominant
role in establishing social connections and gaining the audience's
support. The textual content and their followers' comments on
such content validate that their connection with the audience is
gained through shared experiences that are real and practical. The
ageing experience they have when shared with their followers
gains much admiration, and they also connect with these elderly
influencers by sharing their interests. The areas of the textual
content posted by these macros and micro-influencers are some
authentic recipes, gardening or any daily activities they undertake.
The textual content captures some discussion around veggies and
how they are grown, along with the catchy visuals. For example -
Kanan Bala, aka Mama Treats, also gives short videos of her
kitchen garden produce with additional information on the
nutritional value of the produce. To make the discussion more
interactive and authentic, she also asks for suggestions from her
'Insta family' (that is what she refers to her followers) for "what
interesting food can be cooked with the produce that she is
picking today from her kitchen garden." This attracts many
comments, discussions, suggestions and tips and showcases her
confidence with her audience.

Another example is Shanthi Ramachandran, aka shaanthram,
who shares her daily life and food recipes with her followers. She
interacts with the audience through her breakfast/lunch recipes
and blends the visual with textual content where she describes her
day; here, she also pours out her happiness as well as her grief
about the ill health of a friend and asks her followers for prayers
for her best friends recovery. A few details are given below to
comprehend the pattern –

> "Today's lunch was with one Amazing received with love
> from one of my dear friends, my dearest amma, which
> made me declare a holiday for my kitchen today, that too
> on Sunday 😁 Served it with simple accompaniments, but
> my heart and stomach became full".

> "Not only in school but on #instagram & in #virtualworld
> also true and beautiful friendships happen, and I am blessed
> to have such friendships, and I dedicate this song to all my
> friends who became real from virtual; I know my friends
> here would understand whom I am referring to 🥰"

> "My heart is paining to know about the sudden health
> problems of one of my best friends, and I pray God to bless
> my friend to recover from the illness soon and to inspire
> many because I am indebted to that gem a lot for being
> what I am today 🥰 I know prayers can do miracles, and I
> have faith in my faith".

Besides sharing their hobbies and daily lives, the older
influencers often talk about experiences, giving "Gyan" (bits of
advice) to break stereotypical societal norms and bust some
myths. The interesting insight seen in the textual content is the
narration of humour attached to it (Lynch, 2002). These women
dismiss the stereotypes and societal norms about ageing by taking
a dig at them and adding a pinch of humour to their content,
making it more appealing to their followers. So, the 'Gyan' they
render is sugar-coated with humour but very thought-provoking
and meaningful and resonates with common sentiments.

For example, Poonam Sapra communicates to her followers
through texts where she gives distinct, clear communication,
humour, and a strong message. Whether wishing her followers on
any festive or celebrating her presence with the Insta family or a
daily dose of motivation or life lessons, all are displayed through
texts on a placard. There were messages like

> "Love is the vaccination for hatred, anger and jealousy."

> "It is okay to be confused sometimes. We are all trying to
> figure out Life" or

> "There was a boy named Teja, he had a lot of bheja
> (brain)."

The humour used in connecting with the followers can also be
considered an influential tool for forming and strengthening
intimacy.

Also, Sheela Bajaj, aka caughtcrafthanded, through one of her
posts, shared her dadi-poti (Grandmother-Granddaughter)
relationship with her audience and her followers and how, at
the age of 78, during the COVID-19 lockdown, all the crochet
work and extending it to all begun with the help of her grand-
daughter.

Content to form associations. The third evocative finding is the
consequences of the relationship made by these elderly influen-
cers with their audiences. When we deep dive into their followers'
comments under each photo, video, or text they shared, it is
noticed that they were always very appreciated and well taken by
their followers. Also, it is interesting to note that most of their
followers are younger counterparts who engage with their content
and with them very passionately. This brings out the inter-
generational impact that they created through their content. The
younger generation comprises most of the platform's users (Liao
et al. 2021), and the older influencers gained immense popularity
among the younger audiences. They encourage these older
women with their motivating comments such as –

> "This is such a cool post."

> "If growing old looks like this, I wanna grow old like you!"

> "How can you be so real?"

> "Age is just a number for you."

These are a few of the comments; however, most of the
comments received by them have strong positive connotations
and can be well-defined as – "inspiring, empowering, motivating
and meaningful". These connotations put the ways their young
audiences perceive them. These contents posted by them were
entirely of depictions by younger audiences who have expressed
and showered their love towards these older women with emojis
and icons ranging from attractive to emotive. Since most
comments express a positive outlook and feeling, very few
inappropriate or offensive comments are not worth pointing out
or discussing. Their presence on the platform generally validates
their authenticity and offers their followers a meaningful and
supportive atmosphere.

Genuine and authentic content gaining visibility. The next point also helps us understand how their social capital is traded into economic capital, generating profit. The 'engagement rate' helps us analyse and comprehend these influencers' social media relationships with their followers. In most cases considered, we can note that this indicator is higher than average for their category, i.e. 1.70% (Ouvrein et al. 2021). The three influencers with the highest engagement rate are Poonam Sapra (11.81%), Manjari Varde (4.31%), followed by Seema Anand (3.53 %) and Ravi Bala Sharma (2.59%).

The meaningful outcome revealed through the analysis is the relationship of these older women influencers with their audiences/followers via optimally using the autonomy and spontaneity of the platform, which made them get noticed and garnered collaboration with brands and celebrities. They have gained wide-ranging visibility through their content. Their rise in the platform is the advent of the new phase online. The fast growth of their followers and the rise of these older women influencers have received considerable market attention. Engaging with their million followers also attracted various brands to notice them and consider strategies to incorporate them to target newer demographics. Some ad-hoc marketing agencies now look upon these influencers who want to target their followers through them. Their closeness with their followers makes them more attractive to the brands. The genuineness and authenticity they built through their content can be translated to the brands they endorse; this is how the new line of marketers and brands look at these older influencers. The re-intermediation of the brands and advertising is more prevalent with the macro-influencers who are more rewarding for the brands, and a few of the macro-influencers are collaborating with the brands, integrating them in their posts, mentioning their names and participating in their exclusive events. This is a two-way process where the benefits lie at both ends; however, in the long run, it will be interesting to analyse further if, in the coming times, the older influencers will be co-opted by the entire marketing ecosystem of brands, marketers and advertisers. Also, how their followers will take up their integration and how the colossal follower base will impact the influencers and brand perception.

Conclusion

Older adults in our society find it challenging to carve a niche. Moreover, added to that, in the case of older women, then life is not very easy for them. Old age, age-related physical ailments, societal taboos, and loneliness are sufficient to hold them back and make them feel vulnerable and hopeless. Inequalities tend to exacerbate in old age as shortcomings and discrimination accumulate throughout life. For many years, this has happened to, especially, older women.

The internet and social media platforms were very much young people's phenomenon and older people could not understand and use the internet or digital platforms, one common notion we have lived on for many years.

Twigg (2013) argues that femininity in a standardised notion is conceptualised around the image of 'youthfulness', and whosoever woman fails to abide by or comply with that notion is actually in a sort of fix where she is placed as a 'social exile from femininity' (p. 5). Hence, in the world of visual content where all sorts of perfection exist, primarily the bodily perfections were flaunted and promoted, these older people, in reality, become culturally invisible as their existence does not fit the set rules; however, the rise and acceptance of these older women influencers have set a counter-hegemonic notion countering all the narratives that existed around 'getting older and 'beauty'. The platform Instagram, typically reserved for *fashionistas* (the term

entirely depicted to millennials), is witnessing a new wave. The wave breaks every pre-set ground and reality with its portrayal and defies new norms for society and the people. They were ruling social media with their content like their younger counterparts and recreated the new rule of existence where there is nothing called hindrances/barriers/fences. Their posts rule out every option of 'age' or 'ageing' as detrimental and vulnerable; instead, they used their 'age' as a worthwhile dimension and showcased it with a certain pride. Revealing how they are, supposedly how people look with passing time, such as grey hair, some fine wrinkles and other touches of time, they counter-attacked the conventional and unvarying depictions and projected new and eccentric imageries of older women. Their online portrayal of the "*real self*" is destigmatising ageing and reinterpreting the regular and positive features of the human life cycle. Their posts motivate and create a counterpoint, inspire people to think beyond societal stigmas and idealistic notions and help their audience appreciate the normal biological process. Instagram acted perfectly for them as the real self-depiction of being authentic and genuine became possible because of this platform's built-in features. These helped them gain maximum prominence, depicting a lesser orthodox vision of older women as perceived by old-style media. This study revealed that on Instagram, the content created by these elderly influencers creates pioneering narratives for womanhood, older people and the entire culture, contributing to relooking at the definitions of social representations of beauty, body and old age.

In this research, we discussed the lives of a few older women who have looked at life differently and exclusively. They sketched the beginning of a new aura in social media. Their acceptance in the socially connected digital world proves that blockades are only our perceptions. In their ways, with their hobbies and passion, they created a new world and showcased it as their unfiltered and unmasked identity. They challenged all the age-old notions of how life in old age should be and shaped their own rules for living and leading life. They did it with grit and style. The considerable amount of followers on the platforms also establishes their acceptance. They moved beyond age, judgements, notions and validations. They have killed the conversations on old-age and gender-centric discussions. They repeatedly established that although time can be tricky and challenging, the acceptability and zest to adapt to variation make the change happen. People no longer have to only relate to influencers of young age, skinny body types who are flaunting youthfulness. They have also allowed their older generation to think and use the platforms wisely with their experience. With their unique spunk, this generation of older women attracted their generations and massively appealed to the youth. Their ways of breaking the typecast and societal notions will also be eye-openers for many.

Concerning RQ1, 'How do these Old Women Influencers build and manage their online interactions, essentially with the kind of contents and the messages they put (i.e., comments, hashtags, and posts on Instagram) to interact with their audience'?

The discussions in the finding above highlighted the ways, especially the little gestures, through which, in their unique styles, these older influencers have redefined the preconceived notions of '*how older should feel and look*'. They initiated meaningful conversations around old age, redefining age, feminity and life. Their posts have generated narratives that are inspiring audiences across generations.

The young audiences openly admit that they like to become more like these women when they grow old, so they look forward to them in many ways. At the same time, the mature or a little older audience would like to have the courage and strength to match them so that they do not succumb to the pressure of invisibility and ignorance, considering age as an obstruction or

Table 1 Details of the older women Influencers.

S. No	Name (Insta name)	Age (years)	In instagram since	Followers	Following	Engagement rate (%)	Instagram account URL
1.	Dr. Seema Anand seemaanandstorytelling	61	June 2017	919K	383	3.53	https://www.instagram.com/seemaanandstorytelling/
2.	Ravi Bala Sharma aka Dancing dadi	65	September 2021	274K	114	2.59	https://www.instagram.com/ravi.bala.sharma/
3.	Poonam Sapra aka motherwithsign	67	January 2020	141K	247	11.81	https://www.instagram.com/motherwithsign/
4.	Manjri Varde manjrivarde	67	November 2017	145K	514	4.31	https://www.instagram.com/manjrivarde/
5.	Shanthi Ramachandran shaanthram	65	August 2015	53.2K	1249	0.42	https://www.instagram.com/shaanthram/
6.	Sheela Bajaj caughtcrafthanded	79	January 2020	66.6K	418	1.09	https://www.instagram.com/caughtcrafthanded/
7.	Kanan Bala mamaktreats	61	December 2014	41.2K	443	1.00	https://www.instagram.com/mamaktreats/
8.	Rajani Chandy rajanichandyofficial	72	October 2020	19.8K	77	0.49	https://www.instagram.com/rajanichandyofficial/

end of something. The older women influencers have propelled that courage among their followers to fulfil their passions and live fulfilling lives at any "age". These older women influencers contribute to deconstructing the age stigma, countering it through social media and other online platforms, and the social exclusion conventionally linked with ageing. They offer a fascinating image of how ageing should be imagined, acknowledged, understood, experienced and reconfigured under social and demographic changes.

Through their online presence, these older women influencers have opened the avenues of meaningful discussions and critical discourse that create meaning and represent both the feminist and the ageing movements (Tortajada et al. 2018). Their content and presence on Instagram visually and rhetorically capture the images of older women as someone capable of recuperating liberty from obsolete societal roles. They encourage their followers to adopt the new ways '*the new age women look*'.

Concerning RQ2, 'What are the possible communication strategies they adopt while engaging with their audiences which amplified their popularity on Instagram?', the results showed that these women use visual, textual and a blend of both types of communication to connect with their audience. However, all these mediums were very effective in creating the connection; the combination acted crucial in disseminating an encouraging message and contributed to the thought process that translated to a steady shift in how ageing is perceived.

This change in the augmented prominence of older women in popular culture is usually through the changed communication channels that stimulate the element of newness and essentially lead to social change (Caldeira et al. 2021). They challenged all possible traditional norms of old age. They formed an image of independent women at every age, strengthening their social identity and solidifying women's power in a broader sense. Their presence, content and online engagements have countered all the challenges society attaches to old age. Their undeniable presence and acceptance by audiences across ages can be read as an assertation of self-worth, denial of invisibility and breaking all the pre-set notions seen as taboos or age barriers.

Also, though all these older women influencers were talking about defying their age, valuing themselves, appreciating life at every age, and setting the new narratives and trends in social media and online platforms through their content, they are very different in their narration styles. Each of them has a unique way of connecting to their audience, and their content exclusivity creates a wave in the online platforms and makes them "New Age Influencers".

Considering the abovementioned discussions, this study holds better prospects for future research. Future studies may look into enriching and expanding this research to the next level. They can continue with the path of exploration further with in-depth interviews for more clarity and a better understanding of the future trajectories of these older women influencers. Also, the sampling method can be expanded to make it more heterogeneous and diverse, including a few more age-related hashtags, socio-demographic variables and geographic locations that will enlarge the inclusivity and generalisability of the research. Future research may also identify and include older influencers from diverse backgrounds (both social and cultural) and also from across genders. This will broaden the research area and incorporate these influencers' innovative thoughts, positively contributing to spreading an inclusive representation of ageing.

Finally, further studies can also deliberate, from a crucial standpoint, the influence of these newly formed narratives of ageing and beauty on the audience. Because they are garnering so many followers through the discourses that they have built online, it is crucial to understand whether these new age older women

influencers are also contributing to new forms of hegemony. As these older influencers grow, it will be interesting to note how they chalk out their paths and identities and how the associated industries around them will garner their presence .

Data availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available on their social media page, detailed in Table 1. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain.

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Author contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results and manuscript preparation.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants. Thus, ethical approval is not applicable.

Informed consent

Not Applicable.

Additional information

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