



## **A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF TURKISH X POSTS ABOUT LATE ADULTHOOD: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

(Research article)

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to qualitatively examine Turkish X posts related to late adulthood. An interpretative phenomenological design was employed. Among 23,124 public posts shared between January 1 and 30, 2025, the top 1% most-engaged posts (n = 528) were selected using criterion sampling. Data were collected via the Tweepy library, and analysis was conducted using MAXQDA 20.0 in line with Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis steps. The narratives about late adulthood in Turkish X posts were categorized under two main themes: "Stigmatization" and "Positive Representations of Active Aging." The stigmatization theme reflected age as a state of physical, cognitive, and social decline, materialized in subthemes such as micro ageism, intergenerational conflict, exclusion, and dependency. On the other hand, a portion of the posts portrayed late adulthood positively, highlighting aspects like wisdom, spiritual value, and social contribution. The findings revealed that social media discourse on aging is predominantly shaped by negative and reductive stereotypes. However, a limited number of posts reflected more positive and multidimensional representations. This suggests that social media functions both as a space that reproduces ageist narratives and as a platform with potential to promote positive perceptions of aging. To increase favorable representations of aging, digital awareness campaigns should be organized through collaboration between public institutions and civil society organizations.

**Keywords:** Late adulthood, social media, stigmatization.

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## **1. Introduction**

Old age is a stage of life that encompasses biological, psychological, cultural, and social dimensions, and is imbued with diverse meanings at both individual and societal levels (Estebsari et al., 2020). As societies continue to age, the representation and perception of late adulthood in public spaces have gained increasing significance (Camacho & Moreno-Fernández, 2024; Skipper & Rose, 2021). In today's rapidly digitalizing world, social media platforms—particularly X (formerly known as Twitter), where short messages are widely circulated—have emerged as new public arenas in which individuals express their attitudes, stereotypes, and value judgments about aging (Akar, 2025). In this regard, social media serves not merely as a medium for sharing personal opinions but also as a space where societal norms and discriminatory practices are reproduced (Schramm et al., 2023). Previous studies on social media discourse surrounding aging have shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, late adulthood were frequently stigmatized and labeled with exclusionary tags such as "burden" or "high-risk group" (Ng et al., 2022; Jimenez-Sotomayor et al., 2020). These studies emphasized that ageism was reflected both explicitly and implicitly in social media content, and that micro ageism was often normalized through humor and everyday language (Skipper & Rose, 2021; Ng et al., 2022; Jimenez-Sotomayor et al., 2020). While there is a growing body of research analyzing social media discourse in relation to marginalized groups such as individuals with schizophrenia, autism spectrum disorder, and LGBTQIA+ identities in the Turkish context—often using sentiment analysis methods (Dikeç et al., 2023; Göksel et al., 2023; Doğan et al., 2023)—studies specifically focusing on representations of aging in Turkish-language social media content remain scarce. Moreover, the existing literature tends to concentrate predominantly on English-language content and the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, no study has been identified that qualitatively examines representations of aging in Turkish social media content using an interpretative phenomenological approach. This gap underscores the need for more in-depth analyses of discourse structures unique to Turkish content. Accordingly, the present study aims to conduct a qualitative analysis of Turkish X posts about aging. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on how late adulthood is represented on social media and to enable a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between these representations and broader societal perceptions. Furthermore, the data obtained may provide a valuable foundation for researchers, communication specialists, and social policy makers who seek to examine discourse structures related to aging through the lens of social media content.

## **2. Method**

In drafting this study, the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) checklist developed by Tong et al. (2007) was employed to ensure the clear and systematic presentation of qualitative data analyses. COREQ served as a foundational guideline to enhance the methodological rigor of the study and to ensure transparency in reporting.

### **2.1. Design**

This study adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach, one of the qualitative research designs. Interpretative phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that seeks to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences and to interpret the meanings they ascribe to those

experiences. Rather than merely describing phenomena, this approach aims to uncover the deeper significance of these experiences within their individual, social, and cultural contexts, incorporating the researcher's interpretative insights as part of the analytical process. Its primary aim is to provide an in-depth analysis of participants' subjective meaning-making regarding the phenomena they encounter (Creswell, 2020). The interpretative phenomenological design was deemed appropriate for this study, as the research sought to qualitatively analyze the content of Turkish X posts concerning late adulthood.

## *2.2. Research question*

Under which thematic categories are narratives about late adulthood in Turkish social media (X) posts constructed?

## *2.3. Population and sample*

The population of this study consisted of Turkish-language posts shared by users on the X platform between January 1 and 30, 2025. Using the keywords "aging," "elderly," and "old age," a total of 23,124 unique posts were retrieved after excluding reposts and duplicate entries. The sample comprised the top 1% of posts with the highest engagement (likes, shares, and reach) during the specified period, totaling 528 posts. For the sampling process, criterion sampling—one of the purposeful sampling techniques—was employed. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation. The coding and analysis process was concluded when thematic categories and patterns began to recur, indicating that no new information was emerging (Polit & Beck, 2006).

## *2.4. Data analysis*

The research data were obtained through AI-assisted data mining techniques from content publicly shared on the X platform between January 1 and 30, 2025. Within this scope, publicly available Turkish-language posts were collected using the Python-based social media analysis tool Tweepy library (Roesslein, 2009). The data collection process was completed as of January 30, 2025. The collected posts were analyzed using MAXQDA 20.0 software, in accordance with qualitative data analysis procedures. The analytical process followed Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method. Accordingly, in the initial phase, the data were repeatedly read, and meaning-laden expressions related to late adulthood were identified. Subsequently, conceptual meanings were derived from these expressions and analyzed through an interpretative approach. The meaningful units were coded and grouped into thematic clusters based on their similarities. Themes, subthemes, and codes were then systematically constructed. In the second phase, these themes were readdressed within the content context to evaluate emerging patterns in a holistic manner. Finally, to enhance data validity, the most highly engaged posts (in terms of likes, shares, and reach) were re-examined to ensure consistency between the thematic structures and the overall discourse of the content. This process contributed to the reliability and analytical depth of the study and ensured a rigorous and systematic qualitative analysis.

## *2.5. Ethical considerations*

This study is based on the analysis of publicly available posts shared on the X platform. Since the data examined were situated in an open-access digital environment, no direct interaction with individuals occurred, and no experimental intervention was conducted; therefore, institutional permission or ethical board approval was not required. Throughout the research process, strict

attention was paid to the principles of personal data confidentiality, anonymity, and data security. All potentially identifying elements—including usernames, personal names, institutional affiliations, hashtags (#), mentions (@), and URLs—were removed from the dataset prior to analysis. Additionally, any specific names or descriptive identifiers within the text were anonymized using letter-based coding systems. The study was conducted in accordance with the Turkish Law on the Protection of Personal Data (KVKK, 2016) and the Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research (Franzke et al., 2021). The posts selected for analysis were drawn exclusively from the most highly engaged content (e.g., likes, retweets) and were chosen by an independent academic researcher to ensure objectivity and transparency. This approach enabled the research data to be structured in both a systematic and impartial manner. As a result, the study was limited solely to content publicly shared in the digital public sphere; no users were directly approached or involved, and no personal information that could compromise the privacy of content creators was included. Accordingly, the study was conducted in full alignment with current ethical guidelines and the widely accepted norms of qualitative social media research.

## *2.6. Study team and reflexivity*

The study was conducted by a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of a public university, who possesses both theoretical and practical expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods. The researcher specializes in developmental psychology and has received formal training in cognitive behavioral therapy. They continue to engage in research and practice involving diverse age groups. Although the researcher had previously observed content on the X platform as a casual user, a systematic and impartial stance was adopted throughout the data collection and analysis process to mitigate personal bias. Structured coding techniques were employed during the qualitative content analysis in order to minimize interpretative subjectivity in analyzing social media posts. Theme construction was carried out with close adherence to the raw data and with particular attention to consistency within the content context. This approach was intended to enhance the trustworthiness and transferability of the study and was implemented in line with the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) reporting standards (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007).

## *2.7. Trustworthiness*

The trustworthiness of this study was established based on the four core criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was ensured through a systematic and rigorous analytical process. In this context, the qualitative data obtained from the X platform were coded using MAXQDA 20.0, and thematic structures were developed accordingly. Particular attention was paid to the in-depth description of phenomena during the thematic analysis, and the emerging findings were evaluated in comparison with existing literature to support content coherence. Transferability was addressed by clearly defining the study's context, sampling criteria, data collection period, and analytical strategies. The use of criterion sampling was explained in detail, and the selection and analysis procedures of the social media posts were transparently reported to enhance the applicability of the findings to similar research contexts. Dependability was established by meticulously documenting each step of the data analysis process in a consistent and systematic manner. To reduce interpretative subjectivity, the researcher followed predefined analytical steps, explicitly structured the relationships between codes and themes, and thoroughly recorded the entire analysis procedure. Confirmability was supported through ongoing reflexive evaluation and transparent reporting throughout the analytical process. The findings were

substantiated with direct data excerpts, and the interpretations were verified by comparing them with the broader meaning patterns present in the analyzed content. Thus, the research process was grounded not merely in the subjective views of the researcher, but in empirically derived and verifiable analytical structures, thereby reinforcing the overall trustworthiness of the study.

### **3. Findings**

The narratives about late adulthood in Turkish X posts were categorized under two main themes: “Stigmatization” and “Positive Representations of Active Aging.”

#### *3.1. Stigmatization*

The theme of stigmatization encompassed various interrelated subthemes, such as stereotypes about aging, humorous stereotyping and belittlement, intergenerational conflict and intrusiveness, stereotypes of physical inadequacy, loneliness, emotional vulnerability and exclusion, equating aging with physiological health, socio-cultural modes of representation, perceptions of aging in terms of dependency and helplessness, and manifestations of micro ageism in everyday interactions.

##### *Stereotypes about Aging*

The analysis revealed that users often held various stereotypical and negative judgments about aging. These judgments were framed in ways that both diminished the physical and cognitive capacities of older individuals and portrayed the aging process as an inevitable decline. In participant expressions, aging was predominantly associated with physical frailty, cognitive decline, illness, social withdrawal, and sensory loss. Moreover, “old age” was not merely framed as a life stage but was also negatively constructed as a phase of disconnection from life and loss of functionality. Although expressed in a humorous tone, the majority of these comments contain implicit or explicit stigmatizing discourse. Notably, recurring patterns suggested that late adulthood was perceived as no longer capable of being productive, cognitively slowing down, socially disengaged, and reduced to individuals who solely deal with health problems. In some posts, aging was directly associated with bodily changes such as “white hair,” “dizziness,” “forgetfulness,” “headaches,” and “leg pain,” conveying the message that aging is inevitably synonymous with decline.

- I guess it's time for me to move on to elderly activities like painting wood or doing macrame. My soul has died and I didn't even notice.
- I don't forget to unplug the iron, but I do forget to turn off the oven. Aging is hard.
- Every time I rise after the final prayer gesture, I get dizzy. This aging thing is starting to get a bit too real.
- Could constant headaches be a sign of aging?
- I don't even feel like expressing an opinion in these discussions. Is this what aging feels like?
- I've decided I don't like old people. They exhaust me.
- We've turned into those elderly folks who constantly miss the past and say everything used to be better.
- I couldn't sleep last night because of leg pain. This morning, I finally dozed off for an hour—then my mom woke me up. I took an aspirin, but it still comes and goes. I don't even have

rheumatism—no idea how I turned into Rıfkı\*—but aging really is tough. My blood pressure spiked the other day too. I might as well be retired already.

- We don't even do April Fools' pranks anymore. That's just one step away from old age.
- Every time I visited, my grandfather would hold my hand and ask me to check his meds. Today, he didn't recognize me. He asked, 'Whose son are you?' Life is beautiful, but I wish illness and aging didn't exist.
- Watch your B12 levels, friends. Its deficiency is one of the main causes of Alzheimer's. Even though it's called an 'old-age disease,' a lot of young people are getting it these days.
- Writing this down so I won't forget—aging things.
- I saw my first white hair... It wasn't there two months ago. I guess my 'young and cute' phase is over. Hello, aging.

### *Humorous Stereotyping and Belittlement*

In this subtheme, aging was not directly framed as a complaint or a negative condition; instead, it was often addressed through humor, sarcasm, or irony. However, despite its seemingly playful tone, this approach reflected the reproduction of age-related prejudices and the normalization of belittling language. The posts emphasized late adulthood as being disconnected from technology, unfamiliar with contemporary concepts, slow to understand, and generally out of touch with the modern world. By presenting these stereotypes through humor, such narratives risk legitimizing ageism in an implicit and socially accepted form. Furthermore, some posts revealed that certain terms used to refer to older individuals (such as *moruk*, a derogatory slang word) had been turned into sources of amusement, reducing the notion of old age to a subject of mocking cultural labeling.

- No Instagram, never even downloaded TikTok, and don't even mention Snap—I've reached the point where I listen to music on the radio 🎧 Aging mood: online.
- Old people call Espressolab 'Expreslab'.
- Just by saying *moruk* instead of old person, you can increase your enjoyment of life fivefold.

### *Intergenerational Conflict and Intrusiveness*

This subtheme reflects representations of late adulthood as occupying conflictual, intrusive, and judgmental roles in their interactions with younger generations. The analyzed posts indicate that older individuals frequently make negative comments about the lifestyles, decisions, or appearances of younger people, which, in turn, evokes tension, frustration, and emotional distancing among the youth. In intergenerational dynamics, late adulthood is often portrayed as "moral guardians," "uninformed critics," or individuals who "insist on sharing opinions on everything, even when unwarranted." Such portrayals frame older individuals as boundary-crossing and socially intrusive figures in the eyes of younger users. These narratives further reinforce the perception that the values and perspectives of older generations are outdated, disconnected from contemporary realities, and even incompatible with modern society. As a result, the authority or guidance claims of late adulthood are frequently undermined or ridiculed through humorous or critical discourse, diminishing their perceived social legitimacy.

- During the Eid visit, a fight broke out between the elderly and the younger people. The reason? The younger ones not getting married 😬

- Where do these intolerant and cranky old people find the audacity to question others' morals and manners? If a young person refuses to give up a seat they're not entitled to, they get called all sorts of names and insults. This just severs any remaining ties between the generations.
- It's not that the youth have become corrupt—it's that the elderly lied
- There's such a thing as elderly arrogance and bluntness. I have zero tolerance for it.
- Today on the bus, an old lady asked me, 'Son, why do your shoes have buckles on them? 😊

### *Stereotypes of Physical Inadequacy*

This subtheme highlights common stereotypes regarding late adulthood physical capacities, posture, and performance in daily life. In these narratives, aging is often equated with physical inadequacy, fatigue, fragility, and passivity. Older individuals are frequently portrayed as dependent, "slow," "delicate," or "weak" figures. While some posts express these views using explicitly mocking or derogatory language, others present physical frailty through descriptors such as "cute," "innocent," or "funny," thereby reinforcing implicit forms of belittlement. Such representations overlook the potential of late adulthood to lead active lives and instead contribute to a narrative that renders them passive and normalizes their social exclusion.

- I'm 37 and constantly exhausted. Don't even get me started on my back pain. I'm always sleepy. My 95-year-old grandfather is more energetic than I am. All my friends feel the same. What happened to our generation? This isn't a midlife crisis—this is straight-up old age.
- Just now, two elderly people gave up their seats for me on public transport. That's the tweet 🙏🙏🙏
- I feel like aging is sitting right on top of me.
- I'm young and fabulous, I can handle anything. Let the old ones worry about stuff.
- On the bus today, no one gave a seat to an elderly man. He turned to his wife and said, 'It's fine by me.' I swear I'm about to cry. (Someone's sitting next to me + I've got two bags—I literally can't get up.)"
- My friend's request was peak savagery: He/she wants a separate lane for the elderly because they walk too slowly.
- There's always an old person at every corner, facing the road, counting money to feel safe. They're so cute hhdshsjsh.

### *Loneliness, Emotional Vulnerability, and Exclusion*

This subtheme addresses the emotional positioning of late adulthood within society. In participant expressions, aging was often associated with loneliness, social exclusion, emotional burden, and a perceived loss of life's meaning. Some posts implied that older individuals were neglected or excluded by their social environments, while others depicted them as emotionally fragile or exhibiting signs of depression. In certain cases, late adulthood was portrayed as bothersome or irritating figures, suggesting that they are tolerated rather than embraced within society. Additionally, behaviors such as excessive talking, making outdated jokes, or constantly sharing personal stories were presented as part of negative stereotypes. These types of representations reflect a broader cultural discourse that

trivializes the emotional needs of late adulthood, ignores their experiences of loneliness, and marginalizes them within the social fabric.

- What's your oldest personality trait? Mine is wanting to teleport home whenever I feel sad.
- Sometimes I feel like an old man, filled with the regret of having lived an empty life and the exhaustion of 80 years weighing down on me.
- I'm convinced old people eat garlic on purpose and then go out into the streets.
- My oldest trait? Suddenly launching into a detailed rundown of my day cmflcldöcl.
- No joke, I didn't do any shopping for the holiday. That's a sign of aging—I must be getting old.
- I didn't go visit relatives with my mom. I'm just sitting at home like one of those lonely old ladies in bank commercials, and I keep wanting to cry.

#### *Equating Aging with Physiological Health*

This subtheme draws attention to the health-focused discourse surrounding old age. Participants frequently associated aging with bodily weakness, sensory decline, and increasing difficulty in managing daily life. In such narratives, aging is frequently portrayed as an almost inevitable process of physical decline and is strongly associated with the loss of bodily functions. late adulthood is depicted as experiencing joint and muscle pain, restricted mobility, heightened visual and auditory sensitivity, and decreased tolerance to external stimuli. This approach reduces aging to a medical condition, emphasizing physiological attributes over individual personality or lived experience. Additionally, some posts included sarcastic remarks portraying late adulthood as "fragile" or overly sensitive to environmental conditions. This reflects a subtle form of derogation toward old age.

- I've started having trouble typing on the keyboard. And I enlarged the screen text. Old age is loading.
- My legs hurt again because I'm an old lady. One Parol tablet will heal me and mend my wounds.
- Friends, please think twice before sending voice messages to your elderly contacts—everyone on public transport might end up hearing them.
- Am I the only one who feels weighed down after eating? I feel like an old person.
- They watch TV at such a high volume, you'd have to be deaf not to be disturbed by the noise. I feel like an old person who can't tolerate children's voices.
- I put a paper towel on my back like an old person. The buses were unbearably hot. And no one opened the window! Just a breeze and they'd act like they're about to die ☹️

#### *Socio-cultural Representations*

This subtheme highlights traditional roles, cultural assumptions, and social norms associated with aging. Participant expressions indicate that late adulthood is often portrayed as "old-fashioned but to be tolerated" figures within society, and that aging is shaped not only by physical or mental processes but also through one's self-perception, communication style, and relationship with surrounding objects. In this context, aging is constructed as a sociocultural identity as much as a biological experience. Societal expectations of older individuals are reflected in their manner of speaking, sense



of humor, and attachment to the past. Some posts also allude to symbols of authority linked to aging (e.g., the custom of kissing elders' hands), suggesting that this life stage evokes both respect and a sense of distant acceptance.

- Fake laughing at a painfully bad joke by the senior lawyer in the bar association room? That's love for us.
- My oldest habit? Still asking new people "So, where are you from, my friend?" as the first question.
- I'm in the shadows in every single family photo. Life is over. Average age is 70, but I still look like the oldest one. Is this a joke?
- While packing today, I found calendars from 1996 and 1999. I suddenly feel ancient.
- Five people tried to kiss my hand today. I officially feel old.

#### *Perceptions of Aging in Terms of Dependency and Helplessness*

This subtheme reveals that late adulthood is frequently represented in public discourse as dependent, passive, and fragile figures. In participant expressions, aging is not merely described as a natural life stage, but is also associated with weakness, incompetence, and inadequacy. Such portrayals point to an implicit form of ageism, suggesting that older individuals are no longer capable of playing active or productive roles in society. In some posts, elderly individuals are assumed to be too physically weak to carry out tasks, with accompanying expressions of pity or sadness. Although these sentiments may appear well-intentioned, they ultimately contribute to the reproduction of stereotypical patterns that prevent late adulthood from being perceived as autonomous individuals. Moreover, aging is at times equated not only with physical frailty but also with an empty, meaningless, or regretful existence, framing old age as a period marked by existential loss and diminished purpose.

- An elderly lady sitting by the window called out — she was home alone. Couldn't unlock her phone and was just waiting to show someone. My heart broke for her.
- There's a cleaning lady at the dorm — she's so sweet and kind, and she's older too ☹️ It makes me so sad to see her working like that. When she's cleaning the stairs, I wish I could just fly over so I don't leave a speck of dust behind.
- I'm young and fabulous, I can handle anything. Let the old ones worry about stuff.
- On the bus today, no one offered a seat to this elderly man. And he just turned to his wife and said, "It's okay, I don't mind."
- Sometimes I feel like an old man, filled with the regret of having lived an empty life and the exhaustion of 80 years weighing down on me.
- There's always an old person at every corner, facing the road, counting money to feel safe. They're so cute hhdhshsh.

#### *Micro Ageism and Everyday Tensions*

This subtheme illustrates how late adulthood is positioned in everyday life through belittling, exclusionary, mocking, or discomfort-expressing discourses. Participant expressions often portrayed older individuals as socially inappropriate, boundary-crossing, comical, or irritating figures. While such representations may not overtly reflect hate speech, they reveal discriminatory practices that

have been normalized in everyday language. Physical slowness, manner of speaking, personal habits, or social responses of late adulthood are frequently met with ridicule, annoyance, or impatience. Some expressions reflect stereotypes such as excessive talking, boundary violations, or insistence on being humorous, while others include directly offensive language (e.g., “geezer,” “pervert”) presented through a humorous yet derogatory tone. These types of discourse exemplify micro ageism, undermining both the self-esteem and social inclusion of older individuals.

- I’m convinced old people eat garlic on purpose and then go out into the streets.
- Today on the bus, an old lady asked me, 'Son, why do your shoes have buckles on them? 😊
- Fake laughing at a painfully bad joke by the senior lawyer in the bar association room? That’s love for us.
- My oldest trait? Suddenly launching into a detailed rundown of my day cmlfldöclld.
- Just by saying moruk instead of old person, you can increase your enjoyment of life fivefold.
- Ugh, some of these old men are seriously creepy. I just saw the texts of the elderly guy sitting next to me on the metro.
- The level of savagery in my friend’s suggestion: “Since elderly people walk slowly, there should be a separate old people lane.”

### *3.2. Positive Representations of Active Aging*

The theme of Positive Representations of Active Aging was divided into the following subthemes: active aging and the positive reconstruction of old age, spiritual representations of aging and sanctity, and positive coping and reconciliation with aging through humor.

#### *Active Aging and the Positive Reconstruction of Old Age*

This subtheme highlights that aging can be represented not solely through deterioration, frailty, or dependency, but also through positive aspects such as experience, awareness, inner strength, and social engagement. In some participant posts, the aging process was framed as a phase of personal and social maturity, emotional richness, relational guidance, or the transmission of life skills. The expressions emphasized that late adulthood is not merely figures in need of protection, but also carriers of life wisdom—educational and inspirational individuals. In some examples, aging was portrayed as a process of voluntary simplicity, emotional depth, companionship in relationships, and even personal transformation through self-awareness.

- If the mind is active, the body in motion, and the spirit connected, what you gain is not old age—but wisdom.
- Aging is not merely the passage of years, but a reflection of conscious choices.
- The bond between elderly people and coffeehouse culture in Türkiye is beautiful. Being able to leave the house in the morning and have people to chat with is a real blessing. They socialize all day for the price of a cheap cup of tea. That culture alone is a kind of wealth — no exaggeration.
- Only those who go bankrupt understand the value of money. Only the elderly truly understand the value of time. You only realize the worth of what you had... once it’s gone.

- The wisdom of perspective: elders, parents, and grandparents teach you how to manage your emotions. It's not oppression — it's a kind of education no state institution can provide.
- Before getting married, we should ask ourselves: "Do I truly believe I'll still enjoy talking to this person at the end of the road — when all that's left is old age?"
- Another moment of aging awareness: The older you get, the shorter the roads you know become — and the longer the unknown ones stretch ahead of you.

#### *Spiritual Representations of Aging and Sanctity*

This subtheme illustrates that late adulthood is represented in social discourse not only through biological aging, but also through depictions imbued with sanctity—such as spiritual value, prayer, benevolence, and a protective role. In participant expressions, aging is often idealized as a stage marked by religious, cultural, and moral wisdom—portraying older individuals as bearers of emotional maturity and guardians of society's spiritual balance. These narratives promote a sense of respectful responsibility and protective instinct toward elders, while also highlighting their symbolic contributions through prayer and spirituality. In this sense, aging is represented as a period encompassing both individual and collective sacredness, where the experience of late adulthood is valued not merely for its chronology, but as a form of divine guardianship and moral significance.

- There's truly nothing like talking to the elderly — wisdom, grace, and kindness all live in them. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "If it weren't for the elderly with bent backs, the righteous young, the nursing babies, and the grazing animals, calamities would pour down upon you like a flood."
- By the way, elderly people give the best heartfelt prayers to those who simply listen to them the longest. Tested and confirmed :)
- I gave my seat to two elderly ladies in the minibus, and they showered me with prayers until they got off. (Feeling blessed.) Once again, my right shoulder did the good deed. Thank You, Allah.
- It genuinely breaks my heart when someone yells at an elderly person.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that a significant portion of the discourse surrounding old age on social media contains explicit or implicit stigmatizing elements. In participant expressions, aging is frequently framed through negative representations such as physical inadequacy, cognitive decline, social incompatibility, and dependency. These stereotypes, often reproduced through humorous or casual language, indicate that micro ageism has become normalized, functioning as an invisible mechanism of exclusion at the societal level. Similarly, in their Twitter analysis during the COVID-19 period, Ng et al. (2022) found that late adulthood was stigmatized with labels such as "burden" and "boomer remover," and were othered through intergenerational conflict narratives. Jimenez-Sotomayor et al. (2020) also reported that approximately 21% of the tweets they analyzed contained explicit or implicit ageist content, highlighting that humor was a common tool used to ridicule aging. Though seemingly harmless, such humorous representations tend to portray late adulthood as passive, laughable, or socially irrelevant figures. Likewise, Schramm et al. (2023) emphasized that social media discourse often depicts late adulthood as fragile, passive, and burdensome, and that negative age-related stereotypes—such as slowness, hypersensitivity, and technophobia—are widely perpetuated. Their study underscores the extent to which ageism is internalized through linguistic

codes. Gómez-Camacho and Moreno-Fernández (2024) also criticized the portrayal of late adulthood on social media as being solely “cute” or “funny,” arguing that such representations confine older individuals to fixed stereotypes, stripping them of personal autonomy. Similarly, the study by Talbot et al. (2018) found that late adulthood is often defined in the context of cognitive decline (e.g., dementia), which renders them more susceptible to social exclusion. This finding supports the emphasis on “cognitive deterioration” observed in the present study. The results of this study demonstrate that the discourse around aging on social media is largely shaped by negative and exclusionary stereotypes, often reducing late adulthood social identities to limited representations. At the same time, the findings indicate that aging is not solely constructed as a process of decline, dependency, or deterioration; social media discourse also reflects positive dimensions of aging in societal, spiritual, and individual terms. Participant posts portrayed aging through representations such as wisdom, emotional guidance, spiritual value-bearing, and as a symbol of social harmony. Additionally, examples of reconciling with aging through humor were identified, suggesting an effort by individuals to normalize and accept the aging process. These findings indicate that aging can be represented in more positive and multidimensional ways. In their analysis of Twitter posts during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ng et al. (2022) observed that late adulthood was also portrayed through themes of “resilience” and “life wisdom,” and that negative content regarding aging decreased over time. Similarly, Skipper and Rose (2021) found that late adulthood was not solely depicted as targets on social media, but in some cases as experienced, respected, and defended individuals. Ng’s (2022) guide to combating ageism also emphasizes the importance of strengthening positive narratives via social media by highlighting the active roles and representational rights of late adulthood in society. Furthermore, Gómez-Camacho and Moreno-Fernández (2024) drew attention to portrayals of late adulthood not only in association with vulnerability but also as autonomous and active individuals—engaged in humor, sexuality, and travel. In line with these studies, the findings of the present study demonstrate that social media users produce not only stigmatizing but also respectful and admiring discourse about aging, allowing for more positive and multifaceted representations of later life.

One of the key strengths of this study lies in its in-depth qualitative examination of content produced about late adulthood on the X platform. The posts selected from a large data pool offer valuable insights into how societal perceptions, language, and discourse are shaped through representations of aging. Moreover, the use of MAXQDA 20.0 software during the analysis process facilitated systematic, consistent, and traceable coding, thereby enhancing the thematic coherence and credibility of the findings. The thematic richness of the study contributes significantly not only to understanding individual experiences but also to making broader social tendencies more visible. However, the study also presents certain limitations. First, since the analysis was conducted by a single researcher, intercoder reliability could not be established. This may pose a risk of subjective interpretation in some parts of the analysis. Nevertheless, to mitigate this limitation, codes, themes, and units of meaning were systematically structured, and all analytical procedures were transparently reported. Another limitation stems from the exclusive use of data from the X platform. Considering that social media dynamics vary across platforms, the generalizability of the findings may be constrained. Furthermore, only publicly shared user posts were analyzed, and these may not always reflect the users’ internal attitudes or opinions in different contexts. Finally, although criterion sampling enabled the researcher to reach data saturation, the results are limited to posts that met

specific criteria. Even so, analyzing the most notable, widely shared, and engaging content has been a meaningful strategy for identifying dominant and circulating discourses in society.

## **5. Conclusions**

The findings of this study reveal that discourses on aging in social media are notably dual in nature. On one hand, old age is stigmatized through negative stereotypes such as physical decline, cognitive deterioration, loneliness, dependency, and intergenerational conflict. These representations are often embedded in everyday humor and micro ageism, reflecting an invisible mechanism of social exclusion. On the other hand, the aging process is also idealized through positive attributes such as wisdom, inner strength, social contribution, spiritual values, and life experience—reframed through narratives of active aging. These contradictory representations indicate that aging is constructed on social media both as an object of marginalization and as a symbol of reverence.

In light of the study findings, a range of initiatives is needed to reduce stigmatizing discourse and promote positive representations of aging on social media platforms. First, public institutions, NGOs, and social media companies should collaborate to design digital awareness campaigns targeting young users. These campaigns should highlight the harmful effects of mocking, belittling, and exclusionary language directed at late adulthood, while encouraging critical reflection on the normalization of micro ageism in everyday discourse. Social media platforms should support age-sensitive content creation by partnering with influencers and content creators to amplify narratives of aging that emphasize wisdom, social contribution, and emotional guidance. The Ministry of National Education, universities, and institutions providing media literacy training should develop age-conscious digital communication curricula for younger audiences and integrate these into broader social media campaigns. Additionally, social media companies must enhance content moderation mechanisms to detect and address discriminatory or derogatory language based on age more effectively, ensuring timely and sensitive responses to user complaints involving age-based hate speech. Finally, municipalities and relevant public bodies should organize digital literacy workshops to empower late adulthood in online spaces and establish supportive digital platforms that encourage them to share their own lived experiences and perspectives.

## **Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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