

# FOLLOWER'S REACTIONS TO THE VISUAL DESIGN OF MATURE INSTAGRAM INFLUENCER WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

*While brands have for a long time been interested in using young female influencers to their benefits, there is a particular interest today in senior ones. The fact that women dominate the influence scene and that elder influencers are now becoming a reality is a good reason to understand more their impact on followers or social media users. The objective of this research is to explore the impact of the visual design of mature female accounts of Instagram on the reactions of the followers. Results show that three types of reactions are generated by the visual design: Affective reactions consist on positive feelings such as pleasure and admiration but also negative ones which are irritation and disappointment; cognitive reactions are resumed by credibility and congruence between the age of female senior influencers and the visual content; and finally the abandonment or continuation of browsing the influencers' Instagram account as well as the intention to learn about the products presented were the only conative responses revealed by our results.*

**Keywords:** Senior female influencers, Instagram, Visual design.

## INTRODUCTION

Instagram is conducive to influence marketing and helps to encourage purchase through the mediation of the influencer who enjoys a bond of trust with his or her followers, a bond strengthened by the social medium itself (Safiani & Elhasoumi, 2021). Indeed, 70% of its users claim to have discovered products through Instagram, which has more than 500,000 influencers (Santamaria, 2021). In addition, over the past few years, influencers, and more particularly Instagram influencers, have become partners of choice for businesses that are looking to expand or strengthen their consumer base (Matagne, 2022). As a result, the marketing power of influencers has been increasing, and a number of research studies have investigated the process of influence and its effect on behavior, by involving several variables in several areas such as the food sector (Ho & Chien, 2010), entertainment, video games and fashion (Torres et al., 2019), beauty (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019), and electronic products (Baber et al., 2016).

While brands have for a long time been interested in using young influencers to their benefits, there is a particular interest today in senior influencers. In this regard, Yannick Pon, head of the Reech marketing agency, postulates that: "What is interesting is that, 10-15 years ago, only insurance companies or mutual companies were interested in senior influencers. Today, all brands are interested because they affect individuals who have a high purchasing power compared to the French average" (Devaux, 2022).

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that women dominate the influence scene and that elder influencers are now becoming a reality, no studies seem to have looked yet at elder female Instagram influencers (Crevier, 2022). Furthermore, there is little research on how opinion leaders—that is influencers— influence Instagrammers and their purchase intentions (Neal, 2017).

The objective of this research is therefore to discover the process of influence of senior women on Instagram using the S-O-R model. Several stimuli have been studied in the literature, but visual design is the most important factor in the context of Instagram as it is a social network mainly focused on the visual. Indeed, for Teo et al. (2018), a social network that focuses so much on the visual is extremely effective as a marketing platform since it influences consumer perception as well as purchase intentions. In addition, due to its nature, Instagram is well suited for brands to visually display their products using pleasant and attractive content (Casalo et al., 2017 b) because, unlike applications like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, as a social network, is primarily based on sharing multimedia content, not text (Matagne, 2022).

This article will therefore attempt to fill the theoretical gap in marketing studies on elder influencers by exploring a conceptual model that assesses the complex mechanism of influence among middle-aged women, and then answering the following question: How does the visual design of elder Instagrammers' accounts impact internet user's reactions (emotive, cognitive and conative)? In this regard, a qualitative study was conducted using semi-directional interviews with a population of Instagram users of different ages and socio-professional categories.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Instagram: A Powerful Marketing Tool

The expansion of Instagram is invaluable in the development of corporate marketing strategies. Indeed, for marketers and professionals, this network has become the primary platform that allows them to publish transparent and responsible content (McDowell & Brooke, 2019). In addition, Instagram predominates all other social networks since more than 90% of companies attach particular importance to this platform in their marketing mix (Williamson, 2019). On the users' side as well, Instagram has become the largest visual social network that allows them not only to share photos and videos but also to connect and chat with other users.

Since its launch in 2010, the number of “Instagrammers” has grown steadily, reaching the threshold of one billion monthly active users in June 2018 (Instagram Press, 2019). With over 500 million active users and 400 million stories shared daily (Instagram Press, 2019), Instagram has become a powerful tool, and probably the most important platform for influencer marketing; a statement most marketers agree upon (Doyle, 2020), as Instagram has the ability to “provoke a reaction, change a behavior and produce a measurable result” (McDowell & Brooke, 2019). In this context, companies use this visual social network in collaboration with Instagrammers in order to reach a wider audience more effectively Instagram influencers thus become mediators between the brand and its consumers.

Thanks to their content and number of followers, Instagrammers contribute to achieving the marketing objectives aimed at by managers. In fact, associating with an influencer allows the marketer to gain even more reach. Other goals are also achieved through influencers such as brand commitment, awareness, brand attitude, word of mouth and increased sales (Doyle, 2020). On Instagram, the achievement of these goals is reinforced by the visual character of the Instagrammers' content. Indeed, Instagram is a primarily visually-oriented social network and is

therefore considered a very effective tool for influencing consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Teo et al., 2018).

### **Mature Women's Influence**

Several indicators show that elder people have become technology enthusiasts. A recent study made by a group of American researchers found that in 2000, only 14% of those aged 65 and over were internet users, and that this number escalated to reach 73% in 2019 (Livingston, 2019). Moreover, smartphone use today represents 86% among people aged 50 to 59 (Kakulla, 2020). Among adults using smartphones, 59% say they rely heavily on social media (Huang & Su, 2018). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the elderly too are involved in this general trend of influence. In the case of French influencers for instance, between 1,000 and 2,000 individuals belong to the “senior” category, that is, individuals over the age of 50 (Devaux, 2022).

Everyone recognizes that influencers are not only followed for fun, but they are also sources of information for internet users. Thus, followers regularly consult the publications of influencers to be up-to-date with the newest trends, to know new brands or simply for entertainment (Lin et al., 2018). It is within this context that elder people, especially women, also appear as influencers. For them, social networks can be seen as repositories of diverse voices, which express themselves in multiple ways –texts, images, videos–, and with varying intensities (Bayard & Charton, 2022). Indeed, elder women influencers on Instagram, demonstrate that the female body can, at any age, be festive, playful and sexy, to the delight of their followers who do not recognize themselves in fashion magazines (Crevier, 2022). The long-held belief that seniors are passive consumers of social media (Leist, 2013) has been reversed. Thus, the double invisibility of women and old age fades with the enthusiasm of technology and socio-digital media.

Senior influencers are active in a variety of areas including fashion and beauty at the top of social media, creativity, healthy eating, and travel. While some young influencers claim that their influence is not their main job, but rather a consequence of their occupations as fashion bloggers or beauty bloggers, actresses, photographers, publicists or other (Massicolti, 2019), elderly influencers, and mainly those women among them who struggled during the 1970s to gain control of their bodies and to free themselves from patriarchy, find their emancipation through the various contents they post on Instagram (Crevier, 2022). Indeed, senior influencers that are emerging today are creating their own content on the different platforms to show that they exist and to contradict ageist social practices that “feed an internalization of the bodies of vigilante and socially undesirable women” (Lewis et al., 2011). They display themselves as they are to highlight the acceptance of their age. In fact, recent study has found that seniors had positive views on aging despite the prevalence of negative stereotypes related to age (Malani et al., 2020).

Aging is a heavy toll for women. In addition to losing their physical and sexual appeal, elder women are doomed to social invisibility and loss of power (Borland & Akhram, 2007). However, social networks allow mature influencers to be on Instagram, TikTok and blogs and hence to snatch thousands of followers. Even nonagenarians are now present on Instagram. At 88 years old, Baddie Winkle is probably the most swag and the most famous granny on the Web. Her inimitable colorful looks have melted the hearts of her 3.8 million followers on Instagram (Bertaux, 2019). It is such numbers of followers that have increased the brands' interest in these senior influencers.

As in advertisements, brands offer these senior women to promote products adapted to their age groups given that “50-year-old women would be more concerned about staying young while 60-year-old women would be more concerned about not looking old” (Legros, 2009). The reliance on elder influencers can also lead to purchase incentives given their social impact. Here we are referring to the relationship of “parentage between ‘grandparents’ and their ‘grandchildren’”, which highlights their social power as transmitters within their families of a know-how as well as of social skills (ibid.). Social media would finally offer brands a dedicated space for marketing purposes. Companies use social networks to increase traffic on their web page or to expand their communities, boost sales or reduce traditional communication expenses by promoting electronic word-of-mouth (Sajid, 2016).

## Visual Design

Visual design has proven itself in the digital context. Indeed, visual design has always been considered essential to the success of electronic advertising (Cho, 1999). In particular, studies show that websites with attractive, well-designed images are more likely to build customer loyalty (Kim & Lennon, 2008). In influential marketing, visual design refers to the visual quality of publications and the overall architecture of the influencer’s account (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Thus, visual design plays an important role in the process of influence. Indeed, the visual presentation of influencer publications is one of the important elements that can influence the consumer’s decision-making process.

Instagram is inherently well suited for brands to visually display their products using pleasant and attractive content (Casalo et al., 2017 b) because, unlike applications like Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, as a social network, is primarily based on the sharing of multimedia content, not text (Matagne, 2022). As a result, Instagram’s visual content makes it possible to provide information quickly and playfully to thousands or even millions of users with just one click. The importance of visual design comes down to the fact that it stimulates the reactions of internet users and therefore influences their attitudes and behaviors. Several studies have shown that attractive and visually pleasing stimuli can elicit positive responses from consumers. For example, high-resolution photos allow a better perception of the product and lead to a higher purchase intent (Teo et al., 2018; Hughes et al. 2019; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Reactions to influencers are also affected by visual design. Followers tend to be more loyal to influencer accounts with beautiful visual designs (Cyr, 2014). Indeed, both the visual presentation and the graphic quality of the content shared by influencers increase its credibility and give it a more professional dimension (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As a result, the follower can only see the degree of resemblance between himself and the influencer through the visual design of the publications because “the appearance, the environment or the attitude of the influencer are perceived through content above all visual” (Teo et al., 2018). Visual design thus proves to be a powerful stimulus that can generate mental, emotional and behavioral responses in the process of influence.

## METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to explore the emotional, cognitive and conative reactions generated by the visual design of accounts of elder Instagrammers in order to better understand the process of influence that results. Semi-directional interviews were conducted with 23 Instagram users with an average duration of 85 minutes. Participants demonstrate a diversity

of socio-demographic characteristics but all of them satisfy the condition of being follower of one of the Instagram account of influencers chosen for the study. They were first exposed to the account of the senior Instagrammer that they are following and then questioned about their reactions. Three themes have been predefined, each focusing on one type of reaction: emotional, cognitive and conative.

The choice of senior Instagram influencers is based on age criteria. The usual age limit for seniors is 65 (Paille, 2014). On the other hand, new retirees, baby boomers and young seniors, who are economically active and independent, do not consider themselves “seniors” (Kostro, 2010). For this reason, we will use the notions of “adulthood” and “maturity”. There are two distinct periods in adulthood: that of the young adult aged 20 to 40 and that of the mature adult aged 40 to 60 (Gagnon, 1988). Maturity is the period of life between youth and old age during which human faculties have reached their ultimate development (www.cnrtl.fr). This last category of “mature adults” is the one we’re interested in for our study.

To choose the Instagram influencers for our research, we made use of the report of Medianet that lists Tunisian influencers and is dated 09/12/2022 (www.influenceurs.tn). The total number is 500 influencers including all genders and ages. After eliminating male influencers, we noticed that the majority of female influencers over the age of 40 falls under the category of “TV Host”. Lately, the TV sector has become unrestrained given that TV shows are multiplying and are scheduled for the most part at the same time. For this reason, the competition is tough and television and radio channels feel the need to hire commentators who create false controversies in order to attract public attention and therefore increase not only their TV ratings but also their audience shares on social media (El Herguem, 2022); hence our choice of these influential TV commentators for our study. Out of a total of 20 TV hosts, four fall into the category of “mature adult” influencers. These influencers have varying numbers of followers. We preferred to keep the four for better representativeness. The table below present influencer’s characteristics:

<b>Influencers</b>	<b>Date of birth</b>	<b>Instagram account</b>	<b>Followers number</b>
Baya Zardi	03/08/1965	@beyazardi.official	1.518 M
Afef Gharbi	28/07/1974	@afefgharbi	213.660 K
Sonia Dahmani	25/05/1968	@soniadahmani	348.293 K
Maya Ksouri	28/06/1972	@mayaksouri	144.260 K

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A thematic approach was chosen for the analysis of the corpus. The themes, identified afterwards, relate to the emotional, cognitive and conative reactions generated by the visual design of accounts of mature adult Instagrammers. Moreover, the study reveals that the congruence between the influencer’s age and their account’s visual content acts as moderator in the relationship between the visual design and the emotional reactions.

### **The Emotional Reactions Generated by Visual Design**

While following the accounts of elder influencers, we notice that internet users experience different kinds of emotions. Five main emotions appear from our results: Pleasure,

admiration and surprise as positive emotions, and irritation and disappointment as negative emotions.

The first thing to view on Instagram is visual design. This refers to the quality of the posts and how the influencer's Instagram account is organized (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Thus, the visual nature of Instagram triggers a quick emotional response rather than a prolonged and thoughtful one (Leng, 2013). Images of high visual quality are attractive and can evoke positive emotions. Users feel a sense of joy and satisfaction with what they are watching. Their responses testify to the pleasure and admiration experienced: "I have the impression to watch a thematic album, it is a beautiful scene"; "it's really nice to see such harmonious content, the colors are very well chosen and the photos are creative"; "it's very classy and especially well organized, I'm impressed"; "the profile is really cheerful and energetic for an elderly woman, it's very well designed." Internet users also express their surprise through their reactions: "it's amazing, the account is attractive but I didn't expect it to be so professional"; "it's surprising from an elder generation, but it's very well done".

Respondents' opinions were torn between those positive emotions and negative ones. When the visual elements are not well designed, they tend to cause some irritation. This is translated into feelings of discontent, discomfort and exasperation caused by provocative or annoying stimuli such as incidents, messages or interactions that may conflict with what a consumer expects in a particular situation (Ducoffe, 1996). Indeed, internet users exposed to elder Instagrammers' accounts that are not designed in a professional way feel more embarrassed and annoyed: "I don't like it, it's not attractive at all, it's not even beautiful"; "the posts are unpleasant and reflect a bad taste of the influencer"; "it's so annoying to see such images, it's a bad choice frankly, especially at her age". Respondents also express feelings of disappointment. Indeed, some respondents have been deceived in their expectations of the visualized content of middle-aged influencers: "I feel sorry for her because she isn't ashamed to show herself in this way"; "it is really heartbreaking to look at these kinds of stories and photos"; "Well, I don't like this at all."

### **Cognitive Reactions Generated by Visual Design**

Cognitive states are defined as users' mental reactions to the acquisition, processing, retention, and recovery of stimuli (Eroglu et al., 2001). According to the results, two cognitive responses were identified: congruence and credibility of the influencer.

Congruence can be defined as "the fact that two or more entities fit together well" (Maille & Fleck, 2011). While in other marketing researches, congruence has sometimes been linked to marketing entities such as brand, advertising and products, and other times to entities related to consumers such as mood, emotions, desires or needs (De Fortunato, 2018), the results of our research reveal another type of congruence, which is the congruence of the Instagram influencer's age and the visual content posted and viewed on this social media, as congruence may indeed exist between "entities that vary according to the domains of application" (Maille and Fleck, 2011).

The analysis of the collected interviews leads us to consider congruence as a moderator of the relationship between visual design and emotional reactions. Congruence is "an expression of being appropriate to something, of being appropriate to a situation" (Maille, 2007). Thus, when the visual content is in line with the mature age of the influencer, it acts on the design's perceptions of internet users as well as on their emotional reactions. Age specificity in the study

of elder influencers cannot go unnoticed. Millennials, for example, pay considerable attention to the age of the influencer they follow (Chatzigeorgiou, 2017).

Respondents' statements show that the congruence between the influencer's age and the visual content reinforces the intensity of positive design perception and positive emotions, while an age incongruence with the visual content rather reinforces the intensity of negative perception of design as well as negative emotions. In the first situation, respondents state that: "what I like the most is to see her post photos and videos that suit her age"; "thankfully she doesn't behave like an adolescent on Instagram"; "I like that she makes videos and speeches that are mature, respectful and age-appropriate." In the second situation, that is in the absence of congruence, the internet user would have a negative perception of visual design, causing thus negative emotions: "She is not ashamed at her age to make such photos, it is too excessive, it is a pity"; "It's disappointing to see what she's doing at that age."

The credibility of a source is defined according to how the positive attributes of a communicator can influence the audience's positive reception of the message (Ohanian, 1990). Based on our results, we found that a well-designed visual content is a source of lack of credibility for elder influencers. While Djafarova & Rushworth (2017) believed that the visual presentation and the graphic quality of content shared by influencers increase the credibility of the content and give it a more professional dimension, our survey respondents feel the opposite. For them, given their age and their efforts to look young and beautiful on social media, these influencers cannot always be credible and sincere in what they say or show: "I can't believe what she says because she seems artificial to me"; "her account is so professional that I doubt what she says". On the other hand, the simpler and less sophisticated the visual design is, the more it reflects reliability: "she looks natural and real on her account so she can be trusted"; "it is because she is faithful to herself that I can believe her". Thus, the inadequacy of the real image of the influencer to her Instagram image (photo-shop, threads for photos, etc.) could very well explain this lack of credibility.

Here we return to the importance of the congruence between age and visual content that can moderate the credibility of the elder influencer: "I could have believed her if she were presenting things that are age-appropriate"; "It would have been better if she published stuff that looked more like her." These findings are further supported by Belanche et al. (2021), whose research has revealed an important link between the match-up hypothesis and the source's credibility model in the context of celebrity mentions.

### **Conative Reactions Generated by Visual Design**

The visual presentation of elder influencers' publications provokes conative reactions via affective and cognitive responses. In this research, conative reactions are manifested through the intention to abandon or continue the navigation on one's account as well as through the behavior towards products presented by influencers such as the intention to inform oneself about products and/or to buy these products. For the most part, the answers relate more to the reactions towards the influencer's account. Moreover, the results show that when the emotions generated by the design stimulus are positive, the conative responses are also positive and conversely: "I like her account so much that it encourages me to stay longer to see the trends and news"; "oh !!! That's really beautiful... I love the clothes she wears, I'll see if there's an address where I can buy them from"; "the account looks unpleasant, I'm not interested in seeing what she does or says".

Additionally, when followers are either happy or dissatisfied with the account of the elder Instagrammer, they are ready to write comments, leave reactions by emoticons or like

publications; in short, to commit to the influencer's account. Thus, emotions have an impact on the followers' browsing and commitment behaviors as well as on their purchase intention, which will depend on the positive or negative valence of those emotions. Indeed, according to Trespeuch (2018), some positive (for example love, joy, surprise) and negative emotional reactions (for example anger, fear, sadness) can have different meanings and impacts on behavior.

Followers are furthermore guided in their actions by the congruence between age and visual design: "Her videos are so daring for her age that it no longer encourages me to follow her"; "she is too old to wear these kinds of clothes, but at least she gives us an idea of where to find them". Thus, congruence or incongruence has an effect on navigation behavior and purchase intent. Research in the advertising field shows that consensus has not been reached and that congruence and incongruence can both lead to either positive or negative reactions since they can reinforce persuasion (Guelzim & Madarbi, 2022).

As for credibility, its lack leads followers to inquire about rather than buy the product: "I'd rather find out about the products first, because all influencers are paid to present them, so I'm not too confident about buying the products without checking them in advance"; "even if the influencer doesn't seem very objective to me, she tempts me to check the Instagram account or the website of the brand". This result is confirmed by some previous research. Indeed, according to Safiani & El Hassouni (2021), if a person is considered an expert in the field, trustworthy and attractive, they will be able to influence both the attitude and the behavior of the audience (Ohanian, 1990), including their purchase intention (Gunawan & Huarng, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

This paper aims to explore the impact of the visual design of elder influencers' Instagram accounts on social media users. Research results show that visual design generates emotional, cognitive and conative reactions. The qualitative analysis conducted for this purpose shows that followers of elder female influencers on Instagram experience positive and negative emotions. Indeed, when they perceive a design as pleasant and well designed, the followers are satisfied with what they are looking at and thus release positive feelings such as pleasure and admiration. They are also surprised to see such an attractive design from elder influencers. On the other hand, if they perceive the visual content as inappropriate in any way, they experience negative emotions like irritation or even disappointment because they are embarrassed to see inadequate content posted by elder influencers. As for the cognitive reactions generated by visual design, our results show that the congruence between age and visual content is a moderator of the effect of design on emotions. On the other hand, the credibility of the source is negatively influenced by visual design as respondents feel that the more professional the account of elder influencers is and not reflecting the reality of their age, the more difficult it is to believe them. Finally, in terms of behavior, our results revealed only two conative responses: first, the abandonment or continuation of browsing the influencers' Instagram accounts, and second, the intention to learn about the presented products.

This work helps to overcome the lack of marketing literature on the phenomenon of influence of elder people on the one hand, and on the other hand, to enrich research on SOR influence processes by adopting it to the case of elder influencers. The results can serve as a basis for influential marketing strategies of companies wishing to hire these senior influencers. This way, professionals can understand the scope of this new trend, have a better grasp of how Instagram users perceive this category of influencers and act accordingly. In this sense,



companies must give importance to the congruence of the age of the chosen influencer with the visual content he or she will present and use it in their favor in order to generate positive responses in terms of emotions, credibility and behavior towards products and brands.

The research is limited to a qualitative approach and should thus be the subject of a confirmation by the theoretical model of the influence of visual design on the affective, cognitive and conative variables found at the end of the empirical part. In addition, we limited our study to elder influencers who are considered TV celebrities. It would also be relevant to study the case of elder influencers in other fields as well as to study other categories of influencers such as micro-elder influencers in future research.

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