

Stereotypical views of older people among youth (15-24): insights from semi structured interviews

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Abstract

As society ages, it also becomes increasingly digital and mobile. Although these processes are unrelated, their association highlights age-related stereotypes, as noted by Butler (1969). Despite literature showing that older people are increasingly engaging in everyday digital practices like contacting family, accessing bank services, or making online payments (Carenzio et al., 2021), digital media tends to be seen as an "arena where older people are not able to function" (Rasi, 2021, p. 11). This communication aims to analyze the stereotypical discourses created by young people about the daily practices and media habits of older people in a digital society.

We consider Tajfel's (1963) conceptions and reflections on stereotypes. According to the author, stereotypes are constructed through a labeling process where individuals are associated with a particular national, ethnic, religious, racial, or social group, among others. This interpretation does not happen randomly, it is social. In an inferential process, a series of characteristics are attached to this label. Media, social experiences, or even literature can originate these inferences. Tajfel (1963) argues that these inferences ultimately determine what will be noticed or ignored, what will become the center of attention, and what will remain peripheral. Among various social problems related to stereotypes about certain groups, Tajfel (1963) highlights the spread of discriminatory ideas.

This study presents a qualitative analysis of young people's (15-24) understanding of older people's media and informational consumption. We analyzed 42 semi-structured interviews with young people living in Portugal between May and September 2023. The focus of the interviews was news consumption and digital citizenship, constructed through various exercises. In one exercise, interviewees were asked to think about a cartoon centered on

false information and post-truth. The cartoon shows a dialogue between a father and daughter in front of a computer, where the man asks, "Why is it false if it says exactly what I think?" Spontaneously, young people came up with stereotypical associations and notions about older people, their media consumption, media literacies, and daily habits. In line with the concept of mobility socialites (Hartmann et al., 2021), most associations refer to daily practices and the use of mobile phones and applications for consumption and information exchange.

Preliminary analysis reveals a series of stereotypical notions about older people's skills and daily practices. Young people associated difficulties identifying false content with the lack of digital literacy among older people. In most cases, these difficulties were exclusively linked to the age of individuals. The interviewees distanced themselves from potential challenges they might have in identifying false content as if age granted them a certain "immunity." The data points to a reinforcement of stereotypes about older people by young people, contributing to the spread of discrimination.

Keywords: digital practices, stereotypes, digital media, older people, young people.

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BIOS

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