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**DIGITAL AGEISM
AND THE COMMUNICATIVE MARGINALIZATION OF OLDER PERSONS:
A SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO AGEIST DISCOURSE
ON A CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION'S FACEBOOK PAGE**

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7 August 2025

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Acceptance Page

This paper prepared by **DANTE D. PEREZ** with the title: “**DIGITAL AGEISM AND THE COMMUNICATIVE MARGINALIZATION OF OLDER PERSONS: A SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO AGEIST DISCOURSE ON A CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION’S FACEBOOK PAGE**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Communication.

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Biographical Sketch

Dante Perez started his career in a non-government organization then studied and worked at the Ateneo de Manila University where he obtained his Master in Communication.

From 2008 to 2022, Mr. Perez was Executive Assistant to prima ballerina Lisa Macuja-Elizalde, Program Consultant for Ballet Manila and the Elizalde Group of Companies that owns and operates the MBC Media Group. Currently, he is works a a business development consultant and part-time university media lecturer in I Central Luzon.

Mr. Perez was the local content coordinator for CNN Atlanta, NHK Japan, BBC Radio, and the German National TV for Project Ballet Futures - an internationally recognized arts and culture scholarship program. He is also an alumni of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) in 2007 and the only Southeast Asian participant in the German Bureau of Education's online workshop on sustainability-based games app development in 2021. As a cultural entertainment manager, he conceptualized and implemented the first NCCA International Dance Day in 2015 and was the production coordinator for The Legends and the Classics concerts featuring Lisa Macuja, Cecile Licad, and Lea Salonga.

His research interest includes digital ageism, gerontechnology and social media. He has presented in conferences for these subject areas in Malaysia and England.

Acknowledgement

I want to thank God for the energy, resources and talent that make this doctoral study possible.

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And lastly, I would like to thank myself for not giving up, for believing in the power of faith, love, hope and hard work.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to God who makes all things possible.

To the older persons community in the Philippines,

I hope this output could help us in one way or another.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this achievement to my late father, Pedro S. Perez, Sr.

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ABSTRACT

As societies age and technology rapidly advances, ageism has evolved into a digital construct, with its discourse migrating from offline to online platforms. This phenomenon, termed digital ageism, refers to a variety of personal and societal biases that include negative representations of older persons in online communication environments. Adopting the sociocultural tradition in communication as a framework for critical discourse analysis (CDA), this dissertation explores how communicative practices shape digital ageism. It identifies four Discourses of active dependency, digital deficiency, age-based exceptionalism, and automated empathy from the public Facebook page of COSE (Coalition of Services of the Elderly) – a non-government organization advocating for the welfare of older persons. These Discourses were shaped by COSE’s communicative practices that include capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support, highlighting the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate, celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations, and facilitating technology mediation of care. The study concludes that COSE, while it advocates for the welfare and rights of older persons, inadvertently reproduces ageism as an interplay of communicative practices in the digital realm. The study recommends future research that integrates critical gerontology with discourse analysis to provide deeper insights into the intersection of aging, language, and power. The study further recommends the incorporation of multimodal discourse analysis, encompassing text, video, and images to capture the complex and

layered ways in which age-related meanings are constructed and communicated across diverse media forms.

A practical recommendation for COSE is to revisit its content creation practices by emphasizing narratives of empowerment, agency, and collaboration rather than those that imply dependency or deficiency. By adopting more enabling and inclusive discourse, COSE's communication can both enhance the visibility of older persons as capable digital citizens and resist the reproduction of ageist assumptions in online environment

CHAPTER I

RATIONALE

Ageism, in both traditional and digital narratives, is widely acknowledged as a form of discrimination, but its role in maintaining and disrupting discourse is under-theorized. The pervasiveness of social media has reconfigured the landscape of ageism in public discourse, reshaping how it is expressed and circulated. Within this evolving digital public sphere, ageism has emerged as a persistent form of bias, meriting close examination as a distinct discourse in its own right.

The foundational concept of ageism was introduced by gerontologist Edward Butler in 1969, who characterized it as prejudice displayed by individuals from one age group against those from other age groups. Since then, ageism has been studied across disciplines such as in health care (Araújo et al., 2023), politics (Paniagu, 2023), education (Montepare, 2020), and media (Xu, 2021). In 2022, the World Health Organization defined ageism as the combination of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination directed toward others or oneself based on age (xix). Higgs (2022) argued that while this definition provided a template for social sciences and social policy, it is not sufficient because it avoids addressing other aspects of ageism, such as positive ageism (Palmore, 1999) which recognizes authority and celebrates seniority. Palmore (1999) sees older persons not just as victims of ageism but as agents of change who can live actively and participate in social activities.

For Nelson (2002), ageism is born from the fear of our own mortality. Coupland and Coupland (1993, p.281) defined ageism as the “overlapping processes of

deindividualization, devaluation and above all, disenfranchisement.” For Thompson and Cox (2024), ageism operates on three levels of personal, cultural and structural domains. Margaret Gullette (2022) a leading figure in anti-ageism movements characterizes ageism as a decline ideology and argued that the term “ageism” is more acceptable to describe old age than the term “aging”. Ageism is also associated with dependency discourses (Townsend, 1986; Walker, 2012), underlining older people as recipients of social structures and policy decisions. Calasanti and Slevin (2001) view ageism as a form of oppression that involves everyone regardless of economic privileges and intersects with previous ideologies such as sexism, racism, and homophobia.

Bytheway (2005) argued that these definitions of ageism contribute to the homogenization of older adults by grouping all individuals over 60 together, overlooking the diverse experiences and needs within this age group. In the same vein, Higgs and Gilleard (2022) criticize the notion of ageism as simplistic and should be viewed using a social imaginary that offers a more complex understanding of old age.

Despite advancements in longevity and the increasing population of older persons worldwide, research on ageism is insufficiently explored. Gullette (2022) claims that the slow progress in ageism research can be attributed to the prevailing perception that it is a natural phenomenon, coupled with its relative neglect in scholarly inquiry. Such perspectives are supported by Weir (2023), who concluded that ageism is considered one of the last socially acceptable prejudices and frequently goes unnoticed (Perdue & Gurtman, 1990 as cited in Ayalon & Tesch-Romer, 2018 ; Angus & Reeve, 2006). While it is generally associated with negative connotations, ageism can also be

positive by demonstrating protective and prohibitive communication with older people because of their age, authority (Ayalon et al., 2023), experience, and wisdom in organizational settings (Conley, 2018).

It is important to further establish that ageism is a systemic social issue (HelpAge International, 2022) rooted in historical, social, economic, and cultural complexities. While it affects all ages, ageism is more pronounced in older persons because of their recognizable and diminished physical capacities, psychosocial interactions, and “decreased metamemory confidence” (Ayalon et al., 2023, p.1176). Ageism can be micro or intrapersonal, internalized throughout life stages; meso or interpersonal, experienced through personal and social circles; and macro or institutional, experienced as an outcome of policies and social design (Latzko-Toth et al., 2022; WHO, 2021). Ageism, thus, forms a social disorder that ranks youth as normative and marginalizes aging. Ageism is not just unfair or favorable to a specific group or community; it is also illegal (see Republic Act 10911).

Moreover, ageism is symbolic and visibly communicated in multiple cultural products. It often involves negative stereotypes about older adults, such as being frail, incompetent, or irrelevant. These stereotypes are often reinforced and amplified in online spaces through memes, jokes, and media representations that portray older adults in a negative or demeaning light. Ageism can also be invisible on social media environments that allow anonymity (Pan & Wang, 2023), micro-aggression (Pierce et al., 1977; Sue, 2010), and online othering (Harmer & Lumsden, 2019). These mediated portrayals not only reflect societal biases but also serve as a bridge through which ageist discourses migrate and transform within digital environments.. When this offline

bias moves into digital spaces, it doesn't disappear; instead, it often mutates and amplifies due to the nature of online interaction.

Digital ageism

The discourse of traditional ageism or offline ageism has evolved into the digital realms, into what scholars increasingly refer to as digital ageism. While offline ageism manifests in everyday language, media portrayals, social practices, and institutional policies that marginalize older persons, digital ageism reconfigures these biases through online platforms, algorithmic exclusions, and interface designs that implicitly favor younger users (Rosales & Fernández-Ardévol, 2020). Rather than existing as separate phenomena, digital ageism builds upon and amplifies traditional forms of age-based discrimination, reinforcing the social order that privileges youth while further alienating older persons from full participation in digital culture. This continuity across domains illustrates how ageist ideologies are not only persistent but also highly adaptable, capable of embedding themselves in both analog and digital infrastructures of society.

Fernández-Ardévol & Blanche (2019) refer to digital ageism as a variety of personal and societal biases that prevent or restrict people from utilizing digital advancements because of their (old) age. Other scholars have proposed that digital ageism emerges from the intersections of design decisions (Rosales & Fernandez-Ardevol, 2020), algorithmic biases (Chu et al., 2022), usage patterns, user experiences, and representation (Xu, 2021). This “othering of older adults” (Søraa et al., 2020) in

online environments further underlines the complex interplay of individual biases, societal norms, and corporate values (Rosales & Fernandez-Ardevol, 2020). One of these biases includes implicit or explicit discrimination of older persons based on their representation and experiences in digital platforms (Rosales et al., 2023). Another form of digital ageism is visual ageism or the “social practice of visually underrepresenting older people or misrepresenting them in a prejudiced way” (Loos & Ivan, 2018, p. 164) that marginalizes older persons as members of society.

Digital ageism can affect everyone, but it is the older persons who are the minority group in the Internet user base who are often the target of digital ageism. The effects is not limited to the symbolic marginalization of older persons but also their access to health care. This is supported by the study of Niertz and colleagues (2023) that digital technology-based ageism can lead to discriminatory practices and consequently deprive older persons of receiving optimal medical treatment.

Moreover, digital ageism is firmly ingrained in society and is “deeply unquestioned” (Rosales et al., 2023). It is often viewed as a natural consequence of technological advancements, where a social group is deprived whenever an artifact is introduced and diffused in societies.

As a relatively novel phenomenon, the discourse on digital ageism is limited. The earliest research on digital ageism on three major databases (EBSCO, Proquest, and World of Science) can be traced back to mid-2010s, appearing in scholarly work on social media and advocacy (Trentham et al., 2015) and digital divide and social representation (Amaral & Daniel, 2016, Houssein et al., 2015). Arguably, the most comprehensive scholarly work addressing these issues is the volume entitled “Digital

Ageism: How it operates and approaches to tackling it, edited by Rosales et al. (2023). The book offers an in-depth examination of digital ageism, analyzing it across multiple dimensions, including analysis of design decisions (planning and marketing digital products); cultural domains (meaning-making and experiences) and symbolic narratives (identities and representation).

While existing literature has begun to explore the multifaceted dimensions of digital ageism, significant gaps remain, particularly in understanding how non-government organizations' (NGOs) online communicative practices shape the phenomenon.

From a theoretical standpoint, examining digital ageism illuminates the current and emerging discourse of ageism as created and recreated by a non-government organization for older persons in the world's largest social media site. It offers theoretical value by expanding and refining existing frameworks across disciplines and to critically engage with concepts such as digital marginalization and social media injustices. In critical gerontology, it enhances our understanding how social media can de-pathologize aging by shifting the locus of digital ageism from individual and medical perspectives to broader socio-cultural practices and failures. Critical discourse analysis it provides a meaningful context for analyzing power and ideological narratives implicit or hidden in online communication. Within communication studies, it contributes to examining how digital media reinforces or challenges existing stereotypes.

Moreover, digital ageism as an analysis of age categorization "can disclose how cultural meanings of age are enacted, experienced and reproduced in interaction, that is, how age acquires meaning through discourse (Georgalou, 2018, p.97)". Hamilton

and Hamaguchi (2015, p.713) further underscored the importance of examining the ideology of digital ageism and claims that: “the advantage of studying such discourse about elderly individuals, as individuals and as groups, and of aging more generally, lies in the enhanced understanding of the master narratives or cultural scripts of aging that circulate in specific sociocultural historical perspectives – in contrast, perhaps, to many individuals’ lived experiences of age, including the researcher’s own views about aging and the elderly”.

Practically, research on digital ageism has the potential to inform inclusive policy-making, technology design, and digital literacy programs. As organizations and governments increasingly digitize public services, understanding how older persons are represented on online platforms can lead to the development of more inclusive user interfaces, better-targeted training initiatives, and more equitable service provision across age groups.

Civil society organizations and digital ageism discourse

Age-specific non-government organizations, particularly those focused on older persons, play a vital role as civil society actors that advocate for the rights, dignity, and inclusion of aging populations. They often operate at the intersection of advocacy, service delivery, and community mobilization, ensuring that older adults are not only visible but also active participants in societal life. In the context of the digital age, these organizations take on the added responsibility of bridging the technological divide by promoting digital literacy, facilitating access to online resources, and fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange. However, despite these efforts, age-specific

NGOs themselves may contend with systemic challenges in representing older voices in a rapidly evolving digital public sphere, where stereotypes and biases about technological competence can marginalize both their constituency and their advocacy messages.

Within the framework of digital ageism, age-specific NGOs face the dual task of resisting discriminatory narratives and transforming the online communicative landscape into one that affirms the agency of older persons. Digital platforms, especially social media, are now essential arenas for visibility and influence, yet they are also spaces where older individuals are often portrayed through deficit-based frames—emphasizing vulnerability, dependency, or technological incompetence. Age-specific NGOs, therefore, serve as counter-discursive forces, strategically using digital communication to challenge these narratives, showcase the skills and contributions of older adults, and cultivate solidarity across age groups. By doing so, they not only advance their advocacy goals but also contribute to reshaping digital culture toward inclusivity and respect for aging as a diverse and valuable life stage.

The escalating prevalence of ageism, encompassing both traditional and digital forms, and its impact on the social representation and treatment of older persons constitutes a growing area of scholarly inquiry and practical initiatives within the context of civil society organizations.

To better understand this phenomenon, it is important to first characterize how non-government organizations acting as civil society actors perform broader social and communicative functions. The United Nations Development Program (n.d.) defines a non-government organization (NGO) as “a non-profit organization, group or institution

that operates independently from a Government and has humanitarian or development objectives”. NGOs play a critical role in shaping public discourse, as they offer alternative voices and platforms for marginalized communities and empower people to achieve their potential.

In 2002, global leaders adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which underscores the role of older people in social development. It provided a framework for governments to include ageing in the design, implementation, and evaluation of economic and cultural policies (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). The United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing has accredited 143 NGOs around the world whose work is primarily devoted to the advancement of older persons in various aspects of society (UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, 2024).

Part of this international age advocacy network is the International Federation on Aging or IFA, an international non-government organization based in Canada and composed of members from the government, academia, industry, and individuals, which has been working to combat ageism, advance policy, and advocate for older persons' rights and welfare (International Federation on Aging, n.d.). Its policy on ageism states that “combatting ageism requires a global movement that involves citizens, governments, non-governmental, academia, and industry to transform attitudes and actions across generations and civilization”. Help Age International is another network of NGOs that promotes the rights and well-being of older citizens in more than 90 countries, focusing on systemic ageism, gender equality, income security, healthy ageing, and others (Help Age International, n.d.).

Age-specific NGOs such as the ones mentioned above perform communicatively as sources of digital ageism discourse when they employ communication—whether internal, external, symbolic, or structural—to shape meaning, identity, and action, thereby reinforcing or disrupting social norms. Sciubba (2014) claims that aging advocacy organizations employ various framing strategies in their mission statements—diagnostic (identifying the problem), prognostic (suggesting solutions), motivational (encouraging action), and human rights frame (aligning to global human rights principles)—to address aging issues. The diverse frames allow organizations to resonate with multiple stakeholders, increasing NGO’s reach and effectiveness.

As agents of social order, NGOs act as mediating institutions between the state and civil society. Through public advocacy, education, and service delivery, they help reinforce existing cultural, moral, and political standards. As agents of social disorder, NGOs challenge hegemony, expose injustice, and give voice to marginalized groups (Dar, 2015).

In the Philippines, there is no official registry of NGOs advocating or focusing on older persons. The absence of a unified national documentation or strategies to tackle digital ageism is notable, yet several implemented mechanisms intersect with this issue, such as the enactment of the Anti-Age Discrimination in Employment Act or Republic Act No. 10911 which prohibits discrimination based on age in employment and ensures fair treatment to workers regardless of their age. The National Commission of Senior Citizens (NSCS) also launched the Philippine Plan of Action for Senior Citizens 2023-2028 (PPASC), which aims to create an inclusive and age-friendly society for older persons across the country.

One of the Philippine-based NGOs focused on older persons is the Coalition of the Services of the Elderly (COSE), founded in 1989 by Edward Gerlock. The organization engages in advocacy, capacity, and partnership building for older persons. As one of the leading organizations for senior citizens in the country, “COSE has organized a total of 1,106 older persons organizations in 25 provinces and 82 cities and municipalities across the Philippines” (Coalition for the Services of the Elderly, n.d.).

Since 1991, COSE has awarded 300 outstanding older persons through its annual *Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda* (SUN) Awards. The nominees and awardees represent various sectors, including educators, farmers, indigenous peoples, fisherfolk, human rights advocates, persons with disabilities, and community leaders. Each individual awardee receives a cash prize, a trophy, and a feature on COSE’s Facebook page, recognizing their contributions and increasing their visibility in the community.

In 2020, COSE, in collaboration with students from De La Salle University Manila, Help Age International and the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism launched an intergenerational social media campaign to approach ageism. The project successfully launched a Facebook page, collected seven case studies and hosted webinars for older persons and students (Help Age International, 2022).

Moreover, COSE’s impact on the older person sector has been demonstrated in its significant contribution to various policy design and implementation, including its collaboration with the Confederation of Older Persons Association in the Philippines (COPAP) in the institutionalization of the Social Pension Program under RA 9994 or the Expanded Senior Citizen Act of 2010. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) adapted COSE’s Home Care Program in 2010, signifying the

impact of its initiatives. The organization was also instrumental in the passing of Republic Act 10645 or the Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage for All Senior Citizens, enacted in 2014 (Coalition for the Services of the Elderly, n.d.)

To communicate its mission, vision, and advocacy, COSE maintains a comprehensive online and social media presence through online communication platforms, including a website, Twitter/X, and Facebook. These sites function as critical channels for information dissemination, stakeholder engagement, and the promotion of rights-based advocacy for older persons. COSE's presence and practices on social media provide a relevant research environment for interrogating the dynamics of digital ageism. An analysis of its Facebook content – its linguistic properties and framing of older persons would help us understand how digital ageism is made visible, challenged, or reproduced in online communication by an organization advocating the rights and welfare of older persons.

Positionality

I am a 46-year-old faculty member in a private university in Pampanga, where I teach professional courses in communication and media, including a course in Social Media Principles and Practices. I am also actively engaged with social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, for both professional and personal purposes. I use my personal account mainly to connect with friends and family. I also maintain a business page for my role as a cultural entertainment producer to generate sales and achieve marketing goals. This position provided me with familiarity with the dynamics of online interaction, algorithmic visibility, and advocacy-driven content. With respect to

perspectives on older persons, I approached the study from a stance that values their agency, social contribution, and capacity to adapt to digital environments, while also recognizing the persistence of ageist stereotypes that tend to overshadow such strengths.

Years ago, I volunteered as a social media fund raiser for COSE but our schedules did not align. In April 2024, I delivered a digital ageism webinar on their Facebook page which positioned me with a unique insider perspective, potentially offering valuable insights into the organization's communication and understanding of ageism, as well as its interaction with older persons. This prior engagement with the organization provided a heightened awareness of potential biases that could influence my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This experience also allowed me to bracket or suspend my judgement (Tufford and Newman, 2012) and enhanced the rigor and trustworthiness of this inquiry.

As a middle aged man approaching older adulthood, I was also drawn to this study because it explores the critical issue of digital ageism, a form of discrimination that I find increasingly relevant to my own future. My own lived experience within this age bracket granted me a unique perspective, but it also necessitated rigorous self-reflection. My research avoided perpetuating the very stereotypes that contribute to ageist discourse. Recognizing my potential biases, I committed to employing a critical lens, constantly questioning my assumptions and interpretations. Transparency in my methodology and a commitment to the flexible approach to critical discourse analysis were fundamental to my ethical approach. To address personal assumptions during data interpretation, I employed reflexive practices consistently throughout the data

gathering and analysis of this study. I kept an analytic memo journal to document initial impressions, emerging biases, and interpretive tensions. This practice allowed conscious recognition of moments where personal empathy for older persons might risk idealizing their capacities or, conversely, where personal frustration with social media practices might unduly influence interpretation.

I managed potential blind spots in identifying implicit forms of ageism through critical discourse analysis tools that foreground language patterns, silences, and framing devices. By systematically coding for metaphors, presuppositions, and representational choices, the researcher avoided reliance on surface-level readings of Facebook captions. Furthermore, contradictions were treated not as analytical weaknesses but as productive sites of inquiry—for example, when a post simultaneously promoted inclusion while unintentionally reinforcing deficit views of older persons. In this way, methodological rigor and theoretical sensitivity worked together to minimize blind spots and strengthen the reliability of the findings.

In my analysis of COSE's Facebook posts, I also acknowledged the need to be mindful of my personal reactions to the embedded discourses. I unlearned my own ageist biases by "taking the perspective of those who suffer most from dominance and inequality" (van Dijk, 1993, p.252). Thus, in completing this analysis, I adopted a reflexive stance and challenged myself to challenge the common viewpoints.

Furthermore, the application of Fairclough's three dimensional model demands a nuanced understanding of power dynamics. It is crucial to acknowledge the potential for my research to reinforce or challenge existing structures of age-based discrimination. This requires a careful examination of the language I use, the narratives I construct, and

the implications of my findings. I remain vigilant against essentializing or homogenizing the experiences of older adults, recognizing the heterogeneity within this demographic.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Discourse in the age of social media

Discourse, in the broadest sense, refers to how language and communication shape our understanding of the world. It involves the production, circulation, and interpretation of meaning through various forms of communication, including language, images, narratives, and “practices that collectively produce and authenticate particular knowledges and truths” (Aylett & Barnes, 2009, p.153).

According to McGregor (2004) as cited in Mullet (2018), discourse consists of talk, text, and media that express ways of knowing, experiences, and valuing the world. Often associated with linguistics studies, discourse can also be in the form of media representation, which refers to the “ways in which the media outlets represent certain ideas, objects, events, groups of people and communities” (Xu, 2021). As Fairclough asserted, discourses are particular ways of representing the world and “include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries – representations of how things might or could or should be.... (2001, p.2). Discourse, seen as the construction of a preferred message and message system, then, is also a hegemonic practice (Gramsci, 1972).

For Motschenbacher (2018), there are two purely linguistic interpretations of discourse. The first interpretation is focused on the structural features of language, while the second definition views discourse in a contextualized and functionalist fashion. The author suggested that the third definition of discourse is linked on its ability to create

and sustain power. This view is particularly relevant to CDA as it theoretically aligns with Foucault's (1972) notion of power. Power, in the Foucauldian sense, does not emanate exclusively from the dominant to subaltern individuals or groups but instead is distributed in and negotiated by members of the society.

Discourse, then, is a form and site of power, as it frames what is spoken about, how it is spoken, and who is heard or unheard in communicative content and practices. It can also be used by individuals and organizations to promote or hide ideologies and maintain cognitive influence or what van Dijk (2001, p. 357) referred to as "mind control".

Fairclough claimed that there is power behind every discourse which can take the form of standardization of language or access to discourse (2001). This view is supported by van Dijk (1988), who argued that discourse is not constructed to inform the readers, but rather it represents the ideological and editorial positions of the people or organizations that are involved in the construction and production process of this discourse. In examining discourse of digital ageism, how we talk and write about it can reveal layers of power, ideology, and advantage.

James Paul Gee (2015) further distinguished discourse into "discourse" (small "d" discourse) and "Discourse" (big "D" discourse). Small "d" discourse refers to the features of language, while big "D" Discourses are the "ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are instantiations of particular identities (or 'types of people') by specific groups" (p. 3). According to Gee, little "d" discourse is specifically concerned with studying the "flow of language in use across time, and the patterns and connections across this flow of

language make sense and guide in interpretation (2015, p.3).” ...Big “D” Discourses arise from the little “d” discourses and reflect broader social practices. Moreover, Gee claimed that Discourses are not fixed and the boundaries of each Discourse overlap and contest each other over time (2010).

In the age of social media, discourse has been subjected to drastic transformation, reconfiguring how individuals and organizations communicate and promote ideas. Previously, discourse constructed and reproduced on traditional media followed a top-down flow of information from producers to consumers. On social media platforms, the formation and circulation of discourse depend on algorithms and the content generated by its billions of users, who represent a plethora of voices and perspectives. Social media now seems to have democratized discourse, where users act both as producers and consumers at the same time, a practice known as *prosumption* (Ghaffari, 2020; KhosraviNik, 2022).

Moreover, the architecture of social media favors a certain language – one that encourages brevity and speed reading. Since discourse on social media is dependent on linguistic manipulation, it has changed the kinds of texts people produce, the kinds of social interactions they engage in, and the kinds of social practices and social identities they perform (Herring, 2013). Social media also serves as an emancipatory power in online communication environment. Careless (2015) claims that social media networks enable people to “talk or type” back to dominant ideologies, allowing their voices to counter discourses. Users actively create and participate in online groups and communities, thereby shaping and selecting their own public sphere. Because it is essentially free and open to all people from all walks of life, social media allows diverse

discourse that aligns or even counters dominant ones (Koft, 2025). Will and Pies (2017) refer to this constructive and destructive nature of NGO advocacy as discourse failures.

The ability of social media to reshape the distribution and emergence of discourse can therefore blur the boundaries between dominant and marginalized voices. As individuals and organizations no longer depend on or follow formal structured messaging systems, social media enables the democratization of communication but also exposes users to disinformation, echo chambers, and polarization. These dynamics that social media bring to discourse formation necessitate a new type of discourse analysis, which KhosravaNik (2017) refers to as social media critical discourse studies (SM-CDS). According to him, SM-CDS aims to “unpack the nature of contemporary digital discourses by considering digital practice as a unique and relevant dynamic, rather than simply doing CDS on the materials (which happen to be) on the Internet (2022, p.111).” While the framework judiciously proposes why we need a new approach, it lacks methodological specificity and vaguely offers detailed, replicable steps or tools for analysis.

NGO’s discourse construction on social media

Beyond individual users, non-government organizations (NGOs) engage actively on social media, using the platform to shape discourse and advocate for inclusive narratives. Studies show that social media networks have reconfigured the digital communicative practices of NGOs globally (Moreno-Cabanillas et al., 2024). For an age advocacy group, the integration of social media in their operational frameworks is attractive for multiple reasons. First, it is low-cost and offers a massive reach that can

target local and international audiences. Second, it is participatory and interactive (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) enabling two-way communication within and beyond organizational and geophysical boundaries. Finally, it offers opportunities for generating resources and supports offline and online communication strategies (Waters, 2010, Haruvuy et al., 2024).

NGOs further employ social media for branding and awareness (Wut et al., 2022; Xue et al., 2024), collaborate positively with other organizations for digital inclusion (Bhattacharjee et al., 2024), community engagement, and resource generation (Elvira-Lorilla et al., 2024; Haruvuy et al., 2024). While social media is often seen as an equalizer in online communication, advocacy groups also face challenges in maximizing its complicated environment. For instance, Landers (2024) found that social media managers of non-profit organizations need to improve their knowledge of account management and cross-platform postings. Ozgen and colleagues (2015) pointed out that social media managers of NGOs should frame messages more using call-to-action content. Ng et al. (2024) recommended that age advocacy groups should learn the proper timing of posting on Twitter/X to reach peak engagement and make their content relevant and engaging. There is also a need to strategize social media posting based on gender's perception of messages as pointed out by the study of Bezgin Edis et al. (2024).

NGO's around the world use Facebook more than any other social media sites. In the recent Global NGO Technology Report, a survey of 5,721 NGOs in 160 countries revealed that 90% of non-profits worldwide use Facebook for regular engagement with donors and supporters (Nonprofit Tech for Good, 2019). About 94% perceived that

social media is effective for online brand awareness and 78% thought it is an important tool in creating social change. Campbell and Lambright (2020) claimed that non-profits use Facebook for two primary reasons: presence and engagement. According to their study, non-profits use Facebook for sharing information and asking their followers to take some sort of action.

For NGOs, Facebook offers affordances that enable specific kinds of actions and interaction, providing unique opportunities to amplify messages, engage directly with their stakeholders (Bürger, 2015), and cultivate an online community of supporters and donors. Creating a Facebook page is one of these affordances that NGOs employ to optimize the capabilities of the social media platform. A Facebook page is a public social media profile that allows users, including the government, government officials, and NGOs, to create an official account. Similar to a personal Facebook account, Facebook pages allow account holders to build connections online, promote services through captions, links, photos, and videos (Facebook, n.d.).

The interdependency of digital ageism and the digital divide

While Facebook pages offer NGOs a platform to engage and connect with various publics, the assumption that all users can seamlessly navigate these digital tools overlooks deep-seated imbalances. One of these longstanding inequalities is the digital divide or the disparities in ownership, access, and use of technologies across different social groups (van Dijk, 2020). Digital ageism, on the other hand, is the online and technological discrimination of social actors based solely only on their age. Both phenomena reinforce a vicious cycle of social disorder by perpetuating exclusion and

stereotyping (Capcit, 2024). On one hand, the limited or lack of access to digital capital (Ragnedda, 2019) constrains older person's ability to engage in online conversations, while online ageist narratives sustain policy and design decisions that exclude seniors on the other.

Age is consistently centralized as the key determinant of the digital divide. Jun (2020) reiterates that older persons are traditionally considered "information weak" along with farmers, disabled people, and low-income groups. Scholars such as Millward and Graf (2003) and Mubarak and Suomi (202) referred to this negative distinction as the grey digital divide, describing the challenges faced by older people in technological environments and emphasizing the notion that their age is central to the technological gap. These studies contrast with the analysis of Fang et al. (2019), which argues that age is not the sole driver of the connectivity gap, but that income, education, gender, and generational status also play significant roles. Loos et al. (2021) also underline that more older persons can be early adopters of technology when digital companies involve them in the early stage of the design process.

Studies further emphasize that the digital divide perpetuates cumulative disadvantage (Llorente-Barroso et al., 2023), especially for marginalized older persons—those who may already face barriers due to low income, disability, or rural residence (Wilson-Menzfeld et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2021). As such, digital ageism cannot be disentangled from broader processes of digital exclusion and social stratification.

While content is available on how limited access to digital tools discriminate older persons in pursuing and maximizing work potentials (Krueger et al., 2018), research is

limited on how digital divide serves as a pre-condition to digital ageism. This is a critical missing link because, access, after all, can enable older adults to engage meaningfully with the growing array of online platforms that mediate public discourse and civic participation.

Access and ability to use digital tools have been shown to improve older persons' engagement in public discourse and potentially minimize ageist assumptions. For instance, Xu (2022) and Sanchez-Valle (2023) reiterate that social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp offer older persons the opportunity to exchange ideas in online socio-political communities. Older persons using Instagram, according to McGrath (2018), are able to use the platform to increase visibility to push back against ageist stereotypes.

Access, or the lack of it, to digital tools has broader implications for representation and inclusion. When older persons are unable to navigate digital environments, they are effectively excluded from participating in conversations that increasingly take place online, particularly on social media. This exclusion sidelines their voices, experiences, and positions from public view, reinforcing stereotypes of passivity or irrelevance.

In sum, digital divide and digital ageism shape and are being shaped by each other. The digital divide does not merely reflect a technological lag among older adults but reinforces structural digital ageism. This form of ageism is institutionalized in systems, policies, and technologies that systematically deprioritize or exclude older populations. Understanding digital ageism through the lens of structural inequality

therefore demands a shift from individual blame to systemic critique and inclusive design.

Digital ageism: from traditional to social media representations

The unpacking of ageist discourse further requires a review of how individuals, organizations, and societies assigned and maintained lexical choices to older persons in legacy media. These portrayals have laid the groundwork for how age-based stereotypes persist and adapt in newer communicative contexts. For instance, the word “*silver*” is a reference to gray hair associated with the physical changes that older persons undergo and is used in scholarly and commercial materials. The word has been used in many studies to characterize older persons as members of homogenized groups. Maples (2002) first coined the term “*silver tsunami*” to refer to the global demographic shift where baby boomers are entering retirement age. It can be synonymous with the seismic sea wave that can bring destruction to economies and social care systems and is offensive and ageist (Elbourne & Le May, 2019). In the healthcare industry, the management of trauma for older patients is referred to as “*silver trauma*” (Jain & Gowda, 2024).

On the other hand, the usage of the word “*silver*” can also signify positive representation, such as “*silver surfers*” to describe older persons who use digital technologies (Cody et al., 1999) and “*silver economy*” (Colurcio et al., 2022) referring to older persons as members of a consumer segment who actively participate and contribute in economic activities. Gonzales (2017) uses the word “*silver foxes*” to portray a more positive image of male Hollywood celebrities. Fung (2014) argues that

positive portrayals of older persons do not always result in positive outcomes because such representations can mask the diversity and complexity of aging experiences. Schröder-Butterfill et al. (2023) agree to this compassionate ageism in their study where they found that comic illustrations and billboards represent Indonesian older persons in two contrasting lights: as vulnerable and dependents or as exemplars of “successful ageing,” characterized by health and contribution to family and society. Using ethnographic fieldwork and longitudinal reports, the team highlights the invisibility of care dependence, which is rooted in senior’s declining health and reduced economic productivity. The authors argue that dependence may also be attributed to a “familism by default” approach, where Asian societies assume that families can and will provide care for older members of the households.

While academic scholars and media organizations employ terms such as “silver” to evoke both negative and positive imagery of aging, research often delves into the complexities of old age representations as evidenced by numerous studies on the portrayal of the elderly in traditional and online media (Vasil & Wass, 2006; Selvaraj & Sandaran, 2024). Often, these investigations underlined negative and biased images of older persons such as those found in print media (Wangler & Jansky, 2023; Koskinen et al., 2014; Shimoni, 2023); television shows (Vernon et al, 1999; Reul et al., 2023), advertisements (Graham, 2022); films (Ng et al., 2023) and image banks (Cruceanu et al, 2022).

As digital users, older persons have long been the subject of technophobia or the irrational fear or aversion of using technology (Kania-Lundholm & Torres, 2015; Nimrod, 2018). In a scoping review spanning 13 years of literature in Europe and Australia,

Alexopoulou (2020, p.1) found several technophobic associated terms accorded to older persons such as “non-users, want-nots, digitally backward/internet laggards, needy and unaware of their digital condition”. While technophobia occurs across age groups, Faloye et al. (2022) and Berner et al. (2022) underscored that the older demographic tend to exhibit higher level of technological anxiety. In contrast to technophobic references, Loos et al. (2021) found that older adults are not lagging behind in technology use but they repurpose or reimagine technologies, deviating from the normative scripts provided by technology companies. However, the team’s conclusion is largely drawn from studies conducted in affluent, high-income societies and does not reflect the broader, global experience and representation of older persons in terms of digital engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the unfavorable depictions of older persons especially because of limited mobility and increased reliance to online communication. Studies during the global outbreak frequently emphasized their frailty (Yang et al., 2024); vulnerability (Zhang & Lui, 2021; Myrczik et al., 2021); dependency on family and other social resources (Beasley & Timonen, 2023; Archambault et al., 2022) and powerlessness (Morgan et al., 2021). In their study of Turkish newspaper portrayal of older persons during the pandemic, Course et al. (2024) found that seniors are infantilized as passive and members of at risk groups who are have weaker agency compared to the rest of the society. In a similar study, Amundsen(2022) found that media outlets reinforce the images of older persons as “declining” and “burden” in times of a global emergency.

These representations of older persons in media are not merely reflections of reality, but rather constructions that convey specific messages and values about aging.. As Foucault argued, discourses are not “simply reflections, representations, of social phenomena, but define them, thus giving them a reality” (as cited in Aylett & Barnes, 2009, p.155). More importantly, these underrepresentation or misinterpretation of older persons through language in traditional media channels contribute to the broader discourses about aging and ageism in society (Archambault et al., 2022; WHO, 2021).

While traditional media set the stage, social media platforms have introduced new dynamics that amplify ageist narratives. Systematic reviews of digital ageism on social media found that ageist messages on social media sites lead to “negative health outcomes and poorer mental health for older adults” (Allen et. al. 2022; WHO, 2021 as cited in Dickinson et al.,2024). Studies on social media platforms as sites of visual ageism further show that pre-existing media portrayals of older people are reinforced in the digital realm (Makita et al., 2019). The shift from traditional to digital ageism is well-documented on the negative portrayal of older persons in various social media platforms such as on Instagram (McGrath, 2018; Merz & Gonzales, 2023; Mahmood, 2023); Twitter (Ng, 2024; Schramm et al.,2023, Makita et al., 2019); YouTube (Bandyopadhyay & Singh, 2022); and Facebook (Levy et al., 2014).

Lee and Hoh (2021) emphasized that memes on social media can perpetuate stereotypes and ageist attitudes toward older adults. Their study identified several ageist themes in memes: infantilization where memes depict older adults as immature or dependent, portraying them as illiterate in areas like technology or engaging in childlike behaviors; barbarization where older adults are shown as uncultured, with

inferior cultural tastes or lacking social etiquette and fetishization where older adults, especially women in service roles, are sometimes sexualized or objectified. Lazar et al. (2017) found that older adults' blogs on ageism form collective action resulting to a community that criticizes stereotypical representations of older adults.

Majority of these studies on digital ageism emphasize the negative representation on social media, but there are also studies that highlight the changing perception of older benevolent use of social media to represent a positive image of older people. Some of these studies have demonstrated that a favorable portrayal of seniors on social media improves well-being (Levy et al., 2021; Yachin & Nimrod, 2020) and contributes to cultivating a sense of respect for older individuals (Marrie, 2024). Studies reveal that older persons have the ability to optimize social media and perform as digital content creators or "grandfluencers" by using platforms such as Instagram and Tiktok (Ng & Indran, 2023; Antunes et al., 2022) to express their ideas, communicate with others and influence audiences.

Among social media platforms, Facebook stands out due to its widespread use across age groups and its affordances that both reflect and shape user interaction. Given this power, the social media giant has implemented mechanisms designed to ensure that its platform is used with accountability and responsibility. For instance, the site requires everyone to be at least 13 years old before opening an account – an act that could be seen as discriminatory and protective. Meta, Facebook's mother company, also instituted its Global Community Standards outlining what type of content could be allowed on its platforms including Instagram and Threads. A sentence about "age" only appeared on its July 1, 2022 version of policy which now reads:

We define hateful conduct as direct attacks against people — rather than concepts or institutions — on the basis of what we call protected characteristics (PCs): race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religious affiliation, caste, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, and serious disease. Additionally, we consider age a protected characteristic when referenced along with another protected characteristic (Facebook, 2025).

Despite its self-regulatory mechanisms, ageist practices are still prevalent on the social networking site. For example, there is a Facebook meme that is particularly familiar to Filipino social media users. The meme “*dapat talaga hiwalay na ang Facebook ng matatanda*” (there should already be a separate Facebook for older persons) resurfaces whenever disagreement of demographic opinions where users suggest separating Filipino senior citizens from Facebook because of their views, opinions, and reactions on social networking sites. The viral content appears to be funny and harmless, but is also discriminatory. It assumes that social media is designed for and populated by younger people and that older persons should be isolated to a different social media platform, accustomed to their profile and needs.

Figure 1

Sample ageist meme on Facebook



The presence of such memes exemplifies how social media discourse can inadvertently contribute to digital ageism. While often presented as a lighthearted joke, memetic ageist content (Lee & Hoh, 2021) reinforces harmful stereotypes about older adults as being out of touch with contemporary online platforms and their users.

By suggesting a segregated online space, the meme also perpetuates the notion of older adults as a homogenous group with outdated perspectives, incompatible with the "digital native" generation. This not only reinforces the digital divide but also contributes to a culture of exclusion and othering, limiting the opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and understanding within online communities.

Several studies on Facebook have underlined its capacity to create and amplify ageist content. Levy et al. (2014) found that Facebook Group descriptions carry

negative stereotypes about older persons, often describing their physical and cognitive debilitations. Graham (2021) examined memes on Facebook about older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed familiar themes such as fourth age representation, confinement, sexualized representation and generational contrast. The author also identified instrumental ageism – which employs ageist discrimination to advance the public health agenda. These studies are in contrast to Xu’s (2021) analysis of a Facebook account run by a Swedish municipality, which underlined a more positive portrayal of older persons.

Digital ageism as mediated by algorithms

Central to understanding Facebook’s role in digital ageism is the platform’s algorithmic infrastructure. Algorithms constitute the very technological core of Facebook and rely on machine learning and language processing learning to determine visibility and dissemination of content (Schou & Farkas, 2016). They are “a finite list of well- defined instructions for calculating a function, a step-by-step directive for processing or automatic reasoning that orders the machine to produce a certain output from given input” (van Dijck, 2013, p. 30). In its purest sense, algorithms rely on the “breadcrumbs” of our online activities that trace our digital footprints and participation, build a profile of our interests and preferences, and keep us involved based on our prior engagement and behavior (Bakshy et al., 2015).

At the technical level, digital ageism is viewed as a result of algorithmic manipulation where codes and computer languages determine the nature and flow of discriminatory content. Chu et al (2022) articulated this argument in their model of

technology-mediated cycles of injustice, which describes digital ageism as a result of design decisions, health-related data technology, representation, and allocation.

Algorithms contribute in shaping the direction and depth of discourses by filtering and prioritizing content and conversations. They are powerful because they are invisible and “intentionally hidden from us” (Lauer, 2021). While users can employ their algorithm skills (Gruber & Hargittai, 2023) and reject the personalized ranking of content system (Hendrix, 2021), algorithms are largely controlled by social media companies who know a lot about us but we know very little about them. There seems to an illusion of power where Facebook users create and manage their content on the network but algorithms decide how such content is created, consumed, suppressed or circulated. As profit-driven organizations, Pasquale (2015) noted that “despite their objectivity and neutrality”, algorithms are constantly making controversial, value-laden decisions.”

The automated bias embedded in each algorithm has also been proven to perpetuate age-related stereotypes. For example, Derenne (2024) found that artificial intelligence generators provide more racialized middle-class male figures than women. Similar studies by Kamelski and Klinge (2024) and Allen et al.,(2023) revealed that varying and negative depictions of age on AI models form idealized and unrealistic portrayals, emphasizing the vulnerabilities associated with aging.

Scholars also view digital ageism is a result of algorithmic bias or how computer languages are programmed to create results and representations that are discriminatory to older people (Chu et al., 2022; Allen et al., 2023; Kamelski & Klinge,2024). Stypinksa (2023) distinguished this phenomenon as Artificial Intelligence ageism or “practices and

ideologies operating within the field of AI, which exclude, discriminate, or neglect the interests, experiences, and needs of older population” (p.665).

Algorithms in digital ageism discourse is a critical point of discussion because they amplify existing scripts about older persons and their online footprints. They can promote ageist content, making it more visible and widespread. They can also create “filter bubbles” where users are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs and limits exposure to counter-narrative (Kaluža, 2021). Algorithms tend to have colonizing tendencies to populate social media communication and discourse. Since the algorithm depends on the frequency of posts and sustained engagement of individual or organizational users on such posts, lesser participation from older persons and the groups that represent them would most likely weaken the algorithm in countering digital ageism.

However, scholars argue that algorithms are not necessarily harmful as they also simplify the exponential amount of online data by bypassing information overload. According to Gillespie (2013), algorithms “allow us to participate in social and public discourse and to familiarize ourselves with the publics in which we participate.” Gruber and Hargittai (2023) further noted that individuals who are aware of how personal data are collected are more knowledgeable of how algorithm works and can resist and use social media platforms to their advantage.

Synthesis and gaps in the knowledge on digital ageism

The literature on digital ageism reveals a complex and multifaceted discourse, shaped by various perspectives and research approaches. While current research has

examined the social and psychological impacts, technical, cultural and symbolic domains of digital ageism, there are gaps in the studies that warrant this exploration on digital ageism.

Lack of a specific methodological toolkit for analyzing social media discourse

While numerous studies have explored digital ageism in different social media platforms such as McGrath (2018), Merz and Gonzales (2023); and Ng (2024) and in diverse organizational contexts such as in healthcare (Chu et al., 2022), game design (Romero & Ouellet, 2015), corporate work (Stypinksa et al., 2023) and assisted living settings work (Benito-Montagut et al. 2023), a significant gap persists in the development and application of specific analytical tools tailored to social media discourse. Most frameworks used in existing literature—ranging from critical discourse analysis (CDA) to thematic analysis or sociolinguistic approaches—were originally developed for longer-form or spoken texts, such as interviews, videos, and policy documents. These methods often lack the granularity or adaptability needed to account for the distinctive features of Facebook content: brevity, multimodality, algorithmic visibility, and platform-specific vernaculars. The lack of a unified or specific methodological toolkit for analyzing social media discourse not only limits plausibility but also impedes comparative work across platforms or organizational contexts. As a result, researchers are frequently forced to adapt existing tools in ad hoc ways, raising concerns about consistency and methodological transparency.

This dissertation addressed the gap by applying a novel approach—drawing from the sociocultural tradition of communication—to analyze COSE's Facebook posts as

sources of digital ageism discourse. Nonetheless, the absence of a more robust, dedicated framework remains a limitation of the field and a compelling area for current and future research. Developing such a tool could enhance our ability to rigorously analyze how organizations like COSE leverage digital discourse to enact or disrupt social change.

Scarcity of focused analysis on caption-level meaning making

While social media has been widely studied in the context of communication and advocacy, there remains a significant limitation in research specifically analyzing Facebook captions as a form of discursive practice. Most existing literature focuses on visual elements such as the emphasis on memes by Loos and Ivan (2018) and photos by Mahmood (2023), with limited attention given to how captions alone function to construct or reconstruct meaning. Given the ubiquity and communicative richness of Facebook in NGO work, this study responded to that need by examining how linguistic choices in captions operate as a strategic and meaningful practice.

Reductionist view of digital ageism as a natural consequence of digitization

Existing studies commonly discuss digital ageism as a by-product of digital divide (Choi et al., 2020, Hernandez & Roberts, 2018). While the link between the two phenomena is rigorously analyzed, further theoretical and empirical connections between the two should be made and not treated as separate domains. This disconnect

limits understanding of how infrastructure and support mechanisms actively contribute to online representations. This study confronted the issue by shifting focus from conceptually viewing digital ageism as an inevitable consequence of older persons' inability to cope with the speed of digital technology, but as a construction of ideological and sociocultural practices that are embedded in social media communication.

Lack of analysis on NGO social media communication in the Global South context

Most digital ageism studies involve older persons in the Global North (Rosales et al., 2023; Chu et al., 2024), where many countries have “institutionalized entitlements and high standards of living” (Sciubba, 2014). The digital representations of older persons in the Global South, mostly composed of developing and underdeveloped nations, is underrepresented in the emerging knowledge on digital ageism and should be pursued as aging societies are prevalent in the region. This study filled the gap by focusing on a Facebook page of a Philippine-based age-specific NGO that has been influential in age-related policy design and implementation.

Underdeveloped theoretical synthesis across social media, aging, and advocacy

Finally, the intersection of social media communication and aging advocacy remains theoretically fragmented. While there are robust bodies of literature on each of these domain such as those by KhosraviNik (2022), Sciubba (2014) and Ng et al. (2022), few studies such as the one conducted by McGrath (2018) attempted to synthesize insights between and across these fields to examine how NGOs advocating

for older persons produce, sustain or reproduce discourses of digital ageism. This theoretical gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of how organizations like COSE uses social media communication not just for visibility, networking or fundraising, but to discursively practice representation strategies within the sociocultural, gerontological and advocacy communication frameworks.

This study on COSE's Facebook page as a source of technology-based discrimination has approached this gap by addressing how social media communication, age-specific advocacy and linguistic practices shape and reshape Discourses of digital ageism.

CHAPTER III

FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Research Framework

This study on digital ageism is informed by the sociocultural tradition of communication (Craig, 1999) which views communication as “a symbolic process that produces and reproduces shared socio-cultural patterns (p.144).” In this tradition, the social order is considered a macrolevel phenomenon that is constructed, sustained, and sometimes transformed from the microlevel interactions or communicative practices. In communication studies, social order refers to the patterns, structures, and norms that organize human interactions and maintain stability and predictability in social life. In other words, it is the shared understanding of “how things work” or in this case, “how older persons should be portrayed” in a society—created, reinforced, or challenged through communication.

Digital ageism refers to the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against individuals based on age in the context of digital technology, particularly affecting older persons. When examined through the sociocultural tradition of communication, digital ageism reveals how age-based inequalities are perpetuated—or resisted—through norms, values, and symbolic practices embedded in society’s communication structures. This tradition puts a communicative phenomenon, digital ageism in this case, as a result of a construction process where people create the reality of their social group, organization or culture.

Craig's sociocultural tradition is appropriate in exploring digital ageism as it underscores the pivotal role of communication in shaping and maintaining the fabric of society. By viewing communication as a constitutive process, this tradition provides valuable insights into how social realities, including age-related norms and structures, are constructed and sustained through social media communication.

While Craig notes that “hybrids of sociocultural and other traditions of communication theory are quite common” (p. 145), this underscores—not diminishes—the enduring relevance of the sociocultural tradition. In the context of social media discourse, hybridity is often necessary, given that digital communication cuts across multiple paradigms. However, it is the sociocultural tradition, with its focus on meaning-making, identity, and communicative practices, that offers a foundational lens through which the complexities of digital ageism can be understood. Analyzing COSE's Facebook posts, for instance, requires attention to platform logics, power structures, and institutional voice—but these are best interpreted through the sociocultural tradition's emphasis on discourse, representation, and symbolic action. Thus, even within a proposed composite analytical framework, the sociocultural tradition remains central to examining how older adults and the organizations that represent them construct, contest, and communicate age-related identities in online environments.

Research Questions

Applying the sociocultural tradition of communication theory, this research describes, interprets and analyzes the dominant discourses of digital ageism employed by a civil society organization advocating for Filipino older persons on its Facebook page. The goal is to provide a more nuanced understanding of how digital ageism is shaped and being shaped in the organization's social media communication.

By analyzing the discourse surrounding older Filipinos on Facebook, this study seeks to uncover the subtle and overt ways in which ageist attitudes are perpetuated, normalized or reproduced, potentially contributing to the symbolic marginalization and exclusion of older individuals in digital communities.

Specifically, this study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the civil society organizations' communicative practices of digital ageism?
2. What are the embedded Discourses on digital ageism in the civil society organization's communicative practices?

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is interested in analyzing discourse to find hidden meanings and to uncover the relationships among discourse, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 1992). CDA is not just about language as used in everyday or mediated communication but as part of broader social practices.

Norman Fairclough, one of the central figures in CDA, underlined that the framework “aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) communicative practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (1995, pp. 132–133)”. A critical discourse analyst, therefore, is primarily interested in making the implicit explicit in discourse and unveil power inequalities. As Yerlikaya (2019) asserted, CDA does not only comment on spoken or written text but also explains the power asymmetries that are embedded in them.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2014), CDA is both a theoretical and methodological framework. This view is supported by Bañón Hernández (2018), who stressed that CDA is not a particular methodological orientation, but an interdisciplinary inquiry on communicative practices drawing on disciplines like rhetoric, linguistics, philosophy, and

sociology (Wodak in Kendall, 2007; van Dijk, 2015; Motschenbacher, 2019). In this study, CDA is employed as both a framework and methodology in deconstructing language used in social media communication.

CDA, grounded on critical theory, employs the principle of “criticality”. Etymologically, the adjective “critical” and the verb “criticize” originated from the Greek “kritikos” which means able “to make judgments” or “to separate, decide” (Chilton, 2002, p.1), underscoring the importance of informed decision-making and active engagement with controversial social issues. Taking a critical standpoint, therefore, means “an explicit commitment to the emancipatory agenda...to produce and convey critical knowledge that enables people to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection (Pesic, 2023, p.91)”.

For Wodak (2002), being “critical could be understood as having distance to the data, embedding the data in the social context, taking a political stance explicitly, and having a focus on self- reflection as scholars doing research (p. 9).” Critiquing is making a rational judgment and “implies not accepting arguments or states of affairs as given and unchangeable (Chilton, 2002, p.1).” Being critical in CDA further means not simply finding problematic trajectories but rather deliberately distancing from the data and committing to reflexive practices. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argued that CDA is “critical” in the sense that it “aims to reveal the role of communicative practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power”(p.63) .

There are various approaches to CDA that includes Fairclough’s three dimensional framework (1992) of Text Description, Interpretation and Explanation;

Leeuwen's socio-semantic analysis (1996), Wodak's discourse historical approach (2001), and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (2008). Their frameworks view language not as a neutral medium, but as a socially embedded tool that can reproduce or resist hegemony.

Wodak and Fairclough (1997) previously defined eight tenets of CDA, which Jorgensen and Philipps (2002) summarized into five common features:

1. The character of social and cultural processes and structures is partly linguistically driven
2. Discourse is both constitutive and constituted
3. Language use should be empirically analyzed within its social context
4. Discourse functions ideologically
5. CDA is grounded in critical research

Discourse analysis viewed in the communication standpoint "provides communication researchers with a compelling way to study how people present themselves, manage their relationships, assign responsibility and blame, create organizations, enact culture, persuade others, make sense of social members' ongoing interactional practices, and so on" Tracy (2001, p. 734). Tamassy and Gering (2021) emphasize that "discourse analysis is a complex approach which makes it possible to capture not only the linguistic characteristics of given texts, but also their socially constructive and socially constructed features" (p. 93).

Mumby (1997) and Gee's conceptualizations of discourses further view communication not as a neutral creation and reproduction of content and

representation, but as a site of struggle where power is exercised and ideologies are legitimized or contested. As Hall (1990, p. 140) argues, “power must be understood, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical control, but also in broader cultural and symbol terms, including the power to represent someone, or something in a certain way – with a certain regime of representation.”

Facebook as a site for critical discourse analysis of digital ageism

Facebook emerges as a significant site in social science research (Kosinski et al., 2015), serving as a valuable resource for investigators interested in the construction of the discourse of digital ageism. As one of the world’s leading social media platforms with a vast user base of 3.07 billion (Datareportal, n.d.), Facebook contains a massive amount of publicly available data, including text, graphics, sound, and videos, demonstrating a diverse spectrum of online interactions and representations.

However, the platform’s expansive data collection capabilities and global influence have also raised ethical scrutiny. Facebook has also been in the center of several controversies, particularly concerning privacy violations and political intervention (Hu,2020), censorship (Stjernfelt & Lauritzen, 2020); algorithm manipulation leading to addiction and problematic use (Salma & Bhuiyan, 2024) and hate speech (Ben-David & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2019). The giant social media site is also accused of excluding older persons on job advertisements resulting to a settlement with multiple sectors including the American Civil Liberties Union (Terrel, 2019).

As a site of discourse, Facebook is a platform for social media communication that allows anonymity, interactivity, and intertextuality. These elements allow Facebook users to engage within the platform with autonomy and flexibility. There is also a “Like”

button feature on Facebook that according to Fuchs (2014) promotes an “ideology of liking”. The thumbs up icon which symbolizes the liking of particular content reflects agreement among audiences and may potentially discourage dissenting opinion or discourse. Liking would also feed the algorithms of Facebook and serve the commercial interests of its advertisers.

As a tool designed by humans and guided by corporate values, Facebook is “not a value-free technology but rather an instrument for articulating power” (Rambe, 2012, p. 296). That type of power emanates from both ends of the Facebook multi-user communication equilibrium, where the developer (Meta, the company that operates Facebook) and its users contribute to the production and reproduction of discourse.

Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model for Critical Discourse Analysis

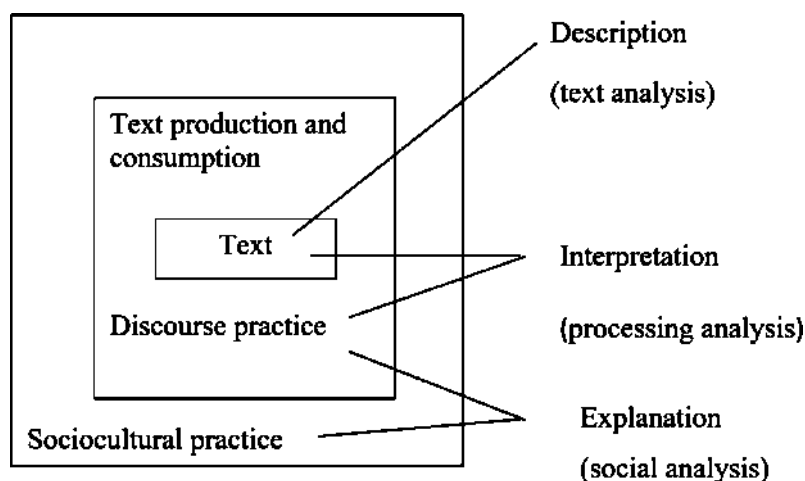
Since this study is interested in peeling the hidden layers of digital ageism on a social media platform, Norman Fairclough’s pioneering model is the appropriate framework to analyzing how dominant discourses on the phenomenon are produced by an NGO, which in turn, reflect social realities, power, and ideology. According to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) as cited in Waller (2006, p.9), Fairclough’s approach “emerged from Critical Theory as a method for accomplishing the critical agenda, an aspect of Fairclough’s CDA which sets it apart from other approaches to the analysis of discourse”.

Moreover, the process of critique within Fairclough’s CDA is foundationally concerned with ideology: “the representation of ‘the world’ from the perspective of a particular interest” (Fairclough, 2013b, p. 46). In this case, the interests of COSE as a

non-government organization advocating for older persons are reflected by its social media posts. Fairclough's model has found application within media and communication research such as such as in speech (Alasiri, 2023); print media (Dewi et al., 2022; Imran & Bowd, 2023); online media (Reynolds, 2018; Lustanas, 2019, Yosawati et al., 2024); and social media content (Linog, 2023, Conte et al., 2024).

Figure 2

Fairclough's Three Dimensional Model



The Fairclough framework is often illustrated in a model of three dimensions, usually represented in boxes, where each box represents an analysis dimension. The model emphasized that each dimension is linked to the other in critical discourse analysis. While each level requires different parameters of analysis, they are interrelated in such a way that “texts can never be understood or analyzed in isolation – they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context (Jorgensen & Philipps, 2002, p. 70).

Dimension 1: Textual Analysis. This stage involves the micro-analysis of the linguistic features of discourse. It covers a number of analytical tools that include grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, text structures and rhetorical devices (Fairclough, 1992; 2015; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). All these elements are selected by the source to convey specific perspectives.

Dimension 2. Discourse Practice Analysis. This stage involves the meso-analysis of communicative practices by focusing on the production and consumption of the text, including who is saying something and what medium is used to communicate. Communicative practices include action and interaction, social relations, the material world, material practices, as well as the rituals, beliefs, attitudes, values, and desires of people and institutions (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999: p. 28). In this interpretation level, the analysis “involves both detailed moment-by-moment explication of how participants produce and interpret the text” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 134). This stage also involves the examination of intertextuality, which refers to the interaction between texts through the use of direct speech or indirect speech (Richardson, 2007).

Dimension 3. Sociocultural Practice Analysis. The second dimension of processing analysis creates a link between the text and the third dimension of “sociocultural practice”. In this stage, the relation between the two dimensions and macro social processes are illuminated and is defined as an overall order of discourse. The bigger picture that hides in discourses is unveiled in this domain where the researcher explains the socio-cultural contexts and criticizes the embedded ideological practices and hegemonic processes.

Data Collection Procedures

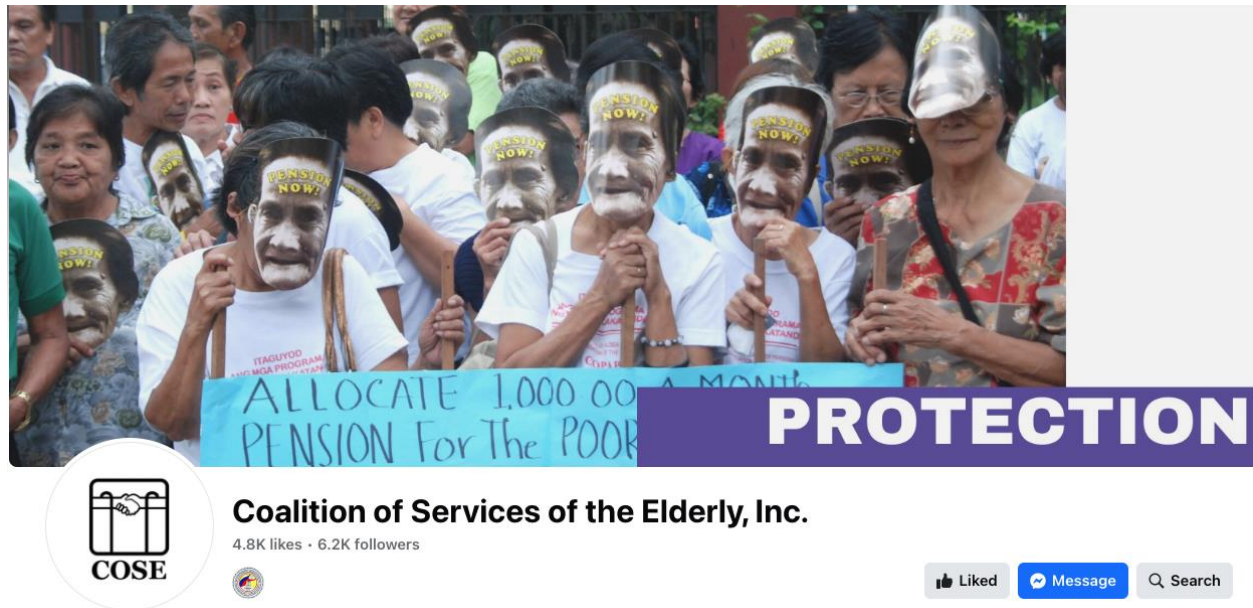
There is no prescribed method in collecting data for critical social research (Harvey, 2022) as critical researchers “attempt to reveal the sociohistorical specificity of knowledge and to shed light on how particular knowledges reproduce structural relations of inequality and oppression” (Muncie, 2006, p.51).

This perspective is also true with CDA, which has no singular method for data collection (Sengul, 2019; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The methodological flexibility of CDA, therefore, necessitates a transparent, systematic procedure. For this study, I analyzed captions, which are text descriptions that accompany a video or photo of a Facebook post. A post is written by a user and appears on another Facebook timeline (Franz et al., 2019). A typical post may contain captions, links, hashtags, @ mentions, emojis, video, or photo.

Specifically, I analyzed captions from the Facebook page owned and administered by the Coalition of Services for the Elderly (COSE), a non-government organization founded by Edward Gerlock and has been advocating well-being, social inclusion and policy for Filipino older persons since 1989. Created in August 16, 2012, the page has 6,200 followers and 4,800 likes as of May 3, 2025. A screenshot of the page’s Facebook cover is shown below. The page can be accessed at <https://www.facebook.com/COSEincPH/>

Figure 3

COSE's Facebook page



Theoretical Sampling

Critical discourse analysis does not follow highly-structured guidelines for data collecting and sampling procedures and some authors do not even mention sampling,' (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 27) in their research. It is also common for CDA analysts to involve "only small number of text, even just one or two" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 206) as the goal in critical qualitative inquiry is to interrogate social and class inequalities from the richness of data, as opposed to quantitative research, which prioritizes volume.

According to Wodak & Meyer (2009), as cited in Mullet (2018), data are often theoretically sampled in CDA, and the analyst might single out a text, find indicators of key concepts, categorize concepts, then collect additional texts relevant to those concepts. Following their lead, I used theoretical sampling to select texts that would

help me uncover the power relations, ideologies, and social structures that are embedded in COSE's Facebook captions.

Theoretical sampling, as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) refers to an iterative process of collecting data, and deciding which data to collect next until no additional data can be found to build the theory. Unlike random sampling which aims for representativeness, theoretical sampling involves an iterative process of data collection. While theoretical sampling is central to grounded theory, it can also be applied in CDA for refining analysis and developing a deeper understanding of the Discourses under investigation.

In this study, I initially selected Facebook post from the COSE page based on existing literature on digital ageism and those that appear to contain age-related language, stereotypes, or discriminatory subtexts.

In the initial samples, I noted emerging patterns and themes related to my research question, specifically on how older persons are often portrayed as vulnerable but at the same time active members of society. As I progressed into the analysis, I choose other samples that may challenge, support, or elaborate upon initial findings, allowing for a deeper exploration of the nuances and complexities of digital ageism. The posts at this stage showed older adults in contrasting roles – empowered on one hand while also being dependent on the other. My subsequent sampling from this point on prioritized this initial finding. Similarly, when I discovered a theme that could potentially contribute in the identification of a dominant discourse, my sampling strategy was directed towards finding examples of an emerging theme to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

I moved back and forth between data collection and analysis which allowed me to further develop or challenge my understanding of the discourse or provide evidence for or against my interpretations. I also maintained notes as additional documentation for my analysis. Upon reaching data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Rhami and Khatooni, 2024), I proceeded to formally analyzing the data using Fairclough's framework.

Data Analysis

After selecting samples from COSE's Facebook posts, I further analyzed the data using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of CDA.

In Stage 1 Textual Analysis, I analyzed the captions based on their textual properties. I isolated and examined the Facebook captions and excluded accompanying photos, links, videos, or audio elements. I coded the captions manually based on three categories: vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices. I input the codes in a five-column table made on Microsoft Word - one column each for date of posting, textual analysis for the codes, communicative practices analysis for the categories, social practice for themes, and Discourses of digital ageism.

In the first stage, I identified vocabulary as the words and phrases used in the captions, including how the words or terms signify a representation of an older person or COSE. I also translated some of the captions from Filipino to English. In terms of grammar, I located the use of passive or active voice, tone, and length of the sentence. In terms of rhetorical devices, I specifically coded appeals used (e.g. emotional, logical) and intertextuality or references to previous captions or posts.

In Discourse Practices Analysis, I performed a categorization of the codes from Stage 1. I organized these codes into broader and more meaningful categories. This process involved grouping similar codes together to identify patterns within the data. The results of Stages 1 and 2 provide the answers to my first research question.

In the Sociocultural Practice Analysis, I investigated how the communicative practices articulate the discourse of digital ageism created by COSE on its Facebook page. I labelled these findings as Themes or the dominant Discourses that contain underlying systems of meanings manifested in COSE’s Facebook social media communication. The results of Stage 3 in the analysis provide answers to my second research question.

Table 1

Data Analysis Procedures

Level of Analysis	Dimension	Output
Stage 1 Textual Analysis	<i>Description</i> – focuses on the linguistic features of the text (vocabulary, grammar, rhetorical devices)	Communicative practices “small “d” discourse”
Stage 2 Discourse Practice Analysis	<i>Interpretation</i> – examines the processes of text production, consumption and distribution/circulation	Communicative practices “small “d” discourse”
Stage 3 Sociocultural Practice Analysis	<i>Explanation</i> – analyzes inequality, power and ideology by identifying common patterns (order) or new forms (disorder) of ageism on social media	Discourses on digital ageism “big “D” Discourse”

In making my coding procedure clear, I explicitly addressed areas of tension and contradiction that emerged during analysis. Some posts from the NGO's Facebook page simultaneously promoted inclusion while unintentionally amplifying digital ageism. For example, while captions celebrated older persons as valued members of the community, they occasionally framed them as dependent recipients of care, reinforcing stereotypes of frailty. Rather than forcing these instances into a single code, I allowed overlapping codes, such as *capacity-building* and *benevolent ageism* to co-exist within the same excerpt. This reflexive approach ensured that contradictions were not treated as inconsistencies to be resolved but as analytical insights that reveal how advocacy language can both empower and marginalize at the same time. In doing so, my coding process moved beyond categorization and into interpretation, showing how well-meaning discourse may reproduce socio-cultural narratives of age that limit older persons' agency. The data sets for this study are the Facebook captions of COSE. Table below shows the captions and their date of posting, textual analysis, communicative practices and identified discourse on digital ageism

Table 2

COSE's communicative practices shaping the Discourse of active dependency

DATE OF POSTING	CAPTION	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (small "d" discourse)	DISCOURSES ON DIGITAL AGEISM EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (big "D" Discourse)
March 28, 2025	"13 Mobile Healthcare Workers and 240 Community Health Volunteers were trained in Basic Geriatric Care to enhance their skills in vital signs monitoring, hygiene, bed making, wound care, and communication with older persons and persons with disabilities. This is part of COSE's project in the	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>"Mobile Healthcare Workers" & "Community Health Volunteers":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>stresses the active role and mobilization of healthcare providers.</i> <p>"Basic Geriatric Care":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>specifies the specialized type of health related</i> 	Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support	Discourse of active dependency

	<p>Municipalities of Del Gallego, Minalabac, Pamplona, and Sipocot of Camarines Sur that focuses on providing healthcare services, especially for frail, sick, and bedridden older persons and persons with disabilities.”</p>	<p><i>training for older persons.</i></p> <p>"Vital signs monitoring, hygiene, bed making, wound care, and communication":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>describes practical skills and indicates the extensiveness of the training.</i> <p>"Older persons and persons with disabilities":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>written twice in the post, emphasizes the target beneficiaries</i> <p>"Frail, sick, and bedridden":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>describes the vulnerable and dependent condition of target beneficiaries.</i> <p>"Enhance their skills":</p>		
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		<p>- <i>focuses on the improvement of competency of mobile health workers</i></p> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Passive Voice (“were trained”): Undervalues agency and focuses on the action</p> <p>Tone: Formal, objective and professional, informative</p> <p>Length of sentence: long and complex; conveys detailed information efficiently.</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Emphasizes activity</p> <p>Intertextuality</p> <p>References to past policies or posts, other related information</p>		
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<p>October 26, 2023</p>	<p>“The Geriatric Training for Nurses and Social Workers: Enhancing Elderly Care and Well-being conducted on October 22-26, 2023 in Pambujan, Northern Samar was facilitated by Ms. Fong Hoke Hiong, Assistant Director, Nursing, Tsao Foundation-Singapore and attended by representatives of the Provincial Health Office and Municipal Health Office of different municipalities of Northern Samar.</p> <p>The training aims to enhance healthcare professionals' awareness, understanding, and skills on</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Geriatric training, elderly care, normal ageing, older persons-centered social protection program”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>indicates specialized nature of the training and the project</i> <p>“Enhancing, well-being”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>frames the training positively suggesting its beneficial impact</i> <p>“support of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Caritas Germany”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signifies international support and partnership</i> 	<p>Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support</p>	<p>Discourse of active dependency</p>
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	<p>normal ageing and how to care for older persons with different health issues.</p> <p>This training is part of the project “Older Persons-Centered Social Protection Program in Northern Samar, Philippines” implemented by COSE through the support of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Caritas Germany.”</p>	<p>Grammar</p> <p>Passive voice (attended by, was facilitated by)</p> <p>Tone: formal, informative</p> <p>Length of sentence/s: long declarative sentences</p> <p>Intertextuality</p> <p>Refers to regular collaborators</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Emphasizes importance of training (written three times in the caption) and its purpose by mentioning authority (Ms Fong Hoke Hiong) and partner organizations</p>		
March 24, 2022	24 March 2022: Facilitation and Documentation Training for Presidents and Secretaries of all	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Facilitation and Documentation Training for Presidents and Secretaries of all</p>	Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support	Discourse of active dependency

	<p>barangays of Mondragon.</p> <p>This training aims to enhance leaders' communication skills, especially in the facilitation of meetings and preparing reports.</p> <p>This activity is under the project "Older Person-Centered Social Protection Program in Northern Samar, Philippines" of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. which is being supported by Caritas Germany and with funding from the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development.</p>	<p>barangays of Mondragon".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>indicates specific nature of and the participants in the training</i> <p>"This training aims to enhance leaders' communication skills, especially in the facilitation of meetings and preparing reports."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes skill-building and technical competencies</i> <p>"supported by Caritas Germany and with funding from the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signifies international support and partnership</i> 		
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		<p>Grammar</p> <p>Predominantly active voice (This training aims..)</p> <p>Tone: formal, informative</p> <p>Length of sentence/s: Short concise sentences</p> <p>Intertextuality</p> <p>Refers to regular collaborators</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Emphasizes the benefit of the training</p> <p>Builds on credibility through referencing international funders</p>		
February 27, 2018	Older women of Barangays Zone 1 and Caridad Ibaba in Atimonan,	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Older women of Barangays Zone 1 and</p>	Capacitating older persons through	Discourse of active dependency

	<p>Quezon province show off their finished product in the recently conducted training on resilient livelihood as part of the Project AA DRR-CCA.</p>	<p>Caridad Ibaba in Atimonan, Quezon province”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>specifies older persons as actors or beneficiaries of the training</i> <p>“show off their finished product in the recently conducted training on resilient livelihood”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>adds a celebratory touch to the accomplishment of the participants; reflects adaptability and self-sufficiency</i> <p>“as part of the Project AA DRR-CCA”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signals that the training is a composite of a larger undertaking</i> 	<p>multi-sectoral and international support</p>	
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		<p>Grammar</p> <p>Predominantly active voice (Older women show off their....)</p> <p>Tone: informative with celebratory touch</p> <p>Length of sentence/s: One compound sentence</p> <p>Intertextuality</p> <p>Refers to a larger framework (AA-DRR-CCA)</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Invokes pathos by emphasizing the accomplishment of older women</p> <p>Builds on credibility through referencing international funders</p>		
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<p>August 16,2012</p>	<p>COSE and its partner Confederation of Older person association of the Philippines started to do relief for 40,000 older people affected by recent flood in Metro Manila and nearby regions. Thanks for older people and friends who partake in this action.</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“COSE and its partners Confederation of Older person association of the Philippines”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signifies collaboration between allied organizations</i> <p>“do relief,” “affected,”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>implies that there are recipients of help</i> <p>“Older people and friends who partake in this action”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>suggests that older people are active in helping others</i> 	<p>Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support</p>	<p>Discourse of active dependency</p>
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		<p>Active voice: Dominantly uses active voice</p> <p>COSE and its partner... started to do relief” is active, emphasizing agency and action.</p> <p>“Thanks for older people and friends who partake...” is also active, showing gratitude.</p> <p>Tone: grateful and informative</p> <p>Length of sentence/s: short and uneven</p> <p>Intertextuality: Implicit reference to crisis events</p> <p>Rhetorical devices: Enumeration of facts, gratitude appeal, emotive trigger</p>		
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The table 3 below shows the captions and their date of posting, textual analysis, communicative practices and identified discourse on digital ageism.

Table 3

COSE's communicative practices shaping the Discourse on digital deficiency

DATE OF POSTING	CAPTION	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS Code	COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (small “d” discourse)	DISCOURSES ON DIGITAL AGEISM EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (big “D” Discourse)
March 18, 2024	Kailan masasabi na Digital Literate ang isang indibidwal? At bakit mahalaga na digitally literate ang bawat indibidwal, kabilang na sina Lolo at Lola? Balikan natin ang naging talakayan	Vocabulary "Digital Literate/digitally literate": <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>highlights the need for older persons to be digitally skilled</i> 	Highlighting the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate	Discourse of digital deficiency

	<p>tungkol sa digital literacy kasama sina Ms. Koree Monteloyola-Cañizares ng Techie Senior Citizens and Retirees PH at dalawa pang nakatatatanda...</p>	<p>“Lolo at Lola (Grandfather and Grandmother)”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>respectful terms accorded to older persons</i> <p>“Kailan (When)”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes time and inquiry</i> <p>“mahalaga (important):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signals relevancy of the skill</i> <p>“Techie Senior Citizens and Retirees PH”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>identifies organization that advocates digital skills of older persons</i> <p>Grammar:</p> <p>Active and passive voices</p> <p>Tone: inquisitive, collaborative</p> <p>Length of sentence: long</p>		
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		<p>Intertextuality: reference to a post/webinar held last March 20,2023</p> <p>Rhetorical devices:</p> <p>Uses inclusive language</p> <p>Uses direct questions</p> <p>Uses call to action</p> <p>Emphasizes relevance of digital literacy for older persons</p>		
February 11, 2024	<p>AI vs YOU: How to be #CyberSmart in navigating the AI world</p> <p>TIP: AI IS A TOOL; YOU'RE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT! While AI recommendations can be helpful, never lose sight of your own judgment when</p>	<p>Vocabulary:</p> <p>AI vs YOU: How to be #CyberSmart in navigating the AI world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Implies a digital skill that can and should be learned</i> <p>“AI, #CyberSmart, digital world, #SaferInternetDay”:</p>	<p>Highlighting the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate</p> <p>Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support</p>	Discourse of digital deficiency

	<p>navigating the digital world.</p> <p>Join PLDT, Smart, and COSE in promoting <u>#SaferInternetDay!</u> <u>#SID2024</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>uses technology related words</i> <p>TIP: AI IS A TOOL; YOU'RE IN THE DRIVE'S SEAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>describes the power of users</i> <p>"While AI recommendations can be helpful":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>acknowledges the impact of AI</i> <p>"never lose sight of your own judgment when navigating the digital world":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes the need to be mindful in using AI</i> <p>"Join PLDT, Smart, and COSE in promoting #SaferInternetDay":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>encourages participation and implies collaboration between organizations</i> 		
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		<p>Grammar</p> <p>Active and passive voices</p> <p>Tone: authoritative and instructive</p> <p>Length of sentence: short with hashtags</p> <p>Rhetorical devices</p> <p>Directly addresses the reader</p> <p>Uses metaphor, hashtags</p> <p>Uses call to action</p>		
May 31, 2019	Connecting the older persons to the digital world: COSE organized a Basic Computer and Social Media Training for the Older People in some areas in Leyte Province from April to May 2019 as part of the Strengthening Older Persons	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>"Connecting the older persons to the digital world":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>positions older persons as needing connection, implying a potential initial disconnection.</i> 	<p>Highlighting the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate</p> <p>Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support</p>	Discourse of digital deficiency

	<p>Organizations and Federations Project supported by Misereor.</p> <p>Erlinda Tondo, 74 years old of Barangay Malagikay, Municipality of Tanauan, Leyte was one of the participants in the said training.</p> <p>"First time ko pong nakahawak ng computer at naka gamit ng Facebook. May apat akong mga anak at tatlo sa kanila ay nasa Manila na naninirahan kasama ng mga pamilya nila. Sa tulong ng training, nalaman ko nang paano gumamit ng Facebook at nakita ko yung pictures ng mga</p>	<p>"Organized a Basic Computer and Social Media Training":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>highlights COSE's active role in facilitating this connection. The term "basic" might suggest a starting point due to a perceived lack of prior knowledge.</i> <p>"Strengthening Older Persons Organizations and Federations Project":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>frames the training within a larger project, suggesting a broader goal of empowerment.</i> <p>"supported by Misereor"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>indicates support from a German organization</i> 		
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	<p>apo ko at kahit yung matagal ng pictures na kasama ako ay nasa facebook pa rin pala at habang titinitingnan ko yung mga pictures nila ay napaluha ako sa kasiyahan na nakikita ko na yung mga anak at apo ko kahit naman lang sa Facebook ay feeling ko na ngayon na mas napalapit na sila saakin.”</p> <p>(This is my first time to use a computer and create an account in Facebook. I have four children and three of them are already living in Metro Manila with their own families. Through</p>	<p>"First time to use a computer and create an account in Facebook":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes the novelty of the experience for the individual, highlighting a digital divide.</i> <p>"Learn how to use Facebook and see photos of my grandchildren":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>specifies the tangible benefits of the training, focusing on family connection.</i> <p>"Teary-eyed...out of happiness":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>adds a personal and positive dimension to the narrative.</i> <p>"Felt closer to them through this":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>reinforces the idea that digital connection bridges geographical distance.</i> 		
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	<p>this training, I was able to learn how to use Facebook and see photos of my grandchildren. I also saw uploaded old pictures where I am in on Facebook. I got teary-eyed while looking at those pictures out of happiness because I got to see my children and grandchildren even just here on Facebook. I felt closer to them through this).</p>	<p>Grammar</p> <p>Uses Active and Passive Voice:</p> <p>Active: "COSE organized a training..." (COSE is the actor) Active: "I was able to learn..." (The individual is the actor) Passive: "older people affected"</p> <p>Tone: Informative, programmatic, personal, and emotional</p> <p>Length of Sentences: long</p> <p>Rhetorical Device</p> <p>Uses emotional appeal</p>		
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The table 4 below shows captions and their date of posting, textual analysis, communicative practices and identified discourse on digital ageism.

Table 4

COSE's communicative practices shaping the Discourse of age-based exceptionalism

DATE OF POSTING	CAPTION	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS Code	COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (small “d” discourse)	DISCOURSES ON DIGITAL AGEISM EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (big “D” Discourse)
October 1, 2024	<p>“Kilalanin natin si Gng. Cristina C. Prado o Nanay Esting, isa sa 2024 Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda Awardees.</p> <p>Sa loob ng 35 taon, pinamunuan at painangunahan niya ang iba’t ibang gawain</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>categorizes older persons and implies exceptionality.</i> 	<p>Celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations</p>	<p>Discourse of age-based exceptionalism</p>

	<p>ng Medalya Milagrosa Association. Binuo niya ang benepisyong “Medical Assistance” at “Death Aid” para sa mga miyembro.</p> <p>Ang programa ay sampung taon nang nag-aabot ng medical assistance at death aid sa mga miyembro. Pasasalamat, pagpupugay at pagkilala kay Nanay Esting at sa lahat ng 2024 SUN Awardees!”</p> <p>("Let's get to know Mrs. Cristina C. Prado or Nanay Esting, one of the 2024 Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees.</p> <p>For 35 years, she has led and spearheaded the various activities of the Medalya Milagrosa Association. She established the</p>	<p>“For 35 years”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes the duration of service, highlights longevity and dedication.</i> <p>"Led and spearheaded”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>denotes initiative and leadership.</i> <p>“Medical Assistance” and “Death Aid”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>refers to specific benefits.</i> <p>"Let's get to know”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>invites the reader to learn about the awardee.</i> <p>"Nanay Esting”:</p>		
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	<p>“Medical Assistance” and “Death Aid” benefits for the members.</p> <p>The program has been providing medical assistance and death aid to its members for ten years.</p> <p>Gratitude, honor, and recognition to Nanay Esting and all the 2024 SUN Awardees!")</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signifies an affectionate term</i> <p>"Gratitude, honor, and recognition":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>expresses appreciation and respect.</i> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Active Voice: (e.g she has led and spearheaded)</p> <p>Tone: respectful, celebratory, and appreciative.</p> <p>Length of Sentences: short to moderately long</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Uses enumeration epithet, and repetition</p>		
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<p>September 30, 2024</p>	<p>“Kilalanin natin si Gng. Alicia La Torre o Lola Alice, isa sa 2024 Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda Awardees. Sa edad na 81, patuloy si Lola Alice sa pangunguna sa iba't ibang gawain ng programang PUSO o Pure and Ubiquitous Senior’s Optimistic na sumasalamin sa kanyang pagmamahal para sa mga kapwa nakatatanda at mga kabataan sa komunidad. Pasasalamat, pagpupugay at pagkilala kay Lola Alice at sa lahat ng 2024 SUN Awardees!</p> <p>("Let's get to know Mrs. Alicia La Torre or Lola Alice, one of the 2024 Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees.</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Outstanding Older Persons Awardees”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>categorizes older persons with specific sets of achievements</i> <p>"At the age of 81”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes age as part of the recognition</i> <p>"Lola Alice continues to lead”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>stresses sustained action and agency.</i> <p>"Outstanding”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>conveys exceptional achievement.</i> 	<p>Celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations</p>	<p>Discourse of age-based exceptionalism</p>
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	<p>At the age of 81, Lola Alice continues to lead various activities of the PUSO or Pure and Ubiquitous Senior's Optimistic program, which reflects her love for her fellow older persons and the youth in the community.</p> <p>Gratitude, honor, and recognition to Lola Alice and all the 2024 SUN Awardees!")</p>	<p>"Love for her fellow older persons and the youth":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>emphasizes care and community involvement</i> <p>"Gratitude, honor, and recognition":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Formal expressions of appreciation and acknowledgment.</i> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Uses the Active Voice: (e.g. "Lola Alice continues to lead":</p> <p>Tone: celebratory and positive</p> <p>Length of Sentences: Short to long</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices Emphasizes age</p>		
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<p>September 30, 2023</p>	<p>“Kilalanin natin si Gng. Amie Monredondo o Nang Amie, isa sa 2023 Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda Awardees. Lingkod bayan.</p> <p>Organic agriculture, small-scale entrepreneurship, and women’s rights advocate.</p> <p>Pasasalamat, pagpupugay at pagkilala kay Nang Amie at sa lahat ng 2023 SUN Awardees!”</p> <p>(“Let’s get to know Mrs. Amie Monredondo or Nang Amie, one of the 2023 Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees. Public servant.</p> <p>Advocate of organic agriculture, small-</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“One of the 2023 Ten Outstanding Older Persons”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>implies that awardees belongs to a set of older person achievers</i> <p>“Advocate of organic agriculture, small-scale entrepreneurship, and women’s right”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signals social merit and moral uprightness</i> <p>“Nang”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>stresses respect for older persons; cultural layer of affection</i> 	<p>Celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations</p>	<p>Discourse of age-based exceptionalism</p>
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	<p>scale entrepreneurship, and women's rights.</p> <p>Gratitude, honor, and recognition to Nang Amie and all the 2023 SUN Awardees!")</p>	<p>Grammar</p> <p>Uses the active voice (e.g. advocate of ..)</p> <p>Tone: respectful, celebratory</p> <p>Length of sentences: short, punchy phrases</p> <p>Rhetorical devices</p> <p>Uses enumeration epithet, and repetition</p>		
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The table 5 below shows the captions and their date of posting, textual analysis, communicative practices and identified discourse on digital ageism.

Table 5

COSE's communicative practices shaping the Discourse of automated empathy

DATE OF POSTING	CAPTION	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS Code	COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (small “d” discourse)	DISCOURSES ON DIGITAL AGEISM EMBEDDED IN THE COMMUNICATIVE PRACTICE (big “D” Discourse)
May 11, 2025	Gawing special ang Mother's Day! Iparamdam ang pagmamahal at pasasalamat sa ating mga Nanay at Lola. Sa pamamagitan ng pag-donate ng ating LalaPoints, masusuportahan natin ang mga	Vocabulary “Let’s show love and gratitude to our mothers and grandmothers”: - <i>highlights respect for older persons</i>	Facilitating technology mediation of care	Discourse of automated empathy

	<p>programa at gawain ng Coalition of Services of the Services of the Elderly, Inc. para sa nakatatandang Pilipino.</p> <p>(Make Mother's Day special! Let's show love and gratitude to our mothers and grandmothers. By donating our LalaPoints, we can support the programs and activities of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. for older Filipinos)</p> <p>Join Rewards bit.ly/Join-Lalamove-Rewards Donate here</p> <p>www.lalamove.com/en-ph/eldercare-on-the-move</p>	<p>“By donating our LalaPoints, we can support the programs and activities of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. for older Filipinos, “Join rewards, donate here”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>uses digital platform to operationalize care</i> <p>“From Lalamove and COSE, Happy Mother’s Day”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>indicates appreciation and gratitude</i> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Active and Passive Voices: (Join Lalamove’s..)</p> <p>Tone: encouraging, persuasive, promotional</p>		
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	<p>Mula sa Lalamove at sa COSE, Happy Mother's Day po</p> <p>From Lalamove and COSE, Happy Mother's Day!</p>	<p>Length of Sentences: short and directive</p> <p>Intertextuality: references previous promo posts</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Uses imperative words; call to action, emotional appeal, repetition</p>		
<p>May 2, 2025</p>	<p>"Makiisa sa mahalagang kampanya ng Lalamove na makapag-abot ng tulong sa nakatatandang Pilipino lalo't higit sa mga nangangailangan. Ang bawat LalaPoints ay mahalaga!</p> <p>480 LalaPoints = ₱20</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>"Join Lalamove's important campaign to extend help to older Filipinos, especially those in need.":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signals the need to use a digital app to help older persons</i> <p>"help", "join here, donate here", "donate here":</p>	<p>Facilitating technology mediation of care</p>	<p>Discourse of automated empathy</p>

	<p>1,230 LalaPoints = ₱50</p> <p>Not a Rewards member yet? Join here bit.ly/Join-Lalamove-Rewards Donate here www.lalamove.com/en-ph/eldercare-on-the-move Help Older Persons Help Themselves!"</p> <p>("Join Lalamove's important campaign to extend help to older Filipinos, especially those in need.</p> <p>Every LalaPoint counts! 👉 480 LalaPoints = ₱20 👉 1,230 LalaPoints = ₱50 Not a Rewards member yet? Join here: bit.ly/Join-Lalamove-Rewards Donate here: www.lalamove.com/e</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>call to action words that invite readers to share resources</i> <p>"Every LalaPoints counts" and "Rewards member"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>introduces branded, digital-economic vocabulary rooted in app-based consumerism.</i> <p>"Not a Rewards member yet?":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Assumes that readers of the caption are regular users of online app</i> <p>"Help Older Persons Help Themselves":</p>		
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	<p>n-ph/eldercare-on-the-move</p> <p>Help Older Persons Help Themselves!)</p>	<p>- <i>Stresses the notion that older persons need assistance</i></p> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Active Voice: (Join Lalamove's..)</p> <p>Tone: encouraging and promotional Length of Sentences: short and directive</p> <p>Intertextuality: references previous promo posts</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices</p> <p>Uses repetition (the word help used 3x); call to action, appeal to empathy, numbers</p>		
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<p>April 27, 2025</p>	<p>LET'S MOVE with purpose and show CARE using our LalaPoints. Donate your earned LalaPoints today to support lolos and lolas from over 1,000 communities through Coalition of Services of the Elderly Inc. (COSE).</p> <p>Not a Rewards member yet? Join here & donate here bit.ly/Join-Lalamove-Rewards Learn more www.lalamove.com/en-ph/eldercare-on-the-move</p>	<p>Vocabulary</p> <p>“Move with purpose and show care, support lolos and lolas”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>uses call to action words that are emotionally loaded</i> <p>“LalaPoints”, “Rewards member”, and “donate”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>signifies care through digital means</i> <p>Grammar</p> <p>Active Voice: “Donate your earned</p> <p>LalaPoints” and “Join here.”</p> <p>Tone: uplifting and promotional</p>	<p>Facilitating technology mediation of care</p>	<p>Discourse of automated empathy</p>
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		<p>Length of Sentences: short and directive</p> <p>Rhetorical Devices Uses repetition, capitalization for emphasis, emotional appeal and reward</p>		
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Ethical Consideration

This study did not involve any human participants. In light of the dissertation's non-intrusive nature, I maintained ethical awareness to help promote a more equitable and inclusive digital landscape. The Facebook captions compiled and utilized for this analysis were extracted from public domains, i.e. COSE's official public pages, and are publicly posted. Thus, given the aforementioned characteristics of this study and following the principle of fair use, I did not seek permission from COSE. Moreover, CDA acknowledges that researchers are not neutral observers (Armayanti, 2019) and their biases and values influence the analysis (Khan & MacEachen, 2021 as cited in Slemon, 2025). Therefore, positionality and transparency about ethical considerations are essential for maintaining credibility. I acknowledge that my position in this research may have an impact on how I understand and interpret the phenomenon of digital ageism. Thus, I strived to maintain objectivity and reflexivity throughout the research process.

Ultimately, my ethical sensibility is rooted in a deep commitment to social justice. I recognize that digital ageism is not merely an academic issue but a real-world problem with tangible consequences for individuals and communities. This study requires ongoing self-reflection, critical engagement with my own biases, and a willingness to listen to and learn from the experiences of others. By prioritizing ethical considerations in this project, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced and impactful understanding of digital ageism as constructed by a non-government organization for older persons and its implications for older adults in the digital age.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Civil society organizations' communicative practices of digital ageism

COSE, acting as a civil society group, and its communicative practices of digital ageism refer to the linguistic and structural devices that deliver, reinforce, or negotiate Discourses of digital ageism. These practices are drawn from the textual and discourse practice analyses of COSE's Facebook captions.

Capacitating older persons through multi-sectoral and international support

COSE uses its Facebook page as a communicative space where notions of empowerment and collective support are circulated. The textual analysis reveals elements that enact capacity building grounded in social support from multiple organizations. This positioning is found in the analyzed captions, including COSE's first-ever Facebook post:

COSE and its partner Confederation of Older person association of the Philippines started to do relief for 40,000 older people affected by recent flood in Metro Manila and nearby regions. Thanks for older people and friends who partake in this action. (Coalition for the Services of the Elderly, n.d.)

The use of words such as “*relief*” and “*affected*” in COSE's captions suggested actions and conditions as responses to providing aid, framing older person as in need. The

phrase “*older persons*” also categorizes seniors as a homogenous group with shared needs and characteristics. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of supporters, including older people, indicates participation and support from various stakeholders.

Alongside these narratives of structural vulnerability, COSE actively shapes the discourse of agency by showcasing the diverse roles older adults play in their communities. This balancing of opposite discourse supports the studies of Careless (2015) and Sanchez-Valle (2018) that underlined the use of social media to reclaim voice and agency and Koft’s (2025) assertion that organizations using digital platforms can inevitably produce contrasting advocacy narratives.

The use of positive lexical choices, such as “*geriatric training*”, “*normal ageing*”, and “*older-persons social protection program*”, is centered when describing programs involving older persons, also reveals this practice. Grammatically, the active and passive voices are used in the captions to portray older persons as dependent in their own lives. For instance, describing how “*older women show off their finished product*” positions older persons as active contributors to public discourse, rather than passive recipients of aid. This grammatical choice reinforces the theme of active engagement. On the other hand, captions describing how trainings “were attended by or facilitated by” signal dependency position. By presenting the subject on their Facebook caption as both doer and receiver of an action, COSE juxtaposes and balances discourses of helplessness and strength, creating a nuanced portrayal of aging on social media. This balanced discourse enables older persons to be seen not only as recipients of care, but also as agents of change, capable of transforming their conditions and advocating for themselves and others.

The NGO's various trainings and workshops are often described in the captions as interventions that are mediated by other social agents who share their technical expertise, financial or technological resources. This implies that the empowerment of older persons does not happen in isolation but is instead embedded in a network of support that includes allied organizations (e.g., Techie Seniors Citizen and Retirees Ph), local government (e.g. Municipality of Tanauan, Leyte;), national agency (e.g. National Commission for Senior Citizens) foreign states (e.g. Federal Republic of Germany) private sector (e.g. PLDT Smart Telecom), and international development partners (e.g. Help Age International, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Caritas Germany). The mentioning of these multiple partners is central to how COSE communicatively constructs capacity building for older persons, not simply as an internal community effort but as a collaborative, multi-level process made possible through solidarity and shared responsibility.

Some of the captions that indicate the plurality of support include:

“This training is part of the project “Older Persons-Centered Social Protection Program in Northern Samar, Philippines” implemented by COSE through the support of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Caritas Germany.”

“This is part of COSE's project in the Municipalities of Del Gallego, Minalabac, Pamplona, and Sipocot of Camarines Sur that focuses on providing healthcare

services, especially for frail, sick, and bedridden older persons and persons with disabilities.”

These captions achieve several communicative functions by acknowledging inter-organizational collaborations that position COSE within a broader ecosystem of stakeholders. The vocabulary also highlights COSE’s institutional support from these agencies, communicatively linking public resources to grassroots empowerment. These captions do more than announce an event; they construct a causal relationship between structural support and collective outcomes. Finally, COSE employs its Facebook captions to increase visibility of partnership-based advocacy. It not only publicizes its services but also makes visible the advocacy networks that make these services possible.

Highlighting the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate

Studies claim that older persons are not absolutely technophobic because of their increasing digital engagements (Merkel et. al., 2016; Federal Government of Germany, 2020; Ramirez-Correa et al., 2018). COSE supports this argument by using its Facebook captions to underline the need for older persons to be digitally competent.

Textual analysis of COSE’s Facebook captions promoting technology training for seniors often reveals this communicative practice. Some of the captions emphasizing the relevance of training seniors to be digitally literate include:

“Kailan masasabi na Digital Literate ang isang indibidwal? At bakit mahalaga na digitally literate ang bawat indibidwal, kabilang na sina Lolo at Lola? (When can an individual be said as digitally literate? And why is it important for every individual, including grandparents, to be digitally literate?)”

“How to be #CyberSmart in navigating the AI world”. TIP: AI IS A TOOL; YOU'RE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT! While AI recommendations can be helpful, never lose sight of your own judgment when navigating the digital world.

The language used in the captions emphasizes older person's limited literacy in current and evolving forms of digital technology. An element of a caption that highlights the social media experience of an older person "*This is my first time to use a computer and create an account in Facebook*" positions older persons as beginners in the digital world. This emphasis on the newness of technology for older individuals implies a need for facilitator to approach limited digital literacy. The use of phrases such as "*never lose sight of your own judgment when navigating the digital world*" further stresses the need to be mindful in using more advanced technology, including artificial intelligence.

This communicative practice relates to COSE's framing capacity building as a collective effort by implying the idea that older persons have limited digital skills and navigating such skills can be learned through the intervention of other people or groups. Elements of COSE's Facebook captions that support the interdependency on external groups include:

“Join PLDT, Smart, and COSE in promoting #SaferInternetDay! #SID2024”

“COSE organized a Basic Computer and Social Media Training for the Older People in some areas in Leyte Province from April to May 2019, as part of the Strengthening Older Persons Organizations and Federations Project supported by Misereor (a German organization).

Grammatically, this practice often employs both active and passive voices when describing an older person’s deficiency in technological knowledge and skills. For example, statements like *“I was able to learn Facebook”* or *“This is my first time using a computer”* frame them as late adopters of digital tools, rather than early consumers of technological products. The structure of technology training programs, as used in the caption for seniors, also reflects this discourse. The phrase *“basic computer skills”* assumes a complete lack of prior knowledge, emphasizing the idea that older people require introductory and simplified instructions. The length of sentences is usually short, creating an impression that the subject is basic or requires simplification. It might imply that the audiences of the Facebook captions need information presented in a simplified, even rudimentary way. It also reinforces the idea that older persons have limited cognitive abilities when it comes to digital technology.

The use of an informative tone suggests that the posts are simply factual matter and may normalize the idea that older people and technology are inherently separate or that there is a natural deficiency. The use of an instructive tone can reinforce the idea that older people can only handle basic computing tasks. It can also mean that other individuals or groups are the experts, and older people are students. COSE’s captions

carry emotional appeals, implying that the joy or relief experienced by older persons after receiving digital training or communicating through Facebook can further solidify the narrative of initial deficiency.

Celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations

At the textual level, this communicative practice is often marked by vocabulary that emphasizes the age of COSE's Ten Outstanding Seniors awardees or the length of their diverse services alongside their accomplishments.

Captions that perform this communicative practice include:

"Let's get to know Mrs. Alicia La Torre, or Lola Alice, one of the 2024 Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees. At the age of 81, Lola Alice continues to lead various activities of the PUSO or Pure and Ubiquitous Senior's Optimistic program, which reflects her love for her fellow older persons and the youth in the community.

"Let's get to know Mrs. Amie Monredondo or Nang Amie, one of the 2023 Ten Outstanding Older Persons Awardees. Public servant."

"For 35 years, she has led and spearheaded the various activities of the Medalya Milagrosa Association."

The use of celebratory and honorific words such as “*outstanding*”, “*achievement*”, “*recognition*”, “*Nang*”, and “*Lola Alice*” highlights that the awards are both expressions of social recognition and cultural affection. Specific linguistic framing of age-related words such as “*at the age of 81*” and “*for 35 years*”, indicates that age is a relevant, and perhaps a surprising factor in the context of achievement. This temporal positioning can challenge social expectations that age is not the sole factor in attaining productivity and contributing meaningfully to social good.

The NGO’s aim here is to celebrate older persons’ participation in community service, countering stereotypes that older persons are passive or inactive. This frames older adults’ activity as *surprising*, unintentionally “othering” them. The infantilizing nickname “Lola” (grandmother) may be culturally affectionate, but in advocacy contexts, it can reduce her identity to her familial role, which may not be how she wants to be represented publicly.

The nuance is missing because the post could celebrate her participation without framing it as an exception to a presumed decline. The focus could shift from overcoming age to exemplifying community involvement and personal commitment, regardless of age.

Grammatically, COSE Facebook captions use active voice when describing the awardee’s remarkable contributions, showcasing their agency and sustained actions. The use of the active voice portrays the awardees as agents of change rather than passive recipients. The respectful, celebratory, and positive tone in the captions position older persons as a group that deserved to be valorized. The sentences in the analyzed captions are also simple and short making them more “*snackable*” for a Facebook

audience. The structure allows for quick reading and emphasizes key information, suitable for social media's scrolling format.

The structure of these Facebook posts follows a template where the awardees are first named, their accomplishments are identified, and then their current age or the timeframe within which these achievements were realized. This narrative structure reinforces the idea that accomplishments are significant precisely because they satisfy parameters that occur in "*late*" in life.

Using their Facebook page, a communicative analysis of these captions reveals that COSE produces these posts in celebration of exceptional older persons. However, the emphasis on "*late-life*" success also caters to a societal and media fascination with unique cases, potentially overshadowing the everyday contributions of senior citizens. The captions invite social media audiences to view aging as a period of continued potential and contribution. While the textual and communicative analysis show that the captions are positive in intention and tone, they inadvertently reinforces a performance-based model of aging where conditional valuing in old age is driven by measurable accomplishments. The awardees and the work that they produced become visible because they break the stereotypes – but in doing so – the stereotype that older people are less capable or valuable is left intact, merely bypassed by exceptionalism.

Facilitating technology mediation of care

COSE's Facebook captions, particularly those involving its partnership with the Lalamove delivery app, are an exclusionary communicative practice that facilitates care exclusively through digital tools.

For instance, the use of the word *“help”* three times in the caption below amplifies digitally driven charity where an image of older persons is primarily defined by their problems and need for assistance:

“Join Lalamove’s important campaign to extend help to older Filipinos, especially those in need...“Help Older Persons Help Themselves”

The use of phrases such as *“join here”* or *“donate here”* indicates that the only access to operationalize assistance is through digital means – a method that effectively leaves out those who have limited or no access to resource-sharing platforms. The posts further assume that all potential donors use the app regularly, have access to a smartphone or computer, and are knowledgeable about digital transactions. The phrase *“every LalaPoint counts”* also indicates that the currency of care is digital and may alienate older persons who are unfamiliar with gamified reward systems. This further solidifies a perception that help must come through digital systems, sidelining those who prefer or rely on face-to-face, community-based giving. The captions do not mention alternative donation schemes such as cash, in-kind, or in-person giving, which signifies an unintentional bias toward younger, app-literate users.

The structure of COSE's captions under this practice follows a pattern of seeking support from the public by using specific and potentially discriminatory mechanism for action such as the use of digital-only access to donation, dates/numbers and links for donation. This can create a simplified and potentially disempowering narrative arc as it outlines a predictive style of communicating or soliciting help. Grammatical choices

further contribute to this discourse. COSE content frequently employs active voices when encouraging its Facebook audience to donate to older persons. While it implies agency, the use of action-oriented voice intended for donors highlights the passive role of older persons as beneficiaries of contributions.

The dominant tones used are encouraging and promotional which integrate charity with digital activity. There is also a sense of urgency and moral responsibility embedded in the phrases used, such as *“help older persons help themselves”* and *“let’s show love and gratitude to mothers and grandmothers”*. In these captions, older persons are used as emotional leverage to promote user engagement and generate support. The length of the sentences in the posts is short and direct, which are common features of social media posts that prioritize fast reading. The vocabulary in this practice repeatedly uses call to action and appeal to empathy to leverage emotional and behavioral engagement. This practice reveals that COSE utilized its Facebook captions to show that older persons are visible, but only as recipients of care. For instance, the Mother’s Day post below suggests the platformization of resource sharing:

Gawing special ang Mother's Day! Iparamdam ang pagmamahal at pasasalamat sa ating mga Nanay at Lola. Sa pamamagitan ng pag-donate ng ating LalaPoints, masusuportahan natin ang mga programa at gawain ng Coalition of Services of the Services of the Elderly, Inc. para sa nakatatandang Pilipino.

(Make Mother's Day special! Let’s show love and gratitude to our mothers and grandmothers. By donating our LalaPoints, we can support the programs and

activities of the Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. for Older Filipinos)

The posts are directed to the public, implicitly identifying donors as tech-literate, younger users who are more knowledgeable in navigating digital loyalty programs. There are no suppositions in the posts that seniors can and would interact with the platform, reinforcing the stereotype that they are technologically deficient or irrelevant in digital spaces. This implicit discrimination further stresses the binary generational gap, where the young users are active digital citizens and the old are passive and in need. Although not explicitly ageist, this framing reinforces hierarchies in the digital sphere.

Discourses on digital ageism

A closer analysis of COSE's Facebook captions reveals that its communicative practices are structured by underlying Discourses that actively shape digital ageism, rather than functioning as neutral acts of support and representation. The practices reveal four dominant Discourses on digital ageism that are shaped and being shaped by the NGO's communicative practices and reflect broader socio-cultural practices.

Discourse of active dependency

Underlying COSE's communicative practice of capacitating seniors through the support of local and international groups is the Discourse of active dependency where older persons are represented as dependent on aid and institutional support but simultaneously depicted as active participants in navigating that dependency. Rather than presenting dependency as passive or disempowering, COSE reconfigures it as a

space for engagement, collaboration, and voice. This communicative practice illuminates the idea that dependency is not denied but can be reframed as productive and participatory – further underlining the duality of agency and dependency.

The linguistic and grammatical choices in this practice reflect a portrayal of active aging where structural support and personal initiative coexist. COSE's Facebook captions focused on capacitating older persons in various initiatives, such as healthcare training, administrative retooling, and participation in online webinars, reiterating that these activities are more possible through the support of local and international organizations. Contrary to the positive view of networking and collaboration as suggested by Bhattacharjee et al. (2024), this interdependency can underline the hegemonic tendencies of "NGO titans" (Demar, 2005) and other social entities that possess economic, communication, and political privileges that may influence the shaping of digital ageism.

Similar to the binary portrayal of dependent yet active seniors as explained by Schröder-Butterfill et al. (2023), COSE's Facebook captions subtly reflect potentially conflicting societal views of aging by acknowledging the desire to see older persons as capable while also justifying the need for support from individuals or organizations. This portrayal of opposite discourses (active yet dependent older persons) on online communication also supports the studies of Careless (2015) and Sanchez-Valle (2018), which underlined the use of social media to reclaim voice and agency, and Koft's (2025) assertion that organizations using digital platforms can inevitably produce contrasting advocacy narratives.

This Discourse further reflects several ideologies related to old age. First, it promotes conditional active ageing where older persons can pursue opportunities to enhance quality of life, but this mechanism must be activated through external support. While seniors are seen as able, their agency is dependent on enabling structures. This avoids total victimhood, but still subtly reinforces a “deficit” model. It also projects an ideology of empowerment, suggesting that with the right support, older persons can adapt and maintain their social inclusion. This assumes that empowerment is not fully innate or self-driven in older age, but something that is “given,” reflecting a paternalistic-progressive stance. Lastly, it reiterates the moral responsibility of the collective, where society, families, and institutions such as COSE have a moral duty to support older persons, who are still seen as contributors to communal life. This frames aging as a shared responsibility, shifting the blame from the individual to structural conditions, but still emphasizing that older persons should do their part. The Discourse of active dependency thus exposes specific socio-cultural conditions and reiterates Help Age International’s (2022) previous argument that ageism is rooted in systemic social inequalities. In the Philippines, where family and community support for older persons are traditionally strong, COSE’s Facebook captions build upon these values by recognizing the complex realities of aging, recognizing the capabilities of older persons while also acknowledging their dependence on social support.

The Discourse of active dependency balances between affirming agency and acknowledging need, but also reflects ideologies that can empower and constrain older people. It challenges ideologies and stereotypes of decline (Gullete, 2022), but risks

replacing them with idealized expectations of productivity, engagement, and “grateful” participation in support systems.

This practice further echoes the Discourse of active dependency as older persons are seen as both needing care and contributing, reinforcing a vision of aging on social media platforms that is interdependent of social actors rather than strictly autonomous. While older persons are portrayed as active and productive, their agency is conditional on external training and funding, reflecting a dependency framework masked by the appearance of empowerment.

Discourse of digital deficiency

COSE’s Facebook captions that highlight the importance of training older persons to be digitally literate inherently reflect the Discourse of digital deficiency , which constructs older persons as lacking in digital skills and knowledge, positioning them as a cohort in need of assistance from more digitally competent individuals or groups. This Discourse is prevalent in COSE’s captions involving technology training programs and informational campaigns that shape how older persons are perceived by other users and treated in an increasingly digitalized society.

At the heart of this Discourse is the emphasis on digital literacy as a beneficial skill for older persons. The captions frame digital literacy as a competency that older persons should possess to be included in online communicative environments. This representation reinforces the stereotype of older person as digital immigrants and reliant on digital natives for knowledge and technical support. It also aligns with what the findings of studies that emphasized older persons’ marginalized position in technology

use, such as those conducted by Houssein et al., (2015), Amaral and Daniel (2016), and June (2020).

In this Discourse, COSE performs as a facilitator of digital participation rather than a paternalistic rescuer. By framing its interventions as creating conditions for older persons to cultivate digital literacy, COSE shifts the focus from deficit to capacity-building. This reframing highlights that digital competence is not an inherent lack but a socially mediated practice developed through supportive engagement. While the facilitating role still navigates structural barriers to access, it situates older persons as active participants in co-constructing digital knowledge and foregrounding empowerment and agency.

COSE mediating role for older persons through webinars and digital literacy training programs, while valuable and well-intentioned, can sometimes boost the idea of older adults as dependent on younger generations or experts. Moreover, this mediating role has the potential for strengthening the Discourse of active dependency. If social media communication consistently frames older person as "in need" of digital assistance, it could simultaneously and inadvertently strengthen a stereotype of reliance dependency while attempting to participate in online conversations.

In conclusion, the Discourse of digital deficiency is a representation of older persons as inherently lacking skills or competencies to engage with current and emerging forms of digital technologies, thus needing some form of saving. This Discourse connects agency and limited digital literacy to broader forms of social marginalization. While it portrays digital literacy as a means of empowerment and social currency – a set of skills that older persons should possess and demonstrate, it also

reinforces negative stereotypes of older persons as technology users and contributes to the age-driven digital divide (Choi et al., 2020).

Discourse of age-based exceptionalism

This Discourse emerges from COSE's communicative practice of celebrating the accomplishments of older persons as age-defying expectations, particularly from its "*Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda* (Ten Outstanding Older Persons) Facebook posts, which are usually published every September and October. The main focus of this narrative is acknowledging the noteworthy accomplishments of senior citizens, which are frequently framed as taking place mostly or most significantly in their later years. Despite its seeming positivity, this conversation contains discriminatory undertones regarding older people and their place in society.

Age-based exceptionalism, which celebrates the achievements of older individuals but frames them as extraordinary deviations from the norm, helps to solidify the idea that aging is inherently linked to decline and an inability to keep up with the digital world. This framing, while seemingly celebratory, positions seniors as "exceptions to the rule" rather than demonstrating that continued productivity and contribution are normal aspects of later life. The "*Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda*" awardees become visible because "they break the stereotypes – but in doing so – the stereotype that older people are less capable or valuable is left intact, merely bypassed by exceptionalism." This means that by showcasing only "outstanding" older persons, the underlying negative stereotype (that older people are generally less capable or valuable) is not

challenged or dismantled. Instead, it is confirmed by implying that only a few rare individuals can defy the presumed decline associated with aging.

This focus on exceptional cases also overshadows the diverse experiences and abilities of the majority of senior citizens. The emphasis on "*outstanding*" individuals or "*super grandparents*" (Vulpe, 2017) creates a binary where older adults are either seen as deficient or as exceptional outliers, obscuring the reality that many possess a range of skills in public or private services. This further marginalizes the norm of capability, by making older achievers appear like exceptions rather than representatives of a broader potential.

From a digital ageism perspective, this representation of age-based exceptionalism perpetuates the notion that older persons must meet youth-like standards of activity, productivity, and advocacy to gain social recognition. It subtly upholds digital ageism by setting a low baseline of expectation for older persons. Even when their achievements are celebrated, the language of anomaly suggests they are deviating from what is expected of their age group—which is often assumed to be digitally deficient, or resistant to change and innovation.

Age-based exceptionalism perpetuates the false notion that an older person who is more active and engaged in social activities is an outlier rather than a common normative feature of aging. The hidden message in this narrative thus points to a dualistic perspective that can be cultivated on online platforms: older persons can be exceptional or be forgotten. The recognitions cultivate an outlier narrative, which is encouraging but can also overshadow the systemic social issues that older persons face.

Discourse of automated empathy

Facilitating technology mediation of care, as seen in COSE's captions, assumes a baseline level of technological fluency which shapes the Discourse of automated empathy. By presuming digital fluency and access among its readers, COSE inadvertently marginalizes those who are digitally disenfranchised—whether due to limited technological literacy, lack of internet access, or cognitive and physical impairments that hinder device use.

This digitally mediated framing of care amplifies stereotypes surrounding older persons by putting them as central figures in need of support and focusing on technology (i.e. Lalamove app) as a modern solution to materialize that support. By actively establishing the need to share resources and promoting such a specific technological pathway, COSE positions itself as the indispensable facilitator of digital access, thereby subtly defining the parameters and methods of care. This institutionalized approach to digital generosity underscores a foundational assumption that older individuals, seen as both donors and recipients in the exercise, require a pre-defined and managed entry point into the digital sphere.

Despite its good intentions, COSE's partnership with LalaMove exploits and perpetuates pre-existing stereotypes on its Facebook page. While its partnership with Lalamove ostensibly expands care access through logistical convenience, it does so at the cost of potentially alienating segments of society including older persons who typically rely on face-to-face or analog means of support. This oversight underscores a digital divide where technological solutions are promoted as universal, despite uneven

capacities and realities among the elderly population. In this sense, COSE's strategy may privilege a subset of tech-savvy seniors while overlooking those most at risk of isolation and neglect.

Moreover, the involvement of a commercial company in advocating welfare and support for older persons reflects platform capitalism – a system from which many older persons are inherently excluded. In attempting to help, COSE and its posts participate in the same Discourse that marginalizes older persons from full digital citizenship.

Moreover, the donation process can only be done exclusively through the *Lalamove* app – a mechanism that assumes audiences possess a level of app literacy, decent Internet access, and brand engagement that older persons often lack. By making the donation possible only through one app, older persons are portrayed as dependent on the digital fluency and kindness of others.

As a result of its communicative practices, COSE reproduces ageist assumptions that conflate aging with obsolescence, ultimately marginalizing the very population it aims to serve. This aligns with Kania and Lundlom's (2023) analysis of internalized ageism, wherein older individuals or organizations themselves adopt and reinforce ageist beliefs. In COSE's case, the use of *Lalamove* to mediate donation services subtly frames older persons as passive recipients of care, implying that they are either unable or less capable of independently navigating economic challenges. This practice mirrors a form of self-othering, where the organization unconsciously internalizes and circulates dominant societal narratives that depict older adults as dependent on compassion, thereby reinforcing these perceptions within its own communication practices.

The role of COSE in shaping the Discourse of automated empathy by facilitating technology-mediated care is complex and layered. Rather than stemming from deliberate harm, it emerges from the organization's sincere efforts to support and advocate for older persons within a societal environment saturated with ageist assumptions. The discrimination is further exacerbated with the involvement of corporate linguistics and digital-only driven communication systems. The repeated portrayal of older persons as dependent on the empathy of others not only undermines the core objectives of COSE but also contributes to discourse failures as described by Will and Pies (2017) wherein representations may inadvertently harm an organization's reputation and compromise the effectiveness of its advocacy.

The relationship between communicative practices and Discourses on digital ageism

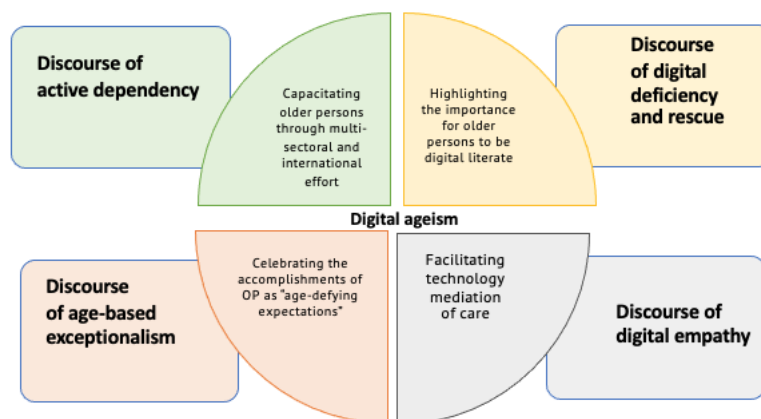
The sociocultural tradition views communication as the production or reproduction of social realities. It approaches meaning as not transmitted but as performed through practices that both shape and are shaped by the tension and practices that help shape social order and social disorder. Communicative practices – such as the ways COSE captions content on their social media page – are not neutral performances; they are constitutive of larger Discourses. In the case of digital ageism, these practices repeatedly enact and reinforce discourses that position older persons in particular ways, affecting how society understands aging and inclusion in digital spaces.

Age-specific civil society groups, such as the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE) operate within this matrix of communicative practice and discourse formation.

The organization's efforts to represent and amplify the voices of older persons through social media illustrate how communicative practice can be a site of both reproduction and contestation of discourse. Even as COSE aims to promote equitable representation and empowerment, its social media content sometimes reflects underlying discourses of dependency, passivity, and decline. This underscores a key insight from the sociocultural tradition where communicative practice is always situated within—and influenced by—broader cultural patterns.

Figure 4

The relationship between communicative practices and Discourses on digital ageism



The relationship between communicative practice and discourse becomes more visible when digital ageism functions as a communicative disorder. In sociocultural terms, disorder does not mean simple breakdown; it signals a misalignment between desired communicative orders (like equity and inclusion) and the actual patterns that emerge. When older persons are backgrounded or represented in limited ways,

communicative practice reproduces a discourse that undermines the very inclusivity social media platforms are often assumed to promote.

Social media platforms themselves act as discursive environments that structure communicative practice. Algorithms, content formats, and audience expectations favor certain types of messaging—quick, visually appealing, emotionally charged—over more complex or nuanced portrayals. These structural features shape how organizations and individuals communicate about older persons, embedding ageist discourses within the affordances of the medium. According to the sociocultural tradition, this highlights how communication is inseparable from the material and institutional contexts in which it occurs.

Yet, within the same sociocultural framework, there is room for agency and change. While dominant discourses shape communicative practices, alternative practices can reconfigure discourse. For example, when older persons produce their own content or directly engage in digital storytelling, they participate in a reconstitution of social reality. Their communicative practices introduce new meanings and challenge existing discourses, demonstrating the dialogical nature of communication emphasized in the sociocultural tradition.

Digital ageism, while often discussed in the context of intentional or unintentional discrimination, can manifest incidentally—arising not from deliberate exclusion but from structural and systemic factors embedded in technology design, policy, and implementation. Incidental digital ageism occurs when digital infrastructures, online services, or communication strategies unintentionally disadvantage older adults because they do not adequately account for age-related needs, preferences, or access

limitations. For example, user interfaces that assume high levels of digital fluency, or resource generation campaigns that require smartphone authentication, can inadvertently marginalize older individuals who may have limited technological familiarity or access. This form of ageism is often invisible to designers and policymakers, yet its effects are real, reinforcing the digital divide and perpetuating the marginalization of older persons.

More importantly, digital ageism does not simply reflect individual biases but operates as a collective, patterned communicative phenomenon. Ageist discourse becomes institutionalized through repeated practices across multiple actors—media organizations, advocacy groups, individuals—which together shape public understanding of older persons. In the sociocultural view, this highlights how communication is both a site of power and a mechanism through which cultural norms are maintained or disrupted.

In conclusion, analyzing digital ageism through the sociocultural tradition of communication reveals that the relationship between communicative practice and discourse is mutually constitutive and socially consequential. Addressing digital ageism involves more than changing representations; it requires transforming the communicative practices that sustain ageist discourses and rethinking the structural conditions under which these practices occur. Only by focusing on both practice and discourse, as interconnected dimensions of communication, can more inclusive and equitable social realities be constructed in the digital age.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

This critical discourse analysis of digital ageism as manifested on COSE's Facebook captions revealed four dominant Big D Discourses – each offering a distinct way of understanding the phenomenon of digital ageism.

The Discourses of active dependency, digital deficiency, age-based exceptionalism and automated empathy contribute to the shaping of how older persons are represented in online narratives. Each Discourse is deeply interconnected and collectively reinforces age-related inequalities on digital platforms. The Discourse of active dependency, which portrays older persons as both capable and dependent feeds into the Discourse of digital deficiency by framing the importance of digital literacy for older persons. The classical negative representations of older persons appear to be countered with the Discourse of age-based exceptionalism which is a two-edged sword narrative by portraying that achievements of older persons are unique because they occur most significantly in *“late”* life. Finally, the Discourse of automated empathy emerges when COSE, despite its well-intentioned programs, may promote biases about what older persons can do on digital platforms, thus contributing in the cycle of digital symbolic marginalization. Each of the Big D Discourse sustains and legitimizes the others, creating a socio-cultural framework of digital ageism – one that reflects digital ageism as an outcome of communicative practices.

The results also revealed that COSE, as a leading NGO advocating for the welfare and rights of older persons in the Philippines, through its public Facebook page, shape these dominant Discourses through a variety of strategies that communicatively constructs digital ageism in both implicit and explicit ways. While it frames capacity building as a collaborative and empowering effort, it simultaneously promotes narratives of upskilling reinforcing the importance of digital literacy for social inclusion, suggesting that technological competence is a moral and social imperative. Moreover, by portraying older persons achievers as exceptional, COSE inadvertently marginalizes the aging population. Finally, the mediation of care through technology is presented positively, yet it is also couched in language that emphasizes risk, dependency, or vulnerability—reinforcing the idea of older adults as passive recipients rather than active agents. Together, these communicative strategies reveal a benevolent form of digital ageism, where older persons are visible in digital discourse but are still othered through implicit and explicit norms rooted in generational assumptions.

Conclusion

The four Discourses of digital ageism identified from COSE's Facebook page and the organization's communicative practices uncover the capacity of an NGO's social media communication in shaping digital ageism. They reflect how an organization can employ lexical and communicative strategies to inadvertently challenge their own advocacies despite well-meaning initiatives.

The Discourses further represent the hidden and subtle power of NGOs as social actors. COSE's use of polite linguistic forms when communicating online can be viewed

as a self-positioning strategy—asserting its position as an advocacy group for older persons—as a way of maintaining organizational legitimacy and cultural decorum. This linguistic behavior may be shaped by social expectations around digital civility and generational conduct, especially in public Facebook pages where intergenerational audiences can be present. As the administrator of its own Facebook page, COSE exercises a certain level of control in determining and producing what type of content appears on its social media account. In doing so, COSE not only constructs discourse to inform its readers but, as van Dijk (1988) argues, represents the ideological and editorial positions of the people or organizations that are involved in the construction and production process of the Discourses. Similarly, Wodak (2009, p. 10) maintains that “language gains power by the use of powerful people make of it”. COSE was able to optimize this power but also generated counter-discourses to its own advocacies.

Facebook, as one of COSE's social media communication platforms, significantly shapes the development of these Discourses. The conventions of digital communication – marked by a preference for conciseness, emotional appeal, and visual engagement, can compel organizations to simplify complex topics to accessible stories. As a result, representations that inadvertently minimize older people to helpless subjects in need of intervention may obscure the complex realities of their lives. The medium used in advocacy communication, therefore, can provide affordances that can subtly reinforce and reconfigure ageism in the context of age-focused advocacies.

Based on COSE's communicative practices on its Facebook page, this study concludes that digital ageism is communicatively constructed in nuanced, sometimes contradictory ways.

Following Craig's socio-cultural tradition, digital ageism appears to be an outcome of collective communicative practices. Through social media, digital ageism gives ageist discourse a new form by transforming biased narratives to online conversations that recreate new forms of digital symbolic marginalization.

Digital ageism, then is not simply a technological issue—it is a cultural and communicative one. It reflects how age is symbolically constructed and reinforced through language and social media communication. At the same time, the digital space is a disputed arena, where NGOs advocating for older persons can help reclaim visibility, voice, and agency, challenging dominant ageist assumptions and redefining what it means to age in a digital world.

In conclusion, while COSE uses its Facebook page as a tool to contribute to the equitable representation and participation of older persons in society, its online narratives unintentionally reproduce a new kind of disorder in online spaces that depict aging as a state of vulnerability, dependency, and decline. Through its communicative choices, COSE's online content affirms that digital spaces do not erase social structures—they *reconstruct* them in new forms, intensifying the social disorder. This further contributes to the mutation of ageist discourses, even as the NGO works towards inclusion and social justice.

The contribution of the study is the use of CDA for sociocultural tradition framework. It advances a sociocultural perspective on digital ageism as a communication disorder, wherein communicative practices reproduce and transform offline stereotypes within social media environments, thereby undermining opportunities for social equality.

By situating the study within the sociocultural tradition, this research highlights the centrality of communication in constructing and negotiating age-related meanings in digital spaces. In particular, it shows how Facebook posts that aim to advocate for older persons may unintentionally recreate linguistic and symbolic markers of marginality, reinforcing the very stereotypes they attempt to dismantle. This dual process underscores the value of using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) not merely as a method of identifying exclusionary practices but also as a tool for uncovering the subtle ways in which communicative strategies can either dismantle or perform social orders. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in its capacity to reveal the tensions inherent in advocacy discourse, offering a nuanced understanding of how digital ageism unfolds through everyday communicative practices.

The results of this inquiry highlight a communication disconnect for groups that advocate for older persons like COSE. While their programs are organically anchored in promoting the rights and welfare of older persons, their social media communication strategies may unintentionally produce new stereotypes and perpetuate old biases that they seek to dismantle. This suggests that advocacy organizations should re-evaluate how they frame messaging to their stakeholders on digital platforms. A more intentional approach toward language can also help guarantee that advocacy efforts reflect the principles of empowerment, dignity, and equality for senior citizens.

This research contributes to the field of Critical Gerontology by illuminating how the hidden power of social media communication may reinforce, perpetuate, and even construct new ageist discourses. It stresses the instrumental role of language and representation in shaping and redefining forms of discrimination within digital advocacy

environments. By highlighting both subtle and overt expressions of age-related biases, the analysis aligns with the broader goals of Critical Gerontology in promoting more inclusive and layered portrayals of older persons beyond traditional gerontological lenses.

Beyond communication, this inquiry offers insights to policy makers and program designer working specifically for older populations. This study suggests that when discourses of dependency and vulnerability is prominent that discourses of agency, it can influence how policymakers and donors conceptualize the needs of older people—potentially leading to a preference for charity-based frameworks rather than approaches grounded in rights or empowerment. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of carefully re-assessing the use of language and representation on a platform that challenges legal models so that that they align with principles of active ageing and inclusion, contributing to shape policies that recognize older person's agency and contributions. It is my hope that the study can help guide the development of multi-sectoral responses to digital ageism, including practical steps such as social media guidelines, public education initiatives, or policy and legal reforms.

Lastly, this study presents opportunities for additional investigations into the intersection of language, social media communication, and aging. Future studies could examine how algorithms influence the development of discourses or compare the approaches between Eastern and Western age-focused organizations. Qualitative research could also explore digital ageism using tools such as virtual ethnography on how discrimination takes place in online communities or phenomenology on how older persons interpret and respond to these ageist narratives themselves. Given the

prevalence of visual ageism on social media, an investigation of digital ageism in multimedia formats, like audio (podcast or radio shows), video (YouTube) and images could also provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Recommendation

This study suggests the need for recommendations at the theoretical, methodological, practical levels. Theoretically, the research contributes to broadening understandings of digital ageism and encourages the refinement of frameworks that examine how ageist discourse operates in online advocacy. Methodologically, it points to the value of diverse, participatory and more nuanced approaches that can fully capture the representation and experiences of older persons in digital contexts. Practically, it emphasizes the responsibility of organizations, technology designers, policymakers, and communities to adopt inclusive communication strategies that challenge stereotypes and foster meaningful participation for older persons in digital spaces.

Theoretical

As digital ageism is a novel phenomenon that requires multi-disciplinary examinations of both material and cultural practices, I suggest that future studies employ grounded theory and develop perspectives that could illuminate more nuances of the phenomenon. I also recommend that future studies integrate critical gerontology with critical discourse analysis as both view digital ageism in terms of power and class differentials. Another area for theoretical pursuit is to examine the role of algorithmic

biases as designed and operationalized by profit-driven companies. As pre-determined elements that determine the ebb and flow of digital communication, algorithms are embedded in social media systems and heavily influence the shaping of online discourses, prompting the need for a specific research focus. Future research should further develop sociocultural approaches to digital discourse, emphasizing how older persons negotiate identity, agency, and belonging online. Such theoretical work will enrich understandings of digital ageism beyond simplistic narratives of vulnerability.

To advance both scholarly and practical understanding of how ageism operates in digital contexts, this study further recommends the adoption of a layered typology of digital ageism that captures multiple and intersecting forms of representational, structural, interactional and algorithmic digital ageism. Representational digital ageism would include stereotypes, tropes, and deficit-based imagery in digital narratives that shape perceptions of older persons. Structural digital ageism could examine policy, platform, and infrastructural arrangements that systematically disadvantage older persons in accessing, creating, or benefiting from digital content. Interactional digital ageism could investigate everyday interpersonal exchanges in online spaces that marginalize or patronize older individuals, including subtle language cues or exclusionary conversational norms. And lastly, algorithmic digital ageism could explore biases embedded in automated systems, personalization algorithms, or data-driven targeting that invisibly limit older persons' visibility, reach, or participation.

In future NGO social media audits, each analytical segment of posts can be coded according to these layers. For example, a Facebook caption portraying older adults only in contexts of vulnerability may be tagged under representational digital

ageism, while the exclusive use of online sign-ups for events in low-connectivity areas can be coded as structural digital ageism. A focus on this layered approach allows for more nuanced interpretations and targeted interventions, ensuring that digital ageism is not treated as a monolithic phenomenon.

Methodological

This critical discourse analysis examined Facebook captions as part of online posts of COSE and intentionally excluded other elements that could provide cues or layers of digital ageism. I therefore recommend that future investigation include audio files, photos and videos as data sets so they could provide a bigger picture of digital ageism. I also suggest to adopt quantitative studies, specifically using the WHO Ageism Scale, to measure how ageist content appear across major social media sites and identify which of the networks tend to host discriminatory materials. More qualitative methods could be also considered in unveiling experiences and meaning-making practices of multiple stakeholders including administrators or managers of social media pages who might be unconsciously contributing to ageist discourses.

This research also highlights the importance of methodological innovation in studying digital ageism. Discourse analysis has proven effective in uncovering the tensions and contradictions in advocacy communication, but future studies may adopt mixed methods to capture a fuller picture. Surveys, interviews, and participatory approaches that involve older persons as co-researchers can provide richer insights and ground academic work more firmly in lived experience.

Incidental digital ageism can also be explored further with Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs) which allows researchers and practitioners to study the intersection of age-related and location-based barriers. Older adults, indigenous people and marginalized communities in GIDAs often face compounded challenges: inadequate internet connectivity, scarce digital infrastructure, and limited access to training or support networks. Even when digital initiatives are rolled out with the intent of inclusivity, they may still fail to reach these populations effectively because they rely on delivery methods—such as online portals or mobile applications—that presuppose stable connectivity and accessible devices. In such contexts, what appears as a neutral or modernized service delivery model can inadvertently exclude older residents, not because of overt prejudice, but because the design overlooks the socio-technical realities of marginalized geographies.

Moreover, digital ageism in GIDAs is intensified by the cultural and economic dimensions of these communities. Older adults may hold valuable local knowledge and play central roles in community life, yet their limited representation in digital narratives and online decision-making spaces means their contributions remain underacknowledged. When public information, health services, and even disaster response systems are increasingly digitized, those who cannot fully engage due to both age and geographic isolation risk being sidelined from vital social and civic participation. This marginalization can lead to a loss of autonomy, reduced access to rights and services, and the reinforcement of stereotypes about older adults as passive or dependent, rather than as active agents within their communities.

Addressing digital ageism in GIDAs requires intentional and context-sensitive strategies that merge digital inclusion efforts with localized, culturally relevant approaches. This includes designing age-friendly platforms with simple, intuitive interfaces; offering community-based digital literacy training tailored to older adults; and ensuring that online services are complemented by offline alternatives. Furthermore, involving older persons from GIDAs in the co-creation of digital initiatives can ensure that their voices inform the design, rollout, and evaluation of technological solutions. In doing so, digital transformation can shift from being an unintentional driver of exclusion to becoming a tool for empowerment, bridging not only the generational digital divide but also the geographic barriers that sustain inequality.

Practical

Practical steps are needed to translate these insights into action. Organizations, advocates, and policymakers are encouraged to critically reflect on their use of digital platforms and ensure that their communication avoids reinforcing stereotypes. Creating guidelines for inclusive messaging, fostering intergenerational collaboration in content creation, and supporting digital literacy programs for older persons can help build digital spaces that genuinely promote empowerment and inclusion.

The layered model of digital ageism is particularly valuable in identifying tensions and contradictions in NGO communications. For instance, a post designed to promote inclusion by celebrating older persons' community participation might still rely on infantilizing metaphors ("young at heart") or overemphasize dependency, inadvertently reinforcing representational ageism even as it seeks to empower. Similarly, a campaign

highlighting digital literacy workshops may unintentionally reveal structural biases if participation requires advanced online registration inaccessible to many in Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDAs). By systematically applying the typology, civil society groups can pinpoint where good intentions are undermined by subtle ageist frames or infrastructural barriers, and where interventions are needed to reconcile advocacy goals with inclusive practices.

It is therefore recommended that age-specific NGOs integrate this typology of digital ageism into their social media content review cycles and strategic communication planning. Embedding this model into internal editorial guidelines can help ensure that advocacy messages not only counter explicit discrimination but also avoid perpetuating latent or incidental forms of bias. In doing so, NGOs can strengthen their capacity to serve as counter-discursive forces against digital ageism, align their narratives with their capacity-building mission, and foster an online communicative environment that affirms the diverse, agentic roles of older persons—even within digitally and geographically disadvantaged contexts.

Finally, this study is my humble contribution to the older persons community and organizations that advocate for their well-being. I recommend that technology developer rethink communication design – one that is more inclusive and accessible. An effective approach would be to complement digital initiatives with accessible, non-digital alternatives and to promote digital literacy programs that meet older persons where they are—not where technology assumes they should be. I suggest that COSE considers the findings in their social media content production and other communication materials. I hope that similar organizations could develop more ideas and strategies on how to

minimize “unintentional digital ageism” by consistently portraying older persons as active agents in society. I also desire that targeted digital literacy initiatives can produce more proactive approaches to increase awareness and facilitate more inclusive access and digital practices across demographics. Finally, I hope that the National Commission for Senior Citizens identifies combating digital ageism as one of its core services. Together, these practical steps can contribute to a more inclusive and age-friendly digital society.

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