

## Intergenerational Influence Culture: Reframing Ageing through Social Media Narratives<sup>\*</sup>

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This article examines how digital platforms are reshaping cultural representations of ageing, with a focus on the rise of elderly influencers as symbolic agents in an evolving influence culture. Moving beyond youth-centred narratives of digital fluency, the study explores the case of Gabriella Tupini, an octogenarian psychologist whose YouTube channel challenges ageist and gendered assumptions about technological competence, self-representation, and cultural authority. Using a qualitative case study approach that integrates content analysis and netnography, the article investigates how figures like Tupini reconfigure the logics of influence culture by employing alternative repertoires of expertise, affective resonance, and narrative intimacy. The analysis addresses three interrelated research questions: How do elderly influencers such as Tupini contribute to reconfiguring ageing narratives via social media? What discursive and relational strategies support their authority, particularly around therapeutic discourse and self-disclosure? To what extent do these practices disrupt stereotypical boundaries of age, visibility, and symbolic capital in digital ecosystems? Findings highlight how Tupini's unscripted videos promote cognitive participation and emotional identification across generational lines, cultivating a distinctive form of intergenerational digital intimacy. Her rejection of commercial strategies and emphasis on reflective discourse contrasts with dominant metrics-driven influencer practices. Rather than embodying performative vitality or entrepreneurial self-branding, her digital presence affirms the value of experience, introspection, and psychological insight. This article advances the notion of "intergenerational influence culture" to describe emerging dynamics in which older adults not only access but reshape digital participation. While such cases offer emancipatory potential, they may also obscure structural exclusions and reinforce neoliberal ideals of productive ageing. By foregrounding alternative imaginaries and affective labour, the study contributes to critical debates on age, media, and agency in platform societies.

**Keywords:** Ageing, Digital storytelling, Social media, Influence culture, Intergenerational communication

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## Introduction

In recent years, social media have not only transformed everyday communicative practices but also reshaped the symbolic frameworks through which ageing is culturally understood. Central to this shift is the expansion of “influence culture” - a socio-digital formation that redistributes visibility and symbolic capital through algorithmic infrastructures and affective labour (Pedroni, 2025; Murru, Pedroni & Tosoni, 2024). Although this phenomenon is typically associated with younger, digitally native users (Palfrey & Gasser, 2011; Prensky, 2001), an expanding body of cultural and sociological research invites a reconsideration of such generational exclusivity. In this context, the emergence of elderly influencers, sometimes referred to as “granfluencers”, illustrates how older adults are increasingly asserting their presence in digital ecosystems that were once demographically exclusionary.

This article explores the role of elderly influencers in reconfiguring narratives of ageing on social media, focusing on the case of Gabriella Tupini, an octogenarian psychologist whose YouTube channel has attracted a substantial and intergenerational audience. Her trajectory challenges prevailing stereotypes about technological incompetence in later life and demonstrates how influence culture can be reshaped through alternative repertoires of authority, including psychological expertise, autobiographical disclosure, and narrative intimacy. We argue that such cases exemplify an emerging “intergenerational influence culture”: a formation in which digital participation not only crosses generational boundaries but also unsettles symbolic hierarchies, privileging youth-centred visibility.

Our analysis foregrounds the intersection of ageing, media engagement, and social positioning, showing how figures like Tupini resist normative portrayals of old age as decline, passivity, or invisibility. Social media platforms are far from neutral or inherently inclusive; rather, they operate as contested terrains in which ageing identities are performed, negotiated, and legitimised. In these spaces, older adults exercise agency not merely as users but as narrators of lived experience, constructing counter-discourses that challenge ageism and revalue later life.

This article contributes to critical gerontology and media studies by addressing underexplored questions about older adults’ practices of digital self-representation and symbolic labour. It pursues three interrelated research questions:

- (1) How do elderly influencers like Gabriella Tupini contribute to reshaping narratives of ageing through social media?
- (2) What communicative strategies underpin their authority and foster intergenerational intimacy, particularly within therapeutic and autobiographical discourse?
- (3) In what ways do such figures challenge ageist stereotypes and reconfigure influence culture, generating new forms of symbolic capital and intergenerational connectivity?

By addressing these questions, we aim to demonstrate that ageing subjects are not merely adapting to digital environments but actively redefining their logics, values, and imaginaries.

## Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing the case study method as its central framework. While qualitative analysis forms the principal axis of investigation, quantitative metrics, such as view counts and audience engagement data relating to Gabriella Tupini's media practices, are also integrated to enhance contextual depth. The case was selected not only for its emblematic relevance within the Italian cultural context, but also for its capacity to critically interrogate and redefine the role of older influencers active on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

The term “granfluencer” reflects the neoliberal extension of productivity into later life, wherein older individuals, through their online visibility and influence, are framed as active contributors to market and social dynamics. By engaging in practices of personal branding, entrepreneurialism, and continuous self-optimisation, these figures embody a model of ageing aligned with neoliberal ideals of individual agency, productivity, and consumer engagement, positioning later life as a stage for economic and symbolic value creation (Syachfitrianti, Setiawardhani, & Kim, 2022).

In Italy, where individuals aged 65 and over comprise 24.1% of the population (Istat, 2023), older adults are traditionally confined to familial roles – particularly as “nonni” (grandparents) responsible for intergenerational transmission (Collicelli, 2024). Gabriella Tupini diverges from this normative image, illustrating a hybrid positioning at the intersection of self-promotion and digital performativity.

Tupini exemplifies a granfluencer who, while retaining her generational identity, departs from the conventional depiction of older adults as exclusively affectionate and familial figures. Her professional background in psychology equips her with discursive tools that enable a thoughtful and reflective mode of intergenerational engagement. This stands in contrast to internationally known granfluencers such as Baddie Winkle and Iris Apfel (see Figure 1), who deploy alternative strategies for reconfiguring ageing identities.

Baddie Winkle (United States) subverts normative age expectations through a playful and provocative aesthetic. Her persona challenges conventional ageing stereotypes via humour and irreverence, transforming mobility aids into stylistic statements and reframing ageing and disability as compatible with sexuality and visual spectacle (Banerjee, 2023).

Similarly, Iris Apfel has achieved iconic status by mobilising her distinctive fashion sensibility to foster cross-generational appeal. Her work connects evolving senior consumer preferences with wider production and consumption trends, repositioning older age within a discourse of aesthetic capital and design expertise (Syachfitrianti et al., 2022).

By contrast, Tupini foregrounds professional authority and intellectual discourse. Her content fosters cross-generational resonance through cognitive engagement and recognition of expertise. This approach not only bridges generational divides but reconfigures the epistemic and affective expectations attached to older social media users. It displaces superficial notions of intergenerational connection with deeper, more dialogic forms of exchange, informed by therapeutic discourse and autobiographical reflection.

<i>Granfluencer</i>	<i>Platform style</i>	<i>Discursive register</i>	<i>Mode of authority</i>	<i>Target audience</i>
<i>Gabriella Tupini</i>	Unscripted, reflective videos	Therapeutic, intellectual	Psychological expertise	Intergenerational, Italy
<i>Baddie Winkle</i>	Visual provocation	Humorous, ironic	Aesthetic disruption	Global, youth-focused
<i>Iris Apfel</i>	Stylised fashion statements	Cultural commentary	Iconic taste and legacy	Design-savvy audiences

Figure 1. Discursive positioning of three granfluencers

To investigate these questions, we adopted a qualitative case study design centred on Gabriella Tupini’s YouTube channel. Methodologically, the research combines content analysis with netnography (Kozinets, 2010), examining both the mechanisms of content production and the dynamics of audience engagement, including patterns of interaction and participation. The empirical sample comprises twenty videos, selected according to two complementary criteria: the first ten videos chronologically uploaded (to trace the origins and evolution of her digital presence), and the ten most viewed videos as of October 2024 (to explore audience reception and resonance). Additionally, all videos explicitly addressing intergenerational dialogue were included, for a total of 9 videos. The selected material was drawn from a corpus of 166 videos uploaded between July 2019 and July 2024. Each video typically ranges between 30 and 40 minutes in length, with some generating up to 1,500 user comments and a total cumulative view count exceeding seven million.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), conducted in parallel with netnographic observation, led to the identification of four major thematic clusters that structure Tupini’s digital discourse (see Figure 2): (1) *Childhood trauma* and the inner child: reflections on unresolved psychological wounds from early life, often articulated in critical relation to therapeutic prescriptions such as unconditional forgiveness; (2) *Therapeutic discourse* and emotional introspection: the use of psychological language to frame self-understanding, relational dynamics, and emotional labour; (3) *Intergenerational tensions* and institutional critique: narratives addressing youth alienation, adult hostility, and critiques of digital culture and formal education; (4) *Spiritual development*: a syncretic vision of “evolutionary magic” that merges psychological insight with intuitive metaphysics and esoteric cosmologies. These clusters are not rigid categories but overlapping interpretive zones that reveal the affective and epistemic textures of Tupini’s influence. Her monologues draw strategically on autobiographical memory, psychological framing, and audience resonance to foster cross-generational connection.

The combination of analytical modalities adopted content analysis, netnography, and thematic mapping enables a fine-grained examination of how ageing, authority, and therapeutic intimacy are enacted in platform contexts. While the focus on a single case may limit generalisability, it offers, in line with Flyvbjerg's (2006) defence of the case study, a powerful lens through which to interrogate emergent cultural phenomena and challenge age-based exclusions in digital participation.

## The construction of ageism

Social media increasingly shape the identities of older individuals, just as they do for younger generations, with particular emphasis on how later life is mediated and rendered visible. Demographic changes have contributed to the emergence of a so-called "third age", characterised by greater social and economic participation among older adults (Cheng, 2023). However, online representations of this demographic remain constrained by persistent ageist stereotypes, often perpetuated by younger users and embedded within the logics of platform culture.

From a constructivist perspective, ageing is shaped by the sociocultural contexts in which it is represented and negotiated. The concept of ageism captures the tension between ageing as a potential resource and ageing as a "social burden," thus positioning older adults as marginalised subjects in policy, cultural, and market domains. This marginalisation persists regardless of individuals' physical, mental, or material resources (Gilleard & Higgs, 2014), underlining the structural nature of symbolic exclusion.

Digital media research has frequently overlooked older cohorts, reflecting a broader epistemological bias towards youth-dominated demographics. In Italy, for instance, only 7.3% of individuals aged 65-74 reported using social media in 2016 (Sala, Cerati, & Gaia, 2023). More recent data, however, indicate substantial growth: the Digital 2021 report by We Are Social and Hootsuite shows that 15% of Italian internet users over the age of 65 now actively engage with social media platforms (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2021). While this suggests growing inclusion, inequalities in access, confidence, and cultural legitimacy persist.

A key dimension of this exclusion lies in the lack of social capital, which Bourdieu (1986) defines as the network of relational resources and social ties that enable access to power and recognition. In digital contexts, social capital intersects with technological competence to constitute symbolic capital, legitimising one's visibility and influence online. Older individuals who lack such capital are often relegated to peripheral positions within platform hierarchies. By contrast, those who succeed in establishing a digital presence frequently possess elite social capital, often derived from professional or familial networks. Biographical experiences, especially those linked to occupational identity, may lay the groundwork for digital competence in later life (Aroldi & Carlo, 2016). Yet access alone is insufficient: low perceived self-efficacy, the absence of tailored support, and structural

barriers to digital training continue to constrain meaningful participation (Wilson, Gates, Vijaykumar, & Morgan, 2023).

In response to this exclusionary environment, Creative Gerontology has emerged as an interdisciplinary framework that foregrounds the narrative and expressive capacities of older adults. Rejecting deficit-based models of ageing, this perspective underscores how older individuals can contribute to public discourse through creativity, lived knowledge, and self-expression (Cohen, 2006). Within this framework, promoting digital literacy among older adults is increasingly viewed as a cultural imperative (Colombo, Aroldi, & Carlo, 2018).

This process of digital inclusion is shaped by what Hirsch and Silverstone (1992) define as “domestication”: the integration of new technologies into everyday life and cultural routines. Within households, intergenerational relations frequently serve as informal sites of ICT learning, particularly through interactions with younger family members (Carlo & Buscicchio, 2023). These exchanges facilitate not only technological skill acquisition but also the formation of affective ties, contributing to the mitigation of the so-called grey digital divide. For many older individuals, digital media serve as tools to “keep up with the times,” sustain social relevance, and reassert agency in a platform-mediated world (Aroldi & Carlo, 2016).

Understanding how older adults engage with social media is thus essential, not only for expanding normative conceptions of participation, but also for contesting the cultural marginalisation that continues to equate ageing with decline. Older users are not passive consumers; they increasingly construct digital narratives that challenge symbolic invisibility and reconfigure later life as a site of reflection, creativity, and social value.

## Reconceptualising Ageing through Social Media

The role of social media in reshaping perceptions of ageing has moved from peripheral to central, establishing itself as a key arena for negotiating the symbolic boundaries of later life. In recent years, internet access among adults aged 65 and over has risen significantly. In Italy, between 2019 and 2023, this demographic recorded a 16.1 percentage point increase in digital exposure (Agcom, 2023), reflecting broader shifts in how ageing is lived, represented, and made visible.

While platforms such as Instagram and TikTok remain strongly generational, primarily attracting users under the age of 30 others, notably Facebook and YouTube, function as more inclusive digital environments. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), these two platforms are the only ones widely used across all age cohorts in the United States, effectively operating as digital *agorás* where intergenerational interaction and convergence take place.

A growing body of literature has explored the psychosocial benefits of digital engagement among older adults. Li and Zhou (2021) investigate gendered patterns in internet use and their impact on subjective well-being, while Cho, Choi, & Lee (2023) examine disparities in



well-being among older individuals living alone versus those cohabiting. In the Italian context, Furlan and Meggiolaro (2025) confirm that internet use positively affects both sociality and emotional satisfaction, particularly when employed to sustain interpersonal relationships.

The emergence of granfluencers, a term originating in journalistic discourse and typically used to describe individuals over 70 who attract younger audiences on social media (Jerrentrup, 2023), illustrates the increasing centrality of older adults within digital publics. These figures actively contest ageist stereotypes that depict later life as passive, dependent, or aesthetically irrelevant. By engaging in dynamic and visible intergenerational interactions, granfluencers introduce new models of age-related participation (Ng & Indran, 2023).

They can thus be understood as “cultural intermediaries” in the Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1979): actors who reshape the symbolic economy of ageing in digital cultures by promoting values such as lifelong learning, reinvention, and creative experimentation. This is especially evident among fashion granfluencers, who challenge expectations of appearance, propriety, and generational legibility by merging stylistic self-expression with cross-generational resonance (Ghosh, 2023; Syachfitrianti et al., 2022).

Yet such visibility is not devoid of ambivalence. A systematic review by Shao and Yin (2025) shows that while these representations can subvert ageist tropes and promote agency, they may also reinforce a neoliberal emphasis on *performative vitality*, a model that marginalises experiences of illness, dependency, and structural vulnerability.

Mainstream portrayals of ageing often adhere to the “successful ageing” framework, developed by Rowe and Kahn (1997), which valorises health, independence, and productivity in later life. Within social media environments, this framework becomes performative: ageing is deemed “successful” only when rendered digitally visible, while those excluded from such visibility are symbolically erased (Gehrmann, 2023). This logic overlaps with long-standing medicalised discourses that pathologise ageing, positioning it as a process requiring clinical or lifestyle intervention (Estes & Binney, 1989). Public narratives increasingly frame older adults as social, economic, and emotional burdens (Victor, 2004), whose worth must be justified through productivity and autonomy.

This *consumerist empowerment* paradigm (Shankar, Cherrier & Canniford, 2006) aligns well-being with consumption and optimisation, offering a narrow and exclusionary ideal of self-worth based on independence and material success. Western digital cultures tend, therefore, to flatten later-life experiences into a singular aspirational script.

In contrast, alternative narratives are emerging within digital spaces, ones that affirm ageing as visible, meaningful, and identity-constitutive, rather than something to be concealed or denied. These counter-narratives draw on cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) rather than dominant norms of beauty or productivity, reconfiguring older adulthood as a space of expression, reflexivity, and relational complexity.

Social media platforms enable the articulation of these alternative imaginaries. Through digital storytelling, older individuals assert knowledge, share lived experiences, and craft identities that resist dominant scripts of decline and irrelevance. These practices support

new forms of symbolic participation, challenging the invisibilisation of ageing and affirming later life as socially and narratively generative.

In this regard, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model (1969) offers a particularly useful lens. As Zhong (2023) argues, older social media creators perform the self in ways that respond to both platform logics and audience expectations. These are not simply strategic displays or passive self-reflections but forms of relational identity-making shaped by algorithmic infrastructures. These performances are dynamic and emotionally resonant, structured around the creator's desire for recognition and the audience's longing for intimacy and meaning.

A foundational case in this regard is Peter Oakley (known online as *Geriatric1927*) who launched a YouTube channel in 2006. Through autobiographical narration and emotional openness, Oakley fostered intergenerational connection and, at one point, managed one of the platform's most subscribed channels (Harley & Fitzpatrick, 2009). His trajectory demonstrates the potential of older adults to use digital media for self-expression, empathy, and community-building. Nevertheless, generalising such cases risks obscuring the structural exclusions that limit digital access and voice for many older individuals.

Indeed, platform infrastructures are governed by commercial and algorithmic logics that prioritise visibility, coherence, and affective appeal. Content that diverges from these imperatives often remains marginal. Even when older adults do achieve visibility, it is often conditional dependent on their capacity to meet the aesthetic and affective demands of platform capitalism.

Gabriella Tupini's digital presence exemplifies this negotiation in distinctive ways. Her videos eschew dominant aesthetic norms and monetisation strategies, favouring unscripted monologues rich in affect and grounded in psychological expertise and spiritual reflection. Rather than spectacle, she offers cultural authority rooted in presence and resonance. She does not perform youthful vitality; instead, she provides reflective density, emotional openness, and a model of later life that affirms authenticity, care, and intergenerational dialogue.

## Case Study: Gabriella Tupini

As of October 2024, Gabriella Tupini's YouTube channel had amassed 143,000 subscribers and hosted 166 self-produced videos, each attracting between 6,000 and 400,000 views, with a cumulative total of over seven million. The channel, inaugurated on 20 July 2019 with a short video entitled *Introduzione alla magia evolutiva* [*Introduction to Evolutionary Magic*], initially followed an unusually prolific rhythm, with near-daily uploads for over three years. In the past year, production has slowed to two or three videos per month, although Tupini has maintained a consistent online presence. The videos, typically 25 to 40 minutes in length, contrast with the short-form immediacy of platforms such as TikTok or Instagram Reels. Yet YouTube remains a medium conducive to extended, reflective content, particularly in



psychological and philosophical genres (Wattenhofer, Wattenhofer, & Zhu, 2012). For Tupini, this format facilitates the exploration of complex themes and fosters a sustained relationship with her audience.

The visual aesthetics of her videos reinforce her recognisability. Filmed in her Roman home, furnished with antique decor and greenery, Tupini often appears against digitally rendered natural backdrops – forests, waves, starry skies – wearing brightly coloured clothing and adorned with numerous rings. The structure of her videos is stylistically consistent: each entry is numbered, titled in uppercase, and introduced with a standardised greeting. While her delivery lacks formal structure and often includes thematic repetition, this appears to be a conscious stylistic choice. Rather than offering didactic instruction, she aims to transmit a personal and spiritual legacy. Her tone is spontaneous, intimate, and affective, echoing Baym's (2015) concept of *imagined intimacy*, wherein sustained presence and self-disclosure foster a sense of personal connection with audiences.

The most viewed videos revolve around several recurring thematic concerns (see Figure 2). These include: (1) the long-term effects of childhood trauma and the centrality of the *inner child*, often discussed critically in relation to therapeutic prescriptions such as unconditional forgiveness; (2) broader therapeutic discourse focused on emotional introspection and affective resonance, shaping both the tone and relational dynamic of the channel; (3) intergenerational tensions and adult hostility towards youth, particularly concerning digital culture and institutional critique; and (4) the notion of *evolutionary magic* – a syncretic and intuitive framework of spiritual development that fuses psychological insight with alternative cosmologies.

Thematic cluster	No. of videos	Avg. duration (min)	Average views	Average comments	Representative Videos <sup>1</sup>
Childhood trauma / Inner child	3	38.54	270.230	2377	<i>Perdonare i genitori</i> [Forgiving One's Parents]; <i>Autostima e Autosvalutazione</i> [Self-esteem and Self-evaluation]; <i>Piacere a se stessi</i> [Self-pleasure]
Intergenerational tensions and youth alienation	2	33.35	68.374	820,5	<i>Videogiochi e smartphone non fanno male</i> [Video Games and Smartphones Are Not Harmful]; <i>Figli incompresi</i> [Misunderstood Children]
Therapeutic discourse and emotional introspection	2	31.2	370.875	2777	<i>Pensieri positivi</i> [Positive thoughts]; <i>Come guarire la psiche</i> [How to Heal the Psych]
Spiritual development	3	18.59	302.531,3	997	<i>Introduzione alla magia evolutiva</i> [Introduction to Evolutionary Magic]; <i>Dove andiamo nel sonno</i> [Where we Go in our Sleep]; <i>Contattare i Defunti</i> [Contact the Deceased]

Figure 2. Thematic Clusters in Gabriella Tupini's Video Corpus: Topics, Reach, and Representative Titles<sup>1</sup>

Exemplary statements include:

If I forgive my parents who harmed my inner child, I wrong my child. (*Perdonare i genitori*)

If a boy prefers video games to reality, it means he is unwell. It is not the game that harms him, it is reality that is more damaging than the game. (*Videogiochi e smartphone non fanno male*)

School is boring because it fails to stimulate. The Ministry of Education prohibits public education because everything must conform to their programmes. (*Videogiochi e smartphone non fanno male*)

Magic is made with the spirit, with the soul. You have to enter a certain dimension. If you do not, it is not magic. (*Introduzione alla magia evolutiva*)

These statements are typically accompanied by autobiographical fragments and anecdotal reflections, but seldom by systematic academic references. Occasional mentions of Freud or Castaneda emerge, albeit informally and unsystematically. Her use of psychological discourse does not function as conventional instruction but rather operates through mediated affective resonance. The unscripted delivery, minimalist aesthetic, and lack of monetisation collectively enhance a sense of authenticity, particularly among younger viewers, who perceive her as intellectually honest and emotionally trustworthy.

Audience engagement is especially intense in the comment sections, ranging from 500 to over 1,500 comments per video. These are overwhelmingly positive, often expressing gratitude for her clarity and for the emotional reassurance her content provides. Viewers frequently share personal experiences, sometimes in vulnerable and confessional terms, attributing psychological relief and recognition to her videos.

She exudes a calmness and tranquillity that puts everyone at ease. She feels like family. In 38 minutes, she managed to explain the causes of social issues common to many families. (YouTube comment, 29 July 2024, female)

Now I feel like I've found the grandmother I never knew – a grandmother who speaks to me with calmness and sweetness. (YouTube comment, 31 July 2024, female)

I'm a 16-year-old boy who loves to ask himself questions... Thank you for giving young people like me – who often feel much older than they should – the tools to work on themselves and live more serenely in a chaotic world. (YouTube comment, 30 July 2024, male)

It had been years since I allowed myself to cry. Listening to you speak made me feel I could do so freely. (YouTube comment, 1 August 2024, female)

In this sense, Tupini's channel exemplifies what Furedi (2004) terms *therapeutic culture*, in which media platforms serve as arenas for mediated self-expression and shared emotional labour. The intimacy fostered in the comment sections is further reinforced by her occasional direct responses and use of "likes," cultivating a sense of mutual recognition and emotional reciprocity.

The channel's level of professionalisation is virtually non-existent. It contains no monetised elements, product placements, or official partnerships. In July 2024, however, Tupini self-published a 300-page book on Amazon, which became a minor bestseller. Reviews noted its amateur formatting and lack of pagination, features that mirror the informal

ethos of her video production. This anti-commercial stance paradoxically enhances her legitimacy in the eyes of her followers, who associate authenticity with independence from platform metrics.

Beyond YouTube, Tupini maintains a decentralised digital presence on Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, and TikTok, though she does not personally manage these accounts. The Instagram profile *@tivoglioparlare*, curated by authorised collaborator Miriam Calderano, reached 119,000 followers by August 2024 and includes 135 reels, with view counts ranging from 20,000 to over one million. On TikTok, although no official account exists, videos tagged *#gabriellatupini* have accrued over two million views, with some individual clips receiving up to 100,000 likes. Telegram and Facebook groups function as extensions of her community, enabling interpretive dialogue and offline collective engagement.

These dynamics suggest a participatory and decentralised ecology of dissemination, consistent with Jenkins, Ford, and Green's (2013) concept of *participatory culture*, in which users act as active curators and mediators of content. The strategic diversification across platforms enables her to reach heterogeneous audiences with differing media practices. Her preference for YouTube as the primary medium aligns with the affordances of vlogging, which supports extended autobiographical reflection through audiovisual storytelling (Burgess & Green, 2018). YouTube's interactive features, particularly its comment system, facilitate intergenerational dialogue and the circulation of emotionally resonant narratives.

From a sociological standpoint, Gabriella Tupini occupies a distinctive position at the intersection of psychological discourse, elder storytelling, and intergenerational digital intimacy. Through the lens of the *Stereotype Content Model* (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), her persona blends warmth and competence, attributes that generate trust and admiration across age cohorts. Unlike many influencers who rely on spectacle or provocation, Tupini fosters engagement through calm presence, reflective delivery, and sustained narrative continuity. Her digital identity functions as a relational composite: part grandmother, part therapist, part spiritual guide. The cultural authority she exercises stems not from celebrity status, but from the resonance of her voice and the depth of her listening.

## Mental Health, Self-Intimacy, and Digital Therapeutic Spaces

The audience's engagement with Gabriella Tupini's content must be situated within the broader cultural prominence of psychological well-being in contemporary social media discourse. The COVID-19 pandemic, marked by widespread trauma and prolonged social isolation, intensified demands for emotional connection and psychological support. During this period, social media usage surged, offering users vital means to maintain interpersonal ties and find solace in online communities (Nguyen et al., 2020). Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok increasingly served as spaces for sharing personal

experiences, expressing vulnerability, and accessing mental health resources, thereby mitigating some of the psychosocial effects of isolation (Ostic et al., 2021).

This broader cultural shift has generated a marked increase in mental health-related content across platforms, ranging from *autopathographies* (autobiographical narratives of illness) and recovery to professionally curated therapeutic materials. These communicative practices serve multiple functions: raising awareness, reducing stigma, and fostering hope for healing (Ziavras & Diamantaki, 2024). Personal storytelling facilitates emotional identification and promotes a sense of community, while the inclusion of professional voices lends credibility and guidance. This evolution signals a reconfiguration of influence culture, wherein vulnerability and psychological introspection increasingly replace earlier ideals of aspirational perfection.

Instagram, once dominated by highly curated displays of achievement and aesthetic control, has in recent years experienced a shift towards content foregrounding emotional openness, illness, and affective complexity (Maslen & Lupton, 2020). This trend responds to a cultural demand for authenticity, where public articulations of suffering are re-coded as forms of relational capital. Digital storytelling becomes a mode of affective labour: creators offer emotionally resonant narratives that deepen perceived intimacy, particularly around themes of trauma, healing, and intergenerational pain.

Yet the circulation of vulnerability is not politically neutral. The conditions under which visibility is granted or withheld remain shaped by structural inequalities. The digital divide continues to follow gendered patterns. Older women, in particular, are statistically less likely to access or feel confident using digital technologies, not only due to technical barriers, but also because of enduring cultural narratives that construct technology as a masculinised domain (Sawchuk & Crow, 2012). This asymmetry raises critical questions about who gains visibility, whose experiences are recognised as therapeutically valid, and under what conditions such narratives can emerge and circulate.

In this context, Gabriella Tupini's digital presence assumes a counter-stereotypical significance. Her content frequently centres on emotional repair, psychological introspection, and the long-term impact of familial relationships, especially the parent–child bond. These dynamics are not only explicitly addressed but also pervade the affective fabric of her discourse, even when not thematised directly. This orientation aligns with broader patterns in online culture, where parenting and intergenerational themes serve as powerful affective anchors for engagement (Abidin, 2017).

To conceptualise the mechanisms operative in Tupini's narrative approach, Zeavin's (2021) notion of “self-intimacy” proves especially salient. Self-intimacy refers to the construction of a relational public self through the digital sharing of personal thoughts and emotions. By disclosing her inner experiences and reflecting on her emotional history, Tupini invites viewers into a space of shared vulnerability. This performative openness fosters familiarity and trust, reinforcing the perception of her channel as a psychologically safe and emotionally intimate space.

Lupton's (2017) concept of “affective atmospheres” further elucidates the emotional textures at play. These atmospheres are not reducible to individual emotions but consist of

shared affective intensities that shape collective experience. Social media platforms, through their multimodal affordances and relational architectures, enable the creation of such atmospheres. Repeated exposure to Tupini's reflective tone, unscripted delivery, and non-judgemental stance generates a rhythm of emotional co-presence, one that privileges recognition, resonance, and empathic alignment.

These theoretical perspectives converge meaningfully in Tupini's video practice. Her monologues exemplify self-intimacy through confessional narrative and therapeutic framing, while simultaneously producing an affective atmosphere that binds her audience through a shared emotional horizon. Her content is not merely watched; it is *felt*. Viewers do not simply absorb her discourse but participate in an emotionally co-regulated experience, one that is simultaneously personal and collectively structured.

These dynamics contribute to the construction of the channel as a *digital therapeutic space*. While it does not offer clinical intervention, it performs analogous functions: fostering insight, processing emotional pain, affirming personal worth, and alleviating isolation. In doing so, Tupini's work challenges dominant assumptions about generational relevance, therapeutic authority, and technological competence. It repositions older women not as passive recipients of care but as affective agents capable of shaping digital publics and sustaining emotionally resonant communities.

## Conclusions: Towards an Intergeneration Influence Culture

The case of Gabriella Tupini exemplifies how digital platforms are reshaping cultural narratives of ageing, disrupting established stereotypes and fostering more inclusive imaginaries of later life. Her trajectory as a granfluencer reflects a broader reconfiguration of influence culture, a domain long dominated by youth-centric aesthetics and performative self-presentation. By asserting a presence grounded in reflective monologue, psychological depth, and sustained audience engagement, Tupini expands both the generational and cultural parameters of digital influence.

The growing visibility of elderly influencers such as Tupini signals a meaningful transformation in the dynamics of platform participation. These figures do not simply adapt to digital environments; they actively reshape them. They mobilise symbolic capital rooted in life experience, professional authority, and narrative authenticity, challenging the assumption that technological fluency is the preserve of younger generations. In so doing, they inaugurate new modes of engagement: privileging introspection over spectacle, resonance over reach, and intergenerational dialogue over algorithmic virality. These modalities disrupt dominant platform practices by prioritising continuity, unscripted delivery, and dialogic presence over metrics-driven optimisation (see Figure 3).

Yet this shift is not without its contradictions. While the prominence of older influencers challenges prevailing imaginaries of decline and dependence, it may also obscure the structural exclusions that continue to shape the digital experience of older adults. Online

representations of ageing often privilege those who are already culturally, cognitively, or economically equipped to participate. As such, the figure of the expressive, self-actualised older influencer risks functioning as an aspirational ideal that inadvertently reproduces neoliberal expectations of productivity, visibility, and personal optimisation. The symbolic capital attached to later-life digital agency thus coexists with persistent inequalities in access and recognition.

Tupini's case also reveals how therapeutic discourse, emotional labour, and affective intimacy have become central to contemporary forms of digital influence. Her videos are not merely media artefacts; they operate as relational practices, spaces of collective reflection, emotional mirroring, and psychosocial reassurance. In this sense, her work enacts a feminist *ethic of care*, recasting older women not as recipients of care but as cultural interlocutors, capable of generating meaning, support, and resonance within digital publics. At the same time, it raises critical questions about the commodification of vulnerability in platform economies, where authenticity is monetised and intimacy becomes a form of capital.

The concept of "intergenerational influence culture" emerges from this complex constellation of practices, tensions, and negotiations. It designates a cultural formation in which older adults not only access but reshape the symbolic economy of digital media. These actors create new circuits of visibility and recognition that transcend generational hierarchies, reframing later life as a space of narrative productivity, social relevance, and relational depth. This form of influence is defined not by follower counts or trend fluency, but by the capacity to mediate between introspection and address, personal biography and collective meaning.

Platforms such as YouTube increasingly operate as affective and cognitive spaces in which older influencers like Tupini engage diverse publics, promote psychological literacy, and cultivate dialogic forms of relationality. Her channel functions as a site of cognitive participation, where audiences are addressed not as passive consumers but as *co-thinkers*. This reframing of influence has significant implications for how cultural authority, agency, and ageing are imagined in digital societies.

Nonetheless, the emergence of intergenerational influence culture also highlights unresolved tensions. The inclusion of older voices may inadvertently reinforce platform logics that reward only those who conform to affective and aesthetic norms. The growing cultural value attributed to older influencers remains, in many cases, conditional, granted to those who exhibit resilience, eloquence, and productivity. As such, the symbolic expansion of influence culture is unequally distributed, and its transformative capacity necessarily partial.

Tupini's case compels renewed theoretical engagement with ageing, not as a passive demographic condition, but as a culturally and politically generative field of practice. Her presence unsettles the visual, temporal, and discursive economies of platform culture, offering not only alternative representations of older adulthood, but alternative ways of being influential. By foregrounding voice over performance, resonance over reach, and care over commerce, intergenerational influence culture provides a valuable lens through which to



reimagine how digital media might accommodate more plural, reflexive, and ethically attuned imaginaries of ageing.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Distinctive traits (compared to mainstream influence culture)</i>
<i>Agents</i>	Older adults, often women, engaging in content production on mainstream platforms	Non-youth-centric; often previously excluded demographics
<i>Platform practices</i>	Long-form videos, unscripted monologues, affective interaction, non-commercial presence	Low optimisation; emphasis on continuity, authenticity, and relationality
<i>Forms of authority</i>	Psychological expertise, autobiographical depth, care ethics, life experience	Less based on aesthetics or trend fluency; more on resonance and credibility
<i>Affective dynamics</i>	Intergenerational intimacy, emotional mirroring, therapeutic trust	Intimacy replaces aspiration as core mode of engagement
<i>Cultural role</i>	Reframing later life as narratively and socially productive	Counters invisibilisation and medicalisation of ageing
<i>Ambivalences and risks</i>	Conditional inclusion; potential co-optation by neoliberal scripts of productivity and visibility	Success framed as exception; dependent on symbolic capital and emotional labour

Figure 3. Dimensions of intergenerational influence culture

### Biographical Note

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thematic clusters were constructed by aggregating the analytical categories presented in this section and cross-referencing them with the empirical data from the video corpus. Total views and comment counts refer to the videos included in the content analysis sample and were retrieved directly from the platform as of October 2024. For each cluster, representative video titles are provided in both the original Italian and their English translations. Durations are rounded to the nearest minute. View counts are not intended as metrics of success but as indicators of audience resonance.