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ARTIGO ORIGINAL

Ageism on geriatric dentistry Instagram posts

Idadismo em postagens sobre odontogeriatria no Instagram

Edadismo en publicaciones sobre odontogeriatria en Instagram

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Geriatric Dentistry Ageism on Instagram

Abstract

Objective: To assess the content of Brazilian Instagram posts related to older adults and Dentistry, with a specific focus on ageism. **Methods:** A search was conducted using Instagram's search tool with the following Portuguese keywords: "Odontogeriatria", "Odontologia geriátrica", "Odontologia do idoso", "Saúde bucal do idoso", and "Saúde bucal na terceira idade". Results were filtered using relevant hashtags. A maximum of 150 of the most relevant publicly available posts were analyzed. Data collection included profile and content analysis, identification of ageist content or depictions of perceived frailty, and the characteristics of images featuring older adults. The data were tabulated and analyzed descriptively. **Results:** Ageism was identified in 26.4% of the posts, and 14% exhibited negative connotations, often portraying the stereotypical frail older adult as a white woman with gray or white hair. All of them originated from professional profiles. **Conclusions:** A significant proportion of Brazilian Instagram posts on Dentistry for older adults reflected ageism, often perpetuating culturally ingrained stereotypes of frailty in old age. These findings highlight the need for raising awareness and developing educational initiatives to combat ageism and promote a more inclusive perspective on aging within society.

Keywords: ageism; aging; geriatric dentistry; health education; social media.

Resumo

Objetivo: Avaliar o conteúdo de postagens brasileiras no Instagram relacionadas a pessoas idosas e à Odontologia, com foco específico no idadismo. **Métodos:** Foi realizada uma busca utilizando a ferramenta de pesquisa do Instagram com as seguintes palavras-chave em português: "Odontogeriatria", "Odontologia geriátrica", "Odontologia do idoso", "Saúde bucal do idoso" e "Saúde bucal na terceira idade". Os resultados foram filtrados por meio de hashtags relevantes. Um máximo de 150 postagens públicas mais relevantes foi analisado. A coleta de dados incluiu análise de perfil e conteúdo, identificação de conteúdos idadistas ou representações de fragilidade percebida, e as características das imagens que retratavam pessoas idosas. Os dados foram tabulados e analisados descritivamente. **Resultados:** O idadismo foi identificado em 26,4% das postagens, e 14% apresentaram conotações negativas, frequentemente retratando o estereótipo de uma pessoa idosa frágil como uma mulher branca com cabelos grisalhos ou brancos. Todas as postagens com esse teor partiram de perfis profissionais. **Conclusões:** Uma proporção significativa das postagens brasileiras no Instagram sobre Odontologia para pessoas idosas refletiu traços de idadismo, muitas vezes perpetuando estereótipos culturais de fragilidade na velhice. Esses achados ressaltam a necessidade de promover a conscientização e desenvolver iniciativas educacionais para combater o idadismo e incentivar uma perspectiva

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mais inclusiva sobre o envelhecimento na sociedade.

Palavras-chave: ageísmo; envelhecimento; odontologia geriátrica; educação em saúde; mídias sociais.

Resumen

Objetivo: Evaluar el contenido de publicaciones brasileñas en Instagram relacionadas con personas mayores y la Odontología, con un enfoque específico en el edadismo. **Métodos:** Se realizó una búsqueda utilizando la herramienta de búsqueda de Instagram con las siguientes palabras clave en portugués: "Odontogeriatría", "Odontologia geriátrica", "Odontologia do idoso", "Saúde bucal do idoso" y "Saúde bucal na terceira idade". Los resultados fueron filtrados mediante hashtags relevantes. Se analizaron un máximo de 150 publicaciones públicas más relevantes. La recolección de datos incluyó el análisis de perfiles y contenidos, la identificación de contenidos edadistas o representaciones de fragilidad percibida, y las características de las imágenes que mostraban a personas mayores. Los datos fueron tabulados y analizados de forma descriptiva. **Resultados:** Se identificó edadismo en el 26,4% de las publicaciones, y el 14% mostró connotaciones negativas, retratando frecuentemente el estereotipo de una persona mayor frágil como una mujer blanca con cabello canoso o blanco. Todas estas publicaciones provenían de perfiles profesionales. **Conclusiones:** Una proporción significativa de las publicaciones brasileñas en Instagram sobre Odontología para personas mayores reflejó edadismo, perpetuando a menudo estereotipos culturales de fragilidad en la vejez. Estos hallazgos destacan la necesidad de generar conciencia y desarrollar iniciativas educativas para combatir el edadismo y promover una perspectiva más inclusiva sobre el envejecimiento en la sociedad. Parte inferior del formulario

Palabras clave: ageísmo; envejecimiento; odontología geriátrica; educación em salud; medios de comunicación sociales.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that the world is undergoing a significant demographic shift characterized by aging populations. Some projections regarding this phenomenon are particularly striking: 1) between 2015 and 2050, the global population of individuals aged 60 years and older will nearly double, rising from 12% to 22%; 2) by 2030, one in six people worldwide will be 60 years or older; and 3) the number of older adults will soon surpass that of children under five years of age.¹

In response to this accelerated aging trend, the United Nations declared the period from 2020 to 2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing, tasking the World Health Organization (WHO) with leading efforts to promote actions toward this goal. In May 2020, the WHO published a strategic framework

with the overarching aim of fostering a society for all ages, in which combating ageism is one of the strategy's most robust pillars.²

However, the early years of the Decade of Healthy Ageing were profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected populations worldwide. This unprecedented event exposed society to acute manifestations of ageism, often portraying older adults as universally fragile and vulnerable.³ Public narratives during the pandemic mischaracterized and devalued older people, with ageist attitudes leading some to perceive the pandemic as a problem primarily affecting older individuals.

The pandemic also transformed internet usage, accelerating the adoption of social media and communication applications as tools for global interaction during periods of social distancing.⁴ According to the same author, algorithms and other digital tools have amplified this shift. However, these platforms also facilitated the widespread dissemination of misinformation and fake news, particularly in the health domain. This poses challenges for healthcare professionals, as such misinformation spreads rapidly and may have serious public health consequences.⁵

Instagram, one of the most popular social media platforms globally, boasts over one billion users.⁶ As of January 2024, India had a total of 362 million Instagram users, the largest Instagram audience in the world. The United States had 169 million users, and Brazil occupies the third place in number of users reaching 134 million.⁷ This platform is frequently used to share personal experiences and engage in business marketing, often incorporating health-related content with minimal oversight.

Given its vast user base, rapid information dissemination, and growing role as a health information source, Instagram has garnered significant attention from researchers investigating how content from various fields is shared and consumed.⁸⁻¹¹ In Dentistry, Instagram offers potential as an educational tool to enhance patient care outcomes when used diligently and ethically. It can also serve as an effective

advertising platform, but its use must be guided by ethical sensitivity and appropriate standards.¹²

In recent years, interest in analyzing Instagram posts related to Dentistry has increased.^{5,13-15} However, no study to date has explored the content of Instagram posts specifically related to Geriatric Dentistry or examined their relationship with ageism.

This study aims to evaluate the content of Instagram posts involving older adults and Dentistry, with a specific focus on ageism. The research seeks to identify the types of profiles generating such content, assess whether these posts represent the diverse profiles of older adults in society, and determine whether stereotypes related to aging are present in these posts.

Methods

This is a cross-sectional study, with data collected between April 17 and May 12, 2023. The search was conducted using Instagram's search tool with the following Portuguese keywords: "Odontogeriatrics", "Odontologia geriátrica", "Odontologia do idoso", "Saúde bucal do idoso", and "Saúde bucal na terceira idade". Results were filtered by relevant hashtags, and the 150 most relevant posts (or fewer if fewer than 150 were identified) in Portuguese were selected for analysis. Reposts were excluded from the evaluation.

Content evaluation was carried out through analysis of images, videos, and captions by two independent and calibrated examiners. Calibration training was conducted by the lead researcher through a joint review of the 10 most recent posts identified under each relevant hashtag. Following the training, both examiners independently analyzed 10% of the sample twice at different time points, with a one-week interval between evaluations. Intra-examiner and inter-examiner agreement was assessed using the Kappa Coefficient test before proceeding with the full sample analysis.

The data collected included 1) Content profile: Classified as dental provider (professional), educational, or social; 2) Representation of seniors:

If a senior individual was portrayed, it was recorded whether the figure was real or representative. Additionally, the image's characteristics, such as gender, skin color, hair color, and elements indicating fragility or vulnerability, were noted; 3) Ageism evaluation: Based on guidelines from the Global Report on Ageing, posts were assessed for the presence (positive or negative) or absence of ageism.

To further explore stereotypes of frailty in older adults, artificial intelligence platforms were employed to generate images using the generic prompt "frail old person." The platforms used included Microsoft Bing (www.bing.com), [Leonardo.AI](http://www.leonardo.ai) (www.leonardo.ai), and [Canva.AI](http://www.canva.com) (www.canva.com), selected for their ability to produce realistic images with minimal distortions. Three images were generated on each platform between October 20 and November 2, 2023, for comparative analysis with the stereotypes observed in the Instagram posts.

The data collected were tabulated and analyzed descriptively and exploratorily using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) statistical software.

Results

Figure 1 illustrates the total number of posts retrieved using the specified Portuguese keywords at the beginning of the search strategy on May 4, 2023. The figure also outlines the post-selection process after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, resulting in a total of 284 posts analyzed.

Following the training phase, the intra- and inter-examiner agreement for the assessment of frailty and ageism was evaluated using the Kappa coefficient. A value of 0.90 was achieved, confirming a high level of consistency and reliability in the analysis.

Table 1 provides an analysis of the presence of ageism and depictions of frailty (representations of older individuals) based on the content profile of the analyzed posts. A total of 284 posts were examined, the vast majority (97.8%) of which originated from dental providers' profiles. Ageism was identified in 26.4% of the posts, and 12.3%

exhibited positive connotations while 14.1% exhibited negative connotations. Depictions of frailty associated with older individuals (when present) were observed in 6.8% of the posts, all of which originated from dental providers' profiles.

Table 2 examines the presence of frailty in older individuals based on characteristics such as gender, skin color, and hair color depicted in the analyzed images. The majority of the images (96.9%) featured real individuals, with 5.1% of the posts displaying characteristics of frailty. Female individuals were more frequently represented (59.6%) and exhibited the highest proportion of frailty (3.9%). Older individuals with white skin were the most commonly depicted (89.4%) and also showed the highest percentage of frailty (5.1%). Among hair colors, gray and white were the most frequently represented (49% and 34%, respectively) and demonstrated the highest levels of associated frailty (3.5% and 1.2%, respectively).

Table 3 presents images generated by artificial intelligence platforms, which predominantly align with the stereotypes of older individuals observed in the analyzed Instagram posts. These images primarily depict older individuals with female gender characteristics, white skin, and white hair, reflecting the recurring patterns identified in the social media content.

Discussion

This study highlights the prevalence of ageism in Instagram posts related to geriatric dentistry, revealing how these posts perpetuate stereotypes and fail to represent the diversity of older adults. More than a third of the analyzed posts contained ageist content, often portraying the stereotypical frail older adult as a white woman with gray or white hair. These findings align with the World Report on Ageism², which emphasizes the pervasive and socially accepted nature of ageism and its intersection with other forms of discrimination, such as sexism and racism.

Regardless of whether they are positive or negative, age stereotypes are inherently inaccurate and potentially harmful, as they constitute oversimplified generalizations that

fail to account for the diversity and individuality of older adults. Although ostensibly positive representations may aim to celebrate aging, they nonetheless contribute to unrealistic and homogenized portrayals that obscure individual variability. Conversely, negative stereotypes, such as the automatic association of frailty with aging, reinforce misconceptions that can influence clinical decision-making in dentistry in ways that may disadvantage older individuals, as demonstrated by Guimarães et al.¹⁶

The portrayal of frailty and dependence in older adults, especially women, reflects deep-rooted cultural stereotypes. As Minó and Mello¹⁷ and WHO² have noted, aging is often seen as a process of devaluation, disproportionately affecting women. This phenomenon contributes to a double standard in aging, where men's physical signs of aging, like gray hair and wrinkles, are viewed as markers of wisdom and maturity, while women face societal pressures to conceal these signs to align with unrealistic beauty standards.^{2,18}

In addition to gender biases, this study underscores the lack of ethnic diversity in Instagram posts. While the majority of Brazil's population identifies as mixed-race or black skin color¹⁹, the analyzed posts predominantly featured white individuals. This lack of representation exacerbates disparities and fails to reflect the diverse reality of Brazilian society. As Gobira et al.²⁰ and Ripardo and Chagas²¹ suggest, inclusive representation in media fosters trust and connection, which is particularly crucial in healthcare communication.

The predominance of dental provider profiles as the source of the analyzed content raises concerns about the ethical responsibilities of healthcare professionals. Despite being viewed as more trustworthy sources of information⁵, these profiles were responsible for all the identified ageist content. This is especially alarming given that a significant proportion of the population relies on social media for health information.²² As such, healthcare professionals must be vigilant about the content they share, ensuring it promotes accurate, evidence-based information

and combats stereotypes.

The study's findings also reflect broader societal norms perpetuated by social media, where youth, beauty, and health are idealized, and aging is stigmatized. In Brazilian culture, where the body often serves as an identity marker²³, the emphasis on anti-aging aesthetics reinforces feelings of inadequacy among older adults. This is evident in Brazil's leading global position in cosmetic surgeries and non-surgical aesthetic procedures.²⁴ The rapid growth of orofacial harmonization compared to geriatric dentistry highlights the prioritization of youthfulness over addressing the unique needs of the aging population.²⁵

The use of images in Instagram posts plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions. Real images of older individuals, rather than illustrations, were predominantly used to engage audiences. However, the consistent portrayal of older adults with white or gray hair reinforces stereotypes of frailty and dependence.²⁰ This finding aligns with the results of AI-generated images using the prompt "frail old person," which mirrored the stereotypes found in the analyzed posts. Such portrayals risk normalizing and perpetuating discriminatory views of aging.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Educational and professional organizations must actively engage on social media to disseminate inclusive, high-quality content that represents the diversity and potential of older adults. Health professionals must also take on the responsibility of challenging stereotypes and promoting positive, evidence-

based messages about aging. These efforts align with the WHO's² strategies for fostering healthy and active aging.

Finally, while this study offers valuable insights, its limitations should be acknowledged. The focus on Portuguese-language posts limits generalizability to other cultural contexts. Additionally, the low representation of educational and social profiles restricted comparative analysis, and the cross-sectional design captured only a specific time frame. Future longitudinal studies with broader scopes are needed to track the evolution of ageism and its manifestations on social media.

In conclusion, combating ageism requires ongoing research and advocacy to address stereotypes and support healthy aging. By fostering a more inclusive and accurate representation of older adults in media, society can take significant steps toward reducing ageist attitudes and promoting equity for all age groups.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal a concerning prevalence of ageism in the most prominent and far-reaching Instagram posts related to geriatric dentistry, which fail to accurately represent the diversity of the older Brazilian population. Notably, professional profiles were responsible for all identified ageist content, with portrayals of frailty often reinforcing the cultural stereotype of a debilitated and dependent older woman.

Table 1 – Analysis of the presence of ageism and frailty (depictions of older individuals) based on the content profile of the analyzed posts

Content Profile	Ageism			TOTAL	Fragilization		
	NO	YES (+)	YES (-)		NO	YES	TOTAL
Dental provider	203 (71.4)	35 (12.3)	40 (14.1)	278 (97.8)	191 (92.7)	14 (6.8)	205 (99.5)
Educational	3 (1.1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (1.1)	1 (0.5)	0 (0)	1 (0.5)
Social	3 (1.1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (1.1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Total	209 (73.6)	35 (12.3)	40 (14.1)	284 (100)	192 (93.2)	14 (6.8)	206 (100)

Table 2 – Analysis of frailty based on variables (characteristics of older individuals) observed in the posted images – n (%)

Characteristic		Presence of frailty		TOTAL
		NO	YES	
Image	Real	235 (91.8)	13 (5.1)	248 (96.9)
	Representative	7 (2.7)	1 (0.4)	8 (3.1)
	Total	242 (94.5)	14 (5.5)	256 (100)
Gender	Masculine	99 (38.8)	4 (1.6)	103 (40.4)
	Feminine	142 (55.7)	10 (3.9)	152 (59.6)
	Total	241 (94.5)	14 (5.5)	255 (100)
Skin color	White	218 (84.5)	13 (5.0)	231 (89.5)
	Brown	14 (5.4)	1 (0.4)	15 (5.8)
	Black	8 (3.1)	0 (0)	8 (3.1)
	Yellow	4 (1.6)	0 (0)	4 (1.6)
	Total	244 (94.6)	14 (5.4)	258 (100)
Hair color	White	115 (45.5)	9 (3.5)	124 (49)
	Grey	83 (32.8)	3 (1.2)	86 (34)
	Colorful	41 (16.2)	2 (0.8)	43 (17)
	Total	239 (94.5)	14 (5.5)	253 (100)

Table 3 – Images generated by artificial intelligence using the prompt “frail old person” (frail older individual)

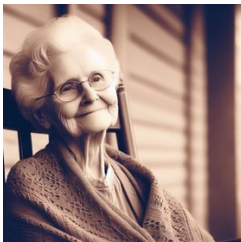
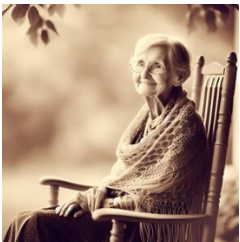




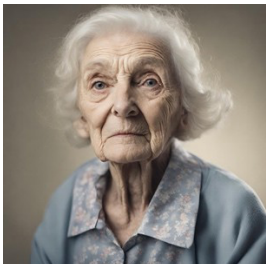
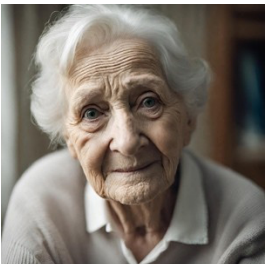
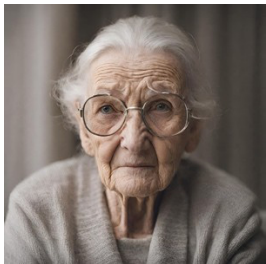
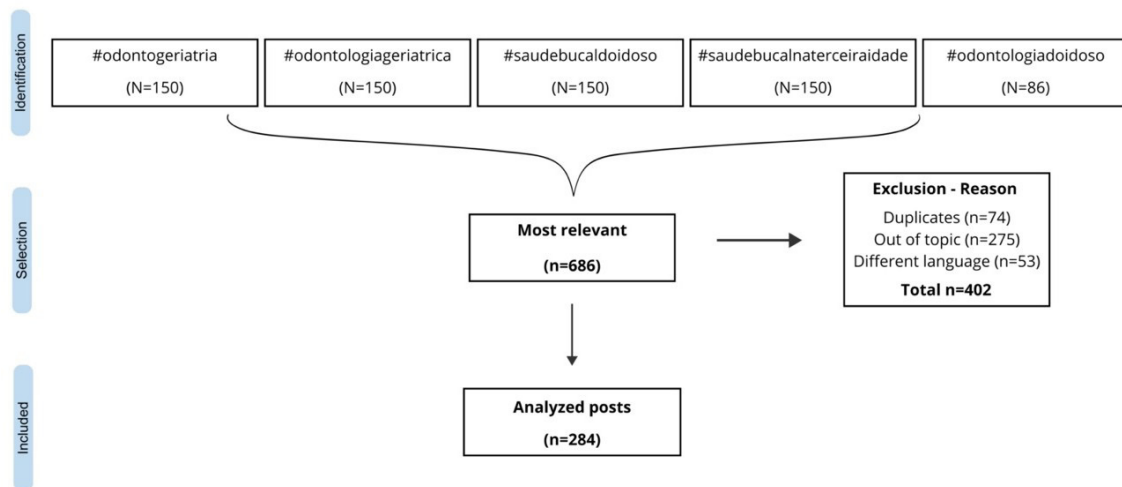
AI Platform	Image 1	Image 2	Image 3
Microsoft Bing			
Leonardo. AI			
Canva.AI			

Figure 1 – Flowchart of content selection for analysis



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