Article

Reverse Generative Learning: Intergenerational Learning for Global Readiness in Higher Education

Wenrui LIANG
Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6549-8627

Rosya Izyanie Shamshudeen
Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9615-3789

Md Azalanshah Md Syed
Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8131-9627

Shenhui
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Beijing Normal–Hong Kong Baptist University, Zhuhai, China
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8297-3243

Corresponding *author: Rosya Izyanie Shamshudeen, Department of Media and Communication Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Orcid ID 0000-0001-9615-3789*

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the impact of senior influencers on Douyin and their role in shaping the educational perceptions of postgraduate students in mainland China. The paper comprises 23 semistructured interviews with students in Guangdong, exploring three themes: algorithm-driven intergenerational identity fluidity, the decentralization of knowledge authority on social platforms, and emotional algorithmizing and reflective agency. The findings include the influence of senior influencers, who provide knowledge input and participate in*

co-creation with students, thereby causing cognitive and emotional shifts. This paper contributes to the discourse on how technological and policy-informed environments facilitate transformative and situation-specific learning, specifically examining intergenerational interactions on social platforms. Although the paper involves local interviews, they correlate with global student mobility in terms of guidance by the 'elder,' which is influenced by platforms, contributing to the determination of risk factors, destinations, and time, ultimately leading to local practical applications in global higher education.

Keywords: Reverse generative learning, Elderly influencers, Transformative learning, Situated learning, student mobility

Academic Editor: Dr. Naziema Jappie, Deputy Dean for Center for Higher Education Development, University of Cape Town, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

On Douyin, a Chinese short-video social media platform launched by ByteDance in 2016, postgraduate students in China interact with senior influencers, including teachers, academics, and senior professionals (Xu et al., 2025; Zhao & Gao, 2025; Hargittai & Palfrey, 2025; Dai et al., 2023). Remarkably, 'elder' influencers, with the support of proactive policies in China that promote lifelong learning, active aging, and the silver economy, have found a foothold in China's unique social, economic, and technological landscape (Chen, 2025). However, in China, the government invests in digital literacy. It incorporates elderly learning into overall strategies, whereas in the West, the targets include a reduced digital divide and ensuring cyberspace rights but with less affinity with elderly learning influence (Lee et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Wen et al., 2025). Thus, in such ambits, the influence of geriatrics in China, along with their supportive institutional and social networks in Douyin, has had a noticeable influence, which is difficult to sidestep even for postgraduate learners in China (Qian & Zhou, 2025). However, the impact of such interactions between postgraduate learners and geriatric influencers on cognition is not well understood. Even when they are most visible, ironically, their influence on altering cognition has rarely been investigated, especially in southern China (Miranda et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2024). Most of the available studies are more interested in 'youth' influence or more intrigued with learning utility in social networks, in general, rather than probing the 'unique' geriatric 'thinker' influence, even in transforming learners and their 'thought' in postgraduate learning (Wang et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025). However, 'Transformative Learning' theories, in their usual garb, remain more conventional in their approach in overall learning forums. However, their usage in social networks, especially in Douyin, which has a geriatric participatory influence on lifelong learning, remains 'rare' (Fryer & Oga-Baldwin, 2019; Liu et al., 2022).

However, in this distinctive Sino-policy environment, theories of transformative learning and situated learning enable the reader to reflect on their

own personal learning practices in the postgraduate environment and on Douyin in new and distinctive ways. Supported by government policy and with the right digital environment, graduate learners experience 'elder' influencers in familiar and transformative settings. However, current theories do not sufficiently explore how such platform interactions, encouraged by the active support of the state, relate to the internal processes of learning transformation. Furthermore, they do not sufficiently explain the learning process whereby interactions between 'elder' influencers and graduate learners become points of true cognitive shift, facilitated by both the policy environment and platform interactions (Alamer, 2020; Kasneci et al., 2021). 'Normal' usage practices in Douyin implement theories of situated learning (Xiao & Zhi, 2020; Liang et al., 2025). This 'unique' Sino environment, in contrast to Western or UN models, reinforces 'educational cognition' in distinctively local terms with global significance (Miranda et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025; Fryer & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). However, in keeping with domestic insights, the mechanisms speak more universally 'internationally mobile' to related issues of higher education, specifically in relation to 'family-elder' advisories, platforms, and the determination of 'authority,' 'risk,' and 'self-projection' concerning 'study abroad.'

To trailblaze innovative approaches to *reverse generative learning*, this research has three objectives. First, to examine how, with the empowerment and support of Chinese policy, elderly influencers in the Douyin online environment influence the learning paradigm of postgraduate students in China. Second, to rely on transformative learning theory and to explore how, in such policy-driven interactions, elderly influencers facilitate cognitive transformation in learners through dialogue and reflection. Finally, with the approach of situated learning theory, innovative learning contexts emerge through the influence of policy, platform, and personal involvement. These aims lead us to three focused questions: How do elder influencers on Douyin affect their own educational cognition as Chinese postgraduate students? How do they promote transformative learning among peers? How, in the rich situational contexts enabled by Chinese policy, do they help advance postgraduate student cognition? To answer these questions, we aim to provide both a practical and theoretical map for readers, who are themselves shaping and being shaped by the era of elder influencers.

Our findings reveal that, in this Chinese context, postgraduate students acquire knowledge not only from older education influencers but also through active participation in knowledge cocreation and reflective engagement with shared content. We term this bidirectional process *reverse generative learning*: students both learn from and coproduce knowledge with older influencers, extending accounts of digitally mediated learning beyond simple adaptation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cognitive impact of elderly influencers

Elderly influencers, particularly those on platforms such as Douyin and Instagram, have been increasingly challenging conventional notions of aging and digital participation. Recent work has shown that elderly (often female) influencers are overturning ageism, inviting intergenerational engagement, and recasting aging paradigms (Miranda et al., 2022; Farinosi, 2023; Ghosh, 2023; Yu & Zhao, 2022). Sun et al. (2025) reported that influencers in China not only disseminate knowledge but also offer psychological support, aligning their content with followers' evolving needs. Gil-Quintana et al. (2022) confirmed that even nanoinfluencers (edutubers) have measurable effects on young learners' engagement, although Recio Moreno, Gil Quintana, and Romero Riaño (2023) warned that the health and fitness sector, too, faces the challenge of superficial engagement.

However, as highlighted by Chen, Yu, Dai, Jing, and Wang (2025), the field still lacks robust evidence on how elder influencers impact postgraduate students' educational cognition and critical thinking. Chang, Panjaburee, Lin, Lai, and Hwang (2022) reported that online strategies can increase self-efficacy and self-regulation, but Brooks (2020) and Chankseliani and Kwak (2025) noted that most existing studies address diversity and mobility rather than the unique perspective of older influencers. However, Gil-Quintana (2022) and Vida de León (2021) conclude that the impact on economic outcomes as well as audience engagement is context specific. In China, Zhang (2024) demonstrated the centrality of Douyin's elder influencers with respect to fashion trends and marketplace attitudes, but further inquiry into their effects on higher-order cognition is necessary. Taddeo (2023) also recognized that, overall, across the graduatespace, informal learning 'follows' influencers in general; however, it is undertheorized with respect to the formalization of its outcomes. Taken together, these results solidify the call for research involving the cognitive effects of elderly influencers on advanced learners in non-Western settings, which may provide important support for policy.

Transformative Learning Online

Thus, the application of transformative learning theory, which has been used in relation to personal and cognitive change, to social media learning, specifically when it involves elderly influencers, is unconventional. Authors such as Hyde (2021) and Hoggan and Kloubert (2020) noted the significant need for critical reflection and discourse in transformative learning. However, most studies, including Du & Alm (2024), have tended to explore more motivational elements of technology rather than deeper, more cognitive levels. Fryer and Oga-Baldwin (2019) and Alamer (2020) stated that although self-determination theory and theories related to motivations seem to be in vogue, transformative learning processes tend to be treated in rather cursory ways in the realm of digital learning.

Korthagen (2010) suggested that even situated learning often neglects the need to facilitate critical incidents intentionally.

Sun et al. (2025) outlined the role of edu influencers in promoting personal development via self-documentation and self-expression in the Chinese context. However, they noted the limitations of algorithms and the potential for censorship. Raaper, Hardey, and Aad (2025), along with Miller, Jolly, Latz, and Listman (2022), located support systems led by influencer networks in higher education, although they found minimal evidence of transformative learning outcomes. Chankseliani and Kwak (2025) explored the butterfly effect of global mobility in higher education, noting that transformation cannot be achieved by merely accessing new information, but rather involves active engagement. Hyde (2021) argued for the dialectics of ontology and epistemology in transformative learning, supported also by Zhu, Hua, and Wang (2024) in their conclusion that Instagram's virtualized campus cultures facilitated situated learning, although they often lacked depth. Thus, although the potential of transformative learning has become widely acknowledged, there is a lack of evidence on the realization of transformative learning in elderly influencer-led education on social media platforms (Al-Dmour et al., 2025).

Situated Learning and Policy Context

The importance of situated learning theory in relation to young influencers and elderly individuals learning in influencer–learner interactions cannot be overstated. Korthagen provided an overall perspective on situated learning in education in 2010. He emphasized the importance of joint enterprise and mutual engagement. On the other hand, Mills (2011) explained the significance of joint enterprises and shared repertoires in learning, which cannot be achieved on digital platforms. On the other hand, in the Chinese environment, support driven by policy objectives, as explained by Wang et al. (2025), creates an opportune situation for the elderly influencer to take on the role of an educational figure. Hardie et al. (2022) and Tang et al. (2023) explained the significance of belongingness and mutual engagement, which cannot be achieved in influencer learning.

Raaper et al. (2025) and Schroeder et al. (2024) noted the increasing contribution of influencers to support and brand representation, and questioned their authenticity and depth. Murimi (2017) highlighted the need for sustained support and community engagement in influencer-mediated behavior change within nutrition education. Canagarajah (2024) and Ngubane and Makua (2021) have criticized the need to overcome dominant discourse and the necessity of adopting decolonized and contextualized approaches. Europe, as noted in Spatial Imaginary (2021) and Revaz (2025), has contrasting stories of Western and Chinese influence on policy narratives. Saldaña et al. (2021) indicated how policy discourse both empowered and restricted influencer-mediated innovation. Finally, learning analytics and metrics, as indicated by Khalil et al. (2023) in their examination of learning outcomes, tend to be inadequate in capturing the depth of situated cognition, let alone contextual influence. Furthermore, learning

environments in play, such as those depicted in Instagram (Zhu et al., 2024), such as simulative learning, tend to ameliorate feelings of belonging; however, ultimately, situated learning must be facilitated in terms of policy, culture, and platform support.

Elder influence on international student mobility

While the literature on international student mobility is vast, we ground our findings in juxtapositions with major sending nations and how they are similar to or differ from those in Australia. From existing works such as Dehmel and Meister (2025). In India, recent research has shown that student mobility is still significantly influenced by parental worries about safety perceptions and financial commitments; this influence appears to reinforce the family-authority dimension in the choice of destination country and timing (Wadhwa 2016; Thomas2025). In Nigeria, qualitative research demonstrates that nuclear family influence—in frequent patriarchal guise—operates in conjunction with recruitment brokers and "push" factors within national systems, yielding definitive advice on whether and where abroad to pursue studies (Okungbowa, 2022). At a higher level, credential-seeking by the elite and status imaginaries—established staples of international student mobility research—are why elder recommendations (offline and online) exert disproportionate persuasive effects across our landscapes (Boler et al.,2025). Senior guidance and family networks thus serve as situated advising infrastructures within China-based mechanisms, which can expedite or limit mobility. In contrast, platform interactions shape the reception, contestation, and internalization of such guidance.

Studies on international student mobility have consistently demonstrated that families, frequently parents and older relatives, influence decisions on studying abroad, destination choice, and the timing of movements (Liu & Wu, 2025). Family advice interacts with perceived safety, cost, prestige, and informal networks of trust (Kasherwa et al., 2025); in Chinese societies, they commonly dictate shortlisting and delay versus hastening plans (Nahar et al., 2025). Traditional push–pull explanations give primacy to family and social capital. In contrast, qualitative work portrays elder guidance as a sustained mode of informal advising capable of validating overseas qualifications or valorizing closeness and stability. Placing our evidence within this study clarifies how platformed contact with older education influencers reinforces offline elderly voices, collectively shaping imaginings of and practical decisions on mobility.

METHOD

This study employed semistructured interviews to investigate how older influencers on Douyin influence the cognition and transformative learning of Chinese postgraduate students in four major cities of Guangdong (Guo et al., 2025), specifically Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, and Macau (Chan & Shek, 2021). All 20 participants were full-time master's students aged 22--25 years (Adiyono et al., 2025; Zheng, 2025). They had followed elder influencers for

more than six months and watched their videos at least three times per week. Semistructured interviews were used to elicit processes ill suited to fixed-form instruments (Junnier, 2024).

The recruitment criteria were precise. We recruited regular followers who were able to describe concrete cognitive or affective changes; casual users were excluded. This ensured a sample that could genuinely speak to the mechanisms of algorithm-driven identity fluidity, knowledge authority decentralization, and emotional algorithmization (Ben Moussa et al., 2024; Wong, 2006; Schellewald, 2022).

Each interview was conducted in the same manner, featuring three questions: (1) How do you view and understand the concept of elderly influencers? (2) Have you experienced anything in Douyin related to reconsidering convictions, ideas, or beliefs concerning authority? (3) Do you remember an instance in which your own feelings, ideas of the future, or personal biography were affected by their videos? The interviews ranged from 90--120 minutes. They were recorded with consent and transcribed, and the moderator's statements were eliminated.

To gain insight into the nature of transferring such learning into global settings in education, the protocol also sought feedback on postgraduate directions, including the level of desire to undertake a stint of learning abroad and the role of guidance by elders. These were descriptive, not corroborative, and were explored to gain further insight into the basic mechanisms underlying learning.

Data analysis was structured in three iterative cycles. First, open coding identified concrete expressions of digital role modeling, identity projection, peer epistemics, participatory learning, empathy triggers, and scenario simulation. Next, axial coding grouped the codes into six subthemes, which in turn formed three main themes aligned with transformative and situated learning theory. For example, one participant described watching a retired teacher demonstrate how to use new software: "I used to think elders were afraid of technology, but now I see their courage, and I imagine myself still learning at that age." This case study was coded both as digital elder role modeling and youthful self-projection into later life, which is consistent with the theme of algorithm-driven intergenerational identity fluidity. Two researchers independently verified the coding, resolving disagreements by second fact-checking against the transcript.

Member-checking, double-coding, and saturation procedures ensured validity. This revealed how elderly influencers help postgraduates reconstruct cognition, challenge hierarchies, and reshape emotional and narrative agency.

RESULTS

The analysis of 23 semistructured interviews with Guangdong-based postgraduate students revealed a rich and multilayered structure of learning experiences shaped by regular engagement with elder influencers on Douyin. Iterative coding yielded codes clustered into subthemes and three main themes. These themes reflect how digital participation with older role models on social media challenges traditional educational boundaries, reconfigures knowledge authority, and activates new

forms of emotional and reflective agency. When participants alluded to studying abroad, their narratives aligned with the same three mechanisms: identity work that normalizes cross-boundary learning, decentralized advising in which elders and influencers become epistemic peers, and affectively charged reflection that reframes risks and benefits. The thematic structure below therefore doubles as a lens for mobility imaginaries without altering our domestic analytical focus. The following table summarizes the thematic framework that guided our deeper narrative analysis (shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Thematic analysis of postgraduate students' learning

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes
1.Algorithm-Driven Intergenerational Identity Fluidity	1.1 Disrupting Age-Role Fixity	(1) Digital Elder Role-Modeling (2) Youthful Self-Projection in Later Life
	1.2 Reciprocal Digital Identity Exchange	(1) Youth as Teachers, Elders as Learners (2) Hybridization of Generational Language & Values
2.Knowledge Authority Decentralization in Social Platforms	2.1 Epistemic Power Shifting	(1) Elders as Epistemic Peers (2) Contesting Traditional Knowledge Hierarchies
	2.2 Participatory Micro-Community Learning	(1) Bottom-Up Content Creation (2) Contextualized Peer Validation
3.Emotional Algorithmization and Reflective Agency	3.1 Algorithmic Mediation of Affect	(1) Triggered Empathy through Recommendation (2) Platform-Shaped Emotional Engagement
	3.2 Transformative Agency via Scenario Simulation	(1) Imaginative Role-Playing (2) Rewriting Personal and Collective Life Narratives

Although algorithm-driven intergenerational identity fluidity and emotional algorithmization and reflective agency might appear similar on the surface, their core logics and mechanisms of influence are fundamentally distinct. The first theme centers on the disruption and reconfiguration of boundaries between generations and social roles. Here, algorithmic recommendations on Douyin foster new forms of identity exchange. Chinese postgraduates and elders continuously swap roles as learners, mentors, and creators. The focus lies in how

traditional divisions between novices and experts, old and young, are destabilized. The process is relational, highlighting who influences whom and how digital environments reshape mutual perceptions across age groups.

However, the third theme refers to changes in affect and self-awareness. The algorithm is doing much more than showing us shift. It constitutes our capacity for empathy and allows a process of transmutation within each one of ourselves. Elder influencers inspired a reflection on both life narratives, resiliency and laughter, that students connected with, which caused them to question their own narratives. This is not a matter of social role movement, but rather an affective resonance and subjectivity in rewriting one's story.

It also represents a departure from the first and third in that it decentralizes knowledge authority. It offers an alternative mechanism for the redistribution of epistemic power, highlighting how bottom-up openness and peer review as a service disrupt top-down structures built (and maintained) around modes of knowledge production. Conversation moves from discussing who we are (primary theme one) and our feelings of reflexivity the reflection itself (main theme three) to more about knowing information and how it is created.

As a result, while these three themes are intertwined in practice, they each represent a different level at which the learning can be illuminated. Fluid selves, epistemic violence and affective reflexivity The language of the input and output must be the same, but merging them would risk obscuring these critical nuances.

4.1 Algorithm-driven intergenerational identity fluidity

Douyin, which turns out from these postgraduate students' accounts, does not merely recommend videos but silently redefines what is considered young and old when learning the daily—as a form of constituent-making. Most students were first drawn to the platform by elder-curated influencers presenting either cute or comedic scenes. However, as exposure deepened, participants described a growing awareness of the authenticity, perseverance, and creativity with which elderly creators approach learning new technologies and social practices. This experience captured by the code of digital elder role modeling served as a mirror for the students themselves.

"Her willingness to try new things at 70 makes me wonder if I've limited myself with my own excuses. I even started to picture my life at her age, asking: will I also still be learning?" (Participant WJH, 23, male, Guangzhou)

Here, the algorithm's persistent suggestion of such content prompted not only entertainment but also deep self-projection into later life, a process that students linked to new ambitions and future planning. The platform also facilitated a two-way exchange of identities. Postgraduate students were often surprised to find themselves in the position of digital mentors:

"Once, I explained Douyin's 'duet' function in the comments for an elderly influencer, and she replied in a video, using my tips. It felt like I became the teacher for a moment" (Participant WYM, 25, male, Shenzhen).

Forcing a twist whereby the roles were reversed and in which youth as well as elders could both teach and learn from one another helped students reevaluate generational roles not simply etched in stone. Thus, the cross-pollination of

teenage slang, values and wisdom, which students use to quibble at their peers as elders try hip lingo from youngsters, was born.

"We talked about the phrase from a grandpa influencer that gets used as a meme in group chat saying, 'you want to talk shift?? somethings are for all ages so I heard'" (Participant ZYF, 24, Macau)

This identity fluidity reshaped participants' educational self-understanding. Instead of seeing age as a line dividing novice from expert, or old from new, students began to see learning as a lifelong, mutually constructed process. One in which digital spaces serve as powerful sites of cross-generational role play, challenge, and transformation.

4.2 Knowledge authority decentralization on social platforms

The open comment threads and reply functions on Douyin frustrated them—they had become accustomed to the top-down teacher-taught dynamic of formal education. This was a place where knowledge did not come from the front but rather was dispersed in microcommunities of interaction, organically if sometimes somewhat chaotically.

"The Grandma influencer fails to solve the tech problem. She queried in comments, and some such students (including me) replied with more guides than they bargained for. Some time later, she created a 'Thank You' video, as well as a list of things she learned. The teacher was no one at that moment, and the never mattered. Everyone was building knowledge together." (Participant SH, 25, female, Hong Kong)

This example manifests the subtheme of epistemic power shifting in which elders and youth work as epistemic peers, both offering to validate knowledge equally. Frequent experiences were centered around challenging the culture of traditional knowledge.

"However, when elder influencers post about historical topics or traditional culture, there are sometimes comments from younger followers that correct or add scientific explanations. Rather than arguments, this transforms all comments into a space where many truths and lived experiences are valued. Even though no one will ever have the correct answer and everyone may choose to disagree with another, I always love reading those to see how each generation interprets a given subject." (Participant LYZ, 25, Guangzhou)

These interactions illustrate how dismantling the traditional knowledge hierarchy produces more complex and nuanced forms of understanding for graduate students. With students not being mere consumers but coauthors of educational content, more participatory microcommunity-based learning also came into play.

"I then uploaded my own version of the cooking tutorial and tagged her. When she reshared it, I linked back to her, and suddenly, we had a live chain of mutual feedback. Everybody can participate, and there are no grades, such as a project-based class. Nothing more than acknowledgment." (Participant LZL, 23, male Shenzhen)

This process of situated peer validation — liking, commenting on comments, and sharing corrections with those lower in multiple social hierarchies — allowed

students to practice critique and argumentation within an informal ecosystem that communicated acceptance before correction.

These experiences fundamentally changed the way postgraduate students viewed what knowledge was and where authority lay. Not only were students no longer taught to be receptacles of wisdom merely, but they could also question sources and information for themselves and add their own insights to help validate the knowledge by incorporating diversity and uncertainty into what is perceived as authentically educational.

4.3 Emotional Algorithmization and Reflective Agency

In addition to its cognitively shifting discourses and institutional power dynamics, Douyin's discoveries on students' emotional lives and critical reflections were deeply intertwined with students' context of learning and becoming. Others complained about how the recommendation of triggered empathy was so frequently referenced:

"The app knows when I'm busy with work. It serves up videos of seniors accomplishing things or engaging in simple pleasures. It's not just comfort. Their outlook is so bright and therefore forces me to consider why I cannot seem happy in bad times." (Participant ZJXY, 24, Guangzhou)

Our postgraduate informants agreed that Douyin's scripted scenario-driven videos—whether of elderly influencers enacting university experience or situational role-playing on screen in family reunions and personal setbacks— enabled transformative agency through the simulation of scenarios.

"I just rewatched an influencer & vlogger "go back to college". He kidded with junior high school students, but he also probed. He called me a dinosaur and that started to twist my thinking all around — maybe there's no deadline of learning; rather, perhaps I should not be drawing boundaries on what could pique my interests moving forward?" (Participant LQL, 25, female, Hong Kong)

The implicational and narrative function of this type of content invited readers to write new personal life narratives, transforming not only their pictures regarding old age but also the frame with which they were constructing the developmental pathway.

These conclusions suggest that Douyin followers are not only a byproduct but also an attempt to influence how Chinese postgraduates perceive their cognition and consolidate their identity. They allow students to switch between roles easily. They allowed students to share and construct knowledge. They also allow students to reflect on their emotions, which is the true learning our students need today, created by online groups.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we have examined how elder influencers on Douyin affect educational cognition, transformative learning, and situated knowledge-building among Chinese postgraduate students in Guangdong's most developed cities. Our findings extend and challenge the literature, addressing notable gaps and

introducing a new conceptual lens that we call *reverse generative learning*, a phenomenon in which younger, highly educated learners not only do not simply receive from but also actively reconstruct, hybridize, and even cocreate with elderly digital educators, generating new forms of learning and agency in both directions.

The Cognitive Impact of Elder Influencers on Postgraduate Students

Previous studies have shown that elderly influencers can challenge stereotypes, foster engagement, and promote authentic digital participation (Miranda et al., 2022; Farinosi, 2023; Ghosh, 2023). However, much of the literature has focused on general youth audiences or informal learners, rarely centering on the advanced cognitive development of postgraduate students. Our results directly address this gap. Douyin's elder influencers provide live proof to postgraduate students that lessons can be learned whenever, wherever, and at any age to anyone doing anything. Students reported that witnessing elderly people learn new technologies, sharing failures, and refining knowledge in public caused a breakdown of their own fixed mindset around both themselves and others.

Importantly, however, participants experienced this shift not simply as role reversal or as inspired. Instead, they painted a nuanced picture of observing and talking with and teaching elderly role models—full of playful mimesis as well—that could putatively foster the birth hybrid cognitive selves. Students also came to understand their expertise as a site of partial knowledge—one wedged into a history echoing other histories, invested in the becoming process rather than total mastery—a reveling from them intergenerational peer learning. This complex mutuality involves new platform features, where students teach elderly influencers and then learn life strategies and values in return. This highlights the lack of cognitive flexibility in earlier studies. *Reverse generative learning* allows younger learners to adopt and generate knowledge, reconstructing education as a two-way, ongoing process.

While our interviews focused on domestic learners, the three mechanisms identified here—identity fluidity, authority decentralization, and affective–reflective agency—also map onto how aspirations for studying abroad are negotiated in Chinese families. Identity fluidity normalizes cross-boundary learning as a life-course possibility; authority decentralization broadens who counts as a credible adviser (including older influencers and older relatives); and affect-driven reflection can either heighten perceived risk or crystallize ambitions. Prior research shows that parents and grandparents actively shape destination choices through assessments of safety, cost, and trusted social networks, sometimes steering students from one country to another during periods of perceived instability (Bodycott, 2009; Li & Bray, 2007). These family logics mean that elder voices—in homes and online—may either valorize overseas credentials or counsel prudence and proximity, with tangible effects on whether, where and when students move. Such dynamics were widely reported among Chinese families during and after the pandemic and continue to influence the

relative appeal of specific destinations. A very brief comparison is beneficial. Elder guidance in other large sending systems also functions similarly, as a gatekeeper or accelerator of travel, but the platform layer is less dense. What is different in the Chinese case is the confluence of dense online elder voices with offline family advice, which condenses advising effects and makes them highly apparent to the peer publics of students. This dynamic serves to help account for both rapid spikes of interest toward ends and patterned reservations during periods of feared uncertainty.

Promotion of Transformative Learning among Peers
However, most digital research to date, especially in influencer studies, has documented only superficial attitude change or motivational uplift (Du & Alm, 2024; Fryer & Oga-Baldwin, 2019). In contrast, our analysis demonstrates how Douyin's algorithmic environment, comment communities, and narrative-driven content not only motivate but also actively scaffold critical incidents and dialogic encounters. Postgraduate students described how microcommunities, often catalyzed by elder influencers, fostered public negotiation of knowledge, values, and affect.

Crucially, this transformation was not unidirectional. Instead, students and influencers coconstruct new meanings through reciprocal feedback, scenario simulation, and even humor. What sets our findings apart is the process by which students collectively develop transformative agency, not only in response to influencer content but also through participation, contestation, and creative scenario-building. These practices, which are seldom detailed in prior work (Korthagen, 2010; Raaper et al., 2025; Miller et al., 2022), demonstrate that students are becoming agents of change within policy-influenced digital spaces.

Advancing Cognition through Policy-Supported Situated Learning

Situated learning theory holds that knowledge is constructed through authentic participation and a shared repertoire (Korthagen, 2010; Mills, 2011). However, as our literature review revealed, few studies have examined how macrolevel Chinese policy and the local context combine to enable or constrain the development of authentic, situated learning via elder influencers. Our findings suggest that the specific constellation of enabling environments provided by supportive Chinese policies, such as digital literacy funding and active aging public campaigns, combined with the Douyin algorithmic design itself, is seeding grounds for mutual engagement between generations.

Given how postgraduate students enacted more than simply consumed this influencerifiable web content by also living in and performatively inhabiting these online spaces as crucibles. Students performed situated learning at scale by working together on projects in the open, commenting publicly and participating, as well as validating each other's work back. They did so by using Douyin not just to learn but also as a location for peer validation, grassroots content creation and situated argumentation that was particularly evident in the ways students appropriated—and recirculated expressed knowledge from—elderly education

influencers or fostered new genres of community-specific expertise. Policy affordances, in that sense, characterize a kind of distributed agency — rendering everyday encounters between the old and young generative to higher-order cognition and collaboratively negotiated meaning. It was not well understood by either Western or Chinese researchers before.

Finally, and most importantly, Douyin's elder influencers have ceased to be digital freaks or entertainment sources. They are agents of deep cognitive reformation, key peer independence and genuine policy-loaded situated pedagogy for Chinese postgraduates. The new lens of reverse generative learning provides a way to theorize and design learning environments that harness the power of digital, intergenerational, and contextual interaction for advanced, lifelong education. The implications for international higher education are a direct consequence. Recruitment of Chinese postgraduates needs to recognize elder involvement explicitly: offering bilingual, family-oriented webinars; issuing plain-language guides on program strength, career options, and campus safety; and asking alumni (and, where relevant, their parents) to codeliver practicalities. Since older expectations tend to linger even after enrollment, universities need to translate this family-sensitive design into student service: predeparture briefings on managing intergenerational expectations, opt-in family update channels during interruptions, and counseling aware of family-driven pressure on changes in destination, major, or poststudy plans. In UK contexts, integration and well-being initiatives connecting Chinese students with supporting communities, which have emerged as particularly relevant, can be complemented by clear risk communication with families such that uncertainty can be mitigated without evading student responsibility. Such responses translate our mechanisms into practice: they recognize elder influence while maintaining students' reflective decision-making abroad.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION: REVERSE GENERATIVE LEARNING

Taken together, these findings lead us to propose the concept of *reverse generative learning*, a unique, reciprocal mechanism in which advanced learners (in this case, postgraduates) both internalize knowledge from older influencers and generate new knowledge, practices, and narratives that feed back into the influencer's identity and the wider learning community. In contrast to the traditional transformative learning or situated cognition model, the implicit assumption is that expert-to-novice (or context-to-learner) knowledge transmission occurs in only a single way. *Reverse generative learning, however,* recognizes the directional mutuality and reciprocity of power between knowers within digital media spaces as being both recursive and contingent, shaping configurations themselves.

This new framework addresses three major gaps identified in previous research. It first addresses the cognitive routes by which elderly influencers influence an even deeper, more organic form of attitude than they do among tertiary (college) scholars. Second, it explicates the enactment of transformative

learning through communality (sharing projects), affectivity (emotions at stake) and criticality in sense-making within algorithmically mediated spaces. This can only be achieved when cell-first learning fosters the grounds of deep, reciprocated and situated Chinese policy-context-dependent growth. *Reverse generative learning* highlights the agency of youth and their dynamics with old digital educators, thus pushing back on prior theory by both amplifying it within existing bounds while pointing toward new avenues in research scholarship that bring together such notions as digital education at this scale takes (again) and still unfolds courses en route peripherals.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

Although this study was rich in interview data and used a rigorous coding framework, it has several limitations. The participation sample consisted of 23 full-time master's students, all of whom were aged between 22 and 25 years, in four first-tier cities of Guangdong. While this regional and demographic focus provided depth, it also somewhat limits generalizability. In contrast, we should expect *reverse generative learning* to unfold differently in undergraduate settings than in working adult settings or across regions where policies differ. Additionally, all participants reported having interacted with Douyin elderly influencers for more than six months. In multiple ways, however, this means that students who are less connected online or more critical of social media could observe and internalize these pressures in a manner not represented by our research.

Our use of self-reported, retrospective interviews — a key method for studying transformative and situated learning processes — may also introduce bias due to memory or selective self-presentation. Although iterative coding and member-checking strengthened themes, the lack of observational or experimental data restricts our ability to make strong causal inferences about how transformational learning processes likely emerge as the lived experiences of elderly influencers and others shift cognition over time. Finally, future research may explore mixed-method designs that combine digital trace methods with more longitudinal observations or intervention studies. It may also be necessary to investigate how *reverse generative learning* functions differently in different disciplines, geographical environments, and social contexts, as well as to expand the theoretical implications of *reverse generative learning*. As the influencer education ecosystem is in a state of dynamic flux, combining qualitative depth with broader comparative or experimental approaches will be necessary for understanding intergenerational learning practices that occur within different contexts and contribute to situating transformative learning processes using digital technologies throughout China.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the institution, ensuring that the privacy and rights of all participants were fully protected.

Informed Consent

All participants signed informed consent forms before the start of the study, clearly understanding the purpose, process, potential risks, and voluntary nature of their participation.

Acknowledgment

In the preparation of this manuscript, we utilized artificial intelligence (AI) tools for content creation with the following capacity:

✔ ***None***
☐ *Some sections, with minimal or no editing*
☐ *Some sections, with extensive editing*
☐ *Entire work, with minimal or no editing*
☐ *Entire work, with extensive editing*

We have disclosed any use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the manuscript's Materials and Methods section and acknowledge full responsibility for the content's integrity and compliance with ethical standards, per COPE guidelines and the Journal of International Students.

REFERENCES

Al-Dmour, H., Al-Dmour, R., Al-Dmour, Y., & Al-Dmour, A. (2025). *Transforming international student recruitment: The role of AI, personalization, and trust in Jordanian higher education. Journal of International Students, 15*(8), 25-52. https://doi.org/10.32674/m2fmc286

Adiyono, A., Suwartono, T., Nurhayati, S., Dalimarta, F. F., & Wijayanti, O. (2025). *Impact of artificial intelligence on student reliance for exam answers: A case study in IRCT Indonesia.* International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research, 24(3), 519-544. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.3.22

Brooks, R. (2020). *Diversity and the European higher education student: Policy influencers' narratives of difference. Studies in Higher Education, 45*(7), 1507–1518. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564263

Brooks, R. (2021). *Europe as spatial imaginary? Narratives from higher education 'policy influencers' across the continent.* Journal of Education Policy, 36(2), 159-178.https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1672212

Ben Moussa, M., Khalil, E., & Zaid, B. (2024). *Algorithmic experiences of Netflix's users in the Arab world: Implications for agency and social practice.* Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 30(6), 2090–2108. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565241301125

Boler, M., Gharib, H., Kweon, Y. J., Trigiani, A., & Perry, B. (2025). *Promoting Mis/Disinformation Literacy Among Adults: A Scoping Review of Interventions and Recommendations.* Communication Research. https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502251318630

Chang, C.-Y., Panjaburee, P., Lin, H.-C., Lai, C.-L., & Hwang, G.-H. (2022). *Effects of online strategies on students' learning performance, self-efficacy, self-regulation and critical thinking in university online courses.* Educational Technology Research and Development, 70(1), 185–204. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10071-y

Chankseliani, M., & Kwak, J. (2025). *The Ripple Effect: Understanding the Societal Implications of International Student Mobility.* International Journal of Educational Research, 129, 102520. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102520

Chen, H. (2025). *When the 'Old' Attend to the 'Old': Female Direct Care Workers Doing Gendered and Classed Age in the Chinese Elder Care Industry.* The British Journal of Sociology. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.13211

Chen, X., Yu, T., Dai, J., Jing, Y., & Wang, C. (2025). *Unveiling learners' intentions toward influencer-led education: An integration of qualitative and quantitative analysis.* Interactive Learning Environments. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2024.2444533

Chiang, T. H.-C. (2021). *Investigating Effects of Interactive Virtual Reality Games and Gender on Immersion, Empathy and Behavior Into Environmental Education.* Frontiers in Psychology, 12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.608407

Chan, C. S., & Shek, K. F. (2021). *Are Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay area cities attractive to university students in Hong Kong? Leading the potential human capital from image perception to locational decisions.* Journal of Place Management and Development, 14(4), 404–429. https://doi.org/10.1108/jpmd-04-2020-0032

Canagarajah, S. (2024). *Decolonizing academic writing pedagogies for multilingual students.* TESOL quarterly, 58(1), 280-306. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3231

Du, J., & Alm, A. (2024). *The impact of ChatGPT on English for academic purpose(EAP) students' language learning experience: A self-determination theory perspctive.* Education sciences, 14(7), 726. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14070726

Dai, Y., Liang, W., Xv, W., Wu, Y., & Wang, Y. (2023, September). *Exploring the Continuance Intention of Young Chinese Females to Use Social Media: The Case of Xiaohongshu.* In 2023 9th International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2023) (pp. 1715-1732). Atlantis Press.

Dehmel, L., & Meister, D. M. (2025). *Shaping opportunity spaces in deep mediatization at school: principals' strategies for dealing with unbounded digital communication.* International Journal of Leadership in Education, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2025.2536062

Farinosi, M. (2023). *Deconstructing the stigma of aging: The rise of the mature female influencers.* European Journal of Cultural Studies, 26(3), 313–335. https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221102188

Fryer, L. K., & Oga-Baldwin, W. L. Q. (2019). *Succeeding at junior high school: Students' reasons, their reach, and the teaching that h(inders)elps their grasp.* Contemporary Educational Psychology, 59, 101778. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.101778

Ghosh, M. (2023). *Female Instagram elderly influencers countering the aging narratives.* Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 10(1). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02323-4

Gil-Quintana, J., León, E. V. de, Osuna-Acedo, S., & Marta-Lazo, C. (2022). *Nano-Influencers Edutubers: Perspective of Centennial Generation Families in Spain* | Article | Media and Communication.

Gil-Quintana, J., & Vida de León, E. (2021). *Educational Influencers on Instagram: Analysis of Educational Channels, Audiences, and Economic Performance.* Publications, 9(4), Article 4. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications9040043

Guo, X., Mohd Adnan, H., & Zainal Abidin, M. Z. (2025). *Behind the screen: Exploring perceptions, attitudes, and coping behaviors toward cyberbullying on Douyin among Chinese undergraduates.* Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2025.2525342

Hoggan, C., & Hoggan-Kloubert, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Adult learning in a migration society.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003124412

Hardie, P., O'Donovan, R., Jarvis, S., & Redmond, C. (2022). *Key tips to providing a psychologically safe learning environment in the clinical setting.* BMC Medical Education, 22(1), 816. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03892-9

Hyde, B. (2021). *Critical discourse and critical reflection in Mezirow's theory of transformative learning: A dialectic between ontology and epistemology (and a subtext of reflexivity mirroring my own onto-epistemological movement).* Adult Education Quarterly, 71(4), 373-388. https://doi.org/10.1177/07417136211003612

Hargittai, E., & Palfrey, J. (2025). *Wired Wisdom: How to Age Better Online.* University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226823461

Istenič, A. (2021). *Online learning under COVID-19: Re-examining the prominence of video-based and text-based feedback.* Educational Technology Research and Development, 69(1), 117–121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-09955-w

Junnier, F. (2024). *Action and understanding in the semistructured research interview: Using CA to analyze European research scientists' attitudes to linguistic (dis)advantage.* Journal of English for Academic Purposes, 68, 101355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2024.101355

Liang, W., Li, J., Wei, J., Min, Y., & Lam, A. T. Z. (2025). *Interdisciplinary situational teaching for postgraduate connotative development: An*

integrated perspective of scaffolding theory and symbolic interactionism. Journal of International Students, 15(10), 153-176.

Kareem, J., Patrick, H. A., Prabakaran, N., B, V., Tantia, V., MPM, P. K., & Mukherjee, U. (2023, May). *Transformational educational leaders inspire school educators' commitment.* In Frontiers in Education (Vol. 8, p. 1171513). Frontiers Media SA.https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1171513

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2010). *Situated learning theory and the pedagogy of teacher education: Toward an integrative view of teacher behavior and teacher learning.* Teaching and Teacher Education, 26(1), 98– 106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.05.001

Khalil, M., Prinsloo, P., & Slade, S. (2023). *The use and application of learning theory in learning analytics: A scoping review.* Journal of Computing in Higher Education, 35(3), 573-594. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12528-022-09340-3

Kandiko Howson, C., & Kingsbury, M. (2023). *Curriculum change as transformational learning.* Teaching in Higher Education, 28(8), 1847-1866.https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1940923

Kasherwa, A., Lenette, C., & Fernandez, E. (2025). *Adverse childhood experiences, social networks and help-seeking experiences of African-background refugee children: Toward a refugee children's Network-Episode Model.* Children and Youth Services Review, 170, 108146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108146

Lee, A. R., Liu, D., & Yue, Y. (2025). *Empowering China's older adults through online learning: Media literacy and its influence on well-being.* Educational Gerontology, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2025.2481923

Liu, C., & Wu, Y. (2025). *The role of family in Chinese international student mobility under the COVID-19 pandemic.* Journal of Family Studies, 31(1), 161–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2024.2429546

Mills, N. (2011). *Situated Learning through Social Networking Communities.* Calico Journal, 28(2), 345-368.https://doi.org/10.11139/cj.28.2.345-368

Miller, E. M., Jolly, J. L., Latz, J. N., & Listman, K. (2022). *Influencers and Major Themes in a Gifted Education Community of Practice on Twitter.* Journal of Advanced Academics, 33(3), 469–504. https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X221099590

Miranda, S., Antunes, A. C. A., & Gama, A. (2022). *A Different type of Influencer? Examining Senior Instagram Influencers Communication.* European Conference on Social Media, 9(1), 130–136. https://doi.org/10.34190/ecsm.9.1.337

Murimi, M. (2017). *Targeting Influencers of Behavior in Nutrition Education.* Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 49(7), 533. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.05.358

Ngubane, N., & Makua, M. (2021). *Ubuntu pedagogy – transforming educational practices in South Africa through an African philosophy: From*

theory to practice. Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 13(1), Article 1.https://doi.org/10.10520/ejc-uz_inka-v13-n1-a2

Nahar, S., Karim, M. S., & Sena, V. (2025). *How do unexpected networks help female entrepreneurs in the Global South survive in adverse contexts? A case study of Bangladesh.* Gender, Work & Organization. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.70030

Nieminen, J. H., Tai, J., Boud, D., & Henderson, M. (2022). *Student agency in feedback: beyond the individual.* Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 47(1), 95-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2021.1887080

Okungbowa, E. (2022). *Refuge and Life Overseas: Influences of Gender, Culture, and Migration on Parenting Practices of African Refugees in Canada* (Master's thesis, University of Alberta). https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-pfq2-xv50

Qian, Z., Fu, J., & Zhou, Y. (2025). *Seeking a Sense of Meaning and Companionship in Life: Informal Learning on Douyin Among Chinese Older Adults.* Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 9(2), 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1145/3711062

Raaper, R., Hardey, M., & Aad, S. (2025). *#Studytalk in marketised higher education: Student influencers as emerging support providers.* Studies in Higher Education, 50(7), 1501–1513. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2385614

Recio Moreno, D., Gil Quintana, J., & Romero Riaño, E. (2023). *Impact and engagement of sport & fitness influencers: A challenge for health education media literacy.* https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14468/24341

Revaz, S. (2025). *Are interest groups effective public action influencers in the field of education? Case studies of two school reforms in Switzerland. Journal Name.* https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041231221468

Sun, L., Zhou, K., Li, L., Cheung, W. M., & Lin, C.-H. (2025). *From Teachers to Influencers: Exploring EdU-influencers' Social Media Practices through Uses and Gratification Theory.* System, 103774. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2025.103774

Schellewald, A. (2022). *Theorizing "stories about algorithms" as a mechanism in the formation and maintenance of algorithmic imaginaries.* Social Media + Society, 8(1), 20563051221077025. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221077025

Saldaña, C. M., Welner, K., Malcolm, S., & Tisch, E. (2021). *Teachers as market influencers: Toward a policy framework for teacher brand ambassador programs in K-12 schools.* Education Policy Analysis Archives, 29(August-December). https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.29.5654

Schroeder, S., Shelton, C., & Curcio, R. (2024). *Crafting the consumer teacher: Education influencers and the figured world of K-12 teaching.* Learning, Media and Technology, 49(3), 442-455.https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2023.2207140

Singer-Brodowski, M., Förster, R., Eschenbacher, S., Biberhofer, P., & Getzin, S. (2022, March). *Facing crises of unsustainability: Creating and holding safe enough spaces for transformative learning in higher education for*

sustainable development. In Frontiers in education (Vol. 7, p. 787490). Frontiers Media SA.https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.787490

Tang, C., Thyer, L., Bye, R., Kenny, B., Tulliani, N., Peel, N., Gordon, R., Penkala, S., Tannous, C., Sun, Y.-T., & Dark, L. (2023). *Impact of online learning on sense of belonging among first year clinical health students during COVID-19: Student and academic perspectives.* BMC Medical Education, 23(1), 100. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-023-04061-2

Taddeo, G. (2023). *Life long/Insta-learning: the use of influencers as informal educators.* Italian Journal of Sociology of Education, 15(Italian Journal of Sociology of Education 15/2), 147-167.https://ijse.padovauniversitypress.it/2023/2/8

Thomas, J. R. (2025). *The Gendered Ways Families Reduce International Migration and Mobility.* International Migration Review. https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918325132905010.1177/019

Xu, Y., Wang, J., & Chen, Z. (2025). *Riding the short video wave: Sense of agency in motion among young users on Douyin.* New Media & Society. https://doi.org/14614448251338515.

Yu, Y., & Zhao, B. (2022). *Can TikTok promote a healthier aging paradigm? A case study of older digital celebrities from China.* Area, 54(2), 322–329. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12777

Yangzi, Z., Cheah, K. S., & Shaharom, M. S. N. B. (2023). *Enhancing self-leadership in online fitness education and training: Exploring strategies and addressing challenges among social media influencers in Henan province, China.* SAGE Open, 13(4), 21582440231219325.https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231219325

Wong, J. L. (2006). *Control and professional development: Are teachers being deskilled or reskilled within the context of decentralization?* Educational Studies, 32(1), 17–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690500415910

Wen, J., Tong, S., Liang, W., He, H., & Shen, H. (2025). *Is the emotional and cultural need satisfied or not?–A qualitative study based on youth users learning dance through Douyin.* Research in Dance Education, 1-22.

Wadhwa, R. (2016). *Students on move: Understanding decision-making process and destination choice of Indian students.* Higher Education for the Future, 3(1), 54–75. https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631115610221

Zhang, K., Cheng, X., Li, D., & Meng, X. (2025). *The Digital Divide of Older People in Communities: Urban-Rural, Gender, and Health Disparities and Inequities.* Health & Social Care in the Community, 2025(1), 1361214. https://doi.org/10.1155/hsc/1361214

Zhang, Y. (2024). *Elderly Engagement in the Digital Marketplace: A Study of Douyin's Silver-haired Fashion Influencers through Two-step Flow and Multistep Flow Models. Springer Science and Business Media LLC.* https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4865619/v1

Zhu W., Hua Y., & Wang L. (2024, January 1). *"I felt like I was on campus" creating a situated learning environment through Instagram.* | EBSCOhost. https://doi.org/10.58459/rptel.2024.19024

Zheng, H. (2025). *Queer milestones: Intergenerational relations and youth transitions of Chinese queer female students residing overseas.* The Sociological Review, 73(4), 844–862. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261251347751

Zhao, Q., & Gao, H. (2025). *Vaccinating despite limited understanding: influenza vaccination behaviors among older adults in rural China under communication infrastructure theory.* Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 12(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05668-0

Author bios

Wenrui LIANG is a PhD student in communication in the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. His major research interests lie in the areas of aging communication, digital aging, and education, with a particular focus on how older adults engage with platformized media in multilingual contexts. He is responsible for full-text manuscript drafting, data collection, and the integration of qualitative findings into the final paper. Email: liangwenrui2022@163.com & s2131713@siswa.um.edu.my

Rosya Izyanie Shamshudeen, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. Her major research interests lie in the areas of qualitative research, media studies, and communication pedagogy, especially in applying interpretivist approaches to Asian media contexts. She is responsible for revising and polishing the manuscript, strengthening the methodological rigor, and aligning the paper with journal requirements. She is the first corresponding author of this article. Email: rosya@um.edu.my

Md Azalanshah Md Syed, Associate Professor, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Communication Studies at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. His major research interests lie in the areas of film studies, media communication, and visual culture in Southeast Asia. He is responsible for defining the research objectives, refining the research questions, and ensuring the theoretical coherence of the study. Email: azalan@um.edu.my

Shen Hui is a PhD student in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Beijing Normal–Hong Kong Baptist University, China. Her major research interests lie in the areas of Hanfu culture, education, and intercultural communication, with an emphasis on cross-border Chinese communities and youth cultural practices. She is responsible for revising grammatical issues, improving the academic style, and maintaining consistency between the Chinese and English versions of the manuscript. Email: 345654436@qq.com