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Grande Dame of Antifascism: Visual Activism and Unruly Aging of the OMAS GEGEN RECHTS

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Abstract

The article analyzes the visual activism of OMAS GEGEN RECHTS ("Grannies against the right"), a movement founded in Austria in 2017 by older feminist women mobilizing against far-right politics. The movement increasingly extends into digital spaces, where political conflict over democratic values and public legitimacy is negotiated. At the same time, forms of protest by older activists remain largely unexplored. Drawing on concepts of agonistic publics, visual activism, and unruliness, we analyze how OMAS GEGEN RECHTS engage with digital media to articulate political positions and intervene in right-wing politics. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of visual practices in Instagram posts published in 2025, focusing on the nationwide account representing Austria: @omasgegenrechts (137K followers in late December 2025). We examine how visual practices are used to mobilize supporters, construct collective identities, and contest right-wing narratives. Our findings reveal how images and symbolic self-representation are used to counter ageist exclusions from digital spaces while simultaneously mobilizing both members of the movement and broader publics. Rather than being marginalized by digital divides, OMAS GEGEN RECHTS actively negotiate platform constraints and transform age into a source of political legitimacy and moral authority. By emphasizing age and visibility as central dimensions of digital conflict, this article contributes to debates on digital media, activism, and political struggles.

Keywords

age; digital publics; granny activism; OMAS GEGEN RECHTS; social media; visual activism

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1. Introduction

In 2017, a group of older women protested on the streets of Vienna against Austria's newly formed coalition government comprising Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ). What initially sounded like an endearing association of seniors has over time become a large protest movement in German-speaking countries: the OMAS GEGEN RECHTS ("Grannies against the right" [OgR]). In January 2026, the movement launched a new European alliance, announcing it on its Instagram account with the words: "The Grande Dame of Antifascism shows everyone that it works better when we stand together" (OMAS GEGEN RECHTS, 2026). As part of this broader movement, OgR Austria also maintains a public presence on social media, including Instagram.

We are interested in examining how visibility is produced visually through Instagram posts, as well as the forms of collective identity, recognition, and inclusion that these media practices enable. Therefore, we examine the visual activism of the OgR on Instagram. Digital media have become central arenas of contemporary political conflict, particularly in struggles over democratic values and public legitimacy. While existing research on digital activism primarily focuses on youth-led movements or technologically innovative practices, forms of protest by elderly activists remain largely unexplored (De Vuyst & De Graeve, 2024). Drawing on theories of agonistic publics, visual activism, visibility, and unruliness, this article analyzes how older women affiliated with the OgR engage with digital media to articulate political positions and intervene in the rise of right-wing politics. The overarching question of our study is: How do the OgR produce public visibility for their concerns on Instagram, and which strategies of visual activism do they employ in doing so?

The article is structured as follows: First, we outline the theoretical framework encompassing visual activism, age, and digital publics. Second, we present our methodological approach. Section 5 then examines the role Instagram plays in practices of visual activism by older women, paying particular attention to how visibility is constructed. This analysis is situated within broader narratives that frame visibility and digital publics. Finally, we discuss the implications of these findings for understanding the intersection of age, media practices, and visibility.

2. Theoretical Framework: Media Visibility, Unruly Aging, and Visual Activism

2.1. Visibility and Invisibility Under Platform Conditions

Visibility has become a central category in communication and media studies (Stehle et al., 2024), where it is increasingly approached not as a neutral property of public communication but as a power-laden phenomenon. Visual studies push this further: Visual culture is "something we engage in as an active way to create change, not just a way to see what is happening" (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 13). From this perspective, visibility is more than perceptibility. It is understood here not primarily in quantitative terms of reach or engagement but as a qualitative process of how actors, positions, and identities are made publicly perceivable. It is the outcome of conflictual negotiations over perception, meaning, and power, in which what counts as publicly perceivable, sayable, and politically relevant is continuously contested (Schaffer, 2008; Thompson, 2005). Becoming visible means bringing positions, bodies, symbols, and affects to bear in public communication spheres, while at the same time being bound to normative images.

Visibility, however, should not be conflated with the visual itself or with visual representations. Drawing on Foucault's analysis of the panopticon, visibility can be understood as a relation that produces its own underside: arrangements that render some visible while keeping others hidden or obscured (Foucault, 1977). Invisibility, in this sense, is presence that is held back, displaced, or obstructed. It takes different forms: it can be protective, where remaining out of view shields actors from harm; a mode of resistance, where withdrawal from dominant regimes of visibility refuses their terms; or exclusion, where actors, bodies, or positions are kept from appearing in public at all (Schaffer, 2008). Visibility is therefore inherently ambivalent (Schaffer, 2008, pp. 51–60): Becoming visible can enable political recognition and participation, while simultaneously increasing exposure and vulnerability. On social media, moreover, actors can develop practices of visibility, but the conditions under which this visibility circulates remain partly beyond their control.

The literature discusses various technological, economic, and governance-related aspects of social media platforms (e.g., Bucher, 2012; Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Gillespie, 2018; Leaver et al., 2020; Leerssen, 2025; van Dijck et al., 2018). These include platform-specific formats, editing tools, and aesthetic conventions; algorithmic selection and distribution; economic logics of attention and monetization; platform governance, including moderation practices; external legal and regulatory frameworks; and the commercial and political interests of platform companies and their owners. Rather than examining these conditions individually, our interest lies in how visibility and invisibility are produced under these platform conditions.

These conditions of platform visibility and invisibility are politically consequential because they shape the constitution of public spheres: They affect which actors, issues, and positions become publicly perceivable and available for collective negotiation. Publics are therefore not pre-given arenas of deliberation, but are continuously produced through mediated processes of making visible and invisible. What remains invisible is structurally excluded from public negotiation; conversely, visibility shapes what becomes publicly addressable and politically contestable.

2.2. Agonistic Publics and Visual Activism

We understand activism and protest as potentially conflictual practices through which social movements can articulate competing positions, mobilize other actors, and challenge hegemonic orders. We draw on Mouffe's (2007) idea of an agonistic public, which understands conflict as constitutive of politics rather than as a disruption of democratic order. This framework is especially crucial for analyzing social movements. Mouffe explores how particular interests and social groups prevail while differences between competing positions persist within society. She assumes that diverse opinions and interests possess equal legitimacy within democracy. Mouffe (2007, p. 10) proposes conceiving the public sphere as a site of contestation, which shifts analytical attention toward competing ideas and the articulation of alternatives to existing hegemonies. These hegemonies are contingent and can be displaced, opening space for alternative positions to prevail. From this perspective, conflict is legitimized within democratic processes and antagonisms can transform into agonisms. This contrasts with consensus-oriented models of the public sphere. Recent work on dissonant and affective publics, drawing on Mouffe, emphasizes that adequate theoretical accounts of contemporary publics require the inclusion of dissonance, as a form of conflict, and affect, as an expression of passion (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018; Pfetsch et al., 2018). This perspective implies that visual forms of expression, alongside political debate, must be considered integral to the formation of publics and counterpublics.

For a more process-oriented explanation of social movements, we combine Mouffe's concept with the analytical framework developed by Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato (1992). Mouffe focuses on the important role of conflict in public negotiations; Cohen and Arato explain how conflict is expressed, organized, and used to influence politics.

Cohen and Arato (1992) provide a framework for analyzing the dynamics of social movements in relation to the public sphere. They distinguish between a "politics of identity," a "politics of influence," and a "politics of inclusion." Developed in dialogue with theorists such as Habermas, Fraser, and Tilly, their approach conceptualizes social movements, particularly the "new social movements" of the 1970s and 1980s, as operating across multiple, interrelated dimensions of public communication (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 556). In this framework, the "politics of identity" refers to the formation of collective identities through the articulation of shared experiences, interests, and demands. The "politics of inclusion" addresses efforts to achieve institutional recognition and reform by integrating movement actors and their claims into formal political processes. Complementing these dimensions, the "politics of influence" is directed toward transforming public discourse itself. It aims to reshape dominant norms, values, and interpretive frameworks, thereby enabling movements to gain recognition as collective actors within the public sphere (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. 526). Thus, the politics of influence is a central mechanism through which social movements intervene in and reconfigure public communication.

Within this multidimensional framework of movement politics, visual practices have gained particular weight (e.g., Askanius, 2014; Wilson & Serisier, 2010). The notion of visual activism brings this weight into theoretical focus by treating visual practice itself as a mode of political action. Mirzoeff (2016, pp. 289–298) describes visual activism as the convergence of contemporary visual culture practice around the goal of producing change, defined succinctly as "the interaction of pixels and actions to make change" (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 297). Pixels here stand for digitally produced cultural forms—word, image, sound, video—and actions for what is done with these forms, from direct political intervention to performance, conversation, or works of art. Mirzoeff frames this as a shift from earlier engagements with how identities were represented in art, film, and mass media toward the active production of new self-images and new ways of seeing and being seen; the participatory slogan "they do not represent us" (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 291) is answered by the claim to represent oneself. From this perspective, images and visual formats are not mere illustrations of political claims but constitutive elements of political contestation. Visual activism in Mirzoeff's account draws on an alternative visual vocabulary that is "collective and collaborative" (Mirzoeff, 2016, p. 297). On social media, this collective dimension becomes particularly evident in the "collective sharing, remixing and recontextualizing of images" (Jenzen et al., 2021, p. 420). Here, our analysis extends Mirzoeff's account by considering not only these collective and collaborative dimensions but also the conflictual elements through which visual activism articulates opposition, contestation, and struggle. These practices, however, are not confined to social media environments: When protest movements use social media, their visual activism typically extends beyond the platforms themselves (e.g., Maier, 2021; Schankweiler, 2019). Across these different contexts, visual activism can challenge established norms of what is considered appropriate and acceptable.

2.3. Unruly Practices

The concept of the unruly has been employed by several scholars to describe the disciplinary workings of power, which construct certain forms of politics, rhetoric, and modes of political resistance as valid, normal, and acceptable, while rendering others marginal and inappropriate (Agamben, 1998; Fraser, 1989). Nancy Fraser (1989) uses the concept of "unruly practices" to theorize about how people can be resistant to power, discourse, and gender norms. Furthermore, the concept has been employed in the context of gender, sexuality, and life-trajectory regulation, underscoring the enforcement of norms while concurrently signifying the possibility of resistance inherent in unruliness (Halberstam, 2011).

In analyses of contemporary activism and protest, unruliness is understood to emerge from the interplay of complex assemblages of bodies, technologies, discourses, and histories, which together shape rhetorical interventions across different spheres (Alexander et al., 2018). Alexander et al. (2018) use the term "unruly rhetorics" to analyze protest practices, embodied performances, queer remix strategies, and forms of "unruly language" as constitutive—if often normatively transgressive—elements of democratic expression. From this perspective, "networks of outrage" traverse time and space through old and new media, disrupting the perceived normal flow of social life and raising questions about participation, representation, and purpose. Examples include feminist performances such as SlutWalk and the interventions of Pussy Riot (Alexander et al., 2018). "Unruly politics" describes emergent forms of collective action and civic engagement operating beyond institutionalized modes of participation. "Unruly politics" can be defined as political action by those who have been denied a voice within the formal rules of the political game. This action draws its force from the transgression of these rules while simultaneously invoking alternative, socially grounded norms of legitimacy and justice (Khanna, 2012).

This perspective is relevant to later-life activism, where unruliness can challenge the dominant expectations. The notion of "unruly practices" reframes the process of aging as a space for subversive expression and unanticipated forms of resistance, challenging the conventional view of aging as a process of decline or invisibility (De Vuyst & De Graeve, 2024). It underscores the significance of existing forms of representation and activism that frequently go unnoticed or unappreciated. Such practices exemplify how older women develop distinctive styles and aesthetics that defy stereotypes of aging and engender unanticipated modes of resistance.

In the present study, unruliness serves as a conceptual framework for analyzing the visual activism of OgR. We consider how these elements challenge established representations of aging and femininity, as well as how these representations remain tied to or reproduce conventional age and gender norms. Instead of classifying the movement's visual activism as inherently unruly, we ask how it becomes unruly, which norms it challenges, and what tensions and ambivalences arise in the process.

3. Activism and Protest in Later Life: A Literature Review

The activism of older women takes many forms, one of which is the struggle for their representation in the media. Ciafone's (2021) study of the US Gray Panthers shows how activists intervened in ageist media portrayals through organized monitoring, media literacy campaigns, and the production of alternative content. This contributed to a visible shift toward more active, autonomous, and even sexualized

representations of older women on US television. However, this reframing also helped establish normative ideals of "successful" and "positive" aging that obscure structural inequalities and reproduce new moral distinctions between "good" and "bad" aging (Ciafone, 2021). Studies on the Raging Grannies in Canada demonstrate how humor, performance, and the strategic adoption of the "grandmother" identity are employed to subvert stereotypes and render older women visible in protest contexts (Roy, 2007; Sawchuk, 2009). These practices frequently occur in unconventional spaces and involve satirical aesthetics, as well as critical reflections on positionality, for instance in relation to settler colonial histories (Chazan, 2016). Empirical analyses of this group further demonstrate that participation in such movements functions as a self-defined social role, relies on layered masking strategies, and fosters collective identity and empowerment among participants (Narushima, 2004), while also generating social capital and enhancing well-being (Hutchinson & Wexler, 2007; McHugh, 2012).

Studies on activism by older women show how gendered cultural practices and moral authority function as a source of mobilization. For instance, the Knitting Nannas Against Gas and Greed employ the medium of knitting as a means of engaging in nonviolent direct action against environmental exploitation in Australia (Larri & Whitehouse, 2019). Similarly, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina illustrate how the role of grandmotherhood can be transformed into a potent political instrument in contexts of state violence and collective trauma (Gatti, 2012). An intersectional analysis emphasizes how older women activists strategically mobilize age, gender, and racial positionalities to engage in intergenerational and cross-movement solidarity, for instance in environmental justice coalitions (Chazan & Baldwin, 2019). Research on the Spanish Iaioflautas movement further demonstrates how activism can foster a collective identity that serves as a counteragent to ageist marginalization, despite the presence of internal tensions and exclusions; at the same time, this identity formation remains ambivalent, as activists may reproduce ageist distinctions by devaluing less politically active members of their own age group (Blanche-T. & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2022). Research on OgR in Austria further points to the growing importance of digital media practices for visibility and political engagement (Drüeke, 2022, 2023). Recent studies on the 2023 Israeli protests have revealed gendered patterns of older-age activism. Women have emphasized their roles as grandmothers to claim moral authority in defending democracy whereas men have more often drawn on past achievements such as military service (Okun & Ayalon, 2024).

Overall, the existing literature reveals a research gap concerning the role of media and digital practices of older women. Although previous studies have thoroughly examined offline protest forms, identity construction, and representational politics, they have barely addressed how older activists engage with digital media.

4. The Movement OgR on Instagram: An Explorative Investigation

4.1. Case Selection

With approximately 30,000 members, OgR is considered one of the largest women's movements in the German-speaking countries (Heisterkamp & Ehrenhöfer, 2024). Monika Salzer founded OgR as a Facebook group in Vienna in November 2017 in response to the formation of the ÖVP-FPÖ government following the Austrian parliamentary election. In Austria, the movement is formally organized as an association and is active in all federal states (OgR, n.d.). The Austrian group became a model for establishing OgR groups in Germany and other European countries. The movement's manifesto emphasizes defending parliamentary

democracy, social welfare, equal rights, and a united Europe. It also opposes antisemitism, racism, misogyny, and fascism (OgR, n.d.). Central to the movement's political identity is its positioning of older women and its use of the grandmother as a symbol of political agency. The name is capitalized to emphasize that the term "OMA" is a political concept. From this position, OgR seeks to become "an unmistakable voice in civil society" (Salzer, 2019, p. 32).

Our study employs a case-based design to examine the visual activism of the Austrian OgR. The movement was chosen as a productive case study because it centers the figure of the grandmother, who is coded by age and gender, at the heart of its collective political identity. The movement combines street-based protest with visual and digital forms of activism (Drüeke, 2023). Instagram was selected as the primary site of data collection because previous interviews indicated the movement's growing interest in the platform and its association with a "younger" form of feminism (Drüeke, 2023). Rather than treating Instagram as the movement's main platform, we selected it because its combination of visual and audiovisual formats with captions, hashtags, music, and sharing functions is particularly relevant to the study of visual activism. Rather than merely treating Instagram as a channel of communication, our study approaches it as a cultural environment in which identities, meanings, and social relations are produced and negotiated (boyd, 2010; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). The aim is to analyze digital practices to capture the diversity of existing forms of engagement. The focus is on what can be conceptualized as the media practices or repertoires of social movements (Della Porta, 2011; Tilly, 2005), which are understood as the tools, tactics, and forms of action through which activists articulate claims, express dissent, and mobilize support (Özkula, 2021).

The Instagram account @omasgegenrechts, categorized as a "community" on Instagram, serves as the central account of the Austrian OgR movement and links to the movement's website. In November 2025, two additional accounts were created in Austria by groups in Tyrol and Salzburg; however, these were not included in the study as the period of analysis had already begun. At the start of the study (January 2025), we selected the only existing Instagram account of a group of the OgR in Austria, which was primarily managed by the Vienna-based group. We selected the period from January to December 2025 as a complete and clearly defined observation period. This allowed us to examine recurring forms of visual activism across different political events and protest contexts over the course of a year, rather than focusing on a single campaign or moment of heightened activity. Restricting the corpus to one calendar year also provided a sufficiently broad yet manageable body of material for in-depth qualitative analysis of communicative and visual strategies. At the time of analysis, in late December 2025, the account had 137,000 followers.

Following a feminist ethics of care (e.g., franzke et al., 2020), only publicly accessible content was included in the analysis. Stories and live formats were excluded; the choice of permanently visible posts is itself read as a decision for lasting visibility within the platform's economy of ephemeral and persistent content. The Instagram posts included in the sample were saved locally at the time of data collection and documented with relevant metadata to ensure a traceable record of the data analyzed.

4.2. Data Analysis

Our analysis follows a qualitative approach through which recurring practices and patterns in the visual material were analyzed and interpreted (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Wang & Feng, 2022). Meaning was conceptualized as emerging from the interplay of textual, visual, auditory, and other semiotic modes. To account for the platform-specific conditions under which these images are produced and circulated

(Colombo et al., 2023; Rogers, 2021), we define a post as one published Instagram entry, irrespective of format. Single-image posts, reels/videos, and carousels each count as one post; all slides of a carousel are analyzed as part of the same post. The analysis includes the visual or audiovisual content together with the caption, hashtags, and, where applicable, audio or music. Motif refers to what is predominantly depicted in a post, such as a protest group, placards, or individual activists, and is identified as the dominant visual element across single images, video sequences, and reels. Engagement metrics were collected as contextual interaction data rather than as indicators of visibility or as an analytical dimension of the study, and were last retrieved in December 2025. Building on this overview, the image-level analysis draws on established traditions of qualitative image research (informed by Hand, 2016; Maier, 2019; Mietzner & Pilarczyk, 2005; Rose, 2023). Each post is examined for its visual composition, including bodies and gestures, clothing and material objects, symbols and colors, as well as references to wider visual repertoires of feminist and protest cultures. The dimensions recorded for each post are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions of the Instagram post analysis.

Level	Dimensions examined
Post metadata	Date, format
Post content and analytical dimensions	Visual/audiovisual content, caption, hashtags, topic, motif, visual conventions, music/audio
Contextual interaction data	Likes, comments, shares

To identify the ways in which OgR creates visibility for older women, we analyzed the posts for recurring themes, visual patterns, communicative functions, and constructions of political identity. Through an iterative interplay between empirical material and theoretical concepts, these recurring elements were organized into broader thematic clusters. The formation of these clusters followed both inductive and deductive logics: While recurring patterns emerged from the material, their interpretation was informed by previous research on visual activism (Maier, 2021), video activism (Askanius, 2014), and identity politics (Cohen & Arato, 1992). Mirzoeff's (2016) notion of visual activism and scholarship on unruly aging (De Vuyst & De Graeve, 2024; Halberstam, 2011) provided further sensitizing concepts for interpreting the visual material.

Constructions of age and gender were analyzed as interrelated categories. We paid particular attention to how the posts visually address gender and femininity, for example through the figure of the grandmother, embodied performances, clothing, symbols, and practices of care and solidarity. We also considered how gendering is mobilized as a political force. This approach enabled us to explore how gender and age are (re)defined as a means of achieving public visibility, fostering a sense of collective identity, and facilitating political intervention, while potentially challenging or perpetuating ageist and gender-based norms. In a subsequent analytical step, we examined how the thematic clusters related to recurring modes of communication and intervention. From this inductive-deductive process, we derived four strategies of visual activism that capture recurring ways in which OgR uses visual communication to mobilize, construct collective political identities, negotiate age and gender, and intervene in digital publics:

1. Information and mobilization strategies;
2. Documenting participation in demonstrations and events;
3. Visual constructions of identity;
4. Counter-images that disrupt prevailing representations of aging.

The strategies are analytically distinguishable but not mutually exclusive: Recurring themes may perform different functions and relate to more than one strategy, while individual posts may combine several strategies.

5. Results: Instagram Content as a Site for Visual Activism

We first provide a brief overview of the composition of the sample before turning to the four strategies of visual activism identified in the analysis. The posts are unevenly distributed across the year, with higher posting frequency in the first three months and in May and lower activity during the summer months. The posts appear in different Instagram formats. Single images are the most frequent format, followed by reels, while carousels become more common in the second half of the year (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of posts by format.

Format	Single image post	Reel/video post	Carousel post	Total
Number of posts	36	19	13	68

5.1. Information and Mobilization

In the analyzed posts, a first strategy of visual activism combines the dissemination of information with calls to political action. Visual codes are deployed to make political positions legible at a glance and to invite users into ongoing debates and movements. This strategy corresponds to what Cohen and Arato (1992) describe as the politics of influence: the attempt to reshape dominant interpretive frameworks within the public sphere. Visually oriented social media platforms such as Instagram facilitate such practices by combining images and short-form videos with captions, hashtags, and sharing functions, enabling political actors to frame issues and circulate interpretive patterns (Towner & Muñoz, 2018).

The OgR engage this strategy primarily through calls and announcements for days of action, concerts for democracy, demonstrations, and vigils. These calls take recurring visual forms: text-based tiles designed in the language of placards, frequently in red, with concise messages and event details; videos in which activists address the camera directly to invite participation; and image posts that combine event information with visual markers of the movement. The captions provide further context on what the posts inform about and mobilize for, including action days, demonstrations and rallies, commemorative events and walks, concerts for democracy, and human rights actions. Across these formats, the OgR consistently link the dissemination of information with mobilization for collective action offline.

Alongside this recurring visual repertoire, the OgR occasionally take up social media trends from contemporary online activism, translating platform-specific communicative conventions into their activist work. One example is the appropriation of the "I am…and of course…" trend, which circulates widely on TikTok and Instagram. Typically operating as a satirical form of self-presentation, the trend involves speakers humorously exaggerating or subverting stereotypical assumptions about a particular group. The OgR adapted this format in a reel in June 2025, with more than 38,000 likes, featuring different activists addressing the camera and completing the phrase "I am with the Omas because…." The clips combine humorous and self-deprecating elements—references to smoking during demonstrations or sharing a beer—with explicitly political statements about motivations for activism. At the same time, the videos

engage with and reinterpret the category of "grandmother," playfully questioning conventional expectations associated with age and care. OgR's playful and satirical appropriation of Instagram trends can thus be understood as a form of unruly aging: By reworking platform-specific formats often associated with younger users, the activists disrupt expectations and position older women as humorous and digitally competent.

5.2. Documenting Participation in Demonstrations and Events

In the analyzed posts, a second strategy of visual activism consists of documentary image practices, understood as a practice of witnessing: making political action visible by documenting it as a real, situated event and thereby positioning the documenting actors as witnesses to what unfolds (e.g., Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009; Schankweiler et al., 2019). In this sense, witnessing is not merely a representational act but a social practice that relates a witnessing subject, an event, a testimony, and an audience to one another (Schankweiler et al., 2019). Theoretically, this media practice can be approached through work on video activism in the German-speaking context, which has its own history and traditions of protest documentation (Eder et al., 2025; Fahlenbrach, 2020). Documentary images follow the conventions of the most faithful possible depiction of persons, objects, and events, and they always stand in a relation of resemblance to an extra-medial reality. Their political force derives from a claim to immediacy and authenticity: The medial constitution and mediatedness are pushed into the background so that viewers' attention is directed through the medium toward the documented event itself. In this way, they draw on the authority of eye-witnessing grounded in "being there" (Schankweiler et al., 2019, p. 3). In the analyzed posts, this is reflected in the prevalence of photography and conventional video and in a reduced aesthetic, often without text or sticker overlays. The images thus function as visual evidence of political grievances and the protest against them, while at the same time inscribing collective actors as physically present and capable of action into public space.

The OgR employ this strategy primarily to document their participation in demonstrations and public events. A recurring visual motif consists of staged group portraits taken during these occasions: protesters face the camera, hold signs and banners, and display shared visual markers such as knitted hats and badges. The captions further situate this documented participation in political contexts including protests against the FPÖ and right-wing politics, climate and social policy, asylum and human rights, as well as antifascist remembrance.

These images combine documentary protest photography with the visible presence of the OgR as a recognizable collective. They render older women visible as bodily present and politically active. Documentary image practices are not exhausted in the recording of events. They are effective and forge community: they convey emotions, address viewers, and can move them to act (Richardsen & Schankweiler, 2019; Schankweiler et al., 2019). In this visual-affective dimension, the function of such image practices shifts from mere representation, memory, and archiving toward an active shaping of social change—toward visual activism (Mirzoeff, 2016). For the OgR, this means concretely that their images of demonstrations are not only records but part of the protest itself—they carry it beyond the street into the digital sphere and make it available there for further mobilization. At the same time, such digital image politics cannot, on their own, bring about long-term social change. The work of the OgR shows precisely that digital activism exerts its effect in interplay with political engagement beyond the platform, including participation in demonstrations, vigils, and public events, whose images then circulate on Instagram.

5.3. Visual Constructions of Identity

The third strategy captures how collective identity is visually produced and stabilized through shared symbols, aesthetics, and performative elements. Such shared visual repertoires are central to protest movements as they contribute to the formation of collective identity, movement culture, and public visibility (Fotopoulou, 2017; Kavada, 2016).

The activists develop recognition markers, such as self-knitted pink hats in the style of the Pussy Hats known from protests against Trump in the US, as well as the "Oma-Song" (lyrics: "Grannies, grannies, the whole country needs us/we fight for the children and resist!"; Salzer, 2019, p. 137). These markers recur across the analyzed posts. Pink knitted hats appear in group portraits at demonstrations, vigils, and action days, alongside umbrellas with "Oma" motifs and placards bearing the movement's name. Sound operates in a similar way: The "Oma-Song" is present across the analyzed posts as the original audio recorded by the movement itself in three video posts and as Suli Puschban's song "Omas gegen Rechts" used as a soundtrack in a series of seven single-image posts.

These elements express a collective self-image as older women mobilizing against right-wing politics and foster a sense of community through participation and collective action. At the same time, hats, buttons, and protest signs function as visible symbols through which unity and belonging are communicated to the outside. They function as visible elements that make the OgR recognizable as a collective in the protest setting and in digital feeds. Singing here functions not merely as an expressive practice but as an identity-forming element, a sound marker, and a recognizable feature of the movement. In the visual context of Instagram, the shared performance translates collective identity into a sound marker and sign of recognition, strengthening collective belonging and recognizability in digital feeds.

Following Cohen and Arato's (1992) understanding of the politics of identity and influence, the performance can be read as an attempt to stabilize a collective self-understanding while also intervening in public meaning-making processes. This identity work becomes part of digital public formation: These posts render older women's political voices visible and audible, and insert their collective presence into broader democratic publics. However, the collective identity formed through this shared visual vocabulary is not without exclusions. The hat, the song, and the figure of the grandmother generate internal cohesion and public recognizability. However, they also define the conditions under which belonging becomes apparent. Those who cannot or do not identify with these markers remain only marginally included in the collective. The analyzed posts predominantly center women who are read as white while racialized and culturally diverse experiences of aging remain scarcely visible. This narrows the public image of who is represented as an "Oma gegen Rechts" without necessarily implying formal exclusion from the movement itself.

5.4. Counter-Images

A fourth strategy works through counter-images that disrupt prevailing representations of aging. Building on Mirzoeff's (2016) account of visual activism, this strategy treats the image not as illustration but as the site where dominant figurations of old age are contested. Several studies identify older people as frequently portrayed in stereotypical ways, e.g., as "happy aging woman" or "grumpy old woman" (De Vuyst & De Graeve, 2024). Counter-images do not merely add another representation to those already in circulation;

they intervene in the visual order itself, opening space for figurations that established forms of representation foreclose. In this sense, they enact the politics of identity outlined by Cohen and Arato (1992) under platform conditions, where claims to a collective political identity are increasingly negotiated through images and where the visibility of a collective actor is bound up with the visual figurations through which it becomes recognizable.

Unlike the other strategies, counter-images emerge less through individual posts explicitly addressing aging than through the recurring visual construction of older women across the sample. Recurring motifs show older women marching in demonstrations, posing collectively with banners and protest signs, and performing on stages. In several posts, activists individually or collectively face the camera and deliberately pose for it, turning their participation into a staged visual address to social media audiences.

Through these motifs, the OgR account makes visible a particular figure of aging: the "Oma" as mobile, witty, politically engaged, and social-media-fluent. This recurring construction can be understood as a form of unruly aging, as it challenges normative expectations of how older women should appear and act in public. It carries the political force of the counter-image because it directly contradicts dominant scripts of old age as withdrawal and depoliticization. At the same time, this figure is itself a specific construction of aging: Forms of aging that fall outside this register—withdrawn, fragile, dependent—appear only marginally.

One of the few posts that does take up such signs is a video featuring an animated figure of an older woman with a walker who moves forward in a stiff, mechanical manner, as if wound up like a wind-up toy. In the subsequent interview with three activists, however, this animated image is countered: They emphasize their mission, their political purpose, and the importance of making themselves visible in public space. These counter-images can be read as a visual mode of unruly aging (De Vuyst & De Graeve, 2024): subversive image practices through which age as a social construct is questioned and dominant figurations are unsettled. Yet this strategy carries its own ambivalences. Working with stereotypes does not overcome them. Even where stereotypical images are taken up to be subverted, they are necessarily invoked, and negative figurations of old age are not displaced but remain available for reactivation.

Across the posts analyzed, the four strategies demonstrate that the OgR are not merely acting on Instagram but rather with Instagram in a conflict over democratic values. Strategy 1 involves a discursive intervention; Strategy 2 entails bearing witness; Strategy 3 encompasses identity work; Strategy 4 disrupts the dominant figurations of aging. Visibility, in this constellation, is a contested resource: the four strategies are practices through which the OgR produce visibility, but each encounters limits set by the conflict itself—the algorithmic restriction of political content (Strategy 1), exposure through bodily presence (Strategy 2), and normative expectations about age and gender (Strategies 3 and 4). Visibility is not only the outcome of activist practice; it is what is at stake in the conflict.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on a qualitative analysis of 68 posts published by the Austrian OgR Instagram account in 2025, this article examined how visual, auditory, and textual elements interact in the movement's digital activism. The protest practices examined here show how the movement takes shape in visual practices on Instagram while also forming a recognizable collective actor in digital publics. These visual practices challenge

dominant figurations of later life as passive, withdrawn, or disconnected from contemporary media cultures. At the same time, their recurring association of political agency with activity, vitality, and positivity may privilege a particular figure of "good aging" as a new norm.

The OgR's visual activism operates within a double opacity: Their bodies become visible to publics, while the platform logics through which this visibility is produced remain hidden from them. At the beginning of the study period, Instagram's stated policy was not to proactively recommend political content to users from accounts they did not follow unless they adjusted their settings. In January 2025, however, Meta announced that it would gradually phase political content back into personalized recommendations, without specifying a country-specific implementation timeline (Kaplan, 2025). These changing policies illustrate what Bucher (2012, pp. 1171–1174) calls the "threat of invisibility": Activists can develop strategies for becoming visible, but the circulation of their content remains conditioned by rules established by the platform. Making one's bodily presence visible also entails risks. The same features that produce political recognizability may also increase participants' exposure. Our analysis does not establish whether this exposure resulted in hostility or harassment; rather, it points to a potential risk inherent in these modes of public appearance.

Understanding the public sphere as a site of contestation also means recognizing conflict as constitutive of democratic politics rather than as a disturbance of it. The visibility of OgR is not simply a matter of gaining attention, but forms part of an agonistic process in which conflicting political positions and understandings of democracy are articulated and contested, while meanings of age and gender are simultaneously negotiated. On the one hand, it allows the movement to make older women visible as political actors. On the other hand, visibility can expose activists to contestation, ridicule, and delegitimization. The movement's demands are embedded in agonistic struggles over public meaning. By challenging nationalist and authoritarian tendencies, the activists enter a contested arena in which their interventions may encounter rejection or hostility. The public sphere can therefore be understood as a space in which political positions may gain visibility while simultaneously becoming more exposed. For older women activists, this potential vulnerability may be intensified by ageist and gendered assumptions that question their political relevance, competence, or authority.

In the case of the OgR, established practices of visual activism acquire particular significance because they make older women visible as collective political actors who actively intervene in political conflicts and public debates. This extends research on age-based activism by drawing attention to the visual practices through which older activists claim political visibility in digital spaces. Future research should therefore examine more closely how older women's visual practices on social media interact with their activist practices beyond social media and how political visibility is produced across these interconnected spaces. The case of the OgR shows that the significance of visual activism lies not only in creating new forms of visibility for older women, but also in drawing attention to which actors shape publics and intervene in political conflicts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data collected for this study are stored locally on secure, access-restricted systems. The dataset is not publicly available in order to avoid the redistribution of identifiable and traceable social media content and to comply with the ethical principles guiding the study.

LLMs Disclosure

AI-based tools were used to support the preparation of this manuscript. ChatGPT was used for translation, and DeepL for language editing. Claude AI was used for language editing, proofreading, and to support critical reflection on selected passages of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and revised all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the final content.

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