

# *Self-representation on short videos: the example of "silver-haired people" on Tik Tok*

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**Keywords:** silver-haired group, Tik Tok, self-presentation

**Abstract:** As a large social group in Chinese society, the silver-haired group has its specificity, and the self-presentation behavior of the silver-haired group is also unique. We extend Goffman's mimetic theory to the self-presentation of the middle-aged group on Tik Tok. Firstly, we explore the motives and reasons for the self-presentation of the silver-haired group. Secondly, we analyze how the silver-haired group performs self-presentation in the online short video platform and the influence of the viewers on it. Finally, the gap between the "front stage" and the "backstage" is understood through the observation of their real life.

## **1. Introduction**

The term "silver-haired" refers to people who have retired from their jobs. They are still valuable assets to society. Although they have retired from their respective jobs, it does not mean that they have lost all their working ability, they are still a valuable asset to society. With rich work experience, social experience, and life experience, they have the advantage that other age groups do not have.

This paper investigates how silver-haired people present themselves on the short-video music platform, Tik Tok, in the context of the rapid development of short-video. The significance is to observe and interview the silver-haired group, to get into their lives, to understand why this group wants to self-present and how they do it, and to understand what kind of changes the current era of rapid technological development has brought to the silver-haired group.

## **2. Tik Tok: a stage for silver-haired groups to present themselves**

### **2.1 The silver-haired group on Tik Tok**

At present, the silver hair economy in the field of short video has not formed a corresponding scale, after gathering a large number of accurate middle-aged and elderly groups. After gathering a large number of precise middle-aged and old-aged groups, the "post-millennials", "Generation Z", "new middle class" and "silver-haired group" are subdivided by age group. In the short video platform, we segmented the most concerned about the elderly groups of several modules are health care, knowledge information, and entertainment content. But in the current situation, the first two are still at a disadvantage in terms of commercial realization. As the silver-haired group has plenty of disposable time and often lacks company in their daily lives, their willingness to seek fun for themselves is also stronger, which makes the prospect of entertainment and recreational content specifically for the

silver-haired group bright.

Looking at the accounts with a large proportion of silver-haired groups on short video platforms, we find that most of them are based on the interests of middle-aged and elderly people, and provide light science or teaching guidance on this basis, such as chess, opera, fishing and square dance, which is loved by middle-aged and elderly mothers. As square dance has a natural appeal among the middle-aged and elderly, a large number of square dance accounts have been emerging in the short video field. With the number of silver-haired users in Tik Tok rising day by day, square dance content also occupies an important part in the short video platform, only the video playback under the #square dance topic in Tik Tok has accumulated 2.75 billion times, which is the key to attract silver-haired users from interest.

Due to the popularity of the Internet among the silver-haired group, middle-aged and elderly people have become more and more discerning about information. The poisonous chicken soup, "pseudo-knowledge" and vulgarized contents that were widely circulated in the circle of friends earlier have been gradually eliminated, and the silver-haired group has a greater demand for diversified contents. The silver-haired group's pursuit of beauty and fashion has been discovered, and a large number of silver-haired netizens have been incubated in Tik Tok. In the traditional perception, we generally think that the elderly have lost the pursuit of fashion, but the grandfather in a straight suit in Beihai has shown us another possibility of the elderly life. The head account of Tik Tok, "Mouna Uncle", has successfully attracted 1300W+ fans, driving up the commercial value. In addition, although the content form of "Beihai Grandpa" is located in "senior fashion", it still harvests a large number of younger viewers, satisfying their imagination for senior life.

## **2.2 The motivation of self-presentation by grassroots groups**

### **2.2.1 Self-needs: self-presentation and satisfaction**

The silver-haired group records their lives and presents themselves by making videos on the Tik Tok platform. These recorded life clips will become part of the meaning of self-life. Interviewee Tsum said, I usually take these short videos because I want to record my life and show my dance on the platform so that I can become more confident. Sometimes I can't remember what I did by myself, but the short videos on Tik Tok can help me remember. At the very beginning of playing Tik Tok, I was shooting the landscape or something, and then later saw Tik Tok also like myself shooting Tik Tok. They sang and danced in Tik Tok, so I thought why don't I also try it. After that, I'm thinking about trying to send their video and found it quite fun.

In addition to recording their lives, the silver-haired group on the Tik Tok platform wants to be recognized and resonate with other people, just like a performer who wants to be applauded, the silver-haired group also wants to be recognized by the viewers. The interviewee Wang Dui said he usually has a lot of likes and likes for those segments posted on Tik Tok so that he can be more motivated to create more videos.

### **2.2.2 Interpersonal needs: expanding one's circle of friends**

The silver-haired group has many different motives for self-presentation on the Tik Tok platform. The biggest and most common point is to be able to communicate with others, and the need to establish relationships with others while self-presenting to satisfy their interpersonal needs.

Through the overall interview with the interviewees, we learned that before the emergence of Tik Tok, there were many short video platforms, such as Meipai, Seconds, etc., but the content presented on these platforms was not very relevant to their lives, and there was not much content that they wanted to know about. However, the majority of user groups, also need to present themselves and lack a product that meets their habits and their actual life situations.

### *2.2.3 Self-presentation: the "front stage" performance of the silver-haired generation*

Goffman's drama theory divides the situation in life into two areas, the foreground, and the background. A front desk is a place where people perform, and what they show is the socialized self. Therefore, in terms of presentation content, people always hope to be able to present a socialized and idealized self, and at the same time hope to be able to present a positive image in front of others.

The silver-haired people, also care about the quality of their works, hoping to produce some excellent works to gain the recognition and support of the viewers. However, in actual situations, due to technical limitations, silver-haired people often adopt some simple production and editing methods before making processed videos. Therefore, most of the self-presented performances and productions of the silver-haired people are relatively low-level.

Any performance needs an audience. In terms of interpersonal needs, the silver-haired people who perform frequently need to share their lives through communication with the audience; in terms of their own needs, they also need to be recognized by the audience. For the silver-haired people on the Tik Tok platform, in the process of their self-presentation, watching users is a very important part. It is equivalent to the performance. If there is no audience, then the performance will be nothing to the silver-haired people.

For the silver-haired people on the Tik Tok platform, the audience's feedback mainly lies in the number of likes and comment interactions on the video. The more likes and interactions, the more the content they present is recognized and supported by the audience. Therefore, the number of viewers has the effect of inspiring the silver-haired people to present themselves to a large extent. Respondent Pemba said that after seeing his work with a high level of praise, this further stimulated his desire to perform.

### *2.2.4 Ordinary or not: the "backstage" reality of the silver-haired generation*

Goffman points out in "Self-Presentation in Everyday Life" that backstage has two attributes: first, it appears to the foreground and is interdependent. The notion of backstage exists with frontstage, and in contrast to the direct self-presentation of frontstage, backstage brings out facts that are concealed, backstage is the place where the performer is sure that the audience will not burst in. Second, the two can be interchanged. "Although there is a tendency to label an area as either frontstage or backstage associated with a certain performance, many areas are used as frontstage in this time and meaning, but become backstage in another." connection between backstage and frontstage then becomes stronger and stronger, the boundaries between backstage and frontstage become increasingly blurred, backstage can be presented more directly and completely in frontstage, and the two transform into each other more and more frequently.

### *2.2.5 Not everyone wants to be a Redditor*

Most of the silver-haired groups on the Tik Tok are retired or laid-off people, they are ordinary people who are no more than ordinary people, they can no longer contribute their share to the society and cannot realize their value. Therefore, they transfer their real-life psychological needs, which they hope to achieve value but cannot, to the platform of Tik Tok, and accumulate fans through this platform of Tik Tok, passing positive energy and spreading the feeling of happiness. A large number of silver-haired groups rely on this platform to stand out and appear in the public eye so that their own psychological needs to achieve self-worth can be maximally satisfied. Most of the silver-haired groups on Tik Tok still feel that playing Tik Tok is a hobby, and do not think about using this platform to become popular. However, for the silver-haired group, this is also a problem that is difficult to determine, because now there are already many silver-haired groups on the Tik Tok that have become popular, widely known, and loved. Tik Tok has given them away to realize their self-worth, and there is a lot of uncertainty as to what kind of results this way will bring in the end.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper finds that the main motives for the grassroots group to perform self-presentation are: the psychological need for self-presentation and the interpersonal need to proliferate their circle of friends. After that, based on Goffman's mimetic drama theory, it further explains the grassroots group's use behavior for snapshots. From the perspective of performers, the process of constructing the idealized self of the silver-haired group is analyzed by observing their performance behavior in the foreground and the influence of audience interaction feedback on their performance. Through the observation of the actual life of the grassroots group backstage, the most real-life of the grassroots group is understood.

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