

Narrative Characteristics Analysis of Short Videos of "Silver Internet Celebrities"—A Case Study of Tiktok Platform

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Abstract: Under the increasingly serious social reality of aging, silver Internet celebrities, as the first elderly group to cross the digital divide between generations, actively present and express themselves in the short video field. Through the research and analysis of the narrative characteristics and social value of short videos of silver Internet celebrities, this paper finds that the development of Tiktok silver Internet celebrities presents the characteristics of diversified narrative subjects, diversified styles and specialized production modes. The sudden emergence of silver hair Internet red makes up for the social absence of the middle-aged and elderly people in short video platform creation, and not only enriches the main body and content of short video creation, but also provides a new opportunity for the development of our senior economic market.

Keywords: Elderly video stars, Short video, Narrative characteristics, Narrative problem

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

According to the latest population data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, the population aged 60 and above reached 280.04 million, an increase of 12.68 million, with its proportion rising by 0.9 percentage points to account for 19.8% of the total population. Among them, the population aged 65 and above was 209.78 million, an increase of 9.22 million, with its proportion rising by 0.7 percentage points to account for 14.9% of the total. As a deeply aging society approaches, the elderly group has become an essential and unignorable component in the process of social development.

According to the 52nd Statistical Report on the Internet Development in China, recently released by CNNIC, the proportion of internet users aged 60 and above increased from 11.3% in June 2022 to 13.0%, indicating that the internet is further penetrating the elderly population.

American scholar Marc Prensky coined the term "digital natives" for those who have grown up with the internet and "digital immigrants" for those who have grown up before the technology explosion. "[1]In 2021, Tiktok launched the "Old Friends Plan," focusing on protecting the healthy and safe internet usage of the elderly and enabling them to integrate into and enjoy digital life. On March 29, 2022, Tiktok upgraded various measures under the "Old Friends Plan" to systematically safeguard the healthy internet usage of the elderly.

1.2. Research Object and Significance

1.2.1. Research Object

To clarify, "silver-haired internet celebrities" in this study refer to individuals aged 60+ who have influential accounts on short video platforms, managed by family or MCN agencies. Selection criteria include accounts featuring elderly main characters, operated by individuals, groups, or agencies, with at least one million followers on Tiktok (TikTok's Chinese version).

1.2.2. Research Significance

This paper explores "silver-haired internet celebrities," analyzing their short video narratives and sustainable development in current social-tech contexts. It aims to overcome aging challenges, promote social participation among the elderly via short videos, and offer new perspectives for China's communication ecology.

1.3. Research Approach and Methods

Case Study and Content Analysis. Based on long-term online observation, the author searched for keywords such as "grandpa," "grandma," "maternal grandmother," "maternal grandfather," "uncle," "aunt," "auntie," and "elder uncle" on the Tiktok platform. In conjunction with the comprehensive analysis of the official data analysis platform "Douchacha," 54 silver-haired internet celebrity accounts on Tiktok were selected as research objects. By examining and analyzing their fan numbers, video content, operation methods, and data performance, this study provides factual evidence and data support. It summarizes and sorts out the representative narrative characteristics of silver-haired internet celebrity short videos on the Tiktok platform and discusses the existing problems in these videos.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Short Video Narrative Features

This study referenced the CNKI search system, finding 247 results for "elderly internet celebrities" and 143 for "silver-haired internet celebrities" as of October 20, 2023. The literature review revealed extensive research on silver-haired internet celebrities in social short videos, focusing on "silver-haired economy," "media image," and "self-presentation." Han Xiaohui (2021) analyzed self-image presentation characteristics. Zhao Longhua and Liu Junran (2020) discussed the transition to the silver-haired economy. Wang Yike et al. (2023) conducted a framework analysis of elderly media image construction.

2.2. Research on Silver-haired Internet Celebrities

Using the CNKI search system, this study found 247 results for "elderly internet celebrities" and 143 for "silver-haired internet celebrities" as of October 20, 2023. Through a literature review, the author gained insights into research on silver-haired internet celebrities in social short videos, focusing particularly on the silver-haired economy, media image, and self-presentation. Key contributions to this field include Han Xiaohui's (2021) analysis of self-image presentation characteristics among silver-haired internet celebrities, Zhao Longhua and Liu Junran's (2020) discussion on the transition from silver-haired internet celebrities to the silver-haired economy, and Wang Yike, Qiu Xinlei, Wu Lingxuan, and Chen Huiliang's (2023) framework analysis of elderly media image construction.

2.3. Innovations of This Study

Silver-haired internet celebrities, a recent academic concept and media trend, have gained attention despite limited studies. Current research on elderly groups focuses on macro issues like aging and digital divides, neglecting silver-haired celebrities. Short video narrative studies mainly cover cultural, food, news, and rural videos, lacking focus on silver-haired celebrities. As media evolves, their popularity rises, attracting industry attention but lacking academic focus. Therefore, deeper research is needed. This paper analyzes silver-haired celebrities on Tiktok, transcending self-image perspectives, and contributes to the field through narrative and issue studies.

3. Narrative Characteristics of Silver-haired Internet Celebrity Short Videos

3.1. Narrative Subject Characteristics of Silver-haired Internet Celebrity Short Videos

3.1.1. Diversified narrative subjects, with MCN operations being the mainstay

An analysis of the samples of short video accounts by elderly internet celebrities reveals that approximately 39% of these videos are operated by individual users, 56% by MCNs, and 5% by celebrity company teams. The TikTok platform, with its extremely low entry threshold and production

costs, presents a diversified and widespread range of narrative subjects across various videos. Celebrity narratives are also a significant aspect of short videos by elderly internet celebrities. For instance, "Grandpa Ji Gong - You Benchang," "Zhang Shuangli," and "Feng Gong" are renowned film and television actors who have transitioned from TV screens to online media after retirement. MCNs account for the largest proportion of narrative subjects among elderly internet celebrities, occupying two-thirds of the overall analysis samples. Seven out of the top ten elderly blogger accounts on TikTok in 2022 are operated by MCNs.

3.1.2. Female Narrators Are More Popular Among Top Elderly Internet Celebrities

Regarding gender ratios, among the 54 accounts analyzed in this study, there are 25 male and 29 female elderly internet celebrity accounts, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution. However, among the top ten elderly blogger accounts on TikTok in 2022, seven are female narrators, with only three male narrators. This suggests that female narrators are more popular among top elderly internet celebrities. It reveals that in the internet sphere, where technology empowers and user consumption types diversify, social development and innovative concepts have propelled more female narrators from the margins to the center, attracting increased attention.

3.2. Characteristics of the Narrative Objects in Short Videos by Elderly Internet Celebrities

3.2.1. Diversified Narrative Content with Comprehensive Styles

The 54 accounts analyzed in this study cover a wide range of narrative content in short videos by elderly internet celebrities, including comedy, food, fashion, daily life, medical science popularization, traditional skills, celebrities, product reviews, parenting tips, knowledge explanations, life reflections, fitness, and more, constructing a comprehensive narrative landscape. In the blue ocean of short videos by elderly internet celebrities, different creators deeply explore and present content tailored to their unique niches. Overall, the diversified narrative objects in these short videos fully demonstrate the rich and varied consumption preferences of contemporary audiences, as well as the rich lives, skills, and unique charms of the elderly.

3.2.2. Comedy Shorts Occupy a Large Proportion, with Fewer Knowledge-Based Video

The narrative content of short videos by elderly internet celebrities is diverse, showcasing the images, lives, and states of the elderly from different perspectives. However, an analysis of short videos from different elderly internet celebrity accounts with over one million followers reveals that comedy-themed videos dominate, accounting for 17 out of 54 samples. Fashion, daily life, and science popularization content also occupy a certain proportion, while knowledge-based videos are the least represented. Undeniably, entertainment is one of the primary motivations for internet users to engage with relevant media platforms today. However, the over-entertainment orientation prevalent in current short videos featuring silver-haired internet celebrities has also sparked certain misconceptions.

In many short videos produced by silver-haired internet celebrity accounts, elaborate funny scripts create shallow and vulgar content forms. The over-entertainment tendency in short videos featuring silver-haired internet celebrities is detrimental to their sustainable development and does not benefit China's cultural communication ecosystem.

3.3. Narrative Formal Characteristics of Short Videos Featuring Silver-haired Internet Celebrities

3.3.1. Immersive Reproduction of Narrative Scenes

Based on sample data, daily life and humorous short videos account for nearly half of the total samples, with the narrative scenes of these two types of short videos essentially being real and specific scenarios from the lives of the elderly. In short video narratives, the selection and design of scenes can unleash different functions of short videos, creating a unique sense of immersion, interaction, and experience. For example, in humorous short videos, the funny skits of "I Am Tian Laolao" are filmed from fragments of her daily life, presenting a tendency towards authenticity and lifeliness, allowing audiences to feel the humor conveyed in the videos within tangible scenarios.

3.3.2. Three-dimensional Experience of Music and Narrative Rhythm

In short video narratives, the coordinated use of audio has become a common symbolic mode. For example, in the short videos of the account "Grandma Wang Who Loves Wearing High Heels," most videos are accompanied by music, controlling the emotional tone of the audience's viewing experience

and enhancing the corresponding color of the short videos. In addition to music as a background enhancement, the use of dynamic sound effects is also a major formal characteristic of narratives in short videos featuring silver-haired internet celebrities. For instance, in the account "Uncle Zhou Refuses to Age!" featuring fitness content, Uncle Zhou's movements, expressions, and language changes in the videos are accompanied by relevant matching sound effects.

3.3.3. Clear and Eye-catching Subtitles

Subtitles belong to the "paratext" mentioned by Genette, serving as textual ideograms.^[2] In the narrative formal characteristics of Tiktok's "silver-haired internet celebrities" short videos, the design and use of subtitle symbols also exhibit notable features. Through observation and analysis of Tiktok's "silver-haired internet celebrities" short videos, it is found that the subtitles are mostly placed centrally and slightly lower, with medium to large font sizes. The font colors are mostly yellow or white, and the fonts have black outlines. Some short videos feature diverse subtitle effects, such as color transitions, font enlargements, and fade-in/fade-out effects, enhancing the attractiveness of the short videos.

3.3.4. Emphasis on the Use of Diversified Voice Timbres in Post-production Voiceovers

As the auditory language of short videos, sound plays a crucial role in presenting their effects. In short videos featuring "silver-haired internet celebrities," various voice timbres such as "Monkey King," "Chen Jianbin" (the emperor role-player in *Empresses in the Palace*), and "Watermelon Strip" are presented. This is achieved by utilizing specific functions in video editing software to convert text into sounds that resemble those of Sun Wukong, Chen Jianbin, and other familiar characters. Converting some human voices into those of well-known characters like Sun Wukong, Xiong'er, and Chen Jianbin in short videos can bridge the distance with younger generations, better cater to current creative trends and directions, and retain more audiences.

3.4. Narrative Perspective Characteristics of Short Videos Featuring Silver-haired Internet Celebrities

According to the focalization theory of French narratologist Genette, narratives can be classified into three types: non-focalization, internal focalization, and external focalization.^[3] Most short videos of silver-haired internet celebrities display both internal and external focalization. Internal focalization, further divided into protagonist and witness perspectives, often uses "other-shot" forms filmed by professionals or family, focusing on the narrated characters from a witness angle. External focalization, exemplified by craftsmanship videos like Uncle Amu's, lacks narrative discourse or interaction, objectively recording the process with both narrator and audience remaining outsiders, relying solely on lens images to spark audience curiosity.

4. Analysis of Narrative Issues in Short Videos of Silver-haired Internet Celebrities

4.1. Mechanization and Homogenization of Dubbing

Current silver-haired internet celebrity short videos often utilize trendy sound effects, such as the voices of Sun Wukong or the Emperor from *Empresses in the Palace*. However, the overuse of these AI-generated sound templates has led to audience fatigue, with some criticizing the videos for appearing "insincere," "lacking originality," and "copying content." This homogenization of sound effects diminishes the depth and authenticity of the content, hindering the ability to genuinely connect with viewers and reducing the intimacy of the short videos.

4.2. Lack of Selfie Perspective for Personal Expression

Most silver-haired internet celebrity short videos are shot from a "third-person" perspective, often by professional crews or family members. While this approach effectively captures events and enhances interactivity, it lacks the intimacy and authenticity of a "first-person" or selfie perspective. The absence of a direct narrative voice from the protagonists themselves limits their ability to express inner emotions and opinions, widening the gap between the silver-haired celebrities and their audience.

4.3. One-sided and Superficial Content

A significant portion of silver-haired internet celebrities are contracted by MCN agencies, which

dictate content planning, performance, and editing. Driven by the pursuit of young audiences on platforms like Tiktok, MCNs prioritize entertaining and humorous content, often neglecting the genuine needs and spiritual qualities of the elderly. This results in superficial and shallow content that lacks depth and substance, failing to showcase the unique charm and value of the senior population.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

By presenting the profound connotations that the elderly population wishes to express and display, silver-haired internet celebrity short videos provide channels for self-presentation and expression among the elderly. They innovate and develop the current internet short video ecosystem, promote changes in public stereotypes towards the elderly, and reshape respect, admiration, and identification for this demographic. The development of silver-haired internet celebrity short videos offers an innovative window for our country to devise new strategies in response to the deepening social reality of an aging society. However, existing silver-haired internet celebrity short videos also face issues such as homogenization of narrative styles and content, excessive entertainment, and a lack of ideological depth, necessitating attention and improvement from society.

Acknowledgements

This article represents a phased research achievement from Postgraduate Research & Practice Innovation Program of Jiangsu Province. Project Approval Number: SJCX24_0710.

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