

The Research on the Usage Behavior of TikTok Short Video Platform in the Elderly Group

Yihua Li^{1, †}, Qinxuan Liu^{2, †}, Yixin Wang^{3, *, †}

¹ Film Academy, Modern College of Northwest University, Xian, Shaanxi Province, 710000, China

² School of Media and Law, Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, Ningbo, Zhejiang, 315000, China

³ School of Communication, American University, Washington, 20016, United State

*Corresponding Author Email: yw7155a@american.edu

[†]These authors contributed equally to this article.

Abstract. With the continuous development of new media technology in current society, most Internet users gradually move from PC to cell phones, and convenient and fast short videos become their primary source of information. Short videos, which are easy to operate, have become their primary choice. At the same time, the aging problem in Chinese society has been intensifying, and the elderly have gradually reached the Internet to meet their psychological needs and social interactions. In this paper, the author studies the relationship between aging groups and short videos, analyses the current situation, motivation and impact through interviews and case studies, and proposes measures to promote older people's better integration into online society. The result shows that for the current situation, the number of elderly users has increased significantly, preferring practicality and entertainment, and older people watch short videos for a more extended period and like to share them with others. The elderly market is enormous, and TikTok shopping has become a new battlefield. The Motivations for older People's Use of TikTok include Curiosity, the diversity of content on TikTok, and the desire to connect with society. The impact of TikTok on older people includes new tools for participation in society, new ways to maintain social circles, and new ideas for older people to communicate with family members.

Keywords: Elderly People; Short Video; User Usage Behavior.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of new media technology, new media products represented by cell phones and tablets are gradually entering every household. Short video platforms are rapidly emerging under their fragmentation characteristics, attracting the attention of all age groups. At the same time, the wave of aging in China has become a social factor that cannot be ignored, and the main body of the growth of Internet users is gradually transformed from the youth group to the elderly group. Spring et al. (1993) studied the usage of the elderly group and mass media. They showed that the elderly group would spend 40% of their spare time using mass media, which would have an impact on the leisure activities and interpersonal relationships of the elderly, which is contrary to the traditional theoretical notion of older people's involvement in the mass media. As the "silver-haired" group gradually "reaches out" to the Internet, the age of users of short videos continues to penetrate to both ends of the spectrum, and many elderly people join them and even become "silver-haired" netizens. Christina Eira Buse's (2009) shows that post-retirement seniors have a strong appetite for media information and interaction. Tan (2021) found that more than 60% of older adults use TikTok daily, with a high frequency of use and a duration of 1-2 hours each time. According to the 2020 Silver Hair Crowd Insight Report published by Quest Mobile, the current mobile device size of older users over 50 years old in China has exceeded 100 million, accounting for two-fifths of the number of all older people, with a growth rate far faster than other groups. For seniors, accessing new media can be difficult.

Furthermore, TikTok offers humor and a first-person perspective appeal to seniors. Older people are more likely to receive new things in this way. With its characteristics, a short video has become

the first choice for the elderly to "reach out" to the Internet. In their survey results, Peng Du, Lili Xie, and Fei Wang et al. (2022) showed that the top two reasons for excessive use of short videos were that the content of short videos was too attractive and life was boring, with the percentages reaching 42.78% and 39.04%, respectively. After analysis, Tan (2021) found that performance expectation is an essential factor affecting older users' willingness to use. Short videos are timelier and more effective for older people to receive information than text or pictures. Han and Shiao Wu (2021) argued that media factors also contribute to the participation of older adults in short video activities. The more convenient mode of operation and easy-to-use video production of TikTok attract more older adults to participate, and Wang (2020) mentioned that mobile video brings immersion. The impact of aging on the elderly in their lives is mainly loneliness, and watching and shooting TikTok can be an excellent way to alleviate the vacancy.

In an aging society, older people are less noticed, which leads to a series of social problems. Yu & Bo (2022) mentioned that TikTok could reduce ageism by providing psychological support and satisfaction to older adults through expressions and various positive words, and Qiu (2022) similarly suggested that TikTok provides an opportunity for older adults to show their lives and also allows older adults to become dependent. Because it is a concern among friends and family, older adults will feel more dependent on TikTok. In an aging society, older people are less noticed, leading to social problems. Yu & Bo (2022) mentioned that TikTok could reduce ageism by providing psychological support and satisfaction to older adults through expressions and various positive words, and Qiu (2022) similarly suggested that TikTok provides an opportunity for older adults to show their lives and also allows older adults to become dependent. Because it is a concern among friends and family, older adults will feel more dependent on TikTok.

However, in communication science, most studies still focus on young users, ignoring many older people on the periphery. This study focuses on the "silver-haired" group, which not only helps to explore how older users, who have long been in a state of discourse deficit, use short videos. It can also help Internet enterprises better understand the elderly group so that developers of short video products can create a better experience for them based on the needs of elderly users and promote their active participation in social activities in the context of the Internet.

This research takes the psychology and behavior of the elderly as the starting point, analyzes the relationship between the elderly and short videos in the new media era in depth through the research method of interview. Explores the motivation of the elderly to participate in short videos through social factors, environmental factors and psychological factors from the perspective of individuals, and aims to find better ways for the "silver-haired" group to integrate into the social community, to open the channel of communication between the elderly and the outside world, and to lay a bridge of communication.

2. Research method

This study starts with the relationship between the elderly and short videos, and the research subjects are the group of older adults aged 65 to 89 years old. The platform medium used in the research case is the new media platform represented by TikTok. This paper addresses the research questions through the qualitative method of in-depth interviews, using a semi-structured format in which questions are asked of the interviewees based on the interview outline. Then flexible questions are asked based on the answers, and the interview data are continuously enriched and recorded. The study included both online and face-to-face interview modes to ensure effective continuity of the interviews. The author obtained more realistic data and direct sensory statements and explored more deeply the attitudes and habits of the elderly towards short videos. It is expected to fill the gap in communication studies for the elderly group and update the data for direct reference. With the support of the above data, this paper hopes to address the following questions.

- 1). How do older people know about TikTok, and how do they use it now?

- 2). Does the existing new media platforms represented by TikTok have more advantages than disadvantages or disadvantages for the elderly?
- 3). what are the motivations for older people to participate in short video activities?
- 4). why are older people not disconnected from the social media environment of short videos?
- 5). How to better promote the participation of the elderly in Internet activities in the new media era?
- 6). What are the factors behind the rise of many "silver-haired netizens" in recent years? Is it subjective, or is it driven in some way behind the scenes?
- 7). What are the reasons for seniors to participate in new media, and why do they focus on new media platforms such as TikTok?
- 8). What are the real needs of the elderly, and in what ways should the new media platforms focus on facilitating them accordingly?

3. Research results

This in-depth interview was based on purposive sampling, combined with a snowball sampling method to screen older people who use the TikTok app around them and identify interviewees. A total of six older people was selected for interviews, three of whom were between the ages of sixty-five and seventy and three of whom were over seventy, with a gender ratio of 4:2.

From the interviews, this paper has obtained and analysed much first-hand information, and the author found that introducing TikTok to the elderly has significantly impacted them. Firstly, older people often use Tiktok to get information or entertain. For example, "I think it is the news, the pictures are big, and the sound is loud, so it is easy to know what is going on. I also like watching popular health and wellness videos, learning a lot, and sharing them with my family. I have recently been learning how to write with a brush at a university for the elderly, how to sharpen the ink, how to lift the brush, and there are videos on Tiktok." (Interviewee no. 1); "Square dancing, a lot of them teach you how to dance. I have learned many dance steps. Many people over there in square dancing watch this and learn." (Interviewee no. 6). At the same time, the research found that older people were skilled in using some of the functions of TikTok, but some were still unfamiliar with sending TikTok. For example, "I did not know how to buy anything the first time (in the live stream). It was too fast to follow what was said in the live stream." (Interviewee No. 6); "I thought the font and stuff were quite small before, but finally people told me there was some senior citizen mode, and that solved it. The other thing is that this posting video will sometimes forget how to do it." (Interviewee No. 4); "At first, I could not shoot the video. I did not know how to press it." (Interviewee no. 5).

In addition, older people generally use it for extended periods, which brings much convenience to their lives while giving them more options to spend their time. For example, "I will have lunch with my partner at noon, and after I nap, I will start watching videos because I do not have anything to do in the afternoon. I also watch videos in the evening, but I go to bed early, after nine o'clock, and fall asleep after a while." (Interviewee no. 1); "I watch it every day whenever I have time" (Interviewee no. 5). TikTok has done an excellent job of improving the psychological situation of older people, on the one hand, by making the elderly group less disconnected from new media, and on the other hand by giving them more positive thoughts and attitudes about their lives and their inner being.

As older people continue to be exposed to new media, their families and communities become strong helpers in solving the difficulties they encounter and advancing better integration into the new media society. However, older people still have many problems when dealing with TikTok-led software and need help from others. For example, "The community also teaches us to use our phones. I went with Dongdong (another elderly person's name) last time; a group of university students came over and gave me a piece of paper to read when I did not know how to." (Number 6 interviewee); "Ask the children, ask the grandchildren, let them mess with it for me and teach me how to operate it, we have a bigger family and live close to each other, so I can ask my peers if I do not know how to do it." (Number 4 interviewee).

4. Discussion

Through in-depth interviews, this paper will discuss three aspects of the current situation, motivation, and impact of the use of TikTok by older people, in an attempt to clarify the relationship between short videos and older people and explore new ways to push for better social integration of older people in the context of active aging.

4.1. The Current Situation of the Use of Tiktok Among Older People

With the continuous development of Internet technology, mobile phone access to the Internet has begun to break down the boundaries and barriers between ages, promoting the integration of older people into the online society. At the same time, China's aging has deepened, and the time older people spend on the Internet has increased linearly.

4.1.1. Significant Increase in the Number of Older Users, Preferring Practicality and Entertainment

According to the 2020 Silver Hair, Crowd Insights Report (2022) released by Quest Mobile, the percentage of older people using short video apps in 2020 will increase from 10.7% to 13.4% compared to 2019, with a huge upside. The short video has become the main growth point for older people to reach out to the internet. Unlike years ago, when older people had a rejectionist attitude towards the internet, today, older people are happy to accept this novelty and share it with others. In addition, in the wake of the epidemic, older people are choosing to use short videos to escape boredom and loneliness in their homes. For example, "During the epidemic, I think it was 20 years ago. It was too boring to stay at home, and I could not understand much of what my family was saying, so I got off Tiktok TV." (Interviewee No. 1)

The Short Video Research Series for the Middle-aged and Elderly (2019) shows that the elderly group favours short videos with solid practicality. Most elderly users are keen to watch general knowledge and entertainment videos [10]. Six older adults were interviewed in depth for this thesis. Male older people tend to watch general knowledge and news videos, while female older people prefer singing, dancing, and drama videos. Interviewee No. 1 was an elderly male who usually watched news and health science videos on TikTok. Female respondents No. 2, No. 4, and No. 6 all responded that they use TikTok to watch dance videos.

4.1.2. The Older People Spend More Time Watching Short Videos and Like to Share Them with Others

Older people have some problems with their eyesight, watching videos is more convenient than reading text or pictures. Short video applications are easy to use, which is why most are "addicted." In-depth interviews with six older people revealed that they open TikTok in their free time every day. Some said they "Brush TikTok when not sleeping and feel bored." "After having lunch with my partner and taking a nap, I start watching videos because I do not have much to do in the afternoon. In the evening, I also watch it for a while, but I go to bed early, at nine o'clock, and fall asleep in bed after watching it for a while."

In addition, TikTok has become a new venue for older people to socialize, preferring to communicate offline due to their lack of proficiency in typing on their phones or unfamiliarity with app functions. Not many older people are good at posting and editing videos, lack familiarity with the platform, and need help from the next generation. At the same time, older people have a sense of self-presentation. They are willing to learn how to post and shoot videos, often remembering them at the moment but forgetting them later due to personal memory or other circumstances. For example, "Some of my friends know how to make videos themselves, sometimes his granddaughter helps him make videos, and he also sings Huangmei opera and Beijing opera, an ancient costume drama. I said, how come you are so good at it? I said, "How come you are so good at it? You have good expressions and good movements. I said you are also older than me. How come I cannot understand it and cannot

get it right? They would ask my granddaughter to tell me but teach me that I would know it then and then forget it all of a sudden." (Number 2 interviewee).

4.1.3. The Elderly Market is Huge and Tiktok Shopping is the New Battleground

The outbreak of the new crown epidemic has indirectly fostered the habit of live shopping for the elderly, making it a significant force in e-commerce shopping. According to data published by CNNIC (2020), as of September 2020, the scale of China's live e-commerce users reached 309 million, with 6.8% of live e-commerce users over 60 years of age and over 20 million older people shopping live [11]. Older people with money and time have long been the leading consumer force that powerful platforms are competing, and compared to the traditional "picture + text" online shopping, the short video, and live shopping format will be more intuitive and convenient for the elderly group to understand, and more attractive to them to buy. At the same time, TikTok is trying to use short videos and live shopping to cultivate the shopping habits of the elderly, using low prices and practical items to retain the elderly consumer group and enhance user stickiness.

4.2. The Motivations for Older People's Use of TikTok

Older people are no longer a minority, and there are several reasons why TikTok has become a new media app of choice for older people and the wider environment.

4.2.1. Psychologically Driven by Curiosity

Through the interviews, the older people coincidentally suggested that they had become curious through the interviews. After all, their friends had started to learn about TikTok because their family members kept mentioning it, clearly showing that the older people's curiosity was one of the reasons why they started to get into TikTok. The word TikTok comes up repeatedly in conversations with friends and the usual daily chatter of family members. Older people want to fit in more, so using TikTok has become a natural trend. Without the use of TikTok, older people would be in an awkward situation, and the discovery of this situation has prompted the use of TikTok by older people. As TikTok becomes one of the topics of daily conversation among older people, it becomes natural to use TikTok to join in.

The new media industry needs to consider older people's use, whether it is new media applications or software. Older people make up a large proportion of society and tend to feel a psychological gap when they retire. TikTok, as one of the representatives of new media applications, is an excellent solution to the psychological disparity of the elderly and has aroused their attention. For example, "All the children at home are playing, and every time they come to the house, they sit on the sofa and play with their mobile phones, they can not understand what they are talking about at all, and they cannot intervene. (Interviewer No. 1); "I did not know at. First, I said look at TikTok and see what TikTok is up to. He looks like a little bird, this is TikTok." (Interviewee No. 2); "When I saw my sister playing it, I was curious and wanted to play it myself, so I asked my granddaughter to help me download it." (Interviewee no. 3).

4.2.2. The Diversity of Content in TikTok

TikTok provides an excellent platform for people to communicate and post their videos with any ideas or preferences, so there is a wide choice of content on TikTok. Older people have different interests and different levels of education. Nevertheless, when they use TikTok, older people can choose the content that interests them. Furthermore, based on TikTok's algorithmic recommendations, seniors can easily brush up on the content they have always been interested in. This means that older people are not psychologically excluded or confused about how to use it. Music, drama, news, and sitcoms have all become popular content for older people.

TikTok provides a very open platform for older people to have an additional choice of mental entertainment. That is why older people enjoy using TikTok, from learning about it in the beginning to liking it later on, as their interests change from a single square dance or playing chess in the park to a more diverse range of activities. Furthermore, TikTok makes it easy for them to watch this content.

Through the video format, older people's receptiveness and acceptance time become shorter, and they can listen to and watch the videos without the need to be literate.

4.2.3. Older People's Desire to Connect with Society

The popularity of smartphones has derailed some older people from society because of the complexity of smartphone use, still retaining the use of older phones. However, the advent of TikTok has brought them into contact with smartphones. Because of the epidemic and the change in the pace of life, younger people are more willing to spend their use on their phones and applications. Older people's lives can be more boring than before—the emergence of TikTok offers a solution to the boredom of the elderly. Older people's mental health and happiness should be an area of concern for society, and the emergence of TikTok has provided a way for older people to pass the time. Many older people have thus been given an alternative form of entertainment. It has made their lives happier and more enjoyable. For example, "Every day I sometimes stir-fry in this house, and I put TikTok on while I am here, and listen to TikTok singing. When I finished stir-frying, I kept seeing my son and daughter-in-law, and they came back from work for dinner and stopped watching." (Interviewer No. 2).

4.3. The Impact of TikTok on Older People

In recent years, the emergence of short video-type platforms, represented by TikTok, has solved the problem of accessing and outputting information for some older people who are not well educated and have difficulty reading.

4.3.1. New Tools for the Participation of Older People in Society

The short video app is quick, easy to use, and rich in content. It has become an essential part of the cultural and entertainment life of the middle-aged and the elderly. It has become one of the main communication channels with the outside world, becoming a new tool for the elderly to participate in society and not be out of touch with the Internet era. It has become a new tool for the elderly to participate in society, not being out of touch with the Internet era. It has successfully connected with the Internet through short videos. Due to their physiological and social nature, older people lack social contact, and this can easily affect their physical and mental health.

4.3.2. New Ways for Older People to Maintain Their Social Circles

Since retirement, older people have moved from a dominant societal position to a marginalized figure. Even though they make up a large proportion of the population, their attention span is not high. Moreover, their social network gradually shrinks, the scope of their social circle becomes smaller, their social participation decreases, and their confusion period which often touches on new knowledge grows. It has been found that middle-aged and older people also need to continue to realize their self-worth after retirement. Furthermore, to realize their self-worth, apart from re-employment and other means, they can do so through a rich cultural and recreational life. Traditional television and radio can only serve as an input for the middle-aged and elderly, while certain thresholds exist for output such as text creation and music composition. The emergence of the Internet and short-form video platforms may have found a breakthrough for these problems. The emergence of short video platforms has promoted the desire of older people to learn more about the Internet and their eagerness to enter the Internet era. With the increasing popularity of the Internet, access to the Internet is becoming easier and easier for older people, and the ease of creating short videos also allows them to have a lower creative threshold. Older people can better express their personal views, experiences, and talents through short videos.

4.3.3. New Ideas for Older People to Communicate About Family Members

According to interviewee number 1, her close friends use short video platforms to brush videos and live stream or shoot videos on short video platforms to share, including singing and daily life. In this process, older people's views are fully expressed, and younger people can learn from them. This

interaction is conducive to older people's sense of social participation and self-identity. In addition, the emergence of TikTok can also increase the frequency of interaction with family and friends. Short videos are not only an output and expression channel for middle-aged and older people, but at a social level, TikTok is also helping older people in addition to family relationships, and the sharing and interactive attributes of short videos have a facilitating effect on older people's friendships. They are easier to interact with and share on the TikTok platform, allowing older people to have a common language with their children or other family members; interesting content can stimulate the desire to interact and share with middle-aged and older people and also help them to increase the frequency of communication with family and friends. Overall, it enhances the sense of well-being of older people.

4.4. Countermeasures and Recommendations

With the continuous development of the Internet, mobile is penetrating the population, and the elderly are gradually becoming the leading force in the short video market. However, through interviews, the author found that some problems still prevent older people from genuinely integrating into the Internet society. In response to these problems, this paper proposes the following countermeasures.

4.4.1. Community-University Linkages and the 'New with Old' Model

The post-'00s students, as Internet natives, have a particular sensitivity and familiarity with the Internet and are familiar with mobile phones as a representative of mobile operation. At the same time, a significant reason why the elderly "Internet immigrants" cannot integrate into the Internet is that they do not know how to operate it. By working with universities and inviting students to become volunteers, the community can help the elderly better understand electronic products on the one hand and encourage students to participate in social practice, which can help both.

4.4.2. Internet Software Development Should be Estimated to Consider the Elderly Population

Most platforms today suffer from the common problem of neglecting older people, such as small font sizes that are not clear to read and modules that are too rich to blur the purpose. Currently, the Internet has developed a model for the elderly with the TikTok platform as an example, setting font size adjustments for the elderly, simplifying the page, and allowing them to browse the page smoothly and comfortably, thus encouraging them to actively "reach out" to the Internet and better integrate into society.

4.4.3. Customizing Diversity in Teaching Methods

At a community level, more activities should give older people a sense of participation. A series of teaching and guidance activities should be carried out using the Internet as a link to the urgent needs of older people. At the family level, it is essential to be more patient with the elderly and to keep them company. Family members have the most extended daily contact with the Internet, so they can spend time with them and guide them in new areas. They are also the first driving force in helping them to establish a correct view of Internet consumption. Children should patiently teach the elderly how to operate their mobile phones and install the relevant software they need in their daily lives. They should also inform them of the risks associated with using the Internet and set limits on payment software to avoid possible losses.

4.4.4. Network-Related Policy Reform and Improvement

Improving the environment for internet use. Xie Xianglong, Chen Yan, and Laoyingxin. Jiang Yaqin (2017) argues that older people lack the ability to discern the credibility of information on the Internet and are vulnerable to the influence of undesirable information on the Internet, such as pop-up advertisements and product promotions, which can seriously reduce older people's trust in the Internet and their senses [12]. The government and related websites should strengthen the screening and filtering of information to enhance the trust of the elderly in online information. In addition, the most common problem encountered by older people using the Internet is the difficulty in searching

for information, with twice as many older people having difficulty searching for information on websites as other age groups. Therefore, the website in question could improve the design of the search engine. In addition, the use of cognitive theory to train and address the difficulties of older people in using the Internet, and the development of an Internet environment adapted to the cognitive characteristics of older people can also be effective in addressing the difficulties of older people in using the Internet. To effectively promote the use of the Internet among older people, it is necessary to adapt the hardware and software to suit the characteristics of older people. For example, suppose older people tend to focus on health-related websites. In that case, these websites need to be designed to take older people's age into account and improve the information content, color scheme, and operational settings.

5. Conclusion

In the Internet age, the advent of mobile phones has genuinely broken-down age barriers and boundaries, with more and more older people actively engaging with the Internet, presenting themselves through new media such as short videos and communicating with an increasingly evolving society, breaking the stereotype of the "internet refugee."

Through in-depth interviews and case study analysis, this paper finds that the following characteristics exist in the current situation of short video use among the "silver-haired" group: (1) The number of elderly users has increased significantly, preferring practicality and entertainment. (2) Older people watch short videos for a more extended period and like to share them with others. (3) The elderly market is enormous, and TikTok shopping has become a new battlefield.

Based on the responses of different interviewees, this paper then explored the motivations for older people to participate in short videos: not wanting to be disconnected from society, the richness and variety of TikTok content, and choosing to use TikTok to pass the time. It was also found that short videos are also influencing the lives and psychological conditions of older people subtly and that short video applications such as TikTok are becoming a new tool for social participation, a new way for older people to maintain their social circle and a new way for older people to communicate with family members. At the end of the article, recommendations and countermeasures are proposed to improve the new media environment for different individuals and better promote the integration of older people into the Internet society.

This paper is an in-depth study of the relationship between the elderly and short videos, but there are still certain shortcomings and flaws. Firstly, in terms of the research subjects, due to the limited time and energy, only six older people were interviewed, and the sample size was insufficient to produce more accurate data. Secondly, when conducting an in-depth observation of the elderly group on the short video platform, there will inevitably be subjective tendencies in the analysis, with certain shortcomings. It is hoped that this study will help to promote the future of "aging positively," taking note of the vulnerable group of older people and helping them to better communicate with society and not become disconnected from an increasingly evolving society.

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