

# Image Construction and Social Cognition of Chinese Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities

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## Abstract

Silver-haired internet celebrities have attracted widespread attention and followers with unique styles and personality traits, influencing social culture and consumer trends. This study explores the image construction and cognition of silver-haired internet celebrities in society. Analyzing the positioning and influence of silver-haired internet celebrities on social awareness provides in-depth insights into the phenomenon of silver-haired internet celebrities. It gives a new perspective for future social cognition and media communication research. The results show that through positive, healthy, and optimistic images and content, silver-haired internet celebrities show the energetic and intelligent side of older adults to society, encourage older adults to pursue a quality of life with a positive attitude, and promote the community to pay more attention to the needs of older adults. In the future, silver-haired internet celebrities will integrate into the digital era with diversified development characteristics and contribute to promoting the communication concept of active aging.

**Keywords:** silver-haired internet celebrities, image building, social cognition, influence

## 1. Introduction

On April 19, 2023, the United Nations released data stating that India will become the most populous country in the world within this year, with 2.9 million more people than China. As a result, China's population aging issue has again become an issue of global concern. According to the standards of the United Nations, an aging society is defined as an aging society when the proportion of people aged 65 and above accounts for more than 7% of the total population, and an aging society is identified as exceeding 14%. In 2020, China's seventh census data showed that China's silver-haired population aged 60 and over accounted for 18.7%, reaching 264 million people, of which 191

million were aged 65 and over, accounting for 13.5%. It is estimated that the number of silver-haired people in China will reach 487 million in 2050. As of the end of 2021, the country's elderly population aged 60 and over was 267.36 million, accounting for 18.9% of the total population; the country's older adults aged 65 and over was 200.56 million, accounting for 14.2% of the total population. That means that China has entered an aging society, and the rate of aging is rapid.

As society ages, the importance of silver-haired people (referring to older people with silvery white or gray hair) has gradually become more prominent. At the same time, internet celebrity culture has risen with the popularity of the

internet and social media, and silver-haired internet celebrities have gradually become famous social network stars.

## 2. Overview of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities

According to international regulations, people over 60 are defined as elderly. Silver-haired internet celebrities refer to older people with silvery white or gray hair. They are a particular group of people active on online platforms to be positive, share experiences, and show real life. Silver-haired internet celebrities attract fans and followers by sharing diverse content on social media platforms. This phenomenon is gradually emerging with the deepening of social aging and the development of digital society.

### 2.1 Definition and Characteristics

Silver-haired internet celebrities are generally 60 years old and above. Although they may also include people in their 50s, they are mainly 60 years old and above. They are usually retired or semi-retired individuals with more free time to devote to networking activities. "Internet celebrity" refers to a social media influencer, which some scholars define as a person who attracts the attention of netizens through certain behaviors, characteristics, or events on the internet platform. This article describes a silver-haired internet celebrity as a group of people aged 60 and above who continuously and actively publish information on social media platforms through intelligent devices and actively participate in fan interactions to gain some influence.

Judging from the popularity process of silver-haired internet celebrities, they can be divided into two types: active display type and passive exposure type. The former refers to becoming popular by showing oneself, expressing opinions, sharing life, etc., through the internet. The latter refers to a group that has attracted widespread attention due to an event or behavior uploaded and transmitted on the internet. Silver-haired internet celebrities are active on major social media platforms and use social media, video sharing platforms, etc., to spread their opinions, lives, skills, and experiences. They may create a dedicated account, channel, or page and update content regularly. Build your IP by creating unique content and engaging imagery. And build strong connections with fans. The content produced by silver-haired internet celebrities is diversified,

covering daily life, hobbies, health, cooking, travel, handicrafts, music, and other fields. Moreover, this group generally has an optimistic life state. They convey positive energy by sharing diverse content and encouraging other older adults to actively participate in society and try new things to attract the attention of different groups.

### 2.2 The Rise and Development of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities

The rise of silver-haired internet celebrities benefits from digital social development, modern social recognition, and diverse social groups. Before the emergence of short videos, the public learned more about older adults through traditional media such as television and newspapers. The intervention of family-style digital feedback has accelerated the elimination of the digital divide. Undoubtedly, it has helped the elderly group grow from "digital refugees" to "new digital immigrants" and laid a realistic foundation for the silver-haired group to freely and independently participate in online life. Society has gradually begun to accept the participation and contribution of older adults, and silver-haired internet celebrities have received more social recognition and attention. Silver-haired internet celebrities have attracted many fans through sincere and unique content, formed fan groups, and created unprecedented opportunities to enter the internet celebrity circle.

#### 2.2.1 The Experience Stage of Social Media Going Online and Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities Debuting (2000-2015)

The development of social media in China can be traced back to the late 1990s and early 2000s, when some online communities and forums emerged in China, such as Tianya Community. Tianya Community entered the public eye in 1999 as an online social forum, providing a platform for users to discuss various topics. In the same year, Tencent QQ was launched and became one of the earliest social media in China. Maopu was founded in 2003. It was originally a social networking website with the theme of campus culture and attracted many college students. In 2009, the launch of Sina Weibo became an important milestone for Chinese social media. Sina Weibo is China's largest microblogging platform, similar to Twitter. Users post short messages, follow other users, and share content. Weibo has been a massive

success in social media, attracting hundreds of millions of users. 2011, the WeChat app's launch changed China's social media landscape. WeChat provides chat and various functions such as payment, mini programs, and public accounts, making it a comprehensive social media platform.

The development of Chinese silver-haired internet celebrities continues progressing with the evolution of Chinese social media. In the early days of the rise of social media, older people rarely participated in online activities due to factors such as age and technical barriers. However, with the popularity of social media platforms and smartphones, older people have gradually become exposed to and accustomed to using social media. Some older adults have begun to actively try to share their skills, knowledge, and life experiences on the internet. They attract attention by uploading videos, writing blogs, participating in social media, etc., and gradually forming a particular fan base.

#### 2.2.2 Live Streaming Becomes Popular, and Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities Attract Attention (2016-2019)

In 2016, the TikTok application was officially launched. TikTok was initially called "TikTok short video." The application allows users to create 15-second short videos. It quickly won the love of young users, especially teenagers and young adults, as soon as it went online. It has become a significant competitor in China's domestic social media field and has led the short video boom in China. Short videos have attracted many users with their unique content format and appeal and have become essential to social media. With the development of temporary video platforms, many older adults have joined and begun to try to make short videos and activate live broadcast functions to share their daily lives, hobbies, or professional skills. There is more direct evidence that the traffic of middle-aged and elderly users is shifting to short video platforms. Since 2018, many silver-haired internet celebrities have been born on the TikTok platform, especially in the year's second half. For example, many senior internet celebrities on the TikTok platform, such as Grandpa Jigong-You Benchang, Uncle Mana, Aunt Youfaner, etc., entered the venue in 2018. Since then, the short video platforms of China's four major social media giants, represented by TikTok, KuaiShou, Little Red Book, and Volcano Video, have entered a mature and stable stage of

development. The rapid expansion of the scale of silver-haired internet celebrities has caused the media to begin reporting and paying attention to them, and more older adults have become active on various social media platforms. They attract audiences with unique, engaging, and educational content and become knowledge communicators, life sharers, and opinion leaders in specific fields.

#### 2.2.3 The Stage of Diversified Development and the Official Rise of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities (2020-Present)

Many people regard 2020 as an extraordinary year. The widespread outbreak of the global COVID-19 epidemic this year has forced many older adults to live at home, leading to an increase in people's demand for online content. The global outbreak has also incentivized silver-haired internet celebrities to embrace the internet. Silver-haired internet celebrities are gradually recognized by society, and their participation methods are not limited to a particular platform. They began to try to participate in multiple social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, KuaiShou, Weibo, etc. The content released by silver-haired internet celebrities has gradually diversified, covering areas such as knowledge, health, entertainment, food, etc., forming a rich and colorful culture of internet celebrities. Some silver-haired internet celebrities are also trying to engage in cross-border cooperation with brands, cultural institutions, etc., to expand their influence and popularity. As society's recognition of older adults' active participation in online social networking continues to increase, the phenomenon of elderly internet celebrities will continue to grow and bring more colorful elements to society and culture.

#### 2.3 *Classification and Characteristics of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities*

According to the creative content and fields of silver-haired internet celebrities, they can be divided into four categories: life and entertainment, health and wellness, beauty and fashion, and culture and art. Each type of silver-haired internet celebrity has unique characteristics and audience, but the common thread is that they feature silver hair and attract fans and attention through personalized content. A silver-haired internet celebrity whose content is mainly about life and entertainment, he especially shares his daily life, funny jokes,

hobbies, travel experiences, etc. A silver-haired internet celebrity who pays attention to health and wellness, he pays more attention to health, fitness, sports, and other fields. His content creation mainly focuses on sharing health knowledge and lifestyle. A silver-haired internet celebrity passionate about beauty and fashion, focusing on beauty, fashion, skincare, and other fields, shows her fashion taste and style through short videos. Silver-haired internet celebrities who love culture and art are more inclined to focus on literature, music, painting, and other artistic fields and share their personal opinions and creations.

### 3. Image Construction of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities

Nowadays, the presentation of the image of silver-haired people in short videos is no longer a single mass media construction but a process in which the silver-haired people actively “cooperate” with young people, share themselves, and reshape their image under the mold of technology. Successful silver-haired internet celebrity images are built on authentic, engaging, and valuable content. What’s important is making genuine connections with fans through a unique voice and perspective and continually developing awareness skills. Looking at the accounts of silver-haired internet celebrities on social media platforms, whether individual users or MCN users with management companies behind them, they will clearly understand their characteristics before entering the traffic platform. They will set their personal role positioning and future development route in advance. Regarding the selection of creative content, we will also cater to the preferences of fans based on the results of interaction with fans and publish works related to lovers and hot topics. Whether it is in the video content of “silver-haired internet celebrities” in the lifestyle, drama, or food production categories, they will use a series of film and television languages — lines, pictures, background music, etc., to construct an apparent emotional tone line.

#### 3.1 Self-Presentation and Impression Management

In today’s prevailing social media environment, everyone plays a specific role in different social situations and presents themselves through carefully designed expressions to show the so-called “idealized” social image. Erving Goffman calls the behavior of individuals

presenting themselves on the “stage” of social life “theatrical performance.” He believed that people would express themselves unconsciously during interactions, conveying and emphasizing a particular impression in the minds of others through a series of performance behaviors. Then, he proposed two core concepts of “self-presentation” and “impression management.”

Silver-haired internet celebrities present their desired image through social media platforms, which aligns with Erving Goffman’s theory. They may highlight their unique fashion, attitude towards life, wisdom, and charm through carefully selected photos, videos, descriptions, etc. This presentation is designed to attract attention, increase followers, and win social approval, thereby constructing an idealized image. Erving Goffman focuses on the role switching between “front stage” and “backstage.” In the context of silver-haired internet celebrities, the image they display on social media can be considered a “front stage,” carefully designed and edited to attract attention. In the “backstage,” they may have different life states, genuine emotions, and daily experiences. This contrast shows their role conversion between the virtual world and real life.

Erving Goffman’s self-imprint management theory emphasizes that individuals present their social image by controlling imprints. Imprints can be signals in speech, behavior, appearance, etc. They convey specific information and shape others’ impressions of an individual. Silver-haired internet celebrities showcase their unique traits and tastes through carefully designed imprints. They may highlight age-related marks of wisdom, maturity, fashion, etc., to establish their desired image. On social media, these imprints are presented to the audience through photos, videos, text descriptions, etc. The aim is to create an attractive image. They also manage their appearance by controlling how their imprints are spread and presented. Carefully choose what they post and how they describe their life, interests, and attitudes to convey the social media presence they wish to project. This careful management allows them to control fans’ impressions and reactions.

#### 3.2 Public Opinion and Image Maintenance

Public opinion refers to the public’s views, evaluations, and comments on a specific social,



cultural, political, or economic event or individual. It is broad, rapid, and diverse. As the aging trend of society continues to deepen, as an emerging representative of older adults, silver-haired internet celebrities' image and image maintenance have gradually become the focus of research. Social public opinion plays a crucial role in shaping, maintaining, and influencing the image of silver-haired internet celebrities. Public opinion shapes the public's perception of silver-haired internet celebrities through reports and discussions on them. This perception may include their qualities, characteristics, achievements, image, etc., which will profoundly impact the establishment of the image of silver-haired internet celebrities. Public opinion not only presents facts but also conveys specific values. It can affect the image of silver-haired internet celebrities, making them be seen as positive, beneficial to society, healthy and energetic, etc., affecting the audience's attitude towards them. Positive public opinion evaluations will have a positive impact on silver-haired internet celebrities and establish a good image. On the contrary, negative comments may hurt the image, so image maintenance is essential.

Maintaining the image of silver-haired internet celebrities is crucial to maintaining their positive image and increasing public recognition. Image maintenance contributes to the long-term stability of personal appearance but also helps to improve the image and social status of the entire silver-haired internet celebrity group. In the context of profound aging, as a positive representative of the elderly group on online social platforms, silver-haired internet celebrities should be committed to creating authentic, positive, and valuable content to reflect their real lives, attitudes, and values. For example, actively participate in public welfare activities and charities to demonstrate silver-haired internet celebrities' social responsibility and positive contributions. Maintain sincere interaction and communication with fans, pay attention to the spread of public opinion, and promptly respond to events or news that may affect the image to ensure that the image is not affected by negative public opinion. Choose partner brands carefully to ensure they are consistent with the brand image and avoid being associated with bad brands or adverse events to maintain a positive impression. Evaluate your image regularly to understand how public

opinion views you. Based on the evaluation results, adjust your behavior and image positioning to adapt to societal changes.

#### **4. Social Perception of the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities**

Social cognition refers to the process and ability of individuals to perceive, recognize, understand, judge, reason, and evaluate social phenomena, other people's behaviors, social norms, cultural values, and other socially related things. It is an individual's perception of the social environment and their role, position, and responsibility in social relationships. There is a close relationship between social cognition and individual image creation. Social awareness affects an individual's recognition, evaluation, and image shaping. An individual's social understanding is affected by factors such as the social environment, feedback from others, and cultural values, and the individual's image is also regulated and shaped by these factors.

##### *4.1 Social Cognitive Shaping of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities*

Social cognition shapes people's perception, evaluation, and expectations of silver-haired internet celebrities and affects their perception and presentation of their image. From the audience's perspective, broadening channels for the audience to obtain information has diversified their cognition. From the standpoint of the silver-haired internet celebrity group, they are influenced by emerging technologies such as the internet and dare to break through themselves and use short videos to integrate into the social environment. By actively displaying their vitality, creativity, and positive attitude, silver-haired internet celebrities change society's traditional concepts of older adults, break the impression of aging, and present a cheerful, optimistic, and energetic image. By sharing their knowledge, skills, wisdom, and creativity, older adults show their rich life experience, establish the idea of older adults as wise men, and make society more recognized for their contribution to wisdom and creativity.

In the past, society generally believed that short videos and internet celebrities were exclusive labels for young people. Still, with the evolution of social concepts, older people are also considered internet celebrities. People are starting to respect the experience and wisdom of older adults more and see them as a group that can share valuable information on social media.

As older people become active on social media, society pays more attention to their lives, opinions, and interests. Changes in social concepts and the active participation of older adults in the digital community have allowed more and more brands and commercial organizations to see the potential market value of silver-haired internet celebrities. The active participation, experience sharing, and brand cooperation of older adults will further promote the recognition and development of the image of silver-haired internet celebrities in society.

#### *4.2 The Impact of the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities on Social Cognition*

Silver-haired internet celebrities comfort the audience through their positive, healthy, and optimistic image. At the same time, they also promote the spread of the concept of active aging at the social level and change society's inherent impression of older adults. The audience resonates with the content of silver-haired internet celebrities, identifies with their views and attitudes, builds a certain degree of trust, and is more inclined to accept and trust their recommendations. The recommendations and reviews of silver-haired internet celebrities can influence the audience's purchasing decisions. The audience is more willing to take their suggestions, especially in health, wellness, travel, and other areas. The active display of silver-haired internet celebrities has caused society to re-examine the aging society and prompted a change in concepts, believing that older adults can also be energetic, creative, and attractive. By following silver-haired internet celebrities, the audience can understand older adults' lifestyles, needs, and ideas and enhance their knowledge and concern for the elderly group.

### **5. Controversies and Reflections on the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities**

The image of silver-haired internet celebrities has brought many controversies and reflections. It involves society's perception of older adults, the norms of online social platforms, and the self-perception of older adults. An in-depth review and discussion of these issues can help find more appropriate, respectful, and positive ways to present older people.

#### *5.1 Analysis of Social Controversy and Public Opinion on the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities*

The emergence of silver-haired internet

celebrities has sparked controversy over the image of older adults. Some people believe that silver-haired internet celebrities break the stereotype of older adults with their upbeat, active, and fashionable photos and help change negative views of older adults. However, some people are worried that this phenomenon may over-idealize older adults and create unrealistic expectations for the younger generation, which may hurt older adults. Another point of controversy is the degree of commercialization and authenticity of silver-haired internet celebrities. Some silver-haired internet celebrities may tend to be overly commercial and excessively pursue advertising cooperation, the number of fans, and social attention, which may affect the authenticity and originality of their content. This raises questions about the motives of silver-haired internet celebrities and the authenticity of their content.

In response to the above two controversies, we have to reflect on society's respect for older adults, the responsibilities and regulations of online platforms, and the self-awareness and self-expression of older adults. Older adults also have a colorful life and can pursue their interests and hobbies and participate in social activities. This recognition should be based on authenticity, positivity, and respect. At the same time, older adults should fully realize their value and social influence and actively participate in online social networking. We should reflect on the extent to which society respects older adults and whether there is damage to the rights and interests of older adults in the community and actively improve the social status of older adults. Online platforms should review and standardize the content of silver-haired internet celebrities to avoid spreading harmful content, strengthen supervision of commercial cooperation, ensure the transparency and authenticity of advertising cooperation, and protect the rights and interests of users.

#### *5.2 Social Responsibility and Moral Issues of the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities*

The image of silver-haired internet celebrities should be based on a positive attitude towards life, conveying their love for life, expectations for the future, and positive contributions to society. They should encourage older adults to face life with a positive attitude, bravely pursue their dreams and goals, and show the extraordinary lives of older adults. To change the traditional stereotypes of older adults,

encourage society to pay more attention to and respect more senior adults, and promote active aging. Silver-haired internet celebrities have particular social influence and can use this influence to participate in public welfare activities and social services and positively contribute to disadvantaged groups and society. Demonstrate social responsibility through general welfare activities and encourage more older adults to participate in available welfare undertakings.

Silver-haired internet celebrities should act authentically, ethically, and responsibly when creating content. We should not attract attention through false information and exaggerated facts. Still, we should present real life and ourselves to the audience with an honest attitude while maintaining a moral bottom line. When conducting business cooperation and product recommendations, carefully select partners and recommended products. Avoid commercial interests at the expense of your audience and ensure recommended products meet ethical, quality, and safety standards. It should be recognized that fans are the main objects of their influence, and caring for and being responsible for fans is their moral obligation. Pay attention to fans' needs, emotions, and problems, and build good fan relationships through positive interactions, responses, and encouragement.

### *5.3 Prospects of the Image of Silver-Haired Internet Celebrities*

With the diversification of the elderly group, the image of silver-haired internet celebrities will show more diversified characteristics, covering older adults in different fields, interests, hobbies, and lifestyles. There are not only elders full of wisdom and experience but also older creators full of energy and creativity, as well as more senior professionals who have achieved success in all walks of life. In the future, as the digital literacy of older adults improves, silver-haired internet celebrities will be more deeply integrated into the digital world. They will use digital technologies such as social media, video platforms, and live broadcasts to show their lives, thoughts, and ideas and interact with more audiences.

Society's perception of older adults will gradually change. Older adults will no longer be regarded simply as a group trapped in retirement but as individuals full of vitality, creativity, and prosperous life experience. This

cognitive change will push older people to play more roles in all areas of society. The rapid growth of the elderly population provides essential opportunities for developing the silver hair industry. Vigorously developing the silver hair industry can not only meet the needs of older adults and improve their well-being but also become a positive driving force for expanding domestic demand and promoting economic growth.

## **6. Summary**

The rise of China's silver-haired internet celebrities represents the active expression and integration of older adults in the digital age. It indicates the change in society's image of older adults. Through social media, short video platforms, etc., silver-haired internet celebrities spread a positive, active, and creative vision, breaking the traditional stereotypes of older adults. This new way of image communication affects the public's understanding of older adults. Older adults are increasingly viewed as an experienced and positive group, promoting a more positive, respectful, and caring attitude towards aging. The image communication of silver-haired internet celebrities will be more diversified. Users will further integrate digital technology. Through the balance of creativity and responsibility, silver-haired internet celebrities will continue to deepen their expertise in their respective fields and promote society to form a more inclusive, diverse, and positive image of older adults.

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