

SELF PRESENTATION ON DOUYIN AMONG ELDERLY IN CHINA AND ITS IMPACT TOWARDS THEIR WELL-BEING

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‘Digitalization’ and ‘Aging’ are two major trends that cannot be ignored in the current world. Social media platforms, such as Douyin, have become an ideal stage for the elderly to engage in online self-presentation. Drawing on self-presentation and the Uses and Gratifications theories, this study conducted in-depth interviews with the 15 elderly in China that are aged 60 and above to explore their self-presentation behaviors on Douyin. The collected data were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis. This study found that elderly self-presentation behaviors on Douyin include front-stage performance, backstage performance, and impression management. Furthermore, regarding elderly’s motivations for self-presentation on Douyin, findings revealed three themes: passing time and entertainment, technological empowerment, and peer pressure. It is worth noting that for peer pressure, this study innovatively discovered the influence of traditional Chinese cultural values (Guanxi, Keqi, and Mianzi) on the self-presentation of the elderly in China. Lastly, this research also indicated that self-presentation among the elderly on Douyin can enhance their subjective and psychological well-being. The focus on the elderly highlights concern for vulnerable groups, especially amidst rapid digitalization and the promotion of active aging by the government and various societal sectors, emphasizing the significance and practical value of this study. The findings may also help younger generations develop a more balanced and objective view of the elderly, fostering a more optimistic attitude toward their own aging process.

Keywords: elderly, self-presentation, Douyin, well-being, active aging

INTRODUCTION

China is the world’s fastest aging country with the world’s greatest aging population (He et al., 2020). Nevertheless, when it comes to people’s happiness, China only ranked 60th out of 140 countries and regions in the World Happiness Report 2024. Thus, China aims to actively address aging and consistently enhance elderly well-being. Well-being refers to a person’s sustained level of happiness across far longer times (Sirgy, 2002). Notably, The World Health Organization (2002) introduced active aging, which involves optimizing choices in security, participation, and health to enhance individual quality of life as they age. The rise of social media provided more possibilities for realizing an active aging society. Participation is the core of active aging, now extends beyond real-life interactions to include media participation (Guo et al., 2024) such as participating in social media and presenting themselves.

Douyin, an emerging social media platform, offers an ideal stage for self-presentation. By April 2021, users aged 60 and above had created over 600 million videos and received over 40 billion likes (Gao, 2021). However, research on elderly self-presentation on Douyin is limited compared to WeChat (Fan & Hasan, 2022; McKenna et al., 2023). Additionally, Cheng (2021) categorized the elderly into two groups: ordinary elderly individuals and elderly celebrities (Dou et al., 2022). While elderly celebrities receive considerable attention, ordinary

elderly users, who constitute the majority of China's aging population (Guo et al., 2024), are largely overlooked in existing research on self-presentation on Douyin.

The elderly has diverse motivations for self-presentation on social media, including entertainment (Jung et al., 2007), information (Hossain et al., 2019; Fan & Hasan, 2022), interpersonal (Li et al., 2022), and peer pressure (Malik et al., 2016). However, traditional Chinese cultural values, like Guanxi (interpersonal connections), Keqi (politeness), and Mianzi (face-seeking), also influence their self-presentation. For example, McKenna et al. (2023) found that the elderly carefully selects photos for posts, especially when sharing enjoyable moments. Particularly, they are more cautious to avoid giving the impression of showing off. Additionally, Zhu (2014) noted that the elderly often reciprocates likes on friends' posts, reflecting Keqi behavior. Moreover, Douyin users present an idealized self to avoid judgment, reflecting element of Mianzi (Lu & Lu, 2019). Therefore, further research is needed to explore self-presentation motivations of Chinese elderly on Douyin.

While self-presentation has grown in popularity among all age groups, most research has focused on young adults. For example, in-depth interviews with young Instagram users reveal that ideal self-presentation can harm well-being by causing anxiety (Moreton & Greenfield, 2022). Valkenburg and Peter (2008) suggested that self-presentation patterns may vary across one's lifetime. This implies that the elderly may exhibit different self-presentation behaviors than younger individuals, which could have varying impacts on their well-being. Thus, it's necessary to study the impact of self-presentation behaviors on the well-being of the elderly.

In summary, this study addresses three research questions: 1) How do the elderly in China portray their self-presentation on Douyin? 2) What motivates the elderly in China to present themselves on Douyin? 3) Why self-presentation on Douyin is important in influencing the well-being of the elderly in China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elderly Self-Presentation on Social Media

The elderly exhibit diverse positive self-presentation behaviors. Ng and Indran (2023) found that more positive videos are created by the elderly on TikTok than negative ones. In TikTok challenges, they often showcase physical activities like dancing to present a healthy image. Similarly, Chinese elderly often present themselves positively by sharing uplifting content and avoiding potentially embarrassing posts (Fan & Hasan, 2022).

Current research on self-presentation primarily focuses on elderly celebrities. Guo et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative content analysis of ten elderly Chinese Douyin celebrities and found that their content covered various topics, including knowledge, health, lifestyle, entertainment, cuisine, and fashion. Their posts also challenge stereotype of aging as decline and dullness by showcasing diverse lifestyles (Dou et al., 2022; Yu & Zhao, 2022). Moreover, studies shown that elderly celebrities on Douyin opt for real-life settings for self-presentation to establish closer connections with audiences (Wirén & Korpi, 2023; Yang & Seo, 2022; Zhou, 2023). However, other research indicated that they enjoy using virtual backgrounds to enhance videos' appeal. The filters, music, text, and template features are essential tools for them in self-presentation (Yang et al., 2022; Yu, 2023).

The Motivations of Elderly Self-Presentation on Social Media

The uses and gratification (U&G) theory assumes that media users are aware of their needs and motivations, which leads them to make media choices and obtain gratification. There is limited research on motivations of elderly self-presentation on Douyin. Zhou (2023) found that elderly celebrities on Douyin are motivated by internal factors like self-identity and social needs, as well as external factors such as technological empowerment and peer pressure. Dou et al. (2022) also found that the elderly enjoy learning from peers. They also indicated that primary motivation for retirees to engage in self-presentation on TikTok is to maintain relationships with acquaintances, followed by self-expression and entertainment. Moreover, Li (2022) observed that middle-aged and elderly women use Douyin for self-presentation to idealize themselves, reduce loneliness, alleviate stress, spend leisure time, and seek fame.

The Impact of Self-presentation on Social Media on Elderly Well-Being

Well-being consists of two aspects: subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). SWB refers to individuals' overall evaluation of life as well as their feelings, such as life satisfaction, positive, and negative affect (Diener et al., 2022). While PWB includes social connectedness and self-esteem (Yang et al., 2022).

Research has shown a close correlation between self-presentation and various well-being indicators. Sheldon et al. (2021) discussed how the older generation often uses Instagram to document and seek inspiration, by listing events and positive memories that enhance their life satisfaction. Li et al. (2022) found that loneliness affects the elderly, and creating Douyin content helps alleviate it. Additionally, scholars explored the impact of self-presentation on elderly's well-being from both positive and authentic perspectives. Positive self-presentation can enhance self-esteem and positive affect (Kim & Lee, 2011). However, conflicting research exists. Niu et al. (2015) found that emphasizing positive self-presentation may hide negative aspects, potentially reducing PWB. Regarding authentic self-presentation, Bailey et al. (2020) indicated that this strategy was positively correlated with increased life satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 Chinese elderly. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: 1) aged 60 or above and residing in China; 2) active Douyin users (minimum daily access); and 3) using Douyin for over a year and posting at least once a month.

The sample consists of six males and nine females, with an average age of 62 (eleven participants aged 60-64 and four aged 65-69). Participants come from various provinces and municipalities across China. In terms of education and occupation, most have a junior college, high school, or lower education level and hold ordinary jobs. To protect privacy, they are labeled as Respondent 1 (R1) to Respondent 15 (R15). Table 1 lists their profiles.

Data was collected from April to May 2024. Given the widespread geographical distribution of respondents in China, interviews were conducted online via voice calls. Each interview lasted 30 to 50 minutes to avoid fatigue (Ekoh et al., 2020). Open-ended questions were used to obtain more comprehensive information. An interview guideline was developed, and the interview questions were divided into three sections: demographics, research, and cooling-down questions. With participants' approval, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Moreover, considering that interviewees are Chinese elderly and to ensure

participants feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, this study was conducted in Mandarin and then translated into English.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, specifically following the six-step procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In Stage 1, the researcher read transcript and organized the data. In Stage 2, codes were generated from the data. Stage 3 involved generating themes from the codes, followed by Stage 4, where themes were reviewed. In Stage 5, the themes were defined and named, leading to the final stage, Stage 6, where the report was produced.

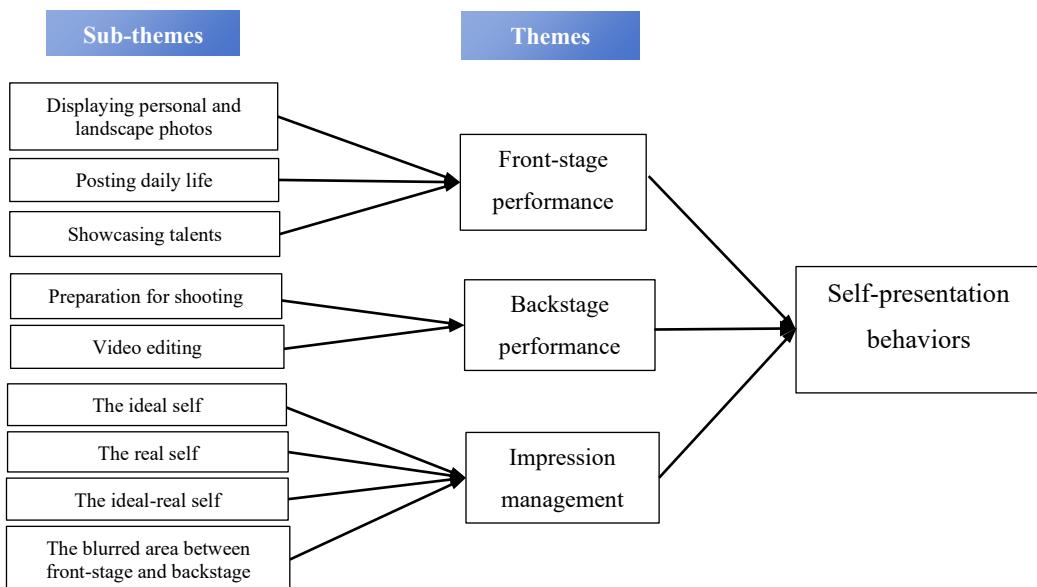
FINDINGS

The research findings are organized according to each research question, with relevant responses from the participants included.

RQ1: How do the elderly in China portray their self-presentation on Douyin?

Self-presentation, whether in real-life interactions or online communities, can be viewed as a form of performance (Liu, 2022). Goffman (1959) introduced the concepts of front-stage and backstage to reveal individuals' self-presentation. The front-stage performance refers to the way performers present themselves to audiences (Xu, 2020). The backstage, relative to the front-stage, is a more concealed domain, away from the audience's gaze (Haferkamp et al., 2012). Individuals also engage in impression management through stage settings and script design (Attah et al., 2022). Thus, based on self-presentation theory and interview transcripts, this study revealed three themes: *Front-stage performance*, *Backstage performance* and *Impression management*. As shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes of self-presentation behaviors



Front-stage performance

The front-stage refers to the space where performers present themselves, mainly including the performers' profiles and performance content (Yang & Seo, 2022). It has three sub-themes: *displaying personal and landscape photos*, *posting daily life*, and *showcasing talents*.

On Douyin, the audience first encounters the performer's personal profile page. Among the 15 elderly, 13 used personal or landscape photos as their avatars or background images. *"As for my avatar, it's a large cluster of flowers. Since I don't have any pets, and I don't want to use something like cartoons. I think that flowers are quite beautiful." (R12)*

Posting daily life is not just about leaving traces of their lives, but also about sharing moments with the audiences. For example, *"I just casually capture my daily life. Just recording the bits and pieces of life. Sometimes I post videos of cooking or gardening. And I really enjoy outdoor activities. Despite my spouse and I getting older, our health is still good. We enjoy hiking with friends, and I'll share our hiking journey, as well as the scenery along the way." (R5)*

The elderly also showcases talents such as dancing, lip-syncing, playing instruments like the saxophone, piano, and Erhu, as well as performing Qipao shows (traditional Chinese performances with elegant attire).

Backstage performance

The backstage is a secluded space, separated from the performance venue, where people can temporarily drop their idealized masks and prepare for front-stage performance (Yang & Seo, 2022). It includes *preparation for shooting* and *video editing*. Preparation for shooting refers to the stage before formally starting video production. This study focuses on the selection of shooting locations and background music.

The shooting locations are places from their daily lives, whether indoors or outdoors. For instance, *"I'm a farmer, and I used to be the village head. In my spare time, I enjoy taking walks in the fields and taking some shots of the crops we grow in our village, like millet, apples, tomatoes, peppers, and others." (R6)*

Most respondents stated that they carefully choose background music, often opting for nostalgic old songs. For example, *"I really care about choosing the right music, usually old songs. It has to sound pleasant and match perfectly with the video, making everything come together nicely." (R3)*

Video editing, the second sub-theme of backstage performance, focuses on enhancing the professionalism and appeal of the videos. Typically, users can utilize built-in editing tools on Douyin to add subtitles, trim, and apply filters and video effects.

Impression management

Every performer adopts impression management techniques to avoid breakdowns and present a flawless performance (Goffman, 1959), thereby creating a favorable front-stage impression. There have four sub-themes: *The ideal self*, *real self*, *ideal-real self*, as well as, *the blurred area between front-stage and backstage*.

Most video effects can enhance user's strengths and help create an ideal image. Female elderly tends to use Douyin's effects more than males to present their ideal selves. *"I'm in my sixties, a grandmother now, not as pretty as I was when I was younger. But everyone likes to see themselves looking nice, and I'm no exception. Beauty filters can make me look prettier, it feels like going back to my younger days." (R8)*

The real self refers to a person's natural expression in self-presentation, showcasing the most genuine state without embellishing personal behavior or image (Kim & Lee, 2011). "*I portray myself as a very positive and optimistic person, someone who knows how to enjoy life, with no difference from my real life.*" (R9)

Additionally, they not only showcase their ideal selves (through selection, modification, and enhancement) but also retain a part of their real selves (based on their preferences and personalities). This self-presentation represents both an aspiration towards their ideal selves and, to some extent, reflects their real selves. For example, "*When I was choosing username, I asked my daughter, and she thought it would be nice to give me a homophonic version of my real name. It keeps things real and adds some fun and personality to the username. Plus, my name sounds like 'spring' and 'summer' in Chinese, giving off this lively vibe.*" (R14)

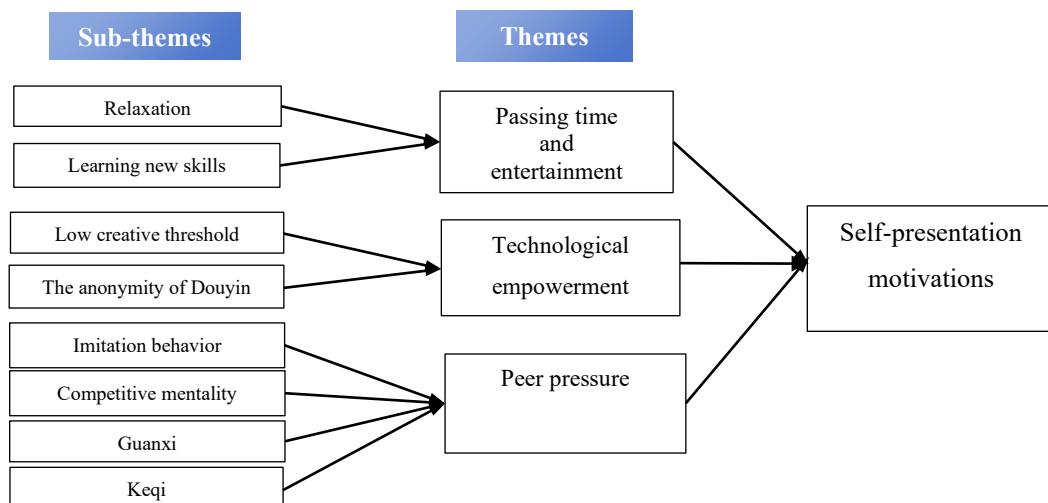
Moreover, bringing backstage life to the front-stage has become a very common way of impression management (Dai, 2022). By blurring the area between front-stage and backstage, they bring their private lives into the public eye, creating a sense of intimacy with audiences. "*I often post videos of myself frying twist doughnuts, all filmed right in my own kitchen. I also captured the moment when our whole family was sitting around the table enjoying twisted doughnuts, filled with laughter and joy.*" (R11)

In summary, this section mainly addresses the first research question, which is the self-presentation behaviors. There have three themes: Front-stage performance, Backstage performance, and Impression management.

RQ2: What motivates the elderly in China to present themselves on Douyin?

The U&G theory has been widely applied to understand users' motivations for using social media. Further research also is needed to uncover the motives behind users' self-presentation on Douyin. Thus, based on U&G theory and interview transcripts, this study identified three themes: *Passing time and entertainment*, *Technological empowerment*, and *Peer pressure*. As illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: Themes and sub-themes of self-presentation motivations



Passing time and entertainment

All participants expressed that passing time and seeking entertainment are their primary motivations for self-presentation, with two sub-themes: *relaxation* and *learning new skills*. Posting videos on Douyin has become an important way for the elderly to relax. “*There aren’t many amusement facilities in the countryside, so after finishing farm work, I spend time with my grandson by watching or making short videos together.*” (R13)

“*I couldn’t go out during the Covid-19, and I found myself with nothing to do at home, so I started making videos to pass the time.*” (R4)

For some respondents, the entertainment experience is accompanied by learning new skills. For instance, “*It’s like a game, a form of self-entertainment. I play around with different templates, effects, and filters. Recently, I spent 38 CNY on Douyin to buy an editing course and I’m learning editing now. It’s so much fun!*” (R1)

Technological empowerment

Technological empowerment refers to the growing opportunities for ordinary users to disseminate information and express themselves as media technology advances (Zhou, 2023). There are two sub-themes: *low creative threshold* and *the anonymity of Douyin*.

Douyin serves as a highly convenient self-presentation platform, with a user-friendly interface and a wide range of templates that encourage elderly users to present themselves. “*Posting videos on Douyin is quite simple. I just tap the plus button at the bottom of the screen, then shoot or select an existing video, add music, and finally tap ‘publish.’ That’s it! When I see beautiful scenery, I capture and share it directly on Douyin.*” (R5)

Chinese parents often interact conservatively with their children in real life, showing minimal verbal expressions of affection. The anonymity provided by Douyin offers them a new platform for self-expression. “*I enjoy posting videos on Douyin to wish my child good luck, smooth sailing, and expressing my love. These are words I don’t usually say directly to my child, but it’s another way of letting him know how much I love him.*” (R1)

Peer pressure

Findings show that influence exerted by peers can affect the elderly in self-presentation. The theme includes four sub-themes: *imitation behavior*, *competitive mentality*, *Guanxi*, and *Keqi*. Observing peers’ experiences may inspire the elderly to start showcasing their own creations (Li et al., 2022). For instance, “*Douyin often recommends me works by elderly individuals, such as practicing Tai Chi, dancing or performing Peking opera. Thus, I also want to showcase my own talents. I used to be a theater manager and have a passion for various musical instruments. Now I often post videos of myself playing saxophone solos.*” (R1)

Competitive mentality refers to the psychological state in which respondents strive for advantages, often accompanied by comparison and competition with others (Dotson, 2022).

“*Some of my relatives and former colleagues are using Douyin to post videos of themselves exercising in the park and traveling, I feel it’s a great way to document one’s life, so I decided to learn it myself. Since they can do it well, I’m sure I can too.*” (R10)

Guanxi is a crucial dynamic in Chinese culture and serves as the foundation of interpersonal relationships. Due to Guanxi networks, the elderly exhibit greater self-discipline in self-presentation (Trottier, 2011). For example, “*Before posting a video, I always share it with everyone in the group. If everyone thinks it’s good, I’ll post it immediately. But if there*

are suggestions for improvement, I'll carefully consider them and make revisions before posting." (R1)

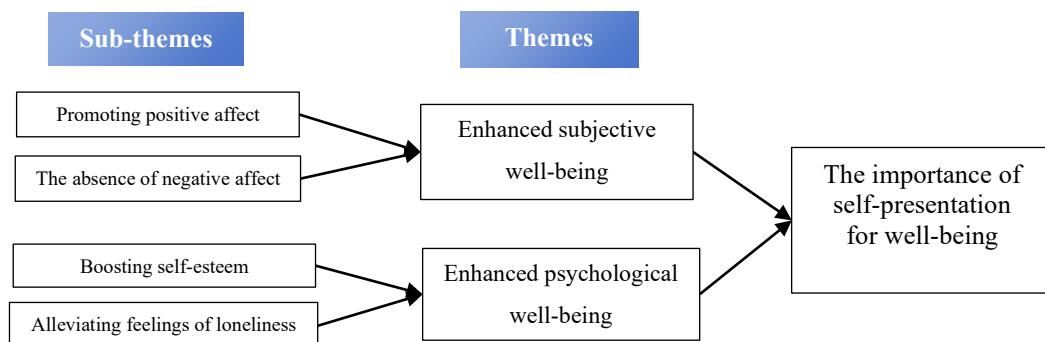
Keqi is a way of expressing good manners in interpersonal relationships, demonstrated through polite language and behavior towards others (Chen, 2013). Liking and commenting on each other's posts is a polite social practice, largely performed by Chinese elderly. *"Fantastic! The melody is beautiful. Listening to you play the piano is such a pleasure." (R2)*

In summary, this section primarily addresses the second research question, which is the self-presentation motivations. There are three themes: passing time and entertainment, technological empowerment, and peer pressure.

RQ3: Why self-presentation on Douyin is important in influencing the well-being of the elderly in China?

Well-being is regarded as a state of positive mental health and wellness (Weare, 2015). Based on the interview records and past studies, thematic analysis identified two themes: *Enhanced subjective well-being* and *Enhanced psychological well-being*, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Themes and sub-themes of the importance of self-presentation for well-being



Enhanced subjective well-being

SWB refers to how an individual feel about their life, experiencing satisfaction, happiness, or comfort (Webster et al., 2021). There are two sub-themes: *promoting positive affect* and *the absence of negative affect*. Posting daily lives and hobbies satisfied elderly's need for entertainment, bringing them joy and happiness (Li et al., 2022). For example, *"I used to be a teacher. With the rapid development of society, it's important for me to keep up with these changes. Creating videos is not only a form of entertainment, but also a way to engage with today's society. I often post videos of myself playing the piano and Erhu on Douyin, which brings me great joy." (R2)*

When asked whether negative comments would trouble them, they expressed that they didn't mind, as it would not affect their emotions. For example, *"Since I started posting videos, I've never received any negative comments. Even if there were any, I think it's normal. It's impossible to please everyone, even family members have conflicts, let alone strangers. There's good and bad in everything. If people aren't satisfied, I'll try to dance better next time, but to be honest, I don't really care." (R14)*

Enhanced psychological well-being

PWB is most suitable for addressing self-fulfillment and personal functioning, like positive relationships, autonomy, self-realization, and purpose in life (Galiana et al., 2020). It includes two sub-themes: *boosting self-esteem* and *alleviating feelings of loneliness*.

Self-esteem refers to the recognition an individual has for their own worth and dignity (Gao, 2021). Positive feedback can be seen as an affirmation of one's abilities and actions, thereby boosting self-esteem (Yu & Zhao, 2022). For example, *"When the view count of my Tianshui spicy hot pot video exceeded 30,000, it was my happiest moment. Even some friends messaged me, saying, 'The food videos you post are so mouthwatering! Where did you eat? I want to go there and try the same dish you had.' After receiving compliments, I wanted to shoot more videos to promote hometown delicacies."* (R11)

Moreover, self-presentation on Douyin effectively alleviates loneliness of the elderly. *"After retiring, we began posting videos of ourselves playing the piano and Erhu. This has garnered a lot of attention, with some people sending us private messages requesting to meet offline. Despite being retired, we still feel that we have things to do."* (R2)

In summary, this section addresses the third research question, which is the importance of self-presentation for elderly well-being. The study found that they experience enhanced SWB and PWB through self-presentation on Douyin.

DISCUSSION

This study first explored elderly self-presentation behaviors on Douyin, identifying three themes: front-stage performance, backstage performance and impression management. Front-stage performance includes three sub-themes: *displaying personal and landscape photos, posting daily life, and showcasing talents*. Most elderly often use real-life photos, primarily personal and landscape pictures, as their profile pictures, consistent with prior studies (Dou et al., 2022; Zhou, 2023). Sun (2023) noted that these photos provide other users with a sense of authenticity, increasing the potential for social interaction. Additionally, their video content often focuses on daily life, as their activities are primarily home-based, with their city or nearby areas serving as the main range. They also showcase talents. Notably, some participants enjoy creating lip-sync videos, like Peking Opera. Even without related talents in real life, they can showcase their abilities uniquely on Douyin and present an idealized self-image in front-stage performances (Krisnawati, 2020).

Backstage performance has two sub-themes: *preparation for shooting* and *video editing*. Carefully designing videos before release aligns with Goffman's (1959) backstage metaphor, where individuals prepare for front-stage performances. This study found that both ordinary elderly users and celebrities chose everyday life scenes for their video (Yang & Seo, 2022; Zhou, 2023). Regarding video editing, most participants rely on Douyin's built-in editing tools, using special effects to enhance video appeal, aligning with findings by Yang et al. (2021) and Yu (2023). Notably, only four participants in this study used professional editing Apps like Jianying for secondary editing.

Impression management includes four sub-themes: *ideal self, real self, ideal-real self*, as well as, *blurred area between front-stage and backstage*. Individuals can present diverse selves on social media (Maliki et al., 2022). Elderly women use beauty effects to appear younger, portraying their ideal selves. They also use special effects for role-playing to enhance performance professionalism, aligning with findings by Gao (2021) and Yang et al. (2021). Krisnawati (2020) noted that on the front-stage, someone can polish as beautiful as they can

and act as professional as they can to look immaculate, while audiences cannot see their real self-image on the backstage.

Most participants also present their real selves. Berezan et al. (2018) noted that the elderly authentically presents themselves based on their preferences, possibly due to a greater acceptance of themselves, aligning with previous studies (Guo et al., 2024; Yang & Seo, 2022). Notably, elderly men rarely use beauty filters. This may be because males feel less pressure to adhere to gender and beauty norms compared to females, leading to less emphasis on idealized appearances and image editing (Skogen et al., 2021). Additionally, they present ideal-real selves, aligning with prior research (Sun, 2023; Guo et al., 2024). Dou et al. (2022) observed that while individuals aim to present themselves authentically, they often embellish their self-presentation to some extent, portraying the person they aspire to be. Goffman (1959) indicated that, like performers seeking applause after a show, people aim to leave positive impression on others by playing their roles and giving their best effort (Akbuga, 2023).

Moreover, the area between front-stage and backstage is becoming blurred. If the front-stage is defined by the actor's presented behavior, then the backstage refers to one's offline personal space (Guo et al., 2024). Elderly self-presentation often revolves around their real-life settings, using personal daily experiences as creative material (Krisnawati, 2020; Wirén & Korpi, 2023). Thus, as their videos include content that was previously private, the area between front-stage and backstage has become blurred (Dou et al., 2022; Yang & Seo, 2022), which simultaneously enhances the authenticity of their front-stage performance.

This study also examined the elderly's self-presentation motivations on Douyin, namely passing time and entertainment, technological empowerment, and peer pressure.

Passing time and entertainment includes two sub-themes: *relaxation* and *learning new skills*. The elderly often has more leisure time, and making videos provides them with opportunities to create content, becoming an effective way to pass time. This aligns with previous findings (Jung et al., 2007; Li, 2022; Zhang & Jiao, 2023). Meantime, they try out various effects and editing tools, which allow them to showcase themselves in new ways. Li et al. (2022) indicated that Chinese elderly present themselves on Douyin for entertainment, willingly learning post and shoot videos, though they may often remember in the moment but later forget the content due to personal memory or other factors.

Technological empowerment includes two sub-themes: *low creative threshold* and *the anonymity of Douyin*. Douyin's low creative threshold allows them to easily share their lives, consistent with many studies (Li et al., 2022; Wirén & Korpi, 2023). Zhang and Jiao (2023) noted that TikTok empowered elderly users in self-presentation, offering them ample creative inspiration through its diverse content and templates. Douyin's various effects also enable them to present an idealized self in front-stage performances (Dou et al., 2022).

Peer pressure has four sub-themes: *imitation behavior*, *competitive mentality*, *Guanxi* and *Keqi*. Imitation behavior is the first sub-theme. Li et al. (2022) indicated that TikTok is a popular topic of conversation among the elderly. To avoid being left behind by peers, the elderly who haven't used it are eager to join, making self-presentation on TikTok a natural trend. Their self-presentation is also driven by competitive mentality, reflecting traditional value of Mianzi. The elderly meticulously creates videos to showcase themselves and, to maintain their social image, often strive to outperform their peers and present an idealized self in front-stage performances (Dotson, 2022; Yan, 2021).

Guanxi subtly influences elderly self-presentation. Their Douyin posts attract peers with similar age and life experiences (Skogen et al., 2021; Wirén & Korpi, 2023). They often seek resonance and identification within peer group, reflecting the continuation of traditional value of Guanxi in the modern era of social media. Keqi is the fourth sub-theme. According to Fan and Hasan (2022), interaction on social media represent an overlap and extension of real-life interactions. In offline settings, Chinese elderly typically maintain good relationships

through polite behaviors. Similarly, on Douyin, they engage in positive interactions, with praise and encouragement being common. Yu and Zhao (2022) noted that courteous online interactions foster a caring atmosphere, encouraging media participation.

Lastly, this study investigated the importance of self-presentation for elderly well-being, revealing that it indeed contributes to enhanced SWB and PWB. Enhanced subjective well-being includes two sub-themes: *promoting positive affect* and *the absence of negative affect*. Self-presentation on Douyin satisfies the entertainment needs of the elderly, fostering positive emotional experiences and thereby enhancing their SWB, as supported by prior research (Li et al., 2022). When asked if negative comments affect them, all participants expressed that their main goal in self-presentation is to enjoy happiness. As Dou et al. (2022) described, retirees are unaffected by negative comments, possibly due to their greater knowledge and experience in managing negative emotions (Rui et al., 2021).

Enhanced psychological well-being includes two sub-themes: *boosting self-esteem* and *alleviating feelings of loneliness*. In front-stage performance, the elderly typically uses old photos as their profile pictures and emphasize nostalgic old songs in their videos. Pinquart and Forstmeier (2012) noted that this allows them to publicly reminisce about past enjoyable experiences, enhancing their self-esteem. Additionally, according to self-presentation theory, Douyin serves as a stage, where likes represent applause from the audience. Peers' likes can enhance self-esteem, encourage further self-presentation, and ultimately boost PWB (Kim & Lee, 2011; Yu & Zhao, 2022).

CONCLUSION

More elderly individuals are willing to present themselves on Douyin. This shift from passive viewers to active participants shows that social media can be a vital tool for promoting active aging. In the context of active aging, this study first examined the self-presentation behaviors of the Chinese elderly, focusing on front-stage and backstage performance, and impression management, based on self-presentation theory. The second focus analyzed their motivations for self-presentation, including passing time and entertainment, technological empowerment, and peer pressure. Finally, this study examined the importance of self-presentation for elderly well-being, revealing that it enhances their SWB and PWB.

This study presents several implications. It contributes to self-presentation research by focusing on Douyin and ordinary elderly users aged 60 and above in China. Most existing studies on self-presentation primarily concentrated on younger adults (Skogen et al., 2021) or elderly celebrities (Dou et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2024; Ng & Indran, 2023). This study also applies self-presentation and U&G theories in the Chinese context, incorporating traditional values like Guanxi, Keqi, and Mianzi. Additionally, it offers recommendations for future research, such as conducting comparative studies on self-presentation between younger and older generations. However, it has limitations, such as a small sample size, with most participants aged 60-64. While the sample reached theoretical saturation, it remains relatively small compared to the large elderly user base on Douyin (Guo et al., 2024). The narrow age range may also limit insights into older age groups. Future research should expand sample size (Jacob & Rahman, 2022) and include a wider age range for more accurate findings.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency (15 Respondents)	Respondents (R1-R15)
Gender	Male Female	6 Respondents (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6) 9 Respondents (R7, R8, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15)
Age	60-64 65-69	11 Respondents (R3, R4, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R12, R13, R14, R15) 4 Respondents (R1, R2, R5, R11)
Place of residence	Shaanxi Province Chongqing City Ningxia Province Heilongjiang Province Jiangsu Province Gansu Province	7 Respondents (R1, R2, R5, R6, R12, R14, R15) 1 Respondent (R3) 2 Respondents (R4, R7) 3 Respondents (R8, R9, R10) 1 Respondent (R11) 1 Respondent (R13)
Occupation	Farmer Teacher Worker Housewife Theater manager Pharmacy cashier Sales manager Self-employment	3 respondents (R6, R13, R14) 2 respondents (R2, R3) 2 Respondents (R7, R9) 1 Respondent (R12) 1 Respondent (R1) 1 Respondent (R8) 2 Respondents (R4, R10) 3 Respondents (R5, R11, R15)
Highest Education level	Junior high school Vocational school High school Junior college	4 Respondents (R3, R11, R12, R13) 3 Respondents (R4, R7, R8) 7 Respondents (R1, R5, R6, R9, R10, R14, R15) 1 Respondent (R2)
Marital status	Married Divorced	12 Respondents (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8, R11, R12, R13, R14, R15) 3 Respondents (R7, R9, R10)

