

Someone makes videos and gets the money for it' - Agency of Older TikTokers in Digital Capitalism

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The capitalist operations of today have been described in various forms in literature, and while each concept highlights different aspects of this operation, they all agree that large tech companies are the biggest beneficiaries of this transformation, capable of influencing market dynamics and consumer behaviour. Technological development has enabled the emergence and advent of social media platforms, allowing users to intentionally present themselves and engage with narrower and broader audiences, which has resulted in the proliferation of online personas. However, these online personas often align with existing social norms regarding primary axes of social stratification to achieve high publicity.

What options are available for users who are not the primary target group due to their age?

Given current demographic trends, the number of older internet and social media users is steadily increasing. Although older adults are not typically viewed as content creators, several studies have explored their presence on various platforms. TikTok, a relatively new and sometimes controversial platform, has recently begun to attract scholarly attention regarding its use by older users as well. However, it remains a rather hostile online environment, where ageist stereotypes target older adults, the platform's algorithm disfavors them, and consequently, their content's popularity can never match that of younger content creators.

By what means can someone considered an older content creator gain publicity?

This study examines how content creators over sixty construct their online personas on Hungarian-speaking TikTok.

Is it possible to categorise and typify them?

How do these personas reflect the experience of ageing?

What different social roles do they emphasise as part of their online persona?

This research uses a framework based on Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model to examine the short TikTok videos, supplemented by visual and verbal video analysis and discourse analysis.

Five distinct online personas were identified as constructed by older content creators, each with different goals, themes, tools, and reflections on ageing. Gender issues emerged as a key finding of the research, as did how these TikTokers engage with the platform's capitalist dynamics. The findings show how older adults, on a platform usually considered a playground for younger generations, can practice agency, and explore the extent to which they break away from stereotypical depictions of ageing.