

# 140 million

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a middle-aged woman, generously sent cash to Xu during his livestreams.

It's not just men focusing on his demographic. A female content creator known as "Yi Xiao Qing Cheng," or "smile that charms a city," boasts 19.15 million followers on Douyin. Nearly 80 percent of her fans are middle-aged and elderly men.

In a recent showdown, Scholar and Yi Xiao Qing Cheng engaged in a livestreaming competition that attracted a record of over 20 million viewers. The top five viewers gave the Scholar at least 100,000 yuan (US\$13,657) each in "tips."

Following the Scholar's suspension, his female counterpart's social media accounts posted a notice that she is "resting at home." She hasn't made a video since August 21.

Fans have expressed concern about the absence of both idols. "We're worried," one user commented.

These creators, often referred to as "harvesters of the old and middle-aged," have mastered techniques to appeal to older generations. Some rely on pop music popular decades ago; others cut dashing figures from rural-themed TV shows, said Li Junnan, a senior psychology consultant.

These videos target emotional needs, she said. They hark back to nostalgic

times, presented with cheerful demeanors and loving tones.

Li said the widespread accessibility of smartphones and the mobile Internet enables such practices even in the most remote corners of the country.

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Many viewers use these platforms to share the stories and joys of their own lives. Some even write explicit love poetry to their idols.

One middle-aged fan explained that he turns to these short videos for relaxation after a long day at work.

"Seeing someone with a beaming smile brings comfort and relaxation, making me willing to become a fan," he said.

A woman in her 60s said she had plenty of free time after retiring. The videos of the Scholar brightened her life, she said, and she enjoyed the experience of interacting with other fans.

It is natural for older people, just like younger generations, to find joy in watching online videos for relaxation, just as others read books or watch



Following the suspension of the Scholar, the account of its female version "Yi Xiao Qing Cheng" went into limbo with a post saying that she is "resting at home."

movies, Li said.

She said many older people grew up during times when people didn't openly discuss intimacy, but the Internet has opened up a space to express latent desires that were previously taboo.

"It's important to recognize that everyone has their own preferences for relaxation," she added.

Currently, the elderly have become a major user group of short-video and livestreaming platforms.

A recent survey reveals that users aged 51 and above account for 19 percent of Douyin and Kuaishou platforms' audiences, with nearly 30 percent having a monthly online spending capability exceeding 2,000 yuan.

Some other experts said the phenomenon reflects the loneliness and emotional void experienced by many elderly individuals. They call the short videos "electronic vitamins" for the elderly.

For instance, "Fashionable Grandmothers," the online site of a group of women 65 years and older who strut a catwalk in traditional *qipao* dresses, has nearly 4 million followers. Within less than a year of its livestreaming, over 1,000 people have spent over 10,000 yuan on the account.

Aside from the positive benefits of companionship and entertainment for the elderly, these platforms do pose



A livestream competition between the Scholar (right) and Yi Xiao Qing Cheng attracted a record of more than 20 million viewers.

potential risks.

"While it's natural for fans to occasionally show appreciation by offering tips or leaving comments, it's essential not to let such activities become excessive or negatively impact one's financial well-being," Li said.

Previous cases, such as the one involving fraudulent videos using actor Jin Dong's images, highlight these dangers.

Criminal groups may impersonate the identities of celebrities to snare victims and snaffle their money.

From May to July, Jing'an District police in Shanghai conducted operations to apprehend the "Fake Jin Dong" fraud group and arrested eight members. Jin expressed his gratitude.

The online realm is undergoing somewhat of a crackdown. Since July 1, Douyin has penalized 110,991 accounts and permanently revoked streaming privileges for 1,059 accounts, some with over 1 million followers.

The platform targets 10 categories of misbehavior, including provocations, malicious promotions and vulgar content.

"Online content can serve as a source of entertainment and connection, but it should complement, not replace, the rich tapestry of offline activities and social interactions available to individuals of all age groups," Li said.



After watching his livestreams, a 72-year-old woman traveled from northeast China's Jilin Province to east China's Anhui Province to meet the Scholar.