

# People are pretending to be 'NPCs' on TikTok and it's not just weird, it's also lucrative

By [Edith Jennifer Hill](#)

14 Aug 2023

The one constant the internet offers us is a continual rotation of trends. Months ago, the trend was people exhibiting "main character energy". People were imagining themselves as main characters in their own life show: they were the ones who knew everyone's name in the coffee shop, they were having a whirlwind romance and they were only accepting the best.



Source: [unsplash.com](https://unsplash.com)

Now, the trends have moved on, and people are NPCs.

Non-playable characters, or NPCs, are taking TikTok by storm. NPCs originate in video games. They are the background characters, the ones with repetitive movements and sayings, and no storylines. The main, playable, character can interact with them but only in limited ways. They are tools in someone else's story.

People pretending to be NPCs on TikTok are not new. Creator [@loczniki](#), Nicki Loczek, has been acting like a video game character on her TikTok page for two years. Her videos regularly get millions of views.

NPC content rapidly gained popularity in recent months when creators like [@pinkydollreal](#) have been live streaming as NPCs. NPC creators perform scripted lines and reactions to purchased "gifts" from their fans that then appear on screen

as emojis.

Giving diamonds, coins and other gifts to creators has a very low cost to fans. However, when creators accumulate large audiences, the profits can add up significantly, especially when the streams can go for hours. Creator @glam\_with\_dee tried out the trend and shared that she made \$99 in a two-and-a-half-hour stream.

“Pinkydoll got up to almost 35k viewers on her live tonight 🎮🎮 [pic.twitter.com/JGmx1OpXA](https://pic.twitter.com/JGmx1OpXA)—

✓ 22222222R222222222222222222222222 (@sunny\_cloud\_) [July 31, 2023](#) ”

Some people are calling the NPC trend a fetish – more often than not it is beautiful women performing actions and sounds on command for an audience. Others, however, disavow this sentiment, stating that people always claim women making money from the absurd is a fetish, when it is often far from the truth.



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People watch NPCs on TikTok for a variety of reasons. Nicki Loczek's popularity came from her funny videos pretending to be a video game character in public. Many streamers also dress up in elaborate cosplay costumes, feeding into the gaming and fantasy aesthetic.

Others, myself included, watch for the absurdity. It is uncanny watching people be NPCs.

## Commodifying the self

People online have been commodifying themselves since social media platforms introduced creator fund programs and brands recognised the income potential of content creators. For years, creators have been participating in brand deals for anything from health products to home décor, with some going as far as deals for free cosmetic surgery.

One of the key principles of being successful online is a consistent personal brand. Traditionally, when we think about people becoming successful online, we attribute this to authenticity.

Audiences want consistent posts, a clear authorial voice, and a person and brand where they know what they're getting. While NPCs cannot technically be "authentic" as they are characters rather than people, they still fulfil these attributes on TikTok. They do what we think they will do. Their reactions are expected, if not delivered at the specific times we ask for them.

NPC live streamers have planned reactions to the “gifts” they receive while they stream. Bigger gifts usually have bigger reactions. Christine Tran, a PhD candidate from the University of Toronto, states: “NPC streamers are just the latest genre of creators who divide their bodies into marketplaces of intimacy.”

The NPC trend fits in with other forms of online commodification. Pretending to be an NPC on TikTok live is not too far removed from popular YouTubers maintaining an “online persona” for the purposes of creating a marketable, brand-friendly channel.

## Monetisation online

TikTok is one of many social media platforms where users create and sell a personal brand for money. Tobias Raun, an assistant professor in communications, states: “YouTube as a platform plays a crucial role by persistently encouraging

users to compete for attention and status and rewarding them economically for promoting themselves.”

TikTok pays its users far less than YouTube does. While the real numbers differ depending on video length and the creator themselves, TikTok is known to pay \$0.03 per 1,000 views, compared to multiple dollars on YouTube. The most money to be made on TikTok, outside of brand deals, is through live streams.

The creator fund on TikTok is limited to creators with over 10,000 followers who have amassed a minimum of 100,000 views in the last month. It is also available in limited countries. Australia is not included.

Alternatively, any creator with over 1,000 followers can live stream and can cash out in-app “gifts” for real money. This system is available to far more people.

“ This girl doing an NPC AI livestream but as a frail Victorian child has permanently altered my brain chemistry.

[pic.twitter.com/JkZnpJIPU3](https://pic.twitter.com/JkZnpJIPU3)— Caelan Conrad (@CaelanConrad) [August 1, 2023](#) ”

The NPC trend has shown us how the self-branding online we are more familiar with, people being so authentically themselves, can be surpassed by people playing a character. The rise in live videos on TikTok is linked to the platform’s monetisation policies. If content creators want to make money from their content, they either need an incredibly large following or must find brand deals or do live streams.



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Erin Deetlefs 8 Aug 2023



I couldn’t call myself an autoethnographic researcher without trying to go live myself. I did.

TikTok is a strange, strange place. I went live for 15 minutes while writing some of this article, and 320 people watched me. I talked to some of them. Someone said I typed too hard. Someone else asked me to sing Black Sabbath.

I closed my TikTok app with a new-found appreciation (and a little bit of fear) of how hard it must be to maintain a character for hours during a live stream.

Someone did say they liked the sound of my typing. If I found a way to do my marking on an ASMR live stream, you would find me on TikTok tomorrow.

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