

The Study about the Impact of Douyin on Youth Culture and Consumption Behavior

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Abstract. This paper explores the significant influence of Douyin on youth culture and consumption behavior. Through a detailed case discussion and analysis of theoretical perspectives, it highlights the tension between content homogenization and multicultural expression. This tension is driven by personalized content tailored specifically for individual users, with core processes revolving around big data analytics and algorithmic recommendation systems. These systems raise ethical considerations in influencer marketing. The study reveals that the platform's phenomenally popular cultural content amplifies the influencer economy and intensifies societal phenomena, such as the spectacle of society, which impact the cultural identity and consumption preferences of young people. The paper offers a series of recommendations based on these insights. Firstly, it suggests strategies for content diversification to combat the homogenization trend and promote a richer tapestry of cultural expression. Secondly, it emphasizes the need to reinforce ethics in influencer marketing to ensure that young audiences are not exploited or misled. Lastly, it advocates for measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the Society of the Spectacle on youth culture and consumer behavior. These recommendations aim to cultivate a more balanced digital ecosystem and facilitate a healthier and more democratic communicative environment. By implementing these strategies, Douyin can foster a platform that supports diverse cultural expressions while protecting and empowering its young users.

Keywords: Douyin; Youth Culture; Consumption Behavior.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With the development of short-video platforms, TikTok (known as Douyin in China) has become one of the most influential social media applications in the world, especially for the young generation. Douyin performs high penetration and has lots of active audiences. According to the '2022 Network Audio-visual Content Creators White Paper' released by the Development Research Center of the National Radio and Television Administration, The scale of China's online audio-visual market was estimated to reach approximately 800.2 billion RMB in 2022, and the creators aged 25-34 serving as the main force behind online audio-visual content production. Among the various forms of content submitted by these creators, short videos occupy the highest of the types, as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 [1]. The fragment mode of expression is swift and direct and aligns more closely with the rapid pace of modern life.

Based on the above discussion, Douyin, as a pioneer in the short-video platform industry, not only shapes the new youth cultural phenomena, such as the video creation and sharing, the emergence of new internet slang and online events but also transforms the consumption patterns of young generation from traditional shopping to live streaming e-commerce and KOL endorsed consumption. The reason why the author chose this topic to research is that Douyin has a profound impact on youth culture and consumer behavior. Understanding these shifts in youth consumption patterns can help brands target their consumers accurately, formulate marketing strategies that can suit the contemporary market, and enhance market competitiveness. It is also significant for the government to guide a healthy online culture.

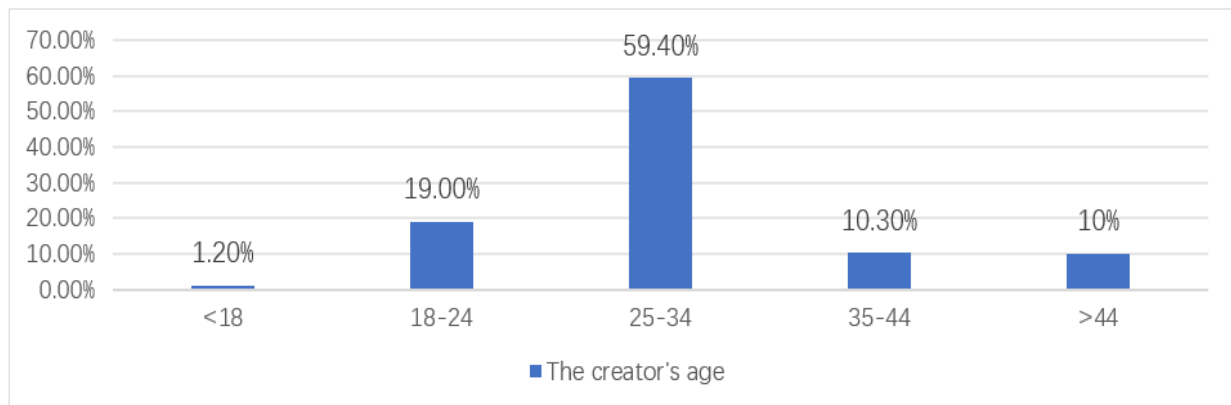


Fig 1. The creator's age distribution.

(China: National Radio and Television Administration Development Research Center, 2023).

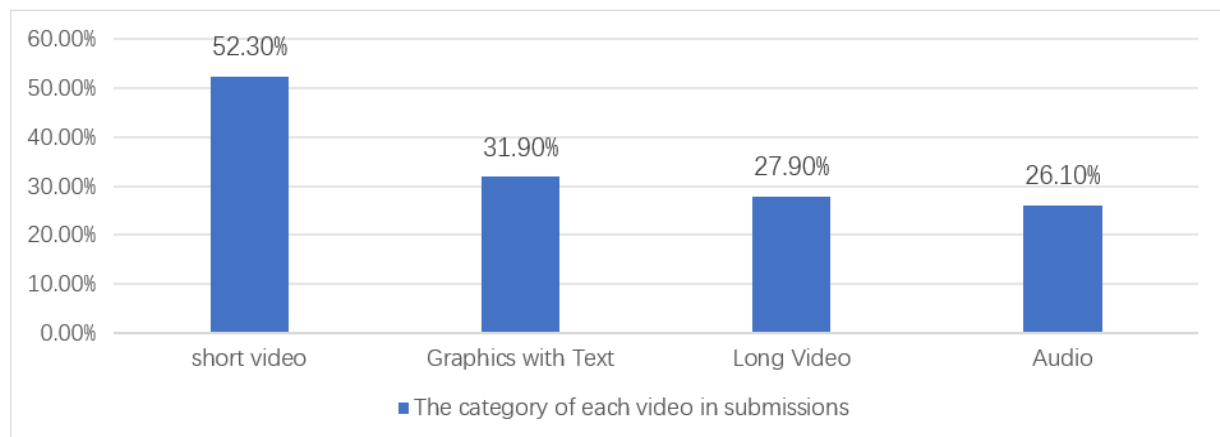


Fig 2. The average proportion of each video category in submissions.

(China: National Radio and Television Administration Development Research Center, 2023).

1.2. Literature Review

Liu proposed that based on the shared interests among users, the short video platforms construct virtual communities where individuals gain a sense of identity and belonging. These platforms not only foster the development of youth subcultures but also have a profound impact on individuals' psychological states and social identities, which demonstrate new forms of interpersonal relationships and cultural construction in the digital era [2]. Liu's perspective provides a theoretical guide for the author to comprehend how Douyin influences the cultural inclinations of the youth, particularly in the transformations of community construction, subculture formation, psychological states, and social identity. These changes are important factors to consider when studying how Douyin impacts the consumption behaviors of the young generation.

Dong & Xie analyzed the initial Douyin Use Motive Scale, including the Douyin Watching Motive Sub-Scale and Douyin Shooting and Submitting Motive Sub-Scale. They drew a conclusion that the six motives for watching (seeking novelty, habit, relationship maintenance, releasing pressure, killing time, and escapism) and three motives for shooting and submitting (pursuing fame, recording, sharing, and satisfying curiosity) short-form videos [3]. The multiplicity of usage motives in Douyin significantly influences content consumption and creation, impacting the consumption behaviors of young users. This conclusion profoundly enriches the authors' understanding of how platforms shape youth culture and consumption behaviors and offers valuable perspectives to study how Douyin affects the consumption behaviors and preferences of young people.

According to a recent study published in Scientific Reports by Motta & Liu & Yarnell, they designed an experiment in order to enhance the quality of effective mental health communication by

influencing the Key Opinion Leader on TikTok [4]. This research not only sheds light on the potential positive impact of social media on youth mental health but also emphasizes how high-quality mental health content can spread among adolescents so that it can alter their behavior patterns and consumption decisions. The conclusion suggests that TikTok plays an important role in the field of shaping culture and as a driver of consumption behavior.

Solea & Sugiura used the performance of incel (involuntarily celibate) communities on TikTok as a case study to explore how incel theories utilize the vast user base in TikTok to convey stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs about women. Despite the incel communities altering their harmful statement to other words in order to avoid platform moderation, they still impact viewers and enhance misogyny [5]. TikTok is not only a platform for entertainment and social interaction among the youth but also a platform that can convey ideas. Activities of communities on TikTok have a potential influence on young people's perceptions of gender, consumption choices, and behavioral patterns, particularly in areas related to gender roles and interpersonal relationships. Consequently, as a cultural medium, TikTok will have a profound impact on young people about their values and consumption behaviors.

Most scholars focused on exploring the role of Douyin in the field of shaping youth culture and influencing consumption decisions. In contrast, there are few scholars who pay attention to how specific content on Douyin impacts the consumption preferences of various youth cultural groups differently and how Douyin's content strategies dynamically adapt and lead the evolution of youth culture.

1.3. Research Framework

Firstly, this paper provides a brief description of Douyin, detailing the background of Douyin as a case to study, its user demographics, and its current popularity and impact among the youth. Secondly, the author explores how Douyin influences youth culture and consumption behaviors and the preferences of youth consumption, including providing algorithm-driven personalized content and the impact of phenomenon-level cultural content and the influencer economy. Thirdly, the author identifies three existing issues with Douyin: the contradiction between content homogenization and multicultural expression, ethical considerations behind the 'Influencer Economy' marketing, and introduces the concept of the society of the spectacle to explore its relationship with the evolution of youth culture.

Subsequently, in the strategy recommendation section, targeted solutions are proposed to address the above issues. In the conclusion, the author summarizes the key findings of the study and emphasizes its significance for the short video industry, ByteDance, and the social culture field. At the same time, the author honestly acknowledges the limitations of her research and outlines potential directions for future studies.

2. Case Description

Douyin, produced by ByteDance, has rapidly evolved into a global short-video-sharing application since it was applied in 2016. This platform successfully attracts hundreds of millions of users worldwide through its highly personalized recommendation algorithms, rich content, and user-friendly creation tools. Young adults represent the platform's most engaged and dynamic user segment, and they are not only the consumers of content but also the key drivers of creative production and dissemination.

Within the youth demographic, Douyin has emerged as a component of daily social interaction, entertainment, and even education for teenagers. The short videos on this platform, characterized by their brevity and concise content, perfectly align with the fast-paced lifestyles of young people and the trend of fragmented information consumption in today's society. The different content categories on Douyin satisfied the diverse intellectual requirements of the youth. Moreover, the platform has a

convenient sharing function so that people can share the videos they like with their friends and family easily. Therefore, Douyin has a lot of loyal users who drive with high-frequency interaction.

Douyin plays an important role in shaping youth culture and consumption habits. Firstly, many new trends, memes, fashion statements, and even music are derived from this platform and have gained rapid popularity. ‘Douyin culture’ influences the linguistic expression, aesthetic preferences, and social behaviors of young people. Secondly, Douyin’s commercial strategies, which include live-streaming sales, brand collaborations, and influencer endorsements, dramatically reshape the young generation’s purchasing patterns. Influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have a vast fan base and can compel young viewers to buy some items, which is called an ‘Influencer-Driven Economy’. Additionally, as young users develop trust in content creators, the center of consumers’ trust shifts from brands to individuals or communities, and some consumption behaviors based on social-driven will be improved.

Furthermore, Douyin’s content recommendation system fully applies artificial intelligence and big data algorithm technology to firmly attract users, precisely matching users’ interests and delivering personalized content to them. It increases the probability of young consumers encountering products and services that they find interesting, so content consumption will transform into product purchases. At the same time, merchants and the platform utilize marketing approaches such as discounts in a limited time to stimulate consumer consumption, and the proportion of purchase decisions made by young users in a short time has a significant enhancement.

In summary, Douyin not only achieved success as a global short-video-sharing platform but also influenced and reshaped the cultural values and consumption behaviors of today’s youth. Understanding these changes is critical for making adaptable marketing strategies for brands and also has a significant meaning for forecasting future market consumption trends.

3. Analysis on the Problem

3.1. Impact of TikTok on Youth Culture and Consumption Behaviors

The influence of TikTok is far beyond the entertainment field; it is a significant force to reshape the consumption behaviors of young people. Through algorithm-driven to-do personal recommendations, the amplification of influencer economies, and the creation of viral content, TikTok has transformed the consumption patterns of young consumers to some extent. As a result, brands can foster deep connections with young audiences with the help of TikTok’s algorithms and data to understand the market dynamics.

3.1.1. Impact on the formation and recognition of cultural identity

TikTok is an excellent platform for culture exchange, where young users explore, express, and seek multifaceted identities in this platform. Whether content originates from the East or the West, whether it is traditional arts or contemporary trends, TikTok provides a stage for these contents and their audience to communicate.

Videos in TikTok always frequently go viral and become content phenomena. Despite people having language barriers, viral videos, music trends, and dance can surmount geographical boundaries. Young people who have different life experiences and educational backgrounds and live in different regions can be connected tightly with shared interests. For instance, a news report about a cat walking on ice on the Han River in Korea turned into a global hand gesture dance challenge on TikTok. Many users use this news report audio as background music, participating in this intellectual Feast that goes beyond borders. This instance not only demonstrates the rapid transition of cultural conditions in the internet era but also reflects the young generation’s desire for culture sharing and collective experiences. They were separate interest groups in the past, but now TikTok was gathering them. They foster a sense of belonging in their unique groups and significantly enhance the community cohesion on the platform.

However, due to the platform's tendency to recommend viral content, sometimes it is detrimental to the development of niche cultures. While young people pursue trends, they may also face the risk of their personal identity and cultural uniqueness being diluted.

3.1.2. The profound impact on the preferences of the youth consumption

Douyin, which is centered on big data-customized algorithms, has influenced the consumption habits of young consumers. This mechanism has altered the way that consumers receive information about product placements and endorsements by celebrities or influencers, all of which influence consumers' choices. At the same time, the preferences of young consumer's consumption have turned into visualization data, which is more helpful for brands to formulate their marketing strategies.

3.1.3. Algorithm-driven personalized content

The content recommendation mechanism of Douyin is based on the big data of the user's historical behaviors, such as likes, comments, and browsing history, so that the algorithm can analyze the interests of young consumers and deliver personalized content to users. This mechanism ensures that users receive interesting information, which definitely enhances their attraction. The concept of the Attention Economy was proposed by American economist Herbert A. Simon posits that information is no longer perceived as a precious resource because of the abundant popularization of the internet in today's society. Instead, what has become scarce is the users' time and attention. For brands, occupying the consumer's attention and their time allocation means that they have more chances to make transactions with consumers. It will lead to a more profound impression of the brand in the consumer's memory and will increase the brand visibility and higher sales volumes so that it will be more probable for businesses to achieve their commercial objectives.

3.1.4. The Impact of phenomenon-level cultural content and the influencer economy

Both the content phenomenon and the influencer economy can become catalysts of consumption on this platform. Influencers or KOLs gain more attention from their followers through recommending and endorsing products. They can translate the attention from the purchasing behavior derived from young consumers. Similarly, when a product or brand is associated with phenomenon-level content on Douyin, its impact will have a significant growth.

In the internet era, businesses not only need to focus on the speed of communication for their products or brands but also on emotional connections with consumers, which can provide new opportunities for marketing activities.

3.2. Problem-Identified Analysis

3.2.1. The Contradiction between content homogenization and multicultural expression

There is no doubt that Douyin has improved the trend of globalization, but when culture is shared, certain regions and users are currently facing the fierce risk of local cultural dilution and erosion of individual characteristics, even if they will disappear in the future. The platform's emphasis on viral content may overshadow some content that is less popular but rich in cultural depth. The homogenization of content may lead to a deficit in cultural diversity expression. It is detrimental to multicultural expression in international areas. It shows a challenge faced by every nation and culture: how to preserve the difference of individual cultures in the global cultural wave.

3.2.2. Ethical considerations behind the 'influencer economy' marketing

The rise of the 'influencer economy' has introduced new complexities into the digital advertising landscape. This marketing approach obscures the lines between real content and sponsored promotions. Especially for adolescent users, it is difficult to distinguish whether the content posted by influencers is genuine or just a commercial advertisement. As a result, this marketing approach can have a significant impact on young people's purchasing decisions, potentially leading to impulsive buying behaviors. There are many examples. Adolescent users purchase and become addicted to video games after they watch the video game live streams. When their parents find this

fact, they request a refund. These marketing methods may lack transparency and leading some ethical issues, such as inducing adolescents to consume, whether influencers should be responsible for the product problems that they promote, and the protection of consumer rights.

3.2.3. Society of the spectacle and the evolution of youth culture

Douyin has a deep influence on youth culture and consumption patterns. According to statistics published by Statista in May 2024, TikTok had been downloaded over 4.92 billion times globally up to April 2024, with monthly active users exceeding 1.582 billion, which makes it the fifth most popular social media application in the world [6]. This indicates that a significant proportion of users' visual and information intake from Douyin in their daily lives. The younger generation perceives the world and even shapes their values and lifestyles through consuming this content.

Guy Debord introduced a concept named Society of the Spectacle. He posited that with the development of capitalism, social relations are no longer direct, face-to-face interactions but are instead mediated and replaced by 'spectacles'. The 'spectacle' refers to a form of social reality displayed through visual representations such as images, symbols, media, and advertisements. In the society of the spectacle, people's life experiences are shaped by commercial images and symbols, with genuine social interactions obscured by appearances and illusions [7].

Douyin is the modern instance of the society of the spectacle. The content on Douyin primarily consists of short videos that are aligned with the characteristic of the society of the spectacle, which is that images and visual elements dominate social communication. In the society of the spectacle, reality is transformed into consumable visual experiences. Douyin influences users, particularly young people, through its short video content and algorithm recommendations. Users engage in social interaction, acquire information, and participate in cultural exchange by viewing and uploading short videos.

However, despite the personalized recommendation algorithm providing users with highly customized content experiences, it also led to the phenomenon of information cocoons. Moreover, content and advertisements on the Douyin platform frequently promote specific lifestyles and consumption patterns, encouraging users to pursue commodities in fields such as fashion, beauty, and entertainment and linking the value of goods to the symbols of personal identity and social status. This may reinforce consumerism and lead to excessive consumption by users, especially young individuals who lack social experience and judgment capabilities.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Strategy for Content Diversification

Establishing a system that supports diversity creators, which includes the following methods, is important. Firstly, a Multicultural Creation Fund should be set up to provide financial backing for creators who focus on non-mainstream and niche cultures. What's more, the platform can organize some creation challenges around different themes to encourage users to create and share stories from a variety of cultural backgrounds and perspectives. And the platform can give traffic or cash rewards to users through their participation in different challenges and topics. A challenge is a viral competition where users post videos with hashtags and invite others to upload videos of a similar style to increase their view count and popularity [8]. That means the content associated with a challenge will see a significant increase in visibility. Last but not least, building partnerships with other cultural organizations and educational groups (such as the university labs) to plan and promote multicultural themes projects together can also increase the volume of videos that have different cultural characteristics from different regions beyond the domestic market, and contributing to a more diverse digital cultural landscape.

Adjusting the personalized recommendation algorithm and introducing the diversity standards encourages the algorithm to recommend content from creators who are derived from various regions and cultural backgrounds so that the niche cultures can gain the same level of attention as popular

and trending videos. Avoiding excessive exposure to homogeneous content, thereby enhancing the richness of the user experience.

Establishing the users' feedback channels to gather the user's perspectives and suggestions on content diversity and continuously modify the platform community policies. Encouraging users to participate in content moderation and fostering a healthy and multicultural ecosystem.

4.2. Strengthening Ethics in Influencer Marketing

In order to address the ethical considerations in influencer marketing, Douyin should implement clear disclosure policies to mandate all videos involving commercial partnerships to be explicitly labeled as 'sponsor' or 'advertisement', thereby strengthening consumers' right to informed consent. In the essay titled 'A Review of social media platform policies that address cannabis promotion, marketing, and sales', the authors analyzed Cannabis marketing on Douyin and eleven other social media platforms. They concluded that ambiguous policies on social media might facilitate Cannabis marketing, promotions, sales, and underage exposure [9]. Thus, it shows the profound impact of corporate actions on young people, especially minors. Consequently, platforms are responsible for refining community marketing policies, clarifying the obligations of influencer marketing, and enforcing strict penalties for violations, unlawful activities, and dishonest marketing practices. Additionally, the platform could periodically organize some small-scale educational activities like 'Douyin Junior Judges', using the ways that encourage users to judge the case about illegal activities to help young users enhance their ability to distinguish the marketing content, thereby safeguarding the platform's public trust.

4.3. Alleviating the Negative Impacts of the Society of the Spectacle on Youth Culture and Consumer Behavior

In the essay titled 'Do Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth? How EU Law Underenforcement Allows TikTok's Violations of Minors' Rights', the author cites two cases of underage consumption, intended to highlight inadequate platform oversight of minors' spending. In both instances, minors spend expenditure to purchase likes and followers to boost their popularity [10]. Platforms are responsible for oversight and warnings, and they need to provide media literacy education for juvenile users to enhance their understanding of the Society of the Spectacle and sharpen their critical thinking skills to the media messages so that they can distinguish between reality and reality which were constructed by others. Douyin could imitate Bilibili's quiz registration model, where users need to answer the questions correctly and can use the application. This method can effectively guide and alert users to recognize the symbols, images, and narratives in media, fostering resistance against the consumerist culture.

Additionally, platforms could organize more offline collective events, which not only can enhance virtual community cohesion but also can promote bottom-up cultural innovation, which can release the negative influence of the spectacle society on youth culture and consumer behavior produced by the platform, and against the consumerist landscape, and cultivate an environment where have more democratic, diversity, and reality.

Last but not least, platforms could improve algorithm transparency, giving users more choice and control and reducing the phenomena that the recommendation algorithms reinforce the spectacle of society, such as the information cocoons.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key Findings

This study investigates how the algorithm for personalized content recommendation shapes the young generation's cultural identity and consumption preferences. Despite the personalized content delivered by the big data satisfying the users' immediate demand, it also triggers the contradictions between content homogenization and multicultural representation. Besides the influencer economy,

the ethical considerations are hidden. Moreover, the theory of the Society of the Spectacle provides new prospects to comprehend the evolution of youth culture, illustrating how the platform insidiously shapes the values and consumption patterns of youth.

In order to address these issues, the author has several recommendations: First, using three strategies to promote content diversity. Then, transparent exposure policies will be formulated to safeguard young people's consumer rights. Lastly, through online oversight and offline innovative events, the negative effects of consumerist landscapes are reduced.

5.2. Research Significance

This study offers insights for Douyin and other similar social media platforms on fostering a healthy cultural ecosystem and consumption behavior. For the short-video industry, this study provides the importance of content diversity and ethical standards, which can make the industry more healthy and sustainable. For ByteDance, the findings provide a basis for refining algorithms and content strategies, contributing to enhanced long-term competitiveness while preserving a positive corporate image. On a social culture level, the study emphasizes that platforms play an important role in shaping the values and consumption patterns of young people, appealing to corporations to assume social responsibility and helping the young generation to cultivate critical thinking skills and healthy consumer attitudes.

5.3. Limitations

This study primarily relies on secondary data, lacking to collect and analyze primary data and lacking empirical validation, which restricts our deep insight into users' behavior. Future research can use methods such as surveys and in-depth interviews to gather primary data from users, thereby gaining more comprehensive outcomes. By gathering quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, assessments of the long-term impacts of Douyin and other platforms on youth culture and consumption behavior, as well as the practical effects of policy adjustments. That will provide stronger evidence for platform managers to promote the sustainable development of the digital media environment.

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