

Theoretical Analysis and Countermeasure Research on the Impact of Short Videos on Adolescents' Values

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Abstract. With the rapid development of mobile internet, short video platforms have emerged swiftly, becoming a major channel for adolescents to access information and entertainment. Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on the mechanisms through which short videos influence adolescents' values and explores corresponding countermeasures. The study aims to uncover the value orientation characteristics of short video content, analyze its influence mechanisms on the formation of adolescents' values, and propose targeted guidance strategies. This research adopts the literature review method to synthesize relevant domestic and international studies and employs content analysis to examine the value orientations of trending content on mainstream short video platforms. The analysis is grounded in media dependency theory and social learning theory. The findings reveal that some current short video content often exhibits problematic value orientations such as consumerism, entertainment supremacy, appearance anxiety, and a mentality of instant success. The algorithm-driven "information cocoon" effect, combined with adolescents' psychological tendencies toward imitation and identification, exerts a negative impact on their consumption values, aesthetic standards, and career outlooks. This study proposes that a coordinated effort is required at multiple levels to cultivate adolescents' media literacy and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: short video, adolescents, values, algorithmic recommendation

1. Introduction

Short videos refer to video content ranging from a few seconds to several minutes in length, disseminated via mobile internet platforms, and characterized by fragmentation and entertainment orientation. In recent years, short video platforms have developed rapidly, with a continuously expanding user base. According to the China Online Audio-Visual Development Research Report [1] released by the China Netcasting Services Association, as of December 2024, the number of online audio-visual users in China had reached 1.091 billion, accounting for 98.4% of all internet users. Notably, the usage rate among adolescents aged 13 to 18 was as high as 67.3%, indicating that this demographic has become a major user group of short video platforms. It is important to note that adolescence is a critical period for the formation of values, during which individuals are particularly susceptible to media influences. While existing studies have primarily focused on the communication characteristics and usage behaviors associated with short videos, there is a lack of

systematic analysis regarding the value orientations embedded in their content and the mechanisms through which they influence adolescents' value systems.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the value orientations of short video content and explore the pathways through which algorithmic recommendation and psychological identification mechanisms affect adolescents' consumer values, aesthetic perceptions, and career outlooks. The research employs literature review and content analysis methods, and draws upon media dependency theory and social learning theory. The objective is to provide practical insights for family education, school-based guidance, and platform governance.

2. Content characteristics and value orientations of short videos

As an emerging form of media, short videos exhibit distinctive communication characteristics. First, they are highly fragmented in nature, with durations typically ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, catering to users' need to utilize fragmented time in the mobile internet era. Second, short video platforms adopt algorithm-based recommendation mechanisms that deliver personalized content based on users' behavioral data. Dong Wanghao et al. [2] point out that personalized algorithms can collect users' interests and behavior records to push targeted short video content directly to their mobile devices. This cycle tends to create an algorithmic feedback loop, fostering user dependence on short videos. Third, short videos display a strong tendency toward entertainment, relying primarily on visual stimulation and emotional appeal as dissemination strategies.

However, concerning value orientation, the content of short videos reveals several notable issues. Consumerism is particularly prominent in short video content. A large number of videos center around themes such as luxury goods and excessive consumption, promoting materialistic values. The entertainment-first orientation is also highly apparent. In pursuit of traffic and engagement, many content creators intentionally fabricate conflicts, exaggerate performances, or even stage fake scenarios to attract attention. A study by Guo & Chen [3] revealed that adolescents spend an average of 94.2 minutes per day watching short videos, and over 20% of them experience negative effects on sleep or academic performance due to prolonged use. The phenomenon of "appearance equals justice" is widespread across short video platforms, where content featuring excessive beauty filters and body anxiety proliferates, easily triggering appearance-related anxieties among adolescents.

At the same time, the promotion of a "shortcut to success" mentality and anti-intellectualism in some short videos is concerning. Headlines such as "Earn 100K a Month" and "Get Rich Quick" are frequently seen, often downplaying the importance of knowledge accumulation and hard work. In contrast, educational or science-based content, while present, lacks sufficient reach and visibility. Entertainment- and consumption-oriented content still dominates most platforms.

The underlying causes of these problematic value orientations are multifaceted. They are closely tied to platforms' traffic-centric logic, driven by commercial monetization goals, and shaped by the competitive environment of capturing user attention.

3. Mechanisms of short videos' influence on adolescents' values

The influence of short videos on adolescents' values is a complex, multi-layered, and multidimensional process involving communication mechanisms, psychological mechanisms, and individual developmental characteristics.

3.1. Communication mechanism: algorithmic recommendation and the information cocoon

The “information cocoon” effect generated by algorithmic recommendation serves as a crucial communication mechanism through which short videos influence adolescents’ values. Qin et al. [4] point out that short video platforms, exemplified by TikTok, use unique recommendation algorithms that continuously stimulate users’ sensory and psychological responses, creating a strong flow experience. Elements such as enjoyment, concentration, and time distortion within this experience jointly enhance the platform’s addictive potential, with “concentration” acting as a key mediating variable.

Algorithms continuously optimize recommendations based on user behavior data, forming a self-reinforcing feedback loop that increases user engagement and the risk of addiction. For adolescents whose cognitive and critical thinking abilities are not yet fully developed, this algorithmic mechanism exposes them to a homogenized information environment over an extended period, limiting access to diverse perspectives. Consequently, it becomes difficult for them to form comprehensive and objective value judgments, heightening the risk of value distortion.

3.2. Psychological mechanism: social learning and cognitive characteristics

From a psychological perspective, social learning theory provides an essential framework for understanding how short videos influence adolescents. According to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory [5], individuals learn and imitate behaviors through observation, a process involving four key stages: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In the context of short videos, adolescents often perceive online influencers as role models or exemplars. Through observing their lifestyles and value expressions, adolescents unconsciously acquire corresponding attitudes and behavioral patterns.

Moreover, adolescents’ developmental characteristics make them more susceptible to the negative effects of short videos. Boer et al. [6] found that Spanish adolescents exhibited the most problematic behaviors in social media use, with TikTok being the most popular platform among youth, showing particularly pronounced effects. As adolescents are in a critical period of value formation and their prefrontal cortex is not yet fully developed, their cognitive control and impulse inhibition remain weak, increasing the likelihood of problematic use and emotional distress.

A systematic review by Settanni et al. [7] further revealed significant correlations between TikTok use and several adolescent mental health problems, including decreased life satisfaction, increased susceptibility to the spread of psychological symptoms, and problematic usage behaviors.

3.3. Specific impacts on values and behavior

At the level of values and behavior, short videos exert influence mainly in shaping adolescents’ aesthetic preferences, social values, and behavioral patterns. As previously discussed, through algorithmic recommendations and high-frequency visual stimulation, platforms reinforce value orientations centered on appearance, entertainment, and consumption. This subtly affects adolescents’ aesthetic standards and self-identity. For example, the widespread “beauty culture” and luxurious lifestyle displays prevalent on such platforms may lead adolescents to develop appearance anxiety and materialistic tendencies, thereby undermining their pursuit of intrinsic values and rational judgment.

In addition, the fragmented dissemination mode of short videos alters adolescents’ attention patterns and information processing methods. Overindulgence in short video content may lead to

reduced concentration, shallow thinking, and a preference for immediate gratification and entertainment. Jain et al. [8] found that the interaction between platform design and individual traits reinforces this dependency on short-term stimulation, thereby influencing adolescents' behavioral choices and value judgments.

Overall, while short videos provide adolescents with new channels for self-expression and social participation, existing research has primarily focused on their potential negative impacts. Systematic investigations into their positive roles remain insufficient and warrant further exploration.

4. Policy recommendations: constructing a multi-dimensional value guidance mechanism

The influence of short videos on adolescents' values is both profound and long-term, shaped by multiple interrelated factors such as algorithmic recommendation, psychological identification, and social learning. To effectively address the value challenges brought by short videos, it is essential to build a systematic mechanism for value guidance and media literacy development through coordinated efforts at the levels of family, school, platform, and policy.

4.1. Family level: enhancing parental involvement and media literacy education

The family is the primary environment for adolescents' value formation. In the face of short videos' high engagement and strong persuasive power, parents should shift from traditional control-based supervision to an emphasis on emotional communication and joint media learning with their children.

First, parents need to improve their own media literacy, understand the algorithmic mechanisms and content ecology of short video platforms, and avoid educational disconnection caused by technological unfamiliarity. By co-viewing and discussing short video content with their children, parents can guide them to distinguish between reality and fiction, substance and hype, and cultivate critical thinking. Second, a supportive and communicative family atmosphere is crucial. Parents should pay attention to adolescents' emotional states and psychological needs, reducing the risk of media overuse caused by emotional neglect. Research shows that positive family interactions can significantly lower the likelihood of problematic media use among adolescents [9]. Finally, parents should serve as role models in their lifestyle choices and value orientations, providing adolescents with positive reference points and creating a virtuous cycle of value transmission.

4.2. School level: integrating media literacy and values education

School education also plays a central role in shaping adolescents' values. In response to the challenges posed by short video culture, schools should integrate media literacy with ideological and moral education, systematically teaching students the principles of media dissemination and value orientation. This can help them critically assess, reflect on, and rationally engage with short video content.

In terms of curriculum, schools should introduce media cognition and critical thinking courses to help students understand algorithmic recommendation systems, commercial logics, and information bias, thereby enhancing their ability to discern and critique online content. At the instructional level, teachers should emphasize value guidance both in classroom teaching and everyday interactions. They should encourage students to adopt a rational and balanced perspective on online trends and the culture of popularity.

Additionally, schools can organize short video creation and showcase activities, encouraging students to produce content around themes such as campus life, social responsibility, and traditional culture. Through content creation, students can learn positive expression, value-based judgment, and understand the societal responsibilities of communication behaviors.

4.3. Platform level: optimizing algorithms and content ecosystems

Short video platforms play a pivotal role in adolescents' media engagement. Their algorithmic structures and content governance directly shape the direction of value transmission. Therefore, platforms must shoulder social responsibility and balance commercial interests with public values.

Platforms should optimize algorithmic logic by increasing the weighting of positive content, avoiding excessive promotion of low-quality or sensational material in pursuit of clicks and user retention. Moreover, platforms need to improve their content review and age-appropriate content filtering systems. Content involving violence, wealth flaunting, and misinformation should be strictly regulated, while educational, public interest, and cultural content should be actively promoted. By upgrading "youth mode" systems that integrate time control, content filtering, and parental coordination, platforms can offer technical guidance for healthier usage behavior. Furthermore, platforms could establish mental health intervention mechanisms, using big data to detect patterns of problematic use and offer users timely risk alerts and psychological support resources.

5. Conclusion

This study explores the impact of short video platforms on adolescents' value formation, focusing on how content characteristics, algorithmic recommendation systems, and psychological factors interact to shape attitudes and behaviors. Findings indicate that mainstream short video content often emphasizes consumerism, entertainment-first values, and appearance-oriented ideals. Algorithm-driven personalization increases adolescents' exposure to homogeneous content, while social learning and imitation mechanisms lead them to internalize platform-promoted values unconsciously. Consequently, excessive short video use may affect adolescents' aesthetic standards, consumption outlook, career aspirations, attention span, and behavioral habits. It may also weaken their critical thinking and long-term goal-setting abilities.

However, this study has certain limitations. It relies mainly on literature review and content analysis, lacking large-scale empirical or longitudinal data to establish causal relationships. Moreover, it does not explore the potential positive impacts of short videos. Future research should employ experimental or longitudinal methods to analyze the interaction between algorithmic exposure and adolescent psychological development. Additionally, studies could investigate strategies to promote constructive engagement with short videos, assess the effectiveness of educational interventions, and explore group differences to better understand how short video content shapes adolescent values across diverse populations.

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