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From Browsing to Purchasing: The Impact of Douyin Live Streaming on Teenage Consumption in China

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Abstract. The effect of Douyin's short-video platform on teenage users' intentions to use it and its impact on their emotional well-being has been assessed by previous studies. Existing literature highlights the relationship between live streams and consumption behaviors and mental health conditions. Firstly, the algorithmic and live streaming nature of the platform induces impulsive and emotionally driven purchasing behavior. Secondly, there are negative psychological effects of continued use, such as anxiety, social comparison, and low self-esteem. Thirdly, the more general influence of these patterns on the economy is that they cause households to reallocate their funds, and by doing so, precondition spending patterns that can be projected into adulthood. Drawing upon behavioural economics, motivational psychology, and media research, this study argued that neither of the two phenomena is the result of various processes, but they are created from the combined effects of the commercial efficacy of Douyin and the emotional expenses. It is proposed to respond to it with responsible marketing and media literacy education and more efficient regulatory frameworks.

Keywords: New media platform, Consumption intention, Economic behaviour, Douyin

1. Introduction

With growing short-video app popularity nowadays, certain app platforms cumulatively become part of customers' spending habits and daily routines. Short-video apps are no longer used solely for entertainment. Short-video apps also dictate what consumers want and when they want to buy it. Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, has further espoused these changes. Launched by ByteDance, Douyin became the most popular short-video streaming app in mainstream Chinese society. Douyin has become interlaced in the daily lives of the ordinary Chinese citizen. Douyin has no less than 700 million monthly users. What distinguishes Douyin from its predecessors is not only its scale, but also its very structure, a self-recommendation algorithm that creates a more accurate model of the content each user likes and applies that model to deliver content, and even commerce with an almost surgical precision [1]. The user does not feel spoken to; they feel sympathised with, and this is a more commercially worthy experience in the entirety.

The power of Douyin, however, does not end with entertainment or even shopping. The platform has been shown to exert a strong influence on the buying habits, emotional dispositions, as well as value systems of users in a way that is beginning to attract serious academic attention. Research by

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Wang and Binti Musa attests to the long-standing intuitive knowledge among practitioners that live-stream shopping and influencer promotions result in instantaneous purchase behaviour since they reduce the consumer decision-making process to an emotional response, but not deliberation [2]. Meanwhile, there has been a concomitant body of literature associating prolonged Douyin consumption with high anxiety, low self-esteem, and depressive affective states, especially in young users [3]. The same emotional architecture that renders Douyin so powerful in motivating consumption, as this paper proposes, results in, as an unsurprising byproduct, the negative emotional states that researchers are increasingly reporting. Due to the increasing role of Douyin in the digital economy of China, it is important to understand how it has influenced consumer behaviour and mental health. On the one hand, Douyin has changed the behaviour of online marketing, as it allows brands and influencers to make a closer and more conversational approach to buyers [4]. The idealized content on the platform has been associated with anxiety, social comparison, and emotional instability in young users on the other side [3]. Given these contradictory effects, it is necessary to examine both its advantages and the risks it poses to its consumers.

This study investigates Douyin's impact from three critical angles. The first is from a consumer behavior standpoint, analyzing how Douyin's content and marketing techniques impact user shopping decisions. With respect to emotional health, this study will examine whether chronic usage of Douyin is a contributing factor to stress, anxiety, or negative emotional states. With respect to economic effects, this study will examine the emotional vulnerability and impulsive purchase behavior and the long-term micro-economic impact of the teenage users of Douyin. The study will provide a bottom-line perspective of the impacts of Douyin on the economic behavior, emotions, and decisions of Chinese teenagers.

2. Features of Douyin

There is no clear equivalent to Douyin in the Chinese digital economy because it fulfills the roles of a social network, a content platform, an advertising space, and a shopping venue all in one, and all of those functions are perceived to be fluidly integrated by its users. Douyin's system combines AI-powered content recommendation, social features, and e-commerce. This is all designed to increase the amount of time users spend on the platform and to stimulate as much commerce as possible in a single touchpoint. The effects of this system working seamlessly together are intentional; the lack of a clear boundary between entertainment and commerce means users are engaging with both simultaneously. This makes Douyin highly personalized, and highly effective in creating a deep emotional response and purchase intent. The content ecosystem Douyin offers is a product of its sophisticated algorithms, and includes an incredible diversity of commercial content, entertainment, product reviews, lifestyle content, and education [4]. However, the most significant factor is not the diversity of content, it is how that content is targeted to specific users at specific times.

The content ecosystem, which is driven by the Douyin algorithm, has an incredible diversity of formats and content. Various information, such as lifestyle, product recommendations, education, entertainment, and promotions. However, the important thing is not the variety of content but how content is delivered to a particular user in a unique way. The short-video clips, which are usually fifteen to sixty seconds in length, are based on music, visual effects, and fast cuts to create emotional reactions within a duration of time that does not allow conscious thought processing [5]. This is not a random circumstance of the format but one of its major commercial benefits. By the time the viewers have been emotionally triggered and then undertake the conscious thought, they are already predisposed to make a purchase decision.

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Another move towards this dynamism is the rise of online shopping and live streaming. Zhao records that live stream sessions turn the purchasing experience into a live social experience where a trusted host showcases products, clarifies the questions, generates a sense of urgency by offering limited-time deals, and fosters a communal experience among fellow co-watching attendees [6]. It is crowding what the classical consumer theory imagines as a multi-step process of decision making into a purpose of emotional response in one moment, in which the distance between desire and transaction virtually vanishes. User interaction features such as likes, comments, shares, and the promotion of trending challenges are designed to keep users engaged in the ever-changing business landscape, thereby maintaining their interest.

3. The influence of Douyin on consumption intentions

3.1. Douyin marketing strategies

Douyin influencing consumer behaviour is not a recent discovery. The platform is extremely effective at triggering purchase intention among young users by exploiting personalisation via algorithms, emotional appeal, and the strategic blurriness between entertainment and advertising. Of analytical interest is not the effectiveness itself but the mechanisms that, when viewed through a microscope, reveal a marketing architecture that operates primarily through the psychological channels that, in their disproportionately high strength, are found to be disproportionately strong in the adolescent years. Research explains how the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theoretical framework was applied to short video advertising on the Douyin platform [5]. Several elements, such as music in videos, humour appeals, emotional storytelling, and visual effectiveness, are important stimuli that elicit a successful response. This organism involves an individual's inner needs, including emotions, aspirations, social anxiety, and self-identity. The resulting behaviors, such as interest, attraction, and purchases, are responses to the viewer. The peculiarity of Douyin usage is that before the stimulus appears, the platform has already mapped the organism. This algorithm is not a hypothetical assumption, but rather ensures the accuracy of information by tracking user behavior on the platform.

Another dimension is the psychology of consumers. The authors found that a significant proportion of purchases inspired by Douyin among young users did not arise as a result of a deliberate evaluation of preference but as an outcome of the fear of missing out (FOMO) [7]. Failure to buy when an adolescent watches a host promote a limited-edition product to thousands of other viewers, who are co-watching, is like a social rejection, and this threat appeals to the belongingness level of Maslow's hierarchy, which is most intense and most vulnerable in adolescence [8]. The relational dimension holds the view that viewers who watch often develop real emotional attachments with hosts, developing a level of trust that is more reminiscent of the sense of friendship than acceptance of the advert and providing purchase intentions that cannot be countered by the traditional brand loyalty index.

A study introduces a valuable dimension by analysing the genre of self-media creators' non-celebrity content creators who build their following by posting regularly and creating an authenticity aesthetic. Their followers view them as colleagues, not as promoters, and this implies that their endorsements have the power of social recommendation [2]. They discovered that self-media strategies that focused on authenticity were effective in inspiring engagement and purchasing behavior, especially with niche products and smaller businesses. This creates a structural information asymmetry. Creators promote products in exchange for payment, while viewers

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perceive this as a well-intentioned recommendation. This imbalance is not a coincidence, but a condition that the structure of the platform actively replicates.

3.2. The role of live streaming in consumer behaviour

In case short-video advertising signifies the ability of Douyin to prep the consumer emotionally, live streaming signifies its ability to make the sale, and the data testifying to its success is substantial. The study established that confidence, warmth, and perceived expertise are much more likely to motivate viewers to buy a host, and the emotional connection that is established between a host and a viewer in a live session serves as a stronger predictor of purchase intention, as opposed to the inherent attributes of the product being advertised [6]. It means that live stream commerce is not merely useful in making the consumer make more informed decisions, but also creates an environment where consumer reviews of products are largely replaced by seller reviews.

It has been operationalised on beauty products, where live demonstrations with interactions, where the hosts apply the products on themselves, answer questions, and express a noticeable excitement, produced significantly high purchase intentions compared to recorded material with the same theme [2]. One of the effects that has been produced by interactivity is the subjectivity of personalised advice versus mass commercial communication. This assumption was captured by another research, arguing that live streaming is a performance, conversation, commerce fusion where urgency, social proof, and communal involvement are combined into emotional momentum to purchase [1]. According to McClelland's framework, this environment is so attractive to teenagers because it satisfies their individual psychological needs [9]. Obtaining a product before it sells out satisfies their need for achievement, watching live streams with a group of people with similar interests satisfies their need for belonging, and gaining recognition in the live streaming community satisfies their need for social status.

Regarding the discussion, this paper argues comparative insights that stress the TikTok implications. Douyin falls under the domestic digital ecosystem in China. However, its international equivalent, TikTok, provides a useful comparative lens for understanding the generalisability of the mechanisms outlined in this review. What TikTok's evidence suggests is that those mechanisms are not culturally specific, but are structurally inherent in short-video platforms that incorporate algorithmic personalisation with affective content and embedded commerce. It is noted that the content on TikTok about Chinese culture, food, travel, and daily aesthetics proves that international viewers are willing to visit China and interact with Chinese products, without any direct advertising process. The commercial impact of emotional resonance alone is enough to confirm the hypothesis that the boundary between entertainment and marketing is as porous on TikTok as on Douyin, and that the platform should not profess a commercial intent to wield commercial influence. For example, Jiao et al. gave a structural comparison, believing that TikTok is skewed towards entertainment, whereas Douyin combines full e-commerce functionality into the viewing experience [3]. As TikTok builds its own shopping system, it adheres to the commercial scheme Douyin has already created, which validates that the effects of consumption intentions that this review records are structural attributes of algorithmic short-video systems, not a China-only phenomenon.

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4. The effect of Douyin on negative emotion levels

4.1. Short video consumption and psychological implications

The same affective structure that enables Douyin to be such an effective consumer driver, the algorithmic personalisation, the parasocial intimacy, the constant stimulation, and the social comparison it generates, as an expected and well-studied side effect, a spectrum of adverse psychological conditions in heavy users. This is not by chance, but it is a structural consequence. Maintaining attention by consistently linking content with emotional vulnerability will produce the same emotional states predicted by attention science, such as excitement after fatigue, connection after comparison anxiety, and pleasure after needing the same level of stimulation. These dynamics are not comfortable, as the emotional regulatory systems of teenage users are still in their development, and their sensitivity to social feedback is at its peak. They are both economically and personally expensive.

Guo et al. offered some of the most direct evidence [10]. They discovered that high-frequency Douyin users in the youth population reported a higher level of negative emotion, lower self-control, and a lower ability to manage their own mood. The emotional exhaustion, as a particular result of heavy use, especially late-night use among university students, was reported by Liu et al. [11]. These authors linked the infinite-scroll nature of Douyin to a psychological condition with tangible downstream effects on academic performance and the quality of decision-making. Ye et al. established that those who use short-video platforms too often often find themselves anxious and emotionally unstable, and another study found a trend of emotional shopping and mindless scrolling, which is at once a manifestation of distress and a cause of it, in a loop that the platform is designed to keep [7, 12].

The most theoretically advanced explanation is one that explains the dynamic in terms of attachment theory. Users form real emotional connections to favourite hosts - connections that generate warmth, identification, and social belonging. But the very bonds are painful in the comparison. Social comparison is most harmful with respect to individuals whose approval people want: the person who makes a teenager feel like a member of the community is the same person who makes an individual feel like she is not pretty or successful enough. In terms of Maslow's hierarchy, this hits the esteem rung at the very developmental stage when it is the most salient. The platform provides belonging and, at the same time, devalues self-worth, within the same content, during the same session [8].

4.2. Emotional states influenced by content

In addition to the time spent on the platform, the qualitative nature of Douyin's content has a particular and well-documented effect on users' emotional states. Here, the evidence is unified around a finding that is psychologically familiar and economically important. The presence of idealised beauty ideals, conspicuous consumption and aspirational lifestyles creates, in their habitual users, a sense of inadequacy, envy and low self-esteem that acts as a kind of emotional tax on using the platform. Wang discovered that the feeling of inadequacy and the distortion of self-worth evaluation in adolescents under consistent exposure to such content were indeed significant [13]. His argument relates directly to the long-term observation of Veblen, who stated that consumption is never solely material, but is always also social, and always also a statement about ones position in relation to others [14]. The resulting social comparison is structurally biased in favour of the viewer

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when the reference group is not formed by the individual peer community but by an algorithmically selected feed of influencers who have shown the most commercially desirable variant of their lives.

Wang et al. further applied this analysis to the more specific impact of appearance and status-oriented content on the value systems of teens [15]. Their results revealed that young users who consumed such content regularly were more inclined to assess their own value in terms of material possessions and physical appearance, a value orientation that has long-term consequences regarding how these individual users interact with consumer markets in adulthood. They introduced another dimension by investigating emotional marketing, content that employs sentimental storytelling, nostalgia, or patriotic appeals to produce strong affective reactions. They discovered that such content is highly effective at increasing short-term purchase intention, but overuse creates emotional fatigue and, in some cases, leads to confusion about the authenticity of one's own emotional reactions. This point is frequently ignored. As the platform systematically generates emotional responses, it is likely to gradually lead users to doubt the authenticity of their own emotions, with far-reaching ramifications.

Roostika and Aji found that regrets are a frequent occurrence following impulse purchases that have been made during emotionally charged live-streams [4]. The buying that initially appeared adventurous and exciting in the excitement of the stream is lost in the cold reality of the aftermath, a symbol of loss of control. For teenagers who have not yet mastered self-regulation, the cycle of hasty purchases and self-blame can create a vicious circle with emotional and financial consequences. Chronic exposure to status displays, in the long term, causes loss of emotional integrity in individuals with low media literacy to distinguish between the created commercial messages and the actual social reality. It is assumed that this illiteracy is not a nuisance of the education sector but rather a structural weakness that is exploited by commercial sites.

5. Synthesis of findings

Looking at current literature as a system, rather than separate pieces of evidence concerning consumption and emotion. What emerges is the image of a platform that is not only efficient in making a sale but is also structurally crafted to convert adolescent psychological needs into a commercial outcome. The result of that conversion process is, as an unavoidable by-product, the negative affective states, the cost of which is not borne by the platform but by the users themselves. Marketing of Douyin, algorithmic personalisation, influencer endorsement, and live stream commerce are all effective in increasing consumer interest and stimulating purchase behaviour. However, these instruments are helpful since they respond to the emotional and social needs that are the most developmentally pressing during adolescence: the need to belong, the need to be respected, and the anxiety of being shunned by the community. Moreover, in the process of commercialising those needs, the platform enhances the anxiety, comparison, and emotional exhaustion that those needs generate when methodically under-met.

Several previous studies mention that the relationship between the heavy use of Douyin and emotional imbalance is not an accidental relationship to the commercial success of the platform, but a structural one. As can be seen in the previous work, even TikTok users in other countries are exposed to the same dynamics, which confirms that what this review has described is not a culturally peculiar Chinese phenomenon but the natural outcome of a platform architecture that is currently being exported to other nations. Existing literature has insufficiently explored the economic aspects of this combined effect. This paper argues that the most effective advantage of Douyin's commercial success lies in its cost. Impulsive consumption, emotional harm, damage to self-esteem, and the development of harmful long-term consumption patterns are all borne by

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teenagers and their families, while the benefits ultimately go to the platform, the brand, and the broader digital economy.

6. Conclusion

This paper focuses on how Douyin affects the consumption and perceptions of teenage users in China. Based on the research results and findings of previous studies, and combined with practical cases, this study holds the view that live streaming on Douyin influences the purchasing behaviours and conceptions when buying products online. Particularly, the KOL marketing in short videos and live-streaming shopping plays an important role in contemporary consumer shopping. There are also psychological costs of using these apps. Long-term use of these apps and the ideal lifestyles portrayed create stress, emotional burnout, and lowered self-worth in young consumers. This review is also characterized by the economic aspect. Young adolescents are opinion leaders during their peak spending years, and the short video apps become an additional spending pressure. These habits have negative impacts on the personal and domestic economy. More transparent marketing, responsible media, apps, and policy design are suggested in unison with better digital education and ethically guided algorithm development. Despite the fact that it cannot be denied that Douyin has transformed the way the younger generation shops and interacts, its two-sided impact needs a careful, informed, and long-term approach.

There are practical implications for marketers and policymakers in this research. For marketers, personalised and emotionally resonant content is proven to be effective, yet the evidence considered in this paper indicates that it should be used responsibly. The use of FOMO, parasocial trust, and status comparison as a stimulus to make purchases among adolescents is a short-term source of revenue that may harm long-term user confidence and well-being. To policymakers, commercial disclosure rules and platform liability rules are a welcome beginning, but they address symptoms rather than causes. Adding applications such as usage-time reminders and content filters can be regarded as an effective approach, and providing young people with tools to critically assess the commercial messages they receive is encouraged. Moreover, this integration of transparency requirements, ethical influencer behaviour, and user education is the most consistent policy action in response to the structural vulnerabilities identified in this review.

From the limitations of this paper, most findings in this area are qualitative case studies, self-administered surveys, or cross-sectional research, which establish trends but not causation or long-term outcomes. Therefore, future studies should be conducted to emphasize the statistical relationships among different factors. None of the longitudinal studies has investigated the effects of such adolescent Douyin use on consumption trends, emotional regulation, and economic decision-making in adulthood; thus, financial behaviour developed during adolescence is path-dependent. Finally, comparative studies to understand similar platforms in distinct cultural and regulatory settings are needed to identify which effects are platform-specific and which are structural features of algorithmically based short-video commerce on a global scale.

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