

Creative Class' Visibility Exhibition on Short Video Platforms, Taking Douyin as an Example

Lanjun Liu^{1, a, *}

¹ *Department of Digital Media and Culture, The University of Warwick, 10000, United Kingdom*
a. Lanjun.Liu@Warwick.Ac.Uk

** corresponding author*

Abstract: With the continuous development of Internet technology and mobile communication technology, the penetration of video websites and video apps is increasing. In the environment of new media, mobile video has become the most popular social platform due to its low creation threshold, easy homogenization, and information fragmentation. If video creators want to gain online traffic, they must optimize their strategies and increase visibility of their videos. Therefore, in such a short video era, this paper investigates how the creative class uses video platforms to compete for 'visibility' and get more traffic. Through the lens of the uses and gratifications theory, it finds that due to China's unique cultural background, Douyin's algorithmic recommendation mechanism gives priority to content in line with mainstream social values. The emergence of short video as a medium has brought great changes to Internet users.

Keywords: Douyin, visibility, creative class, uses and gratifications theory

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

As digital media are speeding up, short video platforms attract more and more attention from various industries. The *2022 Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China* released by China Internet Network Information Center shows that as of June 2022, the size of Chinese Internet users reached 1.051 billion, increasing by 19.19 million from December 2021 [1]. The Internet penetration rate reached 74.4%, the size of smartphone users reached 1.047 billion, and the size of Internet video (including short video) users reached 995 million, accounting for 94.6% of the overall Internet users.

With the rapid rise of short video platforms, the growth rate of conventional video platforms is gradually slowing down and the market concentration is further increasing. While each video platform is capturing market share, Douyin has become one of the most popular digital platforms in China at present. It is found due to China's unique cultural background, Douyin's algorithmic recommendation mechanism prioritizes content that conforms to mainstream social values.

The emergence of short videos as a medium has brought great changes to Internet users. On the one hand, people use the short video platforms to record their daily life and try to change their own situation; on the other hand, short videos also gradually domesticate users' life patterns in reverse. For the majority of user groups, the platforms provide them with a fair and huge space for

performance. The word ‘visibility’ means that users are not only ‘seen’ but also becoming visual material producers. Therefore, in such an era where life is filled with short videos, how does the creative class use video platforms to compete for ‘visibility’ to obtain higher traffic and revenue?

1.2. Research Questions

The paper mainly deals with the following two questions: first, can the creative class make use of the algorithmic mechanism of short video platforms to fight for ‘visibility’ for themselves? Second, how can the uses and gratifications theory better provide theoretical support for them to gain more ‘visibility’?

1.3. Literature Review

The current academic field mainly conducts research on two aspects, namely mobile short video and uses and gratifications theory.

1.3.1. Research on Mobile Short Video

Regarding the research on short videos, some scholars have compared China's popular short video software with similar foreign software and discussed in depth the characteristics of short videos and future development trends [2]. Luo made a detailed analysis of the marketing characteristics and advantages of short videos, such as the relationship between the fragmentation of videos and people's reading habits, the economic benefits of short videos, and their role in the development of experiential marketing. In his view, they stimulate users' audio-visual senses and provide more three-dimensional experience [3].

To sum up, most scholars focus on the development of short videos and the related operation modes, but very few of them use relevant theories of communication. This opens up a broader space for theoretical research on short videos and has a great academic value.

1.3.2. Research on Uses and Gratifications Theory

According to the uses and gratifications theory, all media in contact with users have a strong purpose to meet the needs of users. If a platform wants to be attractive and enhance its visibility, it has to retain users' browsing time through different approaches. With the development of short video platforms such as Douyin, video content is not longer single but rigorously complies with algorithmic recommendation mechanisms [4].

In the late 1970s, a Japanese scholar proposed that in society, everyone will have different expectations of the media due to various personal and social factors. Once people start to contact the media, they will have a certain degree of gratification, and this degree of gratification depends on whether the services provided by the media meet the user's original cognitive expectations. The higher the degree of gratification, the more they will continue to pay attention to the media. The uses and gratifications theory objectively recognizes the user's motivation in media selection. The user's point of view is a significant change from the traditional rigid bullet theory and has greatly contributed to the development of mass communication [5]. Since the 1980s, the emergence of the Internet has given the media a completely new environment for development. At the same time, users have created new needs that are different from those of the past [6].

Moreover, the uses and gratifications theory is used to study the behavioral motivation related to smartphone reading among college students. The behavioral motivation of college students to read through cell phones is universal, and the gratification they obtain from reading is also stronger [7].

Previous studies have also noticed the crisis in the new environment and proposed that humans and technology should be integrated to obtain more development opportunities [8].

To sum up, the uses and gratifications theory takes users' satisfaction and needs as the main starting point of research and analyzes the psychological effects of media communication on users and their usage frequency. This theory has been continuously discussed and researched and has produced rich theoretical results. In the 21st century, the development of new media technology is changing rapidly, and the creative class mainly occupies the short video platforms. People possess double roles in both the content supply and demand chains.

2. Research Methods

This paper mainly combines literature analysis and a questionnaire survey to continuously observe the creative class and uncover their thoughts and feelings, so as to explore the visual performance practice of their visibility. First, the walkthrough approach builds a corpus of basic data on which a more detailed analysis of the intended purpose of short video platforms, especially Douyin, is based. The embedded cultural significance and the implied ideal users are also considered.

Moreover, in order to have a deeper understanding of the influence of 'visibility' on Douyin, a questionnaire survey was conducted. The survey focuses on frequent users of Douyin. From the perspective of sample scope, the sample was ensured to be extensive, and then a multi-aspect survey was conducted on Douyin users in the form of online questionnaires. A total of 180 questionnaires were distributed in this study, and 151 were valid. The author conducted a comprehensive analysis of the survey results with the help of questionnaire magnitude data analysis software.

3. Affective Elements to Visibility

3.1. From the Invisible to the Visible

In the new media era, the 'visibility' of things is based on the 'obscurity' of the traditional media era. In the past, mass media as an intermediary connected individuals and society. The individual can only know the world through media, while media are not an all-seeing system. Ordinary persons are often 'voiceless' and 'absent'. Douyin and other mobile video applications encourage individuals to express themselves, participate, and interact with each other. They provide people with a channel to voice and a space to perform and give them the visible capital to become online celebrities. As a result, visibility becomes a basic right that everyone wants to 'conquer', which is driven by external forces and internal demand. It awakens the subject's emotions through technologically mediated perception and interaction. Moreover, it allows the public to gain visibility, define the visibility of others in their own way, and become the organizers of visibility [9].

The process of gaining visibility consists of three aspects. First, users should register and then get the power to 'exchange' visibility. Second, they should try to get 'Like' and 'Comment' to interact with others and get feedback to stimulate their exhibition action. Finally, they should get more followers and retweets to use the networked connections to expand social visibility.

The tools for measuring visibility are generally presented in the form of symbols in their own functional designs, such as following, liking, commenting, and retweeting. It is worth noting that all of these are presented in a quantitative way. The data are transparent. The numbers of followers and likes are bolded on the personal homepage. This visualization of data further clarifies the visibility index. It is directly related to the scope and intensity of the individual's visibility.

In the process of the author's operational exercise on Douyin, the following means to improve the visibility of the producers and consumers are found. First, the user's authentication is a kind of

authoritative hint. Second, the fan service is a way to get more attractions. Third, the battle between different accounts is a tool to gather high popularity.

Because Douyin's algorithm is based on the number of 'Like', users need to pay more attention to attract fans. With so many content updates on Douyin, the viewers' attention become scarce, and this competition intensifies users' desire for visibility. On the one hand, they seek attention in extreme ways, aiming to become 'spectacle directors'. They act like zoo animals who must surrender control of their appearance in the face of social callousness toward the sick, the insane, and the incarcerated. On the other hand, they are paying for visibility in a currency that subverts the meaning of visibility in fake ways. The recruitment advertisement of 'fake fans' on Douyin with a daily salary of 300 yuan can be found on WeChat and in text messages. It is easy to see that Douyin uses quantifiable data as a measurement tool to gauge the level of visibility, and the data bring differentiated satisfaction, which stimulates people's competition for visibility. In this process, the creative class uses Douyin's push mechanism to compete for 'visibility' for themselves, while they use different forms of performance to enhance the continuity of their content and real-time presence on Douyin.

3.2. The Uses and Gratifications Theory

Because Douyin's short videos are only 15 seconds long, they have 'short, flat, and fast' characteristics. This short video form effectively solves users' needs for short video browsing and meets the display needs of video producers in the correspondingly refined range [10].

Also, Douyin is an application that operates around music. Some people take it as a creative function, but in fact, it is more appropriate for young people to create a characteristic expression that is more in line with young people. At the same time, users can choose topics that interest them and win the attention of their own bloggers, and they are able to communicate with other users. The video application of this software and the social network are mutually beneficial, which can mobilize users to share and spread their enthusiasm and promote communication among them.

Most users have the feeling that the process of watching short videos simply cannot be stopped. In essence, in the era of new media, most users have 'media dependency syndrome'. Users are seriously addicted to the media and cannot effectively identify the real environment and the virtual environment [11].

4. The Impact of Video content, Presentation Mode and User Usage to Audience

In order to study the influence of visibility, users' motivation was analyzed based on the data collected from the questionnaire and through the uses and gratifications theory. According to the questionnaire survey, the proportion of female users (59%) is slightly higher than male users. Users of Douyin are mainly born in the late 1990s, while the post-00s and post-80s account for less. The reason for this result is that in the fast-paced modern life, more and more young people choose to live alone due to the high pressure of life. Few people only use Douyin once a month, once every two or three weeks, and twice a week, less than 20% in total, while the percentage of Douyin users who use it once a day or more is very high, up to 81.04% in total. It indicates that Douyin has frequent daily and monthly activity and high user stickiness.

The use motives of Douyin audiences mainly include three aspects, namely individual performance desire, mood transformation, and information acquisition. In contrast to traditional media and social media, which lack diversity in expression and simplicity in operation, Douyin makes up for these two shortcomings. Hartley believed that it lowers the threshold for shooting videos without the need for professionalism and more effectively addresses users' needs for expression through the fusion of images and sound in videos [12]. The above-mentioned de-specialized content

production also leads to an increasing number of “users generated content”, so users can freely express their own perceptions.

Short videos on Douyin are different from the previous way of information dissemination, no longer possessing seriousness. The trend of entertainment, visualization, and other features are increasingly prominent, and they effectively use multimedia, network communication, animation production, web links, and other high-techs to highlight the visual effect of content, thus addressing the needs of users. By sharing, enjoying, and uploading short videos, users can effectively relieve their stress and get a lot of valuable information in the process.

Douyin short videos contain a variety of content, ranging from beauty, pets, to funny stuff and also include a lot of life knowledge content. For example, The ‘Douyin Prawns’, a new cuisine that is very popular on Douyin, teacher users how to make unique prawns in a limited time; the ‘contrast plus flash’ method allows users to enter a new stage of selfie; some videos show how to quickly put children to bed to reduce parents’ stress. On the other hand, a great deal of life knowledge, such as timely cleaning of vehicle scratches and washing machines, is also very popular. Users have a huge appetite for knowledge, so they are promoted to understand the information in the videos, and this information can make them better.

Douyin takes advantage of the audience's entertainment, cognitive, emotional, social, and commercial needs to encourage creative users to improve their video content to gain more ‘visibility’ through different forms.

5. Conclusion

From the transformation of ‘media event’ to ‘media story’, it is common to see the turn of media discourse from the state to the market. The ‘media story’ dominated by commercial media deconstructs the dominant national media discourse system and gradually begins to pay attention to daily life. The ‘media moment’ formed by the convergence of these fragments of life and life in the short videos constitutes a huge ‘behavior reservoir’. Those unseen individuals can be ‘visible’ in the continuous cycle of performance and traffic and attention. Through performance and competition for visibility, producers and consumers not only reshape their own images but also accumulate social capital, which has a non-negligible impact on the promotion of contemporary social public life. Douyin is no longer a passive consumption channel for users but also a channel for them to realize self-construction and self-cognition, establish social networks, and obtain social capital.

Moreover, Douyin analyzes the actual needs of users based on the uses and gratifications theory and occupies the short video market better and faster. However, due to the characteristics of short videos and the hidden characteristics of network social interaction, short video content tends to be entertaining and even vulgar. If the short video platforms do not have relevant regulations or take effective technical measures to avoid inferior content, they could not survive the fierce competition. Based on this, Douyin itself should not only take necessary technical measures to regulate and guarantee content but also actively guide users to create high-quality, interesting, and useful original short videos.

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