

The Reshaping of Consumer Behavior and Lifestyle by the Entertainment Economy: Evidence from Short Video Platforms

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Abstract. In the digital era, the entertainment economy has emerged as a transformative force, reshaping the ways individuals consume content and interact with media technologies. Central to this transformation are short video platforms such as TikTok and Douyin, which serve as hybrid spaces combining entertainment, marketing, social interaction, and commercial activity. This paper critically examines how these platforms influence consumer behavior and lifestyle patterns, with particular attention to the underlying mechanisms of behavioral change. Employing a mixed-methods approach incorporating literature review, case analysis, and theoretical synthesis, this study identifies four major pathways of transformation, including : fragmented viewing practices, the rise of instant gratification, participatory content creation, and the normalization of impulsive consumption. The paper further explores the role of algorithmic governance, cultural mediation, and platform capitalism in reinforcing these trends. In addition to highlighting the economic opportunities provided by short video ecosystems, this research also outlines the cognitive, social, and ethical challenges they introduce. The paper concludes with a discussion of optimization strategies for stakeholders and offers recommendations for future scholarly inquiry into the long-term societal impacts of the entertainment economy.

Keywords: consumer behavior, entertainment economy, short video platforms.

1. Introduction

The rise of the entertainment economy reflects a significant cultural and economic shift, as digital technologies and algorithmic infrastructures transform everyday habits of consumption, communication, and self-presentation. In particular, short video platforms like TikTok and Douyin have catalyzed new behavioral norms and marketing ecosystems. Unlike previous iterations of digital media, these platforms function not simply as content distributors, but as ecosystems that aggregate data, shape preferences, and mediate user experiences through predictive algorithms. This paper seeks to unpack the complex interaction between these platforms and consumer behavior, emphasizing how the architecture and affordances of short video environments contribute to new patterns of living, consuming, and engaging with cultural content.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative strategies to examine the influence of short video platforms on consumer behavior and lifestyle. The primary methodology involves three components: a critical literature review, targeted case study analysis, and observational synthesis of user behavior data drawn from existing research.

First, the literature review anchors the study in existing academic discourse, providing theoretical grounding through frameworks such as Uses and Gratifications Theory, platform capitalism, and algorithmic governance. This review also integrates recent empirical findings on user psychology, media multitasking, and digital commercial behavior. Second, the case study approach centers on two prominent cultural events within the Douyin ecosystem: the rise of micro dramas and the Jay Chou online concert. These case studies were selected based on their viral influence, audience scale, and illustrative power regarding new consumption patterns. They allow for an in-depth understanding of how entertainment is produced, distributed, and monetized on short video platforms.

Third, this study incorporates user behavior data from secondary sources, including usage metrics reported in academic papers and platform disclosures. Key indicators such as average session length, time-of-day usage distribution, and livestream conversion rates are referenced to reinforce the conceptual analysis. While the study does not rely on original fieldwork, its triangulation of scholarly literature, publicly available behavioral data, and detailed media cases ensures a robust and multifaceted understanding of the subject matter.

Limitations include potential gaps in data transparency, as platform-specific statistics are often selectively disclosed. In addition, cultural variability and regulatory differences between TikTok and Douyin may limit the generalizability of findings across global contexts. Despite these constraints, the combined methodology allows for a meaningful and theoretically informed exploration of the reshaping of consumer behavior through entertainment media.

2. Literature review

This paper is situated within a growing body of scholarship at the intersection of media studies, consumer behavior, and platform theory. Before turning to the specific mechanisms of behavioral change, it is important to contextualize this work within the existing literature. Early work on media consumption drew from the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that audiences actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs, such as information, entertainment, personal identity, or social interaction [1]. UGT was instrumental in shifting the focus away from media effects and toward user agencies, yet its assumptions have been increasingly challenged in platform environments, where algorithmic curation narrows the spectrum of accessible content. In particular, platforms like TikTok do not merely serve content based on expressed user intent but shape preferences through predictive feedback loops. This renders older frameworks partially insufficient to explain emergent behaviors.

Contemporary scholars have built on UGT by integrating structuralist perspectives from political economy and critical algorithm studies. For example, some scholars introduced the concept of 'platform capitalism' to describe how firms like ByteDance (TikTok's parent company) monetize user data through surveillance and algorithmic sorting [2]. In this view, users are no longer autonomous consumers but also unpaid laborers generating monetizable data. Other scholars further extend this critique by analyzing the opaque operations of algorithmic governance and the commodification of personal information [3,4]. These theories are essential to understanding how short video platforms not only reflect consumer behavior but actively configure it through embedded incentives and infrastructures.

The theoretical foundation of this research draws upon several interrelated frameworks. The UGT, long used to explain media selection and consumption motivations, provides a useful starting point. However, traditional UGT often overlooks the structural constraints imposed by platform algorithms, which mediate access to content in ways that complicate user agency. This necessitates an engagement with newer perspectives, such as platform capitalism, which situates user engagement within a broader economic logic of data extraction, behavioral manipulation, and surveillance-based value generation [2]. Combined, these approaches allow for an exploration of both user motivations and systemic forces in shaping behavior on short video platforms.

One of the most pronounced shifts facilitated by short video platforms is the fragmentation of attention. Empirical studies show that users spend increasing amounts of time engaging with bite-sized media throughout the day, often in tandem with other activities such as commuting, eating, or resting [5]. This pattern reflects not only technological affordances—ubiquitous smartphones and autoplay mechanisms—but also changing cultural attitudes toward time. In the entertainment economy, leisure is no longer distinct from labor or domestic life; rather, it is interwoven into micro-moments that are commercially exploitable. The implications are substantial: not only do these practices reduce opportunities for sustained reflection and critical thinking, but they also normalize a reactive mode of consumption that is easily leveraged by marketers.

The appeal of instant gratification further reinforces this trend. Short video content often prioritizes novelty, humor, or emotional impact, capitalizing on users' desire for quick stimulation. This is not merely a stylistic preference, but a reflection of underlying psychological mechanisms. Research in cognitive psychology suggests that dopamine release associated with novelty-seeking behavior makes short-form content particularly addictive [6]. Platform design elements—such as infinite scroll, trending hashtags, and algorithmic reinforcement—amplify this effect, encouraging repeated exposure and deepening platform dependency. These design strategies blur the line between user autonomy and behavioral conditioning, raising ethical concerns about manipulative design and its impact on mental well-being, especially among adolescents.

In addition to reshaping passive consumption, short video platforms have also redefined media production and participation. The concept of the "prosumer"—a hybrid of producer and consumer—is no longer novel, but the extent to which everyday users now generate viral content marks a significant development. User-generated content (UGC) on TikTok and Douyin is not only algorithmically promoted but also monetized through views, gifts, and brand collaborations. Some scholars argue that these dynamics create an attention economy in which visibility becomes a form of currency [7]. While this participatory model democratizes content creation, it also introduces new pressures to perform, conform, and optimize one's online persona for algorithmic visibility. Content creators, even casual users, must navigate platform norms, audience expectations, and commercial incentives, effectively laboring within a gamified media economy.

The commercial integration of short video platforms has had particularly pronounced effects on consumer behavior. The emergence of livestream shopping, particularly in China, exemplifies how entertainment and commerce have become inseparable. Livestreams are often hosted by influencers who combine humor, storytelling, and urgency to promote products. These sessions rely heavily on impulse triggers—countdown timers, flash deals, limited stock notifications—that mimic scarcity and increase perceived value [8]. Some scholars provide empirical evidence demonstrating that consumers exposed to video-based product recommendations exhibit significantly higher conversion rates than those exposed to static ads [9]. The convergence of entertainment and e-commerce thus not only accelerates the speed of consumption but also reconfigures the social dynamics of

purchasing decisions, with parasocial relationships between influencers and followers playing a crucial mediating role.

3. Case studies and comparative evidence

3.1. Cultural divergence: TikTok vs. Douyin

These dynamics are not culturally neutral. The same platform may operate differently depending on regulatory regimes, cultural values, and user expectations. For instance, while TikTok in Western markets emphasize entertainment and youth culture, Douyin in China integrates public service announcements, educational content, and government-sanctioned campaigns. Algorithmic curation is also subject to state regulation in China, resulting in different content hierarchies and affordances. Comparative research reveals that Chinese users exhibit higher trust in state-endorsed digital ecosystems, while Western users are more skeptical of platform surveillance, despite being subject to equally pervasive data practices [10]. This raises questions about how cultural and political contexts mediate platform effects and user agency. Cross-platform and cross-cultural analyses are thus vital for understanding the global impact of short video technologies.

3.2. Structural impacts and algorithmic externalities

Short video platforms like TikTok and Douyin are not neutral intermediaries, but profit-driven enterprises deeply embedded in the dynamics of surveillance capitalism. Their core business models rely on data extraction, attention maximization, and behavioral engineering. These platforms monetize user engagement by selling hyper-targeted advertisements, positioning themselves as intermediaries between content creators, advertisers, and consumers. Every tap, pause, like, share, and rewatch is meticulously tracked to build dynamic behavioral profiles, which in turn inform real-time content curation and advertisement targeting.

The design of platform interfaces is geared toward prolonging user retention and maximizing ad impressions. Features such as infinite scroll, auto-play, reward mechanisms, and real-time feedback loops are deliberately engineered to sustain user immersion. These features not only encourage passive consumption but also shape user preferences and behaviors over time. For example, the use of reinforcement learning algorithms allows platforms to personalize content feeds that increasingly align with users' cognitive biases and affective tendencies. This dynamic leads to a feedback loop in which users' attention is gradually narrowed, fostering behavioral predictability and commercial exploitability.

From a commercial perspective, this architecture creates significant value. Advertisers pay a premium for programmatic ad placement optimized by Real-Time Bidding (RTB) systems. The more granular the user data, the more efficient platforms can match advertisements with consumer intent, even when that intent is subliminal or effectively driven. Moreover, influencers and content creators are incentivized to produce content that aligns with algorithmic trends and commercial opportunities, often blurring the boundary between entertainment and advertising.

However, this model raises ethical concerns about autonomy, manipulation, and informed consent. Users rarely understand the extent to which their behaviors are monitored, predicted, and influenced. The lack of transparency regarding algorithmic operations and data flows creates an asymmetry of power between platforms and users. Scholars argue that this asymmetry erodes the foundations of democratic agency, as it undermines the ability of individuals to make independent decisions [4].

Furthermore, behavioral manipulation on these platforms is often optimized for short-term engagement rather than long-term well-being. Sensationalist content emotionally charged videos, and clickbait thrive in this ecosystem, potentially contributing to anxiety, distraction, and misinformation. Regulatory responses have been slow and fragmented. While some jurisdictions have implemented data protection laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the EU or the Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) in China, enforcement remains inconsistent and platform adaptation strategies often outpace regulation.

To address these issues, scholars and policymakers have called for a reorientation of platform design principles toward what is known as “human-centered AI.” This involves designing systems that prioritize user autonomy, transparency, and well-being over commercial imperatives. Proposed interventions include explainable recommendation systems, opt-out algorithms, screen time nudges, and independent algorithm audits. Such measures can help rebalance the platform-user relationship and mitigate the manipulative potential of current business models.

Beyond individual behavior, the entertainment economy has systemic consequences for public discourse and collective attention. As more social energy is directed toward performative engagement and algorithmically selected content, opportunities for civic deliberation and knowledge accumulation may diminish. Filter bubbles, created by personalization algorithms, limit users’ exposure to diverse viewpoints, reinforcing cognitive biases and reducing tolerance for ambiguity or disagreement [11]. In this sense, short video platforms may inadvertently contribute to ideological polarization and social fragmentation, even as they claim to foster community and connection.

These challenges are compounded by the economic imperatives that govern platform design. Under the logic of platform capitalism, engagement is monetized through data extraction and targeted advertising. This creates structural incentives to prioritize content that is emotionally engaging, controversial, or sensational-regardless of its truth value or social utility. The result is a media environment that rewards virality over veracity, and visibility over nuance. Regulatory interventions aimed at increasing transparency and accountability have struggled to keep pace with the rapid innovation and opacity of platform infrastructures. Without meaningful oversight, the risks of manipulation, exploitation, and harm remain significant.

To mitigate these risks, a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary. Platform developers must adopt more responsible design principles, including features that promote content diversity, digital well-being, and informed consumption. Media literacy programs should be implemented to educate users, especially young people, about the mechanics and motivations of algorithmic curation. Policymakers must also play a proactive role, enforcing regulations that ensure transparency in advertising, data use, and content moderation. Ethical frameworks for platform governance must go beyond technical compliance and consider the broader implications of digital infrastructures for social justice, equity, and democratic participation.

Short video platforms also play a key role in the construction of digital identity and bodily self-presentation. TikTok and Douyin are not only venues for communication but are also stages for curated performances of the self. The algorithmic encouragement of certain aesthetics-such as youthfulness, beauty filters, choreographed dance trends, or reaction memes-produces a culture of optimization and commodification of personal appearance. Scholars have argued that social media platforms create an environment where self-worth becomes entangled with metrics of visibility and engagement [12]. On TikTok, this process is intensified by the platform’s reward structure: aesthetic conformity and trend participation are often prerequisites for virality. This has significant implications for how users perceive their bodies, identities, and social capital, especially among

adolescents and marginalized groups. The construction of identity online becomes an iterative process, mediated not only by peer feedback but also by opaque algorithmic preferences.

Moreover, the entertainment economy fostered by these platforms reshapes temporal structures in users' lives. Unlike traditional media, which often follow scheduled programming and fixed formats, short video platforms promote a temporality of infinite availability and perpetual novelty. The endless scroll design erodes clear temporal boundaries between activities, making entertainment a constant background activity. As a result, users may experience attention deficits, reduced productivity, and difficulties engaging with long-form content. This aligns with the theory of social acceleration, where time compression and digital saturation lead to feelings of disorientation and alienation [13]. The entertainment economy, therefore, not only modifies consumption behavior but also restructures the rhythm and quality of everyday life.

Furthermore, while platforms like TikTok and Douyin are often praised for democratizing fame and empowering creators, structural inequalities persist. Access to visibility is not evenly distributed; it is shaped by the logic of algorithmic curation and influenced by users' demographic profiles, geographic locations, and socioeconomic status. Research has shown that creators from marginalized communities often face systemic bias—such as reduced algorithmic amplification or content moderation disparities [14]. These dynamics challenge the narrative of digital democratization and suggest that entertainment platforms may replicate, and even intensify, existing social hierarchies. To address these disparities, platform governance must move beyond superficial diversity measures and adopt transparency, accountability, and fairness in algorithmic design.

The existing scholarly literature reflects growing concern over the opacity and power of recommender systems. While personalization algorithms enhance user engagement, they also undermine user autonomy by restricting content exposure to what is already familiar. This leads to epistemic closure, reinforcing ideologically homogeneous networks and limiting critical reflection. To confront these issues, researchers have proposed algorithmic auditing frameworks and design interventions aimed at reintroducing randomness, serendipity, and user control into recommendation systems. Initiatives such as algorithmic explainability and user customization tools represent promising steps, but their implementation remains inconsistent across platforms. As algorithmic curation becomes the dominant mode of content delivery, there is an urgent need to embed ethical principles into the core of platform architecture.

4. Conclusion

The rise of short video platforms like TikTok and Douyin has not merely added a new genre to the media landscape; it has reconfigured the architecture of attention, the grammar of communication, and the logic of consumption. These platforms represent a new phase in the evolution of the entertainment economy—one that blurs the boundaries between leisure and labor, identity and commodity, user and product. The entertainment economy, as enabled by these platforms, reshapes not only how people consume content, but also when, why, and what they consume.

This study synthesized theoretical frameworks including Uses and Gratifications Theory, platform capitalism, and critical algorithm studies, demonstrating how user behavior is both self-directed and structurally conditioned. Through the analysis of four behavioral shifts—fragmented viewing, instant gratification, participatory creation, and impulsive consumption—along with in-depth case studies such as micro dramas and livestream concerts, the study presented empirical evidence of changing digital habits.

Key challenges, such as attention fragmentation, algorithmic bias, and commercial oversaturation, were explored alongside platform-, user-, and industry-level optimization strategies.

This study proposes that platforms adopt design principles that encourage diverse and substantive content; users develop digital literacy and intentional consumption habits; and industry regulators craft ethical and transparent guidelines to ensure long-term well-being in the digital entertainment economy.

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies to assess the cumulative lifestyle impacts of short video use and conduct comparative analyses between TikTok and Douyin to understand how cultural and regulatory factors shape digital consumption. It is crucial for academia, policymakers, and platform stakeholders to work together in order to design a more equitable, creative, and reflective entertainment ecosystem. To the media landscape; it has reconfigured the architecture of attention, the grammar of communication, and the logic of consumption. These platforms represent a new phase in the evolution of the entertainment economy—one that blurs the boundaries between leisure and labor, identity and commodity, user and product. While they offer unprecedented opportunities for creativity, connection, and commerce, they also pose profound challenges to cognitive autonomy, cultural diversity, and collective well-being. As such, they demand sustained scholarly attention, cross-disciplinary inquiry, and coordinated policy response. Future research should focus on longitudinal impacts, intersectional user experiences, and comparative institutional contexts to fully understand how platformized entertainment is reshaping the fabric of contemporary life.

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