

The Influence of Social Media Usage Motivations on Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

Social media platforms have transformed the ways in which people communicate, connect, and consume material. With smartphones, this has grown to encompass prospects from everyday life all over the world. Of these, one of the fastest-growing platforms is Douyin, as known as TikTok, especially for the young audience. The combination of algorithmic personalization and short-form video contents of Douyin makes it indisputably a compelling tool for both entertainment and social interaction. However, the influence of social media platforms like Douyin on psychological well-being (PWB) has become a critical area of concern, increasingly capturing the attention of researchers and professionals in the field of PWB. This becomes particularly relevant in light of the fact that various motivations for usage on the platform may have positive and negative influences on PWB. The theoretical framework of this paper is rooted in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) to assess how Douyin use affects PWB. The specific psychological well-being differences that arise from diverse motives for usage form the basis of this research study. For this study, Douyin usage motives are the independent variable, while PWB is the dependent variable. It will also provide additional information about how different motives for using Douyin influence the PWB of user.

Keywords: Douyin (TikTok), Psychological Well-Being, Uses And Gratifications Theory, Social Media, Social Media Motivations.

Introduction

Among social media, the most popular are short video applications like TikTok, which is called Douyin in China. It has risen to global prominence in a very short time and has become one of the leading social media platforms globally. In 2023 alone, Douyin's global downloads surpassed 4 billion, making it the most downloaded application this year so far (Iqbal, 2024). While Douyin has a wide range of content in order to cater for users both as entertainment and to interact socially, it also raises several risks in overuse and psychological dependence. Many studies have pointed out the enormous influence social network platforms have on

users' daily life and interpersonal interactions. For instance, using social media for entertainment can promote relaxation and happiness, whereas engaging with it for escapism may contribute to addiction and diminished PWB, among other adverse effects (Kross et al., 2013; Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017; Ramsden & Talbot, 2024). And when user' needs for entertainment, socializing, information seeking, self-presentation, and seeking recognition are met through Douyin, they may feel more satisfied, thereby enhancing their PWB. According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), people use media with the goal of achieving satisfaction and fulfilling needs, which is similar to addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Therefore, understanding whether the motivations for using social media are satisfied is crucial for users' PWB.

In today's digital era, the rapid development of smartphones and multimedia technology has profoundly changed the way people communicate, socialize, and entertain themselves (Shanmugasundaram & Tamilarasu, 2023). With the continuous advancement of the Internet, social media usage has been steadily increasing, becoming an essential part of daily life for contemporary people. Consequently, academic research has focused on the relationship between social media use, user well-being, and the impact of various online behaviours, particularly how these behaviours meet the needs of individuals in different regions (Lian, 2022). In recent years, an increasing number of studies have been based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Zolkepli, Kamarulzaman, & Kitchen, 2018), Self-Determination Theory (Sheldon & Titova, 2023), the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Gerson, Plagnol, & Corr, 2016), and the Technology Acceptance Model (Camilleri & Falzon, 2021). These theories and models have been utilized across various disciplines, including communication studies and psychology, to explore the use of SNS and its impact on well-being (Hylkilä et al., 2024). Moreover, numerous studies have pointed out that the motivations for social media use have a dual impact on psychological well-being, acting as a double-edged sword. Therefore, it is very important to dig deeper into the area of specific uses and their impacts social media have on psychological well-being (Oksa, Saari, Kaakinen, & Oksanen, 2021; Rae & Lonborg, 2015; Schivinski et al., 2020). For this reason, we should further investigate how Douyin psychological well-being is influenced by using it for specific motivations.

As Douyin has a shorter history compared to other social platforms, it has not received as much research attention as sites like Facebook and Instagram. The Douyin short and engaging video format, with its content delivered in such a very precise way to users, may nurture somewhat different use patterns and motives compared to other social platforms. Consequently, research has established that Douyin is used not only for entertainment and information purposes but also handled as a means of self-expression and social interaction that are significant parts of young people's lives (Gu, Gao, & Li, 2022). Because users have different experiences with the application, their uses of Douyin also vary. It uses personalized content recommendations which are designed to maximize user satisfaction by displaying highly targeted content (Gu et al., 2022).

In summary, studying specific usage motives in relation to Douyin will prove more relevant in examining its effects on users' psychological well-being.

Thus, the specific research objectives of this investigation are to identify the impact of Douyin use motivations on the PWB of users.

Specifically

- To determine the impact of entertainment motivation on Douyin users' psychological well-being.
- To determine the impact of information-seeking motivation on Douyin users' psychological well-being
- To determine the impact of social motivation on Douyin users' psychological well-being.
- To determine the impact of self-presentation motivation on Douyin users' psychological well-being.
- To determine the impact of escapism motivation on Douyin users' psychological well-being.

Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The study bases its conceptual research framework and research constructs on UGT. UGT denotes the active process by which individuals seek specific media and content to fulfill particular needs and desires (Blumler & Katz, 1974). This theory is commonly applied to understand the interaction between media and users and is widely used to examine motivations for social media use (Sichach, 2023).

According to UGT, users use specific social media platforms generally for the needs of content satisfaction and process satisfaction (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). Previous research outlined that these needs include: Entertainment (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016), Information seeking (Liu, Lee, & Bai, 2023; Niu, Shrestha, Ghimire, & Lu, 2023), Socializing (Ko, Cho, & Roberts, 2005; Preece, 2004), Self-Presentation (Huang, 2014) and Escapism (Falgoust et al., 2022; Menon, 2022). This may be quite varied in impact on PWB, depending on the individual and their needs. UGT emphasizes the active user role in choosing and using media for gratifications to be satisfied; it also may explain the linkage that exists between media use and its impacts on users' attitudes, behaviors, and psychological well-being.

Through the investigation of Douyin use motivation, the current study will be using UGT as a theoretical tool. Stafford et al (2004), argue that, in a review of past literature, UGT satisfaction refers to a sense of fulfillment derived by users from their active involvement with media. Whether these needs, also called motivations for use (Bae, 2018) are satisfied by using the media, or whether the purpose of the audience for using social media is attained, becomes an influential variable affecting the audience's PWB. For example, individuals might use TikTok as a platform to fulfill their social and entertainment needs (Sharabati et al., 2022).

Motivations for Douyin

Motivations for Douyin use are the goals and purposes of using Douyin. According to Kross et al (2021), assessing the dynamics of various social media use motivations is essential for determining the impact of such motivations on the well-being of users. The same researchers also believe that such motivations are then related to problematic social media use (PSMU), which, in turn, affects the consumers' PWB (Schivinski et al., 2020b). Accordingly, by identifying and predicting various motivations for use, one finds the respective impacts on PWB. As one of the fragmented sharing platforms, Douyin provides multifarious content, including entertainment, knowledge acquisition, sports, socialization, and shopping, that caters to different user motives.

However, with the use of Douyin, it is found that six kinds of motivations have been put as part of UGT and previous literature: seeking entertainment, seeking convenience, seeking escape, seeking information, seeking social support, and seeking socialization (Bae, 2018). As usually seen in the existing research, three of the major motivations that are most cited include self-expression, social approval, and seeking fame (Falgoust et al., 2022; Shao & Lee, 2020). Besides, the research on Douyin behavior and satisfaction of Danish consumers proves that such motivations are major drivers of Douyin-related behavior (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020). Kuss and Griffiths (2017), identified recreational motivations for social media use as including several factors: entertainment, relaxation, and escapism. Further, convenience and socializing have also emerged as major motivators in using Douyin (Falgoust et al., 2022; Uslu, 2022; Yang & Ha, 2021). In general, entertainment, information seeking, socializing, escapism, and self-presentation are the main specific motivating elements derived from user motivations.

Entertainment

The motivation-related studies on social media platforms very often highlight entertainment motivation as the most visible driving force (Dolan et al., 2016). A structural survey based on a sample comprising Chinese university students showed that entertainment stands out as the primary motivation for Douyin use, where users seek enjoyment, relaxation, and time-passing (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Yang & Ha, 2021). Douyin, as a highly engaging entertainment platform, satisfies users' desires for pleasure by providing an immersive audio-visual experience, particularly during short, fragmented periods of leisure.

Other studies have also claimed that entertainment motivation is not only related to the use of social media but is also an important determinant in explaining the relationship between social media gratification and PWB. For instance, one study measuring short social videos regarding well-being found that their impact depends strongly on their content. Specifically, entertainment-focused videos have been found to impact life satisfaction differently than thematic or character-based videos, with the former sometimes diminishing feelings of fulfilment (Wu et al., 2021). Additional studies indicate that entertainment-driven social media platforms can enhance users' self-representation, which subsequently leads to an improvement in subjective well-being (J. Y. Kim, Chung, & Ahn, 2014; Zhang, Tang, & Liu, 2023).

Information Seeking

The other main motive for using Douyin is information seeking, which, together with entertainment, has consistently been among the most prominent factors (Liu et al., 2023; Niu et al., 2023). Both Douyin and TikTok are used to stay updated on trends, news, and educational content. Notably, a study in the U.S. found that 32% of adults aged 18-29 regularly use Douyin for news access (Matsa, 2023). A survey carried out by Ofcom in the UK showed that Douyin is the fastest-growing news source among adults and already has a high level of influence among younger users (Ofcom, 2022). That shows Douyin is not only a platform for entertainment purposes but also an important tool for dissemination and consumption of information, especially among the younger population. The relation between information-seeking motivational factors and PWB for Douyin users make for a complex and multi-dimensional construct. According to UGT, one such view is that Douyin use is driven to gratify entertainment and emotional needs, which in turn shapes behaviours of content consumption and creation.

One of the studies examined the direct effect that social media gratification had on PWB; indeed, it proved that such a sense of fulfillment plays an important role in young adults' PWB. However, adverse health outcomes have been linked to the interaction of social media with other factors. People often engage in information seeking on social media to satisfy their desire for knowledge (Reichelt, 2019). Prior research indicates that adolescents experiencing low moods frequently use social media to distract themselves by seeking more uplifting content (Radovic, Gmelin, Stein, & Miller, 2017). Increased social media use, particularly for information-seeking purposes, has been shown to reduce feelings of isolation (Yue Chen & Gao, 2023), which positively influences PWB. As such, information seeking can be considered a predictor of PWB.

Similarly, research has demonstrated that using social media for information seeking can significantly boost self-esteem, providing a critical avenue for users to gain social support from peers and online communities (Haslam, Tee, & Baker, 2017). Such behaviours not only elevate users' self-confidence but also enhance their overall PWB (Zhang et al., 2023).

Socializing

Douyin serves not only as a short video platform but also facilitates various social interactions through features like commenting, sharing, and video collections (Zheng, 2023). In contrast to traditional media, Douyin's social elements cater to users' needs for community, social connections, and relationship-building, effectively fulfilling their desire for social interaction. Research defines socializing in social media as the interactions and connections facilitated by online platforms (Ko et al., 2005; Preece, 2004). These interactions fulfil users' basic human need for connection, providing opportunities for meaningful engagement and communication. Users primarily engage with platforms like Douyin to connect with others, sustain relationships, and foster a sense of community, especially in scenarios where face-to-face interaction is constrained. Social media platforms with strong personal interaction features, like Douyin, excel in facilitating these social needs. As a social media platform with strong social attributes, Douyin can provide users with online communication, fostering the establishment and maintenance of social relationships and serving as a tool for communication. In a study by Whiting and Williams (2013), on why people use social media, the social motive was the primary reason for users' use of social media, with 88% of respondents indicating they use social media to communicate with different types of users. The social motive has always been an important presence in the study of the motives behind social media use, and with the rise of the Douyin platform, many scholars have also begun to consider social motivation as an important motive for using Douyin. Gao's study emphasizes that Douyin's unique algorithm fosters the creation of distinctive social circles, meeting the socializing and sharing needs of younger users (Gao, 2023). These social interactions help users form and nurture relationships, fulfilling their fundamental social desires (Sampat & Raj, 2022).

Social media users who successfully connect with friends and family often report enhanced mood, reduced feelings of loneliness, and a greater sense of social support. These positive effects contribute significantly to users' PWB. Several studies highlight the link between social media use and improved PWB. Hu, Kim, Siwek, and Wilder (2017), note that online socialization can help alleviate loneliness, a finding echoed in the work of Lou, Yan, Nickerson, and McMorris (2012) and Deters and Mehl (2013). A qualitative study by Falgoust et al (2022),

on 32 college students (aged 18-23) found that socialization ranked as the third major motive for social media use, following entertainment and convenience. The study revealed that social media participation, especially in activities like Douyin challenges, significantly impacts users' psychological and physical well-being. In addition to this, scholars of UGT highlight that social interaction serves as a critical motive for choosing specific social media platforms. A platform's failure to meet this social need can negatively affect users' sense of well-being (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997).

As Mutabazi (2023), elaborates in the text, the core of social media lies in sharing and interaction. Social media transcends its role as a mere technological innovation, evolving into a cultural phenomenon that reshapes the ways individuals engage with their social environments. Platforms that prioritize social interaction foster a sense of belonging and contribute to enhanced life satisfaction among users (Gabbiadini et al., 2020; M. S. Kim, Wang, & Kim, 2023). These platforms play a crucial role in helping young people form close connections, contribute to their positive development, and exert a beneficial impact on their PWB (Lee & Horsley, 2017; Vaingankar et al., 2022).

Self-Presentation

In the context of social media, self-presentation is understood as one of the key motivations for social media use. Huang (2014), in his article refers self-presentation to the conscious or unconscious attempts individuals make to influence the impressions they create during social interactions, and suggests that social media platforms also allow users to engage in interactions, chats and comments that provide opportunities for self-presentation through humours, knowledge sharing and demonstrating competence. The visual anonymity of social media provides users with greater freedom to manipulate features online and present themselves differently than they do in everyday life (Huang, 2014). Another study expresses this as using social media to share oneself versus sharing personal information (Reichert, 2019). Self-presentation is proposed in a study on WeChat by Chen (2020), as the gratification of generating a certain self-image through expression and influencing others' perceptions and attitudes towards oneself. Self-presentation has been widely used in social media-related research as one of the motivations for college students to use social media.

Self-presentation is identified as a major driver for social media use. Huang (2014) defines self-presentation as individuals' conscious or unconscious efforts to shape the impressions they create during social interactions. He further argues that social media platforms facilitate such self-presentation by allowing users to participate in activities like humour, knowledge sharing, and demonstrating competence through comments, chats, and interactions. The visual anonymity provided by these platforms grants users the freedom to alter how they present themselves online, often in ways that differ from their real-life personas. Reichelt (2019), similarly describes this phenomenon as a distinction between sharing oneself and sharing personal information. A study on WeChat by Chen (2020), also frames self-presentation as the pursuit of creating a desired self-image and influencing how others perceive and react to that image. Self-presentation has been widely acknowledged in social media-related research as a key motivation.

The psychological and emotional impact of social media use is closely tied to individual goals and psychological states. Early research into the effects of Internet use identified a direct

relationship between independent variables (e.g., types of Internet use) and dependent variables (e.g., social connections or well-being). Valkenburg and Peter (2009), proposed that the Internet's positive effects on social connections and PWB are driven by increased online self-disclosure. Further studies have indicated that self-presentation strategies used by adolescents on social media can yield both positive and negative consequences for their social and PWB (Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi, & Bano, 2019). On the other hand, social media and other entertaining platforms offer a site for self-expression, social networking experience, and increased self-esteem among campus students. Those with high techniques in self-presentation usually tend to have irresistible impressions and gain high levels of social capital (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017).

On the other hand, self-presenting strategies of adolescents have been found to relate to a number of negative effects like cyberbullying, social comparison, and anxiety. There is a pressure for adolescents to present themselves in a certain way, and once they fail to make it so, feelings of inadequacy or anxiety result. Moreover, inauthentic self-presentation or risky behaviors indeed lead to undesirable results such as social rejection or reputational harm (Yao, Ma, Yan, & Chen, 2014).

Escapism

Escapism is also one of the well-acknowledged motives for using social media. The use of social media for escape involved the use of these sites to escape from the psychological stresses and pressures emanating from daily life as a way of temporary respite from people's daily life or problems (Falgoust et al., 2022; Li, Zhan, Zhou, & Gao, 2021). In the academic literature, "escapism" has been associated with a variety of outcomes, including temporary relief from anxiety and release of stress. Escapism as a coping mechanism and even as a way to avoid social interactions in real life (Tang, Omar, Bolong, Wirza, & Zawawi, 2022). The researchers suggest that while escapism can provide short-term relief, it can also lead to avoidance behaviours that affect long-term well-being. In previous studies, Douyin shared some of the same motivations as Facebook. Such as watching videos or pictures, talking to others online and so on. Some studies on Douyin often refer to Facebook's motivational element of social media use for analysis. In a study on the use motivation of Facebook and other social media platforms, it is proposed that different social platforms have different functional function-centred satisfaction, but these satisfactions have some overlapping elements in the use motivation of different platforms. These overlapping elements include escapism motivation, which also confirms that escapism motivation can be one of the common motivations of social media use platforms (Menon, 2022).

In Douyin's study of use motivation, escapism is also an important use motivation. In the process of social media usage by users, escapism is an important behaviour to exchange satisfaction through the use of social media. The escapism of escaping from real life or reducing stress during the process of updating or liking and sharing, or diverting attention through the comments and likes of others, helps users to temporarily divert their attention from their current psychological state. In Liu et al (2023)'s study of Douyin, escapism was considered the first satisfaction sought, suggesting that people perceive that they can escape from their work or studies, as well as those around them, such as family, friends, classmates, and colleagues, through the use of Douyin.

Whether the escapism motivation is satisfied, i.e., whether the user's original intention of using social media is realized, has an impact on the user's PWB. Successfully escaping from the stress of real life through the use of social software can reduce psychological stress to a certain extent, thus enhancing PWB. In some literature on the study of escapism motivation and PWB, Chiu, Cheng, Huang, and Chen (2013) found that users have positive subjective well-being when the satisfaction of social media can fulfil their motivation to use it. In another study, it was shown that the motivation of social network game players was positively related to subjective well-being. Whether or not the user's motivation to satisfy escapism, entertainment, challenge, and fantasy in social network games is satisfied is an important moderator of the user's psychological subjective well-being (Jin, 2014). Examining the relationship between escapism and user's PWB is critical to understanding how media acts as a coping mechanism to influence PWB.

The Impact of Douyin Use Motivation on PWB

PWB is a multidimensional concept encompassing positive functioning, life satisfaction, and the absence of mental illness (Sharma, Singh, Sharma, Dhakar, & Bharti, 2022). Ryff's six-dimensional model provides a comprehensive explanation of PWB, including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life goals, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Numerous studies have examined the relationship between PWB and social media use among college students. Hernández-Torrano et al. (2020) noted a steady increase in research on PWB over the past few decades, particularly since 2010, with a focus on this demographic.

Scholars have further refined the concept of PWB as an individual's subjective evaluation of life quality, personal development, and positive interpersonal relationships (H.-T. Chen & Li, 2017; Diener, 2009). This review draws on UGT and existing research on PWB. There is evidence that the relationship between social media use and well-being is generally determined by one's motivation to use it (Wang & Deng, 2023). For example, social media use that is specifically aimed at self-presentation motives is associated with a decrease in PWB (Skogen, Johnsen, Bøe, Hella, & Knudsen, 2020). On the other hand, during positive self-presentation, if users receive more comments and likes, their PWB is usually higher (Astatke, Weng, & Chen, 2024). Furthermore, there is a point suggesting that frequent social media use in service of maintaining and enhancing relationships with family and friends may be associated with a more positive PWB among students (Zhang et al., 2023).

Overall, the relationship between social media and PWB is multifaceted. Social media can enhance the PWB of user but can also provoke negative emotions, such as anxiety, which may inhibit well-being. Current research has identified two primary approaches to PWB: the social value approach, based on interdependent self-construction, and the content value approach, rooted in independent self-construction. Jiao, Jo, and Sarigöllü (2017), argue that both social interaction (social value) and content sharing (content value) significantly impact users' PWB. Previous studies primarily focus on factors like social media usage history, frequency of replies, and the number of friends in online environments. However, only a few studies have specifically examined the primary usage patterns and functions of Douyin (Bossen & Kottasz, 2020; Scherr & Wang, 2021). Moreover, most research fails to differentiate between Douyin's diverse functions, such as information seeking, communication, and entertainment, leaving a gap in understanding how specific usage motivations affect PWB.

Conclusion

In recent years, Douyin has seen a significant surge in usage, establishing itself as a widely accepted platform for entertainment, social interaction, and self-expression. The popularity of Douyin's short-form video content mirrors a broader trend in social media towards more dynamic and engaging modes of communication. However, the study of social media has grown increasingly complex, partly due to the diverse ways in which platforms like Douyin are utilized. While Douyin's unique features, including algorithm-driven content and interactive capabilities, have been well-documented, research specifically addressing its impact on PWB remains limited.

The present study investigates the effects of Douyin use motivation on PWB, emphasizing how the different motivational uses—such as entertainment, information, socializing, self-presentation, and escapism—influence PWB. The results demonstrated that though Douyin provides a lot of benefits, for instance, connecting people and offering an avenue for creative expression, it also brings a variety of hazards, especially with regard to social comparison, addiction, and the reduction of self-esteem.

The findings of this review are added to the growing number of studies related to the effect of social media on PWB, especially for Douyin's signature short-form video platform. On the contrary, the influence of Douyin on PWB is quite diverse owing to different motivations and use patterns. This complexity suggests that there might be a potential need for more research on different motivations.

While future studies can attempt to unravel the common factors and differences Douyin shares with other social media platforms regarding influencing PWB, it is also important that future studies continue to test how particular user motivations interact with satisfaction to mitigate or exaggerate the psychological effects of this platform. Although Douyin shares a lot of its functions in common with most mobile social media, the unique nature of the short format video content produced on the platform may lead to unique outcomes that have not yet been fully uncovered. Therefore, more explorations should be done with regard to how Douyin is affecting PWB, especially in comparison with other forms of social media, in reaching a better understanding of the broader implications of its use.

Furthermore, since Douyin gains more momentum day after day and affects users' daily life, the solutions should aim at best practices and strategies holding healthier usage patterns. In understanding the factors contributing to various positive and negative outcomes, educators, mental health professionals, and designers of social media can develop more effective interventions and guidelines to support the PWB of Douyin users. The final emphasize of this research is that the influence of Douyin upon PWB is an issue that merits being researched further, as, after all, its influence on young adults is only likely to increase in the future.

Contribution

This contribution is of paramount importance from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Theoretically, this study extends the literature on social media users' motivations by underlining the crucial role of satisfaction as a mediator between usage motivations and psychological well-being. This thus provides richer evidence about the application of the Uses

and Gratifications Theory in the light of how these particular motivations translate into enhanced well-being through satisfaction.

More practically, the results provide useful guidelines to inform the design and operation of social media platforms. Emphasizing that addressing diverse user needs with regard to their platforms, features, and content strategies invokes user satisfaction and increases the levels of psychological well-being, allowing for higher levels of engagement. This research also provides future scholars with an analytic framework for further investigation of the many-sided relationships between user motivations, satisfaction, and well-being in the use of social media.

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