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ВЛИЯНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ МЕДИА НА ЦЕННОСТИ КИТАЙСКИХ ПОДРОСТКОВ: КЕЙС-ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ РОЛИ ПЛАТФОРМЫ DOUYIN В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

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Аннотация. Анализируется влияние платформы коротких видео *Douyin* (китайская версия *TikTok*) на формирование культурной идентичности и ценностей молодежи. Рассматривается влияние рекомендательных алгоритмов и пользовательского контента платформы *Douyin* на ценности подростков через различные формы коммуникации. Делается вывод о том, что платформа *Douyin* способствует формированию локальной культурной идентичности, но также несет потенциальные риски (эффект информационного кокона и формирование моноценностной системы личности). Отмечается, что эти проблемы могут ограничить доступ подростков к культурному разнообразию, что, в свою очередь, может привести к сужению мировоззрения.

Ключевые слова: социальные медиа; *Douyin*; культурная идентичность; ценности; подростки.

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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE VALUES OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ADOLESCENTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF PLATFORM *DOUYIN* IN A SHAPING CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract. This article analyses the impact of the short video platform *Douyin* (the Chinese version of *TikTok*) on the formation of young people's cultural identity and values. It examines the influence of *Douyin*'s recommendation algorithms and user-generated content on adolescents' values through various forms of communication. It concludes that *Douyin* facilitates the formation of local cultural identity but also carries potential risks (such as an information cocoon effect and the development of a monotheistic personality structure). It is noted that these problems may limit adolescents' access to cultural diversity, which, in turn, can lead to a narrowing of their worldview.

Keywords: social media; *Douyin*; cultural identity; values; adolescents.

Introduction

In the context of digitalisation and globalisation, social media has become a key platform for the cultural identity of adolescents. In China, particularly, *Douyin* (the Chinese version of *TikTok*) has emerged as one of the most popular short-video platforms globally, profoundly influencing the cultural identity, values, and behavioural patterns of young people. According to official data from *Douyin*, the platform has over 700 mln active users, with a significant proportion of these being adolescents. These young people are exposed not only to local culture but also to foreign influences.

However, such influences are not entirely positive. *Douyin*'s personalised recommendation algorithm has raised some potential issues. The platform recommends content based on users' browsing history, likes, comments, and favorites, which, while enhancing the personalised experience, can also lead adolescents into an «information cocoon», where they are exposed only to content that aligns with their interests and preferences, thus neglecting broader cultural values [1; 2]. Moreover, some of the values promoted on *Douyin*, such as consumerism, appearance anxiety, and vanity, may have potential negative effects on adolescents, even leading to the distortion or loss of their cultural identity.

Especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, social media platforms became the primary means for adolescents to connect with the out-

side world. The pandemic caused a sharp increase in the online activities of young people, with *Douyin*'s usage reaching unprecedented levels. The platform's content ranges from daily life and traditional culture to social hot topics and political viewpoints. While this diversity offers adolescents opportunities to explore their cultural identity, it also risks leading them to lose their way amid information overload and conflicting values [1].

According to the 5th National survey on internet use by minors released by the China Internet Network Information Center in 2023, the number of minor internet users in China reached 193 mln in 2022, with 54.1 % of them watching short videos, and platform *Douyin* plays a crucial role in this phenomenon [3]. This widespread usage means that *Douyin*'s impact on adolescents' cultural identity is ubiquitous.

Adolescents are at a critical stage in shaping their personal ideologies, making it particularly important to study how short-video platforms like *Douyin* influence their cultural identity. This research aims to explore, through the typical case of *Douyin*, how digital media can effectively promote the healthy development of Chinese adolescents' cultural identity and values in the context of globalisation. The study also seeks to provide valuable insights for education, cultural communication, and social policy, contributing to the healthy cultural identity and value formation of adolescents.

Materials and methods

This study combines content analysis and case study methods to comprehensively understand the impact of the social media platform *Douyin* on the cultural identity and value formation of contemporary Chinese adolescents. The analysis includes examining popular videos on *Douyin*, the interaction patterns of adolescent users, and the influence of the platform's personalised algorithm mechanism.

Cultural identity. Cultural identity refers to an individual's or group's sense of belonging and recognition of shared cultural traits, such as language, values, and beliefs. It helps individuals understand «who they are» and how they perceive their relationship with others. Cultural identity not only facilitates cultural exchange but also may lead to conflicts and fragmentation of identity [4]. In the context of digitalisation and globalisation,

social media, as a «global cultural melting pot», exposes adolescents to diverse cultures but also risks causing them to lose touch with their own cultural identity¹.

For adolescents, social media serves as an important platform for constructing self-identity. In the digital age, social media provides a virtual space for young people to express and reinforce their cultural identity. However, as a representative social platform, *Douyin* offers diverse cultural expressions while also potentially challenging adolescents' understanding and definition of their cultural identity [2].

Values. Values are the fundamental beliefs and principles that guide human behaviour and decision-making. These principles may vary across different eras but are universally present in human societies. They determine how individuals view themselves and others, guiding the behaviour of individuals or groups. For example, respect for life and the pursuit of happiness are shared values in many cultures.

With the rapid development of the internet, the speed and influence of media have increased, and social media (especially short-video platforms) has become an important channel for shaping adolescents' values [1]. Through platform content, *Douyin* shapes adolescents' views on modern values such as consumerism, vanity, and individualism.

These platforms directly influence adolescents' understanding of the world and their definition of personal values through visual and contextual content dissemi-

nation. Therefore, short-video platforms not only provide space to showcase and reinforce individual cultural identity but also subtly shape adolescents' social values.

Research on the impact of social media on adolescents' cultural identity. Previous research has shown that social media, through platform-based self-expression, provides a new way for adolescents to construct their cultural identity, but also brings the risk of cultural identity fragmentation². Specific groups, such as immigrant adolescents, can use social media to both reinforce their original cultural identity and weaken it due to the pressure from mainstream culture³. Domestic scholars argue that platforms like *Douyin* significantly impact adolescents' values and cultural identity [2]. Some entertainment or commercialised content on these platforms may lead adolescents to deviate from mainstream values. Therefore, it is important to strengthen guidance and implement measures to help adolescents establish healthy values [2].

On one hand, *Douyin*, as the most widely used short-video platform, provides adolescents with new ways of self-expression and promotes the exchange of diverse cultures. On the other hand, *Douyin*'s algorithm mechanism can easily create «information cocoons», potentially narrowing cultural identity [1; 2]. Based on these research findings, this study explores how *Douyin*, through its personalised recommendation mechanism and content dissemination, influences adolescents' cultural identity and value formation.

Results and discussion

Potential impact of *Douyin* content on adolescents' cognition and values. Platform *Douyin* attracts a large number of adolescent users with its engaging, entertaining content and powerful algorithmic recommendation function. The time constraints of short videos (usually ranging from 15 s to 3 min) lead to fragmented and visualised content, which, while helping to capture attention quickly, may result in adolescents having a superficial understanding of local culture without delving into its history and significance.

For instance, popular videos on *Douyin* often use visual symbols, background music, and trending phrases to convey values. Videos about Chinese traditional culture typically reinforce the transmission of national culture by utilising elements like traditional Chinese music and ancient-style clothing. Through watching these videos, adolescents can quickly form an emotional connection to their local culture. Some *Douyin* creators are particularly skilled at evoking emotions, such as through videos about family reunions or nostalgic memories, which easily stir up a sense of national identity and patriotism among young viewers. However, the

platform is also flooded with content that promotes wealth, vanity, and superficiality, which could negatively impact adolescents, leading them away from traditional moral and cultural values [2].

Construction and conflict of adolescent cultural identity. In recent years, platform *Douyin* has vigorously promoted content related to traditional culture, such as the display of intangible cultural heritage and the celebration of traditional festivals. These types of content help adolescents more directly engage with and understand local culture. For example, the videos of Li Ziqi, a creator who has gained popularity both in China and internationally by showcasing traditional Chinese lifestyles, exemplify this trend. Through short videos documenting her handcrafting traditional foods and non-material techniques (such as hand weaving and brewing), Li Ziqi integrates the charm of Chinese traditional culture into everyday life. As shown by H. Y. Shi, H. Y. Cheng, and J. He [5], Li Ziqi's short videos effectively transmit traditional cultural values.

Adolescents who watch Li Ziqi's videos not only experience the aesthetics and values of traditional culture

¹China Internet Network Information Center : website. URL: <https://www.cnnic.net.cn> (date of access: 24.05.2026).

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

but also develop an appreciation for traditional values such as labour, nature, and wisdom in daily life. For instance, the pastoral life and manual skills showcased in Li Ziqi's videos demonstrate the traditional Chinese concepts of «harmony with nature» and «self-reliance», which deeply resonate with adolescents, fostering a sense of cultural identity⁴.

At the same time, *Douyin's* interactive mechanisms (such as likes, comments, and shares) provide adolescents with a platform for self-expression and communication, which helps them find like-minded peers. On this platform, adolescents are influenced by the «peer effect». For example, content from Li Ziqi, which highlights rural life and traditional culture, spreads rapidly and creates a «group effect» among young users⁵. Seeing their peers actively participate in discussions may encourage them to join in and emulate the behaviour, using similar filming techniques to showcase their hometowns

and cultures. This process strengthens their recognition of traditional culture. However, *Douyin's* recommendation algorithm is also prone to forming «information cocoons», meaning that the platform pushes content based on personal interests, limiting the range of cultural perspectives adolescents are exposed to and preventing them from developing a more comprehensive understanding of diverse cultural values [1; 2].

Potential issues. *Douyin's* algorithm tends to recommend content based on users' preferences, which enhances the user experience but may result in adolescents being exposed to a narrow range of content, thereby overlooking other cultural values. This creates an «information cocoon», where the information they encounter becomes narrow, limiting their ability to fully appreciate the diversity of culture [1]. This can lead to confusion and conflict regarding cultural identity, an issue that warrants attention⁶ [2].

Conclusions

The research results indicate that *Douyin* plays a positive role in shaping adolescents' local cultural identity through symbolic and emotional content, especially through creators like Li Ziqi [5]. However, under the influence of foreign and popular cultures, there are potential changes in adolescents' values, demonstrating the dual nature of short-video platforms in shaping cultural identity and values.

Moreover, *Douyin's* interactive mechanisms reinforce the «peer effect». Through likes, comments, and imitation, adolescents further consolidate their recognition of specific cultural values. However, *Douyin* also brings the risk of the «information cocoon» phenomenon,

which could narrow cultural identity and limit exposure to diverse cultural perspectives.

Future research should further explore how to optimise platform dissemination to promote multicultural communication and avoid the narrowing of cultural identity. Additionally, educational policies can provide guidance on the use of social media, helping adolescents build their cultural identity. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparative studies in different cultural contexts could offer broader perspectives, exploring the multidimensional impact of social media on adolescents' values in the context of globalisation.

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⁴China Internet Network Information Center : website. URL: <https://www.cnnic.net.cn> (date of access: 24.05.2026).

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.