

Research on Ideological and Political Education of College Students Under the Popularity of Short Videos

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Abstract

The domain of mobile short video content is developing at an unprecedented rate. Its inherent media features align seamlessly with effective means of leader-driven mobilization, facilitating the effortless acquisition of trust, the creation of information silos, the propagation of influential content, and most importantly, a profound impact on college students. This proliferation, however, carries with it latent risks — potential losses in control over educational discourse, risks related to content production, and threats of digital addiction. It also introduces new variables to the ideological and political education of college students. This situation demands that platforms accept their responsibility, that industry norms are observed, and education systems are adaptive and effective. Only then can these variables within mobile short video usage be converted into gains for the ideological and political education of college students.

Keywords: short video, ideological and political education, college student

1. Introduction

In our current digital era, the field of short video content is witnessing accelerated growth. As per the most recent data from QuestMobile, in all sectors of the Chinese mobile Internet industry, short videos have the highest user time engagement and continue to sustain their rapid growth rate. (QuestMobile, 2023) This medium satiates the modern populace's desire for expressiveness with more innovative, intuitive, lively, and varied techniques, thus attracting a large demographic of college students who are receptive to new trends. A survey conducted in April 2022 by the China Youth Network Campus News Agency, which involved 11,267 college students nationwide, found that 80.32% of the participants frequently use short videos. As per the study, 38.6% of respondents engage with short videos for 1-2 hours daily, 26.48% watch for 2-5 hours, 17.04% spend less than 1 hour, and 17.04% engage for more than 5 hours daily. Over 90% of users consider short videos a means for entertainment and relaxation, while over 70% agree that it's easy to become hooked. (China Youth Network, 2022) In the contemporary sociocultural context, short videos have emerged as an essential part of social interactions. While they provide college students with entertainment, information, and a platform for broader social engagement, they simultaneously pose numerous hidden risks, thereby bringing challenges to the ideological and political education of these students.

2. Impact of Short Videos on College Students' Thought Processes

Gustave Le Bon, in his influential book *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, highlighted three modes of action used by leaders: affirmation, repetition, and contagion. He demonstrated how these factors could rapidly transform popular opinion into a widespread belief. (Le Bon G, 2002) Short videos, as a media form, align remarkably well with these three methods of mobilization, acting almost like a natural "leader" that effortlessly earns trust, constructs information cocoons, and instigates potent contagion, thus significantly swaying the thought processes of college students.

2.1 How to Easily Gain Trust in Short Videos

The rise in popularity of short videos mirrors the pervasive fast-food culture we see today. Audiences, in their quest to consume more in less time, have gravitated towards the fragmented, easily digestible nature of short videos. Unlike the exhaustive and intricate reporting of newspapers and TV news, the conveyance of news on short video platforms merely requires straightforward text or a voice-over. Take for example the news from March 3, 2023, that “both parents of post-95 graduates, who failed their postgraduate entrance examination, managed to pass the exam themselves”. This story gained considerable traction on major Chinese short video platforms like TikTok, Kuaishou, and Video Account. The news originated from a post on Xiaohongshu, where the poster, Ms. Chen, shared that while she failed the exam, her parents, who also took the test, passed. After receiving 21,000 likes on Xiaohongshu, the story was picked up by the media and disseminated on various short video platforms. The media outlets, instead of conducting thorough interviews or on-the-spot reporting, simply took screenshots of the posts, integrated some unrelated video clips, and rounded it off with text and voice-over commentaries from the involved parties. This resulted in a buzz-worthy piece of news that sparked wide-ranging discussions and debates, with college students being the most active participants. Interestingly, they exhibited little skepticism, instead sharing anecdotes about their own high-achieving parents. However, the narrative took an unexpected turn on March 4, when a reporter from the Yangzi Evening News suggested the news could be a recycled marketing piece. Following this revelation, the post was deleted and the account was cleared mere hours after the reporter reached out for an interview. Despite the absence of concrete evidence, by 23:00 on the 3rd, the topic had garnered nearly 300 million views and continued to circulate widely on short video platforms, with many college students still believing in its veracity. This striking impact, achieved with minimal yet potent evidence, underscores a powerful capacity of short video platforms that traditional news reporting struggles to match.

2.2 How Myopia Fabricates Information Cocoons

Short video platforms are rife with repetitive content and operate under a blend of stringent and lax content moderation mechanisms. If a video comprises non-original or non-creative material, even if it successfully gets published, the platform quickly curtails its reach to impede widespread circulation. Nevertheless, simple modifications to graphics, subtitles, soundtrack, or special effects can often bypass the content review process. In contrast to traditional media, where the concepts of resharing and rebroadcasting are constrained by column space and require curated content selection, short video platforms allow unlimited news pieces without any enforced correlation among the shared content. The strategy of these platforms focuses on reporting traffic volumes, whereby they aggregate, deliver, and reshape popular online content. Their ultimate goal is to instigate a ‘qualitative change’ in follower growth, driven by the ‘quantitative change’ of extensive news sharing. Moreover, short video platforms incorporate algorithmic recommendation systems. If you engage with a news item for a significant duration and participate in interactions like commenting, liking, or sharing, chances are you’ll encounter similar content by different media sources on your next browse. As noted by Sunstein, this strategy limits consumers’ exposure to a diverse range of information. (Sunstein CR, 2006) By continuously pushing content that aligns with our interests, these short video platforms encase us in so-called “Information Cocoons”.

2.3 How Short Videos Can Be Powerfully Contagious

The key to generating substantial traffic on short video platforms lies in tracking and responding to trending topics. These ‘hot spots’ represent areas of heightened public interest. By maintaining a pulse on such trends, the platform’s big data algorithms can connect you with a receptive audience, thereby driving attention and traffic your way. For instance, in the first quarter of 2022, a list detailing the national college’s comprehensive influence on the Chinese short video platform, TikTok, was published. According to the list, the user @Minjiang University held the top spot, boasting an impressive 109.38 million views and 2.37 million likes. Following closely was the user @Shanghai Ocean University, who shared a hand gesture dance and amassed 73.73 million views and 1.85 million likes. A similar gesture dance video by @Wuhan Textile University secured the third position. (China College students Online, 2022) Despite each of these videos featuring identical background music and choreography, different college students performing the routine at various campuses kept the content fresh. These staggering view and like counts underscore the incredible virality potential of short video platforms. More so, they highlight that audiences, including college students, have a seemingly insatiable appetite for trending content.

3. What Kind of Hidden Dangers Are Brought by Short Videos

3.1 Hidden Danger of Loss of Educational Discourse Power

The advent of short videos has significantly widened the avenues through which college students can access information, engage socially, and participate in public discourse. However, it has also escalated the diminishing

influence of education's voice. Taking into account the current digital educational platforms in colleges and universities, various new media outlets such as official websites, Weibo, WeChat public accounts, and Yiban have been launched by significant institutions to meet the requirements of new media ideological and political education, thereby amassing a degree of influence. However, with the dawn of the short video era, the focal point of new media education has shifted yet again. Although many Chinese colleges and universities have established related short video accounts, many are yet to form a team proficient in short video creation and dissemination. Aspects such as the quality of content, frequency of updates, and fanbase size need significant improvement. Simultaneously, the way short videos communicate information — using a blend of visuals and text — can stimulate college students' senses completely, address their needs accurately, and offer unceasing updates. As noted by Lin Chen and Hongmei Gu, "Many college ideological and political educators struggle to keep pace with students, and fail to comprehend the students' concerns in the new media landscape. Consequently, the authority of college ideological and political education has been significantly undermined." (Chen L & Gu H., 2020) The continuous flow of engaging content and substantial updates offered by short videos are further eroding the influence of college education and weakening the actual impact of ideological and political education for college students.

3.2 Hidden Dangers of Content Production

The content production model of short video platforms is primarily driven by traffic, where traffic is a measure of attention and popularity. To the platform, this attention translates into revenue. Factors such as completion rate, the volume of comments, likes, and shares are all considered when determining if a piece of content can engage an audience. If it succeeds in doing so, the platform then directs more traffic towards that content. Moreover, on these short video platforms, traffic can even be bought outright. For example, TikTok offers "DOU+", Kuaishou has "Fenniao", and Video Account has the "Heating Plan". These platforms also provide tailored services, allowing users to pay for increased comments or views. In essence, traffic is a commodity designed to facilitate the monetization of content. Under this production model, creators may initially not set out to monetize traffic. Still, they may find themselves under the sway of the system, essentially serving as tools to indirectly satisfy market demands. Therefore, even content released by mainstream media on these short video platforms may see its authority eroded and its educational value sidelined in favor of more engaging and entertaining content. Consider, for example, the case of short video operators in colleges and universities. Since these operators typically run non-certified media accounts, they are not allowed to publish news content as per platform guidelines. Consequently, they can only produce creative content. This dynamic can trigger a content production crisis, as college operators might find that carefully crafting an educational video generates far less interest than producing a casual gesture dance. As the commercial logic of consumer society takes precedence, ideological and political education begins to seem like a thankless task. The result is that college students are ultimately presented with the same kind of entertaining and popular content, regardless of the source.

3.3 Hidden Dangers of Mental Addiction

Technology, in and of itself, is morally neutral; however, platforms can be designed to encourage social connection as well as induce addiction. Zhengwei Zhao identified a closed-loop relationship between addiction to TikTok, a popular short video platform, and the optimization of its algorithm. (Zhao Z, 2021) The design of present short video platforms, largely mirroring TikTok's model, is evolving in a direction that increasingly fosters user addiction. This contributes to a dual addiction among college students, positioning them as both consumers and creators of content. As consumers, big data algorithms allow college students to obtain instant gratification through the simple action of swiping across the screen. The platform's intentional obscuration of time makes it challenging for students to halt their viewing habits once they start consuming short videos. In addition to being viewers, college students are also creators of short videos. When the videos they create are made public, they may receive positive feedback in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Such positive responses can strongly motivate them to produce their next video. However, feedback isn't always positive. A video lacking likes and comments can lead to feelings of confusion and discomfort. When students utilize the same soundtrack as others, mimic the same actions, or even apply the same beauty filters, but their engagement levels differ from others or their own previous videos, such unpredictable feedback can also motivate them to create more content. Therefore, regardless of whether they are viewers or creators, college students are at risk of developing a psychological addiction to these platforms.

4. How to Transform Short Videos into Ideological and Political Increments

4.1 The Platform Is Responsible

To convert short videos into useful tools for ideological and political development, platforms must assume responsibility. First, a short video platform needs to lead by values and demonstrate responsibility. Rather than focusing solely on traffic and the commercial interests tied to it, these platforms must carry their duties to their users and society, allowing mainstream values to guide their algorithms. There's a need for improvement in their

overarching design, by amplifying the presence of content recommendations aligned with mainstream values in their algorithmic recommendations. This would entail a structural reform on the supply-side in the field of information production, to ensure the prominence of value leadership and responsibility. Second, the short video platform must show responsibility in its technical design. A blind pursuit of user engagement could sow seeds of long-term problems for the platform's development. Short video platforms need to proactively implement robust anti-addiction measures for younger users and restrict the amount of time they spend on short videos. For adult college students and other users, they should launch a reminder system to prompt users about their daily online time and encourage them to take timely breaks. Lastly, the short video platform needs to be accountable for its review and supervision process. This would entail improving content review and supervision procedures, severely penalizing breaches of laws and regulations, and violations of social norms and ethics, and eliminating content that involves "sex, ugliness, strangeness, fakeness, vulgarity, and gambling". An enhanced real-name authentication process should be introduced to ensure traceability of posts and comments; a blacklist system should be established to strictly regulate those on the list; and the reporting mechanism should be optimized to block sensitive content in real time. Only when a short video platform upholds its role in value leadership, technical design, and review and supervision can it foster sustainable and healthy development. In doing so, it can better assist college students in their growth.

4.2 The Industry Has Its Own Laws

If a short video platform assumes responsibility, it may inevitably sacrifice a portion of its profits. Capital is bold when profits are assured, therefore, it can't simply rely on platform self-discipline. Industry regulation laws should be introduced. Relevant government departments have already begun to take action. For instance, on March 13, 2023, the Central Cyberspace Administration issued a series of special action plans under the "Qinglang" series, aiming to strictly rectify the chaos in "self-media" across key platforms like social networking, short videos, and live broadcasts. However, these state departments face challenges due to legislative delays, fragmented measures, and temporal lag in handling detrimental information. The system to hold accountable those who produce harmful information — that is, the offenders — evidently still lacks sufficient legislative backing. Relevant departments should enhance legislative, law enforcement, and judicial system measures, pushing short video platforms to fulfill their primary responsibilities. They should leverage robust political means to amplify the supervision of short video platforms. Furthermore, the industry shouldn't allow criteria designed by platforms based on their interests to become the only standard for evaluating video content. A top-down approach should be adopted, employing methods like organizing short video contests for college students or selecting the top ten short video operation awards for universities. Values and moral concepts should be considered essential assessment criteria for video content. Non-certified media accounts, which are unable to publish news-style content, should receive guidance and affirmation when creating content. This would motivate them to invest more enthusiasm in creating mainstream content. Only in this way can the audience be exposed to more high-quality mainstream content. This would lead to a virtuous cycle of creation, education, communication, and audience feedback, with audience feedback supporting further creation. This can ultimately achieve the goal of gathering widespread social consensus.

4.3 Education Plays a Role

University educators should stay attuned to student trends, drawing on short videos as resources in their pedagogical approaches. It is important to fully leverage the minutiae of life, showcasing positive energy from all angles. Practical cases can leave a lasting impression on college students, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political education. Simultaneously, educators must organize, coordinate, and guide students to actively engage in the creation, dissemination, appreciation, and analysis of platforms like TikTok. In doing so, short videos can become an innovative medium for ideological and political education. Methods such as hosting campus short video competitions can stimulate student creativity, respect, and emphasize their central role in the process of engaging with short videos, sparking their creative desire and potential. It is also essential to build a robust management team, technical team, and service team to operate behind the scenes of short videos. These teams must enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and ideological and moral qualities. By transforming them into politically reliable and technically skilled implicit ideological and political educators, short video platforms can become powerful new mediums for ideological and political education. This fosters the cultivation of socialist core values and promotes the dissemination of positive energy in cyberspace.

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