

“Why do users keep coming back to TikTok? Understanding users’ motivation toward the continuous use intention of Chinese adolescent social media users”

AUTHORS	Jinhua Shao  Meiling Zhao  Yan Lyu Yugang Chen
ARTICLE INFO	Jinhua Shao, Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu and Yugang Chen (2023). Why do users keep coming back to TikTok? Understanding users’ motivation toward the continuous use intention of Chinese adolescent social media users. <i>Innovative Marketing</i> , 19(3), 134-144. doi: 10.21511/im.19(3).2023.12
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/im.19(3).2023.12
RELEASED ON	Friday, 08 September 2023
RECEIVED ON	Monday, 17 April 2023
ACCEPTED ON	Wednesday, 09 August 2023
LICENSE	 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
JOURNAL	"Innovative Marketing "
ISSN PRINT	1814-2427
ISSN ONLINE	1816-6326
PUBLISHER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

49



NUMBER OF FIGURES

2



NUMBER OF TABLES

4

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 17th of April, 2023
Accepted on: 9th of August, 2023
Published on: 8th of September, 2023

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Yugang Chen, 2023

Jinhua Shao, Ph.D., Lecturer, School of
Humanities and Social Sciences, Anhui
University of Science and Technology,
China.

Meiling Zhao, Ph.D., Lecturer, College
of Tourism, Hainan Tropical Ocean
University, China. (Corresponding
author)

Yan Lyu, Ph.D., Assistant Professor,
School of Humanities and Social
Sciences, Anhui University of Science
and Technology, China.

Yugang Chen, Ph.D., Assistant
Professor, School of Art, East China
University of Technology, China.



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Conflict of interest statement:
Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

Jinhua Shao (China), Meiling Zhao (China), Yan Lyu (China), Yugang Chen (China)

WHY DO USERS KEEP COMING BACK TO TIKTOK? UNDERSTANDING USERS' MOTIVATION TOWARD THE CONTINUOUS USE INTENTION OF CHINESE ADOLESCENT SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

Abstract

In recent years, the TikTok platform has made a significant impact in the social media market worldwide, now holding a large market share in the short video service market popular with young people. Despite all this success, there is little research on how Internet users become loyal to TikTok. Hence, this study proposes a framework based on the use and gratification theory to evaluate the antecedents of adolescents' continuous use motivations and behavior, and how they influence teenagers' continuous use of TikTok. The survey population for this study was reached both online and offline. A total of 362 adolescent Chinese users of the TikTok platform were surveyed. The results show that self-expression, entertainment, information seeking, communication, and passing time were derived as adolescents' motivations to use TikTok. Among these motivations, entertainment, communication, and passing time positively affect user satisfaction with TikTok. Furthermore, user satisfaction and loyalty positively affect the intention to continue using TikTok. Finally, this study advances understanding of adolescents' use motivation of TikTok and provides new reference material for the continuous innovation of the short video format.

Keywords

TikTok, use motivation, self-expression, user satisfaction, entertainment, information seeking, communication, passing time

JEL Classification M31, M37

INTRODUCTION

In the ever-changing internet age, mobile media consumption has substantially transformed from text to video content. In particular, with the rapid popularity of the Internet, short videos have become the main medium used by businesses and consumers. In recent years, short video applications have become more popular with social media users. One of the likely reasons for this market breakout is the acceleration of disruptions to the basic life rhythm. People's leisure time has become fragmented into disjointed hours or even dozens of minutes. With the decreasing use of time-consuming leisure activities, more and more people prefer fragmented content, such as playing short videos for entertainment and relaxation. In this way, short video applications help fill the gap of a fragmented life and satisfy people's entertainment needs. Often, these short videos are rich in content, and consumers can communicate with one another on the platforms.

TikTok is a social networking application offering users a platform to post short video content. However, beyond that, it also has distinct functions like filters, background music, and lip-synching templates to create and share videos for communicating with an online community of viewers. TikTok content has been increasingly diverse, including music videos, humorous jokes, fashion trends, social issues, street interviews, public services, advertising ideas, customized businesses, and more. Since the content is short, the video can be a single or a series. Users can subscribe and produce what they prefer, according to their interests. Users can make friends and share experiences through the TikTok application, like disclosing their daily life activities. They can also edit songs and movies to create their own video works.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The central idea of use and gratification theory (UGT) is that people use media for their own needs and are satisfied when they are met (Katz et al., 1973). Generally, the use and gratification theory is based on a traditional media perspective, such as radio, news, and television (Cushion, 2022; Sridhar et al., 2022). However, in today's information society, the use and gratification theory is still useful because it can explain how people use information and entertainment provided by new media such as the Internet. It can explain why and how to use this information and entertainment powered by new media. Kang and Atkin (1999) found that people have specific desires when using media and meet their needs by using particular media.

Contemporary research efforts on the motivation for using new media like social networking services (SNS) are often still focused on specific consumer groups (Jin & Villegas, 2007). In the specific social media market, this was necessary. Therefore, exploratory research was conducted on the use state of SNS based on the use and gratification theory. The main categories of use and gratification theory are information, self-expression, entertainment, communication, and escapism (Pai & Arnott, 2013), where outcomes show strong relationships with consumer use behavior.

In their pioneering effort, Blumler and Katz (1974) mainly utilized the use and gratification theory to study the use of various media. Liu et al. (2020) argued that the use and gratification theory could explain the motivation of SNS users. Rubin (2009) employed the use and gratification theory to study the influence of media on user characteristics and

social structure. Therefore, the use and gratification theory centered on media users is suitable for exploring and studying users' media motivation and behavior (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

A reasonable explanation of the influence of the use and satisfaction theory has been made in preceding research. Moreover, this theory is considered the appropriate theory when studying the sustainability of SNS. Therefore, this study also used this theory to evaluate the motivation of adolescent TikTok users. It used self-expression, entertainment, information, and communication as motivations for adolescents' use of SNSs and as tools for staying in constant contact with the platform (Naqvi et al., 2020).

Short videos attract more users through their features (Wang, 2020). Meral (2021) pointed out that the rapid pace of modern life may partly cause the increasing popularity of short videos. As the pace of life accelerates, people's leisure time becomes fragmented. Therefore, short videos meet the entertainment needs of netizens in today's fast-paced world. Wang (2020) explained that users like short videos on social media because they are short and convenient. Additionally, short videos can provide a wealth of information. Users can generate their own video content or follow and communicate with one another by watching, commenting, liking, and sharing content generated by other users.

Short video applications have continued to grow exponentially in China. After the emergence of TikTok, it quickly became popular among social media users around the world. Therefore, TikTok brings social media users from all over the world closer together. This enables social media influencers and followers to form parasocial ties that facilitate the exchange of services, ideas, and products.

1.1. Relationship between motivations and satisfaction

The emergence of new SNS applications provides users with various media experiences. It means media users can have multiple needs and voluntarily choose and use SNS. Researchers have conducted several studies related to SNS usage motivation. Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identified and classified the motivations of website users as information, entertainment, social interaction, self-expression, passing time, seeking new trends, and career development. Jung et al. (2007) showed self-expression, entertainment, passing time, career development, and communication with family and friends were the most critical motivational elements for Korean SNS users. The focus of this paper is not only limited to identifying the motivations of TikTok users but also how such motivations relate to TikTok use and satisfaction.

Self-expression can take many forms on social media. Positive self-expression by users on social media is often used to express their ideas or positions to prove to others their sense of existence. Through this, they can maintain and expand personal social relationships. Alhabash et al. (2014) and Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) found that if people want to make new friends or maintain a continuous relationship with existing friends, they will use SNS more frequently. Moreover, Johnson and Paine (2007) found that multiple methods of self-expression on SNS improve intimacy or inter-relationship with others.

Use and gratification theory describes that when users choose social media, they believe the satisfaction from personal awareness to usefulness and entertainment comes from media content that satisfies their needs and interests (West et al., 2010). According to Lin and Chu (2021), the use and gratification theory was applied to many specific media studies. So, the entertainment value is best suited as a research requirement for users using TikTok.

Internet users utilize social media for fun and enjoyable interactions when interacting with others in the online community (Hsu et al., 2015). Additionally, internet users seek sensory stimulation when searching for product or service information on SNSs (Lin & Lu, 2011; Hsu et al., 2015; Chen, 2018). The prior studies largely explain why people have em-

braced social networks so quickly and completely (Chakraborty et al., 2002).

The rapidly changing information environment helps expand the social network and information world of internet users (Sin & Kim, 2013). As a popular platform, social networks have great potential as a tool for acquiring, delivering, and sharing information about everyday life (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Through SNS, one can connect to various people, often providing valuable information (Fisher & Julien, 2009).

Information-seeking is the purposeful act of seeking information to satisfy some specific needs. Therefore, information-seeking is one of the basic needs of media use. Based on Pang et al. (2022), users of SNS are motivated by information, which leads to discussion, which leads to opinion, and finally, opinion triggers action. Moreover, Bond et al. (2012) found that online information can directly influence political information-seeking, voting behavior, and the self-expression of users and their friends. It is believed that motivations for seeking information include the desire to hear many perspectives.

Social media platforms are an example of the application of Web 2.0 technologies, which have strongly promoted communication between users in recent years (Chen et al., 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media allows users to receive information while sending their thoughts and ideas to social networks (Yoo et al., 2016). Thus, through social media platforms, users play an essential role in information dissemination, such as passing on information, creating content, and commenting on hot topics. At the same time, users can also communicate with information publishers and other netizens.

In addition to the psychological domain, information expression and communication have been popular topics of use and gratification theory research (Yoo et al., 2016). Communication is essential for information producers because it relies on self-reflection and extensive dissemination (Yoo et al., 2016). While obtaining information through social media, users can also satisfy their need to communicate with other users and their desire to meet new friends.

To pass time, the traditional use and gratification theory framework is used to study motiva-

tions for social media use (Alhabash et al., 2014). Passing time is regarded by some scholars as an aspect of social media gratification (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). For example, Ferguson and Perse (2000) confirmed that passing time is one of the motivations for consumers to use the Internet. In addition, Alhabash et al. (2014) also verified that passing time motivation is still the most influential factor in Facebook use. Since many adolescents lack self-control and time-management skills, they may visit social media platforms such as TikTok to waste time.

Zeglat et al. (2016) said that in the new media competition, satisfaction is critical, and so is the formation of customer loyalty. Bitner (1990) revealed that satisfaction significantly influences loyalty through structural equation models. Susilo (2020) found that e-satisfaction has a positive impact on e-loyalty. These results show that customer satisfaction can increase customer loyalty.

In the use and gratification theory, users employ media based on a specific motivation, and if the motivation is satisfied, it is considered that there will be a repeated media use (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Wenner, 1982). In addition, satisfaction is a significant variable affecting the potential future behavior of media, such as continuous use intention (Chen & Lin, 2015). In addition, Chen et al. (2012) and Chen and Lin (2019) verified the relationship between both user satisfaction and continuous use intention.

Many theoretical models in the preliminary studies can be used to account for the satisfaction of social network users and their intention to continue using these platforms. Kim and Park (2019) validated the hypothesis that the higher the satisfaction with the SNS, the greater the intention to continue using it. According to Mouakket (2015), satisfaction affects habits because the repeated use of Facebook will eventually become habitual if users are satisfied.

1.2. Aims and hypotheses

Due to the explosive growth trend of TikTok, academic research on TikTok is also rapidly increasing. With digital media's development and increasing influence, adolescents have become a

non-negligible group among audiences of interest, either as a target market or research population. Therefore, the aims of this study are as follows:

- (1) Contribute toward a better understanding of adolescents' motivations to use TikTok, which could benefit application developers who want to understand the motivations of TikTok users.
- (2) Evaluate how loyalty affects the relationship between satisfaction and continuous use intention while also examining the impacts of determinants, including self-expression, entertainment, information seeking, communication, and the perception of passing the time.

Since consumers enjoy various social media services or brands to maintain long-standing relationships, loyalty is a direct factor of continuous use intention (Japutra et al., 2014). Kim et al. (2005) found that consumer loyalty to mobile applications is of great significance to continuous use intention and that loyalty has a positive effect on continuous use intention. Based on the cited research, this study can predict that if consumers develop a favorable attitude toward the TikTok application, this will impact their willingness to continue. Therefore, following the literature review, eight hypotheses are suggested:

- H1: Self-expression positively influences satisfaction toward TikTok.*
- H2: Entertainment positively influences satisfaction toward TikTok.*
- H3: Information seeking positively influences satisfaction toward TikTok.*
- H4: Communication positively influences satisfaction toward TikTok.*
- H5: Perception of passing time positively influences satisfaction toward TikTok.*
- H6: Satisfaction positively influences loyalty toward TikTok.*
- H7: Satisfaction positively influences continuous use intention toward TikTok.*

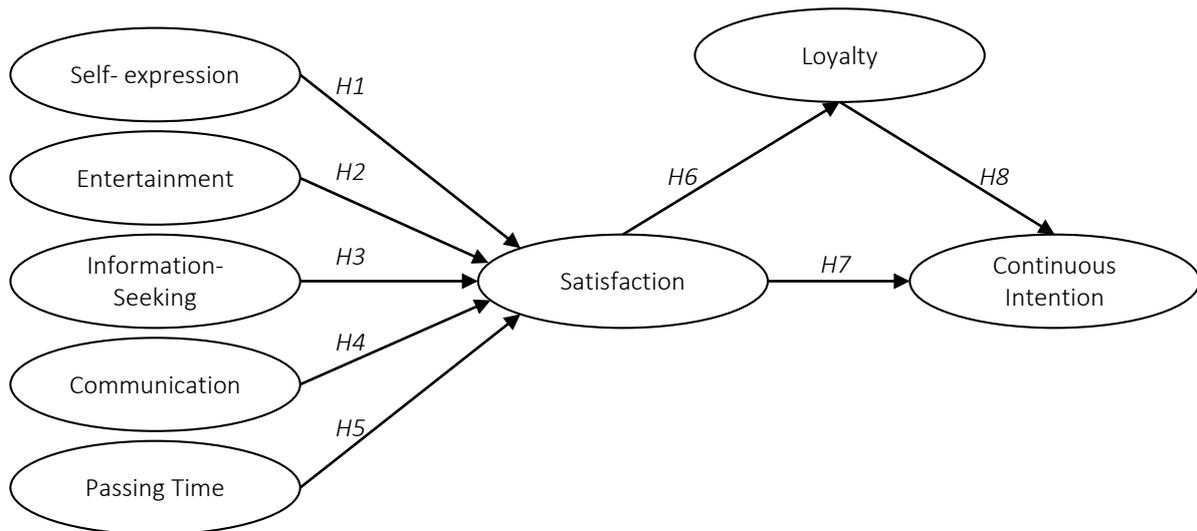


Figure 1. Research model

H8: Loyalty positively influences continuous use intention toward TikTok.

Figure 1 represents the research framework used in the present study.

2. METHOD

To examine the influence of TikTok motivations on satisfaction, brand loyalty, and willingness to continue usage among Chinese adolescents, stratified sampling was conducted among primary, middle, and high school students in Guangzhou Province, China. Data were assembled between March 18, 2021, and March 26, 2021, and both online and offline methods were used. Finally, in total, 366 questionnaires were collected. Four of these were invalid, leaving 362 questionnaires to be used for analysis. As shown in Table 1, in this study, 29.8% of the total respondents were male, while 70.2% were female. Regarding age categories, the majority (48.5%) of the interviewees were within the age group 16-18, and those between 10-12 and 13-15, respectively, took up 28.9%. Regarding students of different educational stages, 105 students in elementary and middle school were selected to correspond with their proportion of 28.9%, with the rest (42.1%) of the students in high school. Regarding the frequency of TikTok usage, the data suggested students using TikTok 1-2 days per week account for 40.5%, 3-4 days per week taking up 20.1%, 5-6 days per week having a ratio of 13.2% of the data. In contrast, those who use TikTok every day occupy 26.2%.

This study performed Partial Least Squares (PLS) using SmartPLS to analyze the empirical data. PLS assists in analyzing the theoretical linkage between exogenous and endogenous constructs.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Profile		Person	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	108	29.8
	Female	254	70.2
Age	10 ~ 12 years	113	31.2
	13 ~ 15 years	74	20.3
	16 ~ 18 years	176	48.5
Grade	Elementary	105	28.9
	Middle	105	28.9
	High	153	42.2
Use frequency	1-2 days a week	147	40.5
	3-4 days a week	73	20.1
	5-6 days a week	48	13.2
	Every day	95	26.2

3. RESULTS

All items measured were based on previous research and have been modified to reflect the reality of the current analysis. The study used composite reliability (CR) to estimate the reliability. A CR of 0.7 is considered to have higher internal consistency (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2018). As shown in Table 2, all CRs of each construct exceed the 0.7 threshold. Therefore, all metrics satisfy the internal consistency of the model.

Table 2. Results of the measurement model

Construct	Item	Loading	Composite Reliability	Cronbach' α	AVE
Communication (CM)	CM1	0.859	0.885	0.868	0.790
	CM2	0.928			
	CM3	0.879			
Continuous Intention (CI)	CI1	0.816	0.773	0.714	0.634
	CI2	0.721			
	CI3	0.847			
Entertainment (ET)	ET1	0.825	0.780	0.778	0.693
	ET2	0.861			
	ET3	0.810			
Information Seeking (IS)	IS1	0.890	0.734	0.613	0.564
	IS2	0.543			
	IS3	0.777			
Loyalty (LY)	LY1	0.881	0.908	0.904	0.766
	LY2	0.923			
	LY3	0.874			
	LY4	0.845			
Satisfaction (SF)	SF1	0.85	0.862	0.860	0.706
	SF2	0.875			
	SF3	0.87			
	SF4	0.761			
Self-expression (SE)	SE1	0.891	0.922	0.837	0.657
	SE2	0.915			
	SE3	0.665			
	SE4	0.743			
Passing Time (PT)	PT 1	0.875	0.847	0.843	0.761
	PT 2	0.847			
	PT 3	0.894			

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	CM	CI	ET	IS	LY	SF	SE	PT
CM	.889							
CI	.364	.796						
ET	.301	.602	.833					
IS	.476	.485	.643	.751				
LY	.218	.627	.416	.371	.881			
SF	.474	.653	.654	.519	.519	.840		
SE	.599	.405	.352	.266	.266	.426	.810	
PT	.316	.547	.588	.357	.357	.536	.341	.872

Note: CM = Communication, CI = Continuous Intention, ET = Entertainment, IS = Information Seeking, LY = Loyalty, SF = Satisfaction, SE = Self-expression, PT = Passing Time.

Table 4. Structural model with path coefficient and significance level

Path	Path coefficient	t-statistic	p-value
Self-expression → Satisfaction	0.058	1.197	0.232
Entertainment → Satisfaction	0.461	8.549	0.000
Information Seeking → Satisfaction	-0.002	0.026	0.979
Communication → Satisfaction	0.248	4.955	0.000
Passing Time → Satisfaction	0.167	3.206	0.001
Satisfaction → Loyalty	0.519	13.192	0.000
Satisfaction → Continuous Intention	0.499	8.707	0.000
Loyalty → Continuous Intention	0.395	7.911	0.000

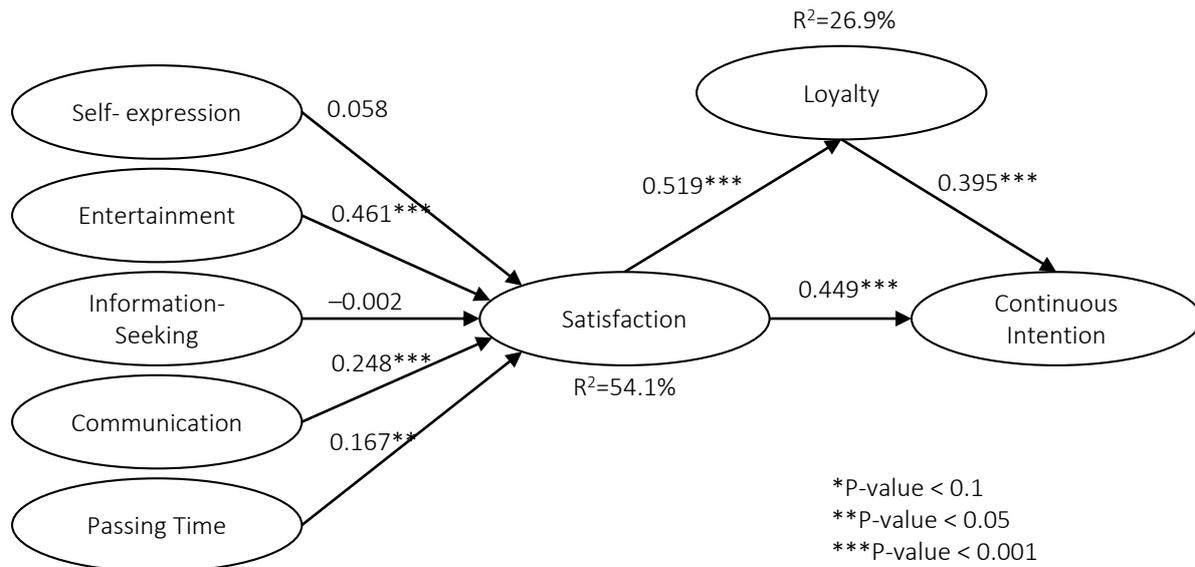


Figure 2. Structural model with path weight and significance level

To evaluate the convergent validity, the paper evaluated each construct’s average variance extraction (AVE). According to the criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the average variance value (AVE) of each construct was considered satisfactory when it was higher than 0.5 (as shown in Table 2).

Further, this study evaluated the correlation between the AVE’s square root and each construct’s correlation coefficients to analyze the discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, the element in the diagonal signifies the square root of the average variance extracted, and the correlation coefficients are shown in off-diagonal positions. According to Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) suggestion, the square root of each AVE should be greater than the correlation coefficient with other constructs. According to Table 3, the discriminant validity was acceptable.

To prove the proposed research hypotheses, the study evaluated the path coefficients for significance and R-squares for endogenous constructs (as shown in Figure 2 and Table 4).

The paths from entertainment, communication, and passing time motivations to satisfaction are positive ($\beta = 0.461, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.248, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.167, p < 0.01$, respectively), showing that entertainment, communication, and passing time motivations increased TikTok adolescents’ satisfaction. However, the paths from self-expression and information-seeking motivations to satisfaction are insignificant ($\beta = 0.058, p$

$> 0.05; \beta = -0.002, p > 0.05$, respectively), indicating that self-expression and information-seeking motivations do not increase TikTok adolescents’ satisfaction. Thus, H2, H4 and H5 are supported. However, H1 and H3 are rejected.

H6 predicted greater satisfaction would increase TikTok adolescents’ loyalty. The path from satisfaction to loyalty is positive ($\beta = 0.519, p < 0.001$ respectively), indicating that satisfaction increased TikTok adolescents’ loyalty. H7 and H8 predicted that greater satisfaction and loyalty would increase TikTok adolescents’ continuous use intention. The path from satisfaction and loyalty to continuous use intention is significant ($\beta = 0.449, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.395, p < 0.001$, respectively), indicating satisfaction and loyalty increased TikTok adolescents’ continuous use intention. Thus, H6, H7, and H8 are supported.

4. DISCUSSION

From the use and gratification theory perspective, this study discussed the influence of use motivation on TikTok adolescents’ continuous use intention. The findings of this study support the view that motivations (entertainment, communication, and passing time), satisfaction, and loyalty, which represent an important goal of TikTok as a positive antecedent, regularly affect continuous use intention.

First, this study has shown that entertainment, communication, and passing time motivations positively influence TikTok adolescents' satisfaction. Teenagers can use TikTok to communicate with other users and feel entertained when bored. Previous studies have shown this relationship between entertainment, communication, passing time, and satisfaction in the context of a short video (Yoo et al., 2016). However, self-expression and information-seeking motivations do not increase TikTok adolescents' satisfaction. This result is inconsistent with the results of Tosun (2012) and Sin and Kim (2013). One possible explanation for this outcome is that traditional Chinese educational culture values silence over self-expression. Therefore, it can be inferred. When the TikTok application appeared, adolescents used TikTok to satisfy their desire for passing time, entertainment, and communication rather than satisfying their strong desire for self-expression. Compared with adults, teenagers usually do not need social media to quickly search for information. Therefore, the result can be well understood.

Second, this study has shown that the effect of adolescents' satisfaction on loyalty and continuous use intention is positive, indicating satisfaction increased TikTok adolescents' loyalty and continuous use intention. Moreover, the effect of loyalty on continuous intention is positive, indicating loyalty increased TikTok adolescents' continuous use intention. This result is consistent with Zeglat et al. (2016) and Susilo (2020).

According to the results, satisfaction and loyalty are critical determining factors in continuous use intention in social media. Continuous use intention is the users' attitude and satisfaction that benefits the online service companies through reuse. Adolescents' continuous use intention, satisfaction, and loyalty are interconnected, which means if users' satisfaction and loyalty increase, continuous use intention will also increase, and conversely, if these situations reverse. Therefore, in this case, satisfaction and loyalty cause adolescents' continuous use intention. These results are consistent with the results of Kim et al. (2005), Mouakket (2015), and Kim and Park (2019).

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze factors influencing the use of TikTok among Chinese adolescents. The findings provide some implications for live commerce that have received much attention in China. TikTok is an essential international platform. Therefore, according to the motivations of TikTok users, live streamers can better understand and meet the needs of consumers when delivering live commerce broadcasts. This can be done by creating an atmosphere of entertainment, humorous jokes, and communication to enhance users' sense of social presence and promote users' consumption behavior. Therefore, this form of live commerce can replace the traditional e-commerce model more quickly and promote the development of the global economy.

The study offers several recommendations for scholars and media practitioners. Prior research on short video platforms, like TikTok, has been insufficient compared to other social media platforms. This study becomes a reference for future research. First, the findings have implications for parents and guardians of adolescents. Since a person's values are almost formed during adolescence, there is a high chance of being lured by many of these social media outlets like TikTok. Particularly, if adolescents' use of social media platforms is not closely monitored by parents or guardians, as with many children, adolescents may be exposed to unnecessary harm.

Second, the findings have implications for social networking service providers. An effective global strategy is needed to improve target market positioning and optimize content and functions. Similar Internet companies in other countries can learn TikTok's advanced technologies and promote the sustainable development in their own countries. However, other countries have also learned that TikTok needs to have stronger measures in place to protect users' personal information. Therefore, if TikTok wants to become a leading global communication platform, it is necessary to strengthen its technology to protect users' personal information. Failure to do so may result in bad publicity as they grow.

This study has some limitations. First, the increasing usage of short video services is due to the widespread emergence of young people in a mobile environment. However, only investigating adolescents when generalizing the analysis of the results is a weakness. In future research, people of different age groups can be used as the research population to differentiate their motivations and usage patterns of TikTok among people of different age groups. Second, TikTok was selected as the test subject in this study. However, with the rapid development of the network era, future studies could consider different types of social networking services. Third, this study is limited by investigating adolescents in only one region of China. Since each country has its own unique culture and social network environment (e.g., open or closed environment), different countries may have different perceptions. Future research should consider additional factors to gain insightful findings that influence TikTok users' intentions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Jinhua Shao, Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu, Yugang Chen.

Formal analysis: Jinhua Shao.

Investigation: Jinhua Shao.

Methodology: Jinhua Shao, Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu, Yugang Chen.

Validation: Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu.

Writing – original draft: Jinhua Shao, Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu, Yugang Chen.

Writing – review & editing: Jinhua Shao, Meiling Zhao, Yan Lyu, Yugang Chen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study appreciated the partial financial support from Research Project of Anhui University of Science and Technology in 2023 (Project topic: Research on the construction and improvement strategy of mobile shopping experience evaluation system from the perspective of experience economy; Grant number: 2023yjrc30) and Key Research Projects of Humanities and Social Sciences in Colleges and Universities in Anhui Province (Project topic: Research on the Management Mechanism and Practical Path of Anhui Free Trade Zone; Grant number: SK2020A0199).

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