Media engagement and gratification patterns in long and short video use among Chinese college students

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ABSTRACT

Short videos and long videos have become the primary forms of media consumption among college students. However, existing research lacks an in-depth exploration of the differences between these two video formats concerning user engagement and satisfaction mechanisms. This study, based on the usage and satisfaction theory, conducts a comprehensive analysis of users' motivations, usage behavior patterns, and satisfaction in choosing short videos and long videos. Thirteen Chinese college students were selected for semi-structured interviews. The results demonstrate distinct engagement patterns among college students when using short videos and long videos. Short videos are characterized by high frequency and low depth of participation, fulfilling shallow and immediate needs. Conversely, long videos exhibit low frequency but high depth of participation, addressing deep-seated and continuous demands. Additionally, users actively switch between media forms based on usage situations and purposes to maximize satisfaction of their needs. This study compares the engagement differences between short videos and long videos among college students, revealing the complementary evolution logic of these two formats. The research findings provide empirical support and theoretical guidance for content strategy development on video platforms, optimization of user experience, and understanding of media consumption behaviors among users.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by comparing the differences between short and long videos to reveal the complementary development of different media types. It is one of the few studies that investigates media engagement in different video formats and focuses on the differences in satisfaction patterns among Chinese college students.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital video ecosystem is undergoing a profound structural change driven by multiple dimensions of technology, market, and user behavior. Users are shifting from passive consumers to active participants, choosing between increasingly complex video formats. The competition between long video platforms, represented by YouTube, Netflix, BiliBili (usually referring to content over 10 minutes), and short video platforms, dominated by

TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts (usually referring to content within 1 minute), has evolved from simple competition for market share to a deep game of user attention, usage habits, and even satisfying patterns [1]. This situation is not a simple competition but is deeply rooted in the diverse media needs of users [2]. The process by which users proactively seek specific media content to meet their cognitive, emotional, social, or personal integration needs constitutes the core logic for understanding the coexistence and competition of long-term and short video platforms [3, 4].

In China, long video platforms, such as BiliBili, and short video platforms, like TikTok, represent two completely different models that meet the diversified needs of users. The difference between long and short videos goes far beyond length. The distinction between these two reflects differences shaped by users' content perceptions, engagement behaviors, and broader sociocultural practices [5]. Long videos and short videos profoundly influence the media consumption patterns and satisfaction mechanisms of college students. Short videos, due to their algorithm-driven "infinite scrolling," highly stimulating content, and highly fragmented characteristics, have been widely proven to efficiently meet users' immediate entertainment needs, relieve temporary stress, provide relaxing social topics, and stimulate curious exploration [6, 7]. The social functions of short-video platforms also enable college students to share interesting content and interact with friends. In contrast, long videos, with deep narrative, information density, and coherence, more effectively serve users' needs for knowledge learning, immersive emotional experiences, building a deep sense of community belonging, and serious issue thinking [8]. Long videos are more suitable for in-depth content presentation and narrative development, meeting users' higher-level cognitive and emotional needs [9]. This fundamental differentiation of satisfaction types not only shapes users' platform choices in different contexts but also drives the platform's differentiated evolution in content strategies, algorithm recommendations, and interaction design [10, 11].

With the continuous development of media technology, short videos and long videos represent the two mainstream video formats chosen by most users. More detailed research is needed on the engagement behavior and need satisfaction of these two video formats in users' daily use. Most of the existing research focuses on a single type of video, mainly short videos, because they are more trendy. Few studies have compared the different performances of these two video formats in meeting user needs [12]. In addition, many studies regard user satisfaction as a fixed concept, ignoring that changes in demand can affect users' choices of long- and short-form videos, thereby bringing about changes in satisfaction [9]. This choice is often based on the user's personal usage situation and needs. Comparative qualitative research, compared with quantitative surveys or case analysis, is easier to improve the understanding of user behavior and needs satisfaction. Therefore, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) will be used as a guiding framework to explore users' media participation behaviors in different video types and the satisfaction mechanisms of multi-dimensional need types [13]. This study focuses on three main research questions.

a. What is the difference in media engagement between long-form and short-form videos?
b. What is the difference in gratification patterns between long videos and short videos?
c. How do changes in user needs affect the choice among different video formats?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Characteristics and Differences Between Long Videos and Short Videos

Contemporary video platforms present unique structures and content paradigms. Long videos (usually over 10 minutes) prioritize narrative coherence and depth, and cultivate sustained attention through complex storytelling [14]. Platforms such as Netflix and BiliBili use high-production-value content (such as documentaries and TV series) to promote cognitive immersion and emotional investment [15, 16]. In contrast, short videos (usually less than 3 minutes, such as TikTok) rely on algorithmic fragmentation and sensory immediacy. Their vertical scrolling interface facilitates fast context switching, reduces cognitive load, and maximizes novelty [17]. This form utilizes user-generated content (UGC) and participatory culture to achieve instant gratification through likes or shares [18, 19].

The core differences between long videos and short videos are reflected in three aspects. Firstly, in terms of time investment and dissemination mode, long videos require deliberate planning of time. Long videos mainly rely on the traditional linear dissemination mode, and users view content in the established playback order [20]. This model is conducive to the systematic and coherent dissemination of information, but it lacks flexibility. Users need to invest more time and energy to receive information in a complete manner, and are limited by time schedules and content rhythm during viewing. Short videos rely on fragmented and intermittent use. Users can watch and switch between different short videos at any time according to their own interests and needs [21, 22]. This dissemination mechanism has greatly enhanced the efficiency and coverage of information dissemination, enabling it to spread rapidly within a short period of time. Secondly, in terms of content, long videos are mainly professionally produced, while short videos rely on decentralized UGC to drive viral transmission [23]. Long videos typically have a longer duration, which allows for the inclusion of more complex storylines, detailed information interpretation, and in-depth analysis. Short videos are characterized by their brevity and conciseness, often transmitting core information within a few seconds to minutes [24]. They can serve as quick demonstrations of life tips, key clips of news events, or short comments on hot topics, effectively capturing users' attention in an intuitive and concise manner. Regarding user participation and interactivity, long videos primarily foster deep thinking and emotional resonance during viewing. However, their interactivity tends to be limited, mainly involving simple feedback methods such as comments and likes. Conversely, short videos tend to have higher interactivity and user engagement. Users can quickly comment, like, and share videos, and also participate in content creation and dissemination by shooting and uploading their own short videos [25]. In addition, from the perspective of the algorithmic logic of the video platform, short videos adopt a highly personalized recommendation engine, while long videos still retain users' active search behavior [26].

2.2. Media Engagement

In the digital age, the concept of media engagement has been redefined. Media engagement has transformed from traditional passive participation to a multi-dimensional practice model that is actively initiated by users. The development of media technology, the content push logic, and users' diverse needs have jointly created a richer media engagement ecosystem. Contemporary scholars define media engagement as a multi-dimensional structure that encompasses cognitive attention, emotional investment, behavioral interaction, and social participation [27, 28]. In the traditional media era, media engagement was mostly limited to passive reception of information, and the role of the audience was relatively singular. However, in the digital age, the media participation model has been deeply reshaped. In the context of video consumption, participation goes beyond mere viewing time, including comments, sharing, content creation, and algorithmic interaction [29, 30]. Engagement is now widely defined as a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activities performed by individuals on media content and platforms, including activities ranging from passive lurking to active co-creation [28, 31]. With the diversification and enrichment of social media platforms, users' motivations for use become more dynamic and diverse, and the media participation model also presents multi-dimensional characteristics, covering cognitive investment (in-depth understanding and thinking of information content), behavioral participation (specific operational behaviors such as likes, comments, and sharing), and emotional participation (emotional resonance caused by media content). Users may interact on social platforms due to social needs, browse hot topics for information acquisition, and may also visit media platforms for entertainment [32]. Audiences no longer passively accept media content, but actively search, filter, and customize information that meets their interests and needs. This paradigm shift reflects a move from passive acceptance to a participatory culture. This engagement pattern enables users to be more proactive in choosing different media forms. To meet individual needs, the framework centered on mass media gradually shifts towards being centered on user needs and participation, and through platform support, they actively co-construct meaning [33].

With the popularity of mobile devices and the continuous development of new media technologies, media participation models are becoming more and more diverse. At the same time, the emergence of immersive media

technology has further deepened emotional participation and cognitive absorption, bringing a transformative experience to media immersion [34]. Users have an increasingly strong need to satisfy deep emotions, so the choice of media types emphasizes personal subjective experience. Users are no longer limited to a single platform or simple experience model but are showing greater autonomy in how they interact with media, making choices based on their personal needs and preferences [35]. Although these are important forms of participation driven by specific motivations, the negative consequences of this media participation model also lead to complex and versatile trends in the digital age [36].

Research on the participation of long video and short video media mainly focuses on surface-level behavioral indicators, such as views, likes, and comments [37]. While these indicators provide useful quantitative measures, they fail to capture the deeper levels of engagement associated with emotional investment, meaning creation, and identity negotiation. The qualitative dimension makes it easier to explain the inherent factors in switching between different media types in daily media consumption by analyzing the user's personal usage experience. Traditional quantitative methods are limited in revealing the dynamic and situational processes by which user motivations and gratifications evolve over time [38, 39]. Due to the difficulty in capturing the dynamic formation process and contextualized evolution of participation motivation, there is a lack of explanatory research that places users' life experiences within it. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a more detailed personal experience exploration of how users build and experience media engagement in both long-video and short-video environments [40].

2.3. Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

Use and gratification theory holds a significant position in the field of communication studies. It explains how audiences actively utilize media to meet their own needs and gain a sense of satisfaction. This theory emphasizes that the audience does not passively receive media information but purposefully selects and uses media based on factors such as their social background and psychological needs [37, 38]. In the era of social media, UGT helps to understand how users obtain information, entertainment, social interaction, and other satisfactions by choosing different platforms, as well as their preferences for various media platforms and online consumption behaviors [32, 39]. Furthermore, when studying the phenomenon of social media addiction, the uses and gratifications theory also provides a perspective to explore the situation where audiences overuse social media to meet certain needs. In the study of online video viewing behavior, the application of this theory further verifies the characteristics of the audience's active choice of media to meet their own needs [41]. The traditional UGT framework needs to adapt to the characteristics of digital platforms to accommodate new user motivations, behaviors, and forms of satisfaction [42]. Digital platforms have changed the way people seek and experience media gratification. Through content creation, users can satisfy their needs for self-expression and social recognition, transforming them from passive consumers to active participants. This kind of active participation is different from traditional passive consumption and has become a defining feature of contemporary social media [43]. Different media platforms address different aspects of user needs but are interconnected. Various media forms intersect and complement each other, and together provide users with a more comprehensive media ecosystem. Understanding this complementary relationship requires not only measuring user behavior but also explaining the meaning of user engagement in different media ecologies [44]. For users, usage habits and subjective intentions play an important mediating role between UGT and usage intentions. Simply meeting needs cannot directly predict usage behavior, but needs to be achieved through the role of habit formation and social norms.

Uses and gratifications theory provides a core framework for understanding users' active media choices. However, when existing studies are applied to comparing long and short videos, they mostly quantitatively measure user motivation and satisfaction through Likert scales [8]. These methods ignore the situational and emotional dimensions of user experience and are difficult to capture the user's dynamic, complex, and contextualized satisfaction process. The trade-off mechanism and unspoken motivations behind this "need-satisfaction" path are difficult to fully

reveal with traditional scales [7], especially when users switch media based on their own needs. The logic of satisfaction formation in this process requires further exploration.

3. METHODS

This research adopted a qualitative exploration method based on the use and gratification theory to investigate the satisfaction of different user demands by long videos and short videos. The research was mainly conducted in a university in Zhejiang Province, China, and it was approved by the university's ethics review committee. Considering the complexity of young people's cross-platform media usage behavior, this research adopts semi-structured interviews as the method. The research is conducted by taking TikTok and BiliBili as typical representatives of short video platforms and long video platforms, respectively. The interview content is centered around dimensions such as usage motivation, situational triggers, content preferences, usage behaviors, satisfaction, and a sense of disparity, to obtain rich and detailed data.

3.1. Participant Recruitment and Sampling

In the digital era, Chinese college students use digital technologies for online learning, social interaction, and information acquisition, demonstrating a high acceptance and usage frequency of digital technologies as well as adaptability to the technological environment. The participants of this study are Chinese college students. The selection criteria are college students currently enrolled and using both TikTok and BiliBili simultaneously. The final sample included 13 participants (7 females and 6 males), from different grades, and had different usage behaviors for TikTok and BiliBili (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

No.	Gender/Age	Grade	Typical behavior
P01	Male /19	Second year	A deep user of TikTok
P02	Male /20	Junior year	Learn technical/Software tutorials on both BiliBili and TikTok
P03	Female /21	Senior year	Search for design news on TikTok and learn software tutorials on BiliBili
P04	Male /22	Senior year	Watch technical videos on TikTok and anime on BiliBili
P05	Female /18	Freshman	Watch the plot commentary on TikTok and documentaries on BiliBili
P06	Male /19	Second year	Watch funny videos on TikTok and learn professional knowledge on BiliBili
P07	Female /20	Junior year	Watch medical science popularization videos on BiliBili
P08	Female /21	Senior year	Watch travel videos on BiliBili
P09	Female /19	Second year	Watch funny videos on TikTok and anime on BiliBili
P10	Male /20	Junior year	Search for tutorials on TikTok
P11	Male /22	Senior year	BiliBili is used for learning postgraduate entrance examination knowledge, while TikTok is mainly used for entertainment
P12	Female /18	Freshman	Watch funny videos and share others' daily lives on TikTok
P13	Female /21	Senior year	Watch all kinds of videos on TikTok and share life

3.2. Data Analysis

This study uses the thematic analysis method to systematically analyze the interview data. Thematic analysis can better verify the different motivations, satisfaction levels, and usage behaviors of Chinese college students towards short videos and long videos, and at the same time, it is easier to identify the common patterns and potential relationships among them [45]. Compared with previous descriptive studies on a single medium, this study is able to construct a comparative framework between short videos and long videos through thematic analysis, highlighting the explanations for the differences in media participation and gratification patterns. The study followed the six-step thematic analysis process to discuss participants' usage behaviors, preferences, and the satisfaction of their needs for

long videos and short videos [46]. The interview contents are transcribed and imported into NVivo 15 for reflective thematic analysis of the verbatim transcription of the interview, and the coding matrix is managed.

4. RESULTS

Through meticulous coding of interview data, the research found that there are obvious differences in the engagement patterns of college students when using short videos and long videos. The research has identified significant differences in motivation and participation patterns among college students regarding the use of short videos and long videos. The interview data will be encoded from several aspects, including usage motivation, satisfaction, content perception, and usage behavior. Tables 2 and 3, respectively, show the different encoding results of short videos and long videos are represented. In terms of motivation and context, emotion regulation and fragmented time utilization are the main application situations of short videos, while learning needs and immersive entertainment are the core driving forces of long videos. In terms of satisfaction, short videos provide instant satisfaction but are also prone to regret. Long videos are more likely to offer a sense of value and immersion, but they also pose problems of time consumption and difficulty in persistence. Regarding content perception, the fast-paced and information-intensive characteristics of short videos make them the first choice when attention is scattered, whereas the in-depth information and complete narrative of long videos are more suitable for focused viewing. In terms of usage behavior, the "browsing" of short videos and the "watching" of long videos are in sharp contrast, and the frequent jumping behaviors between different platforms reflect the flexibility and diversity of media use. Concerning media relationships, users generally believe that short videos and long videos are complementary, and they have high expectations for content fusion and media evolution.

Table 2. "Short video engagement and gratification pattern" narrative.

Coding	Meaning Making
Emotion regulation	Use short videos to quickly change mood, relieve stress, or seek immediate happiness.
Escape from reality	Use short videos to fill short, purposeless time to achieve a short-term distraction and escape from reality.
Instant gratification	Quickly obtain pleasure, novelty, or information points through fast and high-frequency content switching.
Emotional disparity	After short-term satisfaction, negative emotions such as regret and emptiness arise due to the waste of time and superficial content.
Information fragmentation	The content is short and dense, lacking context and depth
Low cognitive threshold	Short videos do not require highly concentrated attention and are easy to access and exit in an interfering environment.
Passive viewing	The content is pushed by algorithms, leaving users with no choice
High-frequency interaction	The interaction with the content (such as likes, comments, and shares) is more frequent and lightweight.

Table 3. "Long video engagement and gratification pattern" narrative.

Coding	Meaning making
Emotional immersion	Invest in long videos to achieve a deeper and sustained entertainment experience and to realize a more profound relaxation.
Purposeful investment	Watching long videos with a clear purpose, rather than browsing casually.
Sense of value acquisition	Users can gain profound insights, accumulate knowledge, and resonate emotionally.
The contradiction of investment	Although it has a strong sense of value, there are problems due to high time investment and slow content pace.
Information integrity	Long videos can provide in-depth, contextually coherent, and structurally complete content.
High cognitive investment	Watching long videos requires a focused, undisturbed environment and continuous attention.
Planned viewing	Consciously arrange time to watch
Low frequency but long duration	The frequency of single viewing behavior is low, but the duration of each viewing session is long.

4.1. Driven by Both Emotional Regulation and Escape from Reality

When it comes to the motivations behind the use of short videos, they mainly revolve around emotional regulation and the utilization of fragmented time. When users seek immediate emotional relief, they usually choose to watch short videos to gain pleasure, which is consistent with the UGT, and the utilization of fragmented time by short videos is highly consistent with the fast-paced lifestyle of contemporary college students [7, 47]. Short videos are mainly used as a tool for instant satisfaction in fragmented situations, helping students cope with negative emotions and escape from the pressure of the real world. With their short and refined characteristics, short videos have become an ideal choice for college students with fragmented time. This efficient way of information transmission makes short videos an important means for college students to obtain information and entertainment in a fast-paced life. In addition, the research also pointed out that the emotional compensation effect of short videos plays an important role in students' daily lives [42]. The diverse, novel, and interesting content presented by short videos can provide college students with a way to escape reality, allowing them to obtain short-term happiness and satisfaction in the virtual world. This psychological compensation mechanism helps to a certain extent to alleviate the psychological pressure of college students, fill emotional vacancies and meaning in real life, and improve their life satisfaction.

In contrast, the motivation for watching long videos is more goal-oriented, such as acquiring knowledge, completing homework, or engaging in in-depth entertainment. This goal-oriented behavior demonstrates planned media use [2]. Unlike the fragmented information of short videos, long videos can provide a complete and coherent knowledge system to help users deeply understand complex learning content [11]. Therefore, long videos play an irreplaceable role in meeting the cognitive needs of college students. They require users to invest a significant amount of time, and this immersive experience can satisfy users' deeper emotional and aesthetic needs [14]. In addition, the narrative and coherence of long videos make them uniquely charming in the entertainment field.

Different from the immediate use of short videos, watching long videos requires more time, attention, and cognitive effort from the user. This viewing behavior is often related to the user's deeper need for information or emotion in a specific situation [48]. Users do not choose media randomly but combine usage needs with situations. This consistency is the result of the interaction between personal needs and media experience. Only when there is a whole block of time or a deep understanding of a certain topic is needed will one choose to watch long videos. This kind of usage behavior demonstrates stronger planning and functionality.

4.2. Instant Satisfaction and Long-Term Value

Short videos focus on the immediate release of dopamine, but they may leave one feeling empty or wasting time afterward. Therefore, the sense of satisfaction brought by short videos is mostly immediate, but it is often accompanied by other negative emotions. That is, after a brief pleasure, emptiness and regret follow. Short videos can bring instant pleasure and novel information to users through rapid content switching and, in this way, enhance users' instant satisfaction. However, on the other hand, behind this short-term satisfaction, users often feel emptiness and regret due to superficial content, waste of time, or emotional ups and downs. This "satisfaction-regret" cycle is closely related to the addictive mechanism of short videos. Users use it again to relieve regret, forming a closed loop of "stimulation-release-guilt-restimulation" [49]. Therefore, short videos can allow users to gain pleasure and psychological satisfaction in a short period of time, but this is temporary. Behind this short-term satisfaction is dependence and cognitive imbalance on the emotional stimulation brought by short videos, causing users to fall into a cycle of instant gratification and pleasure, and eventually become addicted to short videos. This addictive behavior not only affects college students' learning investment but may also have a negative impact on their sleep quality, mental health, and academic performance.

In contrast, long videos can provide complete and coherent content, helping users deeply understand complex learning materials or emotional stories, giving them unique advantages in knowledge dissemination and emotional

experience. This in-depth experience is difficult to achieve in short videos [50]. Long videos provide a more valuable sense of satisfaction cognitively and emotionally. When watching long videos, users need to continue focusing and cognitive processing, and ultimately gain deep cognitive satisfaction and a narrative immersion experience [48]. This feeling of satisfaction is usually characterized by delay and high value. Users often feel a strong sense of harvest after viewing or during the process, and think that the time investment is worth it. This usage method aligns more with users' in-depth needs in specific situations. However, the high time cost of long videos has become its main drawback. Some respondents also said that long videos are too time-consuming and can easily cause unwillingness to watch. This indicates that long videos, while meeting users' demands, are constrained by time costs, imposing cognitive burdens and time pressures on users. Therefore, although long videos better meet users' in-depth needs in specific situations (such as deep learning and relaxation), they also inevitably bring severe challenges in time management for users [24].

4.3. The Cognitive Difference Between Fast Pace and In-Depth Information

Short videos and long videos show significant cognitive differentiation. The difference in information density further anchors the functional boundaries of the two. Users generally describe short videos as fast-paced, relaxed, and entertaining characteristics [51] suitable for instant satisfaction in fragmented attention situations. Short videos are suitable for quick browsing and shallow memory, which adapt shallow cognitive processing and instantaneous memory through fragmented information [52]. Short videos are described as "electronic pickles," which means providing intense sensory stimulation but lacking nutritional depth, essentially belonging to emotional regulation tools [47]. Through the dual effects of high-frequency sensory stimulation and personalized recommendation algorithms, short videos significantly enhance users' immediate satisfaction, thereby easily inducing addiction-related problems [53].

In contrast, long videos are characterized as excellent production, rich content, and dense information, have a relatively high cognitive threshold and time cost, and are more suitable for the cognitive immersion needs of a focused state. Long videos are more suitable for users' cognitive deepening needs and deep learning motivations [54]. Long videos are suitable for linear depth and emotional accumulation, and rely on narrative coherence to support in-depth information integration and emotional accumulation [55]. For college students, long videos can meet their high-level demands in terms of professional knowledge, culture and art, and ideological depth. This deep learning behavior not only improves their cognitive level, but also, through time and effort, users can gain a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction closely related to personal growth and development in the process of learning and understanding.

4.4. Behavioral Differentiation

Users exhibit different characteristics in viewing behaviors of long and short videos. With their fragmented characteristics and algorithm recommendation mechanisms, short videos meet users' needs for instant satisfaction and relaxed entertainment, but they are also prone to addictive behaviors and distractions. Long videos provide users with more lasting satisfaction through their deep value and purpose, but they face challenges in attracting and maintaining user attention.

> "I usually watch short videos while waiting for the bus or queuing up because this can pass the time and will not affect my other activities. However, for long videos, I only watch them when I am sure I have enough time. Moreover, I have a clear purpose for watching long videos, such as learning professional knowledge, but watching short videos is very casual, and I tend to browse various content." (P06)

Short video usage often reflects a "browsing" pattern characterized by frequent content switching, divided attention, and repetitive engagement. This behavior is closely related to the algorithm recommendation function of short video platforms. Short video platforms continuously push personalized content to maintain users' attention. Providing users with a cycle of instant gratification and compulsive use through recommendation algorithms,

gradually evolving into an addiction to short videos [53]. In contrast, long-video consumption aligns more closely with the performance of "watching." Users have clear goals and planned viewing times [49]. This model can be regarded as purposeful participation, making users more patient and focused. During the process of watching long videos, users are more likely to immerse themselves in the content narrative, which can generate profound emotional experiences and extract deeper values. At the same time, users are more likely to enter a state of deep concentration while viewing. Long videos require longer single viewing times, but the rate of full viewing is not high, which may be related to the distraction of modern users [3] and also reflects the challenges of long videos in attracting and maintaining user attention.

4.5. Complementarity and Platform Switching

Research has found that college students exhibit platform switching behavior between short videos and long videos, which indicates that the two media forms have certain complementarity and interactivity in the content consumption chain. This reveals that short videos and long videos form a dynamic, complementary ecosystem within the content consumption chain. The complementarity and mutual conversion between such platforms and video forms can promote greater satisfaction opportunities for users [13]. For example, P03 shared that

> *"TikTok will recommend a lot of design news and design cases to me. If the design inside makes me feel very distinctive, then I will search for relevant software tutorials on BiliBili to learn how these design effects are achieved. For me, it is like two different types of tools switching to each other."*

Users can quickly browse a large amount of easy and interesting content in a short time to obtain instant entertainment satisfaction through short videos [50]. At the same time, long videos can focus users' attention at a specific time and produce deep cognitive satisfaction and a sense of high value. Users' seamless switching between platforms and video formats can often be based on their own different usage needs, thus forming diversified media participation models. For users, short videos and long videos belong to the same ecosystem, and there is no competition between different video forms. Most participants believe that short videos and long videos are complementary, which shows that different forms of video content can coexist and meet the different needs of users. This complementarity allows short videos and long videos to play different roles in the daily lives of college students, and jointly meet their diverse needs [52]. The complementarity and users' platform switching behavior are key to significantly expanding user satisfaction and rich media engagement. However, there is also an alternative relationship between short and long videos. Some participants believe that short videos "take up" the time for long videos. This is mainly because of the fragmented characteristics and instant satisfaction of short videos, which make users more inclined to choose short videos to quickly obtain entertainment and information in a limited time, and reduce the viewing time of long videos. This alternative relationship poses a challenge to long video platforms, requiring them to innovate in content creation and user experience to better attract and retain users.

5. DISCUSSION

According to different usage situations and purposes, the engagement patterns of long videos and short videos among college students show different characteristics. As two mainstream audio-visual content carriers, long and short videos have built a unique and significantly different satisfaction experience system. Based on the results of the thematic analysis, the following table presents the core differences between short videos and long videos in multiple dimensions (Table 4), highlighting the differences in media participation and satisfaction patterns among Chinese college students in different video formats through comparison. Research shows that short videos and long videos contribute to the differentiation of user satisfaction through different media participation models. The content of short videos is fragmented and highly stimulating, which can offer immediate emotional release and real-time online social interaction. In contrast, long videos promote continuous cognitive engagement and deeper emotional resonance through expanded narratives and immersive storytelling [9, 56]. The difference between short videos and long videos

creates two completely different experience modes, which together form a dual-track model of media participation [24]. Short videos are characterized by high frequency and low depth of participation. They mainly meet users' needs for rapid emotional adjustment and efficient use of fragmented time, and solve short-term, superficial needs. Long videos are characterized by a low-frequency and high-depth participation mode, undertaking deep learning functions and immersive entertainment experiences, and meeting deep-seated and continuous demands.

Table 4. The differences between short videos and long videos.

Dimensions	Short video	Long video
Usage situation	During fragmented time and browse at any time	Focus on time and watch with a plan
Motivation characteristics	Emotional regulation, escape reality, instant gratification	Learning, immersion experience, cognitive growth
Content attributes	Fast pace, fragmentation, and lightweight	Deep narrative, complete information, and structured
Behavioral pattern	Browse. Passive reception	Watch. Actively engage
Satisfaction type	Instant pleasure, short-term relaxation	Long-term value, lasting immersion
Emotional feedback	A sense of disparity after rapid stimulation	Stable pleasure and sense of accomplishment

Generally, media engagement is broadly defined as a series of multidimensional structures in which individuals engage with media content and platforms, including cognitive attention, emotional input, behavioral interaction, and social participation [27, 28, 31]. For college students, their choice of video media shows significant situational dependence, and their engagement patterns are jointly shaped by immediate scene demands and deep cognitive goals [54, 57]. In fragmented situations such as breaks between classes, commutes, and waiting in line, short videos, with their high frequency and low cognitive load characteristics, have become immediate emotional regulation tools. The algorithm-driven immersive information flow can quickly meet sensory stimulation demands and efficiently fill fragmented time [52]. Short videos can efficiently meet their entertainment and relaxation needs in these fragmented times, presenting the characteristics of high frequency and low depth engagement, which meet the needs of instant emotional regulation and fragmented time utilization [55, 58]. However, in in-depth demand situations (such as academic expansion), college students actively turn to long videos to build a systematic cognitive framework. This type of situation requires continuous attention, input, and situational immersion. Users usually engage in low-frequency but high-intensity interactions through conscious behaviors [20]. Since long videos and short videos provide different satisfying experiences, college students often feel conflicted in switching and choosing between the two. On the one hand, they hope to seek quick satisfaction and emotional release through short videos to relieve academic and daily stress. On the other hand, they are more willing to choose to watch long videos to obtain deeper cognitive engagement, personal growth, and knowledge accumulation. Over time, these choices change based on different use contexts, frequency of use, and purposes, resulting in college students becoming situationally dependent on different media types. Ultimately, the dynamic interplay between short- and long-form video usage creates a complementary model of media engagement [59].

Based on an in-depth analysis of college students' media usage behavior, the study found that short videos and long videos are two parallel forms of media participation, allowing users to dynamically choose and flexibly switch according to their needs and situations (as shown in Figure 1). This switching behavior is also affected by the behavior and demand value satisfaction of different video formats [60]. Short videos can provide users with immediate satisfaction during fragmented time, enabling them to "browse" videos and regulate their current emotions. Long videos can trigger the behavior of "watch" videos, providing in-depth content exploration and immersive satisfaction experiences [9, 61]. Users' choice and switching between the two video forms enable a dynamic balance between short videos and long videos, and ultimately form a media ecosystem that is complementary in many aspects and meets personal needs. Short videos, with their immediacy and fragmented characteristics, mainly meet users' demands

for an instant presence, providing lightweight information and entertainment. Long videos, on the other hand, satisfy users' yearning for deep immersion through in-depth narrative and systematic knowledge transmission, responding to higher-level cognitive and emotional investment needs [11]. However, at the same time, users will dynamically migrate between long and short videos based on unmet needs, forming a kind of compensatory behavior. This dynamic adjustment demonstrates that users' choice within the form of different media has become the core strategy to meet their usage needs, and is influenced by factors such as content depth gradient, usage situations, and cognitive energy consumption. Users actively seek media to meet specific needs, and this theory is further extended to the digital media era, highlighting the importance of in-form selection (the choice between different forms within the same media type) as the core satisfaction strategy for users [51, 62, 63]. This phenomenon highlights the two-way influence of content characteristics on users' media usage behaviors, as well as the strategic behaviors of users actively adjusting and balancing their psychological and cognitive states during the media selection process [64].
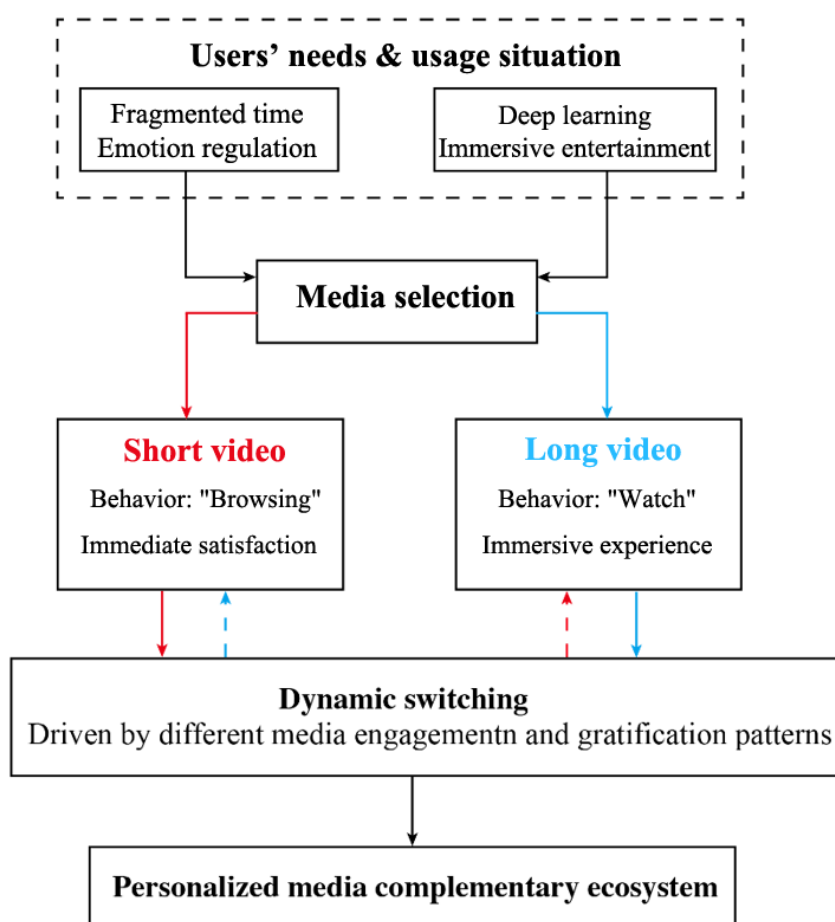

Figure 1. Dual-track engagement model for long videos and short videos.

In today's digital era, users have demonstrated high adaptability and strategic choice ability regarding different media types, which aligns closely with the current trend of media diversification [65]. A growing number of media platforms are experimenting with hybrid content formats to fill the gap between fast-paced entertainment and in-depth narratives, such as short dramas and documentary-style feeds. These emerging formats are popular with users for their attractiveness and time efficiency, reflecting audiences' increasing openness to diverse and integrated media experiences [66].

As algorithmic recommendation systems become more complex and user needs continue to diversify, the traditional boundaries between short and long videos may become increasingly blurred [67]. This change places higher requirements on the platform. Platforms must guide viewers to adapt to these new formats, ensuring

appropriate content experiences for different viewing environments and user needs [68]. Although technological innovation remains the driving force for reshaping the competitive structure of the media industry, user experience should still be a core consideration [69]. While traditional UGT focuses on individual users' reasons for choosing specific media types, the results of this study emphasize how users make subtle choices between different types of the same media. This result highlights the complementary nature of long-form and short-form video in the media ecosystem [69, 70].

Users can smoothly switch between long videos and short videos according to situational needs, emphasizing a media ecosystem that can meet users' multi-level needs and participation models in different usage situations and achieve a complementary balance. By integrating diverse content forms, it should provide users with a comprehensive and multi-level media consumption platform to meet their diverse needs in different time and space situations [71]. This not only enhances the user experience but also strengthens the platform's competitiveness in the fierce market competition, providing strong support for users' diverse needs in different time and space situations.

6. IMPLICATIONS

By distinguishing the usage motivations and behavioral differences between short videos and long videos, this study deepens the understanding of the diverse digital behavior patterns of users in the digital media environment. The dual drivers of emotion regulation and escape from reality, as well as the cognitive differences in the information conveyed by media, lead to different demand satisfaction mechanisms and media participation models for short videos and long videos among users, and also emphasize the potential complementarity of the two video forms in the media ecosystem.

The results of this study can help media organizations more accurately predict changes in audience engagement and content preferences in the context of the continuous development of user attention and satisfaction mechanisms. Furthermore, by deepening the understanding of users' digital behavior patterns, more accurately predicting the evolution trends of media, providing strategic support for content producers, and ultimately promoting the evolution of the digital media ecosystem towards a structured and sustainable direction.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Although this study delves deeply into the user usage and satisfaction mechanisms behind the competition between long and short videos, there are still limitations. Firstly, the representativeness of the sample is limited to the college student group, and it is difficult to reflect the engagement patterns of other user groups. Secondly, technological iterations are becoming increasingly prominent, and the research results may be difficult to be consistent with the rapid development of media technology. Finally, there is insufficient research on cross-platform collaboration mechanisms.

Future research cannot only expand the research group to a wider range of age groups and social groups but also explore the coordinated development mechanism and integrated innovation path of long and short videos in the cross-platform communication ecosystem, and pay attention to the dynamic impact of technological iteration.

8. CONCLUSION

This research deconstructs the motivation, behavior, and satisfaction mechanisms of college students in the use of short and long videos. The research results show that college students exhibit significant situation-dependent characteristics in the selection of these two video formats, with notable differences in their functional satisfaction dimensions. Short videos primarily serve functions such as instant emotional regulation and fragmented information acquisition, whereas long videos aim to meet the needs of deep cognitive learning and immersive emotional experiences, forming a clear complementary relationship. Importantly, users demonstrate a wide range of cross-

platform migration behaviors and possess a clear understanding of the synergistic value and limited substitution between the two video forms.

This study not only provides an empirical basis for the media selection theory of young people in the new media environment but also lays a theoretical foundation for content optimization and morphological innovation of video platforms from the perspective of demand satisfaction mechanisms.

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