

**“It's a great product, but maybe I'm not the target user”:
Media strategy and identity perception of short video industry practitioners**

Student Name: Qingyan Gao

Student Number: 578334

Supervisor: Qian Huang Lecturer

Master Media Studies - Media, Culture & Society
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2021

Abstract

Nowadays, short video has become one of the most popular media forms, both in China and around the world, with more and more users, especially teenagers, using short videos to record and show themselves, socialize with others or gain knowledge. In addition to the video-based media form and relatively short media duration, the most prominent feature of short video applications is the platform-based design mechanism and algorithm-based recommendation content distribution mode. Short video applications have gained increasing success and popularity, but also aroused a lot of controversies and discussions, such as the addiction use and the echo chamber effect by algorithm recommendation mechanism, as well as criticisms of vulgar and exaggerated content, and controversies related to personal information collection and data privacy.

Douyin / TikTok is one of the most iconic companies and products in the short video industry. As an emerging and thriving technology company from China, it is now a global success, with nearly 100,000 employees around the world. The study focuses on the group of people who work in Douyin, when they are using their own company's application, they are not only prosumers, but also the creators and designers of the mechanisms, cultures and rules of the product.

Through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 practitioners who have experience working in Douyin, and based on thematic analysis of the interviews, this study explores the media usage habits of short video practitioners, their perceptions of the mechanisms and controversies of the product and industry, as well as their own identity perceptions and negotiations. The study aims to provide more inside-industry voices on the study of short video from the practitioners' perspective.

The study results show that, overall, Douyin employees, as professional practitioners in the short video industry, are actually not heavy users of short video nor social media lovers, and they have clear motivations and high demands for information access and consumption. From terms of technical perspective and social value, they have a relatively positive evaluation of Douyin and the industry, admit some controversies, but believe that the problems are exaggerated, and many of the controversies are common industry issues, and closely related to users' personal habits and preferences, but they are generally pessimistic about data and privacy issues. When it comes to identity coordination and recognition in their work, they generally expressed a sense of powerlessness, and they put

platform data-driven requirements as the first priority, but their personal preference and creativity have a very limited influence in their work.

In general, for professional practitioners of short video industry, there is a clear separation and gap between their work content and personal media habits, which affects their attitudes and cognition of platform mechanisms and controversies. Platformization, as an important feature of short video products, has a huge impact on both the production and consumption of content, has also become the reason for attribution in various controversies, while influencing professional practitioners' perception and evaluation of their work and identity from the inside.

Keywords: short video, Douyin, social media platform, knowledge labor, platformization

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
1. Introduction.....	6
1.1. Relevance -The prosperous and controversial short video industry	6
1.2. Case Study – Douyin, the most representative star company	9
1.3. Research questions –Individual perspective of professional practitioners.....	10
2. Literature Review and Theoretical framework	12
2.1. Literature Review - Douyin as a social media platform.....	13
2.2. Theoretical framework - knowledge labor in informational capitalism.....	17
3. Methods.....	22
3.1. Methodological approach.....	22
3.2. Data Collection.....	22
3.3. Data analysis	26
4. Results and Analysis	28
4.1. Media habits and use behavior	28
4.1.1. Deep media literacy with clear motivation.....	28
4.1.2. Not social media lover nor Douyin expert.....	30
4.2. Overall evaluation of Douyin	32
4.2.1. Rich diverse and easy, with “positive energy”	33
4.2.2. User-driven and data-oriented	35
4.3. Perception of the controversies	37
4.3.1. The problems exist but are exaggerated	38
4.3.2. The problems are common	40
4.3.3. Give up of privacy	43
4.4. Identity coordination	44
4.4.1. Personal achievement	44
4.4.2. Work comes first	45
4.4.3. A sense of powerlessness on the platform.....	48
5. Discussion and conclusion	51
5.1. Media behavior - Work but not use.....	51
5.2. Controversies perception - In the name of platform	53
5.3. Identity coordination - As a platform worker.....	54
5.4. Limitations and Future research	56
References	58
Appendix.....	64

Appendix A: Interview Topic List	64
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form.....	67

1. Introduction

In June 2021, at The Ninth China's Internet Audio and Video Convention, Zhongruan Sun, vice president of the famous Internet company Tencent, commented on the short video industry: "Low-intelligence and vulgar short videos will affect the user's mind for a long time, and personalized distribution is so powerful, so if you like pig food all you see and get is pig food." This speech quickly triggered huge discussion and controversy, and the vice president of ByteDance, the most representative company of the short video industry in China and even the world, also responded to the criticism, pointed out that Tencent was also developing its own short video application, and Tencent's short video platform was the only one that fails to provide special protection for children's access to information in accordance with relevant regulations.

The dramatic mutual criticism within the industry has in fact triggered more discussions of the emerging medium of short video. Since the emergence and popularity of short video platforms, various criticism and controversy have accompanied the development of the industry, such as social media addiction, vulgar content, controversial algorithmic recommendations, and potential information risks to special groups, etc. However, in terms of these controversies, it is no doubt that the short video media and the short video platforms have now gained great success and influence, both in terms of commercial value and the huge cultural and social and trend changes brought about by this new media.

1.1. Relevance -The prosperous and controversial short video industry

Nowadays, short videos have become the most popular media form, and people have been used to using short videos to record themselves and various kinds of lives. Short video applications have increasingly become important tool for people especially teenagers to spend their time and even get information (Anderson, 2020, Du et al., 2020). According to the "2021 China Network Audiovisual Development Research Report" released by the China Netcasting Services Association, in 2020 people spent 125 minutes on short videos in a single day per person, which has surpassed instant messaging and become the number one channel for users to "kill time". Among all video media, short video has the highest user usage rate of 88.3%, and the user scale has reached 873 million. No matter from which data dimension, short video is the source of the largest user time, traffic and content creation in China's Internet industry (Cyberspace Administration of China, 2021).

From a global perspective, in addition to the new emerging short video applications that continue to develop markets in various countries, traditional social media or content

platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, etc. have also incorporated short video features into their own applications, covering more and more of their own large user base. The popularity of short videos has also largely changed the competitive landscape of the music and entertainment industries (Zhang, 2020).

In 2011, a Chinese Internet company developed the short video application Kuaishou based on a GIF creation tool, which is seen as the beginning of short video products in China. The founder of Kuaishou, a technology engineer, Hua Su introduced a personalized recommendation algorithm to recommend content for each user's different preferences and emphasize the operation of the user community. Since 2016, many short video applications such as Douyin, Weishi have appeared and become popular in China. In the development of the industry, the popularization of Chinese mobile Internet infrastructure and the rapid development of the smartphone industry have provided very favorable conditions for the expansion of the market.

After the great success in the local market, Chinese short video applications have started their expansion in overseas markets, and globally, there are also many emerging companies or traditional giants investing in the new field of short video. 2017 can be seen as the starting point of Chinese short video applications' overseas expansion (Kaye et al., 2020). ByteDance, acquired the US short video, picture social app Flipagram, then launched Douyin International, at the end of the year Later, Douyin International merged with Flipagram and Musical.ly, renamed Tik Tok. Kuaishou also tried to expand the market in the same year. In the process of overseas development, its short video platform Kwai, emphasized the values of "no class" of the platform and integrated with regional cultures. By recruiting local content creators, Kwai took the lead position in Russia, South Korea and other neighbouring markets, and also achieved huge market success.

In 2018, Facebook launched the short video application Lasso, similar to TikTok, Lasso also allows users to create and share short videos. YouTube later launched the user-generated short video feature Shorts, which was also seen as a direct competition to TikTok by the traditional social media company. The basic function of Shorts is similar to TikTok, but users can use copyrighted music from YouTube Music directly. In August 2020, Instagram announced the launch of its Reels feature, a counterpart to TikTok, in the U.S. and 50 other regions. This new feature, which is built into Instagram, allow users to create 15-second short videos with music that can be played on a loop. The launch of this feature means that users can have a similar experience on Instagram as they do with TikTok.

The global popularity of short videos has sparked various discussions and controversies. On the one hand, the short video industry, which has entered a mature stage,

has shown a lot of positive social values, especially in the Chinese social and cultural environment. For example, some users living in rural or poor areas, the short video platform provides them with a very convenient and efficient access to information, and even makes them become the creators of video content (Lin & de Kloet, 2019). Without platforms like Douyin or Kuaishou, they may not have the opportunity to make their image perceived by other groups directly, or to sell the products they produce directly to potential consumers. The result of the process is to change their life quality and cultural status (Lin & de Kloet, 2019). The short video industry is therefore considered to be showing great social value in terms of promoting flexible employment and bridging the digital divide (Li et al., 2019).

Compared to its positive impact, criticisms and controversies about the short video industry come from more aspects. One characteristic of short videos is that on the platform, video content and algorithmic distribution are combined (Kaye et al., 2020). Through the analysis and prediction of user data, the algorithm recommendations will continuously feed users with content they may be interested in. The algorithms have changed the traditional logic of information and knowledge distribution, from users actively retrieving content and information, to passively receiving content distributed to them by algorithms (Wang, 2020). In this way, through a very efficient logic, information has a broader flow space in theory (Kang & Liu, 2019). However, in real life, one of the negative effects brought by algorithm recommendation is easy to get addicted and overuse, and it is difficult for users to control their use behaviour. And in the long run, users overly accept information content with similar interests to their views, which also causes polarization and homogenization of their views (Auxier & Vitak, 2019).

The content form of short videos also forms a rule for content production, invisibly limiting the content that can and is suitable to be spread. The length of time and the massive information capacity of the platform make the short video content often exaggerated, entertaining and simple, which satisfies modern people's desire and demand for quick information intake, but its "fragmentation" also leads to limited information content and a single style of content. Users' control and management of their own data is very limited, whether they are browsing, interacting or producing on the platform (Rewaria, 2021). And this kind of controversy for the risk of data and privacy, also has always appeared in all kinds of social or content platforms, the popularity of short video media continues to bring this issue widely debated again.

As a mainstream and rapidly growing form of media, it is important to understand and study the mechanisms and operations of short video platforms to better understand the enormous impact they have on individuals and society. At the same time, the controversies

generated by this fast-growing media are unprecedented, partly as a continuation of the existing social media controversies and partly as unique to this form of media and its operation mechanism, and the study of these controversies can help form certain strategies and regulatory recommendations for a healthier development of this media form and applications.

1.2. Case Study – Douyin, the most representative star company

Douyin from ByteDance is the most representative one in the short video industry. And TikTok is the app developed primarily for the international market that is based on Douyin, which serves the Chinese market. In 2020, Chinese Internet users were 940 million, while as of August 2020, Douyin had more than 600 million daily active users, ranking the first short video application in the Chinese market. In the development of Douyin, what has been emphasized is the technical background of and its platform attributes. Zhang Yiming, the founder of ByteDance, has repeatedly stated publicly, "The algorithm has no values. As long as the user feels it is good, it is good." "We are not a content company; we are just a technology company." (Wu, 2015). The emphasis on technology and data but neglect of content management brought the company official criticism from the Chinese government. In 2017, the official media of the Chinese government People's Daily, commented on ByteDance, "Cannot let the algorithm decide the content, cannot leave the users in "information cocoon" and be wary of the algorithm going to the opposite of innovation" (Zhang, 2020). After that, ByteDance adjusted some of the mechanisms and rules for Douyin in content recommendation to fit the official propaganda requirements. The management of content and its own will to emphasize the neutrality of the algorithm to some extent formed a contradiction and conflict.

Douyin/TikTok serves billions of users worldwide, and its company, ByteDance, has more than 100,000 total employees. In 2020, the average employee age of ByteDance was only 27 years old, being the youngest among a number of major Internet companies in China (Lago, 2020). According to the "2020 Internet Talent Recruitment White Paper" released by LAGO compared to 2019, ByteDance's talent demand has increased by 66%, while ByteDance's salary has increased by 12%, becoming the "fastest salary increase" big factory in the industry. No matter from the perspective of revenue, number of users, or company volume, Douyin is one of the most popular Internet companies today (Lago, 2020). Douyin is a company founded by technicians, with a strong "geek culture", which has a unique attraction to young professionals. Also, Douyin was established late and emerged quickly,

with a flat organizational structure and a wide development space, which also gives it a good reputation in the employment market of young talents. Both Douyin's development path and its current market position make it very valuable to study.

1.3. Research questions –Individual perspective of professional practitioners

In previous studies on short video applications or social media platforms, the user perspective was often used, while when studying from a company or industry perspective, the voices of leaders and the overall development paths and strategies of companies were focused on, while the perspective of individual practitioners were more neglected. The number of practitioners in the industry is growing and they will have a real impact on the development and changes of the industry now and in the future, so it will have some innovative and potential value to understand the industry from the perspective of practitioners.

This study focuses on the group of people who work in Douyin, when they are using their own company's application, they are not only "prosumers" (O'Reilly, 2005) as the other ordinary users, but also the creators and designers of the mechanisms, cultures and rules of the product to some extent. The specificity of this identity helps us to understand the various social media controversies from the perspective of professional practitioners, in a more concrete and personal way.

Taking this representative and emerging social media platform as a case, it is possible to use previous criticisms and studies of social media to examine the application to this relatively new social media platform, and to add observation and supplement from the perspective of internal practitioners, but also to explore the particularity and new challenges of this product.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on the topic of short video, using in-depth interviews with practitioners in the short video industry to understand how this group use short video applications, how they see the various controversies or problems faced by this industry, and how they, both as users and practitioners, negotiate their identities in the development of this industry? Based on the above, this study aims to provide insiders' voices to the various criticisms and studies of the short video industry, and to understand the development and future of this vast industry from an individual's perspective.

The research question is: *How do Douyin employees negotiate their experience of using their own company's application?* This study is divided into three sub-questions based on employees' personal experiences and perspectives.

Sub RQ1: How do Douyin employees use Douyin and other media product in their lives and work?

Sub RQ2: How do Douyin employees perceive the mechanisms or controversial issues of the short video applications?

Sub RQ3: How do Douyin employees negotiate their identity as professional practitioners and platform users?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical framework

Chapter overview

This research focuses on the media use strategies and identity negotiations of professional practitioners in the emerging Internet media industry. This industry is in the process of rapid development, which is very special but also controversial, and the employed practitioners themselves also have multiple identities. Therefore, the theoretical perspectives and empirical research involved in the research come from multiple sources, mainly from the field of media studies and sociology. Previous studies on social media use, platform theory and digital capitalism provide the basic general theoretical framework, while the controversies and criticisms on short video media and the studies of mechanisms and observations on Douyin and other short video platform applications provide more specific and particular trigger for this research.

The first section of the literature review presents the current academic research findings on user behaviour and strategies on social media and short video platforms, focusing on providing the basic theoretical framework for studying employees' behaviours and strategies, and help to summarize and generalize their behavioural characteristics and media strategies as users. The existing studies on controversies in Douyin/TikTok and other short video platform applications are also included in the literature review, which provide specific issues and case sources in studying employees' perceptions and attitudes. This section also covers current analysis of the mechanisms and logic of short video platforms from commercial and cultural aspects. Based on existing media research findings, the voices of Douyin employees as professional practitioners in the industry, are expected to provide a more practical, in-depth and open discussion for existing research results. The second section consists of the theoretical framework for this study. The section focuses on the characteristics and significance of short video platforms, this emerging and prosperous media industry as well as the identity of professional practitioners in it. The Internet media development environment of short video applications is characterized by the nature of digital capitalism and knowledge society in the Web 2.0 era, and Douyin is one of the most representative platform-based media applications. Knowledge workers and creative class can also represent the identity of the employees in this industry to a certain extent, so these concepts provide the corresponding theoretical framework to support the issues of this research.

2.1. Literature Review - Douyin as a social media platform

Under the topic of this research, the identity of Douyin employees as professional practitioners of the emerging media platform is multiple, first, regardless of their working identity, they are Internet prosumer like all ordinary users. As industry practitioners, compared with ordinary users, they have more professional knowledge or background, and as employees of a particular company, their working environment or work content will have a certain impact on their perceptions. This multiplicity of identities provides classification for the literature of this study, covering three aspects in combination with the research questions involved in this study. The first part is the general findings on the behavior, habits, and motivations of using short video platforms and social media. The second part is the current criticisms and controversies about short video platforms and other social media platforms. And the third part is more specific current media studies using Douyin as the object of study. The above levels, from general to specific, aim to organize existing literature support, and to provide specific direction and topic for the research.

Social Media Use

This section deals with usage and gratification theory of social media, and different layers of user behavior on user-generated content platforms.

Much of the previous research on social media use behavior and motivation has used the U&G (Uses and Gratifications) framework, which holds that people are motivated to use media to satisfy their personal and social needs (Blumler, 1979). And U&G is also considered to be one of the most suitable methods in studying users' purposes and motivations for social media use (Ruggiero, 2000). In the current research on the motivation of Douyin/TikTok use, entertainment pursuit, archiving, self-expression, social interaction and escapism are the most significant factors (Omar & Dequan, 2020, Li et al., 2019). From the user's perspective, Douyin can be seen as a user-generated content platform that blurs the boundary between information acquisition and information creation, with users being both creators and consumers of content, and the participatory culture brings a new interaction between audience and media, where users can create their own content autonomously, but user activities are also largely controlled by high-tech algorithms and data mining companies (van Dijck, 2009).

According to Shao's research, when users use user-generated media, their different use behaviors correspond to different purposes, and these behaviors are mainly divided into three levels: consumption, participation and production, with their degree of their

participation increasing. Specifically, when users are simply consuming content, their main purpose is to search for information, obtain entertainment, and emotion management, while when users engage deeper on the platform, it is to interact with the content or other people, and when users actively produce content, their main purpose is self-expression and presentation (2009). This study adopts such a classification because Douyin as a user-generated media platform, users' behavior in it can be categorized as described above. For example, when users browse recommended short videos, they are consuming content, while the mechanism of “liking” and “commenting” on Douyin creates opportunities for users to interact with other content or people. Also, users are encouraged to use the application to shoot, edit and share videos, which for them is self-expression through content production. In addition, in the current research on the motivation of Douyin use, entertainment pursuit, escapism, social interaction, archiving, and self-expression are the most significant factors (Omar & Dequan, 2020, Li et al., 2019), which can also correspond to Shao's classification methods. On the other hand, based on the employee's perspective, the motivation of employees in using social media can be divided into three levels, when pursuing entertainment in order to relieve negative emotions, the motivation of employees' social media use is at the individual-level, while when it is for establishing bonding ties, the motivation is regarded as the interpersonal-level, and at the same time, the motivation of employees' social media use also has organizational-level, when it is for organization–employee relationship or other professional purposes (Lee, 2020).

The format and context of content production are largely influenced by the rules of the platform (Livingstone, 2013). While users can choose or negotiate with the platform governance satisfying their own needs, however, this relationship may be increasingly asymmetrical as the platform evolves as infrastructures (Nieborg & Helmond, 2018). On Douyin, users' content creation is strictly influenced by the platform's mechanisms, such as the length of the video and the style of the content, while users' adaptation or catering to the platform's rules can also bring benefits to themselves, which may be the convenience of self-expression or the economic benefits (Zhang, 2020).

Social media controversies

With regard to the controversies in social media use, this study focus on the topics of addiction use, echo chamber effect and risk of data privacy, which are closely related to Douyin, and rely on previous studies on these controversies to understand how Douyin employees perceive and respond to these controversies based on user and practitioner perspectives.

China's burgeoning short video industry includes various platforms dedicated to social entertainment, news and information, and video editing (Kong, 2018). With the popularity of short video applications in recent years, more and more social media platforms have built this form of media into their applications, and the addictive use issues it raises have generated more and more attention and discussion. From the performance of social media addiction, users not only spend more time and energy on social media (D'Arienzo et al., 2019), but also may have incorrect perceptions and expectations about social media platforms, which in turn affects their psychological state in real life (Hou et al., 2019). In terms of the causes of addictive behaviors, there is a significant positive correlation between anxiety and avoidance of intensive and abnormal use of the Internet and social media (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). Lack of friends, feeling of fulfillment, fear of missing out, intertwining of social media and daily life also the main reason for users' reliance on social media (Hou et al., 2019).

The human nature of people to tend to be with those who share the same views and opinions about the world has become the organizing principle of many digital social networks (Auxier & Vitak, 2019). Social media may limit exposure to different perspectives and facilitate the formation of similar user groups that form and reinforce a common narrative, which is echo chamber (Cinelli et al., 2021). On today's content platforms and social media that rely on algorithmic recommendations, in addition to user choice, the system will tend to push content based on user preferences and habits, making it more difficult for the ordinary user to escape the potential impact of echo chambers by having more limited control over the content they access.

Discussions about the security of data and privacy have accompanied the various stages of development of Internet products. The growing popularity of social media has attracted a large number of people to participate in numerous activities on a daily basis. This has resulted in a tremendous wealth of user-generated data (Rewaria, 2021). From the Web 1.0 era to the Web 2.0 era, and then to the emerging Internet products that constantly rely on data and algorithms today, the degree of reliance and utilization of data is increasing, however, the relationship between users and the platform is also becoming more and more unequal (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). The content contribution of users on the platform and the data left by users on the platform have become the two major resources of the Internet platform as well as the means of profit (Livingstone, 2018).

Douyin

In the existing studies focusing on Douyin, in addition to user behavior and motivation, the characteristics of the platform and its close connection with the Chinese political and social environment are also the key aspects that have been focused on.

Younger people make up the majority of Douyin/TikTok users, and the video they produce also largely influences the content and style trends on the platform (Weimann & Masri, 2020). With the expansion of the influence and the commercial value, the platform is becoming more commercialized and professionalized. Celebrities, attention and visibility have formed a unique trend and content norms within the platform, and also have a greater cultural influence outside of it (Abidin, 2020).

According to Shao's classification of users' behavior in user-generated media (2009), a study shows that users also have different motivations and purposes when using Douyin. Users consume or watch Douyin mainly for escapism, social interaction and archiving and they participate in Douyin in order to express themselves, interact with others, and escape from day to day pressure. The motivation for making Douyin videos comes from satisfying their need for self-expression and archiving (Omar & Dequan, 2020).

With the continuous expansion and development of functions and influence, Douyin/TikTok has also been used more often for political campaigns, health and public welfare communication, and commercial brand marketing, and has shown the development potential and great value in multiple fields (Anderson, 2020; Eghtesadi & Florea, 2020; Herrman, 2021, Miao et al., 2021).

Yiming Zhang, the founder of Douyin, has always emphasized the company's strong technological background rather than human intervention and influence on content distribution, and he appreciated the algorithm-driven approach and believed that machine could perform better than humans in distributing information (Feng, 2021). Such attitude and concept of the company have also been widely confirmed in the research. In Douyin's content distribution mechanism, the recommendation algorithm based on user data caters users by fully satisfying their needs, interest tag trees and user personas are used to recommend more accurate and personalized contents, thus making content meets their needs better and prolonging their usage time, which will further enhance the accuracy of the algorithm (Zhao, 2021). The application of artificial intelligence for this platform, in addition to providing users with content they are interested in, lies in its prediction and mastery of user preferences and behaviors, and this feature makes it extremely accurate in terms of ad placement, thus being pursued by advertisers, which is an important reason for the high value of Douyin/TikTok in terms of commercial development (Davis, 2019). In the

product mechanism of Douyin, user-centric theory is regarded as a representative feature, and it focuses on users and their needs throughout the process, so as to produce extremely useful and reachable products for them. When using the product, users' own behavior and habits will once again strengthen their preferences and characteristics in the process, so that this product can meet the needs of individualized and differentiated use (Jaffar et al., 2019).

In addition, Zhang points out in his research that the development of Douyin in China can be seen as the process of "infrastructuralization of platform", which has transformed from an entertainment community to an integrated platform that covering e-commerce, online education, official propaganda, and other functions. More importantly, its partnership with both the central government and the local government has grown over the its development, giving it greater voice in content management and influence on social life (2020). In terms of the change in content style, Douyin was considered vulgar and shallow in its early days, but now it has become keep in line with the "positive energy" of Chinese state propaganda, even creating a unique style of playful patriotism (Chen et al, 2020). This makes Douyin very special, whether compared to other short video platforms in China, or compared to short video platforms in other countries. In Kaye and his colleagues' study, the evolutions of Douyin and TikTok are also seen as two processes with similar functions but widely divergent paths, which is also related to the different socio-political and business competitive environments in which the two products are located (2020). Therefore, the various discussions and controversies associated with Douyin have a more diverse and complex social and cultural context.

2.2. Theoretical framework - knowledge labor in informational capitalism

When discussing labor in informational capitalism, Christian Fuchs followed Slavoj Zizek 's view and mentioned the potential exploitation problems of unpaid knowledge workers by Internet content platforms in the Web 2.0 era (Zizek, 2017), which followed Marx' s discussion on the class problems, namely the exploitation of labor by capitalists. In the information society, the concepts of knowledge, class and labour have become vague and diverse, and the exploitation problem may be more invisible (2010). For short video industry practitioners, on the one hand, they are as ordinary employees, as the potential object of exploitation, while on a larger level, the platforms and mechanisms they create through their professional abilities, also generate certain exploitation for the broader ordinary Internet users, also known as prosumers, and they themselves to some extent also belong to prosumers.

Based on the above, in this section, first of all, as a platform-based content media, the concepts of platform and platformization related to short video applications will be briefly discussed, while the concepts of informational capitalism and knowledge society, as the social context in which they work, are also important aspects for understanding their work and daily use behavior, and provide a broader theoretical foundation for the research topic.

Platform and Platformization

The concept of platforms and platformization is now increasingly applied in research on social media and mobile applications. From a technical point of view, platforms can be considered as online infrastructures that can be programmed and built (Bogost & Montfort, 2009). These infrastructures built by large companies provides special online environments for multiple participants that allows them to be brought together and meet their different needs (Bucher and Helmond, 2018). In the field of media studies, the concept of platformization focuses on the study of 'how the political economy of the cultural industries changes through platformization: the penetration of economic and infrastructural extensions of online platforms into the web, affecting the production, distribution, and circulation of cultural content' (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). For today's social media platforms, end-users, developers and advertisers together constitute the participation and use of the platform, and their actions are linked together through the various mechanisms and rules of the platform (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

According to Bucher and Helmond, different social media platforms constitute different specific internal environments, which consist of their own mechanisms and functions that have a strong influence and constraining effect on their use (2018). In the process of platformization, the rules dominated by large platform companies affect the various production and interactions of content productions within the platform, and the users need to constantly adapt or learn the corresponding rules and features of the platforms, while they also constantly adjust and adapt their practice on the platform based on feedback in the form of data (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). On platforms, the behavior and choice of users have influence on a large extent. However, with the expansion of the scale of the platform, the platform owned by large companies can have the characteristics of infrastructure, and also have a great intervention and influence on the public domain, and the technical neutrality and openness implied by the term platform itself may make people ignore its controversial and social risks (Gillespie, 2010).

In the criticism of the platform economy and platform labor, the relationship between the platform and the platform labors is considered to be unequal, and the labor is not well

protected and can exacerbate the exploitation of creative labor (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). However, in a study of another famous Chinese short video platform Kuaishou, Lin and de Kloet argue that short video platforms have made it possible for more ordinary people, especially grassroots groups who previously did not have the ability to generate content, to participate in content production through a very simple and direct way, and get money and fame from this. In China's social and economic environment, this kind of digital entrepreneurship led by ordinary people through the opportunities provided by platforms is seen as transcending the negative aspects of platform labor (2019).

Informational capitalism in the Web 2.0 era

Information capitalism is used to describe the part of contemporary society that operates primarily on the basis of information, including cognition, cooperation, application processes, and information technology (Fuchs, 2010). With the advent of Web 2.0 applications, there has been a clear shift in the way online media content is produced and distributed, which has led to a participatory culture where users are more active in producing content and expressing themselves, rather than passive reception in the previous model (Jenkins, 2006). With the full implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, this participation activity and participation culture brings more business benefits, with users having more power over content as they add commercial value (van Dijck, 2009).

This culture of participation has also gained value in the larger social sphere outside the Internet, and Ritzer and Jurgenson believes that the current capitalist economy has moved away from being dominated solely by production or consumption, and becoming dominated by prosumption, and the Web 2.0 era made this feature more obvious. In the Web 2.0 era, because consumers were more fully involved in the production process, the relationship between production and consumption was greatly changed, and the concept of prosumption has received an unprecedented boost (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

According to Fuchs, “informational productive forces are the medium and outcome of capitalist interests, strategies, and restructuring - technology is shaped by and shapes society in complex ways” (2010, p180). And a distinctive feature in contemporary society is that networks have emerged not only as a form but have influenced rather the logic of various social structures such as production, power, and exploitation (Fuchs, 2010).

In the Web 2.0 era, Internet applications based on information technology and information interaction logic entered more and more social areas, and large multinational corporations became increasingly influential as the actual controllers of these applications. But at the same time, on top of these applications and platforms, ordinary users and

consumers are not completely passive. Internet applications and platforms have become the infrastructure to a certain extent, while users use them to achieve their own goals and needs. Both the Internet platform as an infrastructure or the content produced by users rely on the cognition, processing, interaction and cooperation of information, and these networks are mediated by information and communication technologies and knowledge processes (Fuchs,2010).

knowledge labor

The discussion of the concept of "knowledge labor" predates the widespread application of the Internet. In the early stage, Bell proposed the concept of "knowledge class" and pointed out that it was the most rapidly developing social group in the post-industrial era, and that the traditional labor theory would be challenged by the value of knowledge because social production practices were developing in the direction of increasing informatization (Bell, 1976). Most early discussions of knowledge labor contrasted knowledge labor with traditional manual labor, while emphasizing the involvement of knowledge in economic activities.

With the development of productivity and economic structure, the role of knowledge in the profession has become increasingly common, and is no longer restricted to specific labor, but has become ordinary activities in various production activities (Burton-Jones,2003), and more and more work related to information and knowledge processing has been classified as knowledge labor. Since the 1990s, the original concept of knowledge workers was challenged, and the category of expertise and the definition of the intensity of knowledge have changed (Svarc,2015). Schmiede proposed a new definition of knowledge labor under the concept of informational capitalism, emphasizing the mastery and application of specific expertise in the new economy, while practical experience and comprehensive capabilities within the field are taken into the consideration of this concept (2006).

Schmiede places Knowledge labor in the upper end of the workforce while Fuchs emphasizes the status as average worker, arguing that even if some knowledge workers become successful knowledge entrepreneurs or accumulate a certain amount of capital through knowledge, the class division does not disappear. Fuchs take google as an example, where the four top directors and officials hold more than 90 percent of the stock, making them knowledge capitalists, while the other 20,000 employees are actually knowledge workers (2010).

In the current concept of informational capitalism, knowledge workers are considered to have certain particularity in ability and thinking and are even considered to somehow form a new class. Florida talks about the rise of "creative class" who work in occupations that require complex problem solving, involve a great deal of independent judgment, and require a high level of education or human capital, while the main goal of their work is to create new ideas, new technologies, and creative content (2002).

Knowledge labor and platform labor in the platform economy overlap to some extent, but compared with the two, platform labor focuses more on the relationship with the platform, while knowledge labor focuses on the professionalism and requirements of the work itself. In this study Knowledge labor is described as the identity of short video industry practitioners, focusing on the professional identity as an employee of a short video platform company.

3. Methods

3.1. Methodological approach

The purpose of this study is to understand employees' identity perceptions and negotiations in their work and in their daily lives when it comes to social media use, especially for short video platforms, focusing more on individual experiences and opinions. In order to achieve this, the research adopts qualitative research method. Rich and descriptive data can be generated through the methods and can be interpreted and analysed based on the topic and categories, making it possible to provide descriptive, in-depth answers to the questions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews was considered to be appropriate due to its potential to access the experiences and opinions of the participants. This form of interview is widely used in studies that provide a specific and in-depth understanding of individual behaviour, which not just focus on what, but how people make sense of the topic (Kvale, 2008). And specific questions can be flexibly adjusted according to the answers of different interviewees, and follow-up questions may also be added to let the interviewee express the related opinions more deeply and comprehensively.

After the completion of all interviews, thematic analysis is used in the process of data analysis. As a foundational research method in qualitative research, thematic analysis can be used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data with rich descriptions and concise organization (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Also, thematic analysis allows the researcher to examine the data intensely and with flexibility, with the purpose of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Considering that the interview topic list in the study made a preliminary division for the interviewees' responses and became the basic coding category, while the different responses based on questions focused on different angles and content of similar aspects. Therefore, the research analysis method of this study is a combination of inductive and deductive.

3.2. Data Collection

A combination of sampling methods is used to recruit the participants. First, purposive sampling is used to sample participants by exploiting the researcher's personal network. The researcher has previous experience working in the advertising and marketing industry, and some of his friends and colleagues who currently work in short-video platforms such as Douyin provided basic industry information for this study, and they became the initial interviewees. Second, the snowball sampling approach was also applied to the recruitment of respondents for this study. After being interviewed, the initial

interviewees recommended friends or colleagues who they thought were suitable and had more insights about the topic to participate in the interviews. In addition, public calls for participation are also posted on the researcher's personal social media, which also brought in more respondents outside of the personal relationships for this study.

In total fifteen practitioners from Douyin had been selected to participate in the study, (including two in pilot interviews). The sample is comprised of nine men and six women and the age of the participants ranged between 25 and 40 years old.

All participants had experience working at Douyin, twelve were directly employed by Douyin, while the other three worked for partner or vendor companies directly related to Douyin. Of these fifteen participants, eleven were still working at Douyin and four were no longer working at Douyin at the time of the interview. The scope of their work involves all aspects of the Douyin platform, mainly based on marketing and platform content operations. To ensure their anonymity and privacy, their names and job titles will not be published in the study. In order to identify the participants in this thesis, numeric code will be used as the names of the participants.

All the interviewees were provided with the Informed Consent Form prior to the start of the interview session, where the contact details of the researcher, the nature of the study and future application of its results are stated. The form also lists the participant's rights, risks and benefits associated with the involvement. All the interviewees were informed that during the interview process, conversations would be recorded and transcribed for subsequent research use and that all information would follow strict confidentiality norms. Furthermore, the participants were informed about the fact that participation in this study was voluntary and that they would not be paid for participating.

Besides the above basic privacy and ethics issues, considering the possible sensitivity of this study topic, the following measures were taken to ensure the recruitment of participants and the protection of them during the design and implementation of the study.

First, regarding the design of the interview questions, the purpose of this study is about employees' identity perceptions and negotiations between work and daily life when it comes to social media use, focusing more on individual experiences and cognitions. Although the interviewees have the identity of employees, all responses and feedback are based on their personal thoughts and did not represent their job status. No specific algorithm design questions or commercial competition issues are involved to ensure that all answers do not infringe on the trade secrets of Douyin at any level, and that all issues related to international relations and political sensitivity in the development process of Douyin would not be mentioned, so as to ensure that all respondents' answers would not involve laws and

regulations or speech norms in China. In addition, all respondents are told in advance that they can skip or refuse to any questions at any time when they think they are unwilling or uncomfortable to provide certain questions.

Second, about the recruitment of interviewees and the protection of their personal information. I know some colleagues and friends who work at Douyin directly through personal and working relationships, and these people were chosen as my "gatekeepers" to enter the group of Douyin employees. They have agreed to be formally interviewed in the future and introduced their close colleagues as my interviewees. I also learned some basic rules about the use of social media by Douyin employees from them, which there is no restrictive norm for their employees to use Douyin, and they are encouraged to use various products from the company for daily communication. To protect interviewees' personal information, their names, years of work, and specific work departments will not be presented.

The interviews were conducted as informal interviews, which allowed the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee to remain open to the interviewee's perspectives (Bryman, 2016). Besides, informal interviews are essential in gaining an understanding of an individuals' point of view (Bryman, 2016). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. The flexibility of this approach enhances the fluidity of the interview as well as being more oriented to the interviewee's personal experience, allowing the researcher have opportunities for follow-up questions, asking for clarification, expansion and other examples (Agarwal, 2020). Semi-structured in-depth interviews ensures that the interviewees are able to express their views on the impact of digital media technologies on the acculturation process in a richer and more detailed manner (Agarwal, 2020). The interview guide provided the preferred order of topics and leading questions needed, but the actual execution of the study varied between participants, depending on the individual and the answers given.

Each interview was expected to last one hour, and the topic list was divided into four sections, from superficial behavior to deep motivation, from general perspectives to specific strategies, based on the previous theoretical framework and relevant previous research, with the aim of obtaining interviewee' answers and opinions to the three sub-questions covered in this study and to the overall research questions.

The first section included an ice-breaking session and basic media usage behaviours. The researcher first gave a general introduction to the purpose and content of the interview and introduced himself and his daily media use habits, after which the interviewees were invited to briefly introduce their basic personal information such as their work experience,

professional background, and years of work. Questions about social media use will be set in specific use scenarios in order to encourage respondents to give as detailed and vivid descriptions as possible. Respondents are invited to describe a typical day in their own lives, and then describe their different use behaviours and the motivations or purposes behind them according to different time points and scenarios.

The second section focused on interviewee' daily use habits and motivations in short-video platforms, such as their understanding and perception of the rules and mechanisms of various short-video applications, including Douyin, their use strategies, frequency, and purposes on short-video platforms, and the differences in behaviours based on work purposes and those based on personal daily purposes.

The third section mainly focused on interviewees' perceptions and opinions on the controversies and evaluations of short-video platforms, which are mainly derived from the current external comments on the criticism of the development process of short-video media such as Douyin and Kuaishou. The negative comments focused on addiction use, vulgar and over-entertainment content, echo chamber effect and risk of data privacy, while the positive comments are about the opportunities for content creation provided by the platforms and the wide and convenient information channels for ordinary users. Interviewees were invited to comment on these views or controversies from the perspectives of practitioners and ordinary users. Considering the sensitivity and controversy, questions about social media mechanisms or controversies are set up in the later part of the interview, after the interviewees and the researcher have established a certain trust relationship.

The last section of the interview focused on the identity negotiations and self-perception of the interviewees in the work. The main questions were related to the life changes brought about by the work experience, the main sense of fulfilment in their work, their personal attitudes when facing controversies in the industry or the company, and their ranking and perception of the identities of users, employees, and creators. As the final part of the interview, some extended questions based on the interviewees' previous answers were extended or added to, and the interviewees were invited to add or express other opinions on the topics covered throughout the interview. At the end of the interview, open questions were set up and interviewees are encouraged to further supplement or modify their previous related answers.

The data collection, including two pilot interviews, lasted from March 2021 to May 2021. In the beginning of March, the two trial interviews were conducted to test the topic list and practice for the interview. Considering that although the topic list was partially adjusted

in the formal interviews, the initial pilot interviews still contained a lot of valuable content, the trial interviews were also included in the final data analysis.

Due to the constraints of the interviewees' workplace, all interviews were conducted remotely via video or audio calls, and in the actual interviews, each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, and the interview recordings were transcribed into text via Iflyrec software, and the researcher manually proofread the machine transcription text. All quoted texts applied to this paper were later translated into English.

3.3. Data analysis

After conducting the in-depth interviews, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analysis through thematic analysis. According to Braun & Clarke, the steps of the thematic analysis are as follows: Familiarizing with the data: This process is a familiarization and preliminary assessment of the interview data. During the data collection process, the interview questions and answers basically follow a sequence from specific behaviours to internal motivations, and from individual experience to overall perceptions, so these questions based on behaviours, motivations, and evaluations can be used for a preliminary and simple classification of the data. Initial coding: The initial coding process used an open coding approach, in which all data collected were coded and initially categorized. The themes are mainly used for the organization and simplification of the interview data. Since all interviews are based on the personal experiences of the interviewees, the data may involve a large amount of specific information, which needs to be categorized during the coding process and presented in codes that minimize specific individual cases and focus on categories and themes of behavior, motivation, and perception. Reviewing the themes: In this process, based on the initial coding themes, it is necessary to return to the questions and sub-questions of this study, to organize and correspond to the existing coding based on these questions. It also needs to reorganize and analyse key elements that involved in previous studies, such as identity contradiction and negotiation of behavior, based on the theoretical framework and literature review. The review of the literature and theory can also help to identify additional elements that may be present in the interview data but have not been discussed in previous studies. Defining the themes: In the later stages of themes definition and analysis, insights and concepts about these themes are prepared for the research report. By comparing and contrasting the different themes and sub

themes, essential information is provided for the answers to the sub-questions as well as the conclusions of the overall research question.

During the actual coding process, since all interviews were structured by the topic list and respondents' responses were addressed with similar interview questions, so all the themes and many of the sub-categories in the interview transcripts were generated in a concept-driven way. The next phase was mainly characterized by a revision of the data: to see if the coded data was an accurate representation of the entire data set, or to code any leftover data that was not coded at all. Additional sub-categories, as well as the sub-subcategories emerged during the interviews, therefore, were added to coding frame in a data-driven way.

4. Results and Analysis

Chapter overview

This chapter is based on the content of the interviews. The results of the in-depth semi-structured interviews are based on the three sub-questions addressed in this study, namely, practitioners' personal habits and strategies of short video and social media use, practitioners' perceptions of Douyin products, and the controversies of the short video industry, and the identity coordination experienced by the practitioners.

The first section analyses the media habits and use strategies of the respondents, covering their general media literacy, their use behavior and motivations, and their use behavior and attitude towards the products of the companies they work for. The second section is about the respondents' perceptions of their company's product Douyin, which involves their analysis and understanding of the platform's mechanism and features from professional practitioners' perspective, as well as their feelings and understanding of Douyin as users. The third section is about the practitioners' views on the controversies in the short video. In the research process, considering the possible sensitivity of employees to evaluate the current employer, some of the controversial issues are put forward from the perspective of the whole industry. The answers from the respondents are also aimed at the controversies and problems existing in the whole short video industry, and in the actual situation, the problems existing in different short video products have some commonality. The fourth part is the practitioners' perception and coordination of their own identities. The analysis of this part comes from the respondents' judgment on the value of their work, their experience in dealing with conflicts at work, their feelings about their personal career development and their understanding of their own professional identities, etc. Through the analysis and organization of these issues, this part discusses the coordination or perception of identity problems faced by the practitioners.

4.1. Media habits and use behavior

4.1.1. Deep media literacy with clear motivation

In a fast-growing industry with good prospects, Douyin has attracted a large number of employees with excellent background. Most of them have great professional background and higher level of education, which to some extent makes them have good media literacy and will selectively receive and consume information and content. Different media and

information platforms will be selected based on their own actual needs and scenarios, and tend to choose systematic, professional and in-depth content or information.

Although Douyin is not a traditional content or media company, many of employees have experience working in traditional media or content platforms, especially in content operations or media management departments. The machine algorithms analyse and predict the habits and preferences of different users to recommend content that may be of interest to them, so that even in content operations or management, employees' personal preferences and experience do not influence the content of the platform, but rather perform basic review and evaluation of content, such as managing or removing videos with pornography, or vulgar content, or organize and promote the content with commercial sponsorship or government promotion.

The current work has limited influence on their own media literacy, but their past media habits, or working experience in content or media organizations still have a greater influence on their current information access and media use habits. Many interviewees say that they are more interested in more in-depth, serious and informative content than entertaining and light-hearted content, and such media habits have influenced their content consumption and information acquisition sources to a certain extent. Also, they evaluate that their attitude towards media information is more neutral and rational, less likely to be overly disturbed or influenced by media information and have more systematic and diversified methods and channels for obtaining information.

I hope that I can get something more in-depth on social media, and then there will be more knowledge, not just for entertainment, not just for recreation, but there may be more extended broader and wide uses, not so narrow. —— Interviewee No. 14

We are clear that all the users see is not what they want to see, but what others want them to see. So we treat information in most of the cases, is to maintain a neutral and questioning attitude, in addition, we may in more circumstances, will not look at the matter, and more about the whole public opinion direction, we may not pay more attention to the event itself, but will pay more attention to the public response to the matter. —— Interviewee No. 6

In addition, some interviewees also mention that the industry and working environment is full of changes and innovations, and it is also a very competitive environment, as one practitioner describe that it is a new industry that "changes day by day

and cannot stop learning", so this environment also has a high demand for self-improvement. Many interviewees talk about the pressure of continuous learning and self-growth, especially when they entered the short video industry from other companies or industries, and this motivate them to acquire useful knowledge through various channels.

Many interviewees mentioned that they try to avoid unconscious use of various types of media for information or entertainment, such as dividing media behaviors based on leisure and entertainment and those based on professional information acquisition and try not to overlap.

Information and entertainment, I actually separate, information to information, entertainment to entertainment, I do not like to mix them together. In fact, I do not like short videos, working in this industry, but the work actually doesn't require us to stay immersed in it. — Interviewee No. 8

Their work has a significant impact on their media habits, not only the use of their own company's applications, but also the use habits of other media platforms. For example, they will follow relevant information for the purpose of understanding market trends and competitors or start to use relevant products after entering the industry.

After working, I may pay attention to some news of competing products, especially the leading company's news. — Interviewee No. 14

In fact, in the early days, I resisted short videos like Douyin because I thought it was boring. — Interviewee No. 4

4.1.2. Not social media lover nor Douyin expert

The majority of interviewees mentioned that they are now intentionally spending less time on social media and even using external tools to reduce their reliance on social media, preferring to return to more serious and focused media platforms for information.

In fact, I have very little contact with other social media products, because I don't think I can access too much information in all places at once, and I don't want to waste time on it. — Interviewee No. 10

Actually, I'm trying to restrain myself from using my phone as much as possible. —
Interviewee No. 1

In general, they are not heavy users of social media and intend to restrain their use; they are more concerned with the purpose of daily use rather than just using it to kill time. They tend to believe that they should reduce the amount of time they spend on social media and expand their access to information in order to make better use of social media and reduce its potential negative impact on their lives.

Even if many interviewees have professional experience in the social media industry, they are not lovers of social media in terms of personal habits and preferences. Many of the use and attention of social media is for professional purposes, rather than personal actual hobbies and needs.

Just not fall in line. — Interviewee No. 2

Almost all interviewees say that although they work at Douyin, they are not heavy users of this product, and their knowledge of Douyin is mostly limited to the field they work in. In terms of use behavior on Douyin, most of them are less engaged, mainly used for browsing and simple interaction, and rarely with active content sharing. From the point of view of functions and mechanisms, their use of Douyin is not comprehensive, and all short video products are not media platforms they would use in their daily life.

There are some distinctive features of the interviewees' less use of Douyin. From the point of view of the "results" of use, almost all respondents say that their Douyin accounts "do not have many followers", and they have never wished to operate their accounts more seriously to express themselves or gain some income from them. In terms of the functions they use in the process, they basically only stay in the most basic video browsing and live streaming functions of Douyin, and they rarely use the online payment functions, social functions and e-commerce functions that Douyin has been promoting.

For many interviewees, Douyin plays a very limited role in their lives outside of work, and when asked about the social media or content platforms they use every day, Douyin is barely among the first names they mentioned. Some of the reasons for this are personal habits and preferences, such as "it doesn't fit my aesthetics and preferences", as interviewee 14 put it. Some respondents also avoid using it in their personal lives for work-life balance reasons. Some respondents said that working at Douyin often requires long

working hours and intense workload, so it is relatively difficult to maintain a work-life balance and they do not want to be occupied by work-related matters outside of work.

My daily work is already about this, if I still spend time on it in my own time, will feel like I'm not off work. — Interviewee No. 7

I basically don't produce anything, mainly browsing, occasionally comment and interact a little. — Interviewee No. 10

But to be honest my desire to express myself would not be that strong now. I even set my account to private. — Interviewee No. 5

4.2. Overall evaluation of Douyin

In the in-depth interviews, all interviewees are asked to give their opinions and understanding of Douyin, from the perspective of users and practitioners. In the interviews, these evaluations come from three aspects, the first aspect is that, direct comments of Douyin, including what they consider the features and style of Douyin, and how they would introduce Douyin to someone who doesn't know much about the product. The second aspect, the evaluation came from interviewees' attitudes of some of the mentioned interpretations of Douyin about specific comments or opinions. The third aspect comes from the other descriptions involved in referring to Douyin during the interviews, and is not limited to direct evaluation, but may come from the evaluation and knowledge of the Douyin product mentioned in response to other questions. Based on these three aspects, a more comprehensive and objective evaluation of Douyin can be obtained.

Overall, the interviewees' evaluation of Douyin is very positive, and they perceive Douyin from the perspective of its use experience and the individual or overall value it brings. On the other hand, they also tend to believe that there is a long-standing stereotype of Douyin, and the evaluation of Douyin lags behind and does not provide a more comprehensive and timely understanding of the product.

All interviewees are users of Douyin, but most are not heavy users, yet all have familiarity and understanding of the mechanics of the product, and when some features are closely related to their work, their evaluation and opinions are more specific and in-depth. The identity of practitioners makes them often incorporate some comparative dimensions when evaluating the product, such as comparing Douyin with Kuaishou or with other short

video applications. In addition, the specificity of the industry and the socio-cultural environment in which it operates are also mentioned in the discussion.

4.2.1. Rich diverse and easy, with “positive energy”

When it comes to the platform and content style of Douyin, the majority of interviewees believe that it is very rich and diverse. In terms of mechanism and functions, Douyin is considered to be a very "comprehensive" mobile application, covering short videos, medium videos, live streaming, online shopping, social networking and other diverse functions. When it comes to the style of the content, interviewees also consider it to be very diverse and believe that there is an endless amount of content available to users on the platform.

When talking about such perceptions, the interviewees tend to contrast the established impressions that Douyin has formed externally. They believe that in the early stages of Douyin's development, it did focus on short 15-second videos, while now medium videos have also become very important content form on the platform. In addition, very popular features such as live streaming, online shopping and even mobile payments have been well integrated into Douyin's product in recent years in China's Internet product trends, making Douyin a very comprehensive application already.

I think now Douyin is already a very comprehensive product, not quite the way it was when people first got to know it, you can treat it as live streaming software, or even Taobao, video is still an important part of it, but other features that are valuable to users, have also been incorporated already. — Interviewee No. 2

For the content style of short videos, the public also tend to think that it is towards entertainment and shallowness. Many interviewees believe that although the media form of the video and the user's usage scenario play a big role in determining its content style, at present, the content style on Douyin has broken through the category of funny and entertainment, and many educational or informative videos with some depth are becoming more and more common. Any user can actually find content that interests them.

Interviewee No. 6 mentioned the "de-entertainment" he experienced in his work. One of the things the brand has been doing is to fight against that “Douyin is useless”, and there are a lot of people criticizing Douyin, saying that it's a waste of users' time, so we will guide the production and feeds of content. Push more knowledge-based content, fact-based

information, as well as high-quality lifestyle and travel content, so that you feel that Douyin is useful. In fact, the style of content is very diverse.

The interviewees believed that the development of product and the expansion of user scale are important reasons for the increasing diversification and integration of Douyin. As competition in the industry intensifies, on the one hand, the platform needs to go on catering to users' needs and creating new features, on the other hand, as the largest short video platform in the market today, a large number of users continue to create content on the platform, which also brings the richness of the content style.

Interviewees believe that Douyin is a very simple and straightforward product, which brings convenience and satisfaction in the use experience, and that users can easily learn and become familiar with the rules of the product and engage in deeper interaction or production.

There are two reasons for this simple and straightforward feature. Firstly, Douyin uses video as the main form of content, compared to text and pictures, the video format attracts the audience's attention more and engages them in the content, and as the video content is not difficult to understand and follow, the audience can easily get entertainment or information from it without investing too much effort. Another reason is about Douyin's product mechanism. From the level of operation, users only need to swipe the screen to choose to browse or skip the video, without more searching or filtering, and they will constantly get the video they may be interested in. From the perspective of interaction and content production, Douyin's like and comment functions are very simple, and users can establish certain social relationships through simple interactive behaviors, thus deepening their dependence on the platform. Smartphones make it easy to take photos and videos, and Douyin's built-in editing features and soundtrack allow users to quickly edit the original content for a better presentation, which also encourages users to produce content.

It may take you a while to get what you want, whether it's a graphic or texts.....so it can be said that Douyin has greatly improved the bottom line of video content production for ordinary users. — Interviewee No. 5

Interviewees' positive assessment of Douyin is also reflected in its high sense of social responsibility, as much of the platform's content and mechanisms are in line with the macro policies and trends promoted by the national society. In China's Internet content management system, "promoting positive social energy" is given a very important place, and this advocacy aims to encourage Internet content platforms and ordinary content creators to

actively produce positive, inspiring content, while avoiding publishing or sharing excessively negative and marginalized content.

From the overall level, short video content platform based on the smartphone and mobile Internet, provide a very simple and convenient way for grassroots users who previously did not have the ability to create content to access and produce content, they can more easily access a wide range of internet content, and furthermore, they can produce content directly in a simple way, thus better integrating into the mainstream culture and even bringing themselves some followers and financial gains. These opportunities are the social value brought together by the short video content industry. On a more concrete level, Douyin has increased its investment and attention to the rural market since 2019, and cooperated with the government to help promote some rural agricultural products and rural tourism through short videos and live streaming, which, combined with the Chinese government's overall mission of "poverty alleviation", have brought real economic benefits to many rural areas.

Very socially responsible, and I think it can actually really do something very meaningful. — Interviewee No. 3

I actually recognize this, I think this is actually probably one of the biggest benefits of the short video platform, it has changed the lives of many people. — Interviewee No. 12

Part of the “positive energy” of the Douyin platform also comes from the government's mandatory regulation and the platform's handling of content. In 2018, other products of ByteDance had been officially punished for content style issues, and with Douyin's rapid development and huge user scale, its content management has gradually become more conservative and unified with what the government advocates.

Maybe we have a little more ‘positive energy’ compared to other platforms. — Interviewee No. 5

4.2.2. User-driven and data-oriented

When talking about the platform mechanism and features of Douyin, most of the interviewees emphasize the important role played by "users", who are not only the producers

and consumers of content, but also, in general, their overall preferences and interests determine the style and overall image of Douyin content. From the perspective of individual experience, each user sees different content, and the content they see is actually a response to their personal habits and interests. Although Douyin will make different treatments for different content, such as blocking illegal or vulgar content and increasing the recommendation of official government content, overall, Douyin as a platform does not directly determine each user's content access and experience in it.

From the perspective of content production, Douyin does not produce content at all, but provides opportunities for users to encourage them to create content, and then through the operation of the platform, the content can be continuously produced and disseminated.

Douyin calls itself a platform, what do you mean by platform? I do not produce content, I let the creators to produce content, I operate these creators, and then make them to produce. — Interviewee No. 8

From the perspective of content acquisition and consumption, unlike the traditional media in the past, practitioners consider the control over content and distribution by Douyin is very limited, and the role is described as "middleman".

Douyin only acts as a middleman. User preferences are more important, so you may see a lot more outrageous, worthless content on it that should not be created and shared. — Interviewee No. 4

Whether it's Douyin or Toutiao, we say we're not the media, we don't have an editing desk. — Interviewee No. 8

In an early interview with the media, Yiming Zhang, the founder of Douyin, said that "algorithms have no values", as a way to explain ByteDance's position of being algorithm- and data-driven and not being involved in content production and control as a technology company, which has come under a lot of criticism during the development of Douyin and other products including official criticism from the government for neglecting its social responsibility as a content platform and the platform's role in guiding user content. Although Douyin and other ByteDance products have increased their intervention and management of content on the platform in the subsequent development process, Douyin is still technology

and data-driven from the perspective of its official propaganda and external perceptions, and this view is shared by the majority of interviewees.

Everything on the Internet is data-driven, all results-oriented. In fact, the platform approach can be guided by some activities or some incentives, certainly not the same as the traditional way of having an editorial room. — Interviewee No. 10

This data-driven philosophy affects employees' judgment on their work decision-making process, and also directly influences their perception of various phenomena or issues on Douyin, such as the more popular video content or content style on Douyin. The popularity of content does not come from the shaping of the Douyin platform, but rather due to users' preferences in the process of using it, and more users browsing, more likes and comments will make the content gain greater exposure, so user behavior based on data is the fundamental reason for the popularity of content on Douyin. The data and technology-oriented feature is also believed to cause different people to have different experiences and feelings in the process of using Douyin, and the algorithm and recommendation technology based on individual users will make different predictions based on individual behavior, rather than treating all users as a whole.

Based on the above perceptions of data and technology as the core, to a large extent, this also brings up other opinions about the Douyin platform and mechanism, such as the belief that it is relatively objective and neutral because it is cantered on algorithms and technology, and the belief that individual users' habits and preferences are the main factors that lead to different results, many of which involve controversial opinions related to Douyin. awareness and processing, which will be specifically addressed in the next section.

4.3. Perception of the controversies

Based on previous critical studies of short-form media and current controversies or criticisms of platforms such as Douyin, this research on Douyin and short video platforms involved controversies and criticisms designed in four main areas: addiction use, fragmented and vulgar content, echo chamber effect, and privacy and data risks. In the in-depth interviews, all interviewees are invited to give their views and opinions on these related controversies or criticisms from the perspective of users and practitioners. Feedback from the interviewees indicates that practitioners are mostly aware of the existence of these issues, but also generally believe that some of the allegations or criticisms are exaggerated. In

addition, these controversies are related to each other, not separate problems, and practitioners often view these problems as a result of industry characteristics, national conditions and user habits, and as a common problem in the development of the industry, rather than a defect of one platform alone. In contrast to addiction use, fragmented and vulgar content, and the echo chamber effect, interviewees were very pessimistic about the risks associated with data and privacy, believing that individual users are powerless and passive in their use of data facing commercial companies.

Interviewees, as practitioners in the short video industry, provide a strong professional insider's perspective when responding to these controversies, and therefore tend to respond to them from a macro perspective. Due to the media habits and behaviours of the interviewees mentioned above, their influence may be relatively limited, so although the interviewees are also ordinary users, in general, they are more likely to express their personal views and attitudes from an external perspective.

4.3.1. The problems exist but are exaggerated

With various controversial issues, the interviewees generally admit the existence of the problems, but at the same time believe that some of the controversies are exaggerated and that some criticism and controversy are prejudicial. At the early stage of Douyin's product development, its platform had a single function, and the platform's supervision of various contents was also very limited. Therefore, in the process of rapid development and popularity, Douyin was labelled as fragmented and overly vulgar, and this perception made Douyin gain a very distinct and specific image perception on the one hand, however, it also brought certain restrictions on its future development, even though the length of its videos and Even though the length of its videos and the functions of its products have become more diversified, it is still more difficult to get rid of the initial perception.

On the one hand, the content on the Douyin platform is already quite diverse and rich, and in addition to entertaining content, a lot of useful, educational and informative content is available on the platform, which can meet users' needs for more in-depth and rich information in addition to leisure and entertainment. The interviewees also believe that the content of the platform is more useful, educational and informative. In addition, interviewees also believe that the content users see on Douyin is closely related to their habits and preferences, and that the same standards and requirements cannot be applied to the needs of different users.

I don't think Douyin is overly entertaining, it now also has a lot of one-minute or three-minute videos, for example, I can also watch TV shows in Douyin. — Interviewee No.5

If you watch the short video, it is not to say that there is nothing at all, and the sense of gain is different for each person. — Interviewee No.5

On the other hand, interviewees also believe that some of the criticisms of Douyin and short videos are full of bias, such as the tendency to view the public's daily media consumption habits from an elitist perspective and perhaps overestimate the influence of short videos on people, and that it is not appropriate to rely on a relatively entertaining content platform and expect such a product to solve the public's information access problem.

So, when we use the elite perspective to criticize this, I actually think this is unfair, what is the real society, a more grounded society? But why is Douyin still relatively popular? It's because most people, in fact, are not like the elite mentality I just described, in fact, their brains are very simple, they simply do not want to get any knowledge, I hope I get home after work at 5 o'clock, brains do not have to move, I just need to move my fingers, and then it's good, I do not want to get knowledge. This kind of people is actually the majority. — Interviewee No.8

There are also some criticisms that Douyin pushes similar content based on users' past preferences and habits, which in the long run will only give users the information and opinions they are interested in, and such a mechanism will narrow their access to information and even making their opinions more polarized, which is not conducive to communication and interaction at the personal and social levels. Some interviewees gave two comments on this criticism. Firstly, from the current technical means, the platform has not only pushed the content that users are interested in, but also added other information to the tweets to constantly expand the range of users' interests and increase their use time. In addition, Douyin is not the only channel for most users to get information, users can get richer and more differentiated content and information through other content media platforms.

Media empowerment, it actually makes this vision of many audiences more open, as far as you can see not only what you care about. — Interviewee No.4

But I think you perceive the world actually has a lot of ways, if you only rely on Douyin, if you feel that this is the whole world, I think there is also a little strange.
— Interviewee No.6

4.3.2. The problems are common

The interviewees tend to believe that some of the controversies are common to the development of the whole industry, not unique to individual platform, and therefore difficult to be solved by changes in one company. And they tend to think that some controversies are reasonable commercialization behaviours and market strategies, which are inevitable trends. It is not comprehensive enough to think only from the perspective of users, and commercial companies cannot be expected to solve social problems.

As an Internet product that provides services for free, Douyin and most other social media platforms have a similar profit model, they need to rely on users' data and content contributions to obtain advertising profits. Under such a model, users' data and content creation become a way for them to exchange with the platform services, and users' ability to control and manage their data is very limited, which has become a common controversy faced by major social media platforms. Most interviewees believe that this controversy is brought about by the development characteristics of the industry, and it is difficult to make changes just by individual companies or ordinary users.

Data and privacy protection, I think we are actually more used to it now. But I think this seems to be a more industry-wide problem. — Interviewee No.3

Many interviewees attributed the entertainment and fragmentation of content and the echo chamber effect brought by the whole social media industry. They believe that based on smartphone usage scenarios and habits, most users do not choose more serious and in-depth content for learning under such conditions, and short and medium length videos are not suitable for learning, and that their suitable field is still the entertainment and leisure scenarios. Before the rise of short video, no matter what kind of media form, relaxing and funny content, whether text or pictures, are easy to get more attention and popularity, so the entertainment of all kinds of media is the common trend of the whole content industry. And nowadays people have been used to relatively fragmented time, short content form is also more in line with the information receiving habits of today's users.

I think such a use scenario also determines that the content that people expect when they use it will not be very serious and deep, right? — Interviewee No.1

And then entertainment is actually a big trend now, in fact, this is also related to customer habits, I think the user habits have been slowly formed. — Interviewee No.12

In the face of controversies against the short video industry or Douyin platform, some interviewees believe that commercialized products should not be expected to take on more social responsibilities that did not belong to them, otherwise it may make the competition in the market stagnant and fail to bring about more prosperous content and information consumption.

I think any Internet product, in the commercial stage, you can not have too high a demand for them, and I think this is a relatively normal market mechanism, you can not let it to become a public product, and only with such competition, so that more people can participate in it. After this market becomes rich, it may also be able to benefit more people. — Interviewee No.3

The interviewees also tend to think that some controversies are brought by human nature, the product is satisfied to demand, and user habits and behavior cannot be changed and should not be able to reverse people's minds.

Regarding the addiction e use caused by short video platforms, especially for children, interviewees understand it more from the human nature perspective, such as the appeal of video media compared to text and people's natural love for light-hearted entertainment content, they believe that individual commercial companies or platforms alone should not be responsible for individual user behavior, and even if there is no company like Douyin there will be other short video platforms that will provide similar services or content in the future to gain users' time. And if there is no such media as short video, there will be more attractive content services such as video games to grab users' attention and time.

Human weakness, you can't have such an option, you don't have Douyin today, you must have other similar products, people will go to Kuaishou, if you can not use

Kuaishou, people may go to RED. I think it's ridiculous, but this thing I think is insoluble. Douyin itself, its foundation is 'people are repeaters'. — Interviewee No.4

I think this is something in human nature, and the platform is irrelevant, that is, if there is no Douyin, people will create other options. — Interviewee No.6

The popularity of short video platforms changed the traditional top-down communication model, more bottom-up, grassroots content has a chance to be seen, whether it is accepted or not, these contents always exist, people see the content that was not paid attention to before with the help of short video, and ordinary creators also gain attention and even economic benefits. The amount of content of short video is huge, to get attention faster in the mass content, strange, exaggerated, non-daily scene is indeed easier to catch people's eyes and get more exposure, the pursuit of these spectacles also created the vulgarization and hunting of content that once happened in the short video platforms.

Those very spectacle scenes, it's not that they didn't exist before, they may have existed before in nightclubs, or in the kind of entertainment venues, it definitely existed. It's just that people may now be able to see in the short video platform. — Interviewee No.7

So many people are making shallow copies of imitations, not because Douyin is toxic, but the people themselves have such a claim. — Interviewee No.4

Many interviewees also believe that different users and habits also explain different people's perceptions and opinions about Douyin and other short videos. If users lack more systematic and in-depth media habits and literacy, they will be more likely to be addicted to the constant stimulation brought by short videos and have difficulty in obtaining more effective information or entertainment. While if they can use various channels in a diversified and integrated way, they will not be overly influenced by the negative effects of short videos. Many of the interviewees mentioned the idea that "it varies from person to person" when talking about the negative effects associated with short videos, that different people's different strategies and habits may have different effects and consequences, and that some people are indeed more susceptible to the negative effects, while others can make it a relatively useful form of entertainment and relaxation.

Because I do think it will give you recommendations based on your preferences, just actually catering to your preferences, not changing your habits. — Interviewee No.11

4.3.3. Give up of privacy

In terms of their personal handling strategy, the interviewees see no way to address data and privacy concerns and have given up resistance. There is almost no way for individuals to have any solutions, especially in the unique environment of China.

In the face of the controversies that exist on various social media and content platforms about user data mining and storage and privacy related issues, almost all interviewees expressed a very pessimistic attitude, and their identity and experience as industry practitioners did not give them any special solutions when it comes to these issues, because they are facing the common situations of almost all platforms and all applications, rather than a single product. In this case, regardless of their professional status, the interviewees put themselves in the role of ordinary users, acknowledging the existence of the problem and believing that they have little ability to fight against, showing a very negative and pessimistic attitude. This attitude is reflected in ignoring the problem or using "privacy is no longer important" as a means to comfort themselves.

It's a devil's bargain, and I've been lying down for a long time. — Interviewee No.4

But I personally don't think I have any particular amount of privacy left in front of the Internet, and I probably belong to a group of people with a more give up attitude. — Interviewee No.6

Some of the interviewees address issues related to data privacy with a focus on China's unique national context and social environment. The development of mobile Internet industry is very rapid in China, and the technology is becoming more popular and faster than people can imagine. This popularity has brought huge benefits to individuals' lives and socio-economic development, while the awareness of data privacy protection is relatively backward. On the other hand, the government has the right to use or manage the data stored by all Internet companies operating in China, which makes it more difficult for ordinary users to protect their privacy, even if they can control their privacy at the level of Internet product applications, they are still powerless to manage their personal data at a larger scale.

Privacy, I care about, but I personally feel that in China, privacy is of no use, you protect it but ‘they’ can all find and use, so that I think in China, privacy is meaningless. — Interviewee No.14

Why do you think it's easier to get data in China, and when there may be some conflicts, do Chinese people still choose convenience? Instead of choosing privacy protection. Then I would think that in China, the concept of protection is relatively weak, because China is developing too fast, and then the development is fast, we all seek convenience. — Interviewee No.8

4.4. Identity coordination

4.4.1. Personal achievement

As a very new industry, short video platforms attract a large number of highly qualified employees who enter this emerging field from other industries and grow and learn together with the industry. The high pace of development, the constant freshness and the large amount of resources brought by the scale of the platform are all very attractive to employees. Many interviewees said that working for a company where they can learn something new every day is very exciting and very different from their previous jobs in traditional industries. And the scale of the user base gives them more opportunities and possibilities for business collaboration or exploration.

Very fast-paced, very cutting-edge stuff let me see a lot of quite different things, this is a very young industry. — Interviewee No.15

As mentioned above, the development of the short video industry has brought content production opportunities for ordinary users and enabled them to participate more actively in social and cultural content interaction. In addition, the rapid development of Douyin has led to more exploration in the field of public welfare and poverty alleviation, both in terms of the opportunities brought by the platform to ordinary people and the economic benefits brought by its public welfare projects, and such social value has become an important source for some interviewees in assessing their own sense of achievement in their work.

The platform will provide some profit share, helping them sell goods in their hometowns, which has changed many people's lives, I think this is actually the biggest value that it brings to society as such a content platform. — Interviewee No.12

From the perspective of personal cognition, as Douyin has a huge user base and now shows a clear downward market strategy, users living in rural areas and low tier cities have received a lot of attention, these users outside the traditional market attention also bring a very distinctive new perspective and social cognition to practitioners. This shift in perception brought about by the work has also influenced the media habits and awareness of the respondents to some extent.

I will find that the diversity of people may have to exceed my imagination, there will be some content, in the past I really have no way to accept, but indeed there will be a large number of users to like, especially some of the head account of Douyin, I think this may I have a more open attitude for more content. — Interviewee No.6

It will allow me to maintain a more objective perspective on things, to think about something deeper and multifaceted.— Interviewee No.14

4.4.2. Work comes first

Deviations between personal value preferences and job requirements are very common for the interviewees, and in the face of such deviations, all of them reported that they were guided by professional requirements in their work rather than personal interests and preferences. Work comes first as a result of identity coordination; however the way of coordination varies for different people. They recognize the deviations between work requirements and personal values and use the professional requirements of the job as the main criterion for their work and try to reconcile their personal deviations in order to adapt themselves to the requirements and content of the job.

It's hard to balance, and there is no, or rarely a more win-win or other approach. — Interviewee No.12

The deviations are particularly obvious, and some I definitely don't want to do very much. For example, there are some users, I actually dislike him, I think he has no sense of this thing, but if I have to write a PR article about this, I may have to do. — Interviewee No.7

The booming short video industry offers significant rewards and future prospects, so this realistic level of feedback is in some ways a very direct incentive and stimulus.

Sometimes a lot of things, I have my own ideas, and the views on many things are not the same, but in order to make money in this industry, so you can only tolerate, to regulate and gradually getting numb, that's what it means. — Interviewee No.14

Another way is to seek a change in mindset, by switching perspectives to rationalize work decisions that are not in line with personal preferences, such as thinking from the user's perspective or trying to accommodate work demands by breaking with personal views. Interviewees also identified professionalism as a way to deal with work challenges in a professional manner and with the intention of solving them.

More importantly, it is actually a change of mind, sometimes not what I want to pursue, but also definitely not something illegal, and not against my moral standard or anything like that. That's it, you can make money anyway. — Interviewee No.10

We all agree that the pursuit of the best, you have to choose the best solution. I may not be a person who insists too much on myself at work, so I think, especially in the workplace, I may be a little more practical from my point of view, and it is most crucial to solve the problem. — Interviewee No.9

Many interviewees specialize their personal choices and decisions in work scenarios, and they divest themselves of their personal preferences and deal with work demands in a completely rational way, without any personal value.

Most of the work is actually more fragmented, and to do a part of task, you do not need to think about how many values this thing has, it has nothing to do with my personal interests, my values. No one is really doing this thing because they like it

very much. This is also a kind of so-called professionalism, and they do not take this into account when recruiting people. — Interviewee No.4

The work still has to be done, and then maybe in the process, they know more about this, and then accept more, and then it's okay. — Interviewee No.5

The interviewees believe that there is a deviation between the work content and their use habits, the work atmosphere and environment have obvious differences from the atmosphere and environment on the platform.

As an emerging and promising industry, short video media attracts a large number of highly qualified practitioners, yet its overall market audience is still dominated by the general public. This brings about two differences; one is the difference between the work atmosphere and the platform atmosphere. At work, employees are faced with, for example, gender issues and social topics, and their views are often progressive and diverse. On the other hand, on the platform, many views and contents tend to be traditional, conservative or even vulgar due to the influence of the user group. The second difference is the difference in media usage habits, even though in this industry, practitioners tend to have more systematic or diversified media channels for content acquisition, resulting in in-depth content with professionalism and little reliance on short-form video, while ordinary users may lack more diversified channels for information acquisition. Professional practitioners are not heavy users of short videos, and their perception of potential negative effects is relatively limited. These two differences above may, to some extent, cause contradictions or deviations faced by employees in the work process.

The deliberate and obvious distinction between personal routine and work status becomes a strategy for interviewees to cope with such deviations, and they rarely apply their personal daily life media habits and interest preferences to their work and avoid letting the content and habits at work affect their personal life too much.

Colleagues will look at it separately. There are a lot of values on Douyin, such as gender issues, and there's a lot of really bad content on Douyin, but Douyin itself is a company that's doing a pretty good job on gender issues. In this company, women or the minority group are being treated very equally and friendly. — Interviewee No.4

I will focus on the user, the Internet is all about the user, so we will judge whether the user can accept this, the user like it or not, and then based on the attributes of the platform to make adjustments. — Interviewee No.8

4.4.3. A sense of powerlessness on the platform

There is a general sense of marginality and unimportance regarding the perception of their identity at work, and they believe that their ability to influence the platform is very limited and that they do not have more dominance in their work. Regardless of job content and years of experience, almost all respondents spoke of the personal powerlessness they face in working on the Douyin platform. They all believe that the work they do is not core work and is relatively marginal in terms of function, and this sense of marginality does not fully bind them to the overall vision and development of the company in a deeper way.

I think I was a special tail-end role. And my connection to the business is not as strong as it could be. The PR department itself is a money-cost department, so it's hard to assess and quantify your work. — Interviewee No.7

My job is not as central. My job is more based on the direction they have developed or they have decided. Then we think about some campaigns, whether events, or brand-related content, to interact more with users, or to promote. — Interviewee No.8

From the point of view of work feeling and commitment, personal powerlessness is also reflected in the attitude towards the work, and there is no deeper emotional commitment. This mentality of professional consideration makes them focus mainly on the completion of work tasks rather than on the continuous attention to work results.

I think me as an employee of Douyin, probably not too different from being an employee of another company, it just so happens that I am in Douyin now. — Interviewee No.9

Most people I think are in “just do a job” status. — Interviewee No.13

Because I think it's a job, and then it's over, I do have some work here, let me seem to design the product, but I do not know how much these designs work in the end, and now seems to have little to do with me. — Interviewee No.15

As an emerging company with a large number of employees and a highly segmented and process-oriented work content, there is a contrast between the huge scale of the platform, the huge number of users and the sense of marginality that employees feel in it. From the perspective of work mechanism, although employees are professional practitioners in the industry, they have no deep involvement in the work they do. The employees themselves do not perceive themselves as the creators of the platform or the designers of the mechanisms and rules, but rather as supporting roles working entirely for the data.

When asked for suggestions for the Douyin platform and the whole short video industry, many interviewees offered some expectations for the product or industry from an ideal perspective and from the perspective of a professional practitioner, but they also mentioned the difficulty of making corresponding changes and the contradictory nature of the current situation.

For example, some interviewees believe that the platform should further guide content to make the audience's access to information more valuable and avoid overly useless and extremist content, and that such guidance and control is one of the social responsibilities of enterprises. However, on the one hand, such guidance may be contrary to the technical and algorithm-driven design of the Douyin platform, while on the other hand, the control and judgment of the content may also make the platform fall into the contradiction of the source of power. Some interviewees are also dissatisfied with the current features and mechanisms of the platform, such as excessive commercial advertising and marketing content, and the addition of e-commerce features that make the content platform too much of a selling atmosphere and detract from the original purpose of the content platform.

Although it is not a news media it is a platform, but I think it can still have a certain guidance, it can make the audience more rational, not too emotional, I think the company should have such a responsibility, but in fact it is very difficult to do. — Interviewee No.14

Too much advertising and selling on the platform, the short video platform is a bit fast into the era of TV shopping. — Interviewee No.9

In contrast, some interviewees also mentioned the difficulty of making changes from the perspective of individual employees. The work of Douyin often has a very clear and segmented division, and each employee can mostly only control the work field they are in, and these jobs also have relatively clear data results as requirements, and ordinary employees think their own decision-making influence is very limited.

Do your words count? Maybe you can have some influence, but in fact this is about your level and your position in the company. — Interviewee No.14

5. Discussion and conclusion

Chapter overview

Based on the results and analysis of this research, this chapter provides further discussion of the research findings. The first section is about the professional practitioners' media use behavior and strategy, and from the results, they are not heavy users of short video products or even social media platforms. The second section concerns the practitioners' perception of platform mechanisms and industry controversies. The interviewees have a tendency to generalize the problems with regard to the various controversies and issues mentioned and are also willing to emphasize the technological neutrality of the platform, which will be discussed and analyzed in this chapter. The third section deals with the identity coordination issues experienced by the practitioners, and the interviewees' mentioned sense of accomplishment, powerlessness and marginality in their work will be further discussed in the context of concepts such as knowledge labor. Finally, the limitations of this study will be summarized and analyzed with suggestions and reference for future research.

5.1. Media behavior - Work but not use

Regarding the media habits and strategies of professional practitioners in the short video industry, from the research results, the respondents tend to have high media literacy and information consumption level, which is demonstrated by the fact that they have relatively professional and fixed media information acquisition channels, and they care more about the quality rather than quantity of content when acquiring various types of information. In different needs and scenarios, they have high requirements for the type and source of information they receive, and after receiving information, they tend to maintain a more neutral and open attitude. Such media habits are in contrast to the relatively entertaining, relaxing and simple content style of short video media platforms, and in fact, most of the industry practitioners interviewed are indeed not heavy users of short video applications. Whether the platform they belong to or other applications, most of their use behavior is very basic, only at the browsing level, with very limited interaction and creation. The professional practitioners are not heavy users of short video media, partly because of their personal habits and preferences, but also because they want to reduce their exposure to work content in order to balance their lives and work.

A very interesting contradiction arises here, as the practitioners are not users of the products on which they work daily. And this difference is also reflected in more ways. For example, for some learning account on Douyin, some interviewees believe that is not a suitable platform for serious learning, but at the same time Douyin is expanding the diversity of content on the platform and promoting educational and practical videos to break the established perception of its content being overly entertaining and shallow. On the other hand, some interviewees mention that the content atmosphere on Douyin is relatively conservative and traditional on some issues, however, they also say that Douyin itself has a very open and liberal work environment. This shows that there is a clear difference between the media habits of the employees and the media habits of the platform's users, and that there is also a difference between the work atmosphere of the employees and the community atmosphere on the platform. As one interviewee put it, "It's a great product, but maybe I'm not the target user."

Short video media platforms have attracted a large number of highly qualified practitioners, but the overall market audience is still dominated by the general public, and it has become an important market competition strategy for the short video companies to continue to capture the market by exploring lower tier cities and even rural markets. One of the features of short video platforms is that they make content creation and production very simple and straightforward, thus enabling more and more people to enter into content production (Omar & Dequan, 2020). In China, the popularity of short video platforms has enabled diverse and marginalized grassroots groups outside of cities to become creative workers, and this has resulted in economic gains for them (Lin & de Kloet, 2019). When more and more people from the general public or even from the bottom of society are able to use the Internet to access information and create content in a more efficient way, it contributes to a certain extent to the equity of information.

Previous discussions on the causes for digital divide have focused on the lack of mental access, material access, and skill access (van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). However, as the progress and popularization of technology, more and more of these lacks are being addressed, but new problems may also arise. For example, in the results of this research, the professional practitioners of the platform are not the main users of the platform, and the content of their work is quite different from their real life. As a consequence, the professional practitioners are in a way designing the product for another group of users, without using it more or being more involved in it, thus bringing another kind of divide, even if this divide is still based on easy and efficient access to information, which results in a difference in the quality of information.

Such differences and separations may lead to deviations in the product design and development process, and a more implicit divide of information at a larger sociocultural level.

5.2. Controversies perception - In the name of platform

Regarding the various controversies and problems in Douyin and the short video industry, the attitudes of the industry professional practitioners in the interviews are highly similar. First, most of them agree that problems exist, but they also believe that the risks of many problems are exaggerated, and that in reality, they are not as serious, and that many of the criticisms only focus on the negative issues, while ignoring the positive effects of many mechanisms and features. In addition, many interviewees tend to believe that the current criticisms and controversies are industry problems that must be experienced during the development phase of emerging products, and that it is difficult to reverse the overall situation through changes in individual company. And, as for some of the actual controversial issues, some interviewees believe that as a platform-based application, users' personal preferences and usage habits largely affect their perception of the content, and the platform is always a relatively neutral and open role in this process. The overall styles and trends presented are direct feedback of users' preferences, and even if they differ from their own preferences, they should not interfere with such objective results.

As described in the previous section, many professional practitioners are not heavy users of short video platforms, and such behaviours and habits may bias their perceptions of some of the current controversies and problems. Many interviewees tend to use social media and short-form video platforms with a certain purpose or deliberately to limit their time and frequency, so they may be relatively less aware of problems such as addiction use. In addition, their relatively diverse and in-depth media consumption habits also make them less aware of the controversial and vulgar content recommended by the algorithm. From the perspective of personal experience, the interviewees generally rely less on short video media, so they do not have actual experience and feelings about its potential risks. Unlike other controversies, respondents' views on personal privacy and data issues are more pessimistic and negative, and they believe that ordinary users are unable to protect their rights, and that such concerns are not related to specific usage behaviours and strategies, but are common to all users, regardless of their usage patterns and levels.

Both from the claim of Douyin's founder and from the algorithm-based content recommendation mechanism of the application, Douyin, as a "platform", does have its

claimed characteristics, that is, it does not generate its own content or intervene in content style, but uses the platform's user preferences as the standard for content recommendations. In such a case, the individual user's experience is indeed influenced by their personal preferences. In the discussion of platform development, Gillespie mentions that platforms are characterized by openness and neutrality, but once they become large and visible enough, they need to deal with the balance between security and controversy, social and economic value, between niche and broad (2013). In China's unique media and social environment, Douyin's loose and open content management method in its early days brought criticism from the government, and as its cooperation with the government has deepened, although it still maintains the "platform" claim, its management and review of content has received intervention and influence of the government. In addition, as Douyin's commercialization deepens, all kinds of advertising content will also get more support and promote, rather than entirely selected by users.

In such a case, the "platform" claim has certain contradictions for Douyin. On the one hand, it has a certain ability to manage the content rather than being completely neutral and open, and to a certain extent it plays the role of a media, whether it comes from the government's requirements for content or for commercialization reasons. On the other hand, when faced with criticism from individual users, the platform feature becomes a reason to get rid of the controversies and criticisms.

From the perspective of users and content creators, the platformization has changed the mode of content production, in which cultural commodities need to constantly adapt to the rules and mechanisms of the platform and change or adjust through feedback from data (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). From the perspective of employees, the platformization has a similar impact and effect on their work, as they believe that they cannot and should not have a personal influence on the content of the platform, but rather they need to further direct their work based on data and users. In this process, datafied user feedback has largely become a criterion for measuring and evaluating their work, rather than a standard based on experience and personal judgment.

5.3. Identity coordination - As a platform worker

In this research, when it comes to the evaluation and negotiation of work value and their identities many interviewees express a contradictory attitude. On the positive side, being in the short video industry and Douyin brings them a certain degree of satisfaction and identity, while the bright industry prospects and good working atmosphere also provide them

with a better working experience. At the same time, however, many interviewees also express the sense of powerlessness and marginality they experience at work, such as not being able to use their creativity and ideas on a larger scale, having access to only a limited amount of work in many cases and not being able to have a more comprehensive perception and control of the whole work, and often encountering many difficulties in the actual work despite their willingness to make changes. All interviewees, when faced with the contradiction between work requirements and personal preferences, prioritize work as a criterion, and personalized value judgments and preferences are ignored.

Professional practitioners in the short video industry do not see themselves as having the opportunity or being able to devote enough creativity and personal value in their work. In 2020, in Chinese society, terms such as "Dagongren (打工人)" "Shechu (社畜)" have become buzzwords, which mean odd-job man and corporate slave. And the users of these terms are often not really underlying ordinary workers, but in fact mostly white-collar workers with better working environment and better payment, such words actually expressed a self-mockery attitude, that work is meaningless, difficult to play greater value, and there is no ideal future prospects. The sense of powerlessness and marginality expressed by many respondents in this study is also consistent with such social sentiments.

The research result that "professional practitioners are not heavy users of the product" also affects their personal identity cognition in the work to a certain extent, and the work they do and the results they produce are not more directly related to their personal lives, but only as objects of work. From the perspective of work process and collaboration, individual practitioners have very limited influence on the output of their work, and in most cases, they are limited to their own process and tasks, and are not responsible for the overall work outcome. Such a way will also affect their perception and judgment of work.

Fuchs has discussed the meaning and value of knowledge labor in informational capitalism and tried to explore the relationship between knowledge labor and class (2010). He argues that in information capitalism, the concept of class should not be limited to capital as a class and wage labor as another class and needs to be expanded to everyone who creates space of common experience through their practices, and the labor of user-generated content is covered (Fuchs, 2010). Many argue that in the Internet era, groups such as Internet users, knowledge labor, and "creative class" have made the concept of class more diverse and flexible (Brooks, 2021; Florida, 2021; Terranova, 2003). Around the rules and mechanisms of the platform, on the one hand, users produce a large number of content, and these content become products to attract other users, and on the other hand, the data left by user activities on the platform becomes a resource that can be sold or used again by large companies for

advertisers, have together resulted in the exploitation and use of users' content creation (van Dijck, 2009). The employees of the platform, to a certain extent, can be regarded as the creators and designers of the platform, and the content platform constructed by their professional knowledge, as an infrastructure, is also used for the exchange, sharing or commodification of other knowledge in informational capitalism, where, Fuchs' view that knowledge is central to class formation in information capitalism and that knowledge constitutes a part of the social commons is confirmed (2010).

It is also like the example of 4 knowledge capitalists and 20,000 employees as knowledge workers in Google (Fuchs, 2010). From the results of the research, Although the interviewees are practitioners with a high level of professionalism and expertise, they are not people who have accumulated capital through their knowledge, but are still people who perform ordinary work through their expertise, as a small part of a large system, and far from having class mobility through their knowledge and expertise.

5.4. Limitations and Future research

The purpose of this research is to examine the understandings and perceptions of professional practitioners in the short video industry from their own perspectives on this emerging and controversial media industry and media products, as well as to explore the identity negotiation issues they experience in the work. The aim is to provide an inside, individual perspective on the current critical study of social media, and to understand and study the industry in a more vivid and concrete way. From the results of the research, industry practitioners do provide some unique views and perspectives, however, there are certain limitations in this study that could also provide suggestions and directions for future studies.

First, the diversity and representativeness of the interviewees in terms of types of work, job position, and years of experience may be lacking due to the limitation of the researcher's access to the respondents. In terms of the recruitment method, most of the interviewees were recruited through the researcher's personal relationships and subsequent snowballing approach, which resulted in many of the interviewees having the similar job content and years of experience, for example many interviewees are in Douyin content operation and marketing department, so may also result in its view and attitude has certain similarity. In terms of the research results, many interviewees express the belief that their work is non-core and that their work is implementing the upper requirements, with very limited personal creativity they could play. Such results may be partly realistic problems on

the one hand, and, on the other hand, it may also be due to deviations from the interviewees' sample. In this study, only two employees are programming or data related. As a company that emphasizes professional technical and data-driven background, more representative professional practitioners should be selected to participate in the research to obtain more representative research results. In addition, among the interviewees in this study, only one is a middle-level manager, while the others were all basic employees. Such a composition of respondents can obtain a more general voice, but it directly contributes to the reality that most respondents consider their power and voice to be limited. Based on the above, in future research, under the premise of ensuring research ethics and protecting the respondents, a more comprehensive arrangement of the interviewees' composition can be considered to ensure their professional representativeness and diversified coverage in terms of positions.

Second, since this research is based on one company, Douyin, and the problem involves the interaction and work of employees in the company, a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the company's operation mode, corporate culture, and management structure should be conducted. From a general point of view, the behavior of employees or practitioners within an organization may be influenced by various factors, such as corporate culture, management system, and organizational style, etc. From the perspective of this case, Douyin, as a young company in an emerging industry, has certain characteristics in terms of the company's culture, management style, and working atmosphere from the interviewees' expressions. But in the interview process, internal elements such as Douyin's management and cooperation style are not more effectively included in the setting of the interview questions and the discussion of the research questions, making some of the questions not industry or company specific. In addition, it would be useful to have a deeper understanding of the collaborative approach, work routine, and evaluation criteria of their work in this type of study to help understand the different roles and considerations of different interviewees when describing their work, and to better study the identity coordination and conflict management issues they experience in their work scenarios. It is also possible to gain a deeper understanding of their daily work, for example, how employees in different functions and positions interact and collaborate at work, and how a decision is proposed, implemented, and made. In future research, whether industry-based or company-based, incorporating certain theories on organizational behavior and business management when it comes to the interaction between individuals and organizations will have the opportunity to obtain more specific and realistic findings.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Topic List

Basic information and media behaviors

1. Please briefly introduce yourself (age, professional background, interests)
2. Can you briefly describe the main scope of your daily work and working years in Douyin?
3. What are the main channels you get information or entertainment in daily life?
4. What are the most frequently used applications on your cell phone?
5. Can you briefly describe what you do with different applications at different time ?

Douyin use

6. How do you usually use Douyin outside of work? (Browse /Interact/Post) Since when do you start use Douyin?
7. How much time do you spend every day on Douyin (and other applications)?
8. What types of KOL or content do you follow? and how many accounts do you follow?
9. Which people or accounts do you generally interact with on Douyin? Do you also follow or interact with them in other applications?
10. Have you posted anything on Douyin? What kind of content? Did you get followers through them?
11. Can you list some of the techniques or methods you know to use Douyin?
12. In your work, what are the main aspects of Douyin that you work on? How does it overlap with your daily use?
13. Do you use apps from Douyin's competitors (Kuaishou, Red, Instagram)? Either at work or in your daily life?
14. What are your main purposes and what do you get when you use Douyin?
15. Do you think the content recommended to you by Douyin is accurate?
16. Can you tell me the three points you are most satisfied with and the three points you are

most dissatisfied with in the process of using Douyin?

Mechanisms and Controversies

17. People often say that time passes quickly when they watch short video content, do you feel the same way? Do you think you are addicted to using Douyin?

18. Some people think that the popularity of short videos has enabled many people who were previously “invisible” could create content, do you agree?

19. Some people criticize the content on short video platforms are fragmented, shallow or over entertaining, do you feel this way?

20. Some people think that this kind of personalized content recommendation will create an “echo chamber effect” that narrows views and interests, do you agree?

21. Some people think that through short videos you can also learn a lot and see different lives, what do you think of this view?

22. Some people think that most short videos are imitations and have little originality, do you agree?

23. Some people think that many SNS apps nowadays lack protection for users' data and privacy and overuse of it, what do you think?

24. The slogan of Douyin is "record the beautiful life", how do you interpret this slogan yourself?

25. More and more apps, such as Red, Kuaishou, and even WeChat have similar features. How do you think of the difference with them?

26. Compared to other apps, what do you think is the most important feature of Douyin's platform rules and mechanism?

27. Compared to other apps, what do you think is the most significant feature of the content style on Douyin?

28. Do you think there is anything to criticize of Douyin?

29. Do you think there are any misunderstandings about Douyin?

Identity perception

30. Have you had any changes in your work experience in Douyin?
31. How do you like your job? What is the most fulfilling thing you have accomplished since working at Douyin?
32. Have you ever encountered some situations in your work where the work requirements and your personal ideas contradict each other? How do you usually solve it?
33. Do you think you have any special features in the use of Douyin compared to ordinary users because of your professional background?
34. Do you think you have any special features in using other apps compared to ordinary users because of your professional background?
35. How do you explain your work to your friends or family? Would you recommend them to use Douyin?
36. What do you think when there are criticisms to Douyin from outside?
37. Do you have any advice for us if we want to use Douyin better?
38. Social media is actually generating a lot of discussions nowadays. What do you think of them from the perspective of practitioners? (addiction use, privacy, polarization of views, fragmentation etc.)
39. How would you rank the following identities, Douyin's employees, Douyin's users, and Douyin's creators?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:

Qingyan Gao, 578334qg@student.eur.nl, +86 18501961516

DESCRIPTION

You are invited to participate in a research about Media usage habits, industry views and professional identity of short video media practitioners. The purpose of this study is to understand the current development and trends of short video social media industry from the perspective of professional practitioners, and to analyze the current discussions and controversies of the industry. The researcher invites you to participate in the study and share your media attitudes, thoughts and industry perspectives as a short video social media practitioner.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed in general terms,

- Your personal media usage habits
- Your views and opinions on the short video industry as a professional practitioner;
- Your identity perception issues in your work as a professional practitioner.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will audio recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point. If you believe that some questions may involve commercial secrets, you may request that they not be answered. After the interview, you may also ask to correct or delete parts of your answers.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. To ensure your privacy, I will not disclose any other identifying information about you such as your name, occupation, etc. in the study, and I will use a digital code to ensure that you cannot be identified. I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT

Your participation in this study will take 45-60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, you can always contact the secretary of the ESHCC Ethics Review Board, Mrs. Linda Jansen, at ethicsreview@eshcc.eur.nl.

SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to participate in this study and be audiotaped during this study:

Name

Signature

Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

参与研究知情同意书

有关本研究的问题，请联系：

高晴檐, 578334qg@student.eur.nl, +86 18501961516

研究概况

邀请您参与一项关于短视频媒体从业者的媒体使用习惯、行业观点和职业认同的研究。本研究旨在从专业从业者的角度了解短视频社交媒体行业的发展现状和趋势，并对目前行业争议进行分析。研究者邀请您作为短视频社交媒体从业者参与本研究，分享您的媒体态度、想法和行业观点。

您接受参与本研究意味着您愿意受访回答以下方面的问题：

- 你的个人媒体使用习惯
- 你作为专业从业人员对短视频行业的看法和意见
- 你作为专业从业人员在工作中的身份认知问题

除非你希望不做录音，否则我将对采访进行录音。

你可以随时跳过任何问题或在任何时候停止参与。如果你认为某些问题可能涉及商业机密，你可以要求不回答这些问题。在采访结束后，你也可以要求纠正或删除你的部分答案。

风险和收益

参与这项研究没有任何风险。为了确保隐私，不会在研究中透露您的任何其他身份信息

息，如姓名、职业等，将使用数字代码来确保您的身份无法被识别。访谈和观察的材料完全用于学术工作，如进一步研究、学术会议和出版物。

参与时间

这项研究将需要 45-60 分钟，但您可以在任何时候中断参与。

报酬

您的参与不会有任何金钱上的报酬。

参与者的权利

如果您决定接受参与本项目，请理解您的参与是自愿的，您有权在任何时候撤回您的同意或停止参与，而不会受到惩罚。你有权拒绝回答特定的问题。如果您愿意，您的身份将在研究产生的所有书面数据中被公布。否则，你的个人隐私将在研究产生的所有公布和书面数据中得到维护。

联系和问题

如果您对您作为研究参与者的权利有疑问，或者在任何时候对本研究的任何方面不满意，如果您有任何疑问，请随时联系依拉斯姆斯大学传播、文化和历史学院研究道德委员会秘书 Linda Jansen 女士，邮箱地址为：ethicsreview@eshcc.eur.nl.

签署同意书

如果您在本同意书上签名，您的签名将是您身份的唯一证明。因此，你不需要签署这份表格。为了减少风险和保护你的身份，你可以选择口头同意。您的口头同意就足够了。

我同意参加研究并且同意在本研究中被录音。

姓名

签名

日期

本同意书的副本由您保存。