

Short Video Using and Emotion Regulation: an Empirical Study on Content Types and Usual Time Spent among University Students

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Abstract:

As the network information technology developing, short videos have become a popular way for university students to release pressure and relax. However, the characteristics such as fragmentation and complexity may have negative influence on the emotion regulation of them. Current researches have been conducted to detect some factors of the short videos and how they affect the emotion regulation ability. However, there lacks combined research of how the time spent and the content types of the short videos influence the emotion regulation and there needs to be more detailed types of the content. This research is conducted between 30 university students on their usual time spent and favorite types of short videos. The time spent is questioned from under half an hour to above three hours, with an interval length of half an hour, and the contents of short videos are divided into eight types, including food, pets, makeup, commentary, science knowledge, game, short dramas, and skits. It is found from the data analysis that the time spent on short videos does not show significant correlation with emotion regulation; while, the types like short dramas, skits, food, and makeup may have a relatively significant positive influence. Cute pets and film/anime commentary have relatively significant negative influence. Games and science popularization content showed no significant positive or negative influence. These results may indicate that under three hours, the time spent has no significant influence on emotion regulation, but the content types should be cautioned while university students watching short videos.

Keywords: short videos; university students; emotion regulation.

1. Introduction

With the development of network information technology, short videos have proliferated widely, gaining immense popularity, particularly among young people. They have become an indispensable medium of entertainment and leisure for the university student demographic. They strongly appeal to university students due to their fragmented, personalized nature and diverse content, but the negative emotions which may be caused by uncontrolled time spent on them and the uneven quality of content has also sparked broad discussion and anxiety. University students are at a critical stage of psychological development, where their mental maturity remains incomplete, emotional regulation abilities remain unstable, and they possess considerable free time, making them more susceptible to the influences of media using behaviors. This paper aims to systematically explore the impact of the time spent and content types of short videos on the emotional regulation abilities of university students by reviewing existing literature. This study seeks to summarize the connection between short videos using mechanisms and the emotional regulation capacity of university students based on the obtained data, thereby assisting universities and students in formulating guidelines for short videos consumption.

Short videos typically refer to videos lasting from a few seconds to several minutes, characterized by features such as „vertical format,“ „infinite scroll,“ and „personalized recommendation“ [1]. These characteristics significantly enhance user immersion and engagement but also increase the potential for over-immersion. Statistics indicate that the number of short video users in China has exceeded one billion, with university students being one of the primary user groups [2]. A survey by Zhang et al. showed that the average daily time spent on short videos among university students is approximately two to three hours, with slightly higher using time among females than males [3]. University students often use short videos during leisure time for entertainment, seeking positive emotional energy, or acquiring knowledge. However, since negative contents can leave a deeper impression on viewers, their fragmented nature and certain vacuous or negative contents may also trigger negative emotions and affect their emotional regulation abilities [4].

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Relationship between Social Achievement Goals and Emotional Regulation

University students are in a transitional period from academia to society, facing challenges such as academic

pressure, interpersonal relationships, economic stress, and anxieties about future employment. These factors make them more prone to emotional regulation issues, leading to mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety [5].

Maladaptive emotion regulation (ER) refers to the process by which individuals influence their own emotional experiences and expressions through cognitive and behavioral strategies, forming a crucial foundation for mental health [5]. Research indicates that failed emotion regulation can lead university students to engage in impulsive behaviors such as substance abuse, risky sexual behavior, binge eating, and non-suicidal self-injury, causing negative consequences for themselves, others, and even the university and society [6].

The study by Shim et al. focused on how university students' social achievement goals influence psychological adjustment through emotion regulation [7]. They categorized social achievement goals into three types: social development goals (focusing on enhancing social skills and deepening relationships), social demonstration-approach goals (pursuing recognition and popularity from others), and social demonstration-avoidance goals (avoiding negative evaluation from others). The research found that social development goals were positively correlated with higher emotional regulation ability and better psychological adjustment. Conversely, social demonstration-avoidance goals were significantly correlated with poorer emotion regulation, depression, stress, and worry. Furthermore, emotion regulation mediated the relationship between social achievement goals and psychological adjustment.

This research suggests that the type of short videos usage (e.g., whether it is aimed at social demonstration) may influence users' social goal orientation, thereby affecting their choice and effectiveness of emotion regulation strategies. For instance, users pursuing „demonstrative“ content may be more susceptible to social comparison and emotional dysregulation.

2.2 The Relationship between the Time Spent on Short Videos and Emotional Regulation

2.2.1 The negative effect of the time spent on short videos

Multiple studies show a significant correlation between excessive short video use and difficulties in emotion regulation. Zhang et al., through a longitudinal study using cross-lagged panel analysis of data measured at two time points two months apart, found that excessive short video use significantly predicted depressive symptoms two months later, whereas depressive symptoms did not

predict subsequent short videos use [3]. This suggests that excessive short videos use may be a precursor to emotional problems rather than a consequence. A Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) by Ding et al. further classified short videos addiction (SVA) into high, medium, and low categories, finding that the high addiction group scored lower on subjective well-being (SWB), social support (SS), core self-evaluations (CSE), and extraversion [2]. This indicates that prolonged short videos use may deplete individuals' internal resources, consequently impairing their emotion regulation abilities.

2.1.2 Motivations for usage duration and emotional consequences

A qualitative study by Shi Xu involving 15 Tufts University students (9 female, 6 male, average age 21.9) pointed out that the primary motivations for university students using short videos include entertainment, coping with stress, and escaping reality [1]. Particularly during exam periods or before deadlines, students are more likely to „binge-scroll“ videos to alleviate anxiety. However, this behavior often leads to procrastination and delayed sleep, subsequently triggering negative emotions such as regret and self-reproach.

2.3 Differential Impact of Short Videos Content Type on Emotional Regulation

2.3.1 Entertainment content: short-term relief and long-term emptiness

Entertainment short videos (e.g., skits, cute pets, short dramas) can provide immediate pleasure and alleviate negative emotions, potentially accumulating psychological resources [8]. However, this relief is often transient. Shi Xu found that students often felt that their time was wasted and the information was meaningless after watching large amounts of entertainment content, which in the long run reduced their subjective well-being and self-efficacy [1].

2.3.2 Informational and news content: cognitive load and emotional burden

News and social information short videos can satisfy the need for information acquisition but may also induce negative emotions such as anxiety and helplessness. Particularly when content involves negative social events or controversial topics, it can easily trigger emotional resonance or resistance, affecting emotional stability.

2.3.3 Social interaction content: the double-edged sword of support and comparison

Short video platforms have strong social attributes, allowing users to interact through comments, sharing, etc. This

interaction can provide social support and enhance a sense of belonging, but it may also trigger upward social comparison, leading to decreased self-evaluation and negative mood [2].

2.3.4 Inspirational story content: longer-lasting positive emotions

Compared to the immediate pleasure of entertainment content, inspirational story short videos, while perhaps not generating as much intense joy, can bring audiences prolonged positive emotions from encouragement and motivation, which is more beneficial for emotion regulation [8]. Overall, the choice of short-form video content may influence university students' emotion regulation abilities. While most content types can bring positive emotions, they also carry certain drawbacks that may foster the growth of negative emotions.

2.4 Mediating and Moderating Mechanisms of Emotion Regulation

2.4.1 Definition of core self-evaluations

Core Self-Evaluations (CSE) refer to an individual's fundamental assessments of their own ability and worth, encompassing four core traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control. Individuals with high CSE typically have positive self-cognitions and tend to proactively pursue goals, whereas those with low CSE are prone to negative self-concepts and more likely to escape reality or depend on short-term gratification behaviors (such as short-form video addiction).

2.4.2 The mediating role of core self-evaluations (CSE)

Ding et al. found that CSE plays a significant mediating role between short videos use and emotion regulation [2]. Individuals with low CSE are more likely to use short videos to escape reality, subsequently falling into an addictive cycle that further weakens their emotion regulation abilities. Meanwhile, Oliveira et al. conducted a study on 261 Portuguese university students (average age 22.5, 81.6% female) using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-Short Form (DERS-SF), Perseverative Negative Thinking Scale (PINTS), Internet Addiction Test (IAT), and a composite subjective well-being index (combining PANAS and WHOQOL-BREF) [9]. Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) performed on the obtained data indicated that emotional insight was negatively correlated with the probability of internet addiction, but students with low insight performed well on goal-directed behavior and impulse control, suggesting that emotion regulation difficulties are influenced by multidimensional factors.

2.4.3 The moderating role of social support

Social support is an important external resource for mitigating the negative effects of short videos. Individuals with high social support exhibited relatively stronger emotion regulation abilities even with longer time spent on short videos [3]. This suggests that a strong real-life social network can buffer the adverse effects of short videos use.

2.4.4 Differential impact of personality traits

Individuals high in extraversion are more inclined to seek satisfaction from real-life social interactions and tend to have shorter time spent on short videos, whereas introverts rely more on virtual social interactions and are more susceptible to addictive behaviors [2].

2.5 Research limitations and future directions

2.5.1 Limitations of existing research

The limitations of existing research are reflected in the following aspects: First, most studies rely on self-report data, which is subject to recall bias and social desirability effects. Secondly, research predominantly focuses on short-term effects, lacking long-term longitudinal data. Furthermore, classification standards for content types are inconsistent, which makes cross-study comparisons difficult. Finally, current experiments lack comprehensive analyses specifically and directly targeting the impact of short videos content on university students' emotion regulation abilities.

2.5.2 Future research directions

Based on the shortcomings of existing research, the following future research directions are proposed: First, regarding longitudinal research design, tracking university students' short videos using habits and emotional changes from enrolment to graduation is recommended. Second, regarding refined content analysis, research directly focusing on the impact of short videos content on university students' emotion regulation abilities is advised. Additionally, regarding intervention studies, designing management programs for short video use based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is necessary. Finally, regarding cross-cultural comparison, comparing differences in short videos use and emotion regulation among university students across different cultural backgrounds is suggested.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study primarily utilizes scales to collect relevant information from participants. To ensure anonymity and

reduce response bias, participants are not required to provide personal identification information when completing the questionnaire.

3.2 Research Participants

Participants were recruited from nearby universities through convenience sampling. Currently, 30 participants (27 female, 3 male, gender ratio 1:9) have been recruited primarily through social media software (WeChat Moment shares).

3.3 Research Tools

3.3.1 Emotion-focused Regulation Questionnaire (EfRQ)

The EfRQ is a seven-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) [10]. This questionnaire presents 23 behavioral descriptions in real-life situations, asking participants to assess the likelihood that they would employ these behaviors to regulate emotions, thereby measuring their emotion regulation ability. The questionnaire primarily covers four dimensions: positive emotions, negative emotions, emotion regulation strategies, and stress. Factor analysis indicates that the scale has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient not less than 0.869.

3.3.2 Other questions

Two screening questions were placed before the formal EfRQ questionnaire to collect participants' short videos using habits for subsequent analysis of their relationship with university students' emotion regulation abilities. The first question investigates the participant's average daily time spent on short videos, with options ranging from „Less than half an hour“ to „More than 3 hours,“ each option covering a half-hour increment. The second question is a multiple-choice question asking participants to select their most frequently watched content categories from eight types (e.g., games, food, animals). Participants were required to select at least one and at most three options. This design facilitates more reasonable choices by participants and provides more experimental data.

4. Research Process

After compiling the questionnaire, the researcher published it on social platforms (WeChat) through Moment shares and friend forwards. Currently, 30 valid questionnaires have been collected. The researcher collected basic demographic information (gender, grade level), average daily short videos viewing duration, most frequently watched short videos content types, and emotion management

ability from the participants. The researcher conducted a preliminary analysis of the currently collected information and derived general conclusions.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Regarding viewing duration: 6.7% watched less than half an hour daily, 23.3% watched between half an hour and 1 hour, 13.3% each watched 1 to 1.5 hours and 1.5 to 2 hours, 16.7% watched 2 to 2.5 hours, 3.3% watched 2.5 to 3 hours, and 23.3% watched more than 3 hours. Regarding content preference: Cute pets and Film/Anime explanations each accounted for 20.0%, games and food each accounted for 17.5%, skits accounted for 11.3%, short dramas accounted for 3.8%, science popularization and makeup each accounted for 5.0%, with cute pets and explanatory types being predominant. The mean total score on the emotion management ability scale was $M = 96.37$, with a standard deviation $SD = 11.367$. The minimum score was 61, and the maximum score was 118.

5.2 Correlation Analysis

Regarding the time spent on short videos and emotion management ability: According to correlation analysis results, the Pearson correlation coefficient between viewing duration and the total emotion management ability score was -0.001 , indicating almost no linear correlation between the two. Although a slight negative correlation exists, it is statistically insignificant. Furthermore, with $p = 0.997$ far greater than 0.05 , it can be concluded that the time spent on short videos and emotion management ability show no significant correlation.

Additionally, regarding viewing type and emotion management ability: Based on the results, among the most frequently watched short video types, participants in the short drama group ($M=101.67$; $SD=14.572$) and the skit group ($M=99.44$; $SD=11.791$) had significantly higher emotion management abilities than participants in other groups. Participants in the cute pet group ($M=94.88$; $SD=13.246$) and the film or anime explanation group ($M=94.94$; $SD=14.205$) scored slightly lower than other groups. Meanwhile, the standard deviations for the short drama group, film/anime explanation group, and game group ($M=95.36$; $SD=14.102$) were relatively large (all reaching 14.000 or above), indicating lower stability within these groups. In contrast, the food group ($M=98.21$; $SD=6.507$) and makeup group ($M=98.50$; $SD=5.802$) had smaller standard deviations, suggesting smaller within-group differences and greater stability. This suggests a

possible correlation between short video viewing type and emotion management ability.

6. Research Results

The research indicates that the time spent on short videos has no significant impact on university students' emotion management ability. However, the type of short video content viewed does have influence on emotion management ability. Short dramas, skits, food, and makeup content may have a relatively significant positive influence. Cute pets and film/anime commentary relatively significant negative influence. Games and science popularization content showed no significant positive or negative influence. The results demonstrate that light-hearted and enjoyable short video types like short dramas can help university students release pressure and regulate emotions to some extent. Cute pet and explanation types might lead to decreased emotion control ability due to their high demand for empathy. Furthermore, the small within-group differences for food and makeup types might be related to the practicality and mundanity of their content. The large within-group differences for short drama, commentary, and game types might be related to the presence of individual participants with high immersion levels and high emotional exhaustion.

7. Limitations and Outlook

The sample size of this study is small, which may cause the data to be significantly influenced by extreme values, resulting in considerable error. Furthermore, due to practical constraints, the gender distribution of participants was uneven and concentrated in the same province, which may affect the results and limit their comprehensiveness. Additionally, the influence of individual personality cannot be ruled out. For example, optimistic and pessimistic individuals might generate different emotions and have varying emotional durations even after watching the same videos, which would also affect individual emotion regulation abilities. Subsequent research should further expand the sample size, adopt more scientific sampling methods, increase the number of male participants, and strive to control for the influence of individual personality on the experiment.

8. Conclusion

This study seeks to summarize the connection between the time spent and types of content of short videos among university student demographic and their emotion regulation ability. From the result of the study, it can be summarized

that the time spent on short videos has insignificant correlation with the emotional regulation ability. In addition, the type of the content of the short videos has significant correlation with the emotional regulation ability. Types like short drama, skits, food, and makeup have significant positive influence, while types such as cute pets and film/anime commentary show significant negative influence. A possible reason may be that these types of short videos require high empathy and may then raise emotional fluctuation. However, there are still some limitations in current study. The sample size is small and the gender distribution is uneven, so the future study should be conducted with bigger sample size and the gender distribution should be equal. Also, tracking the emotion of the participants for a longer period is advised. From this study, researchers, schools, and university students will learn the relationship between the time spent and content types of short videos, which is a popular tool for university students to release stress and regulate emotion. Therefore, they can summarize a better principle for university students to watch short videos properly.

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