

Cyber Impressions: The Impact of Social Media Dynamics on International College

Student Vloggers

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of social media interactions on the self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being of international college student vloggers, framed within the context of Symbolic Interactionism. Focusing on platforms like Instagram, Douyin/TikTok, and Xiaohongshu, the study investigates how these digital environments shape the personal and creative expressions of vloggers. Through a qualitative approach of in-depth interviews, the research reveals that while intrinsic motivation remains paramount, feedback from audiences significantly influences content modification and emotional stability. The findings indicate a dual impact of social media interactions: constructive criticism from regular viewers fosters adaptation, whereas cyberbullying leads to emotional distress and self-abasement. This study underscores the relationship between online feedback and the emotional health of vloggers, advocating for enhanced moderation policies and mental health support to improve the digital experience for international college student vloggers.

Keywords: Social media, symbolic interactionism, self-esteem, external criticism

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving digital age, social media has become a pervasive force, granting individuals the power to share and observe the narratives of others. While transformative in many respects, this phenomenon conceals a profound influence that can shape how individuals perceive themselves and the world around them. Within this digital realm, a single comment holds the potential to act as a catalyst for self-satisfaction or an invisible sword, inflicting psychological anxiety. Social media platforms like Instagram and Douyin offer a space for self-expression and connection with others, playing a notable role in today's digital interactions. Among those who navigate this landscape, college students stand out as active participants, managing their connections and identities within this virtual network. For vloggers in this demographic, who consistently share their experiences, opinions, and personal milestones, the influence of social media interactions on their self-esteem and self-regulation is a subject ripe for exploration.

A vlogger, or video blogger, is an individual dedicated to creating and disseminating video content that often reflects their daily lives, thoughts, opinions, or experiences across social media platforms. These digital narrators leverage the visual medium to forge a deeper connection with their audience, cultivating a community feel amongst their viewers. The role of vloggers has evolved to influence cultural trends, provide educational material, and shape public opinions. Among them, international college student vloggers stand out for their diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences, offering fresh perspectives in the digital space. This group navigates a broad spectrum of online interactions, from peer feedback to global audience engagement, enriching the digital dialogue with their varied viewpoints. However, the effects of these online interactions on such vloggers have not been thoroughly investigated. Given their

burgeoning presence and impact, this study zeroes in on semi-e-commerce platforms, short video platforms and social dynamic sharing platforms as prime examples of platforms where international college student vloggers flourish. This research is motivated by an identified gap in literature; while existing studies have delved into the effects of social media engagement on mental health, the specific influence of online interactions across different social media platforms on international college student vloggers' self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being has yet to be fully explored. Prior research has often focused on the negative aspects and harmful interactions, overlooking the potential diverse impacts of online engagements.

This research focuses on various types of social media platforms as the primary research platforms for discussion in this study. Firstly, the short video platform has experienced explosive growth and popularity, particularly among young adults and college students. It has redefined content creation and consumption, allowing users to express themselves through creative, visually engaging videos (Zhao, 2021). On the other side, the distinct characteristics of the short video platform's recommendation algorithm, which tailors content to individual user preferences, have sparked significant debate. This personalized approach effectively engages users, potentially leading to excessive usage. Without appropriate interventions, there is a risk that this high level of engagement could evolve into dependency, as noted by Zhao (2021). Thus, this kind of social media serves as an ideal platform to investigate the effects of social media interactions on self-perception and emotional well-being.

Secondly, a visually-centric platform like Instagram, enables users to convey their experiences and stories through a rich tapestry of images and videos, making it especially appealing to a young, global audience. Its features like stories, reels, and direct messaging foster dynamic interactions and real-time engagement, providing an ideal environment for vloggers to

share their cross-cultural experiences and narratives. On the other hand, a few social media platforms present a distinctive blend of social media and e-commerce, such as Xiaohongshu, where users not only share their experiences but also influence purchasing decisions.

Predominantly popular among young adults and college students, Xiaohongshu fosters a community-oriented environment where users post reviews, share lifestyle tips, and create content around personal interests and experiences.

The platforms share a common trait in their highly visual nature of content presentation, and such a visual-centric approach aids in attracting a young, dynamic user base that values creativity and expression, characteristics that are pivotal to the vlogging community. Each platform has unique features that foster different types of user interaction, such as Douyin (original version available only in China)/TikTok's algorithm-driven content delivery that personalizes user experiences, Instagram's diverse features like Stories and Reels that facilitate real-time engagement, and Xiaohongshu's community-oriented space that emphasizes authenticity and user-generated content. Despite these differences, most platforms significantly highlight the social interactions as a form of feedback, making them influential in the content creator's digital experience. The global reach and cultural diversity are particularly relevant for international college student vloggers, who navigate cross-cultural interactions and must manage their online identities in a multicultural digital environment.

The focus on international college student vloggers in studying the impact of different types of social media interaction experiences on self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being is significant for several reasons. This specific group is at a critical juncture of their lives, navigating the challenges of higher education while often living away from their home countries, which can amplify the effects of social media interactions on their mental health and

identity formation. International students face unique stressors, including cultural adjustment, language barriers, and academic pressures, which can make them more susceptible to the influence of social media. The feedback they receive online, whether positive, neutral, or negative, can significantly impact their self-perception. Moreover, as active content creators, these vloggers engage with a global audience, exposing them to a wide range of feedback that transcends cultural boundaries. This interaction offers a rich context for examining how these vloggers navigate the complex landscape of online feedback. Understanding their coping mechanisms and responses to feedback, particularly negative or harmful comments, is crucial for developing support systems and interventions to enhance their online experiences.

The sociological theory--Symbolic Interactionism, pioneered by scholars like George Herbert Mead, accentuates the role of social interactions in shaping self-identity. According to this theory, individuals construct their self-concept through their interactions with others and the meanings they ascribe to those interactions (Blumer, 1986). In the context of social media, feedback and criticism from others can significantly impact how individuals perceive themselves. Symbolic Interactionism provides a valuable lens for examining the dynamics between college student vloggers and their experiences about social media. In order to address the research questions, this study used a qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with college student vloggers. Symbolic Interactionism will serve as a theoretical framework to analyze the results and guide the exploration of how social media interactions influence self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being among college student vloggers.

Literature Review

Symbolic Interactionism in Social Media

Central to symbolic interactionism is the concept that individuals interpret and give meaning to the world around them through a process called "the definition of the situation" (Chen et al., 2020, p. 3). In the context of social media, comments are not just text; they are symbols loaded with meaning that are interpreted by individuals within a social context (Blumer, 1986). These interpretations can shape college students' perceptions of self and social reality. George Herbert Mead's theory of the social self suggests that individuals form their identity by taking the role of the "other," imagining themselves from the perspective of their peers (Blumer, 1986, p. 8). For instance, comments from viewers become a significant "other" in this process, providing feedback that can affirm or challenge a student's self-perception and contribute to their sense of identity. Social media platforms are dynamic environments where symbols (e.g., likes, comments, shares) carry specific meanings and can have a profound impact on individuals. Therefore, symbolic interactionism provides a lens to understand how college students interpret feedback from social media, whether as validation, criticism, or indifference, and how these interpretations affect their psychological states and behaviors.

On social media, "likes" are akin to currency. Just as money's value is a social agreement, the value of a "like" is collectively agreed upon. We understand that more likes equate to more approval, popularity, or quality. This understanding influences how people craft their posts – aiming for content that garners more "likes," much like how one might aim to increase their wealth. This phenomenon exemplifies the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, a concept asserting that individuals derive meaning within specific contexts by interpreting their own actions through the lens of external perception (Bruce, 1988). This introspective process

involves a continuous cycle of reflection and social feedback, shaping an individual's behavior within their societal milieu (Bruce, 1988). Through social media, we define our identity based upon our perception of how others view our communications. For instance, hashtags (#) have become a symbol of collective action or belonging (Barron & Bollen, 2022). When people use a specific hashtag, they are not just categorizing their post but signaling their participation in a larger conversation or movement. It's similar to wearing a uniform or badge signifying allegiance or support. Users understand the power of the hashtag to connect and amplify, shaping their messages to align with the collective narrative of the hashtag.

The lens of symbolic interactionism not only helps to explain how meanings are constructed but also how emotional responses are managed. When college students encounter different types of comments on their vlog videos, they are faced with a barrage of symbols that must be interpreted and internalized. Symbols can evoke a spectrum of emotions, from elation to distress, all of which are processed through the individual's subjective understanding of the comments' significance (Wicaksono, 2019, p. 491). It is in this interpretive process that the student vloggers' emotional well-being is either bolstered or buffeted. For instance, positive comments may reinforce self-esteem and promote emotional resilience, whereas negative feedback can lead to self-doubt and emotional turmoil (Cinks & Austers, 2021).

As each social media interaction contributes to the ongoing narrative of an individual's social self, the ability to regulate emotional responses becomes crucial. According to Blumer, the concept of self-regulation within symbolic interactionism involves the adjustment of one's behaviors and responses based on social interactions and the meanings derived from them. It is a dynamic process where individuals continually navigate their emotional experiences in the face of varied social feedback (Blumer, 1986, p. 8). Understanding the nuances of this emotional

regulation is vital for comprehending the impact of social media interactions on student vloggers. Given this theoretical backdrop, it becomes imperative to investigate how college student vloggers perceive the array of comments they receive. This inquiry not only focuses on the immediate emotional effects but also explores the strategies deployed by students to cope with and adapt to the feedback—especially critiques that are negative or harmful.

External Criticism in Digital Realm

External criticism refers to criticism that comes from outside sources, such as feedback from others or evaluations from superiors. A study published in 2019 showed the relationship between external criticism in learning and feelings of self-esteem. The research mentioned that individuals who experience learning difficulties often also experience internal and external academic criticism causing a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms (Spratt, 2019). This suggests that external criticism can have a negative impact on self-esteem and mental health. However, judgments from strangers on social media serve as a form of external criticism, are significantly different from previous research on academic criticism, and thus have different effects on individuals' self-esteem. All self-esteem is sensitive to external contingencies. People just become more aware of this when it is threatened. Our self-esteem depends on external contingencies to a large extent. The motivations of college student vloggers in posting videos also determine the extent to which they are affected by media comments, such as the self-doubt that arises when facing malicious content. Given the randomness and uncertainty of the feedback, it can be difficult for vloggers to determine whether a particular comment represents the “mainstream” or what the majority thinks.

Comments of different categories can be understood as external criticism at different levels, which does not mean that they are necessarily negative. In most cases, social media is

mixed because most viewers don't know a college vlogger in real life, and they pay little to no expense for commenting. Therefore, these comments may be objective, but they may also be subjective or biased. This kind of external criticism is more likely to lead to negative emotions among content creators. Research has shown that people tend to respond more negatively to criticism about their group from an outsider compared to an insider (Adelman & Verkuyten, 2020). This preference for internal over external criticism is guided by perceptions that internal critics are more constructive and more expert than external critics (Adelman & Verkuyten, 2020). This kind of negative reaction does not only refer to resistance, but may also include feelings of self-defeat, frustration, disgust and anger. These emotional responses can be particularly strong when the criticism is perceived as unfair or uninformed. When a comment is perceived as coming from an insider, it is often seen as well-intentioned and aimed at improving the content or addressing issues within the group (Adelman & Verkuyten, 2020). In contrast, criticism from outsiders may be viewed with suspicion, as it may be seen as having different motives or lacking understanding of the group's dynamics. From a broader perspective, this study underscores the challenges of fostering diversity and inclusion in online spaces. Outsider criticism can sometimes discourage individuals from underrepresented groups from participating in online discussions or content creation.

On the other hand, excessive external criticism and critique may lead to refutation and defense from the content publishers themselves. In some cases, individuals or groups may employ rhetorical defenses against external criticism. These defenses can help them maintain their position or reputation. For example, a study on rhetorical defenses against external criticism in the context of the US presidential election found that candidates used various strategies to counter external criticism and protect their image (Rountree, 2022). This specific example

demonstrates that even prominent individuals, such as presidential candidates, employ rhetorical strategies to counter external criticism and protect their image, reinforcing the notion that excessive external critique can prompt defensive responses.

However, not everyone has strong emotional reactions to external criticism. Individual differences may cause each vlogger to respond very differently to external criticism, and one of the main influencing factors is self-regulation. For instance, a study on adolescents in Iran found that parents' external criticism was indirectly associated with obsessive beliefs through emotional self-regulation (Halvaiepour, Nosratabadi, & Khanzadeh, 2016). This finding highlights the significant role of emotional self-regulation as a psychological mechanism that varies among individuals, in mediating the impact of such criticism. Vloggers and content creators, like the adolescents in the study, also exhibit diverse levels of emotional self-regulation. Some may possess strong emotional self-regulation skills, allowing them to process external criticism more objectively and adaptively, while others may struggle with emotional reactions. This case suggests that improving emotional self-regulation skills may empower vloggers to better manage their emotional responses to external criticism, also enhancing their ability to maintain their emotional well-being in the digital space.

Social Media Interactions

Social media platforms provide users with a space to share, communicate, and respond, resulting in a plethora of interactions that can range from supportive to critical. The comments from other users can be critical, humiliating, judging, or even lynch-like, and can be drawn by users whether or not they have knowledge about the matter being shared (Türk, 2019). These comments are not always rooted in a deep understanding or knowledge of the topic being discussed, yet they can profoundly impact the content creator or subject of the post. This

highlights the dual nature of feedback on social media - as both potential tools for feedback and insight, and as triggers for positive or negative emotional responses. A study found that the use of social media during daily activities was related to worse well-being across domains, including lower self-esteem, higher fear of missing out, stress, anxiety, and depression (Barry, Moran-Miller, Levy, & Gray, 2022). College student vloggers, in particular, stand at a stage in life defined by identity formation and self-exploration. They are in their formative years, where both personal and social identities are being solidified. This makes them uniquely susceptible to external feedback, as they often seek validation and recognition.

Some individuals may spend an excessive amount of time on social media platforms, leading to negative consequences in their personal lives. The fear of missing out on exciting events or experiences posted by others can contribute to anxiety and compulsive checking of social media. Thus, relevant scholars argued that social media use can lead to psychological enslavement, where users become victims of the digital product instead of its controller (Bai & Gao, 2021). While some scholars have expressed concerns about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on individuals' mental health and well-being, it's important to note that the concept of "psychological enslavement" is not a widely accepted scientific term (Bai & Gao, 2021). Instead, researchers often use terms like "social media addiction," or "problematic social media use" to describe patterns of excessive online behavior.

Before embarking on a formal examination of the influence of social media interactions on particular demographics, it is crucial to establish clear definitions and interpretations for various categories of media comments. Previous studies have characterized toxic media comments as those that convey disrespect towards individuals through the use of derogatory language, profanity, or name-calling (Kim et al., 2021). This also includes comments involving

personal attacks and the utilization of racist, sexist, or xenophobic terminology. The study's survey experiment revealed a concerning trend: exposure to toxic comments can lead other viewers or even vloggers themselves to respond with increased toxicity. If toxic comments receive more attention and engagement, algorithms might further amplify such content, creating a feedback loop. This cycle of toxicity perpetuation can have profound implications for the online environment, including college student vloggers' platforms, as it may contribute to an increasingly toxic discourse. College student vloggers and their followers likely care about the tone and quality of interactions in their comment sections.

Universities boast a multicultural and ethnically diverse student body, a testament to its commitment to inclusivity and harmony. The university's student body is made up of people from different backgrounds, so the community values racial or gender equality. This inherent compatibility among students serves as a protective shield, rendering them less vulnerable to discrimination or external criticism. However, toxic comments especially encompass those that target individuals or groups based on attributes such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics, often employing slurs or offensive language (D'Sa et al., n.d.). When these toxic comments infiltrate the daily vlog or short video content posted by college students, their impact can be particularly significant. When facing such virtual critical opposition, students may grapple with a sense of division within their own community, which can have far-reaching emotional and psychological consequences.

In controversy, the term “positive comment” can be defined as any comment or feedback given on social media platforms that conveys a favorable, uplifting, or encouraging message. These comments can range from compliments and words of appreciation to expressions of support and validation. Their purpose is often to uplift the recipient, show appreciation, or spread

good vibes in the online space. Positive comments can foster a sense of community, promote healthy interactions, and counteract the negativity that sometimes prevails on social media platforms. However, some scholars suggest that positive comments also could lead to negative reactions of the content creator. A specific study in 2017 demonstrates that positive comments about weight or shape might lead to unfavorable results for some ethnic minority college women (Herbozo, Stevens, Moldovan, & Morrell, 2017). This is a landmark discovery that positive comments can also cause negative physical or psychological changes in a specific group of people. This challenges the general perception that all positive feedback is beneficial and highlights the nuanced and multifaceted nature of human responses to social validation. One reason for such unexpected outcomes might be the internalization of societal beauty standards, which can lead individuals to feel pressure to maintain or achieve a certain appearance, even when praised. Especially in this case, for ethnic minority women, navigating dual cultural expectations - those from their ethnic background and those from a predominantly different society - can further complicate their reactions to positive comments. It underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and awareness when commenting on others' appearances, and serves as a reminder that individual reactions to feedback can be deeply personal, influenced by myriad factors including cultural background, personal history, and individual temperament.

Compared with the absolute nature of toxic feedback, neutral comments are more focused on the event or content itself. It refers to feedback or statements made on a topic, event, or content that carry neither a distinctly positive nor negative sentiment. Instead, they center on the subject matter itself without expressing strong emotions, judgments, or biases. Neutral comments aim to provide information, ask questions, or make observations without taking a stance, and as

such, they often avoid causing strong reactions or polarizing responses from recipients or readers.

Neutral comments are in most cases an objective perspective. A study suggests that comments with a neutral tone can lead to increased one-sided compromises when negotiators communicate through audio (Johnson, Cooper, & Holowczak, 2016). If this finding about neutral-toned expression is applied to social media, vloggers and influencers might adjust their audio content approach, aiming for a more neutral tone to achieve agreeable responses from audiences or collaborators. This could bolster audience trust, seeing the vlogger as unbiased. However, it might also dilute genuine engagement, as a neutral tone could be misinterpreted as indifference. In brand collaborations, neutrality might influence the negotiation dynamics. While some vloggers may benefit from seeming impartial, there's a risk of blending into the background. Therefore, it is crucial to strike a balance between neutrality and authenticity to retain audience engagement. Additionally, neutral social media feedback can act as a middle ground, mitigating the impact of external criticism by offering feedback without overtly taking sides.

College Students' Self-Esteem, Self-Regulation, and Emotional Well-Being

This study aims to delve into the psychological dynamics at play in the lives of international college student vloggers, specifically focusing on the concepts of self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being. By analyzing existing studies, this study seeks to identify patterns, gaps, and insights that inform the psychological impact of social media interactions on this specific demographic. The analysis of self-esteem is directed at understanding how individuals' perceptions of their worth and abilities are shaped by digital feedback. Self-regulation is reviewed to comprehend how students manage their online personas

and responses to social media stimuli. Lastly, the examination of emotional well-being provides insights into the broader emotional states and mental health implications of engaging with social media. Through examining three major aspects, this subsection seeks to understand the psychological underpinnings that drive the responses of international college student vloggers.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is the assessment that an individual makes of themselves, expressing an attitude of approval or disapproval and showing the competence that the subject possesses to believe in themselves, their capabilities, and value (Javed & Tariq, 2016). It is generally believed that having high self-esteem provides benefits such as feeling good about oneself, and living in a social world in which people respect them. On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with depression, shyness, loneliness, and alienation (Heatherton & Wyland, 2019). Additionally, Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Theory posits that self-esteem is a person's overall evaluation of their worth or value as a person, and it is based on the beliefs and attitudes that a person has about themselves (Čerešník, Dolejš, Čerešníková, & Tomšik, 2022). Theories above suggest that these self-assessments critically influence individuals' behavior, reflecting a correlation between self-esteem and social interaction.

Within the modern context of social media, this internal self-assessment can be heavily influenced by the ubiquitous practice of social comparison. A study published by National Institutes of Health have found that there is a positive correlation between the frequency of social media use and dissatisfaction with body image and low self-esteem, which is a typical example of the negative effects (Molina Ruiz, Alfonso-Fuertes, & González Vives, 2022). It is undeniable that social media platforms present a constant stream of opportunities for young adults to compare themselves against the carefully curated presentations of others. Such comparisons can

either validate self-worth or trigger feelings of inadequacy, depending on whether one perceives themselves to measure up to or fall short of their peers. Especially in young adults in this digital arena, the pervasive nature of online feedback—measured in comments and shares could result in significant impacts on a young adult's self-esteem.

The dynamics of self-esteem on social media, through the lens of Rosenberg's concept, become particularly complex when considering the idealized selves that individuals often portray online. According to a study on the relationship between social networking sites (SNS) and body image, self-esteem, and eating disorders, young adults who place high value on their online image may experience more volatile self-esteem that is heavily reliant on the quantity and quality of social feedback they receive (Santarossa & Woodruff, 2017). The disparity between an individual's actual self and their idealized online persona can lead to dissonance and fluctuations in self-esteem. This reliance on external validation and comparison-driven environments, underscores the importance of developing stable self-regulation to maintain self-esteem. Rosenberg's theory thus provides a valuable framework for understanding the potential psychological implications of social media use on self-esteem among young adults.

Self-Regulation

Research on self-regulation within the digital environment, particularly as it pertains to managing one's online persona and responding to social media stimuli, has become increasingly relevant as the digital landscape expands. According to Zimmerman's definition, self-regulation refers to the ability to control one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to achieve a desired outcome. It is an essential aspect of personal growth and development and can be influenced by various factors, including feedback control and goal-setting (Zimmerman, 2000).

In managing an online persona, studies have suggested that individuals use self-presentation strategies that involve curating personal information to convey a particular image. A study on the psychology of the internet explored how people manage their self-presentations online and how successful they are at conveying the impression they hope to create. The study found that different approaches work online, and a clever self-presentation might lead to instant celebrity status. It also highlighted how vital cues are used to form impressions of other people when reading their emails or browsing their social network profiles (Wallace, 1999). This digital self-presentation is a form of self-regulation, as individuals must constantly decide what to share, how to respond to others, and how to engage with different online platforms.

Self-regulation emerges as a critical factor in studying how social media influences college student vloggers' self-esteem because it encompasses the processes by which individuals control and direct their thoughts, emotions, and responses. This self-regulatory process involves the modulation of emotional responses to feedback, directly influencing their self-perception and emotional well-being (Zimmerman, 2000). This regulatory ability directly impacts how students perceive and internalize social media interactions. When confronted with various types of feedback from social media, the capacity to regulate their reactions can determine whether their self-esteem is bolstered, remains unchanged, or is undermined. It is the difference between a student who can bounce back from criticism with their self-esteem intact and one who may be derailed by it.

Emotional Well-Being

Emotional well-being among college students is a crucial concern, given that the college years are often a critical period for mental health development. This stage of life is marked by

numerous transitions, such as adapting to new living situations, forming adult identities, and handling increased academic or financial responsibilities. Emotional well-being during this time can significantly influence students' academic achievement, social relationships, and overall quality of life. It is a period where many mental health issues can first manifest or become exacerbated, making it a vital area for scholarly attention. A study found that cyber-ostracism fully mediates the relationship between perceived stress and emotional well-being among college students, which emphasizes that the combination of stressors related to academic pressures and the quest for identity can trigger psychological challenges (Tang & Duan, 2023).

Moreover, the influence of digital technology and social media on students' emotional well-being is a burgeoning field of study, reflecting the impact of these platforms on the daily lives of young college vloggers. Social media can shape self-esteem, individuals' self-regulation, and the sense of connection with others, all of which are key components of emotional well-being. Social media engagement is intricately linked to the emotional well-being of college vloggers because it acts as immediate and public feedback mechanisms; it can either validate or invalidate their self-worth and identity. The sheer immediacy and public nature of these interactions mean that they can have a rapid impact on an individual's emotional state, particularly for college students who are still in critical stages of their identity development and may be more vulnerable to external validation or criticism.

Therefore, this study prompts the following inquiries:

- 1. What impacts does engaging with viewers on social media platforms have on the self-esteem, self-regulation, and emotional well-being of international college student vloggers?*
- 2. What external factors help international college student vloggers deal with the adverse effects of engaging with viewers on social media?*

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing one-to-one in-depth interviews to explore the usage experiences of international college student vloggers. The focus is on understanding how different types of social media interactions influence their emotional well-being, and how they cope with and respond to these interactions. The qualitative approach is chosen due to their effectiveness in handling elusive and imprecise data that are challenging to quantify, and in-depth one-on-one interviews are commonly utilized in social science research as they enable researchers to gain insights into an individual's views on a specific subject, as well as to explore the individual's previous experiences (Weiss, 1995).

Table 1. *The international college student vloggers interviewed*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Type of Vlog	Main Platforms
John	Male	22	MOBA gaming	Douyin, Tiktok, Kuaishou, X, Wechat
Jane	Female	20	Dance and daily life	Xiaohongshu, Instagram, X, Wechat
Max	Female	21	Political critic and masked singing	X, Tiktok, Quora, Whatsup
Lily	Male	22	Travel and daily life	Instagram, Douyin, Tiktok
Alex	Female	21	Makeup tutorial	Xiaohongshu, Instagram, Wechat
Kate	Female	21	Daily life	Xiaohongshu
Sam	Male	20	Japanese anime commentary	X, Tiktok, Kuaishou

In this research, participants are selectively chosen from a diverse pool of college vloggers. The participants in this study were active social media users, characterized by their consistent engagement with different types of social media platforms. To ensure homogeneity within our sample, participants were aged between 18 and 26 years old, encompassing the typical

age range of college students. Additionally, the selection required that each participant had posted a minimum of ten updates within the three months preceding their involvement in the study. This criterion was established to ensure that the participants had a substantive and current presence on the chosen social media platforms.

The study does not specify the names of the universities to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and to avoid any potential bias associated with particular institutions. A total of 7 participants were included in the study. This sample size is deemed sufficient to reach data saturation while allowing for a manageable and in-depth analysis of individual experiences. The research was conducted through semi-structured interviews. This format allowed for a balance between guiding the conversation with predefined questions and providing participants the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words. Given the potential for certain interview questions to trigger subjects into recalling negative experiences associated with social media use, such as cyberbullying and online violence, which could impact their emotional well-being, the decision was made to omit some planned interview questions if subjects showed extended signs of hesitation or discomfort. The interviews were conducted remotely via video conferencing tools to accommodate geographic diversity and availability of the participants. In the analysis section, the real names of the participants will be substituted with entirely unrelated pseudonyms to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Confidentiality will be assured, with no personal or identifying information being disclosed in the study's findings.

To avoid creating uncomfortable or controversial situations, the interview process was designed to steer clear of leading questions. Additionally, the process allowed sufficient flexibility for the interviewee to share their experiences beyond the primary questions, not limited solely to the pre-planned interview questions. Each interview was recorded with the

participant's consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The average duration of all recordings was 25 minutes. In order to ensure accurate quoting of the subjects' original words, this study employed GarageBand for the transcription and decoding of all audio recordings. The transcribed interviews underwent thematic analysis, a methodical process where data is examined for recurring patterns or themes that are pertinent to the research questions. This analysis began with a careful reading of all the transcriptions, followed by a coding process where specific segments/interview questions were labeled with thematic keywords (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). These codes were then grouped into potential themes that reflected the core information emerging from the data. Through an iterative process of reviewing, these potential themes were developed into three main sections that structured the analysis, directly illuminating key information relevant to the research questions.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, their role, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. The study adhered to principles of confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that personal information and responses were securely handled and that participants are not identifiable in any reports or publications.

Analysis

In conducting this study, I undertook qualitative interviews with seven vloggers who were active across a variety of social media platforms, both in China and the United States. These individuals, who regularly engaged with platforms such as Instagram, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu, brought a wealth of experience and insights into the realm of digital expression and social interaction. Through these conversations, I aimed to uncover the intricate ways in

which different social media platforms facilitated modes of expression, and how these modes influenced the vloggers' content creation and audience engagement strategies. Their firsthand accounts provide a lens to analyze the classification of social media platforms and the methods of expression they afford.

Choosing the Digital Stage: Platform Selection Among International College Student

Vloggers

In this study, five of the social media vloggers interviewed used different types of social media platforms, while the other two only used a single type of social media. Vloggers revealed that the types of media platforms they often use or publish content include short video platforms (Douyin, Tencent Weishi, Kuaishou, Tiktok), social e-commerce platforms (Xiaohongshu), and social dynamic sharing platforms (X, Instagram). According to the core theory of Symbolic Interactionism, feedback mechanisms on social media platforms act as significant symbols through which vloggers interpret their social standing and adjust their behavior. Likes, comments, shares, and algorithm visibility serve as immediate, tangible indicators of approval or disapproval from the audience. The nature and immediacy of feedback vary across platforms, affecting how vloggers perceive their success and how they strategically tailor future content. For example, the quick, often ephemeral feedback on platforms like TikTok might encourage more trend-driven and experimental content, while the structured feedback on Xiaohongshu could foster a focus on quality and detailed narratives. Based on the information provided by the interviewed vloggers, I identified two reasons for why different social media platforms might have varied impacts on vloggers: 1) The uniqueness of viewer groups on different types of social media platforms, 2) Mechanisms for feedback and connection building.

Despite the homogeneity in the background of the participants interviewed—all of whom were international college student vloggers—variations in social media platform preferences distinctly bifurcate their fan bases. This divergence is exemplified in the account of a particular subject, John, a 22-year-old male gaming vlogger who identified as a member of the LGBTQ group. He provided an insightful portrait of his fan base on Douyin, where a significant majority, approximately 80%, mirrored his age group, ranging from 20 to 26 years. This demographic consistency highlights the vlogger's appeal to a specific age group, predominantly attracting fans who are roughly the same age as the vlogger. This pattern persists regardless of variations in the sexual orientation of the audience, suggesting the audience composition that transcended mere age demographics. According to the interviewee, this fan group was more interested in watching the game videos posted by the subject, and most of the comments were closely related to the game itself.

Instead, similar video content can attract completely audience groups on different platforms. He often posted almost identical game guides and video clips on Kuaishou and Xiaohongshu, but the analysis of the fan base demographics revealed a significant difference. According to John's account, over 85% of his followers on the Kuaishou platform were male, predominantly identifying as gay or bisexual. It is noteworthy that, despite Kuaishou and Douyin both being short video social media platforms, there exists a stark contrast in the demographic profiles of the vlogger's followers across these platforms. Furthermore, the vlogger highlighted in an interview that his Kuaishou audience appeared more interested in content related to the gay community rather than the gaming content itself. He stated during the interview,

"You should understand that content creation is difficult...for any type of vlogger, so I will add some words in the game clips that can only be understood by the homosexual group, hoping to increase my fans. Of course, this approach is working well so far."

In an effort to resonate more deeply with the Kuaishou user base, the vlogger incorporated specific linguistic cues and themes into the gaming content, aimed at fostering a connection with the homosexual community. This case study highlights the impact of platform-specific audiences on vloggers in the field of digital content creation. It subtly forces international college student vloggers with multiple cultural identities to learn how to publish in different media platforms in line with the unique expectations of fans on that platform, while effectively interacting with the target audience.

Nevertheless, drawing upon the suppositions posited by the game vlogger, coupled with assertions from additional participants, my analysis suggests that a contributing factor to this phenomenon is the disparate feedback mechanisms inherent to Kuaishou and Douyin, which exert distinct influences on vloggers' experiences and outcomes. As previously discussed, when feedback (including comments, private messages, likes, and shares) on social media platforms is conceptualized within the framework of symbolic interactionism—as symbols requiring interpretation or decoding—international college student vloggers must engage in the process of deciphering feedback from unfamiliar audiences. The distinctive feedback mechanisms characteristic of each social media platform emerge as significant determinants in this interpretive process. These mechanisms not only shape the modalities through which viewers articulate their responses to the content disseminated by vloggers but also indirectly influence how creators interpret and understand these responses.

The distinctiveness of social media platforms predominantly lies in their interaction mechanisms. Jane, a 20-year-old dance and daily life vlogger, articulated a preference for the feedback mechanism of semi-e-commerce platforms like Xiaohongshu over that of short video platforms, attributing this preference to the former's more straightforward liking and sharing functionalities. These features, she argued, facilitate a more accessible expression of appreciation by the platform's predominantly non-content-creating user base towards their favored vloggers/content creators. During the interview, Jane expressed her belief that the aggregate number of likes and followers serves as the primary metric for assessing a vlogger's value and their account's commercial potential.

“Generally speaking, a larger follower base implies I have a group of loyal viewers for my daily posts. This visibility often attracts collaborations with e-commerce entities or MCN (Multi-Channel Network) companies, which propose product promotion within my content. Consequently, this transforms my followers into their potential customers,” she elucidated.

Jane further highlighted the direct correlation between the volume of likes and follows within the feedback mechanism and the remuneration derived from e-commerce advertising engagements. This relationship, she noted, serves as a significant incentive for her continued involvement as an international college student vlogger. The interview analysis revealed Jane's strategic approach to social media engagement, prioritizing platforms that readily facilitate likes and other forms of engagement, thereby maximizing the commercial value of her social media presence over platforms primarily focused on fostering user interaction.

In fact, the social interaction of international college student vloggers on the Internet is not limited to their followers, but also includes many different forms of business cooperation. When discussing the motivations behind his creativity, John acknowledged financial incentives

as a factor in sustaining his content creation efforts, albeit not the sole reason. Initially, he had no aspirations of transforming his social media activity into a professional revenue-generating endeavor, viewing it merely as a casual pastime. However, as his follower count increased, representatives from MCN (Multi-Channel Network) organizations began to reach out to him for partnerships through private messages. John highlighted the challenges that many individual social media vloggers face in monetizing their content and profiles, even after gaining popularity. He argued that a successful business model in this context should be proactive and involve cultivating a loyal customer base. Nevertheless, John expressed reservations about engaging more deeply with MCN companies to boost commercial earnings, citing the difficulty of juggling academic responsibilities with the demands of generating income from short video social media platforms. Moreover, he critiqued that not all types of social media focus on business interactions, one of the examples is the e-commerce feedback mechanisms on platforms like Kuaishou as being underdeveloped and ill-suited to support the financial aspirations of college student vloggers over the long term.

In synthesizing the interview contents with four subjects, my analysis elucidates the varied nature of interactions between Multi-Channel Networks (MCNs) and vloggers across different social media platforms. MCNs offer a comprehensive suite of services aimed at bolstering internet celebrities' careers, encompassing talent scouting, incubation, content development, technical support for self-content platforms, continuous creativity enhancement, account management, integration with platform resources, event management, commercial monetization, and the development of subsidiary intellectual properties. This array of complex operational demands can pose significant challenges for individuals not professionally versed in managing such a multifaceted coordination. Simplified, an MCN functions as an enterprise

dedicated to assisting contracted creators in consistently producing and monetizing their content, whilst also participating in the revenue generated.

According to a comprehensive analysis of the interviews, social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin have relatively mature merchant-vlogger docking systems, so vloggers can clearly understand the specific requirements for advertising or communicate directly with merchants from these platforms. This infrastructure allows vloggers to precisely comprehend advertising requirements or to engage directly with merchants. Conversely, on platforms where feedback from merchants is less accessible, vloggers often find it challenging to generate profit without the intervention of an MCN.

The interviews reveal a consensus among three of the interviewed vloggers, who express skepticism regarding the feasibility of sustained support from MCN organizations for the college student demographic. They highlight the erratic nature of college students' creative and publication schedules, which makes it difficult to adhere to the professional standards expected by social media industries. Additionally, my analysis on post-interviews indicates a common strategy among international student media vloggers: diversifying their content across multiple social media platforms. This approach compounds the complexity of their situation, as maximizing profits necessitates navigating commercial interactions with MCNs and advertisers across various platforms.

Digital Reflections: The Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem, Self-Regulation and Emotional Well-Being

Upon conducting a thorough analysis of the interviews, it has been discerned that international college vloggers' interactions with fans and stranger users on social media

platforms considerably affect their emotional well-being and self-esteem. Nonetheless, these interactions appear to have minimal influence on their capacity for self-regulation.

All participants consistently reported receiving feedback from both fans and non-fans subsequent to sharing content on social media platforms. According to responses to interview questions, media comments and direct messages from strangers were among the most significant elements of social media interactions that impacted emotional well-being. The insights provided by John (a 22-year-old male gaming vlogger who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community) and Max (a 21-year-old political critic and masked singing vlogger) shed light on the harsh reality of malicious comments. These comments, often extreme in nature and extending to verbal abuse and personal attacks, are particularly distressing when they target the vlogger's gender, race, or the ideologies expressed in their content. Such attacks not only represent external criticism from viewers but also reflect broader societal prejudices that permeate online spaces.

Compared with media comments, private messages from strangers are more aggressive and more likely to cause depression/self-doubt in subjects. This discrepancy in the nature of harassment can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the public visibility of comments on social media platforms inherently allows for community moderation, where other viewers can counter or report malicious content, providing a layer of psychological buffer for the content creator. Secondly, comments containing sensitive words or offensive remarks will be hidden or deleted by the comment regulation system, or reported by other users, resulting in more severe penalties. The stricter content moderation policies applied to public comments, as opposed to the more private and less regulated domain of direct messages, result in a higher prevalence of unchecked aggression in private communications. Therefore, Lily emphasized that although sometimes the travel vlogs she posted received some negative comments, she subjectively

believed that this might just be based on simple hatred of rich or envy, which can't actually affect her emotional well-being. However, after posting content, some unknown accounts usually send private messages to her and attack her. Sometimes the specific cause of such harmful content cannot even be identified. This situation will make Lily feel depressed for a short period of time.

Regarding some negative comments in social media interactions, four out of the seven interviewed subjects reported that, albeit reluctantly at times, they usually adapted their content in response to constructive external criticism received through comments. John, Max, and Sam specifically articulated experiencing resistance or negative emotions when confronted with critical feedback. John's account is particularly illustrative of the tensions that can arise in niche content areas like gaming vlogs. While open to objective critiques of game strategies or operations, John expresses a strong aversion to unsolicited advice or criticism regarding his video's stylistic and technical aspects. This distaste for what he perceives as unwarranted interference speaks to a broader sentiment among content creators—a desire for creative freedom and respect for their artistic choices. John's frustration with certain segments of his audience, who he feels overstep their bounds in critiquing his creative decisions, not only affects his mood but also his sense of autonomy as a creator.

*"I have my own style, so I can edit whatever the F*** I want. I hate it when people pretend to know a lot about things, but in fact they don't know many details. After reading those I'm always grumpy with incomprehensible comments." -- John*

His statement encapsulates a defiance against the pressures to conform to external expectations, underscoring a struggle for authenticity in a medium often dominated by viewer feedback. The emotional toll of navigating these criticisms (particularly those perceived as ill-informed or overly intrusive) highlights the challenges faced by college vloggers.

Interactions involving critical comments and private messages can sometimes induce self-doubt among vloggers. However, based on the personal experience and shares from the participants, I identified three specific circumstances that can mitigate the psychological impact of unfriendly external criticism: 1. Vloggers with strong self-regulation ability do not pay much attention to the impact of negative feedback and interactions, or simply ignore them. 2. Vloggers with less academic/other pressure can usually maintain a more positive attitude in facing external evaluations and humbly accept some suggestions for improvement. 3. Vloggers with a large number of fans cannot reply or review them one by one because they have too many private messages and comments. At the same time, they believe that due to the diversity of their fan's demographics, it is difficult for them to meet every single one's expectations.

The self-regulation ability of international college student vloggers exhibits a negative correlation with the negative emotions elicited by external criticism. It was observed that Jane exhibited a marginally higher self-regulation capacity compared to her counterparts, primarily attributed to her practice of selectively disregarding negative feedback. She pointed out that, especially in the realms of dance and daily vlogging, the subjective nature of content often renders it immune to definitive right or wrong judgments. This characteristic tends to invalidate the factual basis of most negative feedback. Furthermore, she underscored her self-regulation strategy, which involved consciously ignoring comments that are patently toxic. This approach is complemented by her deliberate avoidance of seeking emotional validation through social media, effectively cushioning the adverse psychological impacts of social media interactions. This kind of self-regulation is crucial because it not only keeps college students emotionally healthy but also allows them to focus clearly on their creative goals without being shaken by every wave of criticism. As she describes it, her response strategy to social media comments is to proactively

filter feedback to ensure only constructive criticism penetrates their creative bubble, thereby promoting healthier interactions with their audience.

Vloggers unencumbered by significant external pressures, such as academic demands, exhibit a more optimistic outlook towards social media interactions. Their relative autonomy affords them the capacity to evaluate external feedback more objectively, enabling them to distinguish constructive criticism from irrelevant negativity. Among the interviewees, two noted that their professional tracks subjected them to considerably less course-related stress, thus allotting them more time to engage with social media platforms. Specifically, Alex, a 21-year-old makeup tutorial vlogger with a major in women's and gender studies and a vocal advocate for feminism, reported minimal academic pressure. This lack of pressure allows her to devote more attention to managing her social media presence. Notably, Alex's primary platform is Xiaohongshu, a semi-commercial site where she frequently encounters both support and opposition due to the contentious nature of feminism as a topic.

Alex's stance on the negative feedback and interactions she encounters is notably resilient. She maintains a positive demeanor in the face of such negativity, attributing her attitude to the fulfillment she derives from reality outside the digital realm. Her perspective on the matter is dismissive of the negative feedback's significance, grounded in the belief that her real-life support system and online following provide her with sufficient validation. This belief system allows her to view social media interactions as a leisure activity rather than a source of stress.

"What they say really doesn't affect me because I really don't think it matters... I have enough people who like me, both in reality and online. Chatting on the platform is just one of the ways to pass the time, you know, it's hard to be down about something you don't care about."

--Alex

This insight into Alex's experience illuminates the role of external environmental factors in shaping content creators' responses to feedback. It suggests that a less stressful external environment can significantly enhance creators' ability to engage with audience evaluations in a more positive manner.

Disregarding external factors, possessing a substantial fan base inherently results in diminished interactivity and lessens a vlogger's exposure to negative comments or private messages. However, this phenomenon requires careful consideration of the vlogger's specific niche and the nature of the content they produce. For vloggers who boast a substantial following, the sheer volume of interactions makes it impractical to engage with every comment or private message personally. This scenario fosters a natural detachment from feedback, as the feasibility of individualized responses diminishes. Furthermore, the recognition of their diverse audience demographics leads to an acknowledgment of the impossibility of meeting every fan's expectations. Max, who boasts the highest number of followers and fans among the interviewees in this study, disclosed that the sheer volume of private messages from fans impedes her ability to respond promptly. This influx of messages results in a blend of supportive and dissenting comments, further complicating timely communication. Her diverse social media vlogging, which spans multiple genres, attracts varying levels of engagement and feedback. Specifically, vlogs with political content generate more responses and controversy, including a higher incidence of negative comments, compared to her singing vlogs.

Despite the protective buffer that a large fan base typically provides against the adverse effects of negative interactions, Max highlighted unique instances where the scale of followership could exacerbate emotional distress. She recounted experiencing online hostility following the publication of content with pronounced international political implications. This

situation was marked by an overwhelming dominance of critical comments and aggressive attacks, diverging from her usual experience. The unidirectional nature of the backlash and the deluge of negative feedback plunged her into a state of considerable unease, illustrating how certain contexts can intensify the emotional challenges faced by social media influencers, despite the general benefits of having a wide and supportive audience. Thus, while a larger audience can buffer creators from negativity, the effect of this buffer is modulated by the content's context and the creator's engagement strategies.

Drawing from a thorough examination of the subjects' narratives and case studies, it emerges that private messages channels on social media seldom exert a detrimental effect on the self-esteem of international college student media vloggers, but issues related to emotional well-being, such as anxiety, still occur inevitably. With this particular circumstance, John claimed that proper engagement with fans can serve as a mechanism for alleviating anxiety. He proposed that as international students, the dual pressures of language and curriculum they face in school require them to have stronger self-regulation abilities to deal with psychological problems. The complex interplay of multiple identities these vloggers navigate further complicates their social media persona, with the minority group label often facilitating a deeper connection with certain segments of the media audience. John perceives the process of interacting with fans as a strategy to alleviate stress. He proposed that as international students, the dual pressures of language and curriculum they face in school require them to have stronger self-regulation abilities to deal with psychological problems. The complex interplay of multiple identities these vloggers navigate further complicates their social media persona, with the minority group label often facilitating a deeper connection with certain segments of the media audience.

“It’s quite interesting to interact with them in private messages, and sometimes they can even provide some inspiration for my creations. Maybe it’s because most fans online are anonymous, so LGBTQ people like me can be more confident.” -- John

Specifically, John, aligning with his sexual orientation, actively seeks out interactions with fans from the "gay" community, whether through comments or private messaging. He highlights that engaging with users who share similar identity markers can significantly bolster one's sense of belonging and self-esteem, especially during moments of vulnerability. This method of engagement not only serves as an approach against stress but also contributes positively to their emotional health, thus it clarifies the therapeutic potential of the digital community.

John notably emphasized that LGBTQ and other similar minority groups tend to be more actively engaged in interactions on social media, attributing this heightened involvement to the platform's virtual identity and the anonymity it affords. This digital context allows individuals within these groups to express themselves and connect with others more freely, without the constraints and potential biases they might face in offline settings. The anonymity and virtual nature of social media serve as a protective veil, encouraging open communication and support among community members, fostering a sense of solidarity.

Furthermore, beyond factors of race and gender, negative comments targeting vloggers' appearance and body shape stand out as prominent contributors to the erosion of their self-esteem, sometimes even leading to its destruction. Jane's experience serves as a poignant illustration of this phenomenon. Upon initiating her journey as a dance vlogger, Jane encountered viewers who unabashedly critiqued her physique and weight within the comment area. Employing derogatory language and resorting to likening her to certain animals, these attackers

meticulously sidestepped detection by the regulatory system by employing homophones and emojis. Jane recounted feeling deeply affected by such demeaning criticism, experiencing a profound sense of inferiority. Plunged into a spiral of self-doubt, she embarked on a vengeful pursuit of weight loss, resorting even to the use of excessive weight-loss drugs. Consequently, the onslaught of this targeted attack compelled Jane to refrain from sharing any content featuring images of herself for an extended period. According to her description, this influence has even permeated into her daily life, making it challenging for her to wear clothing that accentuates her body contours with the same level of confidence she once exhibited during her weight loss phase.

The comment section of published vlogs has been identified as a primary factor in harming vloggers' self-esteem. This issue surfaced in an interview with Jane and was echoed by other participants. Analysis suggests that the detrimental impact on self-esteem is largely due to the sense of shame experienced after being publicly criticized. Previous studies indicate that college-aged individuals often find public rebukes embarrassing, leading to feelings of shame—particularly as adolescents and young adults have a heightened need for social acceptance and are acutely conscious of how they are perceived by others (Čerešník, Dolejš, Čerešníková, & Tomšik, 2022). This dynamic is similarly observed in social media contexts, where the comment section can sometimes serve as a venue for the "public execution" of the vlogger. A large volume of negative feedback can make vloggers feel severely criticized in front of a wide audience, leading to the loss of self-esteem.

Global Voices, Local Echoes: The Country-of-Origin Effect on Social Media

In this study, the selection of subjects was limited to international college student vloggers. Thus, the study identified a range of social media platforms that are predominantly

utilized by this group for their content creation and interaction, reflecting a diverse array of channels for expression and communication. These platforms include, but are not limited to, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), WeChat, WhatsApp, Quora, Douyin, TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Kuaishou. These platforms are imbued with the cultural nuances and communication norms of their countries of origin. The study investigates how these country-specific characteristics of social media platforms affect the content strategies, audience interactions, and emotional landscapes of the vloggers.

In order to evaluate the influence of different countries' social media platforms on international college student vloggers, a key factor to consider is the origin of these platforms' research and development (R&D) companies. This origin significantly impacts the regulatory mechanisms they employ, particularly concerning sensitive words and harmful content. The variation in regulatory practices can be attributed to the diverse legal and cultural environments in which these platforms operate. In illustrating the impact of the regulatory environment on content, John provided an example that highlights the distinct approach of Chinese short video platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou. He stated that the platforms originated in China implement stringent content moderation policies that block all negative information regarding communism or Maoism. This practice reflects the broader regulatory framework within China, which places a high emphasis on maintaining social harmony and the positive image of its political ideologies. The censorship of criticism towards communism or Maoism on Chinese short video platforms is a stark reminder of their content to meet the regulatory standards of each platform, if they still want to publish content for any kinds of purposes.

This situation does not stop at short video platforms. Similar restrictions also exist in e-commerce social media such as Xiaohongshu. The restrictions underscores the comprehensive

nature of content regulation in China, which not only targets politically sensitive material but also extends to content perceived as promoting excessive consumerism or showcasing wealth disparities. During the interview, Lily mentioned that although she had been very careful to avoid politically slanted content in her travel vlog in order to pass the platform's review, it still often happened that her videos were rejected. In this case, she shared the reason why her vlog was deleted by the platform's censorship system.

"Sometimes my travel diary will be blocked by Xiaohongshu, and the reasons they give are ridiculous. They say I show off my wealth, which I really can't understand." -- Lily

Lily emphasized that the vlogs, intended as simple life shares, such as hotel stays or dining experiences, can be perceived through the lens of wealth display, thus triggering content removal or censorship. This situation highlights the understanding required to navigate the content guidelines of these platforms, where even seemingly innocuous content can fall afoul of broad and variably interpreted rules against promoting high consumption lifestyles. Combined with the analysis of feedback from other subjects, it is known that Chinese social media has very strict restrictions on the high consumption and luxury shared by some vloggers, and this regulatory approach reflects a sensitivity to the social and economic disparities prevalent within Chinese society. The intent behind such restrictions can be understood as an effort to maintain social harmony, and prevent the exacerbation of class consciousness among the platform's diverse user base. Content that glorifies luxury lifestyles or high consumption can, intentionally or not, underscore the socioeconomic divides, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy or discontent among lower-income viewers.

However, this policy is a limitation for international college vloggers who use Chinese-origin social media. They must creatively share their experiences without crossing the

often blurry lines defined by platform censorship policies. The challenge for these vloggers lies in maintaining authenticity while adhering to the platform's content standards, ensuring their content is accessible to their intended audience without promoting excessive consumerism or eliciting negative social comparisons.

In the diverse tapestry of global social media, platforms originating from countries with liberal internet governance policies, like those in the United States, demonstrate a greater tolerance for a wide spectrum of expression. This openness is particularly advantageous for content that spans multiple languages and cultural contexts, which is directly benefiting the creator groups like international college vloggers. Sam, a vlogger specializing in Japanese anime commentary, exemplifies this benefit through his experience on X (formerly known as Twitter). His ability to attract a substantial audience for content produced in Japanese underscores the platform's inclusivity and its appeal to a global user base interested in niche content.

The comparative analysis of content policies reveals that American social media platforms, such as X and Instagram, host a more linguistically diverse audience than their counterparts like TikTok and its Chinese version, Douyin. This diversity is not only a reflection of the platforms' global reach but also of their foundational policies that encourage free expression across language barriers. Consequently, creators like Sam can engage with and cultivate a dedicated following among viewers who share their interests, irrespective of the viewers' primary languages. This inclusivity facilitates the rapid development of diverse cultures, allowing for the intersection of interests, such as anime, with audiences that might not be as easily reachable on platforms with more restrictive language and content policies. The tolerance for multiple languages enables creators to post their vlog without the constraints of their creativity.

Sam said this openness could foster more diverse online discussions among his followers, while conversely language restrictions make it difficult for social media platforms that originated in China to allow speakers of other languages to participate.

“I tried using other platforms or their automatic subtitle translations, but the results were unsatisfactory because few people could understand what I was saying and there were few comments.” -- Sam

These platforms often prioritize content in the dominant local language, limiting the participation of those who speak other languages. Sam’s attempt to bridge this gap through automatic subtitle translations underscores the difficulties faced in trying to engage with a broader audience on these platforms. The lack of effective translation tools and the subsequent limited interaction — evidenced by fewer comments and engagements — highlight a significant barrier to fostering global communities on such platforms.

The diversity of opinions among international student vloggers regarding moderation restrictions on content and comments is noteworthy, with not all expressing aversion to such practices. Max's experience provides a compelling counterpoint to illustrating the potential benefits of stringent content audit standards. She advocates for the global adoption of rigorous moderation mechanisms, drawing from her personal encounter with online extremism.

As Max mentioned during the interview process, her support for strict moderation is rooted in her distressing experience on X (formerly Twitter), where she faced verbal attacks and threats after posting a vlog in support of her country's public health policies regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. The backlash she encountered underscores the darker aspects of social media, where the freedom of expression can sometimes devolve into harmful behavior, including personal attacks that carry a significant psychological toll on college vloggers like her. Despite

X's mechanisms for reporting harmful comments and banning accounts, Max's substantial follower count made it practically impossible for her to shield herself from all negative interactions. This situation highlights the limitations of current moderation tools in protecting users from targeted harassment, especially those who engage in topics that can provoke polarized responses.

Discussion

Although in most of the interviews in this study, the subjects continued to emphasize the importance of their self-creativity and creative motivation, the feedback from their audience groups still greatly affects their update frequency, content modification, etc. This observation also aligns with the principle of symbolic interactivity proposed by Bloomer's Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism in 2015, suggesting that individuals react to feedback in their social interactions, engaging in interpretive processes to adapt and alter meanings. These responses can occur even unconsciously, as individuals deal with their experiences (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

In the process, feedback on social media platforms that negatively affects the stability of emotional well-being of the international college student media vloggers is often decoded into two separate symbols: harsh but constructive suggestions from regular viewers and offensive remarks or sarcasm from extreme cyberbullies. When analyzing whether certain feedback belongs to one of these (the decoding process), vloggers have to distinguish meaningful information from sharp words. This stage is the most likely to affect their emotional health. However, the interviews reveal that for international college student vloggers, not all external criticism is perceived as negative judgment from social media strangers. They often adjust their content, consciously or subconsciously, based on this feedback, indicating that under certain conditions, they acknowledge and incorporate the external criticism from social media.

As mentioned in the analysis section, this does not mean that external criticism is beneficial to the self-esteem and emotional health of international college student video vloggers. The subjects have shown a strong resistance to negative remarks that interfere with their creation. Compared with comments under vlogs that may be blocked by the sensitive content monitoring system, more attackers choose to directly send private messages to vloggers to express their dissatisfaction. The dual mechanisms of public visibility and platform moderation policies inadvertently create a space where private messages become a conduit for more severe forms of harassment. Among many types of social media platforms, the analysis results show that private message harassment is the most serious on X and Instagram, which may be caused by free speech and loose supervision. This observation is particularly concerning, given the psychological toll described by the subjects, underscoring the need for more robust mechanisms to protect content creators from such negative interactions with viewers.

Extremely derogatory remarks regarding body image on social media platforms can significantly diminish or obliterate self-esteem, potentially prompting individuals to resort to extreme measures of self-harm or retaliatory behaviors. This discovery aligns with the findings of the National Institutes of Health, which suggest a positive correlation between users' social media usage frequency and their dissatisfaction with body image (Molina Ruiz, Alfonso-Fuertes, & González Vives, 2022). In light of this, urgent measures are warranted to address the proliferation of negative body-related comments on social media. Enhancements to censorship systems across various platforms are imperative to effectively tackle varying degrees of abusive content. Moreover, as a complementary strategy, the creation and dissemination of promotional content on social media platforms aimed at alleviating body-related anxieties among users could serve as a viable approach. Not only does this initiative aid in mitigating the adverse impact of

negative body image comments, but it also contributes to bolstering the self-regulation capabilities of vloggers within this milieu.

In the context of multiple cultures, social media platforms developed in countries with more liberal approaches to internet governance may offer greater freedom of expression, allowing for a wider range of content, including that which may be considered controversial or sensitive. While this openness can foster a more vibrant and diverse online discourse, it may also necessitate more active self-regulation by vloggers to navigate potential backlash or negative interactions. On the other hand, an overly strict censorship mechanism for sensitive content will reduce the creative desire of the international student vloggers, and at the same time, this restriction will also might destroy inspirations. The essence of creativity in vlogging, especially for individuals with varied backgrounds and experiences, thrives on the freedom to express their perspectives. Overly restrictive content moderation can therefore be counterproductive, curtailing the breadth and depth of discourse that these vloggers can engage in. For international student vloggers, the allure of social media platforms in countries with more liberal content policies is evident. Their inclination towards such platforms underscores a fundamental need for expressive freedom, which is paramount for nurturing their creativity and sustaining their engagement with global audiences.

Moving forward, this study holds implications for the well-being of international college vloggers and suggests avenues for mitigating the emotional challenges they face on social media platforms. Firstly, I assert that educational institutions and social media management companies could play a pivotal role in supporting these vloggers. Schools, for instance, could incorporate modules or workshops within their curriculum aimed at enhancing emotional resilience among students engaging in online content creation. Additionally, social media platforms themselves

could implement more suitable moderation policies to curb harassment and foster a safer online environment for content creators. At this juncture, it is pertinent to highlight that the existing algorithmic framework employed for detecting sensitive language or deleterious content falls short of meeting the needs of this demographic. The inadequacies in discerning benign content from potentially harmful material, coupled with the handling of adverse feedback, underscore the pressing necessity for enhancements in the moderation system's accuracy.

Furthermore, targeted interventions, such as mental health resources and support networks specifically tailored to the needs of international college student vloggers, could be developed and made readily accessible. As student-centered institutions, universities/colleges can contribute to safeguarding the self-esteem and emotional well-being of this vulnerable group by establishing special mental health centers. Such initiatives not only benefit individual vloggers but also contribute to the overall inclusivity and diversity of online discourse, promoting a more supportive environment for creators from diverse backgrounds.

This study acknowledges some limitations. The sample size, while sufficient for in-depth analysis, is small and may not fully represent the broader population of college vloggers. It limits its ability to definitively characterize the complex relationship between social media platforms and the target subject groups. Additionally, the data relies on self-reported experiences, which may be subject to personal biases and interpretations. Moreover, the diverse international identities of the subjects contribute to varied perspectives, with differences in race, gender, and cultural background potentially influencing their preference for particular social media platforms. This diversity in responses may lead to a skewed analysis, favoring certain platforms over others. Indeed, the complexity of mainstream social media platforms extends well beyond

the scope of this study, suggesting that the dynamics between different media user groups and their interrelations warrant further investigation.

Conclusion

This research highlights the interplay between social media interactions and the well-being of international college student vloggers. It elucidates how feedback mechanisms inherent in social media platforms can both nurture and undermine their creativity and emotional realms. While these vloggers value the autonomy to express and refine their content based on audience feedback, they also grapple with the adverse effects of negative interactions, such as cyberbullying and derogatory comments. The study advocates for a balanced approach to content moderation, emphasizing the need for supportive structures that foster positive engagement and mitigate harmful impacts. Educational institutions and social media platforms are called upon to collaborate in providing resources and interventions that bolster emotional resilience among vloggers.

International college student vloggers, who journey abroad for education and share their experiences through vlogging, embark on this path with the noble intention of spreading knowledge and joy. While they use content to bring joy to viewers, they also hope that social media will bring them a positive impact. As such, it is imperative for social media users to exercise kindness in their online interactions, to minimize online violence and negative commentary.

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