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Opportunities and Challenges of Short Video Usage for the Elderly in China

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Abstract: This study adopts descriptive qualitative research method, reviews the literature on the use of short videos by the elderly from 2018 to 2025, and summarizes the definition, types, and digital platforms of short videos in China. The results show that existing studies mainly discuss four aspects: positive impact, negative impact, short video creation, and factors that influence user behavior. The positive impact is mainly reflected in three aspects, including promoting physical health, improving mental health, and increasing social participation. The negative impact mainly includes the harm of digital addiction and the risk of spreading false information. The increasingly popular short video creation can promote the self-expression and active aging of the elderly, while facing the challenges of maintaining innovation and commercial viability. The results also show that there are four factors that influence elderly user behavior, namely exploration motivation, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and digital literacy. This study aims to understand the use of short videos by the elderly from the perspective of information system (IS) and provide academic insights that can be referenced based on the opportunities and challenges encountered by the elderly in China.

Keywords: : Short Video Usage, The Elderly, Opportunities, Challenges, China

1. Introduction

With the widespread use of smart devices in China, short videos have become popular in recent years, driven by various digital platforms. These videos range in length from a few seconds to several minutes, and are designed to instantly capture the audience's attention. They cater to the information consumption needs of modern people in fragmented time, allowing users to be entertained and inspired in a short period of time. At the same time, because the presentation format is more intuitive and vivid, information is easier to accept and spread. Short videos are not limited to entertainment, they have penetrated into various fields of daily life, such as news dissemination, education, and commercial marketing, thus completely changing the way people obtain information and express their opinions.

In China, short videos have become the mainstream of social media, promoting communication and interaction between users. Users can share daily life, personal experiences, travel experiences, and creative content through short videos, and can also express their own opinions (Wang et al., 2022), forming a new social interaction method in the digital age. Companies use short videos for marketing, interacting with consumers and promoting products. Short videos are concise and visually appealing, which can effectively attract consumers' attention (Yuan & Wang, 2024). Government agencies also use short videos to spread information and guide public opinion, including content that promotes “positive energy” and conforms to mainstream values (Zhao & Zhang, 2024).

Due to the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of short videos, the elderly population in China is increasingly using short video platforms. Short video platforms are usually user-friendly and easy to operate, without complicated operating steps, so that the elderly can also get started quickly. This intuitive and easy-to-understand interactive method reduces the digital divide and helps the elderly better adapt to new technologies. In addition, short videos are rich and diverse in content, covering not only entertainment and information, but also practical application information such as health, wellness, and life tips. This makes it easier for the elderly to get practical help and fun from them, thereby enhancing their dependence on and trust in the platform. In addition to information and entertainment functions, short video platforms have also become a new way for the elderly to communicate socially. Through interactive methods such as commenting, liking, and sharing, they can not only get emotional satisfaction, but also feel a sense of belonging to the community.

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Although short videos bring a lot of convenience and fun to the elderly, they are also accompanied by some negative effects. For example, staring at the screen for a long time may cause health risks such as visual fatigue and cervical spine problems; they may be exposed to unverified or false information, which may lead to wrong judgments and decisions; over-reliance on short video platforms may reduce the face-to-face social opportunities of the elderly, which may lead to a shrinking social circle and increased psychological loneliness in the long run; low network security awareness may also make the elderly a target of cyber-attacks or fraud; marketing advertisements in some short videos may mislead the elderly to make irrational consumption or even fall into consumption traps.

Searching for the topics "elderly" and "short video use" on cnki.net, China's largest academic literature database, shows that there are 399 articles in total. From 2018 to now, there is an increasing trend year by year, with the numbers being 2, 5, 14, 62, 102, 99, 94, and 21 respectively. The overall trend of published literature from 2018 to 2025 is shown in the figure 1. Most existing studies focus on the spread and development of short videos among the elderly from the perspective of news media, or explore social work intervention in short video addiction from a sociological perspective. A few also analyze preventive measures for anxiety and depression caused by digital addiction from a medical perspective. Few studies comprehensively analyze the opportunities and challenges faced by the elderly in using short videos from the perspective of information system.

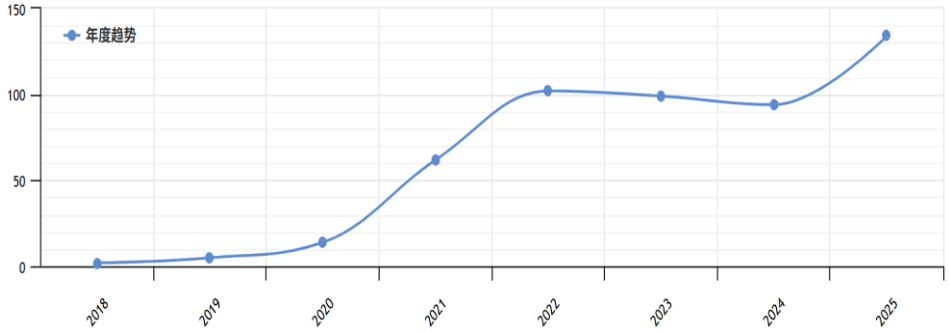

Fig. 1: Research Trends on Short Video Usage Among The Elderly in China on CNIK, 2018-2025

This study aims to understand the short video usage by the elderly from the perspective of information systems, and provide academic insights that can be referenced based on the opportunities and challenges encountered by the elderly in China.

2. Short Video Use for the Elderly in China

In recent years, with the popularization of mobile Internet and smart phones, short videos have become popular in the field of social media and content dissemination, and have become an important carrier for people to obtain information, entertainment and social interaction. They refer to video content with a shorter duration, generally between a few seconds and a few minutes, making them ideal for quick consumption on mobile devices (Wang et al., 2022; Yuan & Wang, 2024). Short videos are designed to be engaging and easily shareable, leveraging visual and auditory elements to capture attention quickly.

Short videos are characterized by entertaining, interesting, educational, and diverse themes. Due to the time limit, the content of short videos needs to quickly capture the audience's attention in a short period of time, and is usually presented in an intuitive, vivid, and interesting way, so that the audience can watch it in fragmented time. A significant portion of short videos focuses on entertainment, often featuring humorous or light-hearted content. In China, this type of content is prevalent on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, which emphasize "fun" as a dominant discourse pattern. More and more content creators can use mobile phones and simple video editing tools to produce and publish short videos, covering multiple fields, including entertainment, education, news, life records, etc., so that they can meet the various viewing needs of different groups of people. Short videos are increasingly used for educational purposes, including the dissemination of knowledge and news. However, the quality and objectivity of such content can vary, as seen in the mixed perceptions of news content among Chinese youth (Lei et al., 2024). Short videos are also used to disseminate health-related information, although the quality and reliability of such content can be inconsistent (Song et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2024). To sum up, while short videos meet fragmented needs with their fast, intuitive and entertaining expression, they also constantly expose challenges in content quality and objectivity.

In China, there are many platforms that support short videos, such as Douyin, Kuaishou, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and Weibo. Douyin has a large number of users and diverse content. It focuses on personalized recommendations and users can browse a large amount of high-quality video content in a short time. Platforms like Douyin have become venues for consumer activism, allowing users to voice concerns and mobilize support for various causes. This type of content often serves as a tool for social change and public discourse (Yu et al., 2023). Kuaishou emphasizes real life recording and has a wide user base. It not only shows urban life, but also pays attention to the daily life in rural areas. The content style is more down-to-earth. It has provided a platform for rural users, particularly women, to gain a voice and visibility that was previously inaccessible in traditional media. This shift has allowed them to engage in online practices that reflect

their cultural identities while navigating the constraints imposed by societal norms and platform policies (Zhang & Hai, 2023).

3. Opportunities and Challenges of Short Video Use for The Elderly

3.1 Positive Impact

The short video usage among the elderly in China has been a subject of increasing research interest, reflecting the broader trend of digital engagement among the elderly. The short video usage among the elderly has multifaceted impacts, ranging from physical health to mental health, and social engagement. The use of short videos can promote the physical health of the elderly to a certain extent, especially in terms of physical exercise. These videos provide a convenient and accessible way for the elderly to exercise, which is essential for maintaining health and preventing age-related decline. The effectiveness of short videos in promoting exercise in the elderly has been confirmed by multiple studies, which emphasize the potential of short videos in improving physical fitness, enhancing motivation and providing sustainable exercise options. Home-based video exercise programs have been shown to significantly improve physical fitness components such as balance, upper extremity strength, and overall strength, which are essential for preventing falls in older adults (Říhova et al., 2024). These videos can be tailored to meet the preferences and needs of older adults, ensuring that the content is relatable and engaging, which is crucial for sustained participation in physical activities (Torres et al., 2019).

Short video usage has been shown to significantly enhance the mental health of elderly individuals. This is attributed to Posting short-form videos can reduce depression among older adults by satisfying basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wu & Peng, 2024). Active engagement on short-form video platforms, such as liking, commenting, and sharing, positively influences social adaptation among older adults. This engagement fosters positive attitudes towards aging (Wu & Peng, 2024). Older adults are increasingly becoming content creators on platforms like DouYin and KuaiShou, challenging stereotypes of them as passive technology users. This transition is facilitated by the platforms' low barriers to entry and the supportive community they offer (Tang et al., 2023).

In addition, the use of short video platforms by older adults has been shown to significantly impact their social engagement. Improved intergenerational relationships and leisure consumption habits fostered by these platforms (Yan et al., 2024). Older adults are drawn to short video platforms due to curiosity, diverse content, and the desire to connect with society. These motivations help them maintain social circles and communicate with family members, thus promoting social engagement (Li et al., 2022). It is crucial for enhancing subjective well-being among older adults (Zhai et al., 2024).

3.2 Negative Impact

Short videos have become a powerful medium in China. Although they have brought many positive effects to elderly users, such as professional health guidance, extensive social interaction, and positive improvement of mental health, they also bring many challenges, such as the risk of digital addiction. The immersive nature of short videos may lead to overuse, which may affect users' well-being (Ye et al., 2022). Although exposure to content related to physical exercise can increase moderate to high-intensity physical exercise, long-term video viewing leads to reduced step counts and lower physical exercise levels (Wu et al., 2022). Watching short videos, especially food-related content, is associated with higher rates of overweight and obesity in elderly women, suggesting the need for targeted public health interventions (Chen et al., 2022). In addition, obsessive use of short video platforms may have a negative impact on marital satisfaction in the elderly. This phenomenon is particularly evident when one party's excessive use of short videos leads to less attention and time for their spouse, resulting in negative emotions and reduced marital satisfaction (Deng et al., 2024).

Short videos can also bring the harm of false information dissemination. The information quality of short videos, especially health videos, is not high, and a large part of the content does not come from health professionals. This has raised concerns about false information and its potential impact on elderly users (Cai et al., 2024), so a critical attitude towards content consumption is needed. In addition, long-term use of short videos will form an "information cocoon" effect. It refers to the phenomenon that people's information field is habitually guided by their own interests, thus limiting their lives. Usually, big data will push a certain type of information that users like through algorithms, and even people of different genders, ages, and hobbies will see different comments on the same video. Therefore, with the development of network technology and the rapid increase of information, the information cocoon phenomenon has become an important issue affecting people's cognition and social development. Therefore, some studies believe that short videos will limit the elderly's exposure to diverse perspectives, thereby exacerbating their depression (He et al., 2023).

In addition, older adults face challenges such as unfamiliarity with technology, cognitive decline, and emotional barriers, which can hinder their digital literacy development and, consequently, their ability to identify misinformation (Xu et al., 2024). Digital literacy positively influences older adults' risk perception and self-efficacy, which are crucial for identifying false information. These factors, in turn, affect their intention to identify misinformation, highlighting the importance of digital literacy in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards misinformation (Chen et al., 2024). A study demonstrated that a digital literacy intervention significantly improved older adults' ability to discern fake news, increasing accuracy from 64% to 85% post-intervention. This suggests that targeted educational programs can enhance

older adults' skills in identifying misinformation (Moore & Hancock, 2022). To sum up, the elderly still face great challenges in using short videos, and the government and relevant organizations need to formulate corresponding policies to enable them to use this platform more safely and effectively.

3.3 Short Video Creation

The phenomenon of senior citizens creating short videos is growing in China, especially on platforms such as Douyin (known internationally as TikTok). The trend is driven by the growth in the number of senior citizens online in China, who use these platforms for self-expression, social interaction, and even commercialization. Senior citizens are not only consumers, but also active creators, contributing to a diversified media landscape. The ease of use and accessibility of short video platforms has facilitated this shift by providing a low barrier to entry for senior citizens to engage with digital media.

Elderly people are becoming internet celebrities, which not only satisfies users' curiosity but also brings a refreshing change to young internet celebrities. The multi-channel network model supports the industrialization of elderly content creators, improving content production efficiency and economic feasibility. Elderly people use short videos for entertainment, information sharing and self-expression, which helps to break the stereotypes of traditional cognition (Yan et al., 2024). Short videos allow elderly people to showcase their musical talents, cultural heritage and vigorous vitality, thus shaping a positive image of old age. Audience comments on these performances play a vital role in shaping public perception and enhancing the self-perception of elderly performers, which emphasizes the potential of digital technology in promoting active aging and social integration of the elderly.

The images of elderly internet celebrities are diverse, covering a variety of types such as youth, intellectuality, and humor, which helps to create a positive and engaging media image (Zhong, 2023). Elderly content creators on Douyin often focus on themes such as health, self-care, and cultural heritage, which resonate with audiences and promote active aging (Liang & Pang, 2022). Elderly influencers, represented by "Kang Kang and Grandpa", have soared in popularity by creating popular content, although they still face challenges in innovation and commercialization (Yu, 2023). The success of elderly creators is often closely related to the number of likes and followers they receive, which in turn depends on the professionalism and frequency of their video uploads (Wang & Huang, 2023).

Elderly users' social loss and personal growth experiences significantly affect their willingness to create videos. These experiences are related to intrinsic generative motivations, which mediate the relationship between aging experiences and willingness to create videos (Wang & Huang, 2023). Users are increasingly interested in elderly influencers, which satisfies their curiosity. The rise of multi-channel networks has improved content production efficiency, allowing elderly content creators to produce on a large scale and professionally train. This trend not only enriches the online celebrity landscape, but also supports the commercialization of short video content targeting elderly audiences (Zhang & Jiao, 2023).

Although short video platforms provide opportunities for older adults to transform from passive consumers to active contributors, challenges remain in maintaining innovation and commercial viability (Yu, 2023; Tang et al., 2023). There are concerns about the potential for digital addiction and the challenges posed by technical barriers. In addition, older creators need to continue to innovate to maintain audience interest and develop sustainable business models. These issues highlight the need to establish a supportive environment and policies to promote equal participation of older adults and bridge the digital divide among older adults. By addressing these challenges, the potential of older content creators to make meaningful contributions to the digital media field can be fully realized.

3.4 Factors that Influence User Behavior

Existing research shows that the factors that affect the short video usage behavior of elderly users mainly include exploration motivation, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and digital literacy. The exploration motivation of elderly users lies in their intrinsic curiosity and the rich content of short video platforms, which can provide both entertainment and practical information (Li et al., 2022). The desire to connect with society and maintain social circles is another important motivation. Short videos provide new tools for social participation and communication with family members (Li et al., 2022). In addition, the interaction of short video platforms meets the basic psychological needs of users, such as ability, autonomy and relatedness, thereby enhancing social adaptability and a positive attitude towards elderly care (Wu & Peng, 2024). It can be seen that satisfying curiosity, satisfying the psychological needs of entertainment, obtaining information and socializing are the main exploration motivations for the elderly to use short video platforms.

Perceived Ease of Use is an important concept in the field of information systems and human-computer interaction. It reflects the user's intuitive feeling about the operation of the system, that is, whether the system feels easy to use and smooth to operate. Studies have shown that perceived ease of use significantly affects user engagement, for example, whether it is easy to interact with others through interesting content (Liang et al., 2021). Older people often face challenges brought by complex interfaces. Simplified designs, such as larger buttons, clear navigation, and minimal icons, are more popular with older people because they can reduce cognitive load and make the platform more accessible. The ease of use of short video platforms enables older people to participate more actively, establish social connections, and reduce loneliness. This active participation can improve social adaptability and meet psychological needs (Wu & Peng,

2024; Li et al., 2022). It can be seen that perceived ease of use involves the acceptance and participation of the elderly in short videos. In China, more and more elderly people choose to use short video platforms such as Douyin to obtain entertainment, social interaction, and information. The ease of use of these platforms is a key factor in determining seniors' engagement and satisfaction. Seniors are attracted to the simplicity and ease of use of short videos, which cater to their preference for simple, practical and entertaining content. This ease of use not only facilitates their initial adaptation, but also encourages their continued interaction with the platform.

Perceived usefulness is a key factor in determining user satisfaction and continued use intention of digital platforms. For example, in the context of social media, perceived usefulness significantly affects satisfaction and continued use intention because users believe that the platform can meet their needs and expectations (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2020). E-wallet research also shows that perceived usefulness has a positive impact on user satisfaction, which in turn affects users' willingness to use the technology repeatedly (Lombu & Wardana, 2024). Perceived ease of use often complements perceived usefulness by reducing the amount of effort required to use the technology, thereby increasing satisfaction and continued use intention (Lombu & Wardana, 2024). These factors suggest that taking an integrated approach that considers multiple dimensions of user experience is essential to promoting long-term user engagement with digital technologies.

For older adults, short videos are believed to help improve mental health because they provide a platform for social interaction and leisure activities, which are essential for well-being. There is evidence that short video use is positively associated with improved mental health, especially in terms of improving intergenerational relationships and developing leisure consumption habits (Yan et al., 2024). These platforms also serve as a medium for the dissemination of health information, which older people believe is helpful in maintaining physical and mental health. The technical advantages of short videos, such as visibility and editability, increase the perceived usefulness of health information and encourage people to continue to participate (Wei & Chen, 2023). Although older people find short videos useful, they also face challenges such as user interface design and privacy issues that may affect their experience. Addressing these constraints is critical to improving perceived usefulness and encouraging older people to adopt technology more widely (Lian et al., 2023). It can be seen that the perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of short video platforms are important factors affecting the use of short videos by older users. However, information and communication overload can lead to fatigue and reduce willingness to use (Yan et al., 2024). Therefore, although short videos are simple to operate and can provide entertainment and social interaction for older people, they also have negative effects. In addition to information overload, there is also the harm of digital addiction, which can lead to older people being isolated in the real world.

Digital literacy is crucial for older adults to effectively use short video platforms. It enhances their ability to access information, maintain social connections, and improve their quality of life (Yang et al., 2022).The ability to interact with short video content, such as liking, commenting, and sharing, enhances older adults' social adaptation and satisfaction of basic psychological needs, contributing to a positive attitude towards aging(Wu & Peng, 2024).The study indicates that digital literacy among older Chinese women significantly influences their engagement with short health videos. As they become more familiar with digital platforms, their participation increases, enhancing their health awareness and interpersonal connections. The sense of familiarity and presence created by these platforms encourages them to seek health information actively (Liang & Pang, 2022). In conclusion, digital literacy plays a pivotal role in shaping the usage of short video platforms among older Chinese people. While it offers numerous benefits, such as improved social integration and quality of life, challenges and potential negative impacts must be addressed to ensure that older adults can fully benefit from digital technologies. This highlights the need for targeted interventions and support systems to enhance digital literacy and mitigate risks associated with digital media consumption.

In summary, when the elderly use short videos, their exploration motivation, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and digital literacy constitute important factors affecting their use behavior. The elderly have a certain desire to explore new technologies and new content. This intrinsic motivation prompts them to try new media forms such as short videos to obtain information and entertainment. If the short video platform is considered to be easy to operate and has a user-friendly interface, the elderly are more likely to accept and use it. Simple and intuitive operation can reduce their psychological barriers when using it and increase their willingness to use it. When the elderly believe that short videos can provide practical and rich information or bring other benefits, their motivation to use short videos will be further enhanced. In other words, the practicality of the platform is an important factor in attracting the elderly's continued attention. Digital literacy reflects the elderly's understanding and ability to use digital technology. Higher digital literacy can help them adapt to and understand the operation of new platforms more quickly, so that they can enjoy the convenience and fun provided by digital content more efficiently. The influencing factors and sources of the elderly's use of short videos are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Literature Review on Factors Influencing The Use of Short Videos by The Elderly

Influencing factors	Source
Exploration motivation	(Li et al., 2022; Wu & Peng, 2024)
Perceived ease of use	(Liang et al., 2021; Wu & Peng, 2024; Li et al., 2022)
Perceived usefulness	(Yan et al., 2024; Wei & Chen, 2023; Lian et al., 2023)
Digital literacy	(Yang et al., 2022; Wu & Peng, 2024; Liang & Pang, 2022)

4. Future Research

From the perspective of information systems (IS), future research on the use of short videos by Chinese elderly people can be explored in multiple aspects, including system design, system content, theoretical model construction, data mining, and user interaction. In terms of system design, focus on user interface and experience design. In view of the physiological characteristics of the deterioration of the elderly's physical functions and the digital divide in cognition, research and design information system interfaces suitable for elderly users. For example, it is easier to use large fonts and voice interactions, simplify the operation process, set up targeted reminder design solutions, improve the user experience of elderly users, and lower the threshold of use. According to user behavior and feedback dynamics, automatically adjust the interface layout, font size, and interaction method to achieve more personalized services and meet the needs of elderly users at different levels.

In terms of system content, explore and optimize the recommendation algorithm in the short video platform to ensure that the algorithm can satisfy the interests of elderly users when recommending content to them, and prevent the spread of information cocoons and false information. Use machine learning and data mining technology to build a recommendation system for the interests and behavioral characteristics of the elderly, and at the same time study how to balance the commercialization of the platform with the knowledge acquisition and social needs of elderly users. In algorithm design, privacy protection and data security mechanisms are integrated to ensure that elderly users are not at risk of sensitive data leakage or misleading content during the personalized recommendation process.

In terms of the development of theoretical models, we can draw on theories such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to build a theoretical model specifically for the short video usage behavior of elderly users to explain the relationship between technology adoption, user satisfaction and continued use. Using the big data generated by the system, the interactive behavior of elderly users is longitudinally tracked and multi-level statistically analyzed to reveal the key influencing factors in the use of short videos, such as the interaction between variables such as system quality, user perceived value, and social support. In addition, combined with text mining and analysis technology, the emotional tendencies and opinions expressed by elderly users in comments and creative content are studied to provide a basis for understanding the positive and negative impacts of digital life. In short, in the field of information systems, future research should not only focus on the technology and design optimization of the system itself, but also comprehensively consider the multi-party interaction of algorithms, user behavior theory, and platform ecology. Through multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary research methods, theoretical support and practical guidance can be provided for building a short video information system that is both safe and efficient and meets the social, psychological, and life needs of the elderly.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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