



CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SHORT VIDEO MARKETING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TIKTOK AND DOUYIN

Anqi Huang¹, Zuraidah Zainol^{1*}

¹Faculty of Management and Economics, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author Email: zuraidah@fpe.upsi.edu.my

Received: 18 August 2025 • Accepted: 21 October 2025 • Published: 31 October 2025

Abstract

This paper explores the differences in the short video consumption across platforms by comparing TikTok and Douyin in a case study of Chinese restaurant brand Haidilao. Although the two are under the same parent company, they are culturally different settings that influence content strategies and reactions by the audience. The research, conducted through a mixed-methods approach, incorporated descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U tests, Spearman rank-order correlations, and cross-tabulations to determine Fisher's exact tests. The results show that Douyin demonstrates higher performance than TikTok in core engagement metrics, including views, likes, comments, and shares. The greater engagement on Douyin is significantly linked to culturally ingrained content, emotional sentiment and professionalism of production, which are characteristics of the high-context and collectivist communication in China. Conversely, TikTok interactions are more based on humorous content, popular melodies, and casual looks, which align with the interests of individualistic low-context cultures. These findings provide empirical support for Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory and Hall's high-context versus low-context communication framework. The results also demonstrate the role of platform affordances in shaping content performance, suggesting that brands must develop culturally adaptive, platform-specific strategies to optimize audience engagement. Although limited by sample size and focused on a single brand, this study provides valuable insights into cross-cultural digital marketing. It lays the groundwork for future research on global content optimization.

Keywords: Content strategy; Cross-cultural communication; Cultural adaptation; Digital engagement; Platform affordances

Cite as: Huang, A., & Zainol, Z. (2025). Cross-cultural differences in the effectiveness of short video marketing: A comparative analysis of TikTok and Douyin. *Asian People Journal*, 8(2), 196-212.

INTRODUCTION

Short video platforms have emerged as some of the most influential digital marketing tools of the past decade, transforming how brands engage with consumers across cultural and geographic boundaries. Among these platforms, TikTok and its Chinese counterpart, Douyin—both owned by ByteDance—exemplify the global power of algorithmic virality, user-generated content, and influencer collaboration in reaching audiences through visually engaging, short-form videos (Schellewald, 2023). While TikTok operates in over 150 countries worldwide, Douyin has become an integral part of China's digital ecosystem, resulting in a technologically similar yet culturally distinct user base (Rejeb et al., 2024).

Despite their structural similarities, TikTok and Douyin exist within entirely different cultural, regulatory, and social contexts. TikTok content and community engagement are often aligned with Western values such as humor, individuality, and entertainment, whereas Douyin reflects Chinese cultural values emphasizing collectivism, humility, and harmony (Hofstede Insights, 2023). These cultural contrasts raise critical questions about the transferability of marketing strategies across platforms: can a campaign that succeeds on Douyin achieve the same resonance on TikTok? This challenge is particularly relevant for Chinese brands such as Haidilao, a globally expanding hotspot restaurant chain that must navigate the complexities of adapting its promotional strategies for international audiences.

As Haidilao transitions from a national favorite in China to a growing international franchise, short video marketing has become a crucial component of its global branding efforts, especially among younger consumers such as Generation Z and Millennials. The brand's promotional activities on Douyin and TikTok provide an ideal case for examining how cultural differences shape digital marketing effectiveness. Moreover, engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and watch time (publicly accessible and quantifiable) offer a practical means to conduct empirical analysis using statistical tools like SPSS, providing measurable insights into audience behavior across platforms.

Although short video marketing has received considerable scholarly attention, most existing studies focus on single-platform or region-specific strategies. Few have directly compared how identical content performs on parallel platforms operating within different cultural environments. Cross-cultural communication theories, including those proposed by Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2001), suggest that content interpretation varies according to cultural dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance. However, quantitative research that empirically tests these theoretical claims in the context of short video engagement remains limited. This gap underscores the need for comparative studies that integrate cultural theory with data-driven marketing analysis.

This study addresses that gap by investigating whether short video marketing strategies effective on Douyin can be successfully adapted for TikTok audiences, or whether distinct cultural factors necessitate tailored approaches. It contributes to the literature on cross-cultural digital marketing by combining content analysis with quantitative statistical methods, thereby introducing empirical rigor into a field often dominated by qualitative perspectives. In practical terms, the research provides evidence-based insights for Chinese brands seeking to expand internationally, offering guidance on how to localize content while maintaining brand identity.

Using Haidilao as a case study, the research aims to compare the effectiveness of short video marketing between TikTok and Douyin. It specifically examines how engagement metrics—such as likes, shares, comments, and views differ between the two platforms, identifies the cultural and content elements (e.g., humor, emotional appeal, localization) that influence these variations, and statistically tests the significance of cross-platform differences. Ultimately, the study seeks to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical application of cross-cultural digital marketing strategies in an increasingly globalized social media landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Short video marketing and platform dynamics

The short video explosion as a marketing format has transformed digital engagement on global platforms. As mobile-first consumption and algorithmically curated feeds have grown, platforms like TikTok and Douyin have significantly altered how consumers discover brands, engage with products, and co-create marketing narratives. Although the technologies used in both platforms share an everyday technological basis, their marketing approaches and audience reception differ significantly due to the context in which they operate, which is shaped by cultural, political, and economic forces (Schellewald, 2023).

The main features of short video marketing include its short length, visual narration, algorithmic virality, and extensive reliance on user interaction systems, such as likes, shares, comments, and reposts. These sites foster parasocial relationships and perceived immediacy, enabling marketers to connect with consumers not through overt advertising but through content that is deeply invested in user experiences (Yang & Ha, 2021). Short videos are especially effective when it comes to younger people, particularly Gen Z and millennials, who are more willing to consume visually satisfying, high-paced, and comedic content (Vidani, 2024).

The point of authenticity and relatability in short video content is driven by an influencer (De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencers who position themselves as common, accessible, and unscripted are likely to receive a greater engagement rate because they reflect the platform's grassroots nature. However, this assumption has been criticized on several bases. This authenticity is, most of the time, performative, or in other words, a well-thought-out performance by content creators to appear spontaneous, while also being strategically correlated with brand collaborations (Singer & Jones, 2025). The grey area between commercial and personal expression makes it more difficult to discern which recommendations are genuine and which are sponsored.

Moreover, short video content is ephemeral, and thus, one might question the effectiveness of short video content in long-term brand building. Unlike long-form content or immersive digital campaigns, short videos prioritize instant gratification and shareability over depth and retention. Due to the platform logic of TikTok and Douyin, a so-called liquid narrative economy emerges, where meaning is generated quickly, shared, and then forgotten, potentially disrupting the stability of brand-consumer relationships (Lin & de Kloet, 2023).

A second significant question is whether algorithmic curation affects user experiences. The algorithms of TikTok and Douyin reinforce feedback loops, resulting in the formation of content bubbles that focus on mainstream, culturally recognizable material (Koç, 2023). Although this enhances participation, it also heightens the likelihood of cultural filtering and ideological insulation, where content that challenges prevailing norms,

whether politically or stylistically, is demoted or prohibited. This criticism is particularly applicable to TikTok, whose international ambitions are reportedly linked to the suppression of creators from marginalized communities and the dissemination of homogenized entertainment aesthetics (Abidin, 2021).

By contrast, Douyin operates in a more clearly regulated context, conditioned by China's cultural and political reality. Douyin has integrated the Chinese propaganda goals of promoting positive energy into its algorithmic control, ensuring that the content produced on the platform supports collectivist values, social cohesion, and patriotism (Chen et al., 2021). This regulatory framework not only affects the nature of content that becomes viral but also modifies how brands formulate their advertising messages. A typical Douyin ad, for example, is based on family values, traditional customs, and national pride, which would be considered uncool and too formal on TikTok.

Such ideological filters influence the tone and aesthetics of marketing. In addition, platform affordances, including editing tools, filters, and music libraries, are also localized, affecting the content creation and interpretation. Douyin is more integrated with e-commerce and government services, allowing for more interactive content, whereas TikTok is more meme-oriented and focused on viral challenges (Kung et al., 2025). Nevertheless, limited empirical research is provided to give comparative data on the performance of identical or similar brand campaigns on TikTok and Douyin. The majority of the study remains descriptive or theoretical, relying on statistical rigor for its findings. The study will close that gap by utilizing quantitative research in SPSS, as well as a cultural communication framework, on real-life content in Haidilao.

Cross-cultural marketing and communication

Cross-cultural marketing is grounded on the premise that consumers interpret and react to marketing communication based on highly embedded cultural constructs. The work of Hofstede and Hall is a seminal contribution still being explored in the field. It also provides conceptual frameworks that distinguish communication inclinations in national cultures (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001).

The cultural dimensions presented by Hofstede (individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity) have become the default frameworks through which international marketing practices are analyzed. As another example, consumers in highly individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States) tend to appreciate personal accomplishments, assertiveness, and personal expression. They are, therefore, more receptive to aggressive, humorous, or controversial advertisements. In contrast, collectivist cultures (e.g., China) tend to value group cohesiveness, authority, and emotional control and thus require less aggressive and more inclusive messaging approaches (Hofstede Insights, 2023).

This perspective is further elaborated upon by Hall's theory of high-context and low-context communication, which emphasizes both implicit and explicit messaging (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures, such as China, most of the message is conveyed non-verbally through tone, symbolism, and shared cultural assumptions. Contrastingly, low-context cultures require clarity, transparency, and direct communication. When applied to short video marketing, this implies that Douyin audiences prioritize continuity and emotional implications of the narrative, while TikTok audiences prefer sharp visuals and direct calls to action. Nevertheless, these frameworks are not immune to criticism. Hofstede's approach is culturally essentialist and static because it supposes that national cultures are homogenous and fixed (McSweeney, 2002). Globalization, media hybridization,

and diasporic identity have eroded conventional cultural borders, making it impossible to assess individuals or online subcultures solely by national scores (Fang, 2005). These theories have their critics, but they can also be valuable heuristics, remarkably when grounded in empirical validation and sensitivity to context. The cultural dimensions in short video marketing are evident in both the content design and user reception. For example, Douyin videos can include group meals, family dynamics, or other patriotic tunes to evoke an emotional connection. TikTok videos can consist of exaggerated expressions, bolder comedy, or more personal stories.

Research has started using these models for short video marketing. Humor and irony can enhance brand recall on TikTok but have a limited effect in certain countries (Divon & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024). Localizing storytelling and aligning influencers with cultural values contribute to a significant increase in trust and engagement in Douyin. In contrast, the Western TikTok audience is more receptive to the visual creativity and charisma of the influencers rather than direct cultural messaging.

TikTok vs. Douyin: platform differences and market positioning

Despite the structural similarities between TikTok and Douyin, which are owned by ByteDance and driven by similar AI-based recommendation systems, the content ecosystem and strategic roles of these platforms are also quite different. TikTok is geared toward worldwide usability, emphasizing trends, challenges, and user-generated entertainment, while Douyin is firmly integrated into China's e-commerce and social infrastructure (He et al., 2021). There are also differences in data policies, monetization tools, and interface features of the platforms, which determine how brands utilize them.

More importantly, TikTok content rules and moderation policies are based on Western principles of free speech and inclusiveness, although there is growing oversight on misinformation and harmful content (Gillespie, 2022). Meanwhile, the more restrictive censorship of Douyin, as it aligns with the Chinese regulatory framework, has a formative effect on content and ideological tone (Ye et al., 2025). This creates a contrasting brand strategy: TikTok can be rewarded by viral experimentation, while Douyin can be rewarded by value-congruent branding that aligns with government-approved narratives.

From a market positioning perspective, brands on Douyin often blend product marketing with educational or community-building narratives, reflecting Chinese consumers' expectations of practical and moral value in advertising (Wang & Wu, 2021). By contrast, TikTok campaigns often lean on humor, innovation, and spectacle, leveraging influencer clout and user participation to create brand buzz (Hazari et al., 2024). These platform-specific characteristics must be considered in any comparative analysis. However, few empirical studies have operationalized these differences for statistical testing. This paper contributes by constructing a coding scheme that captures such cultural and strategic elements and links them to quantitative engagement outcomes.

Branding through short videos: case examples

Short videos have become critical for brand storytelling, especially for food and lifestyle brands. Haidilao, known for its personalized customer service and theatrical dining experience, has effectively used short video content to extend its brand personality across Douyin and TikTok. On Douyin, Haidilao emphasizes its in-store performances, Chinese cultural rituals (e.g., hotpot symbolism), and staff professionalism, aligning with local consumer values of collectivism, hospitality, and trust (Song, 2023). In contrast, its TikTok campaigns abroad often focus on "novelty" and "foreignness," framing the dining experience as exotic or trendy.

This dichotomy echoes earlier findings that "Chineseness" as a brand identity is a domestic asset but requires reframing abroad (Zhao, 2025). However, some scholars challenge the notion that localization always succeeds. Scholars caution against essentializing cultural attributes in marketing, noting that global youth culture is increasingly transcending national boundaries, particularly in digital spaces (McGinnis et al., 2007). Thus, marketers must be careful not to stereotype or over-localize content. The Haidilao case also raises questions about strategic consistency. While adapting to cultural contexts is essential, excessive divergence in branding across platforms can dilute core brand identity. Scholars argue for a balance between brand consistency and cultural adaptability, employing a "glocal" approach that respects local values while preserving the brand's DNA (Balmer, 2017).

There is no consensus on how such a balance is achieved in short video formats. Although some work has examined performance metrics for single-platform strategies, there is a notable absence of research comparing real-time brand campaigns across TikTok and Douyin. This study quantitatively measures performance differences in Haidilao's content and examines how cultural variables influence these outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The research design used in this study comprised mixed research methods by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods of research, such as content analysis and statistical tests, aimed at observing the effectiveness of short video marketing on the TikTok and Douyin short video platforms. This was supported by a comparative case study design enabling the exploration of how similar brand content could work on two similarly technologically related platforms of different cultures aspects. It was also determined that the mixed methods design would be the most appropriate since it would combine the intuitive richness of qualitative research and the objective rigor of quantitative research that would enable the comprehension of the shape as well as the quantifiable effect of short video strategies.

The research adopted the pragmatic philosophy approach and focused more on pragmatism in relation to solving a problem immediately than the empirical belief system approach. The content coding was used to provide qualitative insights that informed the quantitative phase wherein statistical tests were conducted to ascertain the patterns and significance of engagement performance. The focal case was chosen to be Haidilao, a well-known Chinese hotpot brand which has a similar brand identity on both of these platforms, providing a controlled background on cross platform analysis. This research design minimised the possibility of the difference in the results of engagement to be likely due to the brand inconsistencies but rather caused by cultural and platform influences.

Sampling strategy/method

To guarantee relevance and comparability of the selected materials, the study has used a purposive sampling approach. Twenty short-format videos were selected; ten videos on TikTok and ten on Douyin, all of which were Haidilao verified official accounts. Videos that were not published in the past six months were excluded to select current trends and reduce the impact of time effect on trending due to algorithm changing or user behavior. The thematic similarity was applied to the process of making selections, and it included videos emphasizing dining

experiences, staff interactions, or storytelling. Personal content was also not included as well as blogs or periblogging to ensure consistency and data integrity. This method enabled balanced across-platform representation and made interaction disparities show cultural and platform influences and not different dimensions of type of information.

Variables and coding framework

A standard coding sheet was created to capture eight categorical features of content, and these features were manually coded into each video. These attributes were content type, emotional tone, and the level of cultural specificity. The type of actor was also determined by the presence of staff in the video, customers, influencers, or a combination of them. In addition to these, the visual style was coded based on whether the production quality appeared professional, user-generated, or a mix, and the music type was categorized as original/branded, popular/trending, traditional, or none. Each video was also coded for the presence or absence of a call-to-action. Finally, platform identity was recorded using a binary code: 0 for TikTok and 1 for Douyin.

The engagement performance of each video was assessed using nine metrics. These included raw engagement counts, specifically total likes, comments, shares, and views, as well as five derived indicators designed to normalize exposure and account for cross-platform differences. The primary rate metric, Engagement Rate, was calculated as the sum of likes, comments, and shares divided by views, expressed as a percentage. Three ratio-based variables were created to interpret further interaction patterns. Two additional normalized metrics, Comment Intensity and Share Amplification, were introduced to capture the proportion of views that led to commenting or sharing behavior, respectively. These variables were generated directly in SPSS using syntax-based computation.

Data collection procedures

The data collection process was organized into three structured stages to ensure consistency, reliability, and transparency. Identification and selection of eligible videos constituted the first step, and then content codification was performed systematically. All the selected videos were watched to completion and categorized according to the pre predetermined types of contents, which included emotional tone, cultural specificity, and production quality. Two coders were also to test a subgroup of the videos to enhance the reliability and see whether both people would be consistent in their interpretation. Any little inconsistencies were addressed and evolved by consensus before finally making the coding framework.

The second phase was devoted to the collection of engagement data based on publicly available metrics on TikTok and Douyin. To ensure precision in stringent accuracy, the number of likes, comments, shares, and views about each video were tabulated manually. Only official metrics issued on verified accounts were incorporated, which minimized the chance of a bias or inflated figures.

The last step consisted of inputting the entire data into SPSS version 28 to do statistical processing. All entries were thoroughly screened on the issue of transcription mistake and omissions. Derived variables (engagement rate, comment intensity, etc. and share amplified) were calculated using the built-in syntax commands. This three-step process ensured efficient and replicable process of data collection which coupled the methodological rigor with ethical use of information available publicly.

Data analysis plan and technique

The process of analyzing data was successfully designed to correspond to the study research questions and its goals. All statistical analysis was done in SPSS version 28. The initial action was to create descriptive statistics to generalize on the key features of the data. Engagement indicators, including likes, shares, comments, and views were descriptively summarized using mean values, median values, and standard deviations and ranges. This step offered an opportunity to see the trends in the interaction with the audience and to understand the overall performance of the videos by Haidilao on the two media.

To analyze whether statistically significant differences in engagement occurred between TikTok and Douyin, Mann–Whitney U tests were applied to each metric. These tests are appropriate for two independent groups with non-normally distributed data. Effect sizes were quantified using Cliff's delta (δ ; Cliff, 1993), a non-parametric alternative to Cohen's d that performs well with small or skewed samples. The formula used was:

$$\text{Cliff's delta } (\delta) = \frac{2U}{n_1 \square n_2} - 1 \quad (1)$$

Where n_1 is the sample size from TikTok and n_2 is the sample size from Douyin

Also, Spearman rank-order correlation was used to test how engagement measures related to the coded features of the content (emotional tone, localization, and music type) of the coded content. Based on this analysis, it was determined which cultural and stylistic features had the most significant impact on the interest of the audience.

Lastly, a cross-tabulation test, which was accompanied by the Fisher Exact Test, was carried out to test the relationship between the categorical variables and platform type. The test was selected since it will give reliable values of significance with small sample sizes and low cell frequency. A combination of these analysis processes offered an in-depth analysis of data-based engagement performance on the two sites.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics

In order to give a background description of short video engagement, descriptive statistics of each engagement measure was calculated. The findings indicate that Douyin videos typically obtained better engagement volumes under all the key indicators. The mean viewing on all the videos was 4.46 million. The likes of the users were also spread out with an average of 344,120 and a highest of 1.25 million. Likewise, the mean user comments were 36,060, although this was very skewed, with some videos attracting more than 186,000 comments. Content shares also varied greatly, averaging 27,741 across all videos.

Table 1: Engagement Metrics by Platform

Metric	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
RAW METRICS						
Total Video Views	20	4,460,500	3,150,000	3,190,447	980,000	12,500,000
User Likes Count	20	344,120	193,600	313,204	45,200	1,250,000
User Comments Count	20	36,060	10,615	46,782	980	186,500
Content Shares Count	20	27,741	14,410	25,603	3,120	95,200
DERIVED METRICS						
Engagement per view (%)	20	0.0783	0.0732	0.0224	-	-
Comment Activity Level	20	0.0055	0.0037	0.0045	-	-
Share Virality Rate	20	0.0053	0.0056	0.0016	-	-

Boxplots for Metric Distributions

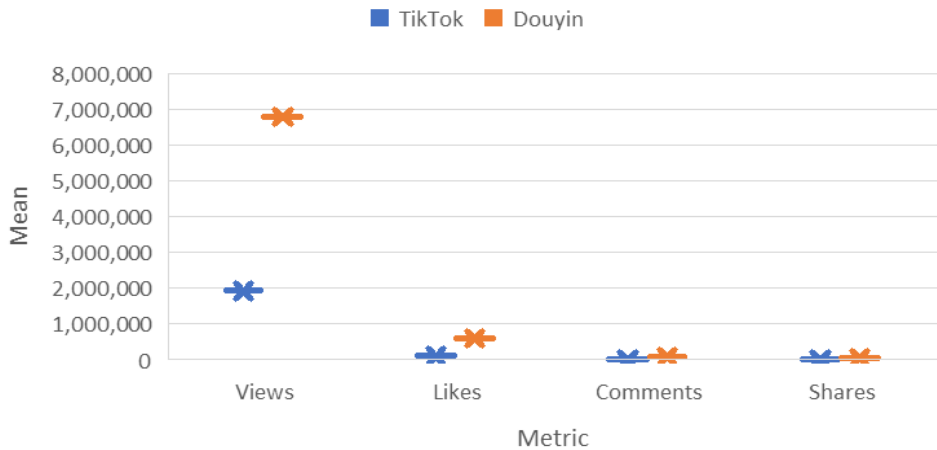


Figure 1: Compare distributions of Views, Likes, Comments, and Shares per platform

Engagement-derived metrics also highlight important platform-specific patterns. While Douyin videos tended to attract larger volumes of engagement overall, TikTok videos showed slightly higher average engagement rates per view. However, Douyin videos exhibited higher comment activity levels and share virality rates, indicating more expressive and socially contagious behavior from viewers.

Content feature distributions

Content feature analysis revealed notable differences in narrative strategy, tone, and cultural framing between TikTok and Douyin. In terms of primary content category, TikTok favored entertaining and informational content, while Douyin emphasized emotional and product-focused formats (see Table 2). This reflects Douyin's cultural sensitivity and customer-centric messaging, in contrast to TikTok's lighter, trend-driven appeal.

Regarding dominant emotional appeal, Douyin again leaned toward heartwarming content (50%) compared to 30% for TikTok. TikTok demonstrated a more even distribution, featuring humor (20%) and neutral tones (30%), indicating a content strategy tailored for viral reach rather than emotional depth. Cultural integration differed significantly. TikTok videos were predominantly rated as "None" (40%) or "Low" (50%) in terms of cultural specificity. In contrast, Douyin had 90% of its videos rated Medium or High, reinforcing its alignment with high-context, culturally rooted communication.

Table 2: Distribution of Content Features by Platform

Feature	Category	TikTok	Douyin
Content Category	Informational	30%	10%
	Emotional	20%	40%
	Entertaining	40%	30%
	Product-focused	10%	20%
Dominant Emotional Appeal	Humorous	20%	20%
	Heartwarming	30%	50%
	Exciting	20%	10%
	Neutral	30%	20%
Featured Individuals	Staff	30%	40%
	Customer	20%	20%
	Influencer	20%	20%
	Mixed	30%	20%
Production Quality	Professional	40%	50%
	User-generated	40%	50%
	Mixed	20%	0%
Audio Type	Original/Branded	20%	30%
	Popular/Trending	70%	40%
	Traditional	0%	30%
Cultural Integration	None	10%	0%
	None	40%	0%
	Low	50%	10%
	Medium	10%	50%
	High	0%	40%
CTA Presence	Yes	80%	60%
	No	20%	40%

The actor types also diverged. TikTok featured 30% staff, 20% influencers, and 50% mixed casts. Douyin, on the other hand, featured more staff, with 40% fewer mixed or influencer videos, emphasizing authenticity and

service representation. Production quality was evenly split between professional and user-generated styles, although TikTok had a higher proportion of mixed formats, at 20%. TikTok leaned heavily on popular audio backgrounds (70%), whereas Douyin offered a more diverse range, including traditional music and original tracks. Finally, call-to-action (CTA) prompts were more prevalent in TikTok compared to Douyin, indicating a slightly more overt commercial strategy on the international platform.

Engagement metric comparisons between platforms

To assess whether observed differences in engagement metrics between TikTok and Douyin were statistically significant, Mann-Whitney U tests were employed. Results revealed statistically significant differences across nearly all engagement dimensions. Douyin significantly outperformed TikTok in terms of views, likes, comments, shares, and all derived engagement metrics, except for the share-to-like ratio and traditional engagement rate. These findings were further validated by large Cliff's Delta (δ) values, indicating practical significance and statistical significance.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U Test Results and Effect Sizes

Metric	U	Z	p-value	Effect Size (Cliff's δ)	Significance
Total Video Views	2.50	-3.592	< .001	-0.92	Large
User Likes Count	0.00	-3.780	< .001	-1.00	Very Large
User Comments Count	0.00	-3.780	< .001	-1.00	Very Large
Content Shares Count	2.50	-3.592	< .001	-0.88	Large
Engagement per View	0.00	-3.780	< .001	-1.00	Very Large
Comment Intensity	0.00	-3.780	< .001	-1.00	Very Large
Share Amplification	4.00	-3.477	< .001	-0.84	Large
Share Virality Coefficient	32.00	-1.366	.190	-0.18	Not Significant
Engagement Rate (%)	39.00	-0.832	.436	-0.12	Not Significant

For instance, the number of video views showed a significant difference ($U = 2.50$, $p < .001$), with Douyin videos ranking substantially higher than those on TikTok. Similar trends were evident in likes and comments, both of which had maximum Cliff's $\delta = -1.00$, suggesting substantial effect sizes. While share amplification was also significantly higher on Douyin ($U = 4.00$, $p < .001$), share-to-like ratio ($U = 32.00$, $p = .190$) and overall engagement rate ($U = 39.00$, $p = .436$) showed no statistically significant differences, suggesting that these metrics may be influenced by algorithmic or external platform dynamics rather than content design alone.

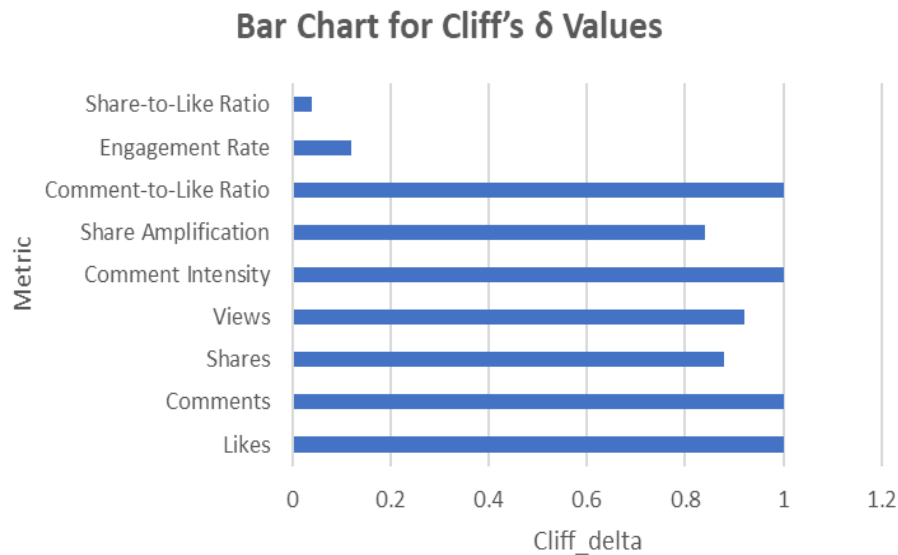


Figure 2: Effect Size Visuals

Relationships between content features and engagement

To explore how content features influence user interaction, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficients (ρ) were computed independently. Spearman correlations revealed distinct platform patterns: For TikTok, cultural integration significantly increased shares ($\rho = 0.900$, $p < 0.05$) and showed a strong positive trend for views ($\rho = 0.866$, $p = 0.058$). Influencer-led videos generated more comments ($\rho=0.894$, $p<0.05$), while neutral/humorous tones outperformed emotional content. Whereas for Douyin, cultural integration strongly predicted views and likes ($\rho=0.866$, $p<0.01$). Professional production and traditional music increased engagement, but call-to-action prompts reduced views/likes ($\rho = -0.866$, $p < 0.01$).

Cross-tabulation of Content Features and Platform

Cross-tabulation and Fisher's Exact Tests were used to assess differences in content features between TikTok and Douyin. A significant relationship emerged between platform and cultural integration ($p = 0.003$): all Douyin videos displayed high or medium cultural specificity, whereas TikTok videos showed none or low levels. Audio background also differed significantly ($p = 0.019$), with TikTok favoring popular or trending music, while Douyin often used traditional or original tracks. Although emotional appeal was not statistically significant, about 80 percent of heartwarming videos appeared on Douyin, suggesting a preference for emotionally expressive content. These results support the view that TikTok emphasizes accessibility and virality, while Douyin favors cultural depth.

Key findings summary

This study revealed apparent disparities in short video engagement between TikTok and Douyin. Douyin consistently outperformed TikTok on most engagement metrics (views, likes, comments, and shares), with statistically and practically significant differences confirmed by Mann-Whitney U and Cliff's Delta tests. These findings align with prior research suggesting that Douyin's algorithm and user base favor high-context, culturally embedded content, leading to enhanced visibility and engagement (Huang & Ye, 2023).

In terms of content performance, TikTok and Douyin responded differently to stylistic and thematic elements. Douyin videos that showcased high cultural specificity, emotionally warm narratives, and professional-level production quality achieved consistently higher engagement. Correlational analysis supported these observations, with cultural integration showing strong positive relationships with multiple engagement metrics. Conversely, TikTok videos that emphasized humor, popular music, and casual user-generated content demonstrated relatively higher engagement, although the relationships were weaker and often statistically non-significant. These platform-specific content preferences are consistent with Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001).

Cultural factors emerged as a critical determinant of performance. All Douyin videos included medium to high levels of cultural specificity, while TikTok content largely lacked such elements. This platform-based divergence was confirmed by Fisher's Exact Test ($p = 0.003$). Douyin content frequently incorporates themes of local tradition, community values, and service excellence, preferences rooted in a collectivist cultural ethos. TikTok, by contrast, leaned heavily on meme-driven, fast-paced, and humorous content, aligning with Hall's theory of low-context cultures, where messages are understood independently of shared cultural references (Hall, 1976).

Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study offer both theoretical reinforcement and practical guidance for navigating culturally diverse digital platforms. Theoretically, the results align strongly with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, particularly the contrast between collectivism and individualism. Douyin users, embedded in a collectivist and long-term-oriented Chinese cultural context, responded more positively to content rich in cultural heritage, emotional depth, and communal narratives. This was supported by statistically significant correlations between culturally integrated content and engagement metrics, validating Hofstede's assertion that collectivist societies value tradition, harmony, and emotional resonance.

By contrast, TikTok engagement did not show a significant correlation with cultural content. This supports the notion that it is predominantly a Western user base, shaped by individualistic, low-context cultural values, that favors content that is overt, accessible, and decontextualized (Hofstede, 2001). Hall's high-context vs. low-context communication theory provides further explanation for these differences. Douyin content resonated with Chinese audiences through implicit messaging, local imagery, and traditional motifs, hallmarks of high-context communication. Comparatively, the TikTok contents were more likely to be direct and humorous and trend-focused images, which aligns with the low-context communication style dominant in the West.

These results also support the platform affordance theory. Despite both TikTok and Douyin being based on the same technological framework of ByteDance, they have become different cultural ecosystems. The relationship between cultural values and the performance of content is mediated by platform affordances, including the algorithmic design, moderation practices, and user norms (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Thus, the platform behavior does not merely react to the technical features but it is based on the sociocultural realities.

In actual sense, these theoretical implications provide conclusive directions to cross-platform strategies on the digital platform to the brands like Haidilao. The degree of interaction offered by the sentiment, culture, and story-based content on Douyin is high, which implies that the localization strategy is urgent. In the example of Douyin, Haidilao should focus on classic themes, social values, and emotional gripping stories.

In contrast, things that performed better in TikTok were funny, fast, and visual and tended to utilize viral sound or influencers. The cultural specificity was not significant in any form and the relatability, humor and informal language were more appropriate. Thus, in the case of TikTok, Haidilao must focus on the alignment with the trends, virality, and casual content presentation, instead of trying to recreate Douyin content.

All these findings point to the necessity of platform-based optimization. Although Douyin and TikTok are based on similar technologies, they are associated with culturally different user environments that must be addressed with specific content approaches. Brands must resist the urge to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach or rely solely on translation. Instead, they should adopt a glocalization strategy, preserving core brand identity while adapting content tone, structure, and delivery to suit local expectations and algorithmic dynamics (Robertson, 1995).

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size ($n = 20$) is relatively small, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Although non-parametric tests, such as the Mann-Whitney U and Spearman's rank correlation, are appropriate for small samples, statistical power remains limited, and the likelihood of Type II errors increases. Thus, even though the effect sizes, as measured by Cliff's δ , were large, the results should be considered exploratory rather than conclusive. Second, the study's focus on a single brand, Haidilao, limits its external validity. Third, the study utilized a cross-sectional dataset based on videos published within six months. As social media platforms continuously evolve, the findings may not capture seasonal effects, algorithm changes, or long-term shifts in user behavior (Eltaher et al., 2025). Lastly, engagement was measured solely through visible metrics (likes, views, comments, shares). These provide valid proxies for interest but do not reveal demographic breakdowns, viewer motivations, or sentiment polarity.

Future research directions

Future research should aim to extend the current findings by adopting larger sample sizes, which would enhance statistical reliability and allow for more detailed subgroup comparisons across audiences and platforms (Halsey et al., 2015). Cross-brand and multi-industry investigations are also recommended to determine whether the content–performance relationships identified in Haidilao's campaigns hold true across different sectors (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Longitudinal designs would provide valuable insight into how platform algorithms and user engagement patterns evolve over time, helping to distinguish sustained trends from short-term fluctuations (Eltaher et al., 2025). Finally, integrating sentiment analysis and natural language processing tools could enrich the interpretation of engagement data, offering deeper understanding of audience emotions and content reception (Jim et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The paper provides a comparative analysis of short video engagement on TikTok and Douyin, and uses Haidilao as a case study to explore how platform-specific content strategy, culture, and audience response interact. The findings show that both platforms are technically similar but differ in cultural and algorithmic context, which affects the performance of content differently. The audience of Douyin likes culturally-oriented, emotionally-motivating, and proficiently constructed material, which is typical of collectivist and high-context communication culture, which is common in Chinese society.

In comparison, TikTok audiences reacted better to funny, time-saving, and visual content that was consistent with worldwide trends and low-context cultural demands. Such disparities highlight the significance of culturally adaptive platform-specific approaches that brands with international markets should employ. While the study is limited by sample size and scope, it lays important groundwork for future research on digital content optimization across culturally diverse social media environments. Ultimately, success in cross-platform marketing hinges not only on understanding technical affordances but also on navigating the cultural expectations embedded within each platform's user base.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to thank Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and the Faculty of Management and Economics for their kind support throughout this study. The authors also wish to express appreciation to their friends and peers for their encouragement during this study.

REFERENCES

- Abidin, C. (2021). Mapping Internet Celebrity on TikTok: Exploring Attention Economies and Visibility Labor. *Cultural Science Journal*, 12(1), 77–104.
- Balmer, J. M. (2017). Corporate brand orientation: What is it? What of it? In *Advances in Corporate Branding* (p p. 175–202). <https://www.academia.edu/download/40705291>
- Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2018). The affordances of social media platforms. In *The SAGE handbook of social media* (Vol. 1, pp. 233–253). https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/9115828/BucherHelmond%7B_%7DSocialMediaAffordances%7B_%7Dpreprint.pdf
- Chen, X., Valdovinos Kaye, D. B., & Zeng, J. (2021). #PositiveEnergy Douyin: Constructing "playful patriotism" in a Chinese short-video application. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 14(1), 97–117.
- De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising*, 36(5), 798–828.
- Divon, T., & Eriksson Krutrök, M. (2024). Playful Trauma: TikTok Creators and the Utilization of the Platformed Body in Times of War. *Social Media + Society*, 10(3), 20563051241269281.
- Eltaher, F., Rahul, K., Gajula, R., Miralles-Pechuán, L., Crotty, P., Martínez-Otero, J., et al. (2025). *Protecting young users on social media: Evaluating the effectiveness of content moderation and legal safeguards on video sharing platforms*. <https://arxiv.org/html/2505.11160v1>
- Fang, T. (2005). From “onion” to “ocean”: Paradox and change in national cultures. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 35(4), 71–90.

- Gillespie, T. (2022). Do not recommend it? Reduction as a form of content moderation. *Social Media + Society*, 8(3), 20563051221117552.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City. https://monoskop.org/images/6/60/Hall_Edward_T_Beyond_Culture.pdf
- Halsey, L. G., Curran-Everett, D., Vowler, S. L., & Drummond, G. B. (2015). The fickle P value generates irreproducible results. *Nature Methods*, 12(3), 179–185.
- Hazari, S., Talpade, S., & Brown, C. O. (2024). Do brand influencers matter on TikTok? A social influence theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 32(3), 271–289.
- He, X., Hua, K., Ji, C., Lin, H., Ren, Z., & Zhang, W. (2021, December 15). Overview of the growth and development of TikTok's globalization. In *2021, the 3rd International Conference on Economic Management and Cultural Industry (ICEMCI 2021)* (pp. 666–673). Atlantis Press. <https://www.atlantis-press.com/article/125965906.pdf>
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Sage Publications.
- Hofstede Insights. (2023). Country comparison: China and the United States. <https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=china%2Cunited+states>
- Huang, Y., & Ye, W. (2023). “Traffic rewards,” “algorithmic visibility,” and “advertiser satisfaction”: How Chinese short-video platforms cultivate creators in stages. *Convergence*, 30(1), 659–682.
- Jim, J. R., Talukder, M. A. R., Malakar, P., Kabir, M. M., Nur, K., & Mridha, M. F. (2024). Recent advancements and challenges of NLP-based sentiment analysis: A state-of-the-art review. *Natural Language Processing Journal*, 6, 100059.
- Koç, B. İ. (2023). *The role of user interactions in social media on recommendation algorithms: Evaluation of TikTok's personalization practices from the user's perspective* [Master's thesis, Istanbul University]. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375775130>
- Kung, Y., Wang, Y., Li, X., Hatrick, J., Liu, W., Wang, Q., Liang, J., & Liu, Y. (2025). Digital labor on TikTok and Douyin platforms: A scoping review. *Review of Communication Research*, 13, 212–228.
- Lin, J., & de Kloet, J. (2023). TikTok and the platform station from China: Geopolitical anxieties, repetitive creativities, and future imaginaries. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(8), 1525–1533.
- McGinnis, T., Goodstein-Stolzenberg, A., & Salianni, E. C. (2007). "indnpride": Online spaces of transnational youth as sites of creative and sophisticated literacy and identity work. *Linguistics and Education*, 18(3–4), 283–304.

- McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's model of national cultural differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith—a failure of analysis. *Human Relations*, 55(1), 89–118.
- Rejeb, A., Rejeb, K., Appolloni, A., Treiblmaier, H., & Iranmanesh, M. (2024). Mapping the scholarly landscape of TikTok (Douyin): A bibliometric exploration of research topics and trends. *Digital Business*, 100075. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666954424000036>
- Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity. In *Global Modernities*. Sage. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/students/modules/hi31v/syllabus/week18/robertson-1995.pdf>
- Schellewald, A. (2023). Understanding the popularity and affordances of TikTok through user experiences. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(8), 1568–1582.
- Singer, M. F., & Jones, O. E. (2025). Constructing authenticity in digital landscapes: Deion Sanders's social media presence and its impact on fan perceptions. *Societies*, 15(5), 134.
- Song, S. (2023). Analyzing the popularity of Hai Di Lao through digital marketing methods. *Advances in Economics, Management, and Political Sciences*, 34, 132–139.
- Vidani, J. (2024, April 30). *Exploring the influence of Reels and short videos on the reading and listening habits of Generation Z: A comprehensive study*. SSRN. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm?abstractid=4889495>
- Wang, W., & Wu, J. (2021). Research perspectives on TikTok & its legacy apps: Short video platforms and local community building in China. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, 23.
- Yang, Y., & Ha, L. (2021). Why people use TikTok (Douyin) and how their purchase intentions are affected by social media influencers in China: A uses and gratifications and parasocial relationship perspective. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 21(3), 297–305.
- Ye, Z., Huang, Q., & Krijnen, T. (2025). Douyin's Playful Platform Governance: The Platform's Self-Regulation and Content Creators' Participatory Surveillance. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 28(1), 80–98.
- Zhao, H. (2025). *Cultural Strategy and Identity Construction in Chinese Emerging Brands' Global Expansion: The Case of Pop Mart* [Master's thesis]. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=9203080&fileId=9203092>