

Changes in Public Emotions and Psychology Under the Influence of Psychological Popular Science Short Videos

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Abstract: Short videos have become an important channel for daily information acquisition and emotional expression. Psychological popular science short videos subtly influence the public's psychology, but their mechanism of action and impact effects remain to be explored. Through literature review and platform content analysis, this paper classifies them into three types based on user experience: perception-oriented, function-oriented, and emotion-oriented, and supplements the research on "emotion consumption-oriented" content. The former can deliver complete psychological therapies and relieve stress, but the content is plain, the duration is long, and the dissemination data is relatively low; the latter has better dissemination performance, but mostly relies on empathy and one-sided psychological knowledge to gain traffic, which is easy to induce negative effects such as internal friction. Through questionnaire and interview research, it is found that this type of content has a dual effect on the audience: at the emotional level, the problem of negative emotion induction is prominent; at the psychological level, although the audience has achieved awareness awakening, cognitive confusion has also emerged, and the overall state is disturbed by dual factors. This result enriches relevant theories in the digital age, and also provides practical reference for online popular science, emotional counseling, and guiding the public to use short videos healthily.

Keywords: Psychological Popular Science; Short Videos; Emotion; Psychology

1. Introduction

With the prosperity of material life, people's desire to explore the spiritual world has been increasing. Coupled with the increasing pressure of life, people are paying more attention to their inner state, trying to understand and solve their

own psychological problems. [1] In this context, short videos, with their short duration and low access cost, have become the main convenient way for contemporary people to explore inward and understand psychological knowledge. The *Report on National Mental Health Development in China (2023~2024)* shows that China's national mental health presents a complex trend: youth crisis is prominent, middle-aged and elderly people's emotions are stable, and lifestyle and digital technology also profoundly affect people's psychological state. [2] However, while the short-term nature of short videos enriches the audience's self-cognition, it also has obvious limitations: its relaxed, entertaining, and fragmented characteristics make psychological popular science content easy to receive, but difficult to deliver comprehensive and specific knowledge. How to dialectically view such fragmented information has also become an important issue for contemporary audiences. [3] Sorting out the existing literature, it is found that current research mostly focuses on orthodox psychological popular science short videos with longer duration and large amount of information, which has a gap with the audience's short-term and fragmented receiving habits, and cannot fully reflect the real impact of such content on the audience. [4] Based on this, on the basis of the existing classification, this study added a type of short videos that use stimulating empathy as a means and one-sided psychological knowledge to gain traffic for analysis, and carried out a series of studies around the impact of such content on the audience's emotional and psychological state. The results show that: at the emotional level, this type of content has a significant dual emotional effect on the audience, and the problem of negative emotion induction is particularly prominent; at the psychological state level, although the audience has achieved the awakening of psychological awareness, psychological cognitive confusion has also appeared, and the overall psychological state is disturbed by dual factors.

2. Literature Review

Current research on psychological popular science short videos has formed a multi-dimensional framework, covering narrative modes, platform algorithms, presentation forms and other directions, covering the entire chain from content production to audience acceptance. [5][6][7][8] Wang Jin and Han Yi conducted a grounded exploration targeting college users on Bilibili, and found that when such users contact psychological popular science short videos, they pay more attention to whether the content can match their own emotional needs, rather than the rigor of professional knowledge; [9] The *Meet Growth · Listening Team* from Sichuan Agricultural University verified through field research that the psychological popular science content on the Douyin platform generally presents the characteristics of "focusing on pain points, focusing on emotions rather than popular science", taking emotional management as the core communication starting point. [10] On this basis, scholars such as Wu conducted a multimodal analysis of mental health short videos on the Douyin platform, revealing that different creators have significant differentiated narrative strategies in content production, some focus on professional interpretation, and some focus on emotional resonance; [11] The international research by Xie et al. further supplemented the findings in this field, confirming that the parasocial relationship between creators and users on short video platforms can play a significant repairing role in users' despair. [12] At the same time, relevant research on the TikTok platform also shows that scholars such as Jerin found that mental health popular science content on this platform extensively uses emotional appeals to attract users, so as to increase the coverage of content dissemination. [13] The comparative study by Chen Lijia et al. pointed out that previous popular science research mostly focused on long-duration professional popular science content, which can deliver a complete knowledge system; [14] Sun Shanshan's research further explained the communication bias of the short video media itself, making the content on such platforms naturally more inclined to short duration and strong emotion presentation, leading to users being unable to process in-depth professional knowledge in fragmented scenarios.

[15] For this reason, scholars have combined five major theories to build a research system that takes into account structure, mechanism and subject. [16-21] On this basis, this paper adds the analysis of "emotion consumption-oriented" short videos to fill the research gap of fragmented popular science. This paper analyzes the operation logic of such content based on the three-dimensional framework of "perception-function-emotion". Such short videos take fragmented psychological concepts as the carrier, empathy as the core, essentially instant consumption of emotional value, and the core feature is the unequal input of users' emotion and cognition. [22] Its operation logic presents three-dimensional differences: [23-24] In the perception dimension, such short videos maximize the perception stimulation logic, using 15-30 second ultra-short duration, suspense titles and strong impact audio-visual elements to capture users' attention in a very short time, adapting to fragmented scenarios and reducing attention cost. [25] In the function dimension, it adapts to the traffic logic. Existing studies show that the professionalism of content has limited impact on the dissemination effect, so such content adopts low-threshold fragmented production to achieve rapid traffic occupation. [26-27] The emotional dimension is the core, constructing an emotion cycle amplification mechanism: at the cognitive level, it can promote users to generate empathic identification, and achieve a similar sober hypnotic effect through repeated action. [28-29] At the behavioral level, it forms a cycle of "emotion mobilization - cognition guidance - induced forwarding", achieving synchronous growth of emotion and traffic. [30][31] Based on this, this paper proposes the hypothesis: such short videos have dual effects, which can not only relieve users' emotions in the short term, but also may lead to users' cognitive bias due to non-professional guidance, and have long-term negative impact on psychological state.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed research method combining quantitative and qualitative methods, integrating questionnaire survey method and in-depth interview method, taking into account the breadth of data and the depth of research, and systematically exploring the user influence mechanism of psychological popular science short videos.

3.1 Data Source

The questionnaire was officially distributed through Wenjuanxing on February 20, 2026. As of March 20, a total of 400 questionnaires were recovered. After screening invalid questionnaires, 361 valid samples were obtained, with a questionnaire recovery rate of 90.25%, providing a quantitative basis for subsequent research. On this basis, this study further carried out qualitative interviews to supplement the in-depth information of quantitative data.

3.2 Questionnaire Survey Method

3.2.1 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire of this study is designed based on the emotion consumption theory and the mature framework of existing mental health popular science research, and is divided into five core modules: basic information of respondents,

usage of short video platforms, contact with psychological short videos, impact effect analysis, and user evaluation and demand.

Before the formal investigation, a pre-investigation was carried out, and 120 valid samples were recovered to optimize the questionnaire: adding logical jumps to avoid invalid filling, adjusting the items to a standard Likert five-point scale, and merging overlapping options to eliminate ambiguity. The results of the reliability and validity test of the optimized questionnaire show that: Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.82, KMO value is 0.79, Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant, the reliability and validity are good, meeting the requirements of academic research.

3.2.2 Variables and items

The variables, corresponding items and reference sources of this study are shown in the following table 1:

Table 1. Questionnaire Item Setting Table

Variable	Code	Item
Basic Information	B1	Your gender
	B2	Your age
	B3	Your educational background[32]
	B4	Have you ever had psychological distress/visited a doctor for mental illness/had counseling experience[33]
Short Video Platform Usage	PU1	Your daily usage frequency of short video platforms
	PU2	Your average daily viewing time of short videos
	PU3	Which short video platforms do you mainly use[34]
Contact with Psychological Short Videos	CE1	Have you ever brushed short videos related to psychology, mental illness, emotional management, psychological counseling
	CE2	Will you actively search for or follow psychological short video accounts/content
	CE3	What are the main types of psychological short videos you watch
	CE4	The proportion of your viewing time of psychological short videos in the total short video viewing time[22][35]
Impact Effect of Psychological Short Videos	IE1	Have psychological short videos improved your understanding of psychological knowledge[33]
	IE2	Do you think the popular science of psychological short videos on mental illness is accurate[22]
	IE3	Has such content changed your views on mental illness and psychological problems[36]
	IE4	Will you label yourself or others with mental illness labels due to the short video content[37]
	IE5	Have psychological short videos made you pay more attention to your own mental health[38]
	IE6	After watching psychological short videos, your emotions usually
	IE7	When you are in negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, what will watching psychological short videos do[22]
	IE8	Have you ever had the situation of paying too much attention to your own emotions and amplifying subtle discomfort due to the content of psychological short videos
	IE9	Will such content cause you psychological discomfort[39]
	IE10	Affected by psychological short videos, have you done any of the following behaviors
	IE11	After trying the psychological adjustment methods in the videos, how was the

		effect[38]
	IE12	Will you change your life, social, study/work habits due to the guidance of psychological short videos[36]
User Evaluation and Demand	ER1	What problems do you think exist in the current psychological short videos
	ER2	Your overall attitude towards psychological short videos
	ER3	In which aspects do you hope psychological short videos can be optimized[22]

3.3 In-depth Interview Method

3.3.1 In-depth interview design

Based on the statistical results of the questionnaire survey(For example, figure1), this study adopts purposive sampling method, accurately selecting 10 respondents aged 19-35 who have experience in contacting psychological popular science short videos to carry out semi-structured in-depth interviews, to explore the deep user experience that cannot be covered by quantitative data.

The interview outline is divided into five core modules, with a total of 15 streamlined questions, and the duration is controlled at about 20 minutes, covering sample characteristics, platform usage, content contact characteristics, impact process, and user needs. It not only

ensures the consistency of interview questions, but also reserves expression space for respondents, effectively supplementing the deficiencies of quantitative research.

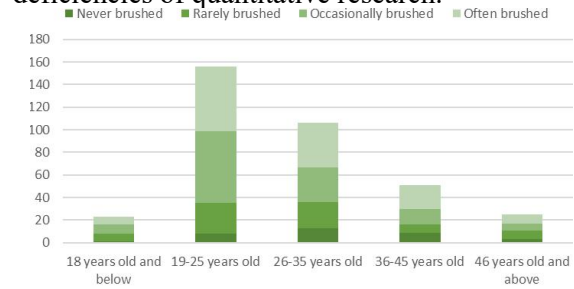


Figure 1. Age Distribution of Audiences of Psychological Popular Science Short Videos

3.3.2 Variables and items

The variables, corresponding items and reference sources of this study are shown in the following table2:

Table 2. Interview Item Setting Table

Variable	Code	Item
Basic Information of Respondents	B5	May I ask your age and educational background?[32]
Basic Information of Short Video Platform Usage	PU4	What is your usual daily usage frequency of short videos, and what types of content do you mainly watch?
Contact with Psychological Short Videos	CE5	Do you usually take the initiative to find psychological short videos to watch, or are they generally recommended by the platform? Under what circumstances do you usually watch such content?[22]
	CE6	What kind of psychological short videos do you like to watch the most? Why[22][35]
Impact Effect Analysis of Psychological Short Videos	IE13	After watching such psychological short videos, what changes do your emotions usually have? Is there any impressive experience that after watching a certain content, your emotions were greatly relieved? Can you tell me the specific situation at that time?[22]
	IE14	Has such content changed your views on mental illness and psychological problems? Have you tried the psychological adjustment methods in the videos, and how was the effect? [36][38]
	IE15	Has watching such content made you pay more attention to your own mental health, or changed your life and work habits[36][38]
	IE16	Has such content prompted you to seek professional psychological counseling or medical help?[33]
	IE17	Have you ever watched psychological short videos that made you feel uncomfortable or even caused mental internal friction? Can you tell me what kind of content it was?[39]
	IE18	Have you ever had the situation of paying too much attention to your small emotions after watching such content, or even labeling yourself or others with mental illness labels? Can you tell me the specific situation at that time?[37]
	IE19	Have you ever encountered psychological content that exaggerates psychological problems and sells anxiety? What impact has such content had on you?[39]
User Evaluation and	ER4	What do you think is the biggest problem with the current psychological short

Demand for Psychological Short Videos		videos?
	ER5	Overall, what is your attitude towards psychological short videos?
	ER6	What optimization do you hope such content can do in the future? Do you have any specific suggestions?
	ER7	Regarding the impact of psychological popular science short videos on you, is there anything I haven't asked that you want to supplement?[22]

4. Research Results

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

A total of 361 valid samples were recovered in this study. The gender ratio, age distribution of the samples are basically consistent with the overall user characteristics of short video platforms [40][41], the educational background is mainly undergraduate and above, with good information judgment ability, which can ensure the effectiveness of the questionnaire. Most users use short video platforms frequently, with an average daily viewing time of more than 30 minutes. Douyin, Xiaohongshu and others are the main positions, which provides a foundation for the dissemination of psychological popular science short videos.

At present, psychological popular science short videos have achieved widespread dissemination, more than 90% of users have had contact experience, but users' active attention willingness is limited, more than 30% of users only passively brush and watch, and such content only accounts for a small part of users' viewing time. Users' needs are concentrated on emotional regulation and basic popular science.

At the knowledge and cognitive level, psychological popular science short videos show a typical "double-edged sword" effect. More than 80% of users said that it has improved their understanding of psychological knowledge, but at the same time, 36.57% of users believe that the current content is exaggerated and misleading, and only 18.01% believe that the content is professional and rigorous(For example,

table 3). More importantly, more than half of the users have not achieved cognitive improvement, and even 24.1% of users have developed prejudice and fear towards psychological problems because of this, which has the risk of exacerbating the stigmatization of psychological problems(For example, table 4).

At the attitude and behavior level, such content has effectively improved users' attention to mental health. More than half of the users pay more attention to their own state because of this, 65.93% of users will take the initiative to seek emotional talk from people around them, and 63.16% have learned the emotional regulation methods in the videos(For example, table 5). But at the same time, the labeling problem is very prominent, 52.91% of users often or always label themselves or others affected by the content, this content chaos urgently needs industry norms(For example, table 6).

At the emotional regulation level, its effect has obvious situational differences. When users are in negative emotions, more than half of the users said that the content can effectively relieve emotions(For example, table 7); but in the normal psychological state, 26.87% of users instead have negative emotions such as anxiety and depression because of this(For example, table 8). At the same time, 53.46% of users have excessive attention to their own emotions(For example, table 9), and 55.4% of users have caused psychological discomfort such as mental internal friction because of this(For example, table 10). This potential negative impact needs to attract the attention of the industry.

Table 3. Users' Evaluation on the Popular Science Accuracy of Psychological Short Videos

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Users' Evaluation on the Popular Science Accuracy of Psychological Short Videos	Inaccurate, with exaggeration and misleading	132	36.57%
	Basically accurate, with a small amount of deviation	100	27.7%
	Very accurate, professional and rigorous	65	18.01%
	Unable to judge	64	17.73%

Table 4. Changes in Users' Cognition Brought by Psychological Short Videos

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Changes in Users' Cognition Brought by Psychological Short Videos	Generated prejudice/fear	87	24.1%
	No change	101	27.98%
	Slight change	107	29.64%
	Significant change, more understanding and tolerance	66	18.28%

Table 5. Behavior Distribution Affected by Psychological Short Videos

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Behavior Distribution Affected by Psychological Short Videos	Actively seek emotional talk from people around	238	65.93%
	Learn and use the emotional adjustment methods in the videos	228	63.16%
	Follow more psychological accounts	222	61.50%
	Make an appointment for professional psychological consultation/medical treatment	210	58.17%
	Forward and share psychological content	189	52.35%
	Others	97	26.87%
	No relevant behavior	74	20.50%

Table 6. Distribution of Labeling Behavior

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of Labeling Behavior	Always	76	21.05%
	Often	115	31.86%
	Sometimes	101	27.98%
	Rarely	53	14.68%
	Never	16	4.43%

Table 7. The Regulation Effect of Psychological Short Videos in Negative Emotions

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
The Regulation Effect of Psychological Short Videos in Negative Emotions	Instead made me feel worse	61	16.9%
	No impact	104	28.81%
	Slight relief	119	32.96%
	Significant relief	77	21.33%

Table 8. Emotional Changes After Watching Psychological Short Videos

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Emotional Changes After Watching Psychological Short Videos	No obvious change	147	40.72%
	Become anxious, depressed, panic	97	26.87%
	Become calm, healing, positive	66	18.28%
	Generate resonance, emotional release	51	14.13%

Table 9. Distribution of Excessive Attention to Own Emotions

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of Excessive Attention to Own Emotions	Never happened	62	17.17%
	Rarely happened	106	29.36%
	Occasionally happened	129	35.73%
	Often happened	64	17.73%

Table 10. Distribution of Psychological Discomfort

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of Psychological Discomfort	Never	66	18.28%
	Rarely	95	26.32%
	Occasionally	138	38.23%
	Often	62	17.17%

Table 11. Problems Users Think Exist in Current Psychological Short Videos

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Problems Users Think Exist in Current Psychological Short Videos	Selling anxiety, exaggerating psychological problems	252	69.81%
	Unprofessional content, wrong popular science	236	65.37%
	Clickbait, eye-catching	225	62.33%
	Over-entertaining mental illness	208	57.62%
	Serious homogenization, no substantial content	189	52.35%
	Others	87	24.1%
	No obvious problem	59	16.34%

Table 12. Distribution of Optimization Directions Users Hope

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of Optimization Directions Users Hope	Reduce anxiety marketing, deliver more healing content	239	66.20%
	Improve professionalism, add authoritative certification	231	63.99%
	Standardize the popular science of mental illness, avoid labeling	221	61.22%
	Add practical adjustment methods	217	60.11%
	Provide formal psychological consultation/medical guidance	172	47.65%
	Others	114	31.58%

Users' attitude towards this type of content also confirms this contradictory feature: most users recognize its auxiliary value, but at the same time believe that the most prominent problem at present is anxiety marketing and insufficient content professionalism. 69.81% of users feedback that the content has the situation of selling anxiety, and 65.37% believe that the content is unprofessional and has wrong popular science(For example, table 11). In this regard, users' most urgent needs are to reduce anxiety marketing, improve content professionalism, and standardize popular science content to avoid labeling(For example, table 12).

The interview results further verified the above conclusions. The interviewees generally said that psychological popular science short videos can provide effective support when they are in emotional low tide, helping to relieve pressure

and adjust the state, but they have also encountered content that exaggerates problems and randomly labels, causing self internal friction. Users generally recognize the auxiliary value of such content, but clearly that it cannot replace professional consultation, and at the same time urgently hope that platforms and creators can improve content professionalism and standardize the content ecosystem.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

In this study, Spearman's rank correlation test was adopted for the core variables to explore the correlation between exposure to popular science short videos on psychology and public psychological changes. The screened statistically significant correlation results are presented in table 13:

Table 13. Significant Correlation Results

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient r	p-value	Significance
Content Accuracy Evaluation	Labeling Behavior Degree	0.3799	7.68E-14	***
Emotional Change After Watching	Labeling Behavior Degree	0.3673	5.68E-13	***
Mental Health Attention Degree	Emotional Change After Watching	0.345	1.57E-11	***
Mental Health Attention Degree	Labeling Behavior Degree	0.4022	1.81E-15	***
Content Accuracy Evaluation	Mental Health Attention Degree	0.383	4.62E-14	***
Content Accuracy Evaluation	Emotional Change After Watching	0.3524	5.43E-12	***
Whether to Actively Pay Attention to Popular Science Content	Excessive Attention to Own Emotions Degree	0.2655	3.07E-07	***
Whether to Actively Pay Attention to Popular Science Content	Content Accuracy Evaluation	0.2349	6.46E-06	***
Whether to Actively Pay Attention to Popular Science Content	Labeling Behavior Degree	0.231	9.27E-06	***
Whether to Actively Pay Attention to Popular Science Content	Mental Health Attention Degree	0.2011	1.20E-04	***
Whether to Actively Pay Attention to Popular Science Content	Emotional Change After Watching	0.1708	1.12E-03	**
Short Video Platform Usage Frequency	Excessive Attention to Own Emotions Degree	-0.1515	3.90E-03	**
Short Video Platform Usage Frequency	Average Daily Short Video Viewing Time	0.147	5.13E-03	**

The results show that the degree of attention to mental health has the strongest positive correlation with the degree of labeling behavior ($r=0.4022$, $p<0.001$), which makes them more likely to match their own daily emotional fluctuations with the disease symptoms in the content when contacting popular science content, and then generate self-labeling behavior, which again verifies the double-edged sword effect of psychological popular science content: while effectively improving users' health awareness, it also brings the potential risk of self-labeling.

At the same time, the emotional change after watching also has a significant positive correlation with the degree of labeling behavior ($r=0.3673$, $p<0.001$), which is consistent with the action mechanism of emotion consumption short videos proposed earlier in this study: emotion mobilization will strengthen users' sense of substitution, amplify users' emotional perception, and then promote users to generate labeling cognition, which also shows that emotional factors are important driving factors for labeling behavior.

At the user behavior level, whether to actively pay attention to popular science content has a significant positive correlation with the degree of excessive attention to own emotions ($r=0.2655$, $p<0.001$), which shows that users who actively seek psychological popular science content themselves have higher emotional sensitivity, and the contact with such content will further aggravate their excessive attention to their own emotions, forming a cycle of "sensitive - attention - more sensitive", which is also an important reason why some users have mental internal friction at present.

The chi-square test results show that the attention to mental health and the emotional change after watching are positively correlated with self-labeling behavior. Actively paying attention to popular science content will aggravate users' excessive attention to their own emotions, verifying the double-edged sword effect of psychological popular science, and also explaining the cause of internal friction of some users.

4.3 Result Analysis

Based on the empirical research from the user experience perspective, [22] this study fills the gap in the current industry and academic research. Previous studies were mostly limited to professional psychological popular science short

videos in the strict sense. Such content has a narrow audience, cannot reflect the real short video ecology at present, and is also difficult to explain the common phenomenon that users "watch psychological popular science but increase anxiety". Overseas similar studies also pointed out the quality hidden dangers of psychological content on short video platforms. On the basis of the previous analysis framework, this study supplemented the research on traffic-oriented emotion consumption content, improving the research system of the entire field. At the practical level, the study verified the current misleading problem of non-professional popular science content, providing a scientific basis for platform content governance, public use guidance and creator content optimization, helping the psychological popular science industry develop in a healthy direction. For the problems found in the research, optimization can be promoted from three aspects: platform audit, professional content supply, and improvement of users' media literacy, to standardize the industry ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

This study incorporated the fragmented emotion consumption content with emotion mobilization as the core into the research category of psychological popular science short videos, and carried out a social survey for such content, aiming to fully restore the real impact of such content on the public's emotional and psychological state, and provide a research basis for clarifying its specific role and protecting public mental health.

At the theoretical level, on the basis of the original "perception-function-emotion experience" classification, this paper adds the concept of "emotion consumption-oriented" short videos, breaking through the previous research limitation that only focused on professional medium and long content; at the same time, it disassembled the internal operation mechanism of such content, clarified the underlying logic of instant attention capture, low-threshold mass production, and emotion cycle amplification, and also revealed the "double-edged sword" dual influence mechanism of psychological popular science short videos, providing a new perspective for subsequent research. Based on the research results, we have clarified the current psychological needs of users, provided specific reference for platform content

governance and public psychological guidance, helping the healthy development of the psychological popular science industry.

Based on the research limitations and existing findings, in the future we will expand the sample coverage, include users of different ages and educational backgrounds, verify the universality of the conclusions, and clarify the impact differences of different groups; at the same time, explore the content impact differences of different platforms, provide a basis for platform refined governance; finally carry out intervention controlled trials, observe users' cognitive and emotional changes under different intervention measures, verify the effectiveness of governance measures, and provide empirical support for industry optimization.

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