

Text, Space, and Media: An Analysis of the Social Logic of Douyin Short Videos Among Youth Groups (Postprint)

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Abstract

In the mobile internet era, media's embedding into social life has disrupted existing social interaction structures and communication ecologies, giving rise to behavioral patterns of mediated social interaction. Within the behavioral spectrum of mediated social interaction, social media platforms represented by Douyin short videos have gained particular favor among youth groups. The short-video social interaction of youth groups on Douyin operates through a threefold logic comprising text production, spatial linking, and media translation. Specifically, the logic of text production constructs the foundation of social interaction within contexts of self-performance; the logic of spatial linking configures the interactive field of youth social interaction through the meaningful integration of multiple subjects; and the logic of media translation interprets and constructs the rich modalities of short-video social interaction, thereby enriching the discursive system of social communication. Furthermore, short-video social interaction projects the cultural habitus of mediated social communication, holding significant implications for the adjustment and reshaping of social interaction relationships.

Full Text

Text, Space, and Media: An Analysis of the Social Logic of Short Video Engagement Among Youth Groups on Douyin

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Abstract: In the mobile internet era, the embedding of media into social life has disrupted traditional social interaction structures and communication ecologies, giving rise to new patterns of mediatized social behavior. Within this

spectrum of mediatized social practices, short video platforms such as Douyin have gained particular favor among youth groups. The social use of Douyin short videos among young people operates through three interlocking logics: text production, spatial linkage, and media translation. The logic of text production establishes the foundation for social interaction through self-performance in situated contexts. The logic of spatial linkage shapes the interactive field of youth social engagement through the meaningful convergence of multiple actors. The logic of media translation interprets and constructs the diverse modalities of short video social interaction, enriching the discourse system of social communication. Furthermore, short video social interaction reflects the cultural habitus of mediatized social exchange, holding significant implications for the adjustment and reshaping of social relationships.

Keywords: short video social interaction; mediatized social interaction; text production; spatial linkage; media translation

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1. Problem Statement

Stig Hjarvard argues in *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* that mediatized communication and interaction are just as real as non-mediatized forms, with the sole distinction that mediatized interaction occurs among individuals not sharing the same temporal-spatial situation [1]. Modern media technology and its products have transformed traditional modes of social exchange, enabling trans-spatial and trans-situational connectivity and interembedding of meaning, making mediatized interaction a cultural habitus of contemporary society. Hjarvard further emphasizes that the manner in which media intervene in social interaction depends on the specific characteristics of particular media—their material, technical, social, and aesthetic features [2]. This perspective affirms the agency of media in social interaction while implicitly acknowledging the multiplicity of media meanings. Due to the interactive and complex nature of media, they serve not merely as channels for information transmission but as integral wholes of social meaning and relationships. Understanding media's significance for social interaction requires taking the uniqueness of different media as a cognitive premise, examining specific groups' media practice logics within concrete contexts of daily social interaction, and analyzing how media shape relationships and structures.

In the mediatized social environment, youth groups have rapidly become practitioners of various media due to their advantages in learning and adaptability. Within the media spectrum, Douyin, a short video app designed for “sharing a beautiful life,” has gained particular popularity among young people. Douyin’s homepage features—Recommend, Friends, Local, Following, and Messages—constitute its explicit functional characteristics as a social short video platform. With “video + background music” as its signature feature and algorithmic recommendation as its foundation, Douyin forms a social relationship-based ecosystem through fan recommendations, user recommendations based on similar interests, and creator recommendations based on traffic. New media serves as both a reference point for youth social interaction and a primary tool for emotional expression, catharsis, and viewpoint articulation [3]. Short video social platforms provide a vast stage for social performance, where individuals engage in dialogue with the public through visual symbols during content creation, dissemination, and interaction, managing scripts, actors, and production crews to complete self-performance and self-presentation within short video social media [4]. This study examines the social logic of youth groups’ Douyin usage, aiming to map the specific connections between youth groups and short video media. It emphasizes three layers of logic in youth short video social interaction, seeking to deeply analyze the conditions and patterns of youth short video social engagement through text production, spatial linkage, and media translation. Finally, it attempts an academic interpretation of the significance of short video social interaction and mediatized exchange in the reconstruction of social relationships.

2. Text Production Logic: Social Initiation Through Self-Performance

American sociologist Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical theory, developed from micro-level observations of daily life, posits that society is a stage and its members are actors who participate in performances according to self-constructed scripts, with stages divided into front and back regions where actors perform frontstage and prepare backstage. In the mobile internet era, short videos as a medium of self-presentation provide an opportunity for interaction among performers sharing common attributes. Within Douyin’s social field, youth groups as primary actors remain active through viewing and performing. The underlying logic of youth short video social behavior in Douyin’s media practice is text production driven by performative desire. Users’ desire for performance becomes the internal motivation for text production, with the text itself serving as the frontstage portrait of youth participation in social interaction. Therefore, text production based on performative desire marks the logical starting point of youth short video social interaction. During text production on Douyin, youth groups engage primarily through two forms: participation in tagged topics and individual performative acts.

First, group participation in topical discussions. From the psychological perspective of information reception, audiences' acceptance, understanding, and reaction to information are influenced by their surroundings, generating a herd mentality that leads to selective acceptance and memory mechanisms. This selective psychology also affects audience content production, resulting in conformist creative themes. In the Douyin community, youth groups demonstrate high levels of activity, participation, and leadership, with conformist content production manifesting in topic tags. Consequently, tags and topics serve as primary reference indicators for examining Douyin users' text production. Observation of Douyin community topic tags reveals that while topics emerge with certain randomness, group participation in virtual communities renders topic popularity predictable. Group participation and individual conformity are often intertwined. Douyin topic group participation stems partly from the practical benefits brought by topic traffic, and partly because most Douyin topics align with youth groups' life attitudes and value orientations. The dual drivers of practical interests and values position youth groups as dominant actors in the Douyin community, granting them powerful discursive advantages in creative content. For instance, the hashtag # 仪式感不能少 (Life Needs Ritual) immediately sparked participation and discussion among young people, who began posting videos related to rituals in romance, food enjoyment, birthdays, and competitions. By October 4, 2021, this topic had reached 15.14 billion views. This massive data spectacle reflects youth users' creative habits of tagged and topic-biased text production, demonstrating powerful leadership in Douyin' s content production while conveying youth groups' lifestyle values and pursuit of ritual.

Second, performative practices of self-presentation. Contemporary social expression is gradually replacing linguistic expression with visual expression, as individuals participate in social interaction by constructing an image-based self. As a public performance stage, Douyin features low production thresholds, diverse content themes, low costs, and rich special effects, making it a primary means for constructing an image-based self. Following Goffman' s frontstage-backstage distinction, audience performative practices include backstage preparation and frontstage performance, with backstage activities ensuring smooth frontstage performances that ultimately enable participation in social interaction as performing actors. On Douyin, most users satisfy themselves with the role of audience through viewing, liking, and discussing, but they also transform their role through another mode of practice—participatory performance. Douyin' s performance roles and relationship settings are diverse, with different creators assuming distinct role positions: recorders of peaceful and interesting daily life, free-spirited distant travelers, fashionable and exquisite beauty sharers, science popularizers, English teachers, voice actors, etc. They construct their media images through specific roles, presenting an image-based self in social interaction through video. These performance role settings influence their text audiences and social partners. Social media self-presentation can significantly enhance subjective well-being [5], and users' performative desire becomes the internal

motivation for text production. The text serves as youth' s frontstage portrait in social interaction, making performative-desire-based text production the logical starting point of youth short video social interaction.

3. Spatial Linkage Logic: The Practice of Disembodied Social Fields

Henri Lefebvre divides spatial production into three forms: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, corresponding to three dimensions for understanding space: physical space, social space, and mental space. Media are not merely technical tools but social realities continuously constructed with human participation [6]. Short video social interaction, characterized by embodied practice with media objects and disembodied interaction among people, shapes short video social patterns through relational forces formed in interactions among various actors. Contemporary electronic media have increasingly permeated people' s daily lives, making the replication of distant spaces and situations a densely occurring norm in both scale and variety. The relationship between distant space and present space has broken through the “margin-center” model, with their interweaving reflecting the increasingly tight embedding in youth life [7]. Douyin social interaction uses the image-based self as the role for engagement, gathering people from different physical spaces onto the same platform, where video texts can operate independently of the real self, achieving cross-spatial disembodied presentation and interaction. In this process, youth media practices break through the real barriers of physical space, constructing social space based on relationships and mental space based on individual emotions through two-way interactions between people and between people and media. The intermediary texts produced through youth' s embodied practice with media objects become the content foundation for establishing social relationships and the key element connecting physical spaces, with text interaction constructing a common and open social field where individual emotions receive responses in interaction, making individuals more dependent on mental space for sustenance.

First, the connection of physical space. As John Durham Peters noted, “Online communication can reduce the risks our bodies, spines, and feet must bear” [8]. In face-to-face interaction, youth habitually maintain good personal images, with posture, clothing, and makeup becoming factors affecting interaction. Mediatized interaction weakens the importance of these factors to some extent, giving youth more time and opportunities to shape their media images. The presentation of the image-based self not only breaks through interaction distance limitations but also reduces individual costs in terms of interaction time, posture, and psychological pressure. The greatest characteristic of mobile internet-based media products lies in the online shift of user behavior. Since its inception, Douyin has rapidly captured the market with its positioning as fragmented, entertaining, trendy, and precise, continuously expanding its audi-

ence base through strategic adjustments. As one of the most representative media products today, Douyin has become an important aspect influencing youth social behavior. On one hand, Douyin gathers individuals from different physical spaces onto an online platform where various practical activities can be completed through just a mobile phone, breaking through interaction barriers caused by environmental, distance, and cultural inconsistencies and promoting the online shift of people's interaction activities. On the other hand, Douyin's filters, beauty enhancements, and special effects provide youth with greater flexibility and convenience in shaping their image-based selves, allowing them to participate in social interaction according to their ideal media images to the maximum extent. This method of social interaction through shaping an image-based self breaks through physical constraints such as time and geography, making interaction in virtual space more random and fantastical—precisely the type of interaction activity favored by contemporary youth groups. Today, Douyin has become a latent force in daily life, prompting us to develop various silent relationships with it. “Scrolling Douyin” has become the primary way for most people to pass time, and this online activity across physical spaces has gradually evolved into a cultural habitus of social interaction.

Second, the construction of social space. Spatial practice and its dynamic processes continuously create, transform, and maintain social relationships [9], with social space being closely related to human practical activities. Douyin users collectively shape a virtual cultural space through various media usage behaviors, where youth engage in self-presentation, fantasy, interaction, and social activities, forming specific spatial production relationships, interpersonal relationships, and social relationships. When long-distance communication is strengthened and short-distance communication declines, human relationships transform into a horizontal dimension: large numbers of people separated in physical space become connected through links to extra-local cultural, political, and power centers, and large numbers of people separated physically and culturally become effective national communities in cultural and political terms [10]. Mediatized interaction strengthens long-distance communication, dilutes regional cultural differences, and makes the establishment of interpersonal and social relationships no longer limited to regional cultural commonalities but begin to seek cross-cultural social connections. The essence of interaction is emotional connection and relationship generation, and Douyin's strong interactivity provides a foundation for forming social relationships. In Douyin's space, youth produce content themselves, presenting it in the form of “short video + background music + caption.” Audiences can like, share, comment on, or privately message about videos they enjoy, follow favorite creators, create duets with preferred authors, and add friends through platform recommendations. Short video creators gain expression and satisfaction through sharing, while viewers gain a sense of participation through commenting, liking, and forwarding functions. Open comment spaces create direct text or video interaction modes between producers and viewers, enabling cross-spatial communication even among strangers. The collective practical activities of user groups form various relationship linkages manifested

in social space, achieving the reconstruction of virtual social space.

Finally, the compatibility of mental space. The shift from offline to online social spaces is accompanied by changes in mental space, with Douyin's own characteristics providing the foundation for mental space compatibility. Youth form corresponding behavioral logics and norms based on emotional biases developed through Douyin experiences. On one hand, as a social platform linked by short videos, Douyin not only caters to youth's fragmented instant entertainment needs in terms of time but also provides a more simulated technical foundation for constructing virtual social fields through its immersive characteristics, making youth experiences more intense. Compared to the cost expenditures of time, money, and spirit in offline social interaction, Douyin social interaction creates a low-cost space for emotional expression and interactive communication, becoming a more favored social method for youth. On the other hand, the anonymity and performativity of Douyin social interaction provide youth with a sense of security that evades reality. Douyin social interaction represents a weakly connected form of engagement that caters to youth's escape from strongly connected interpersonal relationships in real life. Compared to the constraints of relatively stable interaction relationships in real life, Douyin users participate in social interaction through an image-based self, dissolving communication troubles in real interpersonal relationships and becoming an important practical platform for youth social needs. Consequently, Douyin's cultural space demonstrates strong compatibility, with relatively consistent biases in value concepts and symbolic interpretation rules, providing a common understanding framework for youth interaction practices.

4. Media Translation Logic: The Co-construction of Short Video Social Discourse

The characteristics of media determine their modes of social interaction. Within Douyin's discursive space, the rules and patterns of social practice are deeply imprinted with Douyin's media traces. Youth discourse expression is translated into specific social discourse through their practical engagement with Douyin media, thereby constructing a common meaning space for Douyin media where youth social activities unfold. As the most influential representative in the short video industry, Douyin's attributes and characteristics provide the technical and resource foundation for its penetration. The UGC production model satisfies users' self-expression needs, the 15-second video duration caters to fragmented media usage, and algorithmic recommendation technology enhances user stickiness. Integrating fragmented, trendy, and precise usage characteristics, Douyin shapes new social practice models in both space and text. While users "scroll Douyin" and engage in text production, they continuously construct the media logic of social interaction. The text content produced by youth and Douyin is deeply imprinted with Douyin's discursive attributes through the medium's translation, manifesting in social interaction as a specific social discourse system.

First, the strong connection between Douyin attributes and social discourse. Douyin's own media normativity creates corresponding constraints on the construction of its social discourse, serving as guidance and orientation for media translation. Douyin's development has consistently favored a youthful orientation, with relatively more dynamic text themes, content, and discourse expression methods, along with certain standards for video quality. Based on Douyin's positioning, its subsequent functional development has leaned toward youthful characteristics, laying the foundation for its social discourse construction. For example, filters, as one element of video production, have also become a mode of user interaction. Douyin's rich and diverse filter styles are deeply loved by youth users, and videos produced through specific filters form certain topic tags that trigger 联动 among users. Topic formation often brings corresponding discussions, with Douyin captions and comment section language styles, text abbreviations, and hot words becoming common discourse for user interaction. Therefore, Douyin's own media attributes have a strong connection with the formation of its social discourse, playing a regulative and guiding role in its content translation process.

Second, human practice and the formation of social discourse. Humans are the actors in social activities, and human practice is the key factor in constructing Douyin social discourse. When youth use Douyin, they naturally enter Douyin's media space, where viewing behavior is not merely recreational entertainment but also a learning of expression methods; performance is not simply a motivated act of self-presentation but also becomes a social paradigm under specific discourse. Humans are both expressers and receivers of discourse. Youth practices in social life construct social lifestyles and behavioral logics, while youth embodied practices with Douyin construct the ways of viewing and performing in Douyin space, representing the key to forming its social discourse. Under the rules of Douyin's media characteristics, youth production and communication practices are translated through the medium itself into specific social discourse, unfolding youth social practice activities within this discursive space and manifesting them in concrete texts.

Finally, the interembedding of media order and social behavior. In human social practice, there exist patterns of action with a certain degree of regularity and certainty that can be anticipated and summarized, known as order. The evolution of communication technology in recent decades has not only intensified social transformation but also created new spatial orders for social interaction represented by Douyin in its interaction with humans. As the primary audience for new media social platforms such as Douyin short videos, youth groups have subtly constructed the action order of internet virtual space while their interaction behaviors are also constrained and restricted by media order. Since new media platforms like Douyin are generated based on internet technology, breaking through the limitations of time, space, and outdated concepts on previous youth offline interaction forms, youth creativity and individuality have gained greater tolerance and respect in virtual space, and new interaction models have emerged accordingly. Physical presence is no longer a necessary condition for

establishing social relationships, making youth social interaction bolder and braver. In this new social ecology, media order improves the efficiency of youth social interaction. In previous interpersonal relationships, establishing stable social relationships required mutual empathy, but on Douyin, two-way interaction activities become one-way expressions, with liking, commenting, and sharing becoming important symbols of youth social intention. Meanwhile, youth with similar interests gather in the same virtual space, allowing interest-based social relationships to be established and stabilized, invisibly expanding the scope of youth group interaction. Therefore, platforms like Douyin cater to the psychology and characteristics of youth groups, achieving deeper integration with youth interaction behaviors.

Mediatized social interaction represents the reorganization of social relationships under media technology development, significantly impacting not only individual and group behaviors but also the reshaping of social and cultural structures. As one of the most stylistic, popular, and representative social media products today, Douyin connects the logical map of short video social interaction through three aspects: user text production, spatial construction and linkage, and media discourse translation. These three aspects encompass the tripartite forces of humans, technology, and media—the organizing power of mediatized social interaction.

Media are producers of social representation. Beneath the representation of shifting social models lies the adjustment and reconstruction of social interaction relationships. The evolution from language to electronic media has been accompanied by changes in human interaction models. In the era of oral communication, exchange occurred primarily face-to-face and synchronously, emphasizing human participation and presence. After the emergence of writing, this present interaction model gradually decomposed, and interaction began to break through temporal limitations, with intermediaries becoming prominent in social interaction. After the popularization of printing technology, the spatial and temporal boundaries of information dissemination were dissolved, with letters as an information presentation method enabling cross-regional, asynchronous interactive relationships. In the electronic communication era, the role of interaction media has become increasingly significant, with technical elements in interaction becoming key factors in social interaction. Short video social interaction falls within the category of mediatized social interaction, which represents a behavioral manifestation under media culture. This manifestation brings changes and reconstruction to social interaction relationships, and understanding this interactive relationship provides inspiration and reference for people's use of media in social practice.

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