

# The Relationship Between Social Short-Form Videos and Youth's Well-Being: It Depends on Usage Types and Content Categories

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Social short-form video platforms, a new form of social networking sites, are popular among youth. However, the influence of social networking sites on individuals' subjective well-being remains unrevealed. By using objective measures among Chinese youth, the present study ( $N = 1,254$ ) sought to investigate the relationship between different types of usage (i.e., passive use and active use of social short-form video platforms), different types of video content, and 2 outcome variables: affective well-being and cognitive well-being. The results revealed that watching videos (passive use) predicted reduced life satisfaction and reduced positive affect after controlling for age and gender, whereas posting online (active use) predicted enhanced life satisfaction. In contrast to Entertainment/Relaxation themed videos, watching People/Fashion themed videos predicted reduced life satisfaction. Additionally, our analysis showed that Chinese adolescents and young adults differed in social short-form video use. Compared with young adults, adolescents spent more time watching short-form videos and preferred Entertainment/Relaxation ones. They also gave more "likes" yet posted less often. These findings suggest that whether social short-form videos undermine or enhance subjective well-being is dependent on the video content people watch (e.g., Entertainment/Relaxation vs. People/Fashion) and the way they use the platform (i.e., active use vs. passive use).

## ***Public Policy Relevance Statement***

Social short-form video platforms, a new form of social networking sites (SNSs), have distinctive features from other SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This study suggested that time spent on watching social short-form videos predicted reduced life satisfaction and lower positive affect, whereas posting online predicted enhanced life satisfaction. Moreover, adolescents spent more time on this new form of SNSs than young adults in China.

**Keywords:** social short-form videos, well-being, social networking site, youth

Entertainment and networking on social networking sites (SNSs) seem to have become, for many, a central part of life. In 2020, approximately 3.6 billion Internet users are using social networks worldwide, and this number is still expected to grow (Statista Research Department, 2020b). Social short-form videos, a new form of online social media, have also gained great popularity among the public since its launch. The top app for social short-

form videos, Tik Tok, has more than 800 million monthly active users globally in 2020, and these users spend an average of 45 min per day watching and creating videos (Mediakix, 2020). China is one of the countries in which social short-form videos are widely popular. Among Chinese net citizens, the penetration rate of social short-form videos has reached up to 85.6% (China Internet Network Information Center, 2020), and many of these viewers are young people (QuestMobile, 2020).

Given the popularity of SNSs, the effects of SNS use on people's well-being have gained much attention (Kross et al., 2013; Orben et al., 2019; Wenninger et al., 2019). However, little is known about social short-form videos up to now. Identifying the relationship between social short-form videos and well-being has both theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, it helps to extend the knowledge on not only this new form of SNS but also the overall SNSs. It also helps researchers to acquire a deeper understanding of psychological influence of SNS use. Practically, as social short-form videos have infiltrated into many people's lives, exploring the effects of social short-form video use on well-being may help to provide these users with suggestions on how to make use of such platforms beneficially.

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It is worth noting that most studies on the influence of SNSs only focused on the frequency of use and relied heavily on self-reported information (Verduyn et al., 2017). With these facts taken into account, the current study drew on data sets retrieved from one of the most popular SNS platforms in China and aimed to address these gaps by examining how different usage types (i.e., active use vs. passive use) and content categories (i.e., Entertainment/Relaxation vs. People/Fashion) of social short-form videos were related to both adolescents' and young adults' well-being.

### Social Short-Form Videos on SNSs

As the use of smartphones and online social networks increases, social short-form videos have also developed rapidly (Vandersmissen et al., 2014). Short-form videos are usually between 6 s to several minutes in length, which sets them apart from traditional videos. Social short-form video platforms enable users to subscribe to each other, to comment on and "Like" others' videos, as well as to create their own videos with a few simple clicks. Vine is one of the first well-known applications focusing on social short-form videos. After being established, it topped 40 million users worldwide within 8 months (Vandersmissen et al., 2014). Kuaishou and Tik Tok are now the most popular short-form video applications in China, each with more than 400 million monthly active users in 2020 (QuestMobile, 2020). Due to the popularity of social short-form videos, the major SNSs, such as Facebook, Instagram, and China-based WeChat, have recently added video-sharing capabilities or launched their new apps for short-form videos.

This new, video-based form of SNSs may have a different psychological influence on users. Studies on traditional forms of SNSs have revealed that each platform yields unique motivations, gratifications, and usage intensity (Alhabash & Ma, 2017), which are closely related to individuals' well-being (Basilisco & Cha, 2015; Sagiglou & Greitemeyer, 2014). Research indicated that using image-based platforms (i.e., Instagram and Snapchat) would increase life satisfaction and happiness, whereas text-based media use (i.e., Twitter) had no such effect. Researchers proposed that this would be because image-based platforms offered a higher level of simulated social presence and intimacy. Therefore, it would be more likely for the viewers to experience the same emotions that the publishers felt or intended to evoke (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Another group of researchers found that highly visual social media was associated with internalizing symptoms in adolescents (Marengo et al., 2018). However, whether this new form of social networking, which is rich in both visual and auditory stimuli, leads to a differential influence on individuals remains unrevealed.

### Social Short-Form Videos and Well-Being

Subjective well-being refers to how people evaluate their life, and it covers two aspects (Diener et al., 2003): (a) cognitive judgment of satisfaction (i.e., life satisfaction) and (b) affective evaluation of moment-to-moment mood and emotions (i.e., affect). Subjective well-being connects with health, social relationships, and other valued outcomes (Diener et al., 2018). Considering that the frequency of social short-form video use is getting higher, understanding whether and how this new form of social networking will affect subjective well-being is essential.

Existing studies revealed both negative and positive associations between SNS use and well-being. Many studies have linked SNS use with a decreased level of well-being (Geraee et al., 2019; Kross et al., 2013; Twigg et al., 2020). For example, Kross et al. (2013) found that Facebook use predicted negative shifts on both components of subjective well-being in a 2-week experience sampling study. However, some studies found no relationship between SNS use and well-being (Lee et al., 2011; Utz & Breuer, 2017), and others yielded a positive association between the two (Kim & Shen, 2020; Lai et al., 2019).

These inconsistent findings might partially result from the methodological issue that many studies defined SNS use in broad terms (e.g., the frequency of total/overall usage), without identifying different types of usage. Actually, SNS usage can be classified into active and passive type (Thorisdottir et al., 2019). Active use refers to active engagement/interaction with a site (e.g., posting status updates); passive use involves consuming information without interacting with others or creating content (e.g., viewing posts without giving comments or "likes"). Recent research found that active and passive use of SNS had a different influence on well-being and mental health (for a review, see Orben, 2020). For instance, in an experimental study, participants were randomly assigned to the active-use or passive-use group and used Facebook for 10 min in the laboratory. Well-being was measured later with questionnaires at the end of the day. Results suggested that only passive Facebook use had a delayed, negative effect on people's affective well-being (Verduyn et al., 2015). Thorisdottir et al. (2019) found that passive use predicted greater negative affect among adolescents, whereas active use predicted decreased negative affect. Lin et al. (2020) also found a negative association between active use of SNSs and loneliness in Chinese undergraduates.

The different impacts between active use and passive use may be partly due to their differences in fulfilling users' needs. According to uses and gratifications theory, individuals engage in certain media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, social interaction, and information-seeking (Katz et al., 1974; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). As a result, SNS activities that fulfill their needs will benefit their psychological well-being (Kim & Shen, 2020). Compared with the media of the 20th century, modern SNSs are quite prominent in the aspect of interactivity. It is part of what makes SNSs so appealing to users today (Raza et al., 2020; Ruggiero, 2000; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). From this point of view, active use of SNSs involves frequent communication with other users, which satisfies individuals' need for social interaction, whereas passive use does not provide such function. Therefore, positive affect and life satisfaction may be increased through active use but not passive use.

In addition, although passive use of SNSs seems to satisfy other needs of users (e.g., information-seeking), it also puts individuals at the risk of social comparisons (Wang et al., 2017). Social comparison theory proposes that people always evaluate themselves through the process of comparison with others (Festinger, 1954). SNS platforms offer abundant chances for impression management, and individuals often present information exhibiting perfect happiness and ideal selves (Walther, 2007; Yau & Reich, 2019). As a result, viewing such information (i.e., passive use) can elicit upward social comparisons and envy among users easily,

which lead to a decline in self-esteem and well-being (Appel et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2016).

In general, based on uses and gratifications theory, social comparison theory, and the findings on other SNS platforms, we predicted that specific types of social short-form video use would relate to viewers' well-being in different manners. To be specific, active use would positively relate to well-being, whereas passive use would negatively relate to well-being (Hypothesis 1).

Apart from the frequency of specific types of SNS use, the content of videos watched by users may also be related to subjective well-being. In the current research, two categories of videos, namely, Entertainment/Relaxation and People/Fashion, were targeted. First, Entertainment/Relaxation category includes, but is not limited to, gaming videos, comedy videos, and pet-related videos. This category accounts for the majority of all video content and shows great popularity among users. More than 60% of videos on Vine belong to the comedy channel (Vandersmissen et al., 2014), and the entertainment theme is the most popular on Tik Tok (Statista Research Department, 2020a). Just as its name implies, Entertainment/Relaxation category may fulfill the needs for entertainment, relaxation, and so forth. Therefore, as reported by previous studies, videos featuring such contents contributed to the arousal of general positive affect, along with a decrease in negative affect (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2019; Oliver & Bartsch, 2011). For example, hedonic entertainment videos (e.g., funny videos) were associated with self-reported relaxation and resulted in increased vitality (Rieger et al., 2014). Later research found that elevating and gratitude-inspiring videos as well as pure funny videos reduced people's stress at work, and inspiring videos were also related to positive changes in vitality (an indicator of subjective well-being; Janicke-Bowles et al., 2019). In addition, by comparing preview and postview emotions, Myrick (2015) suggested that watching cat-related videos was associated with lower levels of negative emotions and higher levels of positive emotions. Given the existing evidence, we predicted that videos in Entertainment/Relaxation category would positively predict subjective well-being in the current study (Hypothesis 2a).

Second, People/Fashion category includes, but is not limited to, Internet-celebrities, stars, fashion, and luxurious possessions. These videos aim at self-presentation and show idealized lifestyles. According to a Chinese report, generation Y preferred posting "selfie" videos (Tik Tok, 2019). However, video content-creators not only would choose the most attractive scenes to post but also would add effects to those scenes for extra attractiveness. Research concerning Instagram, Facebook, or other SNSs showed that young people are now exposed to the most flattering depictions of friends, celebrities, and others (Barash et al., 2010; Hendrickse et al., 2017). This might lead to upward social comparisons (Wang et al., 2017), which would further elicit envy (Appel et al., 2016), body dissatisfaction (Hendrickse et al., 2017), and other negative psychological outcomes (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019). On the basis of social comparison theory and previous studies, we predicted that, despite its increasing popularity in social short-form video platforms, watching videos in People/Fashion category would negatively predict subjective well-being in the present study (Hypothesis 2b).

## The Use of SNSs by Adolescents and Young Adults

Adolescents and young adults are the best-represented online population (Yonker et al., 2015). For example, in China, more than 40% of net citizens are people aged 10 to 29 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2020). Moreover, youth are active in various SNS platforms, in which case it is similar in both China (Chinese Communist Youth League & China Internet Network Information Center, 2020; Wang et al., 2019) and other countries (e.g., America: Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Germany: Statista Research Department, 2020c). Therefore, studies of SNSs have also paid much attention to adolescents and young adults (Lin et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2020; Yau & Reich, 2019).

Although both adolescents and young adults are active in using SNS, they are found to differ in some ways. On the one hand, adolescents are considered to have greater fluency on new platforms, and they may be more open to new forms of SNS. On the other hand, age can be a strong determinant of individuals' SNS use frequency (Pittman & Reich, 2016). For example, due to their developing cognitive control and limited boundary-setting skills, adolescents seem to spend excessive time on the Internet easily (Kuss et al., 2013). To our knowledge, little is known about the role of age in the use of social short-form video platforms. Nevertheless, answering this question is necessary and meaningful. It helps to provide more information for parents, educators, and policymakers regarding the current situation of extensive social short-form video usage among young people. Given all that, we hoped to answer the research question: Do adolescents and young adults vary in social short-form video platform use?

## The Current Study

The current study focused on the use of social short-form video platforms as well as its influence on well-being in young people. We recruited participants aged 13 to 21 years (covering both adolescents and young adults), all of whom were users of a China-based social short-form video platform. The data of their life satisfaction, affect, and objective usage information on the platform were collected.

On the one hand, because the current research was, to the extent of our knowledge, the first to investigate young people's specific activities on social short-form video platforms (i.e., watching videos, giving "likes," and posting status), we hoped to answer this question:

*Research Question 1:* Do Chinese adolescents and young adults vary in social short-form video platform use?

On the other hand, given the existing theories and evidence, the current study put forward two hypotheses about the relationship between social short-form video use and well-being:

*Hypothesis 1:* Active use would positively predict subjective well-being, whereas passive use would negatively predict subjective well-being.

*Hypothesis 2:* Watching videos in Entertainment/Relaxation category would positively predict subjective well-being, whereas watching videos in People/Fashion category would negatively predict subjective well-being.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 1,589 Chinese participants aged 13 to 21 years were recruited through a link published on a China-based social short-form video platform. In all, 335 participants (21.08%) were excluded, as they either refused to provide their user ID or provided an invalid ID. The final sample included 596 adolescents (199 males and 397 females,  $M_{\text{age}} = 15.24$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ , range = 13–17) and 658 young adults (335 males and 323 females,  $M_{\text{age}} = 19.64$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ , range = 18–21). The Review Board at the authors' affiliation approved this study. Informed consent was presented to all participants on the first page of the online questionnaire.

### Procedure

As part of a research program, a survey was posted directly on a social short-form video platform in China to recruit participants who had experience of using this new form of SNS. The survey was posted from August 22nd, 2018. Users were invited to complete an anonymous online survey about life satisfaction, affect, and demographic information. To limit the age range in our research, participants were asked to report their age at the beginning, and only users under age 22 were asked to complete the survey. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they agreed to provide their user ID for us to retrieve their usage information on the platform (i.e., time spent watching videos, number of videos watched, number of “likes,” number of videos posted, and video contents). For participants who provided a valid ID, user data recorded from August 10th to 16th, 2018, was then collected from the database of the platform. Note that independent and dependent measures were obtained separately with a temporal lag in between to provide stronger evidence for the direction of the relationship and to explore the sustained effect of usage.

### Materials

#### Social Short-Form Video Use

Passive use was assessed by two indicators: (a) average time the user spent watching social short-form videos per day during the week (i.e., the week for data collection) and (b) the number of videos that the user fully watched per day. If the user closed a video before it ended, that video would be excluded.

Active use was assessed by another two indicators: (a) the average number of “likes” the user gave for others’ videos per day and (b) the total number of videos posted. Both of these two activities involve active engagement/interaction with others.

As for the content, all videos were classified into three categories (i.e., People/Fashion, Entertainment/Relaxation, and others) through three steps. First, each video had an initial tag (e.g., gaming videos, comedy, stars) assigned by the platform based on its content. Second, two coders categorized the initial 62 tags into the three categories above based on the categories’ definition. The intercoder agreement was 87.1%, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. In the end, People/Fashion and Entertainment/Relaxation categories contained eight and seven tags, respectively. Third, based on its tag, each video was then put into a matched category. For each participant, the proportion of videos watched in

each category was calculated (i.e., watched videos in each category/total watched videos) as a measure of viewed content. On average, for young adults, Entertainment/Relaxation accounted for 18.24% ( $SD = 9.63\%$ ), and People/Fashion accounted for 31.83% ( $SD = 11.00\%$ ). For adolescents, Entertainment/Relaxation and People/Fashion accounted for 19.86% ( $SD = 11.21\%$ ) and 30.23% ( $SD = 13.18\%$ ), respectively.

#### Life Satisfaction

The overall life satisfaction was assessed with Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale was designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one’s life (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life”). Participants were asked to rate on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher ratings indicated a higher level of life satisfaction. Internal consistencies in both samples were good (young adults:  $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ; adolescents:  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .83$ ).

#### Affect

The mood at the moment of response was assessed with Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale for Children (Laurent et al., 1999), which was derived from Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (Watson & Clark, 1994) in consideration of the minors’ ability to read and understand the items. A Chinese version (Wei et al., 2017) was developed later. Thus, participants in the current research rated 27 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*applies very little or not at all*) to 5 (*applies very much*). Following previous research (Sagivoglou & Greitemeyer, 2014), the items assessing negative affect ( $n = 15$ ) were reverse-scored and combined with positive affect items into one single score. This indicator was then referred to as “positive affect” in the current study. Higher values indicated a higher level of positive mood. Internal consistencies in both samples were good (young adults:  $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$ ; adolescents:  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ , Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .86$ ).

## Results

Analyses were conducted using SPSS 21.0. As the indicators of usage and viewed content were positively skewed, log-transformation was applied with the formula  $\ln(x + 1)$ .

The influence of age was analyzed via two methods. First, we examined age as a continuous variable. Second, we divided participants into young adults and adolescents as in the Participants section, in which it was consistent with other developmental frameworks. The results of both approaches are presented.

#### General Social Short-Form Video Platform Use

We explored the role of age in social short-form video platform use to answer our research question. First, bivariate correlations between age and social short-form video platform use were calculated, in which age was treated as a continuous variable. Age was negatively related to both of the passive use indicators, number of “likes,” as well as the proportion of Entertainment/Relaxation videos viewed. This indicated that younger people spent more time watching social short-form videos,  $r = -.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,

watched more videos,  $r = -.11, p < .001$ , clicked more “likes,”  $r = -.34, p < .001$ , and preferred Entertainment/Relaxation videos,  $r = -.10, p = .001$ , to a greater extent. Meanwhile, age was positively related to number of videos posted,  $r = .24, p < .001$ , and the proportion of People/Fashion videos watched,  $r = .12, p < .001$ . This indicated that older people posted more and preferred People/Fashion videos more.

We then further examined the difference between age groups by performing independent samples  $t$  test. This analysis revealed that adolescents spent more time on social short-form videos per day,  $t(1252) = 3.32, p = .001, d = 0.19$ , watched more videos,  $t(1252) = 2.78, p = .006, d = 0.16$ , clicked more “likes,”  $t(1252) = 10.93, p < .001, d = 0.62$ , and watched more Entertainment/Relaxation videos,  $t(1252) = 2.69, p = .007, d = 0.15$ , than young adults, whereas young adults posted more videos,  $t(1252) = -8.42, p < .001, d = 0.48$ , and watched more People/Fashion videos,  $t(1252) = -2.67, p = .008, d = 0.15$ . Mean scores and standard deviations of frequency of use and viewed content are presented in Table 1.

To investigate the role of gender, we performed independent samples  $t$  test (see Table 1). The results revealed no significant difference between boys and girls in the two indicators of passive use,  $t_{\text{time}}(1252) = 0.01, p = .99; t_{\text{number}}(1252) = -0.05, p = .96$ , but girls displayed higher levels of active use,  $t_{\text{like}}(1252) = -4.30, p < .001, d = 0.25; t_{\text{post}}(1252) = -4.58, p < .001, d = 0.25$ . In addition, girls watched more People/Fashion videos,  $t(1252) = -9.15, p < .001, d = 0.52$ , whereas boys watched more Entertainment/Relaxation videos,  $t(1252) = 12.15, p < .001, d = 0.69$ .

## Passive/Active Use, Viewed Content, and Well-Being

We first performed independent samples  $t$  test on the scores of life satisfaction and positive affect between excluded and remaining participants. The results revealed no significant difference between the two groups on either life satisfaction,  $t(1587) = -1.25, p = .73$ , or positive affect,  $t(1587) = 0.56, p = .87$ .

## Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix. In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that active use would positively predict subjective well-being, whereas passive use would negatively predict subjective well-being. In line with this hypothesis concerning passive use, more time spent on social short-form videos was associated with a lower level of positive mood,  $r = -.13, p < .001$ , and life

satisfaction,  $r = -.09, p = .002$ . In contrast to the predictions about active use, no significant relationship was found between the two indicators (i.e., number of “likes” and posting) and subjective well-being.

In Hypothesis 2, we predicted that watching videos in Entertainment/Relaxation category would positively predict subjective well-being, whereas watching videos in People/Fashion category would negatively predict subjective well-being. As predicted in this hypothesis, watching more Entertainment/Relaxation videos was associated with higher life satisfaction,  $r = .06, p = .046$ , whereas watching People/Fashion videos was associated with lower life satisfaction,  $r = -.08, p = .003$ . However, in contrast to the predictions, no significant relationship was found between content category and positive affect (see Table 2).

## Regression Analysis

Two linear regressions were then carried out to examine and compare the effects of types of usage and content of videos, after accounting for age (as a categorical variable) and gender, on life satisfaction and positive affect, respectively (see Table 3). In both regressions, age and gender were entered in Step 1, types of usage in Step 2, and viewed content in Step 3. Predictors were entered in the current order to explore whether the content of videos could predict well-being besides frequency of use.

**Life Satisfaction.** In Step 1, gender and age were entered as control variables. Age contributed significantly to Model 1 ( $\beta = -.09, p = .002$ ), and the model accounted for 0.9% of the variance in life satisfaction.

In Step 2, the indicators of passive and active use were entered. Given that time spent on social short-form videos and number of videos watched were strongly related,  $r = .98, p < .001$ , and both indicated passive use, the regression only included time spent to avoid multicollinearity. Both indicators of active use were included, as they were not significantly related,  $r = -.04, p = .18$ , and reflected different aspects of active use. Model 2 explained 2.5% of the variance and constituted a significant increase in variance explained ( $R^2$  change = .02,  $p < .001$ ). Consistent with Hypothesis 1, time spent on social short-form videos significantly predicted lower life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.11, p < .001$ ), and number of videos posted predicted higher life satisfaction ( $\beta = .07, p = .02$ ). Age and gender remained significant predictors of life satisfaction.

In Step 3, content of videos was added into analysis. Model 3 explained 3.4% of the variance and constituted a significant in-

**Table 1**  
Means and Standard Deviations Grouped by Age and Gender

Variable	Time spent watching (min)	Number of videos watched	Number of “likes”	Number of videos posted	Entertainment/Relaxation (%)	People/Fashion (%)
<i>Adolescent, N = 596</i>						
All	80.69 (49.78)	138.17 (88.76)	26.9 (39.35)	13.06 (23.53)	19.86 (11.21)	30.23 (13.18)
Male	79.97 (49.36)	138.92 (90.69)	21.12 (34.04)	8.75 (16.78)	27.17 (12.64)	24.63 (11.38)
Female	81.05 (50.05)	137.79 (87.90)	29.80 (41.50)	15.22 (26.02)	16.20 (8.28)	33.04 (13.14)
<i>Young adult, N = 658</i>						
All	69.57 (43.22)	120.86 (77.69)	12.66 (24.78)	27.53 (42.21)	18.24 (9.62)	31.83 (11.00)
Male	70.36 (42.42)	121.19 (75.88)	12.31 (24.20)	22.34 (39.52)	20.37 (9.82)	29.44 (11.05)
Female	68.75 (44.08)	120.51 (79.65)	13.03 (25.40)	32.91 (44.26)	16.02 (8.90)	34.31 (10.40)

**Table 2**  
*Correlations Between Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Positive affect	—							
2. Life satisfaction	.47***	—						
3. Time spent watching (min)	-.13***	-.09**	—					
4. Number of videos watched	-.12***	-.08**	.98***	—				
5. Number of “likes”	-.04	.04	.34***	.32***	—			
6. Number of videos posted	-.01	.04	-.03	-.04	-.04	—		
7. People/Fashion	-.02	-.08**	-.20***	-.19***	-.09**	.17***	—	
8. Entertainment/Relaxation	.01	.06*	.22***	.22***	.09**	-.13***	-.57***	—

Note. N = 1,254.

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001.

crease in variance explained ( $R^2$  change = .01,  $p$  = .003). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, watching People/Fashion category significantly predicted lower life satisfaction ( $\beta$  = -.09,  $p$  = .007). However, contrary to the hypothesis, watching Entertainment/Relaxation category did not predict life satisfaction ( $\beta$  = .02,  $p$  = .61). Age, time spent, and number of videos posted remained significant predictors, whereas gender became nonsignificant.

**Positive Affect.** The same process was conducted with positive affect regarded as the dependent variable. In Model 1, no predictor was significant. In Model 2, with gender and age accounted for, time spent on social short-form videos remained the only significant predictor and had a negative association with positive affect ( $\beta$  = -.13,  $p$  < .001;  $R^2$  change = .02,  $p$  < .001), in which it explained 1.7% of the variance. Model 3 did not significantly explain more variance than Model 2. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, neither Entertainment/Relaxation videos nor People/Fashion videos significantly predicted positive affect. However, time spent on videos remained a significant predictor, which was consistent with Hypothesis 1. The same models with age (as a continuous variable) entered in Step 1 were analyzed. There were no changes in significant levels of well-being predictors.

Findings from regression analysis generally supported and extended results in the correlation analysis. In line with our hypotheses, passive use of social short-form videos predicted reduced life satisfaction and positive affect, whereas active use, posting videos in particular, predicted enhanced life satisfaction.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to examine how social short-form video platform use related to subjective well-being in Chinese youth. Passive use, active use, and viewed content were examined with objective indicators of usage. Despite the fact that social short-form videos currently have billions of users and become one of the leading contents in social media (Wochit Team, 2016), little research has examined the psychological effects of social short-form videos so far. To our knowledge, this was the first study to investigate its predicting effects on subjective well-being. As hypothesized, age and gender were each associated with video platform use. Most importantly, passive use significantly predicted a lower level of positive affect and life satisfaction. Active use, number of videos posted in particular, predicted a higher level of life satisfaction, whereas watching People/Fashion videos predicted reduced life satisfaction.

## The Effects of Age and Gender on Social Short-Form Video Platform Use

Both adolescents and young adults are active in SNS platforms (Chinese Communist Youth League & China Internet Network Information Center, 2020; Wang et al., 2019). However, few studies have investigated the difference between these two age groups directly. In the present research, results revealed that Chi-

**Table 3**  
*Linear Regression Models on Life Satisfaction and Positive Affect*

Predictor	Life satisfaction						Positive affect					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3		Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Age	-.09**	.08	-.10***	.09	-.09**	.09	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04	.04
Gender	-.06	.09	-.07*	.09	-.04	.09	.00	.04	.00	.04	.02	.04
Time spent watching (min)			-.11***	.06	-.13***	.06			-.13***	.03	-.14***	.03
Number of “likes”			.06	.04	.05	.04			.01	.02	.01	.02
Number of videos posted			.07*	.03	.08**	.03			-.02	.01	-.01	.01
Entertainment/Relaxation					.02	.62					.02	.29
People/Fashion					-.09**	.56					-.05	.26
$R^2$		.009		.025		.034		.002		.017		.020
$R^2$ change		.009**		.016***		.009**		.002		.016***		.003

Note. N = 1,254. Age functions as a categorical variable.

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001.

nese adolescents spent more time on social short-form videos and watched more Entertainment videos, whereas young adults posted more. This could be interpreted in relation to existing literature. Research found that the possibility of being highly excessive users was predicted by reduced self-control (Blinka et al., 2015). Meanwhile, adolescents' impulse control was relatively immature compared with adults (Casey et al., 2008), and their ability in cognitive control would be reduced under emotional arousal (Cohen et al., 2016). Thus, once adolescents started watching social short-form videos, they might feel difficult to control themselves and to quit these applications. Furthermore, status updating and posting are activities that accomplish self-presentation—one of the major motivations of SNS use (Seidman, 2013). Research indicated that adolescents were likely to exhibit an interesting, likable, and attractive impression of themselves (Yau & Reich, 2019). However, adolescents in China face great academic pressure (Li et al., 2019) and spend much of their leisure time at school for studying. Thus, lack of time and favorable content may limit their posting activities.

The current findings indicated that gender also played a role in SNS use. Specifically, females displayed more active use of social short-form video platforms. Previous research showed that women posted more public messages and photos and sent more private messages (Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012), as well as provided more public replies (i.e., "likes" and comments; Joiner et al., 2014). This might result from different motivations of SNS use. Females tended to use SNS for connecting and communicating with others, whereas males used it for gathering information (Junco, 2013b; Muscanell & Guadagno, 2012). Besides, the current research showed that Chinese females watched more People/Fashion videos, whereas males watched more Entertainment/Relaxation videos.

### Social Short-Form Video Platform Use and Well-Being

This study contributes to a growing literature suggesting that active and passive use of SNS have a different influence on well-being. Consistent with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Wang et al., 2017), passive use predicted a lower level of positive affect as well as life satisfaction after controlling for age and gender. However, contrary to our finding, Verduyn et al. (2015) conducted 2 studies and found that passive use was only related to affective well-being. One possible explanation might be that the previous research and the current research used different methods. For example, well-being was assessed shortly after using Facebook in their first study, while in the current study, well-being was assessed one week later. Life satisfaction is considered a relatively long-term and general concept (Pavot & Diener, 2009); thus, some delay may be necessary for the influence to take place. Besides, in their second study, passive use was self-reported with a single question. Self-report survey tended to be an inaccurate measure of SNS usage (Burke & Kraut, 2014; Junco, 2013a; Scharkow, 2016). It is also possible that passive social short-form video use has an additional influence on life satisfaction compared with Facebook usage. Nevertheless, as the present study did not compare video-based to text-based platforms, future studies are needed to confirm this hypothesis.

For active use, the number of videos posted predicted a higher level of life satisfaction. The positive influence of posting on

well-being was consistent with the previous studies that found posting status on Facebook was negatively related to loneliness (Deters & Mehl, 2013) and increased positive affect (Bayer et al., 2018). This might be because users' need for social interaction was satisfied through active use (Lin et al., 2020; Verduyn et al., 2017). However, although both posting videos and clicking "likes" were considered as active use of SNS, the current results suggested that they had different effects, as number of "likes" did not predict subjective well-being. One possible explanation is that people click "likes" simply to show the presence or social support without actually bothering to know what the posted content is (Basalingappa et al., 2016), whereas posting connects more with self-disclosure (Bazarova & Choi, 2014) and needs more time and effort (Burke & Kraut, 2014). Consequently, the psychological effects of posting videos would be more obvious.

Besides, as expected, Entertainment/Relaxation videos were positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas People/Fashion videos were negatively associated with life satisfaction. These results might imply that Entertainment/Relaxation videos satisfied users' needs (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2019; Sundar & Limperos, 2013), whereas People/Fashion ones triggered upward social comparisons (Sherlock & Wagstaff, 2019; Wang et al., 2017). Nevertheless, none of the two categories was significantly related to positive affect. In Sagioglou and Greitemeyer's (2014) study, they found that general Facebook usage was not significantly correlated with mood and suggested a short-term effect of using SNSs on affect. As we measured both affect and life satisfaction 1 week later, the influence of viewed content on affect could have attenuated. Meanwhile, self-report might also impede the detection of subtle changes in affect. However, given that only passive use significantly predicted positive affect in regression analysis, our results imply that passive use might have prolonged effects compared with active use and video contents.

It is noteworthy that the relationship between SNS use and well-being is not without another possibility (Luo & Hancock, 2020; Wang et al., 2018). For example, mood management theory suggested an inverse impact (Zillmann, 1988), which meant that individuals might adjust SNS use according to their mood (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014). However, in the current study, it is more likely that SNS use affects individuals' subjective well-being. On the one hand, negative mood would lead to less exposure to upward comparisons based on mood management perspective (Johnson & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2014), which would then lead to a positive relationship between subjective well-being and watching People/Fashion videos. Nevertheless, the relationship was negative in this study. On the other hand, we measured self-reported subjective well-being 1 week after short-form video use. Therefore, it is more reasonable that well-being is the effect instead of the cause in the current research.

### Significance

This study addressed several gaps in the literature. First, it uncovered the differences in social short-form video use between adolescents and young adults, at least for the Chinese population. Compared with young adults, adolescents spent more time watching short-form videos and preferred Entertainment/Relaxation ones. They also gave more "likes" yet posted less often. Second, it focused on the relationship between specific types of social short-

form video use and well-being. Not only did passive use and active use have differential impacts on subjective well-being, the two indicators of active use (i.e., number of “likes” clicked and videos posted) also had a different influence due to their specific characteristics. Third, log data were used instead of self-reported information. Many researchers suggested using direct observational data for behaviors on SNS to increase validity and minimize shared method variance (Deters & Mehl, 2013; Ellis et al., 2019). Objective measures in the current study, including the exact amount of time spent on SNS, number of “likes” and posting as well as video contents viewed, shed light on the complex association between SNS use and well-being.

The current study has both theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, it helps to deepen the understanding of social short-form videos and the relationship between SNSs and well-being. For instance, our results provide an opportunity for researchers to comprehend social short-form video use from a developmental perspective. Although both age groups were young people in the current study, Chinese adolescents and young adults were significantly different in many aspects of usage. Moreover, the findings also indicated that, when exploring psychological influence of SNS use, future studies and related theories should take different usage types (i.e., passive use and active use) and content categories into consideration instead of thinking of SNS use as a whole.

Practically, social short-form videos are quite popular among Chinese adolescents and young adults (Chinese Communist Youth League & China Internet Network Information Center, 2020; QuestMobile, 2020). This new SNS form is changing many young people’s way of getting information. Through exploring the situation of social short-form video use and its relationship with well-being, the current study might help to provide advice for parents, educators, and the users themselves. For example, we found watching People/Fashion themed videos predicted reduced life satisfaction, which indicated that young people should probably watch less People/Fashion themed videos on social short-form video platforms. Besides, adolescents spent more time watching short-form videos than young adults. It is in line with the previous research suggesting that adolescents appeared to spend excessive time on the Internet (Kuss et al., 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for parents and educators to keep their eyes on adolescents’ watching time.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Although the current research provides a novel understanding of the association between social short-form video platform use and subjective well-being, it does come with limitations. First, the effect size in the current study was relatively small. However, it would not deny the explored relationship between variables of interest (Kross et al., 2013; Myrick, 2015). Subjective well-being is a complex concept (Pavot & Diener, 2009); it is possible that one single factor only explains part of its variance. In addition, individual differences (Macrynikola & Miranda, 2019) and national contexts (Boer et al., 2020) are possible factors to influence the relationship between SNS use and well-being. According to these possible reasons, follow-up studies may take individual differences and other factors into consideration.

Second, although there was a time gap between measures of social short-form video use and measures of well-being, each

variable was measured only once. Therefore, the data did not support a cross-lagged panel analysis to make the causal direction more persuasive. Besides, the time gap was not large (i.e., 1 week). Thus, stronger evidence is needed to support the direction of the relationship between social short-form video use and well-being and to support the sustained effect of usage. For a more robust conclusion, future research may adopt a larger time gap and measure both independent and dependent variables at each time point.

Third, although different types of social short-form video use and content were analyzed, the current study did not reveal the mechanism underneath. Several factors (e.g., envy: Appel et al., 2016; meaningless: Yuen et al., 2019) may help to explain why passive use as well as People/Fashion videos undermine life satisfaction. Thus, further studies are needed to improve our understanding of this issue.

Fourth, building on the present results, further research can examine whether these findings remain valid in other age groups and other countries. On the one hand, although young people are major users of SNSs, a considerably large number of users are from other age groups as well. For example, in China, more than 15% of social short-form video users are over 40 years old (QuestMobile, 2020). On the other hand, this study only focused on Chinese users. However, social short-form videos are also popular in many other countries (Mediakix, 2020). It is not clear whether these results can be generalized to other groups. Therefore, future studies may further explore how social short-form videos influence people on a larger scale.

## Conclusion

The present study contributes to the growing body of evidence assessing the psychological influence of SNS use, focusing specifically on social short-form videos. Chinese adolescents showed more passive use and clicked “likes” more, whereas young adults posted more. Crucially, more passive use predicted reduced life satisfaction and lower positive affect, whereas active use (posting videos in particular) positively predicted life satisfaction after controlling for age and gender. In addition, content mattered in a way that watching more People/Fashion videos predicted lower life satisfaction. The current work highlights the need to analyze the psychological outcomes of social short-form video use and the importance of examining different aspects of SNS use. Besides, these results may help Chinese parents, educators, and policymakers to consider related measurements in education.

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