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The Younger, the TikToker: Investigating Social Media Ad Platforms for Young American and Chinese Users

Yunmi Choi^a, Sungwook Shim^b and Minhee Jeon^b

^aIndiana University Southeast, New Albany, IN, USA; ^bHanyang University, Ansan, South Korea

ABSTRACT

With video-based social media platforms such as TikTok and Douyin gaining increasing popularity among young people, it is imperative for advertisers and social media practitioners to understand the role of these platforms before placing an advertisement. This experimental study examined four social media platforms (TikTok and Facebook for American users, and Douyin and WeChat for Chinese users) to analyze how young social media users perceive advertisements on each platform. The findings showed that social media users in the US are more critical of video advertisements on TikTok than on Facebook. In addition, the study found that American users are more generous than their Chinese counterparts while rating the personalities featured in advertised brands.

KEYWORDS

TikTok; Douyin; social media advertising; brand personality; brand youngness; willingness to share; purchase intention

Introduction

Since the launch of TikTok in 2016, the platform has gained widespread popularity globally. As of July 2023, TikTok had over 1.7 billion global users, of which 122.05 million users are in the United States (Ceci, 2023). Importantly, 28% of TikTok users are under the age of 18, and 38% are aged between 19 and 29 (Ruby, 2023). Engagement with TikTok has been increasing significantly, with younger audiences focusing on entertainment content by using short-form videos and user participation with interactions. Other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, offer to post video content on their platforms. However, users engage with Facebook to remain in touch with friends and family or use Twitter to obtain news resources (Haenlein et al., 2020) rather than for entertainment purposes. Brands attempting to target younger audiences for growth should use platforms like TikTok.

Despite the widespread popularity of TikTok among young people, there is limited scholarly effort to understand the role of this relatively new social media platform in the advertising field. Considering that TikTok

primarily targets younger audience, would it be more effective to place ads on this platform than older social media platforms such as Facebook? Since TikTok is originally from China, do Chinese social media users react in the same way as American users?

To deepen an understanding of TikTok as an advertising platform, this study first investigated the perceived brand personalities of an advertised brand on TikTok targeting young audiences, based on Aaker's (1997) Big Five brand personality traits. Second, to determine whether TikTok differs from other social media platforms, Facebook was chosen for comparison. Third, the study examined the effect of TikTok (or Douyin in China) on young Chinese audiences, given TikTok's global popularity. Considering that Facebook is not available in China, the researchers chose WeChat for Chinese participants for comparison. Finally, to understand the effect of social media, its influence on brand youngness, attitude toward ads, brands, and even the platform, willingness to share and purchase intention were measured.

The findings are expected to provide useful information for social media marketing and advertising practitioners to strategically plan how to use this relatively new social media platform to target younger audiences.

Literature review

Brand personalities and brand engagement

After Aaker (1997) developed the personality of brands with the Big Five personality factors (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness), numerous academic researchers applied these brand personality factors to business (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). Considering the growing influence of brand personality on personal life, Fournier (1998) posited that humans tend to perceive brands as relationship partners. Gilmore (1919) explained that humans can perceive non-humans as having human characteristics, making anthropomorphization possible. Giving a human personality to brands is an example of anthropomorphization (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007). Similarly, Aaker's Big Five personality tool can effectively measure non-humans such as brands (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013).

Even though many other personality measurements are available, Aaker's (1997) scales were predominantly applied to various studies (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). Aaker developed the five dimensions with 15 facets (sincerity: *down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful*; excitement: *daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date*; competence: *reliable, intelligent, successful*; sophistication: *upper class, charming*; ruggedness: *outdoorsy, tough*). These facets are rooted in 42 more detailed items.

For example, the *spirited* trait is measured with “*spirited*,” “*cool*,” and “*young*.”

Studying brand personality in social media is not new. Bernritter et al. (2022) determined a negative relationship between brands endorsed on social media and consumers’ self-evaluation. Consumers who endorse a certain brand on social media subsequently negatively adjust their self-evaluation of traits reflecting the brand’s key personality traits. This effect is evident only when consumers endorse the brand (i.e. by “liking” or “following” it), but not when they just visit the brand’s social media page. Therefore, the interactive engagement of social media users is crucial. As contended by Roy and Banerjee (2022), a bibliometric analysis of brand personality, the congruence between consumer personality and brand personality, has yet to be explored. However, studies have provided evidence that consumers naturally use human personality characteristics and traits to refer to brands (Ghorbani et al., 2022).

Several studies have examined social media brand engagement. Osei-Frimpong et al. (2022) provided insights into the interplay between the motivational factors underlying social media brand engagement. The study suggests that sociopsychological gratification variables (perceived homophily, perceived critical mass, and self-status seeking) drive consumer engagement with brand pages and communities on social media. Furthermore, Ran and Wan (2023) demonstrated that for a sincere brand, a sophisticated brand ritual elicits higher consumer purchase than a simple brand ritual only *via* the process of enhanced enjoyment because its sincerity weakens the salience of the process of reduced autonomy. In contrast, for an exciting brand, a sophisticated brand ritual elicits fewer consumer purchases than a simple brand ritual *via* the process of enhanced enjoyment but reduced autonomy.

In this study, Aaker’s Big Five personality factors were applied to TikTok and Douyin to examine young social media users’ brand perceptions and engagement with new social media advertising platforms.

Social media in the United States—TikTok

According to Bursztynsky (2021), TikTok officially has over one billion active monthly users. What makes TikTok conspicuous in this competitive social media market is that approximately 60% of its users are Generation Zs born in 1997–2012, known as trendsetters. Nover (2020) showed that TikTok users in the US are aged 10–29, of which 32.5% of users were aged 10–19 and 29.5% aged 20–29. These users continue to adhere to TikTok as they grow older.

If brands are looking to target audiences aged below 30, TikTok is unavoidably the social media platform they need to step in. With TikTok’s

fast-growing number of younger users, it is important to understand how these consumers perceive ads placed on TikTok compared to social media platforms.

Facebook

Founded in 2004, Facebook is the most popular social media platform worldwide. While TikTok is gaining popularity among younger audiences, Facebook, with a large number of users in the US, is the number one social media platform for advertisers. According to a report from Pew Research (2019), 68% of US adults use Facebook for online news. Facebook users are from the general population aged 18–65, mostly averaging 18–44 globally (Statista, 2021).

Social media in China

China has the largest social media market worldwide, with highly engaged and mobile-savvy users. China's market composition differs considerably from the rest of the world. In light of the Chinese government's internet censorship driven by the "Great Firewall," leading global social media players, including Facebook and YouTube, are banned in the country. Nevertheless, except that each social media site is a domestically-engineered platform, China's mediascape in terms of social networking almost mirrors the rest of the world (Thomala, 2020). Similar to American social media, Chinese social media users share streaming content by posting about their everyday lives with others (Yang et al., 2016). Lien and Cao (2014) determined that Chinese consumers' decision-making tends to be influenced by products or services that a friend or relative recommends on the social media site WeChat. However, TikTok, also known as Douyin in China, has changed people's perceptions regarding social media in China.

TikTok or Douyin is a video-sharing social networking service owned by the Chinese company ByteDance. The platform was used to create a variety of short-form videos with durations ranging from 3 s to 1 min (3 min for some users). Douyin was originally introduced in China in 2016. The following year, TikTok was launched as an international version of Douyin. TikTok became available worldwide after merging with another Chinese social media service, Musical.ly, in 2018 (Graziani, 2018).

If the unique proposition of these platforms is its young users', one can question whether TikTok and Douyin can create different perceptions for advertised brands compared to other social media sites. Since

there is a lack of research on this topic, this study asks the following question:

RQ1: Do Chinese and American social media users perceive brand personalities differently when advertised on Douyin/TikTok compared to WeChat/Facebook?

Social media users in different age groups

Haenlein et al. (2020) noted that using multiple social media platforms is still recommended to social media practitioners, but the researchers cautioned that brands need to understand each platform's uniqueness and user base first, and then articulate their strategies on individual social media platforms. They also pointed out that TikTok is important in the current market given its younger user base and also because it offers more entertainment value with a richer content format compared to Facebook. Young social media users visit Facebook to interact with older family members and friends. However, that is typically the only reason for Facebook usage. To interact with the same generation, younger users spend time on TikTok.

Essentially, there are certain barriers to using social media, even among younger audiences. Bhandari et al. (2022) found that urban users may be at a higher risk of privacy infringement on social media than their rural counterparts. They also determined that young social media users, regardless of their location, are not reluctant to engage on social media. As TikTok offers entertainment content, younger users increasingly congregate on the platform because they find it engaging.

In the wake of TikTok and Douyin having created a space for younger users, the current study proposes that these sites can produce younger images on ads compared to Facebook in the US and WeChat in China.

H1: Young American social media users perceive brand characteristics as younger when ads are shown on TikTok compared to Facebook.

H2: Young Chinese social media users perceive brand characteristics as younger when ads are shown on Douyin compared to WeChat.

Attitudes toward social media ads

According to Wu (2019), American journalists demonstrated different engagement tendencies depending on the type of social media. Younger journalists (aged below 30) as well as their older counterparts (older than 50) engaged on Twitter had a more negative attitude toward social media, while middle-aged journalists (aged between 30 and 50) engaged with Twitter presented positive attitudes toward social media overall. Interestingly, journalists with greater engagement with Facebook regardless of their age displayed a more negative attitude toward social media.

As Wu (2019) has indicated, it is imperative to focus on the influence of age on social media usage to deepen our understanding of these users. TikTok has been neglected even though it has become popular with younger audiences. Therefore, this study proposes that TikTok and Douyin will produce more positive attitudes toward ads, advertised brands, and even social media platforms when ads are featured on their platforms, compared to ads on Facebook in the US and WeChat in China.

H3: Young American social media users have a more positive attitude toward a) ads b) brands, and c) social media platforms when ads are featured on TikTok compared to Facebook.

H4: Young Chinese social media users have a more positive attitude toward a) ads b) brands, and c) social media platforms when ads are shown in Douyin compared to WeChat.

Several studies have examined the relationship between brand personality and attitudes toward advertising and brands. Lee and Cha (2018) discovered that social media brand personality factors positively influenced brand loyalty; however, these effects differed among social media types. Interestingly, the relationship between social media type and attitudes toward ads is fully mediated by brand personality, which plays different roles in symbolic and functional involvement. Feeling-oriented brand personalities influence brand attitude in high symbolic involvement, and thinking-oriented brand personalities influence brand attitude in high functional involvement (Lee, 2006). Moreover, Azevedo and Farhangmehr, (2005) determined that consumers had a favorable response (attitude toward an ad and brand) toward a print ad of a brand with a personality congruent with their self-concept. Jiao et al. (2022) claimed that consumers had a more favorable attitude when the brand personality is sincere and argument quality is strong. Kim and Sung (2013) determined that the interaction between brand personality and regulatory-focused messages influenced the effectiveness of ads. Freling et al. (2011) found that brand personality has a positive influence on product evaluation and that subjects exposed to a brand's personality had a significantly greater number of brand associations.

As earlier scholars have found, brand personality can affect attitudes toward social media advertising. Therefore, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ2: Do Aaker's Big Five brand personalities have any mediating effect on attitudes toward ads or brands when young users use TikTok/Douyin?

Intention to disseminate and purchase intention

Sharing has become one of the most important social media functions (Sohn, 2009). As Robben and Verhallen (1994) discussed, giving away

resources coincides with the perception of their value. Specifically, providing a resource with high value brings a positive response, while those with low-value leads to negative reactions. The willingness of social media users to share and disseminate ads on a particular platform may indicate that they are expecting a positive response from other social media users. Considering that TikTok and Douyin, with a younger user base, match younger audience usage, this study proposes that these platforms may motivate users to share ads compared with Facebook and WeChat.

H5: Young American social media users have greater intention to disseminate ads when they are shown on TikTok than on Facebook.

H6: Young Chinese social media users have a greater intention to disseminate ads when they are shown on Douyin than on WeChat.

Numerous scholars have examined purchase intentions in terms of the effects of social media advertising. Chakraborty and Paul (2023) found that all consumption values influence brand love and confirmed the mediating role of purchase intention in brand love. Chakraborty (2021) earlier found a moderating effect of visibility on intent to purchase on online ordering apps. Later, Chakraborty et al. (2022) determined a significant association between functional, social, conditional, and epistemic values and usage intentions. Furthermore, visibility mediated the relationship between consumption value and usage intention in food delivery apps (FDAs). Verma et al. (2023) also found that consumer emotions and feelings toward FDAs have a significant relationship with customers' repeated purchases and viral recommendations. These studies have found that purchase intention can increase when consumers' expected values meet in a mobile setting, including social media.

Given that TikTok and Douyin have a younger user base, brands targeting younger audiences increasingly place ads on these social media platforms. This study hypothesizes that TikTok and Douyin will bring about higher purchase intentions with a greater possibility of matching their target audience than Facebook and WeChat.

H7: Young American social media users increasingly tend to purchase products when ads are shown on TikTok than Facebook.

H8: Young Chinese social media users increasingly tend to purchase advertised products when ads are shown in Douyin than on WeChat.

Finally, the researchers questioned whether the time spent on TikTok or Douyin influenced how users perceived social media platforms. Accordingly, this study asks the following research question:

RQ3: Do heavy TikTok/Douyin users perceive brand characteristics younger when exposed to ads on these sites than light TikTok/Douyin users?

In sum, [Figure 1](#) shows the conceptual model of this study.

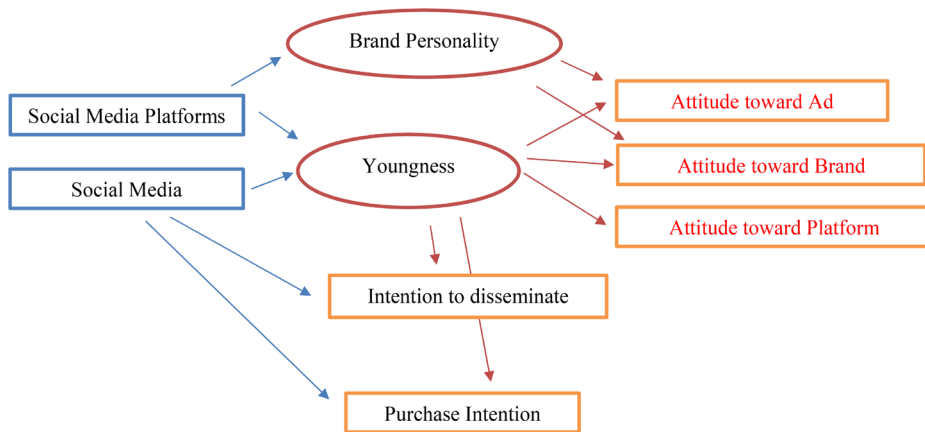


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

Method

To examine the hypotheses and research questions, the researchers conducted an online survey in the US and China in March 2021, involving 494 traditional college students aged between 18 and 24 who were social media users in China ($N=296$) and the US ($N=198$). They were recruited based on their social media usage (they must have used TikTok/Douyin/Facebook/WeChat previously) and age. Since collection of samples from minors was not permitted, this study restricted “young” social media users to the age group 18–24, which falls within the Generation Z cohort (born after 1997).

The respondents were invited to be part of one of the following four: video ad shown on TikTok, Facebook, Douyin, and WeChat. American participants took TikTok ($n=107$) and Facebook ($n=91$), while Chinese respondents participated in Douyin ($n=149$) and WeChat ($n=147$). The survey questionnaire was written in English and later translated into Chinese by native Chinese speakers. The translated survey questionnaire was back-translated into English to ensure correct translation.

The researchers developed four video ad stimuli for each of the online surveys (Figure 2). All the video ads were presented with the same fictitious digital camera brand, Optimax, to avoid preexisting brand bias. Digital camera was chosen because college students may be tech-savvy, but may not be familiar with digital cameras, thereby preventing the development of brand loyalty toward any particular digital camera brand. Instead of digital cameras, most college students use smartphones to capture pictures and videos. The video included a 10-second ad with fast-beat background music and various high-quality pictures taken from a digital camera. Since Optimax is not a real brand, no camera images are displayed in the ad. Only high-quality pictures were inserted in the video and

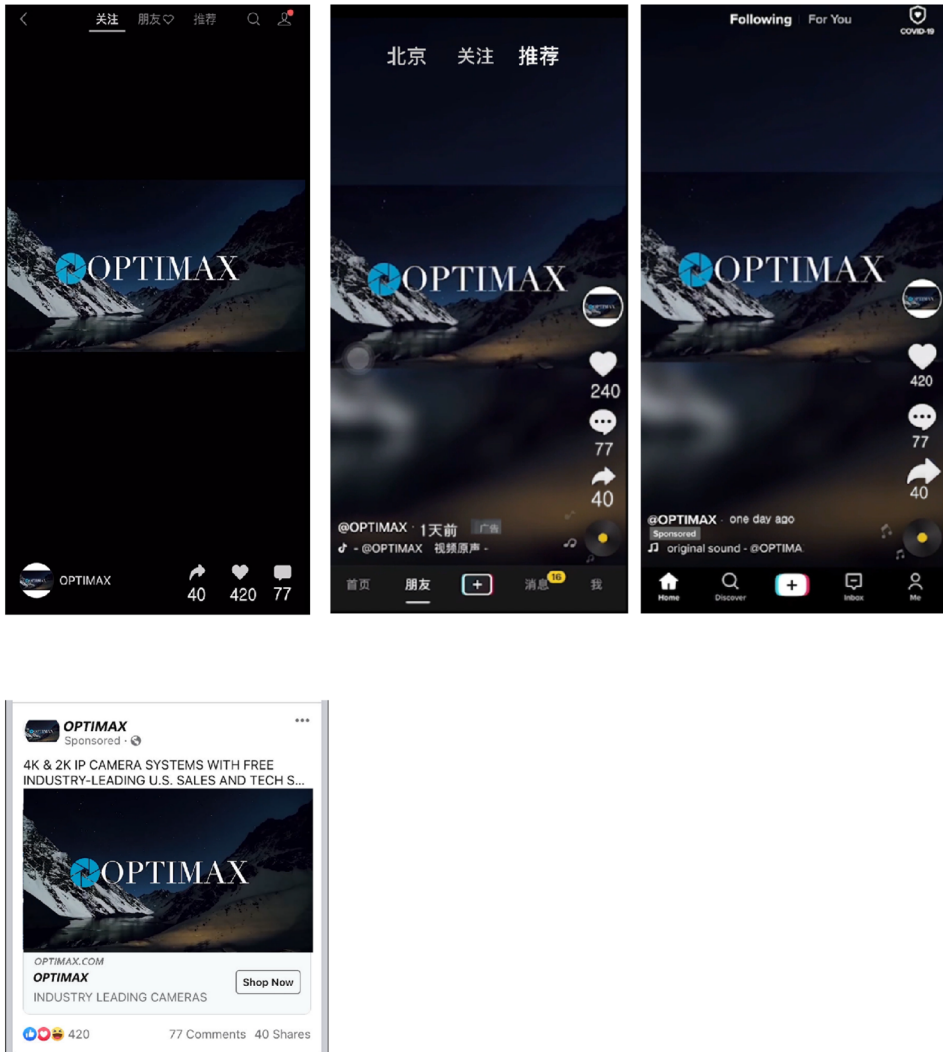


Figure 2. Ad stimuli placed on WeChat, Douyin, TikTok, and Facebook.

presented the brand name “Optimax” at the end of the video. The same video was edited to be shown in each social media frame so that the participants could find the social media platform on which this ad was featured. Chinese participants were shown Douyin and WeChat ads, whereas American participants were shown TikTok and Facebook ads.

As the researchers wanted to see whether a brand could be perceived as younger depending on the social media platform, the online survey questioned how the participants perceived digital cameras in general as younger or outdated before exposure to the stimuli. After answering the questions, the participants watched the ad on one of the social media platforms on the next page. They were asked the following questions: The variables measured in this study are youngness of the brand image,

brand personalities, TikTok/Douyin and Facebook/Weibo usage, attitude toward ads, brands, and the platform, purchase intention, and intention to disseminate information. The participants were randomly selected from different social media conditions. However, only those who have used TikTok in the past were assigned to the TikTok group, while those who had used Facebook participated in the Facebook group. The same technique was applied to the Chinese survey.

Since there is no known measurement for youngness of brand image, the researchers developed four measurement items: *youthful*, *trendy*, *up-to-date*, and *young* (Cronbach $\alpha = .817$) from the brand characteristics measurement items from Aaker's (1997) study. The items are measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". Similarly, brand personalities were measured by Aaker's (1997) Big Five personality factors with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."

Attitudes toward ads (A_{ad}), brands (A_b), and social media platforms (A_p) were measured using 7-point semantic differential scales with the adjectives "unattractive–attractive," "negative–positive," "boring–interesting," "unlikeable–likeable" (Matthes & Naderer, 2016).

Intention to disseminate was measured using two items ("I could repost on my TikTok/Douyin/Facebook/WeChat account the posts shown above," "I would share the video on different social media") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (Balaban & Racz, 2020; Sohn, 2009).

Purchase intention was measured on a 5-point Likert scale using three items ("It is very likely I will buy the advertised product," "I will purchase the advertised product next time," and "I will definitely try the advertised product") (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016).

Results

Before testing the hypotheses, it is necessary to measure how the participants perceived the digital camera. Participants were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale whether they viewed digital cameras as old-fashioned. A one-way ANOVA showed that the perception regarding the digital camera was not significantly different among the four different conditions ($p > .05$). Therefore, it can be asserted that the respondents had a relatively neutral view ($M=2.30$) of a specific product category regardless of the given conditions.

Subsequently, a structured equation model (SEM) was used to determine whether brand personalities had any mediating effects on attitudes toward ads and brands (RQ2).

Using AMOS 20.0, the SEM yielded a good fit according to multiple model fit indices (chi-square = 218.088, $df = 62$, PCLOSE = .000, TLI = .964,

CFI=.971, RMSEA=.071, $p < .001$). Based on the suggested indices of good model fit, the SEM results suggest that our SEM model (Figure 3) offers a good fit for the data. The results of path analysis for the hypothesized model showed that Aaker’s Big Five brand personalities had a significant direct impact on attitudes toward ads ($\beta = .462$, $p < .001$) and brands ($\beta = .147$, $p < .001$). The standardized path coefficient between attitudes toward ads and brands was significant ($\beta = .878$, $p < .001$). With regard to **RQ2**, we concluded that brand personality has mediating effects on attitudes toward ads and brands.

In addition, after running one-way ANOVAs, all four social media platforms (TikTok and Facebook from American users, and Douyin and WeChat from Chinese users) presented significantly different youngness rates for the ad ($F = 8.332$, $p > .00$). Table 1 presents the descriptive results of youngness.

When a least significant difference test was added as a post hoc test, it was revealed that Facebook participants rated the ad as significantly younger than those on the other three social media platforms. The youngness scores for Douyin, WeChat, and TikTok were not significantly different ($p < .05$). Therefore, **H1** was reversely supported, whereas **H2** was not.

The results indicated that Facebook users perceived the same ad to be younger than the ad on TikTok. In contrast to the proposed hypothesis, TikTok users were much more sensitive to evaluating advertised brands as young as possible. Interestingly, Chinese social media users did not show any difference in perceived youngness in the ads, regardless of the

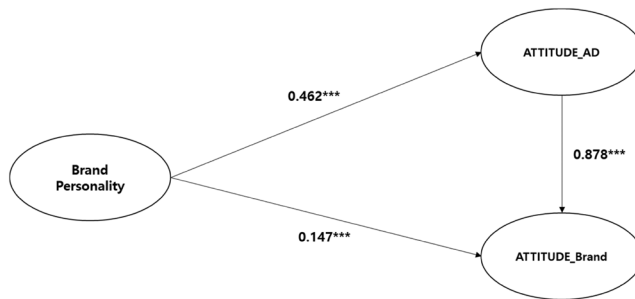


Figure 3. The SEM model results.

Table 1. Descriptive results for youngness.

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
TikTok	107	3.67	0.91
Youngness			
Facebook	91	4.05	0.72
Douyin	149	3.55	0.88
WeChat	147	3.51	0.88
Total	494	3.66	0.88

social media platform. Although WeChat is known to have users of all ages, while Douyin is popular among teenagers and those in their early 20s, the two social media platforms did not show a difference in perceived youngness of ads.

Another set of hypotheses proposed that attitudes toward **a**) ads (A_{ad}), **b**) brands (A_b), and **c**) social media platforms (A_p) appear more positive when an ad is placed on TikTok (**H3**) and Douyin (**H4**) than on Facebook (**H3**) and WeChat (**H4**). A one-way ANOVA revealed that A_{ad} ($F=147.615$, $p < .00$), A_b ($F=110.514$, $p < .00$), and A_p ($F=57.142$, $p < .00$) were significantly different across social media platforms. American social media users rated their attitudes toward ads on TikTok ($M=2.60$) as higher than those on Facebook ($M=2.08$). In addition, attitudes toward advertised brands on TikTok ($M=2.99$) were higher than those on Facebook ($M=2.41$). However, when examining attitudes toward social media platforms, TikTok ($M=2.90$) scored lower than Facebook ($M=3.68$). When comparing TikTok and Facebook, attitudes toward ads and brands were rated significantly higher on TikTok, whereas attitudes toward social media platforms were rated significantly lower. Therefore, **H3a** and **H3b** were supported. However, the Chinese social media platforms Douyin and WeChat did not present significant differences in A_{ad} , A_b , and A_p ($p < .05$). Therefore, **H4** was not supported.

Interestingly, American social media users had significantly negative A_{ad} , A_b , and A_p compared to Chinese users ($p < .00$). Figure 4 presents the results of attitudes toward ads, brands, and social media platforms in both countries.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 propose that TikTok and Douyin users are more willing to share advertisements with others compared to Facebook and WeChat users. A set of one-way ANOVA tests showed that the four social media platforms were significantly different in their willingness to share the ad ($F=6.123$, $p < .00$), and the ad on Facebook was the most highly

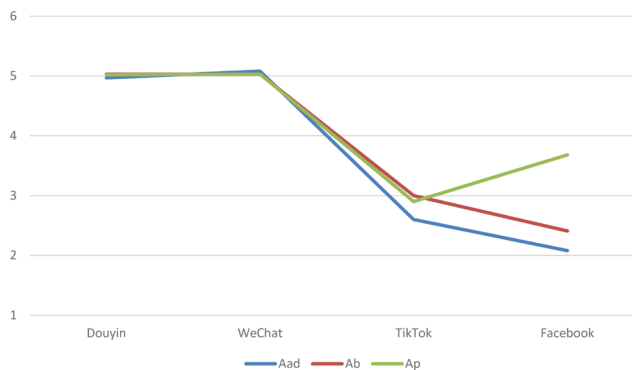


Figure 4. Attitudes toward ad, brand, and social media platform.

rated to be reposted and shared. Furthermore, Facebook ads were evaluated as more likely to be shared with others than TikTok ads ($p < .05$). Therefore, **H5** is reversely supported. Douyin and WeChat are not significantly different in terms of willingness to share ($p > .05$). Therefore, **H6** is not supported.

Hypotheses 7 and 8 posited that TikTok and Douyin would produce more willingness to purchase from college-going social media users than Facebook and WeChat. Another set of ANOVA revealed that the four social media platforms did not show any statistically significant different values ($p > .05$). Therefore, **H7** and **H8** are not supported. The descriptive results for willingness to share and purchase intention are listed in [Table 2](#).

RQ3 questioned whether heavy social media users are more likely than light social media users to rate advertised brands as younger. The researcher asked the survey participants how many hours and minutes they spent daily on each social media. An ANOVA revealed that time spent on social media did not significantly affect youths' perception of youngness of advertised brands ($p > .05$). Therefore, the time spent on social media does not play a significant role in creating younger images of advertised brands on social media platforms.

The researchers also asked how these different social media platforms would impact other brand characteristics, such as *sincerity*, *excitement*, *competence*, *sophistication*, and *ruggedness*. A set of ANOVA tests showed that all characteristics differed significantly between American and Chinese social media users ($p < .00$). Across the five brand characteristics the researchers measured, all presented a similar pattern: Chinese social media users showed no differences between Douyin and WeChat ($p > .05$), while all characteristics were rated significantly higher when shown to American social media users ($p < .00$). When examining only American social media users, *sincerity*, *excitement*, and *competence* were rated significantly higher on Facebook than on TikTok ($p < .00$), whereas

Table 2. Descriptive results for share and purchase intention.

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
TikTok	107	3.42	1.52
Willingness to Share			
Facebook	91	3.96	1.53
Douyin	149	3.14	1.69
WeChat	147	3.13	1.65
Total	494	3.35	1.64
TikTok	107	2.42	0.93
Purchase Intention			
Facebook	91	2.60	0.98
Douyin	149	2.50	1.00
WeChat	147	2.44	0.89
Total	494	2.48	0.95

sophistication and *ruggedness* did not differ between the two social media platforms ($p > .05$). Figure 5 presents the results of the brand characteristics below.

Discussion

This study investigated whether using different age-populated social media platforms play a role in the placement of ads on social media platforms. TikTok and Douyin are well known for attracting younger users compared to Facebook and WeChat, which have a general user population ranging from old to young. As the results of the study have shown (See Table 3), ads placed on different social media platforms do impact how users perceive the advertised brand as younger. The first set of hypotheses proposed that ads placed on social media platforms with younger audiences (TikTok and Douyin) would be perceived as younger than those placed on general platforms (Facebook and WeChat). The results presented were the opposite of researchers' predictions: Facebook users rated the ad as much younger than TikTokers. It is critical for understanding that using social media

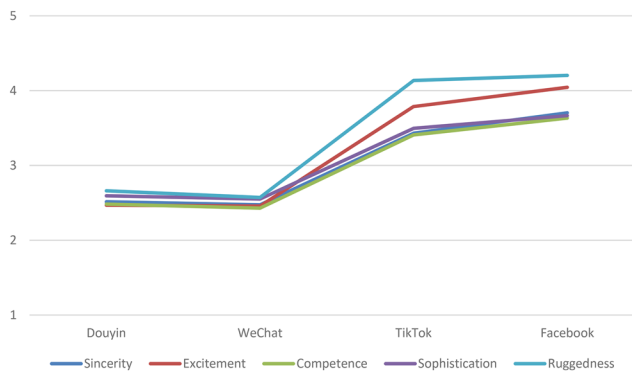


Figure 5. Results of brand characteristics.

Table 3. Results of hypotheses.

Hypothesis	DV	Results
H1	Youngness (US)	Reversely Supported
H2	Youngness (China)	Not Supported
H3a	Attitude toward Ad (US)	Supported
H3b	Attitude toward Brand (US)	Supported
H3c	Attitude toward Social Media Platform (US)	Supported
H4a	Attitude toward Ad (China)	Not Supported
H4b	Attitude toward Brand (China)	Not Supported
H4c	Attitude toward Social Media Platform (China)	Not Supported
H5	Willingness to Share (US)	Reversely Supported
H6	Willingness to Share (China)	Not Supported
H7	Willingness to Purchase (US)	Not Supported
H8	Willingness to Purchase (China)	Not Supported

platforms generated by younger audiences does not simply lead to brands being perceived as younger. Rather, advertisers need to be cautious in articulating messages in ads on TikTok because TikTokers are more critical in analyzing the ads' image. Facebook ads are more accepted and users understand that the platform is used by the general population. If a brand is positioned as age-neutral rather than targeting a younger audience, Facebook can be a better social media platform. However, if it is desirable to target a younger audience, TikTok should be considered with caution. If an ad message is neutral, as in this study, TikTok users will not appreciate the ad as much as Facebook users. Specifically, advertisers and social media marketers need to ensure that they tailor messages to be more personable and trendier for TikTok users.

This study also found that heavy usage of social media did not influence brand personalities. Whether users spend more or less time on specific social media platforms, they have already set up their standard of what content the medium would put forth.

The two Chinese social media platforms used in this study showed no differences in measured variables. This implies that Chinese users do not differentiate Douyin and WeChat when viewing ads on these platforms despite the fact that the two have different age-targeted users. There are three reasons Chinese users did not show any difference between Douyin and WeChat.

First, the video formats of the two platforms are almost identical. The vertical view is the default setting in both Douyin and WeChat videos, allowing users to quickly scroll up and down the feed without having to rotate the screen ([Figure 6](#)).

Second, the two platforms share the same audience. The number of WeChat users was 813 million, and that of Douyin was 680 million, with 59.2% of WeChat users using Douyin (Gentleman Marketing Agency, 2022). The majority of Douyin and WeChat users overlap. In addition, the advertising time allocations between Douyin and WeChat were nearly the same. As a result of checking the daily ad usage time per person, it was found that Douyin used 100 min per person and WeChat 80 min per person (Gentleman Marketing Agency, 2022). Consequently, similar target users are exposed to similar ads during the same period.

Third, the survey participants were homogeneous and in their 20s. They use social media daily and frequently and have similar purchasing power. Watching video content on social media has become common among young users, regardless of which social media platform is used. Douyin, a short-form video-based social media popular with Chinese teenagers and people in their early 20s, was perceived as similar to WeChat, which shows that focusing on short-form video services is no longer unique to



Figure 6. Video ad format examples from Douyin (Left) and WeChat (Right). *From 猪脚饭阿 (Left) and 熊猫的日常啊 (Right)

this audience. Advertising content is more important than choosing an advertising platform in the Chinese social media market.

This study also found that brand personalities influenced attitudes toward ads and brands (RQ2) when all American and Chinese responses were collected. Attitudes toward ads also had a significant effect on attitudes toward brands. However, the results after measuring brand personality showed that Facebook had significantly higher scores for *sincerity* and *excitement* than the other three social media platforms. This may indicate that American users still trust Facebook more than TikTok, which is relatively newer. Generally, social media users are more accustomed to Facebook, and seeing ads on Facebook receives more acceptance than on TikTok.

Meanwhile, Chinese users rated brand personality significantly lower for all brand personalities compared to American users. Although the two Chinese social media platforms have different user populations, their users view them as having similar characteristics. It can be interpreted that users in China have been developing a more unique personality than the social media platform itself. As discussed earlier, the importance of content should be considered more than the influence of social media platforms because most social media platforms offer a similar video ad format.

The two hypotheses supported by the current study were that attitudes toward ads (H3a) and brands (H3b) are more favorable when the ads are

placed on TikTok than on Facebook. In the US, as younger audiences gather more on TikTok, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward ads and brands. However, attitudes toward social media platforms are an exception. This study found that TikTok was rated significantly more negatively as an advertising platform than Facebook. Similar to Wu's (2019) findings, younger users developed more negative attitudes toward social media when they engaged with a newer social media platform.

It is worth noting that TikTokers do not differ in their willingness to share or purchase, but maintain more positive attitudes toward ads and their brands compared to Facebook users.

We would also like to note that, compared to Chinese platforms, both TikTok and Facebook received significantly more negative attitudes toward all three of the measured factors (attitudes toward ads, brands, and social media platforms where the ad was placed). This suggests that Chinese social media users are more likely to use social media as an ad placement platform. We cannot assume that Douyin and TikTok are similar just because they both have a younger user base with the same service. It is easy to conclude that TikTok is an international version of Douyin. The results of this study demonstrate that this simple assumption must be revoked. In reality, these are located in markets with different audiences. Practitioners of advertising and social media marketing must attempt to understand social media platform users.

Limitation and future research

Although this research sheds light on newly-populated social media from younger audiences, such as Douyin and TikTok, there are several limitations. First, some participants indicated that they use different social media rather than the four chosen social media platforms. A comparison of diverse social media platforms would reveal a more realistic perception of different platforms when placing ads. More than half of American participants in the study said they use Snapchat more than other platforms. Snapchat is a popular social media platform for young people. A wider scope is required for future studies. Second, this study experimented with a fictitious brand to reduce bias. However, asking about the perceptions of real ads from various brands may show different results. This study used only one neutrally-positioned ad. For future studies, comparing brands with old-fashioned or outdated images to brands with young and trendy images will deepen our understanding of the role of different social media platforms.

Despite these limitations, the contribution of this study to investigating the newly-populated social media platforms TikTok and Douyin to understand user perceptions of ads is meaningful. This research can be the first step to recognize young social media users on TikTok and Douyin, and what advertisers need to consider for ad campaigns on social media platforms.

Disclosure statement

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