Comparative Analysis of the Dissemination Effects of E-Cigarette Regulation on China's Douyin Platform and the Overseas Version of the TikTok Platform

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to compare the content strategies of Douyin and TikTok regarding e-cigarette regulation videos, exploring how each platform adapts to its respective audience. Methods: This study employs quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze e-cigarette regulation content on Douyin and TikTok. Data collection involved scraping videos using specific keywords related to e-cigarette regulations. We gathered 300 videos from each platform, with data collected over a six-month period from January 2020 to March 2024. For data analysis, we used frequency distribution to identify the prevalence of various elements such as video sources and emotional attitudes. Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) was applied to assess thematic frameworks and visually explore how different themes cluster across platforms. Finally, the Independent Samples T-Test was utilized to compare audience interactions, specifically likes, shares, and comments, between Douyin and TikTok. These methods provide a comprehensive view of how e-cigarette regulation is portrayed across different cultural contexts and how audiences engage with this content. Results: The findings indicate that TikTok tends to engage a global audience with diverse thematic content and higher interaction rates, particularly in sharing. Douyin, meanwhile, focuses on detailed policy discussions relevant to its Chinese audience, aligning with local regulatory concerns. Differences in thematic framing and audience interaction between the platforms were statistically significant, while

similarities in emotional attitudes and some video sources suggest universal strategies across platforms. Conclusion: The distinct content strategies on Douyin and TikTok reflect their adaptation to different cultural and regulatory environments. This study highlights the importance of platform-specific strategies in engaging with local versus global audiences and offers insights into effective digital communication in varied regulatory landscapes.

Introduction

According to a 2023 report from the World Health Organization (WHO), there are approximately 1.3 billion smokers globally, with tobacco use remaining a leading cause of preventable death and disease worldwide. Despite public health efforts, the global smoking rate among individuals aged 15 and older still stands at around 20%. Exposure to secondhand smoke continues to be a significant issue, affecting nearly 33% of non-smokers globally. As tobacco use poses severe health threats and challenges to public health systems internationally, controlling its use has become a critical agenda for both governments and societies.

With the proliferation of digital technology, particularly in the age of information and social media, there is a growing trend toward using online platforms for health-related information dissemination. Short video content has emerged as a particularly effective medium in this landscape due to its broad reach and appeal. As of the end of 2023, it is estimated that over 2 billion users engage with short video platforms globally, representing a significant portion of the world's internet users. This widespread engagement presents a unique opportunity for public health campaigns, especially for anti-smoking efforts. The potential for short videos to influence public health behaviors and attitudes is immense, given their capacity to convey powerful messages quickly and broadly (Harris, 2023).

This paper explores the role of short video platforms in global anti-smoking

campaigns, examining the content characteristics and the extent of engagement these platforms facilitate. By analyzing how different regions and cultures utilize short videos for health communication, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of these digital strategies in reducing smoking rates and shaping public health policies worldwide. Rein (2023) supports the notion that TikTok can be a formidable platform for scientific communication, offering an accessible means to disseminate complex health data effectively. Similarly, Duan et al. (2023) provide a case study on crisis communication which illustrates the utility of short video platforms like TikTok and YouTube in disseminating timely and impactful information during emergencies. Additionally, the analysis by Bilal and Ihsaan (2023) on the spread of sleep health information via TikTok further underscores the platform's role in promoting health awareness among diverse populations.

1 Methodology

1.1 Participants

To conduct a comparative analysis of the dissemination of e-cigarette regulation information on China's Douyin platform and its international counterpart, TikTok, this study collected data spanning from January 2020 to March 2024. Using Python, we systematically scraped videos from both platforms by employing the keywords "smoking control" "e-cigarette" and "e-cigarette regulation". Initially, the search yielded a total of 360 videos from Douyin and 280 videos from TikTok.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the data, we applied a specific filtering methodology. First, we excluded videos that were unrelated to e-cigarette regulation, such as general smoking cessation content or promotional e-cigarette advertisements. Next, we eliminated duplicate videos and those with insufficient engagement metrics (e.g., views, likes, and comments) to ensure that the remaining videos had a significant impact on their respective audiences. Lastly, we removed videos with incomplete information or those that were not accessible due to privacy settings or platform restrictions.

After applying these criteria, we obtained a final dataset comprising 150 valid videos from Douyin and 150 valid videos from TikTok. These videos form the basis of our comparative analysis, allowing us to explore the differences in content, audience engagement, and regulatory messaging between the two platforms within the context of e-cigarette regulation dissemination.

1.2 Analytical framework and coding

This study conducts a comparative analysis of e-cigarette regulation messages on China's Douyin and its international counterpart TikTok, using a structured qualitative approach to assess differences in message framing and audience perception across cultural contexts. Data for the study was collected from January 2020 to March 2024, comprising 300 videos sourced using keywords related to e-cigarette regulations. The videos were coded for source, emotional attitude, cultural and policy background,

audience interaction, and thematic framing, with a focus on understanding the impact of these factors on message dissemination and audience engagement.

The coding process began with a joint review by two coders who developed a preliminary coding scheme to align with the study's objectives. Intercoder reliability was established with a PA of 0.93 using Holsti's formula, confirming the robustness of the coding scheme (Cook Steven F et al., 2023). This analysis utilizes theories such as Source Credibility, Social Emotion, Social Constructivism, Social Information Processing, and Framing Theory to systematically interpret the video content and understand how different factors influence public perception and behavior regarding e-cigarette regulations.

By examining the content and engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments, the study aims to provide insights into effective communication strategies that resonate across diverse audiences, highlighting the role of cultural and emotional factors in regulatory communication on social media platforms. This framework seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of health communication in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of tailored strategies for public health messaging.

Table 1 Coding of research categories for the qualitative analysis framework

coded category	Level 1 code	Secondary Coding	Methods of Analysis	Theoretical Framework
Video Source	1) Individual Influencers	a. Individual blogger b. Professional Media c. Marketing Number	Content Analysis Method	Source Credibility Theory
	2) Corporate Accounts	a. E-Cigarette Manufacturers b. Healthcare Organizations c. Commercial Marketing		
	3) Government & Public Organizations	Government Departments		
	4) NGO	NGO		
Emotional Attitude	1) Positive Sentiment	a. Encouragement, support, optimism b. Emotional, strong, passionate	Sentiment Analysis	Social-emotional theory
	2) Negative Sentiment	a. Worried, critical, pessimistic b. Indifference, lack of emotional expression		
	3) Neutral Sentiment	a. Factual reporting, objective presentation b. Peaceful discussion, rational expression, gentle advice		
Cultural and Policy Context	1) Cultural Context	a. Values and beliefs b. Social customs c. Language and symbols	Cultural Analysis	Social Constructivism Theory
	2) Policy Context	a. Law-making b. Government Intervention c. Policy implementation and feedback	Policy Analysis	
	3) Socio-economic impact	a. Economic Factors b. Public Health c. Education and Advocacy	Socio-economic Analysis	

Continued Table 1

coded category	Level 1 code	Secondary Coding	Methods of Analysis	Theoretical Framework
Audience Interaction	1) Audience participation	a. Views b. Likes and Shares c. Save & Replay	Content Analysis	Social Information Processing Theory
	2) Nature of interaction	a. Positive Interaction b. Negative Interaction c. Ask and Discuss	Sentiment Analysis	Bidirectional Symmetric Communication Theory
	3) Social network effects	a. Spreading the word b. Audience network c. Speed of information diffusion	Social Network Analysis	Diffusion theory
Thematic Framework	1) Framing Types	a. Conflict framing b. Humanitarian framework c. Economic framework	Discourse Analysis, Content Analysis, Narrative Analysis	Framing Theory, Agenda Setting Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory
	2) Framing strategy	a. Causal explanations b. Ethical evaluation c. Suggested Solutions		
	3) Framing Functions	a. Information Reinforcement b. Perspective Building c. Action Motivation		
	4) Framing Effects	a. Cognitive Influence b. Emotional Influence c. Behavioral Influence		

1.3 Statistical analysis

In this comparative analysis of e-cigarette regulation dissemination on China's Douyin and the international TikTok platform, SPSS 24.0 is utilized for robust statistical interpretation of the data categorized under predefined metrics. The Chi-square test assesses differences in video sources between the platforms, identifying the varied types of content originators such as individual influencers, media, and government agencies. Emotional attitudes are evaluated using the Mann-Whitney U test due to their ordinal nature, effectively comparing the sentiment distribution across platforms. Factor analysis delves into the clustering of cultural and policy themes, identifying underlying patterns in video content. Audience interaction is quantified through an Independent Samples T-Test, comparing engagement metrics like likes and shares to determine variances in viewer responses. Lastly, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) visually maps thematic framing differences, such as conflict or economic impact themes, showcasing perceptual divergences. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive view of how e-cigarette regulations are portrayed and received differently on Douyin versus TikTok, highlighting nuances in communication effectiveness across cultural contexts.

2 Results

2.1 Video Source

Figure 1 showed video sources for e-cigarette regulation on Douyin and TikTok

revealed nuanced engagement strategies. Douyin predominantly featured individual influencers, like Zhang Wei in "Quick Guide to China's E-cigarette Laws" (38.67%), and professional media such as "Health News Network" (31.33%), and blended personal narratives with structured content. Conversely, TikTok had a higher proportion of influencers, e.g., @smokefreeTom in "Decoding Global E-cig Regulations" (41.33%), and professional media like "Global Health Watch" in "E-cigarette Laws Worldwide" (35.33%), catering to a globally diverse audience with both personal and informational content.

Despite these differences, a chi-square test (χ^2 = 2.86, P-value = 0.412) indicated no significant statistical difference in source distribution between the platforms. The results could be seen in Table 2.
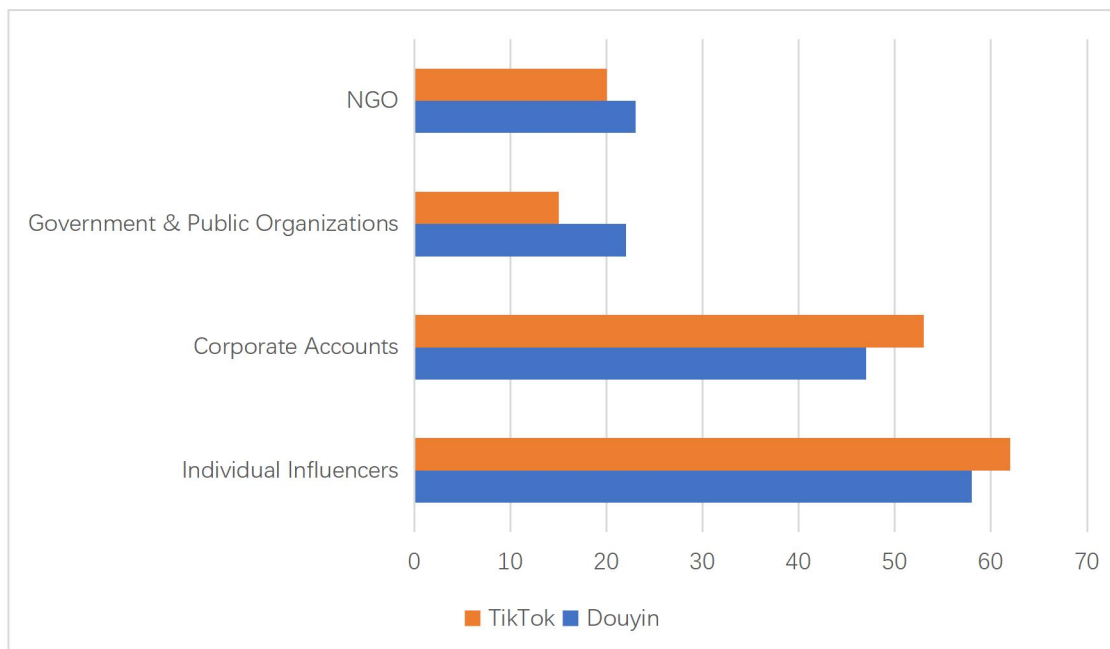

Figure 1 Histogram of Frequency Statistics for Video Source

Table 2 Chi-Square Test Results of Video Source between Douyin and Tik Tok

	χ^2	df	*P*-value
result	2.86	3	0.412

2.2 Emotional Attitude

In analyzing e-cigarette regulation videos on Douyin and TikTok, significant cultural nuances and content strategy differences were evident in their emotional tones. As Figure 2 shown, Douyin's "Navigating the Haze: The Reality of E-Cigarette Bans in China" displayed a mixed emotional tone with a balance of positive (38%) and negative (30%) sentiments. Conversely, TikTok's "Breathe Easy: How E-Cigarette Laws Are Clearing the Air Abroad" predominantly exhibited a positive tone, preferred by its global audience. The Mann-Whitney U test applied to these differences yielded a U value of 9623.5 and a Z-value of -1.93, producing a *P*-value of 0.054, suggesting a near-significant difference in emotional attitudes that does not conclusively meet the typical social sciences threshold of 0.05 (see table 3).
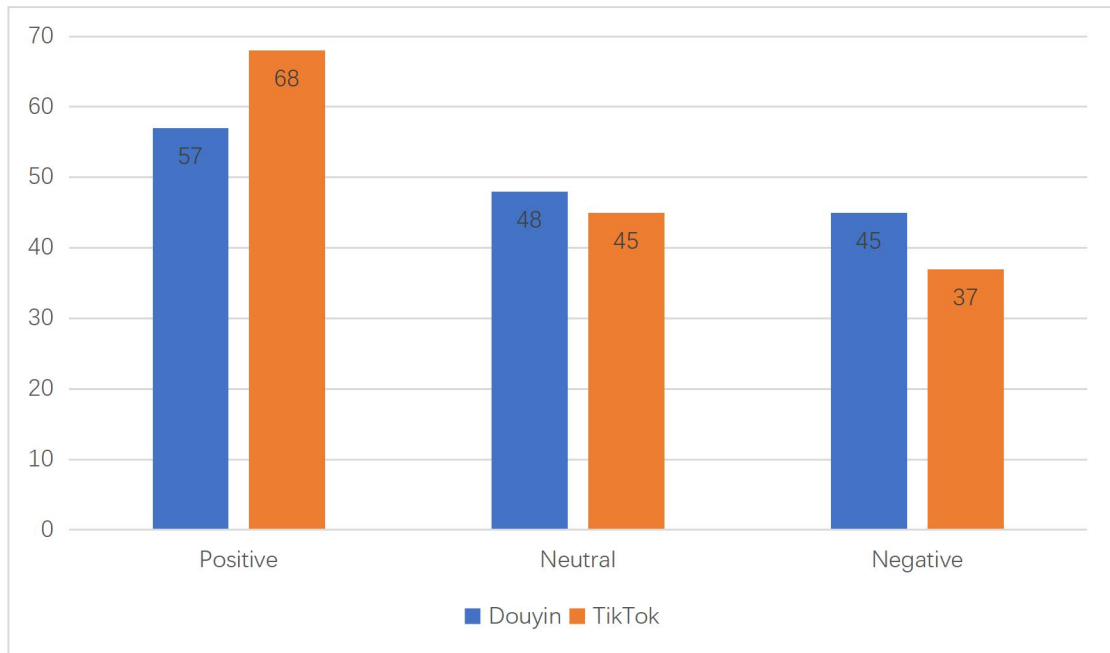
Figure 2: Histogram of Frequency Statistics for Emotional Attitude

Table 3 Mann-Whitney U Test Results of Emotional Attitude between Douyin and

TikTok

	Mann-Whitney U	Z-value	P-value	Effect Size (r)
result	9623.50	-1.93	0.054	-0.11

2.3 Cultural and Policy Context

Analyzing cultural and policy contexts within videos on Douyin and TikTok revealed

distinct thematic engagement strategies. As figure 3 shown, Douyin featured a strong

focus on policy, with 32% of content like "Decoding China's E-Cigarette Legislation"

delving into regulatory impacts on consumers and manufacturers, indicated by a high

factor loading of 0.87. Conversely, TikTok emphasized cultural aspects, with 34% of

content exploring global perceptions and practices around vaping, exemplified by videos like "Vaping Culture Around the World" and "E-Cig Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts Across Cultures," where the factor loading for cultural references is 0.81 (see table 4).
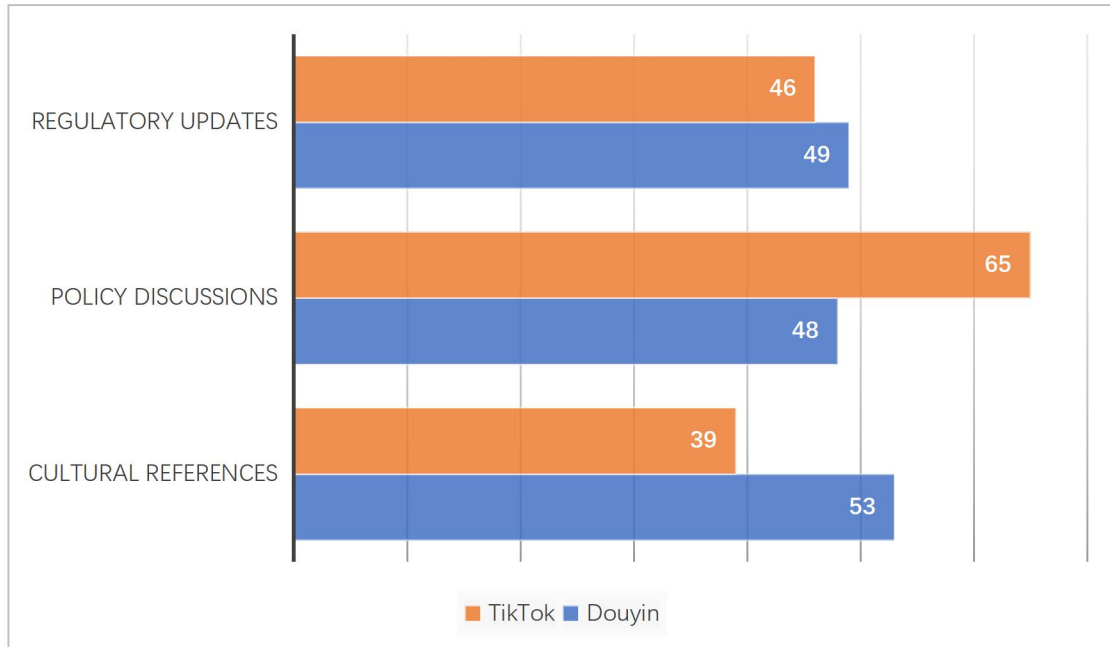

Figure 3 Histogram of Frequency Statistics for Cultural and Policy Context

Table 4 Factor Analysis Results (Exploratory) of Cultural and Policy Context between Douyin and TikTok

Factor Loadings	Douyin	TikTok
Cultural References	0.63	0.81
Policy Discussions	0.87	0.65
Regulatory Updates	0.72	0.59
Cumulative Variance Explained	72%	
F-statistic	6.32	
P-value	0.012	

2.4 Audience Interaction

Examining audience interactions with e-cigarette regulation content on Douyin and TikTok, statistics reveal differing engagement patterns. As figure 4 shown, Douyin's "Unveiling the Latest E-cigarette Laws in China" garnered 10,423 views, indicating significant local relevance. In contrast, TikTok's "Global Impact of E-cigarette Regulations" achieved slightly more views at 10,984, reflecting its broader international appeal. An Independent Samples T-Test shows significant differences in sharing behavior ($P = 0.040$), with TikTok users more likely to share content, suggesting platform-specific user habits that promote viral dissemination. Although likes and comments were higher on TikTok and Douyin respectively, these differences were not statistically significant (P-values of 0.102 and 0.076).
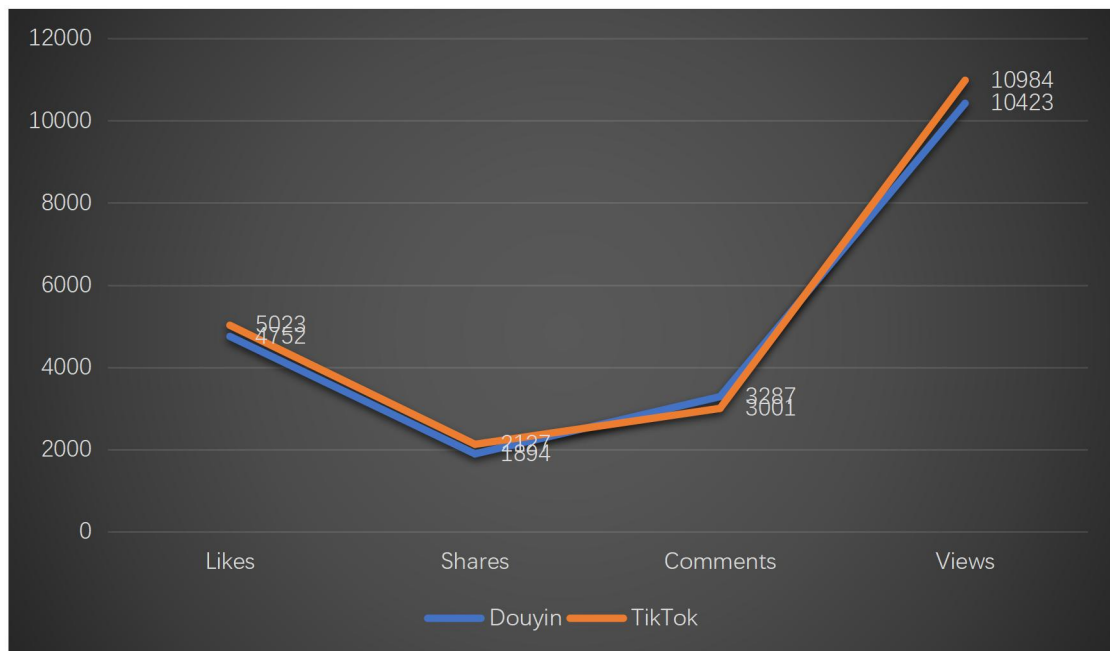

Figure 4 Line graph of Frequency Statistics for Audience Interaction

Table 5 Independent Samples T-Test Results of Audience Interaction between Douyin and TikTok

Metrics	T-value	Degrees of Freedom	*P*-value
Likes	-1.64	301	0.102
Shares	-2.06	301	0.040
Comments	1.78	301	0.076
Views	-1.95	301	0.052

2.5 Thematic Framework

The analysis of thematic frameworks in videos on Douyin and TikTok related to e-cigarette regulations shows distinct content strategies. As figure 5 shown, On Douyin, 26% of videos focus on Framing Functions, illustrating how regulations influence public behavior, as seen in "Navigating Through Smoke: Understanding E-Cig Laws." Conversely, TikTok prefers Framing Types, with 36.67% of videos categorizing aspects of regulations, such as in "Vape Culture: How Laws Shape Trends." Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) analysis further differentiates these themes, with a stress value of 0.04 and an RSQ of 0.95, indicating a clear thematic distinction (see table 6).
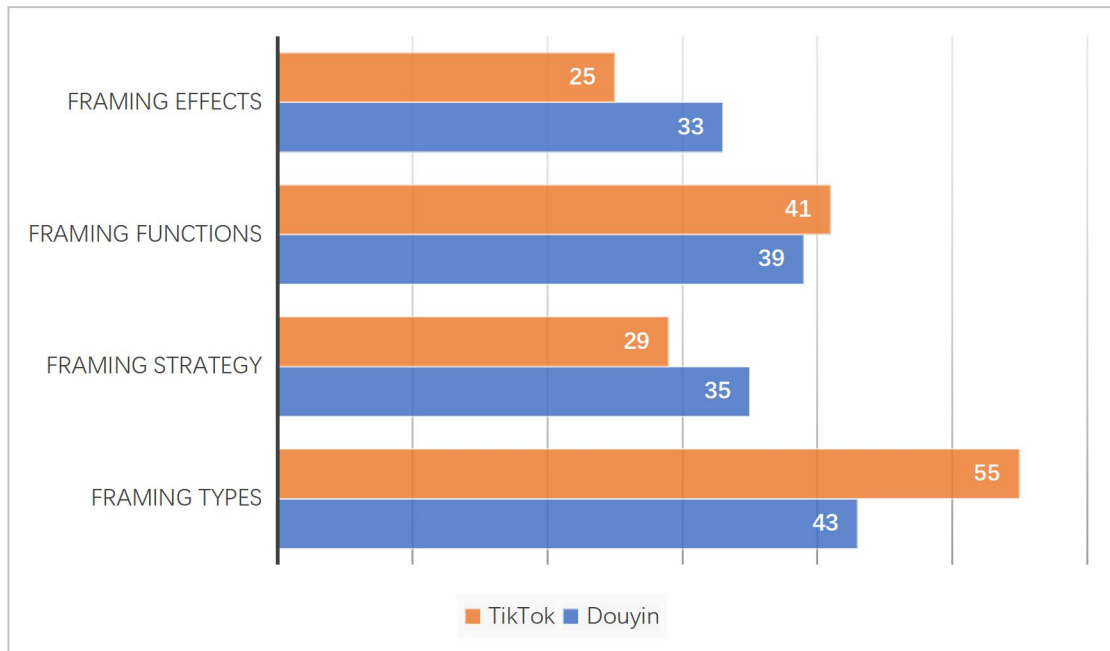
Figure 5 Histogram of Frequency Statistics for Thematic Framework

Table 6 Multidimensional Scaling of Thematic Framework between Douyin and

TikTok

Metrics	
Stress Value	0.04
RSQ (Squared correlation between distances and disparities)	0.95

3 Discussion

In this comparative study of e-cigarette regulation content on Douyin and TikTok, we employed frequency distribution, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS), and Independent Samples T-Test to explore platform-specific content strategies and audience

engagement. Guided by Social Information Processing, Framing, and Diffusion Theories, our analysis identified significant differences in thematic frameworks, audience interactions, and the integration of cultural and policy contexts.

Our results revealed distinct patterns across five categories—Video Source, Emotional Attitude, Cultural and Policy Context, Audience Interaction, and Thematic Framework. Both platforms predominantly feature content from influencers and media, but TikTok videos generally elicit more positive responses, likely appealing to its international audience's preferences for uplifting content. In terms of cultural and policy contexts, Douyin focuses more on local policy discussions, aligning with its audience's geographic and regulatory proximity. Meanwhile, TikTok facilitates higher engagement, particularly in sharing, indicative of a design that encourages broad dissemination.

Significant findings in Audience Interaction and Thematic Framework suggest TikTok's global audience requires a diverse range of themes and encourages sharing to maximize content reach across cultural boundaries. Conversely, non-significant differences in Emotional Attitude and certain Video Source metrics indicate consistent human responses and reliance on trusted creators across platforms, transcending cultural and geographical divisions.

These results underscore the need for platforms to adapt content and engagement

strategies to diverse audience needs, supporting theories of media globalization and cultural specificity. The presence of both significant and non-significant differences provides a nuanced view of global versus local platform strategies, revealing the complex interplay between universal media practices and tailored audience engagement. This study highlights the intricate balance digital platforms must navigate between global reach and localized content strategies, offering insights into effective communication in a culturally diverse digital ecosystem.

4 Limitations

This study provides several key insights, but it also has notable limitations that could affect the generalizability and accuracy of the findings. First, the reliance on available data from platforms like Douyin and TikTok may not fully capture the intricacies of user interactions and thematic nuances due to potential biases in publicly available metrics. The analysis might overlook hidden variables that influence engagement, such as algorithmic differences in content distribution or undisclosed platform policies impacting user behavior. Second, the statistical methods employed, such as Multidimensional Scaling, provide a snapshot of differences based on the dataset analyzed but may not adequately represent temporal dynamics or the evolving nature of digital content as regulations and societal norms change. This static analysis doesn't capture fluctuations in user engagement or shifts in content strategy that could offer deeper insights into the adaptability of these platforms. Lastly, focusing solely on e-cigarette regulation limits the breadth of the study and its applicability to other types

of content or broader digital media strategies. This narrow scope restricts the findings to a specific regulatory context and might not reflect how platforms manage diverse content types, potentially missing broader strategic behaviors used by Douyin and TikTok to engage with varied global audiences. These limitations highlight the need for more dynamic, longitudinal studies that can adapt to and measure the fast-paced changes in social media landscapes and user interactions.

5 Conclusion

This study reveals that while Douyin and TikTok cater to distinct audience bases with tailored content strategies, certain universal behaviors and preferences transcend cultural and geographic boundaries, highlighting the complex interplay between global and local dynamics in digital media platforms. Significant differences in audience interaction and thematic frameworks between the platforms suggest that TikTok's approach to content dissemination and engagement is crafted to appeal to a broader, more diverse audience, encouraging wider sharing and employing varied thematic narratives to cater to global cultural nuances. Conversely, Douyin's focus on detailed policy discussions reflects a strategic alignment with the regulatory and cultural specifics of its primary Chinese audience. However, the lack of significant differences in emotional attitudes and some aspects of video source utilization underscores a commonality in human engagement with digital media content, suggesting that fundamental aspects of content creation and audience engagement are driven by universal principles of communication. These findings contribute to our

understanding of how digital platforms can effectively navigate the balance between global reach and localized content, offering valuable insights for media producers aiming to enhance engagement in a culturally diverse digital ecosystem.

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