Global Research in Higher Education
ISSN 2576-196X (Print) ISSN 2576-1951 (Online)
Vol. 9, No. 3, 2026
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/grhe

Original Paper

Virtual to Real: The Effects of Short-Video Addiction on the Development of Real-Life Social Interaction Skills of College Students, along with Some Countermeasures

Ding Zhiyong[1] & Li Peixia[1]

[1] Qingdao Agricultural University, Qingdao, China

Received: October 25, 2026 Accepted: November 12, 2026 Online Published: November 17, 2026

doi:10.22158/grhe.v9n3p41 URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/grhe.v9n3p41

Abstract

The use of short videos has become quite integrated into the college students routine life. The addictive nature of algorithm-based immersive communication is a danger that represents a real threat to the growth of the students social abilities in the real world. Based on a questionnaire survey of undergraduate students at Qingdao Agricultural University, this paper explores the recent trends of short-video addiction and real-life social skills and the mechanisms by which addiction interferes with the social competence. Results of authoritative research demonstrate that the rate of detecting short-video addiction in college students varies by the sample: 26.3 percent in a sample of vocational college students and 21.63 percent in a national sample of regular college students.

Keywords

short-video addiction, college students, real-world social skills, media literacy, counselor intervention

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the mobile internet and smart phones in the global market, short videos have been the primary form of entertainment, knowledge acquisition, and social networking among young people due to their fragmentized nature and high level of immersion. Based on the data provided by the China Internet Network Information Center, the amount of short-video users in China was 1.050 billion, or 95.5 percent of all Internet users by June 2024. College students, as digital natives, are one of the most active players on short video platforms. Short videos improve cultural and recreational activities, but the phenomenon of the “information cocoon” produced by algorithmic recommendation also has driven some students to extreme consumption and addiction. Typical effects are decreased desire to participate in real-life social activity, poor face-to-face communication abilities, and lack of

interpersonal empathy. The problem of group loneliness is gaining more and more popularity on university campuses.

A type of behavioral addiction is short-video addiction. It is a kind of continuous psychological craving and behavior dependence due to the frequent consumption of short-video platforms with the increase in tolerance, withdrawal symptoms and reduced social performance. The concept of social skills in real life, however, is the composite ability to utilize both verbal and non-verbal messages successfully during face-to-face communication to communicate meaning, develop relationships, deal with conflict, and make emotional contact. Such skills are pivotal in the social adaptation and career growth of college students. Under the current situation of a powerful education nation, directing students to use short-video rationally and overcoming the social challenges brought about by virtual immersing has been prioritized as one of the main tasks of ideological and political education and student affairs. This research looks at the influence of short-video addiction on real-life social skills through empirical findings by taking the viewpoint of the counselor and also offers viable intervention measures that can help nurture talents in higher education.

2. Current Characteristics of Short-Video Addiction and Real-World Social Skills

The research design was stratified cluster sampling where undergraduate students of the College of Animation and Communication, College of Veterinary Medicine, as well as other colleges of Qingdao Agricultural University were employed. The data was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire, Questionnaire on College Students' Short-Video Use and Real-World Social Skills. Out of 320 electronic questionnaires that were handed out, there remained 301 valid responses after invalid ones had been eliminated, which resulted in an overall response rate of 94.1 percent. The male students made up 42.5 percent of the sample and the female students made up 57.5 percent. Freshmen to seniors were reasonably evenly spread across all years, and the sample included students of humanities, art, science, and engineering (hence, it can be fairly representative).

2.1 Short-Video Use and Addiction

The use of short videos by the respondents was common and time consuming. There were 97.3% of students who used short-video platforms on a daily basis, and the most popular platforms were Douyin, Kuaishou and Bilibili. According to surveys published in the Blue Book of Mental Health, college students watched short videos on average 2.72 hours a day. The biggest group (54.1%) spent between 1-3 hours on short video usage, and (23.3) 3+ hours. It was focused mainly before sleep and during breaks in classes and meals and fragmented scrolling occurred simultaneously with long-term immersion viewing. These numbers agree with the results of a 2024 nationwide survey of 130,795 individuals in three demographics, which revealed that university students watched short videos on average 179.9 minutes per day, or about three hours. Over one-third of college students said that extended short-video viewing has negatively impacted their sleep or study motivation. In regards to

motivation, relaxation and stress relief, passing fragmented time, and getting information were the highest, and emotional resonance and social interaction were also significant motivators.

The total mean score of the sample on the addiction measure was 2.83. In accordance with the scale cutoff, 66 students were labeled as having high addiction tendencies, which is a detection rate of 21.9 percent. As per similar survey data, over 20 percent of college students have trouble quitting short videos, and around 30 percent say that they have experienced some negative impact on sleep or study and work due to long-term use. Such results highlight the extent and the intensity of the issue of short-video addiction amongst college students. The most common symptom was "loss of control of time management": numerous students stated that they lost track of time when they were scrolling, and they could not control their urge to continue doing it. There was a demographic disparity; first-year students had significantly higher addiction scores compared to other-year students, and students in humanities and arts had significantly higher scores compared to students in sciences and engineering. Gender differences were found to be not statistically significant.

2.2 Real-World Social Skills

The total mean score of real-world social skills was 3.42 which shows a high overall level but not quite evenly developed across dimensions. Social adjustment had the highest score, then communication efficacy and emotional empathy and social initiative had relatively lower scores. This trend indicates that the lack of social initiative is a typical issue among university students; they should be more active in increasing their personal contacts and establishing more significant social relationships.

The demographic distinction was also observed. Boys obtained much better results on social initiative than girls, whereas girls were much more successful in emotional empathy than boys. The seniors achieved much higher scores on overall social skills compared to freshmen, which may be explained by the fact that over time there is a steady improvement in overall social skills, which is due to the positive impact of campus life and social practice on improving overall social skills. Those who were previously the leaders among students scored significantly higher compared to the ordinary students, which means that the experience of collective labor is one of the crucial ways of developing social competence.

3. Mechanisms through Which Short-Video Addiction Affects Real-World Social Skills

The Pearson correlation analysis indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between the total short-video addiction scores and the total real-world social skills scores ($r = -0.426$, $p < 0.01$, $r = -0.426$, $p < 0.01$). That is to say that stronger addiction was linked to poorer real world social skills.

3.1 Temporal Displacement: Behavioral Substitution of Real-World Interaction

Short videos generate a cyclical effect of immersion through algorithmic recommendation and unlimited information flows: swipe, feedback, swipe again. It is easy to get lost in a time blackhole where people are unaware that they are wasting much of their non-class time. According to relevant

data, college students spend an average of 179.9 minutes on short videos each day and over 70 percent of the polled students acknowledged that they would delay predetermined study assignments due to scrolling short videos. There was a prevalence of statements like, I just wanted to unwind ten minutes, but it turned out to be an hour of scrolling. Students in the high addiction cluster in this survey used short videos on average 4.6 hours a day and engaged in offline social interactions only once every 7 days, which is much lower compared to 3.5 times reported by the low addiction cluster.

The large amount of time spent in virtual space takes away time that could be used in other aspects of life such as engaging in class activities, interacting with clubs, meeting with friends, and others kinds of real-world social activities. It undermines interpersonal relationships and social support systems and limits the chances to develop social skills. As survey results indicate, students in colleges engage in online social interaction up to 3.2 hours daily and engage in offline social growth less than two times weekly; 67 percent engage in under three offline social activities per semester. Other researches state that over 70 percent of students use online social interaction three or more times a day, but the offline social interaction has low frequency and low duration and small circles and 61.4 percent of students interact offline only once or twice daily. The development of social skills requires a constant practice of interactions with people face-to-face, and the absence of real-life interaction situations makes it hard to acquire such skills. The division of time into small segments also inhibits the ability of students to commit to long-term interpersonal relationships, which may require considerable effort, so the social connections become superficial and fragmented.

3.2 Cognitive Schema Shift: Cognitive Barriers to Real-World Interaction

The high rate of fragmented short video messages changes cognitive processes and forms various cognitive obstacles to actual social interaction. To start with, long-term exposure to fragmented information leads to attention fragmentation and less deep concentration and long-time thinking. A Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily survey reported that 50.3 % of those surveyed thought that their ability to think had decreased and their reasoning was unclear, and 43.8 % found it hard to focus and got distracted easily. This confirms the cognitive detrimental nature of fragmented information. The real world social interaction is characterized by the need to listen attentively, express oneself logically and think deeply. As stated by Fang Yan, a member of the National People's Congress, unregulated social media consumption can cause minors to develop chronic distraction and poor social skills in the real world. Once they adapt to quick information switching students can be inattentive, impatient and unable to keep the topic continuity in face-to-face communication, which reduces the quality of interaction.

Then, algorithmic recommendations create information cocoons that cement the cognitive framework and decrease the acceptance of alternative perspectives. The long-term exposure to homogeneous content may strengthen one point of view and make students more prone to disagreements and conflicts when faced with other points of view during their real-life communication, thus, reducing their ability

to adjust to other people. Third, direct positive feedback from virtual social engagement increases expectation bias in real life social engagement. Feedback on virtual social interaction occurs in the form of likes and comments which are straightforward and direct and have low threshold. Once a person has become accustomed to the simplicity of virtual interaction they may be afraid of and avoid the intricacy of real-life interaction which will lead to an increase in social anxiety and withdrawal.

3.3 Social Skill Atrophy: Erosion of Real-World Social Competence

Social skills in the real world include both verbal communication and non-verbal interpretation along with emotional control and conflict resolution. These are obtained and reinforced by ongoing interpersonal contact and communication. The addiction to short videos decreases real-life communication and leads to a direct decrease of these skills due to the phenomenon of use it or lose it.

On nonverbal level, most of the information in real world interaction is communicated by means of facial expressions, eye contact, body movement and tone of voice, whereas short-video watching is mostly a one-way reception without face-to-face feedback. With time, people become less sensitive to the signals of other people emotions, and thus are unable to sense the change of emotions properly, and this causes communication asynchronicity and inappropriate reactions. Emotionally, the anonymity and low stakes of short-video platforms permit users to freely express their feelings regardless of how other people will feel, whereas in the real world, there should be emotional control and putting oneself in others shoes. Exposure to unfettered online self-expression makes emotionally-regulated behavior more likely to fail and therefore make people more prone to emotional explosions or conflicts with others in the offline world.

4. The Ways to Enhance College Students Social Skills in Real-Life Situation in the Context of Short-Video Addiction

4.1 Individual Level: Strengthening Media Literacy and Self-Regulation

The main actors in the process of escaping addiction and enhancing social skills are students themselves. It is important to focus on rational media cognition and independent management of behavior. Firstly, media cognition needs to be reinforced through educating students on the characteristics of media and the algorithm of short videos, the logic behind information cocoon and addictive design, so that they are able to control their own consumption rather than be consumed by algorithms. Secondly, it is necessary to promote scientific time management. Tools like time-blocking can be used by students to schedule the use of short videos, limit applications, and confine their usage to fragmented leisure time and prevent aimless immersion scrolling. Thirdly, students need to be motivated to engage in real-life social practice: to go out of their dormitories, take part in class activities, student organizations and social practice and practice communication, emotional sensitivity, and handling conflicts in real-life interaction. This involvement could assist in developing more

meaningful connections with people in the real world and achieving a sense of emotional fulfillment through the experience of real interaction.

4.2 Counselor Level: Tiered Intervention and Targeted Support

Frontline student-affairs staff such as counselors are well placed to offer tiered and targeted assistance. To begin with, there should be a regular screening and early warning system. Based on a longitudinal study of the university population of Jiangsu, it was revealed that the comorbidity of short-video addiction and group loneliness increased by 27% among Gen Z college students admitted after 2020, and short-video use and social status must be part of the student screening and counseling conversation. Also based on the survey approaches of a practice team at Tangshan Normal University (online questionnaire and offline interview) and ScienceNet survey findings about in-class slacking, counselors may recognize students who require attention by observing classes, visiting dormitories, and observing daily activities and keep a dynamic record. Thirdly, tiered and classified guidance needs to be adopted. Every student should be given a general online literacy and social skill education; those with slight dependencies should be educated in the form of group counseling and peer support so that their behavior of using online media can be enhanced through behavioral training; students with evident addiction tendencies and severe social problems should be counseled individually, combined with professional assistance of the psychological centers and, when required, cooperation with parents to create home-school synergy. Fourth, social groups within classes and dormitories need to be reinforced. Joint activities at the level of classes and dormitories can increase cohesion; the teacher can assist the student leaders to take care of introverted students, integrate them into the group, and establish an intimate social support network in the real world.

5. Conclusion

The detrimental effect of short-video addiction on college students real-life social abilities is a practical problem higher education has to face in the new era of digitalization. Domestic studies suggest that short-video addiction could result in social isolation and personal sensitivity amongst college students. Authoritative surveys also reveal that over 30 percent of college students suffer due to excessive usage of short-videos and their need to reduce such effects by enhancing their real-life interpersonal support structures, which further shows the urgency of the problem. Short videos are a consequence of technology advancement, not an intrinsic danger; the point is the guidance of students to the rational use and the balance between the virtual and real life. The social challenges of short-video addiction should be regarded as significant by universities and counselors and they should address them at the level of individual literacy, campus ecosystem, and multilevel intervention to assist students in exiting the virtual world and participating actively in real-life socialization and acquire sound social skills and general competence. Future studies might increase the population size and perform longitudinal monitoring and additional intervention plans to enhance the scientific legitimacy and utility of practice.

Acknowledgement

The paper is a research product of the 2025 Ideological and Political Education Research Project of Qingdao Agricultural University entitled, quot; From Virtual to Real: An Analysis of the Influence of Short-Video Addicts on the Real-Life Social Competence of College Students and Countermeasures quot (QNSZ2025106).

References

Chen, E., & Zhu, E. C. (2026). The impact of online short videos on college students' cognitive ability and countermeasures. *Journalism and Communication*, *2026*(20), 112-114. (in Chinese)

Chen, L. (2026). The impact of college students' psychological capital on short-video addiction: A moderated mediation model. *Journal of Chuxiong Normal University*, *41*(05), 143-151. (in Chinese)

Hou, Y. J., Xu, J. J., & Sun, L. L. (2026). Current situation, motivations, and guidance strategies of college students' short-video use behavior. *Delta*, *2026*(25), 256-258. (in Chinese)

Kou, L. D. (2026). An analysis of the causes of and countermeasures for college students' short-video addiction in the digital age. *International Public Relations*, *2026*(15), 176-178. (in Chinese)

Liu, S., & Yuan, F. (2026). Research on the formation mechanism of college students' ideological and political identity in the context of short-video communication. *Public Relations World*, *2026*(19), 58-60. (in Chinese)

Zheng, K. J., You, K. Z., & Wang, C. (2026). The relationship between different types of social withdrawal and problematic short-video use among college students: The mediating role of fear of missing out. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *2026*(05), 1100-1104, 1087. (in Chinese)