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Abstract

This study explores the comparative perceptions of beauty trends generated by TikTok influencers from the United States and Douyin influencers from China. By employing a qualitative content analysis of user comments and interactions with top trending makeup videos, this study examines the similarities and differences in responses of Douyin and TikTok users to beauty trends. Drawing on Social Comparison Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, the research seeks to uncover the nuanced emotional and psychological impacts of these trends. The findings highlight significant cultural differences in user responses, revealing variations in admiration, emotional benefit, and self-doubt. Additionally, the study identifies key themes in user comments, such as positive sentiments, product curiosity, self-doubt, cultural references, and emotional impact. The analysis showed that while users from both cultural backgrounds participated in beauty trends for similar reasons, there were some differences in the emotional satisfaction they gained from such content. This study uses qualitative research methods to analyze the user perceptions by analyzing the comments of Douyin users and Tiktok users. At the same time, the study compares the positive and negative emotions of Douyin and TikTok users toward beauty trend videos through sentiment analysis of user comments. This research contributes to the understanding of the global influence of digital beauty trends and the role of social media in cross-cultural aesthetic exchanges. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of examining user motivations and the psychological dynamics at play in social media interactions with beauty content.

Keywords: TikTok, Douyin, beauty trends, makeup, influencers, user comments

COLLISION OF BEAUTY: EXPLORING USERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY TRENDS
GENERATED BY TIKTOK INFLUENCERS VERSUS DOUYIN INFLUENCERS

By

Xueqi Wang

B.S. Troy University, 2021

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Media Studies

Syracuse University

August 2024

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Acknowledgements

My sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Regina Luttrell, my oral defense chair, Dr. Anne Osborne, and my defense committee members, Dr. Hua Jiang and Dr. Erika Schneider. Thank you for your unwavering support and assistance with my thesis and defense. Your professional insights and suggestions have been invaluable to my research. A special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Regina Luttrell, for extending a helping hand when I faced numerous challenges and felt disheartened by my previous research direction. You guided me out of my predicament and helped me chart a new course for my thesis. During times of pressure, your comforting words and encouragement were vital to my research journey. Your suggestions have made my thesis more professional and comprehensive.

Special gratitude to Dr. Martina Santana, my thesis enlightenment advisor. Since the start of my thesis last year, you have been an indispensable source of support, providing both professional knowledge and emotional backing throughout the writing process. Words cannot express how thankful I am for your support over the past year. I am also grateful to Dr. Rebecca Ortiz, Dr. Srividya Ramasubramanian, Dr. Carol Liebler, and Dr. Nicholas Bowman. Thank you for the encouragement and support you provided during my first year at Newhouse, which bolstered my confidence to persevere and complete my master's degree.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, who have been my greatest support for the past 25 years. You allowed me to pursue my academic dreams by sending me to study far away in the United States. I hope I have made you proud. I also want to thank my dear friends, Shumin Du, Yun Guo, and MengZhengYue Lou, for always being by my side and supporting me. To everyone who has helped and supported me throughout this journey, thank you. Completing this thesis was not easy, but your support made it possible.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the blink of an eye, or rather the tap of a finger, a 15-second TikTok video transforms a young woman from ordinary to extraordinary. A swirl of makeup brushes and the symphony of a viral tune transform her face into a manifestation of the latest beauty trend. These mesmerizing transformations are not just entertainment. They are catalysts that shape the beauty standards of millions of young TikTok users around the world. Every day, in the short span of a 15-second video, countless TikTok users are captivated by the transformative power of beauty trends. These videos, featuring influencers from different corners of the globe, present a fascinating mix of distinct and overlapping beauty standards. At the highlight of this cultural confluence are two dynamic forces, the United States and China, vividly expressed on the global stage of TikTok. As the digital curtain falls between the East and West, Douyin and TikTok influencers have emerged as beauty tastemakers, wielding tremendous power over the app's user base. However, how do users perceive and interpret the aesthetic trends steered by these influencers? Moreover, how do users gain a sense of usage and gratification from these beauty trends?

TikTok, at its core, is an experience. Scrolling through the platform offers users a curated journey of rapid-fire content, each video offering a fleeting glimpse into a world crafted by its creator. Beauty, as portrayed by influencers, is not just a visual experience but an emotional one. As users from across the globe engage with these snippets of aesthetic expression, their perceptions are tinged with their cultural, personal, and social contexts. For many, these trends are not mere content; they resonate on a deeper, emotional level, shaping perceptions of self, aspirations, and even global cultural understandings.

With the rise of social media platforms such as TikTok, beauty trends and standards have transcended borders, allowing influencers from different regions to shape the global perception

of beauty. Short videos created by influencers under the umbrella of beauty content on the platform offer a fascinating glimpse into the dynamic, vibrant landscape of beauty trends, which is further amplified by the platform's unique algorithmic distribution (Kaye et al., 2021).

Originating in China, Douyin has quickly become a global phenomenon, especially among younger generations, effectively shaping their perceptions of various societal constructs, including beauty standards. However, an aspect that often remains unexplored is the variance in these perceptions generated by influencers from different cultural backgrounds, particularly the U.S. and China, given the global nature of TikTok and its origins in China (Yang & Ha, 2021).

As Chinese and U.S. influencers emerge as predominant figures on TikTok, discerning the differential perceptions of their propagated beauty trends among users becomes imperative.

Researchers have delved into the relationship between influencers and their audiences.

Influencers foster a sense of belonging and connectedness with their audience, crucial for building their personal brand and commercial value, by strategically sharing 'unfiltered' content (Steinbrecher, 2022). A significant fact of this relationship, particularly in the beauty realm, is the frequent product comparisons influencers indulge in, potentially influenced by partnerships, cultural preferences, or simply the pursuit of the 'next big thing' in beauty (Yang, 2022).

Notably, influencers do not merely reflect beauty trends; they often mold and propagate them, acting as harbingers of both developing trends and those from popular culture. Previous research endeavors have extensively studied the role of influencers in shaping trends. Hudders and De Veirman (2021) highlighted the mechanics of influencer marketing, emphasizing the strategies employed by digital personalities to craft and propagate trends. However, while these studies have been illuminating, they have predominantly approached the subject from the influencers' perspective, often neglecting the user's emotional journey. While these studies have been illuminating in their approach from the influencers perspective, they often need to pay more

attention to the user's emotional journey, leaving gaps in our understanding of how users decipher and respond to these beauty standards.

At first glance, it may appear that TikTok users are passive onlookers of beauty trends. However, beneath the surface lies a realm of active, discerning, and emotionally charged engagement. As users encounter a beauty trend steeped in Chinese traditional aesthetics or the urban chic of contemporary Asia, feelings of nostalgia, cultural pride, or curiosity emerge (Lee et al., 2019). In contrast, a trend propagated by a U.S. influencer, often reflecting Western beauty standards, might be perceived as aspirational, mainstream, or alienating for some (Rubin et al., 2003). The juxtaposition of these diverse beauty narratives within a singular platform offers users a rich tapestry of beauty experiences, each eliciting a spectrum of feelings and perceptions. Some users find empowerment in trends that echo their self-image, while others feel beauty trends on TikTok may appear unrelatable or unattainable, leading to feelings of inadequacy or alienation.

Grasping the nuanced perceptions of TikTok users regarding aesthetic trends presented by TikTok and Douyin influencers is paramount. These perceptions drive the global narrative of beauty and dictate the trajectory of trends, determining which attain prominence and which wane. Because Douyin is one of the few Chinese apps that has achieved significant global penetration, it is a powerful platform for disseminating Chinese culture (Zhang & Liu, 2020). TikTok is not just an app for fun videos; it has become a channel through which aspects of Chinese culture can be shared and spread globally (Stokel-Walker, 2023). Therefore, understanding how Chinese-influenced beauty trends are perceived internationally compared to those from the United States can shed light on the broader dynamics of cultural exchange in the digital age. It explores how digital platforms like Douyin facilitate a reciprocal flow of cultural elements, contributing to the evolution of global beauty norms and influencing individual

identity and cultural perceptions. This research is significant as it provides insights into the dynamic interplay of Eastern and Western beauty ideals, offering a deeper understanding of how digital platforms are reshaping cultural landscapes and influencing societal values in the 21st century.

Moreover, Beauty trends are significant cultural markers, reflecting societal ideals, values, and standards (Frith et al., 2005). By comparing how beauty trends influenced by Chinese aesthetics are received globally versus those from the U.S., we can understand how different cultural ideas and standards from the East and West resonate globally. By analyzing how beauty trends from China and the U.S. are perceived on this platform, we can gain insights into the broader interplay and mutual influence of Eastern and Western cultures in the modern world.

This research focused on the makeup direction, which means beauty influencers use cosmetic products to enhance or alter appearance, serving as an artistic expression and a means to conceal imperfections (Henriques et al., 2020). Makeup is an important theme of beauty trends reflected by TikTok beauty influencers. "makeup" covers the various techniques, styles, and methods used by beauty experts when applying makeup. It involves selecting and using cosmetics to achieve specific aesthetic goals. Therefore, this research focused on the different makeup styles reflected by TikTok beauty influencers and Douyin beauty influencers in beauty trends. As a platform, TikTok plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary beauty narratives (Du et al., 2022). While fashion trends or skincare routines are integral to beauty discussions, the realm of makeup stands out in its capacity to embody transformative power. Makeup is not only for enhancing features but also an art, a form of self-expression, and a symbol of confidence for many people (Lintumäki, 2021). Furthermore, makeup is an immediate, often easily accessible medium for individuals to experiment with and engage in beauty trends (Pitts-Taylor, 2007), so

the popular makeup videos on TikTok are an important aspect of contemporary beauty trends. The impact of makeup on self-esteem is two-sided. On the one hand, a study reveals that women with low self-esteem may use makeup as a tool to conceal insecurities, whereas those with high self-esteem often use it to draw attention (Mafra et al., 2022). On the other hand, women with higher social self-esteem tend to spend more on makeup, suggesting a correlation between self-esteem in social interactions and the importance placed on appearance (Manis, 2022). This indicates that makeup usage is not just a matter of physical appearance, but is deeply intertwined with psychological factors and social dynamics.

This study aimed to understand how TikTok users perceive beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers, how they derive gratifications from these beauty trends and how they are influenced by comparisons with other influencers, especially in the context of makeup beauty trends. This study aimed to dissect the intricate relationship between the consumption of beauty trends led by TikTok influencers and Douyin influencers and their subsequent impact on users' sentiment. At the core of this study is the exploration of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations behind influencer makeup play a key role in shaping these psychological outcomes. Furthermore, this study aims to reveal users' nuanced perceptions of these beauty trends, focusing on the personal affective and cognitive responses elicited by these digital interactions. By using qualitative content analysis, this study sought to fully understand the similarities and differences in these beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers, rooted in different cultural digital contexts, and how these similarities and differences affect users' usage and satisfaction. This study focused on the following three research questions: RQ1: How do users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok influencers compared to Douyin influencers? RQ2: What recurring themes and sentiments are present in comments and user-generated content when discussing beauty trends promoted by

TikTok influencers compared to those promoted by Douyin influencers? RQ3: How does uses and gratifications theory manifest in the beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers? The data and results of this study provided valuable insights into the broader impact of cultural convergence in the digital age and help to gain a deeper understanding of how social media platforms such as TikTok can enhance or undermine users' self-esteem and acceptance in the context of global beauty ideals.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on literature about TikTok users and beauty trends. The first section provides a background of TikTok/Douyin and influencers, focusing on influencers' relationship to beauty trends on social media and a broad overview of TikTok/Douyin and influencers—next, the concept of beauty trends and its theoretical lens. This chapter explores the interactive nature of TikTok/Douyin, highlighting how users engage with and redefine beauty standards through participation in trends and challenges. It also examines the educational aspect of the platform, where influencers share beauty knowledge and product recommendations, thus democratizing access to beauty information. Furthermore, the chapter compares the approaches of TikTok and Douyin influencers, analyzing their impact on beauty trends and user perceptions. Theoretical frameworks such as Social Comparison Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory are employed to understand the psychological dynamics at play. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in existing literature and proposing research questions aimed at exploring TikTok users' responses to beauty trends propagated by influencers from different cultural backgrounds.

Why study TikTok and Douyin?

TikTok and Douyin, despite being essentially the same app, are tailored to different markets—international and Chinese, respectively. Studying both platforms provides a unique

opportunity to compare and contrast user behaviors, content strategies, and cultural influences in two distinct yet interconnected digital environments. TikTok, launched internationally in 2018, has quickly become one of the most popular social media platforms worldwide, particularly among younger demographics (Anderson, 2020). Its Chinese counterpart, Douyin, launched earlier in 2016, enjoys massive popularity within China, boasting over 600 million daily active users as of 2020 (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2020). Both platforms leverage powerful algorithms to curate highly personalized content feeds, making them ideal subjects for examining the impact of digital beauty trends.

TikTok's ascent as a formidable digital entity in social media platforms is undeniable. According to research by De La Garza et al. (2021), the application has accrued over a billion users globally as of 2021. Such expansive reach makes TikTok an indisputably influential vessel in disseminating beauty trends, opinions, and innovations across continents and cultures. The platform's expanse demonstrates the potential magnitude of its impact on global beauty perceptions and trends. Grasping the nuanced perceptions of TikTok users regarding aesthetic trends presented by Douyin and TikTok influencers is paramount. These perceptions drive the global narrative of beauty and dictate the trajectory of trends, determining which attain prominence and which wane.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of TikTok and Douyin allows researchers to explore how cultural context influences the reception and propagation of beauty standards. As Douyin operates within China's unique social, cultural, and regulatory environment, it offers a contrasting backdrop to TikTok, which operates under the influences of Western digital culture (Du et al., 2022). This distinction is crucial for understanding how global beauty trends are localized and reinterpreted across different regions. Studying these platforms also helps to uncover how algorithmic content delivery, user engagement, and influencer marketing strategies

vary between markets, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the global digital media landscape.

Democratization of Beauty

A notable characteristic of TikTok that sets it apart from many traditional platforms is its apparent shift toward the democratization of beauty. Sands et al. (2022) emphasize how TikTok's algorithmic preferences lean more towards user-generated content than the polished, professionally produced content often prevalent on other platforms. This exciting aspect results in a more diverse representation of beauty, challenging and reshaping established beauty norms. On TikTok, the inherent value is not in professional lighting or a high-end camera but in authenticity and individual creativity (Chu et al., 2022). By amplifying the voices of everyday users, the platform potentially fosters a more inclusive environment where a myriad of beauty standards can co-exist and be celebrated. Traditional media have historically championed a particular and often restrictive idea of beauty. This "singular, often narrow, definition of beauty" they promote starkly contrasts the more diverse representation platforms like TikTok offer. In elucidating this point, Snider (2018) remarks on the challenges the conventional media landscape faces. He highlights that while there is no singular narrative in fat activism movements, traditional media platforms have consistently faced criticism for their limited portrayal of beauty.

Definition of Influencers

In the context of this study, influencers are defined as individuals who have gained a significant following on social media platforms due to their ability to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of their authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. Influencers are characterized by their capacity to generate large-scale engagement through original content that resonates with a specific audience or demographic. Influencers on TikTok and Douyin are individuals who have cultivated substantial followings on these

platforms by consistently creating content that resonates with specific audiences. These influencers leverage their popularity and credibility to shape trends, particularly in areas like beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. Unlike traditional celebrities, TikTok and Douyin influencers often gain their status through organic content creation rather than mainstream media exposure, allowing them to connect more authentically with their followers (Kaye, Chen, & Zeng, 2020).

On TikTok and Douyin, influencers utilize short-form video content to engage with their audiences, often employing creative storytelling, humor, and viral challenges to enhance their reach and impact. Influencers on platforms like TikTok and Douyin not only serve as trendsetters but also as cultural intermediaries who bridge the gap between brands and consumers. They do this by crafting narratives that incorporate products into lifestyle aspirations, thereby rendering the commercialized aspects of their content more relatable and palatable to their followers (Jin & Phua, 2014). This ability to seamlessly integrate brand messages into everyday content makes influencers invaluable to modern digital marketing strategies.

The role of influencers has evolved with the advent of social media, where they now function not only as marketers but also as content creators, social commentators, and community leaders, wielding substantial power over public opinion and consumer behavior.

Global Reach of Influencers

Lastly, the platform's impact is not just about numbers or its democratic approach. The true essence of TikTok's influence lies in the global reach of its content creators, specifically the influencers. A study points out that TikTok's influencers have a global audience, making them crucial trendsetters across different cultures and regions. This globalization of influence means that beauty trends from one part of the world can rapidly spread to others, leading to the blending and mixing of cultural aesthetics (Abidin, 2021). This transnational influence results in a fascinating cross-cultural exchange of beauty ideals and standards. Moreover, the influencers

often become aware of their international audience and may intentionally or unintentionally blend elements from various cultures into their content (Brake, 2012). This fusion can lead to a blending and mutual appreciation of beauty standards from both cultures.

In conclusion, the global reach of influencers on TikTok provides a dynamic platform where beauty trends are showcased and mixed, adapted, and perceived in various ways by users worldwide. As these trends traverse continents, they shape and reshape perceptions, making TikTok a melting pot of evolving beauty standards.

How influencers share beauty content on TikTok/Douyin

Interactive Trend Formation

One key differentiating factor of TikTok as a platform is its interactive nature. Zulli & Zulli (2022) posited that TikTok's framework encourages users to be passive observers and active participants. Users can put their unique spin on ongoing trends by hopping onto trending challenges or using famous soundbites. This interactivity is pivotal for beauty trends, enabling a more personalized interpretation. Instead of just adopting beauty standards, users actively reshape and define them (Andrade et al., 2019). This paradigm shift has increased the beauty sector's emphasis on individuality and creativity (Karchin & Horvath, 2023).

Beauty Knowledge

The age-old practice of passing down beauty secrets has found a new platform in TikTok. According to Han (2021), the app has become a treasure trove of beauty knowledge, tutorials, and product reviews. Influencers use their platforms to share beauty tips and methods and provide a vast source of accessible and free education on beauty products and techniques. This sharing of knowledge can democratize access to beauty information and drive trends. As many users flock to the platform seeking guidance on beauty, influencers significantly shape perceptions about beauty standards and ideals (Santiago & Castelo, 2020). This democratization

of beauty knowledge ensures that more people can access up-to-date beauty information regardless of socio-economic background.

Product Discovery and Promotion

The dynamics between brands and social media influencers have transformed with the rise of TikTok. As one study highlighted, TikTok has become an essential product discovery and promotion platform. Brands often collaborate with influencers to showcase their products, making TikTok a significant driver of consumer behavior in the beauty industry (Ki et al., 2020). Such collaborations boost the brand's visibility and play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior (Rathore, 2018). Users rely on their favorite influencers for genuine reviews and product recommendations; this trust has made TikTok an influential platform for driving sales in the beauty industry and promoting beauty trends (Haenlein et al., 2020).

In conclusion, TikTok's interactivity, educational capabilities, and promotional influence have profoundly shaped global perceptions and formations of beauty trends. The distinct approaches of US and Chinese influencers in sharing beauty content provide rich insights into the diverse ways beauty is perceived and presented across cultures.

Despite TikTok's immense influence and the democratization of beauty on the platform, there remains a gap in understanding how users perceive specific beauty trends propagated by influencers from different cultural backgrounds. Historically, the East and West have held distinct and rich beauty ideals, each rooted in their specific values and aesthetic principles. On TikTok and Douyin, this contrast is accentuated as influencers from various cultural backgrounds, particularly from the US and China, play significant roles in determining trending beauty norms.

This leads to the three research questions:

RQ1: How do users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok influencers compared to Douyin influencers?

RQ2: What recurring themes and sentiments are present in comments and user-generated content when discussing beauty trends promoted by TikTok influencers compared to those promoted by Douyin influencers?

RQ3: How does uses and gratifications theory manifest in the beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers?

Theoretical Framework

Social comparison theory

Social comparison theory, introduced by Leon Festinger in 1954, posits that individuals evaluate their abilities and opinions by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). On TikTok, this often involves comparing oneself to the beauty standards of popular influencers and creators. These individuals can unintentionally set norms for beauty, and the algorithmic nature of TikTok's "For You" feed can further reinforce these standards. As a result, users' perceptions of what is 'normal' or 'ideal' may become skewed (Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

According to the social comparison theory, frequent exposure to idealized images can negatively impact self-esteem and body image (Zeigler-Hill & Terry, 2007). Bauer (2020) underscores the potential detrimental effects of Social Comparison Theory in the digital age. Given TikTok's format, users are consistently exposed to idealized portrayals of beauty and lifestyle, which can be hard to match in real life. Such constant comparison can diminish self-esteem and distorted body image, sometimes leading to maladaptive behaviors like excessive dieting or over-exercising. Thus, as users compare themselves to these often-unattainable standards, it can lead to negative self-perceptions and harmful behaviors. Perceiving similarities with role models on social media can influence self-esteem in social media users (Kaskeleviciute

et al., 2023). Greater perceived similarities with a role model can boost self-esteem, whereas fewer similarities can diminish it.

Besides, social comparison is not unidirectional, and social comparison theory suggests that humans have an inherent drive to compare themselves with others, particularly in areas where objective measurements are not readily available (Festinger, 1954), such as beauty. Brown & Tiggemann (2016) articulated that humans often make upward and downward comparisons. Comparing oneself to the idealized images often presented by influencers can lead to feelings of insufficiency, intensifying the negative effects of regularly viewing such content on platforms like TikTok. Research has shown that many women are inclined to make upward comparisons, often benchmarking themselves against the elevated standards depicted in the media (Kim, 2018). With mainstream media frequently showcasing images of successful, empowered, and slender women, many come to see these portrayals as societal benchmarks for beauty. The advent of social media platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, has only amplified this trend by facilitating easier comparisons to these 'ideals' (Santarossa & Woodruff, 2017). While a handful of women claim to derive positive motivation from such comparisons, the predominant sentiment leans negative.

Social comparison theory provides insight into how individuals measure themselves against others. On TikTok, users frequently compare themselves to influencers, who may inadvertently define beauty norms. Amplified by TikTok's algorithms, these norms can skew users' views of 'ideal' beauty. Consistent exposure to these ideals can negatively impact self-esteem and body image, especially when users perceive a disparity between themselves and these influencer role models. The theory also highlights that people naturally engage in both upward and downward comparisons, especially in areas like beauty. Given the prevalence of idealized

beauty standards on media platforms, including TikTok, SCT is relevant for studying how users perceive these beauty trends and the subsequent effects on their self-perception.

Given this theoretical background, exploring how users engage in these comparisons among the diverse beauty standards prevalent on the platform is an important factor in understanding user-perceived beauty trends. Understanding this process is crucial because it elucidates the underlying dynamics of how beauty trends are received, internalized, and acted upon. The pervasiveness of influencers on TikTok and Douyin, as well as the platform's algorithms that curate and propagate specific beauty ideals, leads to the first research question: **RQ1:** How do users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok influencers compared to Douyin influencers?

Comparative Analysis: TikTok Influencers vs. Douyin Influencers

Douyin Influencers

The realm of Douyin influencers, colloquially recognized as 'wanghong' (the Chinese translation of influencers), has garnered attention due to their impactful role in shaping beauty trends on the Douyin platform. According to Wang & Feng (2022), these influencers meticulously construct their identities around three primary attributes. The first is the glamorous self, presenting an image of lavishness and perfection to their followers. The second, the professional self, portrays the influencer as an authority in the beauty domain, with the knowledge and skill to advise and guide. The third facet is the ordinary woman self, presenting a relatable side intended to forge a deeper connection with their followers. A significant finding from this study suggests that the influencers' identity is intrinsically tied to upholding an appearance that aligns with specific societal standards. This not only manifests in how they present themselves but also implies that their followers might also feel a conscious or

subconscious nudge to emulate these standards, signifying the strong influence these influencers wield.

It is clear that Douyin influencers play a key role in shaping beauty trends on social media platforms like Douyin. Beyond this, their influence extends to changing perceptions of beauty and self-esteem among users. These influencers greatly influence the self-objectification and social comparison tendencies of female audiences through their depictions of makeup and beauty standards. Influencers' nuanced representations of beauty and lifestyle set a benchmark for appearance, often making users more willing to alter their appearance to conform to these depicted standards (Mu & Tang, 2022). This phenomenon highlights an important aspect of China's digital culture: virtual representations of beauty are increasingly intertwined with real-life perceptions and self-esteem, especially among young women. Research also highlights the need for greater awareness and potential corrective measures to mitigate the impact of these trends on mental health and self-esteem (Jin, 2020).

TikTok Influencers

When considering the trajectory of beauty influencers in the United States, one must recognize the historical context provided by platforms like Instagram and YouTube. These platforms have been the primary arenas where TikTok beauty influencers made their mark and connected deeply with their audiences. De Perthuis & Findlay (2019) articulate the role of these influencers as more than mere promoters of beauty products. They act as ambassadors of beauty ideals, using their reach and influence to showcase and propagate diverse facets of beauty culture. This involves presenting products or beauty routines and often conveys deeper cultural values, ideologies, and aspirations related to beauty. Therefore, even though TikTok is a comparatively recent platform, the core principles they have developed from their experiences on

Instagram and YouTube provide TikTok influencers with a distinctive viewpoint and methodology for spreading beauty trends.

In the U.S., influencers on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have become key drivers in shaping beauty trends, greatly influencing the cosmetics choices and self-perception of their audiences, especially younger Millennials and Generation Z. According to Hassan et al. (2021), these “beauty gurus” leverage their expertise in makeup to partner with cosmetics brands, leveraging their credibility rooted in knowledge, appeal, and relevance to influence the brand choices of young female audiences. Another study suggested that the impact of beauty influencers extends beyond product choice to impact self-esteem and social comparison (Rüther et al., 2023). This study highlights the complex psychological dynamics triggered by exposure to positively biased images from social media influencers. It suggests that such exposure may lead to upward social comparisons among female viewers, which in turn affects their national self-esteem. Interestingly, while these comparisons generally resulted in lower self-esteem, some instances showed unexpected increases in self-esteem levels, suggesting that the impact of influencer content on self-perception may be multifaceted and context-dependent. These insights highlight the profound and subtle influence that U.S. social media influencers have in shaping beauty standards and shaping individual self-concepts through their depictions of makeup and lifestyle.

RQ2: What recurring themes and sentiments are present in comments and user-generated content when discussing beauty trends promoted by TikTok influencers compared to those promoted by Douyin influencers?

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is a communication theory that explores how and why individuals actively seek out specific media to satisfy various needs and desires. Originating

in the 1940s and further developed by scholars such as Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in the 1970s, UGT shifts the focus from the media's effects on passive audiences to the active role of audiences in choosing and using media to fulfill their specific goals (Katz et al., 1973). This theory posits that media consumers are not passive recipients of media messages but active participants who select media based on their individual needs and gratifications.

With the advent of social media, UGT has found renewed relevance as it offers a robust framework for understanding user engagement with interactive platforms (Pelletier et al., 2020). Social media provides a dynamic environment where users can seek out content, interact with others, and produce their own media (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Scholars have applied UGT to social media to explore various motivations behind user engagement, such as entertainment, obtaining information, enjoying technology and seeking relationships. TikTok, with its diverse content including beauty influencers' makeup videos, provides a rich context for examining these motivations.

Entertainment is a core motivation driving engagement with social media, especially on TikTok. Users frequently turn to TikTok to escape daily routines and enjoy light-hearted content. Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) found that entertainment is a primary driver of TikTok usage among pre-adolescents and adolescents. Beauty influencers on TikTok capitalize on this by creating visually appealing and engaging makeup tutorials and transformation videos that captivate viewers and provide a pleasurable viewing experience (Pop et al., 2021). The quick, visually stimulating nature of these videos aligns well with users' desires for amusement and relaxation.

Social media users often engage with content to stay informed about current events, trends, and specific interests. According to Omar and Dequan (2021), users engage with TikTok not only for entertainment but also to acquire valuable information. On TikTok, users often

watch beauty influencers to learn new makeup techniques, discover product reviews, and stay updated on the latest beauty trends. Beauty influencers serve as credible sources of beauty knowledge, providing tutorials and reviews that help users make informed decisions about their beauty routines. This informational content fulfills users' needs for learning and staying informed.

The technological features of TikTok enhance user engagement by making content creation and consumption more enjoyable. On the one hand, Meng and Leung (2021) highlight that the gratification derived from using advanced technological features on TikTok, such as filters, special effects, and music integration, significantly impacts user satisfaction. Beauty influencers often utilize these tools to enhance their videos, making them more engaging and visually appealing. The ability to easily create and share high-quality content adds to the enjoyment of technology for both content creators and viewers. On the other hand, social media provides users with tools to curate and present their identities to others. This aspect of UGT is particularly relevant in platforms like Instagram and TikTok, where visual content plays a crucial role. Studies by Chua and Chang (2016) on Instagram show that users engage in self-presentation by sharing carefully curated images and videos that reflect their desired self-image.

TikTok also serves as a medium for building and maintaining relationships. According to Alhabash et al. (2024), social interaction is a major predictor of TikTok use, with users seeking to expand their social networks and gain social recognition. Users often engage with the platform to connect with others, share personal content, and participate in community trends. In that case, TikTok Users under beauty trends videos engage with beauty influencers to connect with a community of like-minded individuals who share their interest in beauty and makeup. The study by Bucknell Bossen and Kottasz (2020) further emphasizes that motivations such as self-

expression and fame-seeking drive users to actively contribute to the TikTok community, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

Analyzing user comments through the lens of UGT reveals how feedback and interaction on social media contribute to the overall gratification experience, enhancing the understanding of user engagement. By applying UGT, this study uncovered the complex motivations behind user engagement with TikTok beauty content and how these motivations shape the perception and reception of beauty trends across different cultural contexts.

RQ3: How does uses and gratifications theory manifest in the beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers?

Gaps in the Previous Literature

While TikTok is designed to encompass a broad spectrum of content topics, one of the most prominent and engaging categories is beauty trends. This area is particularly prevalent in TikTok videos in both China and the United States, making it a compelling subject for examining the reactions and perceptions of TikTok users from these two distinct cultural contexts. However, there is a noticeable gap when looking for markers specifically focusing on non-Western beauty standards on TikTok, especially comparing US and Chinese influencers. This timeline illustrates that while TikTok-related beauty research has been increasing, studies concentrating on non-Western standards compared to Western ones still need to be more noticed. The current research also lacks a comparison of TikTok user comments in China and the United States to explore users' perceptions and emotional responses to social media content. Although TikTok in China and the United States operate under the same model, they are two independent applications with distinct user bases and potentially different cultural contexts (Kaye et al., 2021). Therefore, comparing these two platforms is crucial for understanding how users in different regions perceive and emotionally engage with beauty trends on TikTok.

Despite the popularity of beauty trends on TikTok, there is a significant gap in the research focusing specifically on this topic. Existing studies have largely overlooked how beauty trends are disseminated and received on TikTok, particularly in the context of cross-cultural comparisons between China and the United States. This lack of attention to a highly visible and influential category on TikTok represents a critical oversight in understanding the platform's impact on beauty standards and beauty trends.

Moreover, Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a pivotal framework for analyzing user interactions with digital media. While UGT has been extensively applied to mature social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, there is a dearth of research applying this theory to TikTok (Falgoust et al., 2022). Specifically, the motivations and perceptions of TikTok users in relation to beauty trends have not been explored through the lens of UGT. This represents a significant gap in the literature, as understanding the motivations behind user interactions with beauty content on TikTok can provide deeper insights into user behavior and engagement.

Additionally, most prior studies on TikTok have been quantitative, primarily examining how users' personality traits influence their usage patterns (Omar & Dequan, 2020). These studies often overlook the rich, qualitative data available in user comments. To better understand the underlying motivations and perceptions, there is a need for in-depth qualitative research that delves into user comments on TikTok, particularly concerning beauty trends. Such qualitative analysis can offer nuanced insights that quantitative methods may not fully capture.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to explore how users perceive beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin influencers. By examining user interactions with TikTok videos, the research seeks to uncover cultural differences and similarities in beauty

standards and preferences. This methodology chapter outlines the research design and methods used in the proposed study.

Research Approach

This study used comparative content analysis to focus on video content and the descriptive interpretation of videos and texts (Graneheim et al., 2017). Content analysis provides a robust framework with a wide range of techniques suitable for analyzing the diverse and complex data generated by TikTok videos and user comments (White & Marsh, 2006). Studies such as those by (Yilmaz, 2013) highlight the necessity of exploring phenomena qualitatively, especially when comparing different contexts. Content analysis enables the researcher to delve into these qualitative aspects while maintaining a structured approach to data analysis (Forman & Damschroder, 2007).

Additionally, content analysis allows for the systematic and replicable examination of media content (Krippendorff, 2019), which is crucial for a comparative study aiming to draw reliable conclusions about cultural differences and similarities in beauty trend perceptions. The systematic nature of content analysis helps manage large datasets (Lewis et al., 2013), such as the extensive number of TikTok videos and user comments, and extracting meaningful patterns and themes. Since qualitative content analysis involves inductive coding, creating coding schemes, and developing categories through code abstraction, it can be used to study content on websites, analyze information practices, and understand how individuals interact with emerging technologies like TikTok (Vears & Gillam, 2022). In that case, the content analysis approach could provide a nuanced understanding of how beauty trends are perceived in two distinct cultural contexts.

Research Design

The research design comprises several key stages. The beauty domain on social media is vast; therefore, to construct the research framework, the beauty domain should be narrowed down to the makeup category. Initially, this study identified the top five makeup trends on Douyin and TikTok based on the 2023 TikTok trend rankings. Since hashtags are the most effective way to identify specific content categories on TikTok and other social media platforms, and they are a standard tool for aggregating data in social media research, this study used hashtags as the preferred method for identifying makeup trend videos (Sandberg, 2022).

Since posts can contain up to 30 hashtags, it is crucial to explain the methodology used to identify the most relevant and most used hashtags for each makeup trend. The process involved several steps. First, an initial collection phase should be conducted to search for makeup-related videos on TikTok and Douyin. Approximately 200 hashtags were collected from the hashtags used in the top-ranked videos. A comprehensive list of all used hashtags is compiled, creating an exhaustive list of makeup-related hashtags.

The next step involves frequency analysis. After entering the 200 beauty trends hashtags into an Excel table, use the statistics function in Excel to get the number of times each beauty trends hashtag appears after removing duplicates. Then use the sorting function in Excel to sort the hashtags by frequency and get the top five beauty trends hashtags with the highest frequency. The top 5 hashtags with the highest frequency of occurrence were selected to identify the most popular and most used hashtags. Afterward, relevance filtering is applied to ensure that the identified hashtags are directly related to the specific makeup trend being studied. Any generic or irrelevant hashtags be removed to maintain a centralized dataset.

Subsequently, for each identified trend, I collected the ten videos with the highest number of likes from Douyin and TikTok. Subsequently, for each identified trend, the ten videos with the highest likes were collected from both Douyin and TikTok.

Then, user comments under these 50 videos were collected and analyzed to gain insights into how users perceive and respond to the beauty trends presented by influencers. Comments are gathered using automated data scraping tools that comply with TikTok's terms of service to ensure ethical research practices (Bell & Waters, 2018). Apify is a cloud platform for web scraping and browser automation that can be effectively used to crawl and download posts, comments, content, and any associated metadata (Agrawal, 2023). Finally, the comments of 50 videos were imported into NVivo software and transcribed, and all the data was coded and analyzed.

Data Collection

The first step in data collection involves identifying the top five makeup trends on TikTok and Douyin. Popular trends are identified through hashtags, views, and likes, ensuring that the selected trends represent current beauty and makeup practices in both countries (Zubiaga et al., 2015). Based on the 2023 TikTok trend rankings, the top five makeup trend hashtags in Douyin and the TikTok were identified. The research conducted a preliminary collection of 200 makeup-related hashtags, and after frequency analysis and relevance filtering, identify the top five makeup trends on TikTok and Douyin. Each hashtag corresponds to a popular beauty trend, and use these 10 hashtags to identify the TikTok videos that each trend is representing. Likes are regarded as a sign of engagement, and viewers in similar affinity groups are exposed to more highly engaging films thanks to the TikTok algorithm (Park et al., 2016). Using the sorting function within the hashtags, data was collected from the top ten most liked videos for each of these ten hashtags. The 50 most liked videos containing these ten hashtags were downloaded and saved to a password-protected laptop. The research used the open source TikTok scraping tool Apify to collect a dataset of comments in TikTok videos with 10 popular tags. The data collected for each video includes the post's unique ID, URL, title text, creation timestamp, author

username, and number of likes. Researcher first translated the audio, hashtags, and comments of the 50 makeup videos from TikTok and Douyin, and then the data from these 50 videos were transcribed into NVivo software.

Sentiment Analysis and Textual Analysis

The methodology for sentiment analysis and textual analysis in this study involves using NVivo software to analyze user comments on TikTok influencer videos. This approach aims to evaluate the emotional tone of the comments and classify user opinions into positive, negative, and neutral categories.

Sentiment analysis is a crucial part of understanding how users perceive and respond to beauty trends presented by influencers. The process begins with the importation of all collected user comments into NVivo. Each comment is then systematically analyzed for its emotional content. NVivo facilitates this by allowing the researcher to evaluate and code the comments based on the presence of emotional words and phrases (Yu et al., 2011). To conduct sentiment analysis, NVivo's sentiment analysis tool was employed. First, NVivo was used to identify comments and assign sentiment scores to each comment. The opinions of all user comments were classified into positive, negative, and neutral based on the modifiers in the comments. After that, listed the sentiment scores obtained from sentiment analysis classification and summarized the average content of each sentiment. Then, the text analysis results of the nodes that subdivided each theme and factor identified in the study were listed according to each sentiment.

In addition to sentiment analysis, textual analysis conducted to gain deeper insights into the themes and patterns present in user comments. This involves a more detailed examination of the text to identify recurring themes, topics, and phrases. First, developing a coding scheme based on initial readings of the comments. Codes were created for various themes related to user

perceptions of beauty trends, cultural references, and influencer impact. Then, apply these codes to the comments using NVivo's coding features. This involves highlighting relevant text segments and assigning them to appropriate codes. NVivo's query functions also can identify patterns and relationships between different codes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). For example, examining how frequently certain themes appear in positive versus negative comments. After analyzing the data, NVivo could generate visual representations such as word clouds, tree maps, and cluster analysis diagrams to illustrate the distribution and relationship of themes within the data.

By integrating sentiment analysis with detailed textual analysis, this methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of user perceptions and responses to beauty trends on TikTok. This dual approach allows for both quantitative categorization of sentiment and qualitative exploration of underlying themes, offering rich insights into the social media discourse surrounding beauty influencers.

Coding scheme

Creating a coding scheme is a critical step in qualitative content analysis, allowing for systematically categorizing and examining data. The study used the qualitative analysis software platform NVivo for coding and analysis. During the initial review, taking notes on initial impressions and recurring themes or patterns that emerge from the data is important. After developing initial codes, the next step is to create coding schemas that organize these codes into broader categories.

For RQ1, in order to compare the similarities and differences between TikTok and Douyin users on beauty trends videos, the comments of TikTok and Douyin users are coded separately. In the initial phase of coding, an open coding approach was employed to examine each comment and meticulously identify distinct concepts and categories. The category "Suspect

and Lack of Confidence" included comments reflecting users' frustration with their makeup abilities, captured under "Frustration of Makeup Skills," and comments indicating anxiety about their appearance, categorized as "Appearance Anxiety." The category "Praise for Influencers" comprised comments admiring the influencers' makeup skills, labeled as "Worship of Makeup Skills," and comments appreciating the overall beauty of the influencers, categorized as "Beauty of Influencers." Another category, "Evaluation and Feelings," included comments discussing specific makeup styles, categorized as "Makeup Style," comments evaluating the makeup skills demonstrated, labeled as "Makeup Skills," and comments expressing the emotions and feelings evoked by the makeup looks, categorized as "Emotions and Feelings." The final category, "Desire and Curiosity," captured comments showing a desire to try or learn the makeup techniques, labeled as "Want to Try or Learn," comments requesting tutorials on how to achieve the looks, categorized as "Request of Makeup Tutorial," and comments inquiring about the specific makeup products used, labeled as "Makeup Product."

In the second-level coding process, axial coding was employed to refine and group the initial codes into broader categories and subcategories, establishing relationships between them. For example, comments about frustration with makeup skills and appearance anxiety were consolidated into a broader theme of self-doubt and lack of confidence, reflecting users' insecurities and challenges in achieving desired makeup looks. Admiration for makeup skills and the beauty of influencers were combined into a unified theme, highlighting users' praise and admiration for influencers and showcasing their appreciation for the influencers' expertise and aesthetic appeal. The "Evaluation and Feelings" theme merged comments on makeup style, skills, and emotional responses into a comprehensive theme evaluating and discussing makeup trends. It captured users' critical engagement and the emotional impact of the beauty content. The theme "Desire and Curiosity" integrated comments about wanting to try, learning techniques, and

inquiring about products into a theme showcasing users' desire and curiosity for makeup trends. It highlighted the users' eagerness to replicate the looks and gain knowledge about the beauty products and techniques used by influencers.

The final step involved thematic analysis to synthesize the data into comprehensive themes that addressed RQ1. This step ensured that the coding scheme accurately reflected the complexities of user reactions and the cultural nuances present in the comments. Several universal themes were identified, such as shared admiration for beauty influencers across cultures, common interest in learning about products and techniques, and prevalent feelings of self-doubt and anxiety related to personal makeup skills. Additionally, culturally specific themes were noted, including unique cultural pride and engagement in Douyin comments, nostalgic references in TikTok comments, and differences in emotional language used by followers of TikTok and Douyin influencers.

For RQ2, in order to explore the emotions of users on beauty trends videos, all comments were analyzed for sentiment. The comments were categorized into primary sentiments based on the emotional tone expressed by users. Positive sentiments were divided into "Very Positive," which included comments expressing strong enthusiasm and admiration, and "Fairly Positive," which encompassed comments showing a moderate level of approval. Neutral sentiments were captured by comments that were matter-of-fact, informational, or non-emotional. Negative sentiments were categorized into "Fairly Negative," which included comments indicating mild disapproval or frustration, and "Very Negative," which comprised comments expressing strong dissatisfaction or self-deprecation.

For RQ3, the data coding process involved first-level coding to capture broad categories of user motivations and second-level coding to identify specific aspects within each category. In the initial coding phase, an open coding approach was employed to meticulously examine each

comment and identify the primary motivations driving user engagement with beauty trends. Based on the UGT framework, the comments were categorized into four broad categories: Entertainment, Obtaining Information, Enjoying Technology, and Seeking Relationships. Comments reflecting users' enjoyment of the visual experience and learning new makeup techniques were categorized under Entertainment. Comments focusing on seeking practical guidance and product recommendations were categorized under Obtaining Information. Users asked for tutorials, makeup skills, and product details. Comments reflecting users' self-expression and gratification derived from the makeup looks presented were categorized under Enjoying Technology. The category Seeking Relationships included comments that indicated users' desire to form connections and affirm their identities in relation to influencers and peers.

In the second-level coding process, axial coding was used to refine and group the initial codes into more specific subcategories within each broad category. This involved identifying relationships between the first-level codes and organizing them into coherent themes that captured the essence of user motivations. For Entertainment, subcategories like Visual Experience, which included comments appreciating the aesthetic appeal of the makeup looks, and Learning, which included comments expressing the desire to learn new makeup techniques, were identified. For Obtaining Information, subcategories included Makeup Tutorial, Makeup Skills, and Makeup Product, reflecting users' requests for guidance and details about products and techniques. For Enjoying Technology, subcategories included Self-Expression, which captured comments reflecting users' preferences and individual styles, and Gratification, which included comments showing satisfaction with the makeup looks. For Seeking Relationships, subcategories included Same Interest or Identity, which captured comments indicating shared interests and identities with influencers, Compare with Influencers, which included comments

comparing users' own features with those of influencers, and Affirmation of Influencers, which included comments affirming the influencers' beauty and skills.

This research also uses NVivo's cluster analysis tools to identify patterns and groupings within the data. Cluster analysis grouped similar words, codes, or attribute values from the transcribed video content (Oliveira et al., 2013). Running cluster analysis on the data generated cluster analysis diagrams, visually representing the relationships between nodes or sources (King, 2015). These diagrams made it easier to see clusters of similar content or themes, highlighting similarities and differences between TikTok beauty trends in China and the United States. In addition to cluster analysis, NVivo's comparison diagram feature was used to compare the two projects – Chinese and American beauty trends. Comparison diagrams illustrated common themes and unique aspects of each dataset when discussing the same topics (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). This visual representation aided in understanding the comparative elements of the study, providing clear insights into how beauty trends are perceived and presented differently in each cultural context.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Define Top5 Douyin Beauty Trends and Top5 TikTok Beauty Trends

First, I collected a total of 200 beauty trends hashtags from makeup videos published between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023, 100 each from Douyin and TikTok. In videos with the beauty trends hashtag, I collected a total of 200 tags starting from the video with the highest number of likes. Enter these 200 hashtags into an Excel spreadsheet, then use the statistics function and delete duplicate tags to count the frequency of each tag. Then use the sorting function to get the top 5 most frequently appearing tags in each country. The results are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

The top five makeup trend hashtags on Douyin

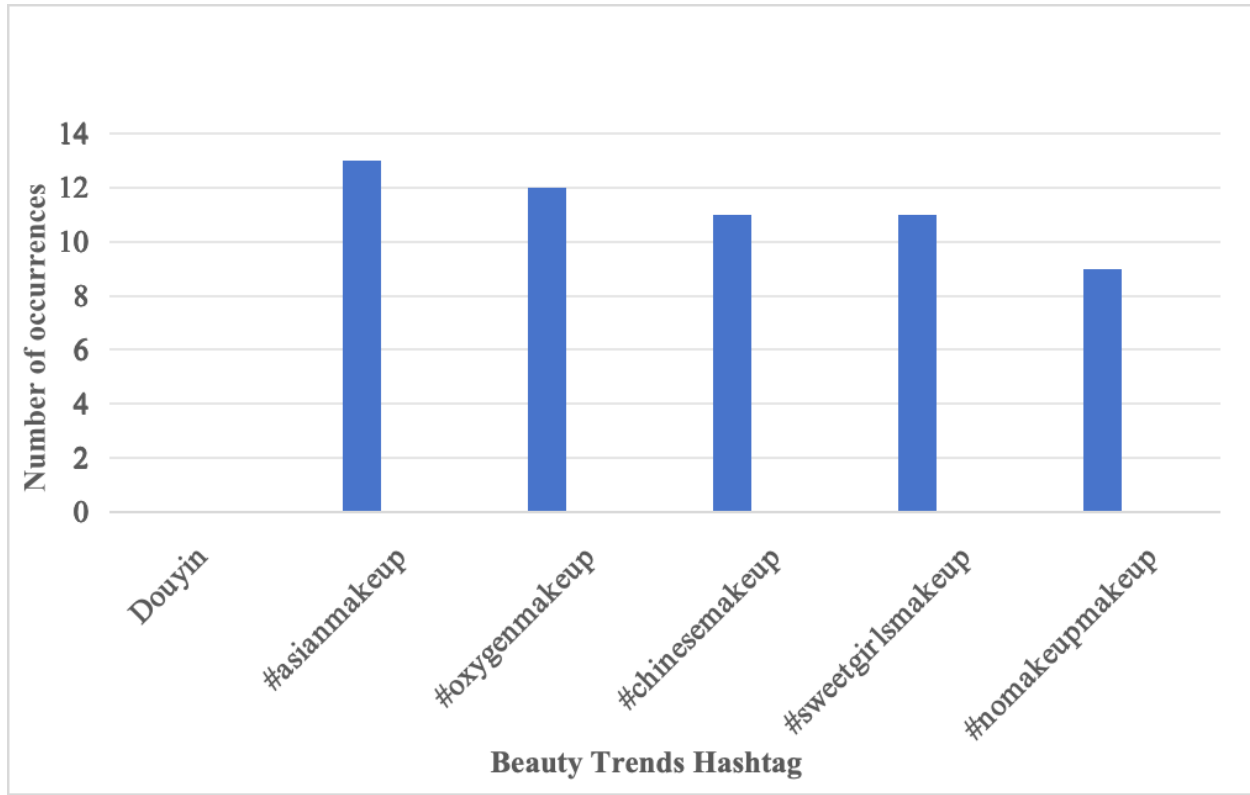
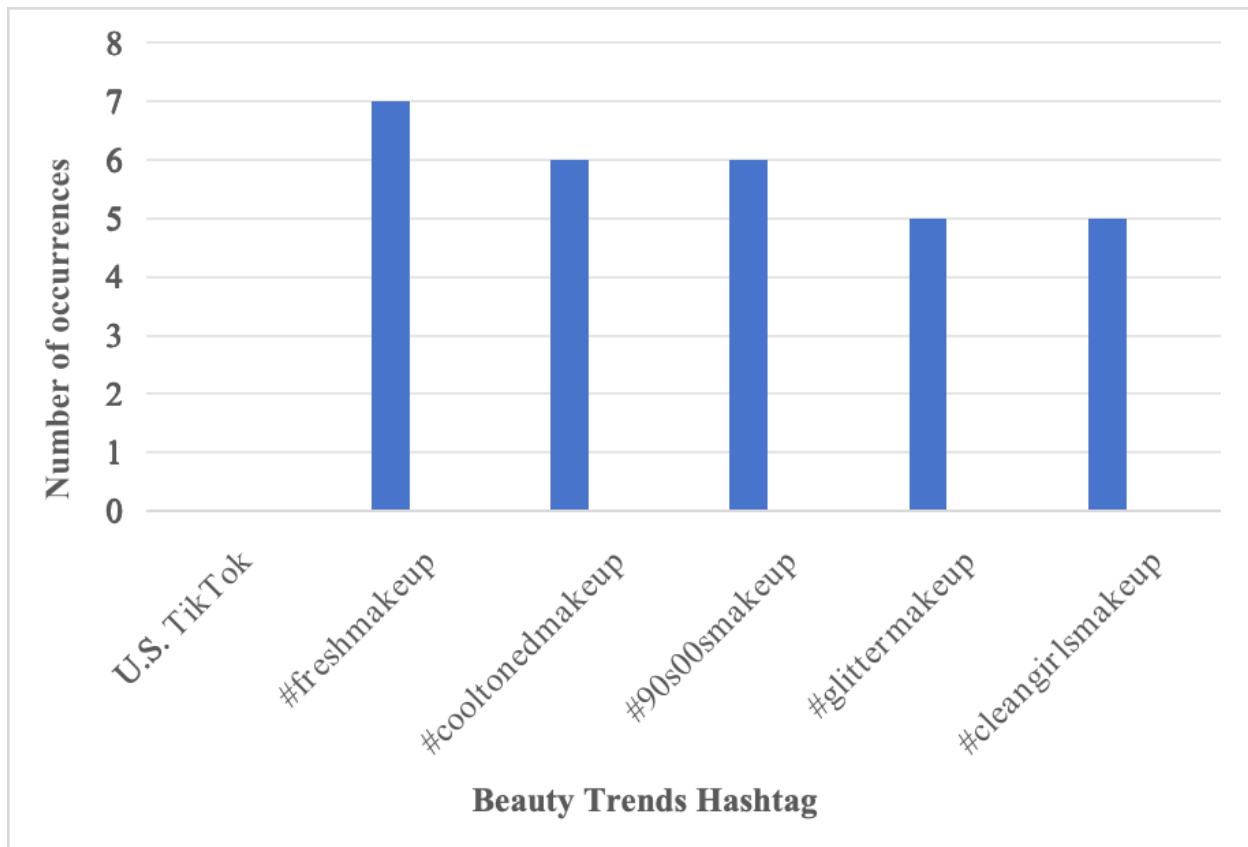


Figure 2

The top five makeup trend hashtags on TikTok



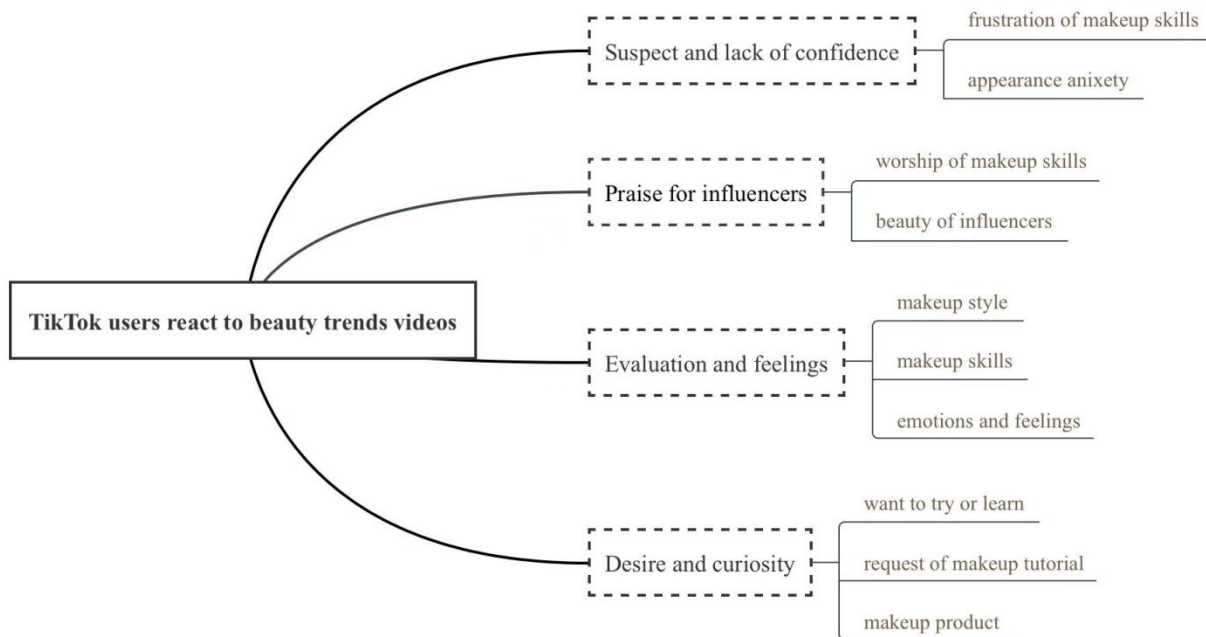
As the results shown in the Figure 1 and Figure 2, the top five makeup trend hashtags on Douyin are #asianmakeup, #oxygenmakeup, #chinesemakeup, #sweetgirlsmakeup, and #nomakeupmakeup. The top five makeup trend hashtags on TikTok are #freshmakeup, #cooltonedmakeup, #90s00smakeup, #glittermakeup, and #cleangirlsmakeup.

According to the 10 defined beauty trends hashtags, selected the top 5 makeup videos with the most likes for each hashtag. Collected the comments under these 25 videos as analysis data. After removing repeated, irrelevant, meaningless, and emoji comments, a total of 1,154 valid comments were collected under these 25 videos (542 comments from Douyin and 612 comments from TikTok).

Users react to beauty trends videos

Figure 3

Flowchart of Users Reaction



The analysis of user comments and user-generated content when discussing beauty trends promoted by TikTok influencers compared to those promoted by Douyin influencers reveals several recurring themes.

Douyin beauty influencers frequently receive high praise from their followers. Comments such as "It's amazing," "You look so good," and "The blogger is so beautiful" are common, reflecting admiration for the influencers' makeup skills and overall beauty. There is also a strong curiosity and desire for the specific makeup products these influencers use. Many users ask questions like "What lipstick are you using?" and "Can you tell me how to do this makeup?" showing a keen interest in replicating the influencers' looks. However, this admiration is often accompanied by expressions of anxiety and lack of confidence among users. Comments such as "Why can't I do it like this?" and "I feel anxious about my makeup skills" highlight the

frustration and self-doubt many users feel about their own makeup abilities. This aligns with social comparison theory, which suggests that frequent exposure to idealized images can negatively impact self-esteem and body image.

TikTok beauty influencers also receive abundant praise, with comments like "You're so pretty," "This is so cute," and "Stunning" being very common. Followers frequently express a strong interest in the products used by these influencers, asking questions such as "What products did you use?" and "Can you drop the products you used?" indicating a desire to replicate the influencers' looks. Similar to the sentiments seen in comments on Douyin influencers, followers of TikTok influencers also express feelings of inadequacy and frustration with their own makeup skills. Comments such as "I can't do that because my lashes are too thin" and "Why can't I achieve this look?" reveal the self-doubt and challenges users face in their beauty routines. Additionally, followers often evaluate and discuss the makeup styles, sharing their preferences and feelings. For instance, comments like "I love this makeup look" and "This is the makeup effect I want" are prevalent, demonstrating a strong emotional connection to the makeup trends.

A key difference between the two sets of comments is the cultural references and comparisons made by Douyin users. Comments like "This is not Asian makeup" or "Douyin makeup suits me very well" highlight a culturally specific engagement with the beauty trends. Furthermore, Douyin users often include detailed inquiries about the exact shades and brands of makeup products, reflecting a meticulous interest in accurately replicating the look. On the other hand, comments on TikTok influencers' videos frequently highlight the emotional impact of the content, with users expressing how the videos help reduce anxiety or provide inspiration, using more emotionally charged language such as "Your videos make my anxiety go away thank you."

Meanwhile, Douyin users are more likely to associate beauty trends with Chinese culture, and highlight a cultural emphasis on specific beauty standards. However, TikTok users are more likely to evoke nostalgia for the past from beauty trends. For example, in the video comments of #chinesemakeup, "You have a very Chinese style even without makeup." "This makeup look is innovative for the Chinese style."; in the video comments of #90s00smakeup, "if I sat at my moms' vanity, I could do the 90's chicana look lol." "90s supermodel glam is the " BEST." "Yes! I wore purple lipstick and whitish blue eyeshadow in 1996 at 14! Not brown."

Despite these differences, there are significant similarities in the way followers of both TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers engage with the content. Both sets of comments show a high level of admiration for the influencers' beauty and skills. Users in both contexts express a strong desire to know the products and techniques used to replicate the looks themselves. Additionally, both sets of comments reveal a high level of admiration for the influencers' beauty and skills, coupled with feelings of inadequacy and frustration about their own makeup abilities and appearance. These common themes of social comparison on users' perceptions and self-esteem, as they navigate the idealized beauty standards presented by influencers on TikTok and Douyin. These responses also illustrate how beauty trends promoted by influencers on TikTok and Douyin resonate with users across different cultural contexts, highlighting both universal and culturally specific sentiments.

Sentiment Analysis of users' comments

NVivo software was used to identify the sentiment process and the division of different emotions. All comments were divided into the following three nodes according to the emotional expressions and feelings in the language: positive (Very Positive and Fairly Positive), neutral and negative (Fairly Negative and Very Negative). In order to answer RQ2 and compare the

comments of Douyin and TikTok users, 534 comments from Douyin and 616 comments from TikTok were imported into NVivo for sentiment analysis. The results are as follows:

Figure 4

Word Cloud of TikTok



The word cloud in Figure 4 offers valuable insights into the discussions related to beauty trends. The term "makeup" appears frequently, indicating a significant focus on cosmetics and their application. Words like "loving," "beautiful," and "pretty" suggest positive emotions and admiration toward beauty. The mention of "skin" implies an interest in skincare and maintaining a good complexion. "Girls" might indicate that the discussion often centers around female beauty. "Gorgeous" and "cool" further emphasize the positive perception of attractiveness. The presence of "use" and "mascara" points to specific beauty products and their usage. Terms such as "good," "perfect," and "clean" reflect the standards and expectations of beauty. Even words like "stunning" and "literally" contribute to the overall tone of awe and appreciation for beauty trends.

Table 1

Statistics of emotional tendency (TikTok)

Emotion	Frequency	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	236	Very Positive	99	38.31%
		Fairly Positive	137	
Neutral	332			53.90%
Negative	48	Fairly Negative	26	7.79%
		Very Negative	22	
Total	616			100.00%

The statistics in Table 1 regarding the emotional tendency in the TikTok show a clear pattern. A majority of the comments and user-generated content have a neutral sentiment, accounting for 53.90%. However, positive emotions are also significant, with a combined frequency of 236, making up 41.69% of the total. Specifically, very positive sentiments occur at a rate of 38.31% and fairly positive at 3.38%. On the contrary, negative emotions are less frequent, totaling 48 comments, which represent 7.79% of the total. Among the negative emotions, fairly negative sentiments appear 26 times and very negative 22 times. This indicates that when discussing beauty trends promoted by TikTok influencers, the overall tone is more balanced, with a leaning towards neutrality and a considerable amount of positive feedback, while negative responses are relatively scarce.

Table 2*Analysis of Typical Comments (TikTok)*

Classification	Typical Comments
Very Positive	I think you great with and with out makeup!

80s and 90s makeup is all I know - I've been hoping that it would come back into the mainstream !!

90s grunge and vamp are still so great!

Absolutely brilliant, waiting for more content like this.

Absolutely gorgeous and this makeup is so slaying

Fairly Positive I love my usual makeup is coming back into style slay
I love that you use mostly affordable drugstore products.
I love the eyebrows actually and looks so good on you
I love the eyebrows
I love this look so much, I wear it everyday

Neutral all the shades of everything you used please and thank you so pretty
I just realized that 90s makeup is my daily makeup.
Also try the charlotte tilbury cream contour in the light shade fair.
And I think I will buy this blush palette, you just convinced me I need one
Before You look even more naturally stunning

Fairly We would have put something very light and frosty on the brow bone,

Negative mistakes were made in the 90's
Bro how the hell is your skin that clear omg
Was too focused on how drop dead gorgeous u are
I'm struggling
Hate the learning process of this but love the result

Very Negative I can't do that because my lashes are too thin.
I have dark circles I'll never achieve this look.

I tried to copy this look in high school but it never looked this good on me lol

My face is bigger than yours and my skin is worse than yours.

I would actually die to look like her and have all the stuff she has

The analysis of typical comments in the U.S. presented in Table 2 reveals a diverse range of sentiments and themes. The very positive comments expressed strong enthusiasm and admiration, such as the hope for the return of 80s and 90s makeup to the mainstream and praise for the brilliant content. Fairly positive comments focus on aspects like the use of affordable products and specific features like eyebrows. Neutral comments often provide more matter-of-fact remarks about colors, products, or potential purchases. Fairly negative comments mention perceived mistakes or personal struggles related to achieving certain looks. Very negative comments include self-deprecating statements about not being able to achieve the looks or reminiscing about past failed attempts. For example, a very positive comment like "90s grunge and vamp are still so great!" shows a clear appreciation for a specific trend, while a very negative one like "I have dark circles I'll never achieve this look" expresses frustration and self-doubt.

Figure 5

Word Cloud of Douyin



In the Figure 5, several prominent themes and sentiments can be observed. The term "makeup" appears frequently, suggesting a significant focus on cosmetics. "Learn" indicates an interest in acquiring knowledge and skills related to beauty. Words like "beautiful", "good", and "amazing" express positive evaluations. The mention of "face", "eyes", "skin", and "lipstick" points to specific areas and products of beauty. "Blogger" might imply the influence of beauty bloggers in shaping trends. The presence of "achieve", "shape", and "suits" suggests a concern with attaining and creating certain looks. "Natural" could indicate a preference for natural styles. Terms such as "eyeshadow", "eyelashes", and "highlighter" highlight specific makeup elements.

Table 3

Statistics of Emotional Tendency (Douyin)

Emotion	Frequency	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	344	Very Positive	150	64.42%
		Fairly Positive	194	
Neutral	111			20.79%
Negative	79	Fairly Negative	41	14.79%
		Very Negative	38	

Total	534	100.00%
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The statistics in Table 3 regarding the emotional tendency in Douyin show a distinct pattern. The majority of the comments and user-generated content have a positive sentiment, accounting for 64.42% of the total. Specifically, very positive sentiments occur at a significant rate of 46.81% (150 out of 534), and fairly positive sentiments make up 194 instances. Neutral emotions are present to a lesser extent, constituting 20.79%. Negative emotions, although less common, still account for 14.79%, with fairly negative sentiments at 41 instances and very negative at 38. This indicates that when discussing beauty trends promoted by Douyin influencers, the overall tone is largely positive, with a relatively smaller proportion of neutral and negative responses.

Table 4

Analysis of Typical Comments (Douyin)

Classification	Typical Comments
Very Positive	This makeup look is absolutely beautiful.
	I think this is the most suitable makeup look for me.
	The blogger is so beautiful.
	It looks especially good.
	The highlighter looks very useful.
Fairly Positive	I also succeeded in doing it.
	I also think it looks great.
	The lips are drawn so beautifully.
	I love this style.
	Such a perfect face.

Neutral	<p>Summer is for clean girl makeup, winter is for 90s makeup.</p> <p>I hope the influencer can post a tutorial for this makeup look.</p> <p>How is this done?</p> <p>I don't know if this suits me.</p>
Fairly Negative	<p>Why can't I do it like this?</p> <p>My nasolabial folds are too deep.</p> <p>I've never learned how to do makeup all these years.</p> <p>This makeup look suits long face shapes.</p> <p>I really have no talent for makeup.</p>
Very Negative	<p>I think this would be very exaggerated in real life.</p> <p>This makeup look is really difficult.</p> <p>I tried my best, but it just doesn't look good.</p> <p>I feel anxious about my makeup skills.</p> <p>I'm too clumsy, no matter how I try, I can't do makeup well.</p>

The analysis of typical comments in Douyin presented in Table 4 showcases a variety of sentiments and themes. The very positive comments are filled with straightforward praise and admiration, such as praising the beauty of the makeup look or the blogger. Fairly positive comments indicate a degree of agreement and fondness. Neutral comments express a mix of astonishment and inquiries, along with uncertainties about suitability. Fairly negative comments involve self-doubt, concerns about specific features, or comments on the learning process. Very negative comments often express difficulties in achieving the look or doubts about its practicality in real life. For instance, a very positive comment like "This makeup look is absolutely beautiful."

shows unreserved approval, while a very negative one like "This makeup look is really difficult." highlights the challenges faced.

Notably, Douyin user reviews exhibit both a higher proportion of positive sentiments and a relatively higher proportion of negative sentiments compared to TikTok user reviews.

For beauty trends driven by Douyin influencers, the sentiment analysis indicates that positive sentiments are predominant, with 64.42% of the comments being positive. Specifically, 28.09% of these comments are classified as very positive, and 36.33% as fairly positive. This high level of positive feedback reflects an overall admiration and appreciation for the beauty trends promoted by Douyin influencers. Typical comments include straightforward praise such as "This makeup look is absolutely beautiful," and expressions of personal suitability like "I think this is the most suitable makeup look for me." This suggests that Douyin influencers are highly effective in engaging their audience and eliciting positive emotional responses.

However, the sentiment analysis also shows that negative emotions, while less common than positive ones, account for a significant 14.79% of the comments. This includes 7.68% fairly negative and 7.11% very negative sentiments. Typical negative comments express challenges and frustrations, such as "I tried my best but it just doesn't look good," and doubts about the practicality of certain looks, like "I think this would be very exaggerated in real life." These negative reviews often highlight the difficulties users face in replicating the looks or the perceived impracticality of the trends in everyday life.

In contrast, TikTok user reviews of beauty trends show a more balanced distribution of sentiments. The sentiment analysis reveals that 53.90% of the comments are neutral, with positive sentiments comprising 38.31% of the total. Among these, 16.07% are very positive and 22.24% are fairly positive. While there is a substantial amount of positive feedback, it is less pronounced

than that observed in Douyin reviews. Typical positive comments from TikTok users include expressions of enthusiasm and admiration for past trends, such as "90s grunge and vamp are still so great!" and appreciation for affordable products and specific features.

Negative sentiments in TikTok reviews are relatively scarce, accounting for only 7.79% of the total comments. This includes 4.22% fairly negative and 3.57% very negative sentiments. Typical negative comments involve perceived mistakes or personal struggles, such as "We would have put something very light and frosty on the brow bone mistakes were made in the 90s," and self-deprecating remarks like "I have dark circles I'll never achieve this look."

The higher proportion of both positive and negative sentiments in Douyin reviews compared to TikTok reviews suggests that Douyin users are more expressive about their experiences and feelings regarding beauty trends. This duality indicates a more polarized response, where users are more likely to either highly praise or criticize the trends, reflecting strong emotional engagement with the content. On the other hand, TikTok users tend to provide more moderate feedback, with a significant portion of neutral comments and less extreme positive or negative reactions.

In summary, while Douyin user reviews of beauty trends driven by influencers are characterized by a high level of positive feedback, they also exhibit a considerable amount of negative sentiments. This contrasts with TikTok user reviews, which are more balanced and less polarized, with a higher proportion of neutral comments. These differences highlight the varying ways in which beauty trends are perceived and discussed across different cultural contexts on TikTok and Douyin.

Overall, the analysis of Douyin and TikTok comments reveals that beauty trends promoted by both US and Chinese influencers are primarily discussed with positive and neutral sentiments, focusing on visual appeal, product usage, and learning new techniques. There is a notable

preference for natural beauty methods, and while negative sentiments are present, they are relatively minimal.

UGT in the Beauty Trends

Table 5

Statistics of four aspects of UGT manifest in beauty trends

Code	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment	231	20.08%
Obtaining Information	173	15.04%
Enjoying Technology	197	17.13%
Seeking Relationships	343	29.82%

Table 5 presents statistics on four aspects of UGT in beauty trends: entertainment, obtaining information, enjoying technology, and seeking relationships. The frequency and percentage distribution indicate that 'Seeking Relationships' is the most prominent aspect, with 343 occurrences, accounting for 29.82% of the total. This is followed by 'Entertainment' with 231 occurrences (20.08%), 'Enjoying Technology' with 197 occurrences (17.13%), and 'Obtaining Information' with 173 occurrences (15.04%). This hierarchy highlights that users predominantly engage with beauty trends on TikTok to form connections and affirm their identities in relation to influencers and peers.

Figure 6

Hierarchy chart of UGT manifest in beauty trends

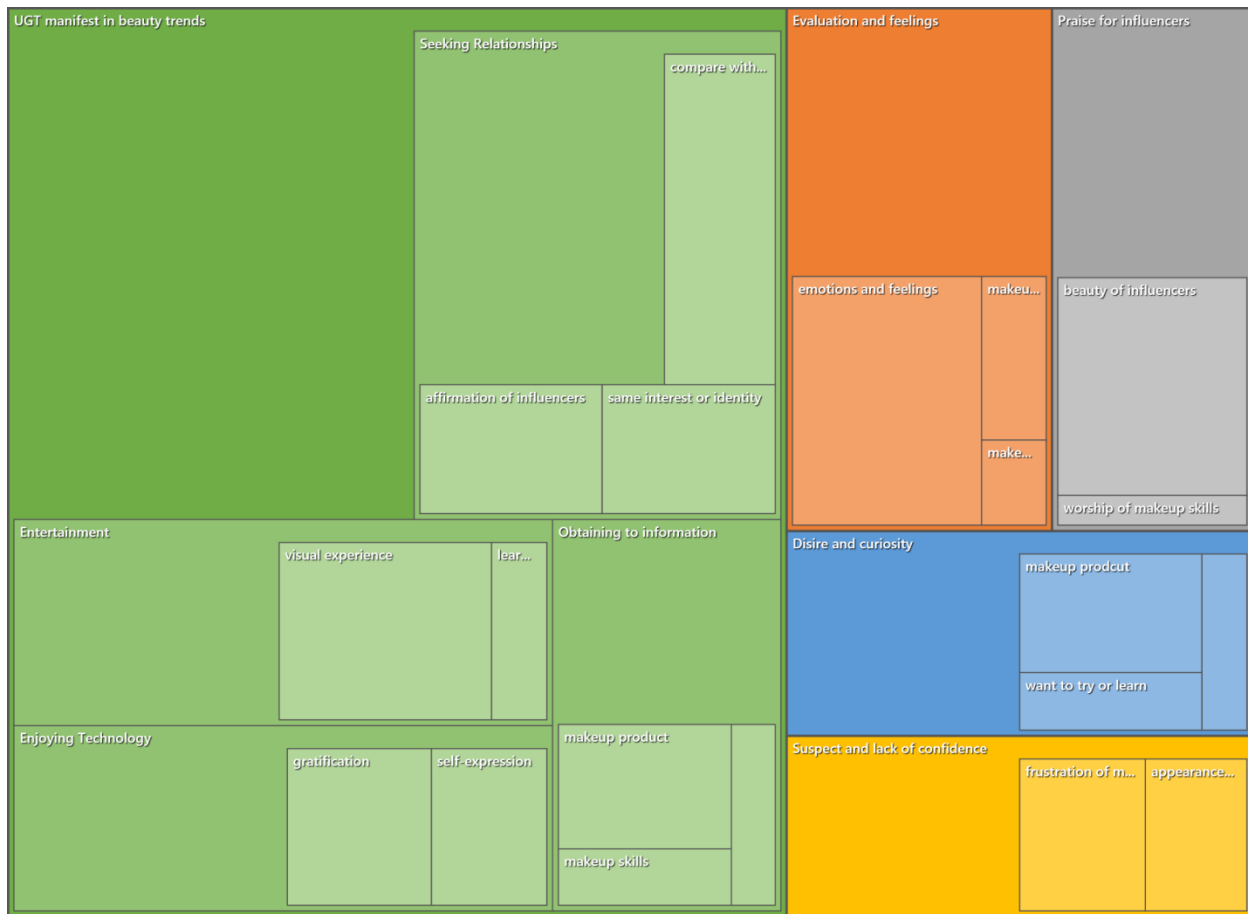


Figure 6 shows the coding distribution of UGT manifest in beauty trends nodes. Within the context of the UGT framework, TikTok users' comments on beauty trends videos are primarily coded in the following four aspects: Entertainment, Obtaining Information, Enjoying Technology, and Seeking Relationships. To analyze TikTok users' comments more thoroughly, secondary coding was conducted in the following aspects: Entertainment (visual experience, learning), Obtaining Information (makeup tutorial, makeup skills, makeup product), Enjoying Technology (self-expression, gratification), Seeking Relationships (same interest or identity, compare with influencers, affirmation of influencers).

Table 6

Analysis of Typical Comments (UGT manifest in beauty trends)

Code	Typical Comments
Entertainment	
visual experience	This makeup look is too beautiful. Your makeup is so stunning.
learning	I need to learn this makeup look. I'll bookmark it but don't know when I'll start learning.
Obtaining	
Information	
makeup tutorial	Can you tell me how to do this makeup?
makeup skills	I'm going to try the setting spray trick.
makeup product	Can you list the makeup products you used?
Enjoying	
Technology	
self-expression	This is the feeling I want. I am cool tone but I like warm tone so much.
gratification	This makeup suits you very well. This is effective makeup.
Seeking	
Relationships	
same interest or identity	I just realized that 90s makeup is my daily makeup.

compare with	Why I don't have this face shape?
influencers	
affirmation of	You already win without makeup.
influencers	

The analysis of typical comments, as summarized in Table 6, highlights the diverse motivations driving user engagement with beauty influencers. Entertainment and seeking relationships are particularly significant, reflecting the platform's dual role in providing visual pleasure and fostering community. The hierarchy chart in Figure 6 further illustrates the relative prominence of each aspect of UGT in the context of beauty trends on TikTok and Douyin, visually representing the distribution and interaction of different gratifications among users.

According to Figure 6 and Table 6, Seeking Relationships emerged as the most salient category, comprising 29.82% of the needs identified by participants. Within this category, the interviewees were primarily drawn to forming connections and affirmations with influencers and peers, representing a significant portion of the excerpts. For instance, comments like "I just realized that 90s makeup is my daily makeup" highlight the shared interest and identity, while "You already win without makeup" reflects affirmation of influencers. Many subjects correlated the fulfillment of relationship-seeking needs with a positive experience on TikTok, suggesting that the social aspect is a key motivator for engaging with beauty trends.

Entertainment was the second most prominent category, making up 20.08% of the identified needs. Users frequently mentioned the visual experience and learning aspects, which were the most engaging factors within this category. Comments such as "This makeup look is too beautiful" and "I need to learn this makeup look" indicate a high level of engagement driven

by the aesthetic appeal and educational value of the content. Participants noted that entertaining and visually appealing content contributed significantly to their overall satisfaction with TikTok beauty trends.

Enjoying Technology accounted for 17.13% of the identified needs. This category included self-expression and gratification elements, where users expressed their preferences and satisfaction with the makeup looks presented. For example, comments like "This is the feeling I want" and "This makeup suits you very well" reflect the gratification users derive from the technology-enabled self-expression on TikTok. Participants indicated that the ability to explore and express their individuality through makeup was a crucial aspect of their engagement with beauty trends on the platform.

Obtaining Information represented 15.04% of the needs, with users seeking practical guidance and product recommendations. Typical comments in this category included "Can you tell me how to do this makeup?" and "Can you list the makeup products you used?" These comments highlight the informational value users find in TikTok and Douyin beauty trends, emphasizing the importance of tutorials, makeup skills, and product details in fulfilling their needs.

In summary, the uses and gratifications theory manifests in beauty trends on TikTok and Douyin through a combination of seeking relationships, entertainment, enjoying technology, and obtaining information. Users predominantly engage with beauty influencers to form social connections and affirm their identities, while also seeking visual enjoyment, self-expression, and practical makeup guidance. This multifaceted engagement underscores the diverse motivations behind user interactions with beauty content on TikTok and Douyin.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter concluded the thesis by highlighting key findings and their implications for understanding how beauty trends on TikTok and Douyin, impact user perceptions and behaviors. Additionally, this section discussed the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research. This thesis sought to demonstrate the importance of examining user responses to beauty trends and the different cultural contexts in which these trends are received. The study involved an extensive analysis of user comments from beauty trends videos, focusing on three main research questions: How do users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok influencers compared to Douyin influencers? What recurring themes and sentiments are present in beauty trends comments and user-generated content when discussing beauty trends promoted by TikTok influencers compared to those promoted by Douyin influencers? How does the uses and gratifications theory manifest in the beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin beauty influencers? By answering these questions, the study provides insights into the dynamics of social media influence on beauty perceptions across different cultures.

Findings

Based on the data analysis, the study revealed several key findings related to the research questions on beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin influencers. First, TikTok users exhibited distinct responses to beauty trends generated by U.S. and Douyin influencers. The analysis of comments revealed that both sets of influencers receive significant attention and engagement from their followers, but the nature of these interactions varies. Users frequently praised the beauty and skills of influencers and showed a keen interest in the specific products and techniques used. This admiration was more pronounced among followers of Douyin influencers, who also expressed significant anxiety and self-doubt about their own makeup skills, reflecting a complex emotional response that combines admiration with personal insecurity. In contrast, TikTok influencers' followers often highlighted the content's emotional benefits, such as

reducing anxiety and providing inspiration. This indicated that while both groups of users seek similar types of content, the emotional gratifications derived from this content differ culturally. Moreover, the research results of RQ1 demonstrate how social comparison theory manifests in users' responses to beauty trends on TikTok. The frequent comparisons to influencers' appearances, the desire to emulate their looks, and the resulting feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt reflected social comparison theory's core tenets. This underscores the powerful influence of beauty influencers in shaping users' perceptions of beauty and the subsequent effects on their self-esteem and body image.

Secondly, users respond positively to beauty trends from both TikTok and Douyin influencers, with followers of Douyin influencers showing high admiration and curiosity about the products and techniques used while also expressing significant anxiety and self-doubt about their own makeup skills. TikTok influencers receive abundant praise, with followers expressing strong interest in the products used and highlighting the emotional benefits of the content, such as reducing anxiety and providing inspiration. Recurring themes in TikTok and Douyin comments include positive sentiments, product curiosity, self-doubt, cultural references, and emotional impact, with Douyin users often making culturally specific comments and TikTok users evoking nostalgia for past beauty trends. Our findings suggest that while Douyin user reviews are characterized by a high level of both positive and negative sentiments, users provide more balanced feedback, with a significant portion of neutral comments reflecting varying cultural contexts in the perception and discussion of beauty trends on TikTok and Douyin.

Combining the conclusions of Research Question 1 and Research Question 2, a finding worthy of our attention is the stronger negative sentiment among Douyin users compared to TikTok users. The findings indicated that while TikTok users often expressed frustration or lack of confidence in their makeup abilities, Douyin users exhibited a broader range of negative

sentiments that extended beyond makeup skills to encompass concerns about their overall appearance and self-esteem. One key reason for the stronger negative sentiment among Douyin users could be rooted in cultural and societal expectations regarding beauty in China. Chinese beauty standards tend to be more rigid and narrowly defined, often emphasizing features such as fair skin, slim figures, and delicate facial features (Jackson et al., 2016). This societal pressure to conform to these stringent beauty ideals may contribute to a heightened sense of inadequacy and self-criticism among Douyin users. When confronted with influencers who seemingly embody these ideals effortlessly, users may experience feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction with their own appearance. Another factor contributing to the negative sentiment among Douyin users could be the cultural emphasis on collective identity over individualism. In many East Asian societies, including China, there is a strong cultural expectation to conform to social norms and collective standards (Ward, 2007). This collective mindset may lead to a greater internalization of societal beauty standards, with deviations from these norms resulting in more severe self-criticism. Douyin users, therefore, might experience greater psychological distress when they perceive themselves as failing to meet these collective beauty expectations.

Finally, this study applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to examine how users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin influencers. Our findings align with past research, indicating that various motivations influence media usage and support the application of U&G Theory to explain motivations for engaging with beauty content on TikTok and Douyin. The uses and gratifications theory manifests in the beauty trends on TikTok and Douyin through aspects such as seeking relationships, entertainment, enjoying technology, and obtaining information. Seeking relationships was the most salient category, accounting for 29.82% of user engagement, emphasizing the role of TikTok in forming connections and affirming identities. This is supported by previous studies highlighting social interaction as a

critical motivator for social media use (Karizat et al., 2021). Entertainment was the second most prominent need, with users engaging with visually appealing and educational content, reflecting the platform's dual role in providing pleasure and learning opportunities, corroborating findings by Söğüt & Öngel (2022) and Sari et al. (2022). Enjoying technology and obtaining information also played significant roles, with users expressing gratification from self-expression and seeking practical makeup guidance. This multifaceted engagement underscores the diverse motivations behind user interactions with beauty content on TikTok, highlighting both universal and culturally specific sentiments.

Future Research

Given the rapidly globalizing world, it is pivotal to understand beauty trends from a comparative lens. Future research could immensely benefit from studies that juxtapose the perception and adoption of beauty trends across cultures. Such comparisons may uncover interesting nuances or similarities between TikTok and Douyin influencers, highlighting different beauty ideals or a confluence of specific trends.

Beyond the evident external shifts in beauty standards and preferences lies a more profound psychological realm. The continuous exposure to, and sometimes the implicit pressure of adhering to, trending beauty standards could have profound implications on an individual's self-esteem, body image, and the very formation of their identity. Future research can play a pivotal role in unearthing these more profound, sometimes latent, psychological impacts. A shift toward longitudinal research could learn about the long-term psychological effects of continuous exposure to ever-evolving beauty ideals on platforms like TikTok and Douyin. By tracking specific target users, researchers can decipher not only changing beauty standards but also the lasting effects of those standards on users. Such studies could offer insights into shifts in perceptions and the longevity of specific trends.

The current literature offers a complex but incomplete view of how the users have beauty perceptions towards influencers on TikTok and Douyin. While platforms like Instagram and YouTube have been extensively dissected in scholarly pursuits, TikTok, the rising star of social media, remains relatively uncharted. The pronounced absence of a comprehensive understanding of non-Western beauty ideals, especially within the TikTok landscape, accentuates the necessity for further exploration. In light of these identified gaps and the increasing global influence of TikTok, this research seeks to delve deeper into unexplored territories of beauty perceptions.

The ramifications of TikTok-influenced beauty trends extend deeper into the psyche, impacting mental health. To delve deeper into the psychological impact of beauty trends spread by influencers on TikTok, it is necessary to consider how these trends primarily affect users' self-esteem. The impact of influencers can not only go beyond superficial beauty standards but can affect the user's mental health on a deeper level. Fink and Kensicki (2002) explored the media's portrayal of beauty and highlighted the compelling role of influencers in forming these perceptions. Although their study centered around sports magazines, the established significance of public figures in setting beauty norms is transferable to the TikTok platform. Veldhuis et al. (2020) further detailed the implications of this influence, pointing out that consistent exposure to idealized beauty images, often promoted by influencers, can result in body dissatisfaction and lowered self-esteem. This dynamic is also supported by Perloff's (2014) examination of the Social Comparison Theory in the context of social media. Perloff deduced that platforms abundant with influencers displaying idealized beauty standards, like TikTok, amplify upward social comparisons, which often adversely affect self-esteem. Chua and Chang (2016) introduced an additional layer of complexity, discussing the tension between authenticity and idealized beauty. Their research indicated that while platforms like TikTok and Douyin champion user-generated content, beauty influencers often grapple with being genuine while simultaneously

presenting an idealized image. This duality can lead to conflicting perceptions among users, impacting their self-expression. In sum, the literature clearly demonstrates the profound and multifaceted influence of beauty influencers on TikTok and Douyin and how they affect users' self-expression, both positively and negatively.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the data collection for this study relied heavily on user comments from beauty trends videos. Although this approach provided a substantial amount of qualitative data, it is inherently limited by the nature of self-reported information, which can be biased or incomplete. Users may not always express their true feelings or may be influenced by the social desirability of their comments. Additionally, the sample size was limited to comments on 25 videos, which may not fully represent the diverse user base of TikTok. The study also focused exclusively on beauty trends, potentially overlooking other content types that might influence user engagement differently. Another limitation is the use of manual content analysis, which, despite efforts to ensure accuracy, is subject to potential biases and inconsistencies.

Secondly, the study did not account for the potential influence of TikTok's algorithm on the visibility of the analyzed videos, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. Users who frequently engage with beauty content may have different perceptions compared to casual viewers. Consequently, the study's findings might reflect the views of a more engaged subset of users rather than the general TikTok population.

Another limitation is the use of qualitative coding and sentiment analysis, while robust in capturing the essence of user comments, is subject to interpretative biases. The coding scheme developed for the analysis, though systematic, involves a degree of subjectivity in categorizing comments and identifying themes. Different researchers might interpret and code the same data

differently, leading to potential inconsistencies. What's more, sentiment analysis, which categorizes comments into positive, neutral, and negative sentiments, might oversimplify the complex emotional nuances expressed by users.

Finally, the study did not account for the long-term impact of exposure to beauty influencers on users' self-esteem and body image. While the analysis provides a snapshot of user reactions and sentiments, it does not explore how these perceptions evolve over time with continued exposure to beauty standards on TikTok. Longitudinal studies are necessary to understand the enduring effects of social comparison and engagement with beauty content on social media platforms.

Role of the Research

Ultimately, it is crucial to acknowledge that as a researcher, I harbor certain biases that I need to account for to ensure a credible representation of the research. As a fundamental tenet of qualitative research, it is vital to recognize that my own beliefs and personal worldviews could influence the research. Therefore, acknowledging these biases is paramount for the honest and transparent presentation of my findings (Mertens, 2020).

First, ever since I studied broadcast journalism as my major and minored in public relations during my undergraduate years, I became interested in the media industry. I started paying attention to the development of social media platforms. After enrolling at Syracuse University to pursue a master's degree in media studies, I gained a deeper understanding of research related to social media. I noticed the impact of social media use on people. My experience and interest in social media research give me an advantageous perspective. My past research projects have centered around social media, underscoring its relevance in people's lives. With TikTok being an integral part of my personal and academic life, I possess in-depth

knowledge and understanding of this platform, which will be invaluable in exploring the complex dynamics of beauty trends on TikTok and their psychological impacts on users.

Additionally, as an avid TikTok user, I feel that influencers affect the user experience and even alter the behavior of users. This impact is immediate and long-term, so I want to use qualitative research to investigate how TikTok users perceive this influence and change from China and the US.

Thirdly, as a Chinese student studying in the United States, I deeply feel the cultural differences between China and the US. However, as a social media platform developed by the Chinese, TikTok has been widely accepted and used by many in the United States, reflecting that TikTok provides a platform for Sino-American cultural exchange. Therefore, I want to explore how influencers, as intermediaries, help Chinese and American cultures communicate and integrate on TikTok and how users perceive it.

Finally, my perception of the world and my place in it is based on my nationality, race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation. I am a heterosexual Asian woman from China. My view of the world differs from other users, as everyone has their worldview based on their unique subjective perspective.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This study used qualitative methods of TikTok user comments in TikTok and Douyin to explore the similarities and differences in the two countries' users perceptions of beauty trends generated by beauty influencers. The analysis revealed that while users from both cultures show high engagement and admiration for beauty content, the nature of their interactions and emotional responses differ significantly. This study applied the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory to explore how users respond to beauty trends generated by TikTok and Douyin influencers. The findings reveal that users exhibit high levels of engagement with beauty content,

characterized by a mix of admiration, curiosity, and personal reflection. Users of Douyin influencers are more likely to express both admiration and anxiety, reflecting a deep engagement with the influencers' beauty skills and a struggle with self-esteem in replicating these looks. In contrast, followers of TikTok influencers focus on the emotional benefits and practical aspects of beauty content, such as reducing anxiety and providing inspiration. The analysis identified several recurring themes in user comments, including evaluation of makeup styles, praise for influencers, and a strong desire for detailed product information and tutorials. Cultural references were more pronounced in comments on Douyin influencers' videos, while TikTok users often expressed nostalgia for past beauty trends.

Appendix A

Data Analysis Figures

Figure 7

Chart Node Coding of U.S TikTok Users Reaction

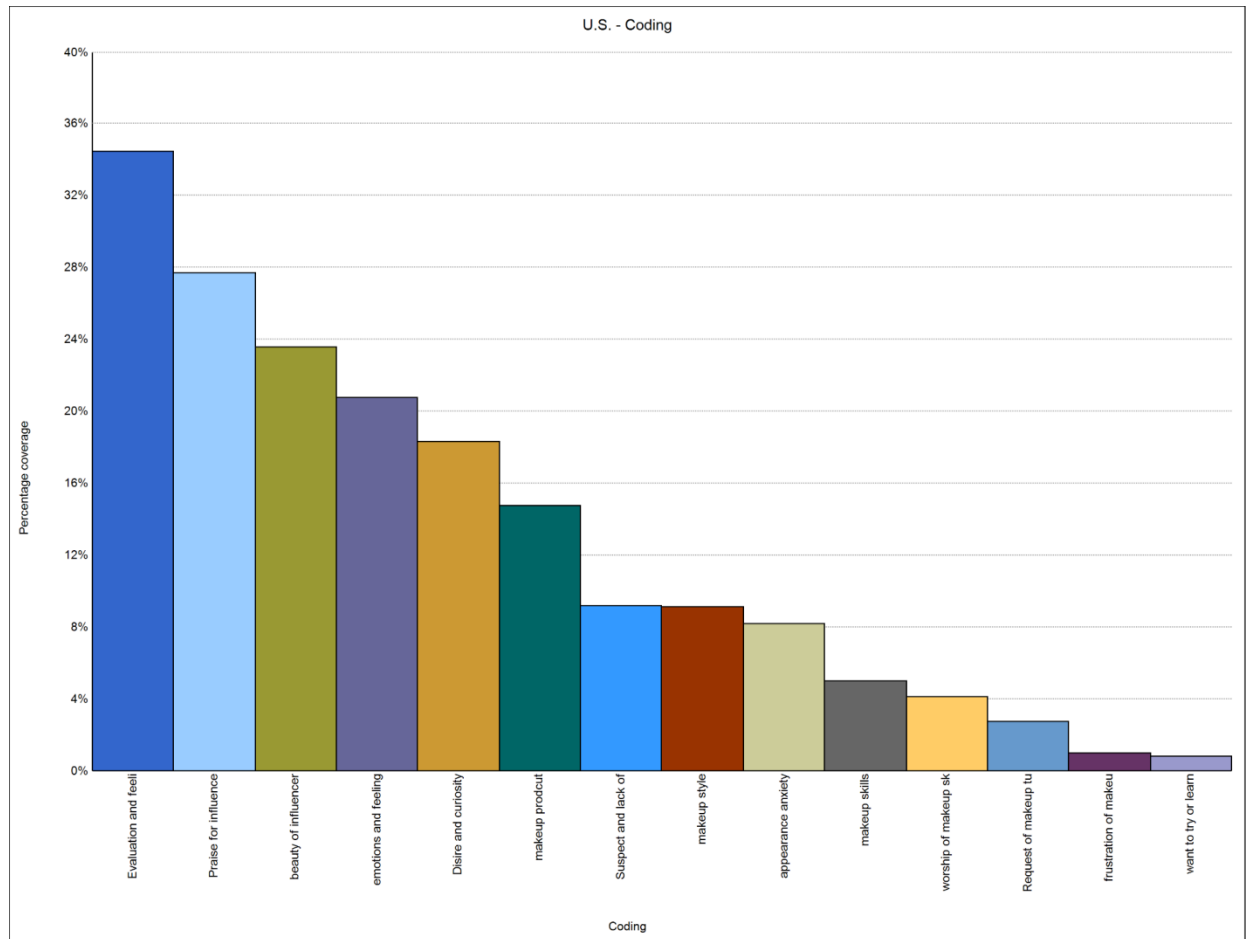


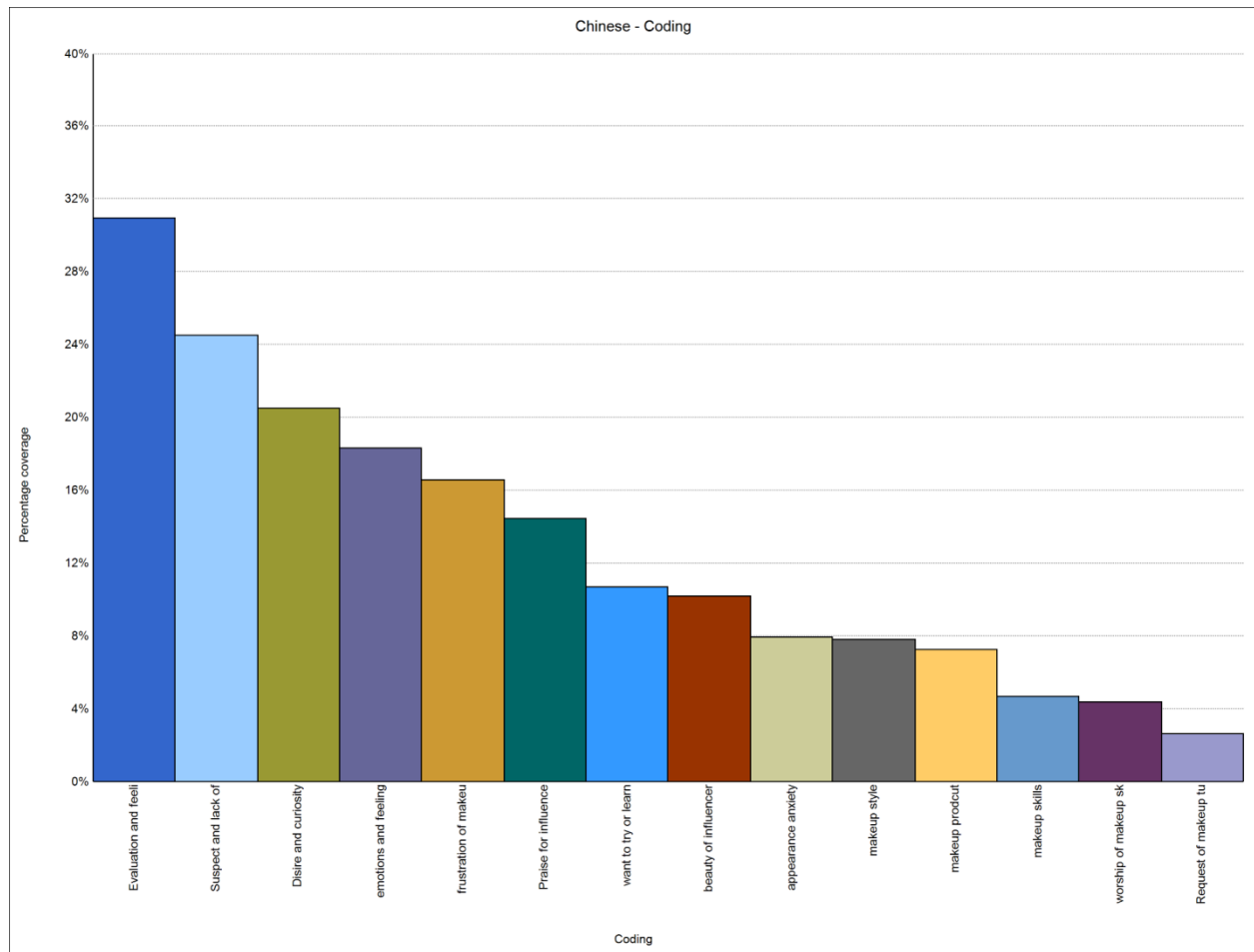
Figure 8*Chart Node Coding of Douyin Users Reaction*

Figure 9

Explore Diagram of U.S. TikTok Users Reaction



Figure 10*Explore Diagram of Douyin Users Reaction*

Figure 11

Explore Diagram of Douyin and TikTok users Reaction

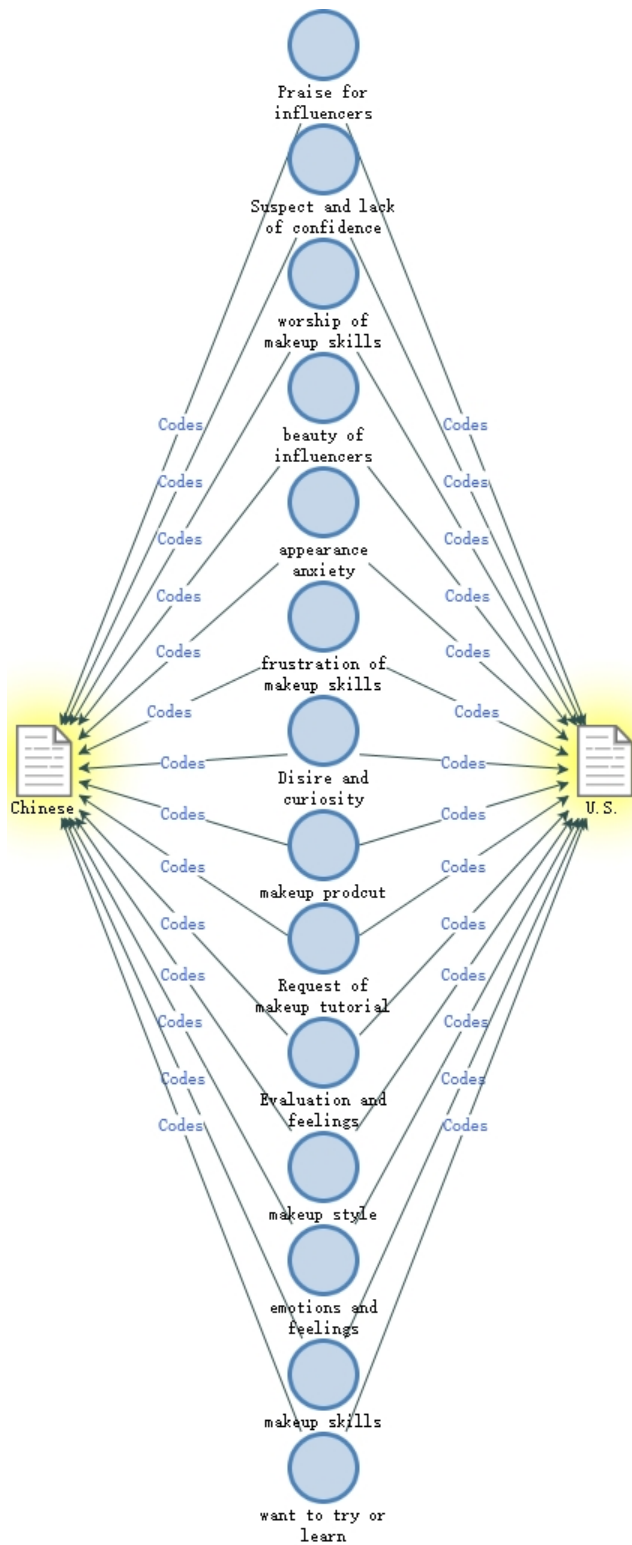


Figure 12

Hierarchy chart of Douyin Users Reaction



Figure 13

Hierarchy chart of U.S. TikTok Users Reaction



Appendix B

NVivo Codes

TikTok users react to beauty trends			Search Project	
Name	Files	References		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspect and lack of confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> frustration of makeup skills appearance anxiety 	2	156		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Praise for influencers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worship of makeup skills beauty of influencers 	2	215		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation and feelings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> makeup style makeup skills emotions and feelings 	2	313		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disire and curiosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> want to try or learn Request of makeup tutorial makeup prodcut 	2	196		

Nodes			Search Project	
Name	Files	References		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UGT manifest in beauty trends <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> same interest or identity compare with influencers affirmation of influencers Obtaining to information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> makeup tutorial makeup skills makeup product Entertainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> visual experience learning Enjoying Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-expression gratification 	2	757		

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Vitae

XUEQI WANG

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EXPERIENCE

People's Daily, Beijing, China

07/2021 – 10/2021

Intern Editor in New Media Center

- Curated and Edited over 100 press releases and 50 news reviews, enhancing client-side communications and content relevance.
- Collaborated in the conceptualization and creation of new media products, showcasing innovation and team coordination skills.
- Developed and Executed a product planning project themed around the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, demonstrating initiative and project management skills.

Hefei Broadcast Television (HFBTV), Hefei, China

06/2020 – 08/2020

Front-line Trainee Reporter for News Channel (mainly in evening slots)

- Engaged in the comprehensive news production process for over 30 news segments, from background investigations and outline creation to shooting, press release writing, and post-editing.
- Sourced and compiled video materials essential for over 30 news productions, demonstrating resourcefulness and attention to detail.
- Crafted and Assembled 20+ press releases, processed numerous video clips, performed dubbing, and compiled diverse news pieces, showcasing multifaceted media production skills.

Troy Trojan Vision, Troy, AL

01/2020 – 05/2020

Intern in the Department of Global News, Nightly News, Midday News

☐ Directed over 10 Global News operations, coordinating tasks and communications across multiple departments, exemplifying leadership and organizational skills.

Managed audio and video servers, ensuring timely transitions to appropriate news/advertisement screens and optimal volume adjustments.

☐ Transcribed and Scrolled scripts into teleprompters for over 50 segments, maintaining sync with the speaker's pace and highlighting precision and multitasking ability.

☐ Operated the camera proficiently for various segments, adjusting positions and angles to meet diverse requirements, demonstrating adaptive technical skills.

SKILLS

☐ Software Applications: Proficient in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, InDesign, and Photoshop. Familiar with SPSS and NVivo for data analysis and research.

☐ Web Design & Coding: Experienced in designing user-friendly interfaces and writing front-end code to enhance website functionality and appearance.

☐ Language: English (Fluent), Chinese (Native)

EDUCATION

Syracuse University (SU), Syracuse, NY 08/2022 – 08/2024

☐ Expected Degree: M.A. in Media Studies, S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications

☐ Research Direction: Social media use and user perception

Yunnan Normal University (YNNU), Kunming, China 09/2017 – 07/2018 & 05/2020
– 12/2021

Degree: Bachelor of Art in Journalism and Communication, School of Communication

Troy University (TROY), Troy, AL 08/2018 – 05/2020

☐ Degree: Bachelor of Science in Broadcast Journalism Minor: Public Relations

1-2-1 program scholarship for international student