

## **Social Media Content Classification and Consumer Behavior: Vice and Virtue Perspectives**

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**Abstract.** Consumers are exposed to diverse content on social media, which can have varying impacts on their behavior. This paper aims to classify social media and its content into vice or virtue categories and examine the different usage behaviors of consumers. The study finds that current research on vice or virtue in the realm of social media content is limited, with most studies focusing on self-indulgent behaviors post-exposure to social media content, while research on self-control behaviors remains scarce.

**Keywords:** social media; content; vice; virtue; self-control; self-indulgence

### **1. Introduction**

Social media, as a highly interactive platform predicated on mobile and internet technologies, serves as a dynamic space where consumers actively engage in sharing, creating, discussing, and modifying user-generated content [1]. This content is diverse and encompasses various themes such as entertainment [2,3], health [4], fitness [5,6], and even inappropriate speech [7,8,9], among others. Due to its wide range of content, social media has evolved into not only a popular venue for gossip but also a significant news source relied upon by adults in both China and the United States [10,11].

Consumers are constantly exposed to different types of content on social media, which can have varying impacts on their behavior. Drawing from the relative concepts of “vice” and “virtue” proposed by Wertebroch [12], this paper distinguishes between vice content that provides immediate satisfaction and virtue content that offers long-term knowledge benefits. Watching virtue content is characterized by self-control, while watching vice content is seen as self-indulgence.

Based on this classification, this study aims to further examine the self-indulgent and self-controlled behaviors exhibited by consumers after being exposed to these two types of content. Through a detailed analysis of vice and virtue content on social media, we can gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavioral outcomes, thereby providing a scientific basis for promoting a healthy online environment.

## 2. Social media content

### 2.1. Definition of social media content

Social media content refers to the information and materials published, shared, or exchanged on social media platforms, encompassing both User-Generated Content (UGC) and Professionally Generated Content (PGC). UGC is created by consumers and includes comments, social interactions, “likes” and “shares” on blogs, as well as aggregated ratings for product sales. PGC, on the other hand, is provided by trained professionals to showcase product quality, such as car reviews and movie trailer critiques. The distinction between UGC and PGC lies in the users’ expertise and qualifications, their knowledge background, and their relevant work experience in the field of shared content [13]. Both types of content include videos (long videos, short videos, and live streams), images, and text (long-form text and short-form text).

### 2.2. Classification of social media

Based on the different forms of UGC and PGC, social media can be categorized into six types: long video platforms (e.g., Bilibili, YouTube), short video platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram), live streaming platforms (e.g., Douyu, Twitch), image platforms (e.g., Xiaohongshu, Instagram), long-form text platforms (e.g., Zhihu, WeChat Official Accounts), and short-form text platforms (e.g., Weibo, Twitter). For a detailed classification of social media, please refer to Table 1.

**Table 1.** Classification of social media

Classification of social Media	Social media
Long video	Bilibili、YouTube
Short video	TikTOK、Instagram
Live streaming	Douyu、Twitch
Image	Xiaohongshu、Instagram
Long-form text	Zhihu、WeChat Official Accounts
Short-form text	Weibo、Twitter

### 2.3. Classification of social media content as vice or virtue

To describe the two categories of consumer goods that people choose based on the trade-offs between short-term and long-term benefits, Wertenbroch [12] introduced the relative concepts of vice and virtue. A relative vice provides immediate gratification during consumption but may lack long-term benefits; conversely, a relative virtue may not be enjoyable at the moment but can yield long-term advantages [14,15]. In consumer research, studies focusing on vice or virtue have primarily concentrated on the domain of food [16,17,18,12,19,20,21], followed by studies in film domain [22], magazines domain [20,14,23], financial domain [21,20], and academic domain [20,24]. Although the relative concepts of vice and virtue are highly applicable to the social media environment,

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research on these concepts within the domain of social media content has been largely overlooked [10].

Social media content can be classified as either vice or virtue, depending on the consumer's intentions [20]. One intention of consumers is to satisfy their curiosity and derive enjoyment from social media content [25,26]. Another intention is to acquire knowledge that may be beneficial in the future [27]. These two intentions correspond to the concepts of vice and virtue. Thus, a range of content on social media that offers immediate pleasure to consumers, such as game live streams, entertainment clips, and entertainment news, may be classified as vice; while a range of content that provides long-term benefits, such as popular science knowledge, educational courses, and scientific news, may be classified as virtue [28,10]. For a summary of current research on vice or virtue across different domains, please refer to Table 2.

**Table 2.** Current research areas in vice and virtue

Author	Research field	Vice vs. Virtue
Wertebroch [12] Liu et al. [19] Masters and Mishra [16] Sela et al. [17] Milkman [18] Kim et al. [20] Laran [21]	Food	Regular Cream Cheese vs. Light Cream Cheese; Ice Cream vs. Frozen Yogurt; Alcoholic Beer vs. Non-Alcoholic Beer; Sugary Cereal vs. Low-Sugar Cereal; Whole Milk vs. Low-Fat Milk/Ice Cream; Cheeseburger vs. Vegetable Salad; French Fries vs. Baby Carrots; Chocolate Cookies/Cake vs. Fruit; Chocolate Bars/Chips Ahoy Cookies/Cheese Rolls/Doritos/Ice Cream/Donuts/Oreo and Fruit Rolls vs. Raisins/Celery Sticks/Cheerios/Low-Fat Milk/Baby Carrots/Oat Bars/Rice Cakes and Apples
Milkman et al. [22]	Film	Lowbrow Movies vs. Highbrow Movies
Khan and Dhar [14] Oster and Scott Morton [23] Kim et al. [20]	Magazine	Obscene Gossip vs. Financial Articles Lowbrow Magazines vs. Highbrow Magazines Leisure Magazines vs. Investment Magazines
Laran [21] Kim et al. [20]	Finance	Consumption vs. Savings
May and Irmak [24] Kim et al. [20]	Academic	Relaxation and Comfort vs. Pursuing Better Grades
Zor et al. [10]	Social media	Twitter Entertainment News vs. Twitter Science News

### 3. Consumer behavior: self-indulgence vs. self-control

According to the dual-system theory of self-control, individuals experience self-control conflicts when faced with decisions between virtue and vice. Choosing vice implies self-indulgence while choosing virtue represents successful self-control [29]. Hence, based on consumers' choices between vice and virtue content on social media, their behaviors reflect either indulgence or self-control.

Current research on the impact of social media content on consumer behavior primarily focuses on indulgent behaviors. Firstly, watching short videos can lead to addictive behaviors. Due to their distinct style, concise content, and fast pace, short videos quickly capture consumers' attention and sustain viewing, resulting in addictive

behaviors towards short videos. This addiction may affect students’ academic performance [30]. Secondly, Gift-giving and sending bullet comments are two common consumer behaviors during live streaming [2,3]. The act of gift-giving during live streams and its influencing factors have garnered significant scholarly attention [2,3]. Unlike gift-giving, bullet comments, which are real-time comments displayed on the screen, represent another influential form of interaction in Chinese gaming live streams, bringing substantial traffic to most live streaming platforms [31]. Studies have explored their motivations [3,32,33]. Finally, watching vice content on social media may trigger mental health issues and indulgent behaviors among adolescents. Social media vice content (fake news, rumors, hate speech, aggressive content, and cyberbullying) has become a major societal concern [7]. A review by Gongane et al. [7] indicates that social media vice content affects the mental health of the younger generation, manifesting as addiction, lack of attention, aggressive behaviors, depression, and suicidal tendencies. Adolescents who watch sexual content on social media may engage in sexual self-display online [34]. Viewing e-cigarette content on YouTube and Instagram is likely to encourage adolescents to use e-cigarettes [35]. Consumers who watch alcohol-related content on social media are more likely to consume alcohol [36].

Research on the impact of social media content on consumers’ self-control behaviors is limited and mainly focused on fitness. A review by Stollfuß [5] suggests that watching fitness videos (including planks, squats, weightlifting, push-ups, and yoga pose challenges) on social media may promote participation in fitness exercises and healthy eating. Peelo Dennehy et al.’s [6] study indicates that female consumers are more likely than males to adopt healthier lifestyles through interactions with fitness influencers’ content on social media. Watching body positivity videos on social media improves consumers’ body image perception [4]. For a summary of consumers’ self-control or self-indulgent behaviors after using vice or virtue content on social media, see Table 3.

**Table 3.** Research on consumer self-control vs. self-indulgence behaviors

Author	Types of behavior	Specific behavior
Wu et al. [32] Yang [33] Ye et al. [30] Li and Peng [2] Li and Guo [3]	Self-indulgence	Short Video Addiction; Decline in Academic Performance; Lack of Attention; Aggressive Behavior; Depression and Suicidal Tendencies; Progressive Self-Display; Use of E-cigarettes; Drinking Alcohol; Gift-giving During Live Streams Posting Bullet Comments During Live Streams During Live Streams
Stollfuß [5] Peelo Dennehy et al. [6] Vandenbosch et al. [4]	Self-control	Fitness; Exercise; Healthy Eating

**4. Conclusion**

This paper summarizes the six major types of social media platforms, classifies the content of social media into vice or virtue, and examines the different usage behaviors exhibited by consumers, categorizing them as either self-control or self-indulgence. The

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study finds that current research on consumer behavior primarily focuses on indulgent behaviors, with less attention given to self-control behaviors. However, given that consumers have limited time, their busy mindset within this constraint may enhance their sense of self-importance, leading to a preference for self-controlled actions [20]. Therefore, future research could further explore the self-controlled behaviors that emerge after consumers engage with social media content.

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