

*Examining the Impact of Reaction Videos on Chinese University Students'  
Independent Thinking: Influential Factors and Perceived Effects*

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**Abstract**

In today's digital landscape, where social media platforms are ubiquitous and influencers with substantial followings are prevalent, the dissemination of information through these channels has profoundly influenced global citizens. However, one emerging form of secondary content creation, reaction videos, remains understudied, particularly within the field of communication. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of reaction videos on the independent thinking of Chinese university students. By employing the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory, this research will explore the motivations and perceived effects of watching reaction videos. Besides, the study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, including surveying at least 400 Chinese university students to gather primary data. Data collection will be conducted using a simple random sampling method through an Internet-based questionnaire survey. Through this comprehensive approach, the study expects to reveal that motivations for clicking on a reaction video include primal curiosity, emotional support, social belonging, and interactive involvement. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the extent to which reaction videos influence the audience's ability to think independently by examining changes in the public's opinion of the original video after watching the reaction video. Additionally, this study will provide valuable insights into the realm of secondary content creation, specifically regarding how the speaker's ethos impacts message transmission and how media may interfere with message delivery. Ultimately, these findings will contribute to a broader understanding of audience engagement and the dynamic digital media landscape.

Keywords: Reaction Videos, Independent Thinking, Media Influence, Audience Engagement, Uses and Gratifications Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory

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## **Introduction**

The past research provides various explanations for reaction videos. Anderson (2011) defines reaction videos as a way to capture primary experiences, presenting one of the earliest insights into this field. Based on this, Kim (2015) suggests that people using webcams to record their reactions while watching specific media content can be considered a form of "cross-media." Vogele (2017) emphasizes the individual nature of this video genre. To elaborate from the audience perspective in this research, a reaction video is a video type capturing media personas watching something, emphasizing their reactions. It usually consists of two sections: a small window displaying the item being watched and the other showing the reactions.

As a new type of user-generated content, reaction videos have gained widespread popularity, demonstrating global audience engagement (Carrêlo, 2022). The content of these videos covers various categories, including reactions to movies, TV shows, music videos, comments on individuals' older videos, and responses to various challenges. Platforms like YouTube have become the center of this trend. YouTube searches for videos featuring the term "react" in the title have reached peak in recent years (Elizabeth, 2019). Additionally, on the Chinese video platform Bilibili, international audiences watching reaction videos to music by famous Chinese artists like Jay Chou have amassed millions of views (Shu, 2023). Thus, reaction videos have been an essential part of the global online content consumption trend, attracting academic attention.

Over the past decade, researchers have explored reaction videos across different fields. Kim (2015) focuses on digital technologies, showing reaction videos reveal the intersection of cultural participation, technology-driven engagement, and the changing dynamics of critique and identity in today's digital culture. In art, Garber (2016) studies the aesthetics and motivations of reaction videos, finding that video-sharing platforms and social factors inspire people to create and watch these videos. Palladino (2016) suggests, from a biological standpoint, that mirror neurons enhance the sympathetic response of reaction video viewers, improving their understanding of the emotional impact. Cultural studies, as highlighted by Swan (2018), emphasize the importance of K-pop reaction videos in terms of performative authenticity, cross-border identification, and the role of race in these videos and global consumption.

While existing research has offered valuable insights, there is a lack of in-depth studies and perspectives from the audience, particularly concerning the influence of reaction videos on their independent thinking. Additionally, there is a lack of exploration into the effects of reaction videos within the context of Chinese cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of reaction videos on audience perception, especially the effects on independent thinking. To achieve this, the study employs the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory. This knowledge can contribute to the development of content creation strategies, offer an understanding of audience engagement, and guide future research in exploring the evolving landscape of digital media consumption and new communication forms.

## **Statement of the Problem**

This study takes an exploratory approach to examine the influential factors and perceived effects of reaction videos on the audience's cognitive and emotional responses. The

investigation employs both the Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Parasocial Interaction Theory. Both conceptual and theoretical frameworks assist researchers in understanding the motivations for watching the reaction videos and how reaction videos affect the independent thinking of Chinese university students, offering a fresh perspective on innovative media forms. The study specifically aims to address the following research questions and objectives:

### **Research Questions**

1. What motivates Chinese university students to engage with reaction videos?
2. What drawbacks do Chinese university students attribute to reaction videos?
3. How does the consumption of reaction videos influence the independent thinking ability of Chinese university students?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify and analyze the various motivations that drive Chinese university students to watch reaction videos.
2. To assess and articulate the perceived drawbacks of reaction videos from the perspectives of Chinese university students.
3. To investigate and understand the specific ways in which the consumption of reaction videos shapes and influences the independent thinking of Chinese university students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework assists researchers conduct their studies, as well as analyze and interpret their results (Sreekumar, 2023). This study focuses on the Parasocial Interaction Theory by Horton and Wohl (1956) and the Uses and Gratification Theory by Blumler and Katz (1974), establishing the foundation for exploring the relationship between different variables.

The Parasocial Interaction Theory highlights how media users develop one-sided relationships with media personas, creating illusions of closeness, friendship, and identification (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Despite these relationships remaining one-sided before, they have evolved into more interactive settings with the continuous access provided by the Internet. This access enables individuals to interact with their media personas, increasing the intimacy and strength of parasocial connections (Bennett & Rossmeisl, 2015).

The Parasocial Interaction Theory offers a framework to explain how the public's attitudes toward media personas shape their perceptions and judgments of videos. In the study, researchers measure the level of independent thinking capability by assessing how individuals recognize and align with the viewpoints presented by their preferred media personas. The theoretical basis allows us to delve into the underlying mechanisms that clarify how and why preferences for certain media personas affect the perceived effects of videos.

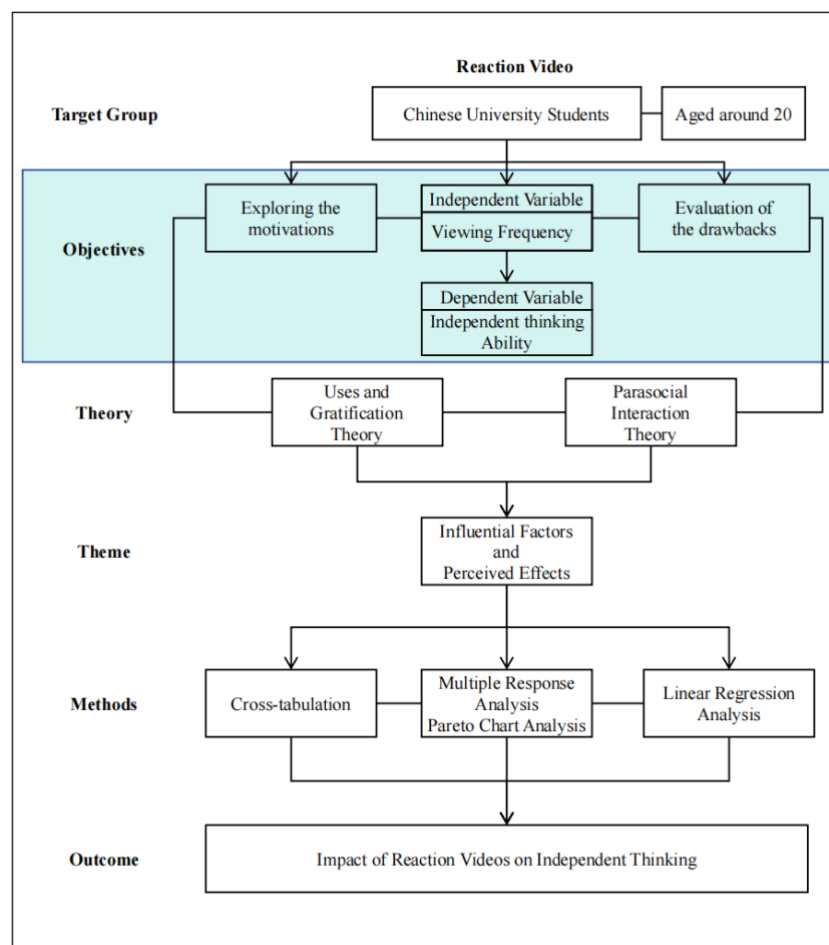
The Uses and Gratification Theory emphasizes that media users select content to fulfill their psychological needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Firstly, the theory supposes users as active agents with control over their media consumption. Secondly, individuals intentionally choose media options driven by their motivations, employing this awareness to select content that matches their specific desires or needs. As media forms evolve, this theory has expanded in

its application. The heightened control and choice offered by new media have prompted research on uses and gratifications, revealing new sources of satisfaction (Vinney, 2019).

In this study, the exploration seeks to clarify how the independent variable of viewing frequency further describes its influence on the dependent variable, specifically, the ability for independent thinking. It helps researchers explain how individuals fulfill their needs through reaction videos, taking into account factors like viewing preferences, motivations, and consumption frequency. By applying the theory, this study can shed light on how and why Chinese university students engage with the form of reaction videos.

### Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1. The framework includes the target group, objectives, previously mentioned theories, and the employed data analysis methods, such as Pareto Chart Analysis and Linear Regression Analysis. Figure 1 clearly outlines the three main objectives to interpret key findings and understand how the viewing frequency of reaction videos impacts the independent thinking of Chinese university students. Through statistical analysis, the study aims to determine if there is a relationship between viewing frequency and independent thinking ability among Chinese students. Additionally, the research contributes to a thorough understanding of audience engagement in the dynamic digital media landscape.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**

## **Research Methods**

This study seeks to reveal the factors that influence and the effects perceived by Chinese university students when watching reaction videos. The focus is on investigating the motivations behind Chinese university students watching reaction videos, their influence on perceived effects, and the drawbacks associated with reaction videos. To achieve this, a mixed methods approach is employed, incorporating qualitative data from literature sources and quantitative analysis using software such as SPSS.

The collected data seeks to examine the motivations driving Chinese university students' involvement with reaction videos, as well as the perceived effects and drawbacks of such videos. To enhance the research design's effectiveness, random sampling is applied to reach Chinese students. An online survey questionnaire is utilized to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

The research questions revolve around reasons, processes, and determinations, making questionnaires the most suitable method for collecting and analyzing data to ensure reliable results. A detailed approach is employed to gather, present, and analyze the data, ensuring the dependability and credibility of the research findings.

## **Research Sample**

This paper surveyed 400 randomly selected respondents, recovering 372 valid questionnaires with a 93% recovery rate. The focus demographic for this study includes Chinese university students, utilizing an Internet-based questionnaire survey to sample the population. The criteria for selecting participants for the questionnaire sample include enrollment in educational institutions and familiarity with the conception of the reaction video.

## **Research Instrument**

The researchers use a self-made questionnaire as the primary research tool. The online survey questionnaire covers the different types of reaction videos, watching motivations, viewing frequencies, and the impact on independent thinking. The questionnaire has four sections: the first part collects basic information about the respondents, and the second explores motivations and frequencies of watching reaction videos. The third part assesses the drawbacks of reaction videos, and the fourth and final section examines audience perceptions, as well as the influence of viewing frequencies on the audience's independent thinking ability. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of reaction videos on Chinese university students, the questionnaire includes single-choice, multiple-choice, and scale-based questions. The researchers aim to gather extensive data to enhance their insights into the perceptual effects of reaction videos on Chinese university students.

## **Data Analysis**

This study aims to analyze the impact of reaction videos on Chinese students' independent thinking. The primary data collected is analyzed objectively to meet the three objectives of the study by using SPSS. All qualitative data is analyzed using descriptive analysis and thematic analysis to explore the motivations behind Chinese university students watching reaction videos (Objective 1), assess the drawbacks of reaction videos (Objective 2), and understand how reaction videos impact the public's independent thinking (Objective 3).

## Establishing Quality

To achieve research goals, it is vital to collect and analyze data effectively. The study employs a random questionnaire survey method to eliminate chance, reduce bias, and ensure the representativeness of the population. The questions are structured without any leading elements. The research progresses from surface-level to in-depth, enhancing the study's value.

## Ethical Consideration

Maintaining ethical standards and protecting respondent confidentiality are essential for the researchers throughout the study. Respondents are treated respectfully, with their personal information kept strictly confidential. The researchers clearly communicate the study's purpose, and the collected data is used exclusively for research, avoiding any other applications or sharing with third parties. Anonymity is maintained by assigning respondents a code number instead of using their names.

## Innovation and Significance of Study

This study holds significance and brings innovation to the existing body of research on reaction videos, especially in the context of Chinese university students. While prior research has explored various aspects of reaction videos, such as their cultural, technological, and aesthetic dimensions, there exists a notable gap in understanding their influence on the independent thinking of the audience, particularly within the Chinese cultural background. The innovative approach, guided by established theories, and the methodology employed contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the evolving landscape of digital media consumption and communication forms.

## Results and Discussion

### Research Question 1

What motivates Chinese university students to engage with reaction videos?

**Table 1: The motivation for watching reaction videos among Chinese university students**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
\$Motivations <sup>a</sup>	Recreation and relaxation	127	16.5%	34.3%
	Sense of companionship and belonging	98	12.8%	26.5%
	Validation of ideas	83	10.8%	22.4%
	Seeking differentiated perspectives	78	10.2%	21.1%
	Access to knowledge	277	36.1%	74.9%
	Understanding of popular culture and trends	105	13.7%	28.4%
(Grand) total		768	100.0%	207.6%

a. The value 1 has been used for tabulation in subgroups II.

As depicted in Table 1, the predominant motivation for respondents to engage in watching reaction videos is to acquire knowledge, constituting 74.9% of the total. Following closely are motivations related to entertainment and relaxation, accounting for 34.3%, and understanding of pop culture and trends, which accounts for 28.4%.

**Table 2: The frequency of watching reaction videos among Chinese university students**

		Frequency	Percentage	Effective Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Less than or equal to 2 times	64	17.2	17.2	17.2
	3 to 5 times	24	6.5	6.5	23.7
	6 to 8 times	48	12.9	12.9	36.6
	9 to 11 times	99	26.6	26.6	63.2
	Greater than or equal to 12 times	137	36.8	36.8	100.0
	(Grand) total	372	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 2, the majority of respondents watch reaction videos more than or equal to 12 times per week, making up 36.8%, and between 9 to 11 times, constituting 26.6%. Subsequently, those watching less than or equal to 2 times account for 17.2%. By combining these analyses, it can be inferred that the weekly frequency of university students watching reaction videos is notably high, indicating considerable popularity among this demographic.

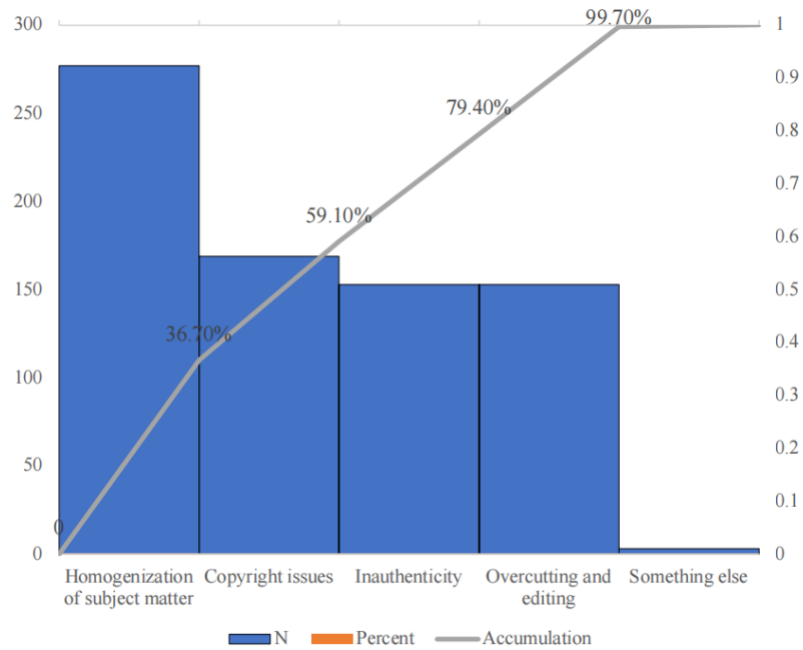
**Research Question 2**

What drawbacks do Chinese university students attribute to reaction videos?

**Table 3: Drawbacks of reaction videos from the perspectives of Chinese university students**

Drawbacks of Reaction Video <sup>a</sup>	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Copyright issues	169	22.4%	42.3%
Homogenization of subject matter	277	36.7%	69.3%
Inauthenticity	153	20.3%	38.3%
Overcutting and editing	153	20.3%	38.3%
Something else	3	0.4%	0.8%
(Grand) total	755	100.0%	

a. The value 1 has been used for tabulation in subgroups II.



**Figure 2: Pareto chart for the drawbacks of reaction videos**

The multiple response analysis and Pareto chart analysis reveal that the homogenization of subject matter (36.7%), copyright issues (22.4%), and inauthenticity (20.3%) collectively constitute 79.4% of the identified defects in reaction videos. These factors stand out as the primary influencers.

**Research Question 3**

How does the consumption of reaction videos influence the independent thinking ability of Chinese university students?



**Table 4: The impact of viewing frequency on independent thinking ability**

Model		Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.46	0.12		20.522	0
	frequency	0.385	0.031	0.544	12.468	0
Dependent variable: endorsement of viewpoints in reaction videos						
2	(Constant)	2.781	0.133		20.864	0
	frequency	0.296	0.034	0.409	8.616	0
Dependent variable: the degree of recognizing the media persona's point of view on an unfamiliar topic						
3	(Constant)	2.658	0.14		18.939	0
	frequency	0.337	0.036	0.436	9.329	0
Dependent variable: possibility of seeking a consensus viewpoint for the viewpoint of interest						
4	(Constant)	2.904	0.133		21.828	0
	frequency	0.271	0.034	0.38	7.893	0
Dependent variable: approval of favorite media persona's opinions						
5	(Constant)	2.719	0.129		21.158	0
	frequency	0.33	0.033	0.46	9.972	0
Dependent variable: recognition of influential media persona's views						
6	(Constant)	2.371	0.132		17.908	0
	frequency	0.391	0.034	0.512	11.467	0
Dependent variable: the extent to which the media persona's viewpoint in the reaction video influences the initial viewpoint						
7	(Constant)	2.45	0.133		18.421	0
	frequency	0.375	0.034	0.495	10.947	0
Dependent variable: endorsement of the expression of the media persona in the reaction video and reduced exploration of the original video						
8	(Constant)	2.188	0.127		17.232	0
	frequency	0.46	0.033	0.59	14.059	0
Dependent variable: reduced commenting or social media discussion engagement after watching a reaction video						

The analysis considered the frequency of watching reaction videos as the independent variable. The dependent variables included the degree of recognition of viewpoints in the reaction videos, the recognition of media persona's viewpoints on unfamiliar topics, the likelihood of seeking consensus viewpoints, the recognition of viewpoints of preferred media personas, the recognition of viewpoints of influential media personas, the influence of media personas' viewpoints on initial viewpoints, the recognition of media personas' expressions, and reduced exploration of the original video, as well as the reduction of comments or participation in social media discussions after watching reaction videos.

The regression coefficient values corresponding to the viewing frequency factor were 0.385 ( $t=12.468$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), 0.296 ( $t=8.616$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), and 0.385 ( $t=8.616$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ) for the linear regression analysis of recognizing the expression of the media persona in the reaction video and reducing the exploration of the original video, and reducing comments or participation in social media discussions after watching the reaction video ( $p=0.000<0.01$ ), 0.337 ( $t=9.329$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), 0.271 ( $t=7.893$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ), 0.33

( $t=9.972$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ),  $0.391$  ( $t=11.467$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ),  $0.375$  ( $t=10.947$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ),  $0.46$  ( $t=14.059$ ,  $p=0.000<0.01$ ). These findings imply that the frequency of viewing has a significant positive relationship with the respondents' ability to think independently. In other words, the more frequent the viewing, the more substantial the effect on the ability to think independently.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the findings indicate that reaction videos are widely consumed for entertainment and educational purposes. Importantly, concerns persist regarding the originality, legality, and authenticity of the content. In addition, the study reveals a significant positive correlation that students who watch reaction videos more frequently experience a greater impact on their independent thinking skills. Overall, these results underscore the intricate dynamics of digital media consumption and its potential impact on audience engagement.

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