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From Electronic Pickles to Contextualized Content: Content Production and User Consumption Needs in the Age of Fragmentation

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Abstract:
This paper takes the phenomenon of digital pickled mustard tuberas an entry point to explore the deeper logic behind content production and user consumption behavior in the era of fragmentation. The study analyzes the characteristics of digital pickled mustard tuber content, the influence of platform algorithms on content production, and the underlying psychological motivations of users from three dimensions:lightweight and emotional,platform algorithms and user preferences,and escape from reality and identity construction. The findings reveal that digital pickled mustard tuberis not only an instantconsumption experience but also reflects users deep-seated needs for emotional comfort, community belonging, and identity recognition in the fragmented era. By drawing on relevant academic research and case studies from the past two years, this paper highlights the evolutionary trend from digital pickled mustard tuber to contextualized content,providing theoretical support and practical insights for understanding the content ecosystem and user behavior in the digital age.

Keywords:
Electronic pickled mustard, Content-driven consumption, Scenario-based content, Short video,Algorithm

1 Introduction

Electronic pickles refer to short-form network culture content that people consume while eating in the digital age, such as short dramas or videos, movie explanations, or audiobooks. Like traditional pickles that accompany meals, electronic pickles serve a side-dish function. Electronic pickles represent a creation and extension of youth cultural consumption in the internet era. However, in essence, electronic pickles go beyond the mere form and content of the videos; they act as a popular meme that accelerates young peoples playful teasing and commentary on their own life situations, manifesting as an emerging youth subcultural media phenomenon. Furthermore, the main consumers of electronic pickles are mostly Generation Z youth, who, as digital natives, have grown up in a highly mediated social environment and are accustomed to multitasking. These contents—from clips of classic TV dramas and food review videos to game livestream recordings and short science or knowledge videos—do not primarily aim to transmit information systematically but rather provide a sense of presence companionship and immediate emotional regulation.

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This study aims to start from the specific phenomenon of electronic pickles, deeply analyzing its core characteristics as a content form and further exploring the profound changes in content production mechanisms driven by both platform algorithms and user preferences. More importantly, the study seeks to uncover the more complex underlying needs behind user consumption behaviors, from seeking mental relief and escapism to building community belonging and identity through shared tastes in consumables. By reviewing and analyzing relevant academic research from 2023 to 2025, this paper attempts to portray a macro view that transitions from the specific consumption behavior of electronic pickles to a broader era of scenario-based content consumption, revealing the evolution direction and future trends of the content ecosystem in the fragmented era.

2 Lightness and Emotionality: The Content Characteristics of Electronic Pickles

Electronic pickled vegetables, as a form of content consumption, are most notably characterized by their lightweight nature and emotional core. These two aspects together form the basis for their widespread acceptance and consumption in fragmented scenarios. It signifies that the focus of content consumption is shifting from traditional knowledge acquisition to instant emotional experiences and psychological comfort.

2.1 Information Lightweighting: Content Formats Transition Toward Ready-to-Consume

The content of electronic mustard presents the ultimate lightweight characteristics in terms of information density and cognitive load, making it have the attribute of ready-to-eat. This means that the content is designed to be highly digestible, and users can complete the consumption process without investing too many cognitive resources, which is perfectly suitable for fragmented scenarios such as dining and commuting that require distraction.

First of all, in terms of content form, it is mostly based on short videos, podcasts, film and television drama commentary or clips, and the duration is usually controlled between a few minutes and ten minutes, avoiding the cognitive pressure caused by long speeches.

Scholar Yang Xiaoqi pointed out: 45-minute TV dramas have a natural advantage in terms of duration, which not only meets their entertainment and leisure needs, but also does not delay normal work and life. Film and television commentary is also representative, these works skillfully use the golden three-second rule of short videos in terms of editing, deconstruct the storyline of the original film and re-edit it, leave the essence, simplify the complex story, and facilitate people to absorb it quickly.

At the same time, compared with short videos, Chinese videos are more popular with everyone, and the horizontal screen frame enhances the audiences immersive experience, and the medium duration can accommodate more high-quality content, and is highly matched with the time of a meal.In addition, the further upgrading and improvement of video technologies such as artificial intelligence, AI, XR, VR, and SORA have allowed people to enjoy electronic mustard more immersively. In addition, after people can master the traffic recommendation mechanism under the algorithm recommendation mechanism, large-scale template editing techniques begin to appear, such as the pictures and videos that attract the audiences attention the most, and

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the more boring places spontaneously prompt the audience that they can be played at double speed here, and the video without soft and wide will automatically add titles in order to increase the users sense of trust: no wide can be eaten with confidence and other titles; In addition, in order to adapt to the content consumption model in the era of fragmentation, new content products have emerged. Short dramas have the advantages of cool content, short production cycle, and short videos, and have become peoples new favorite of electronic mustard.

At the same time, this ready-to-eat nature also brings about the transience of information value. Content is easy to absorb, but also easily forgotten, and its goal is not to build a long-term knowledge system, but to fill the sensory gap of the present. Although the amount of information in some electronic mustard content is acceptable, the overall quality is uneven, and it is difficult to form a deep memory and thinking. This reflects the transformation of media consumption from deep reading to shallow browsing.

2.2 Emotional Drive: From Knowledge Acquisition to Emotional Comfort

If lightweight is the external form of electronic mustard, then emotionality is its internal driving force. The primary purpose of users consuming this kind of content is no longer what they learn in the traditional sense, but what they feel. The core value of content has shifted from information value to emotional value.

Scholars Luo Chang and Wang Feng pointed out: According to Lazarus theory, such emotional expression originates from the users cognitive evaluation of the program scene, and forms an emotional resonance effect through the collective presentation of the barrage pool. The barrage commentary of the long video platform brings together users from different regions through the construction of time and space integration viewing scenes. Users directly transmit information and communicate emotions by viewing and publishing barrages, and users get a sense of companionship in the process of watching the show. This is a typical feature of weak connections in todays network society.

In todays era, peoples survival pressure and information overload, changes in social methods, lack of social trust, sympathy fatigue and other reasons have begun to consciously escape reality and seek emotional comfort and support in fast food-style cultural consumption such as short videos and games.

At the same time, this phenomenon characterized by digital content consumption not only reshapes the leisure habits of college students, but also promotes the alienation of traditional social activities to cyber social networking to a large extent, making cyber social networking occupy an increasing share of college students interpersonal interactions, thus triggering the dilemma of college students social skills deterioration and alienation from real relationships.

Cyber social networking driven by electronic mustard is between social interactions (SocialInteractions) and parasocial-like interactions (ParasocialInteractions).Young people who eat alone create a lively atmosphere by watching videos, which effectively alleviates loneliness. This kind of companionship does not come from real interpersonal interaction, but from low-cost emotional connections through media content. In addition, the emotional orientation of the content is very clear, whether it is the pleasure brought by funny jokes, the healing feeling brought by cute pet videos, or the catharsis brought by complaining videos, the purpose is to provide users with instant emotional regulation.

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In the digital age, dynamic video content can strongly captivate users attention, fully enveloping their focus. When content and timing are well-aligned, watching shows while eating becomes an enjoyable and immersive experience. The audiovisual characteristics of digital pickled vegetables themselves attract viewers choices, and different digital pickled vegetable content offers varied experiences, making the dining process more immersive and the scenario richer. Live-streamed digital pickled vegetables inherently provide a sense of presence, enabling viewers to engage multiple senses, like taste and hearing, through the realistic sounds and visuals of the scene.

Users of digital pickled vegetables engage in virtual presence through bullet comments, creating a shared focus in virtual space. Viewers watching the same style of digital pickled vegetables often share emotional connections. Bullet comments provide an outlet for personal emotional expression while also fostering a sense of identity within a group with shared interests. Real-time bullet interactions create a sense of being together, effectively reducing emotional distance—it feels as if one is not eating and watching alone, but with a group. This can even establish community circles defined by geographical or interest-based connections, generating strong feelings of belonging and collective joy, thus formally constructing a ritual. This sense of ritual is related to, yet slightly different from, the television era, where people were accustomed to gathering with family and friends in front of the TV, eating and discussing program content. These scenarios mainly relied on physical presence to construct rituals. Today, with the rise of solitary groups, young people are more willing to fulfill their emotional needs through virtual presence.

3 Platform Algorithms and User Preferences: The Shift in Content Production Mechanisms

The popularity of digital pickled mustard is inseparable from the powerful resonance formed between platform algorithms and user preferences. Algorithms not only accurately cater to users potential demands but also fundamentally reshape the logic of content production, making short, fast, and quick the mainstream, while templated production becomes the most efficient method. In addition, technological empowerment blurs the boundaries between production and consumption, creating an integrated production-consumption model for information content, which also makes the production and consumption of various digital pickled mustard practically feasible. Contemporary people are immersed in self-constructed virtual information environments, and media deeply embedded in daily life has become an extension of peoples various faculties. As an essential item for dining in the digital era, digital pickled mustard fully reflects peoples media dependency on online cultural products under the condition of deeply mediatized society. The rapid breakout of digital pickled mustard on social media is largely due to the technical support of recommendation algorithms.

3.1 Algorithmic recommendations reinforce the short and fast content logic

Short video and streaming platforms such as TikTok, Kuaishou, and Bilibili are primarily driven by recommendation algorithms based on user behavior data—watch time, likes, comments, and shares. These algorithms naturally favor content that can quickly capture users attention and provide intense sensory or emotional stimulation in a short period. As some studies have revealed, platforms use big data recommendation and content push to continuously feed users content that is quick, short, easy to consume, and immediately re-

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warding, aligning with their preferences. TikTok is implementing a new traffic allocation mechanism, which determines video recommendation priority as a product of predicted user behavior probability × behavior value weight. Short videos that accommodate users fragmented time and entertainment needs have thus become a more popular form of content.

Furthermore, some scholars point out that designs like screen scrolling or scrolling through social feeds, which use a waterfall-style playback, invisibly embed a speed logic into short video platforms, creating continuously updating and alternating images that encourage users to keep scrolling. As the scenes continuously change and users are driven by an inertial need to quickly consume new content, they immediately experience emotions after recognizing video content and rapidly switch to the next video, unconsciously forming a habitual cycle of mechanical, repetitive vertical swiping, emotional stimulation, and pleasure-driven consumption behavior.

This mechanism forms a self-reinforcing loop: users prefer quick and digestible content due to fragmented time, the algorithm detects this preference and increases the recommendation weight for such content, and content creators, in turn, actively cater to the algorithms logic to gain more traffic and exposure, producing even more quick and digestible content.

Hjarvar pointed out that mediatization restructures social time into discrete units that adhere to media logic through institutional intrusion. In the era of traditional media, TV program schedules domesticated family routines, whereas in the digital age, attention is captured through the instant feedback–looped loading mechanism of short video platforms. The so-called meal accompaniment function of digital pickles is actually the platform recommending content through scenario-based algorithms. For example, mukbang videos are precisely pushed during meal times, converting fragmented time into monetizable attention flow. In this process, media technology carries out a double alienation: the unconscious shaping of behavioral habits—over half of the young respondents said they cannot eat without videos, meaning their mealtime behavior is hijacked by the media to become a part of traffic data generation.

3.2 Content production tends to become template-based and replicable

Under the algorithm-driven traffic economy, the efficiency and reproducibility of content production have become crucial. In order to continuously and steadily feed both algorithms and users, content production inevitably moves toward templating and industrialization. This is particularly evident in the many categories of electronic pickles.

For example, movie commentary videos like watch a movie in three minutes follow a fixed template of start with a suspense hook—fast-paced narrative in the middle—conclusion tying up and elevating the theme; food exploration videos have a standardized process of showcasing the environment, close-ups of dishes, and exaggerated expressions of the host; lifestyle Vlogs have evolved reproducible narrative frameworks covering morning wake-up routines, exquisite meals, efficient work, and evening skincare. These templates lower the creative threshold, allowing a large number of creators to quickly produce content that is stable in quality and meets market expectations.

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4 Escaping Reality and Identity Construction: The Inner Needs of User Consumption

However, this trend has also raised concerns in academia. In 2024, He Zihan and Xu Weilan, based on reflections from the audience commodification theory, pointed out that when content production becomes highly templated, audience attention is packaged into a commodity, while the diversity and innovation of the content itself may be suppressed. Creators shift from being individual artistic expressers to content producers on an assembly line, with goals no longer focused on creating unique works, but on making minor innovations within mature templates to maximize gains within algorithmic systems. This has led to homogenization in the content ecosystem: users always have pickles to consume, but their flavors are increasingly monotonous.

4.1 Mental Stress Relief: The Psychological Regulation Function of Electronic Pickles

Contemporary young people face multiple pressures from academics, work, and life. In the context of a rapidly accelerating society, digital junk food has become an important tool for psychological adjustment. In a 2023 study, scholar Xing Weichen explored the evolution of digital junk food from the perspective of social acceleration. Consuming this light and mindless content has become an effective way to temporarily disconnect and escape from the anxiety of reality.

This psychological adjustment function manifests on several levels. First is the diversion of attention. By immersing themselves in video content, users can temporarily shift their focus away from troubling real-world problems and gain a brief moment of peace. Second is vicarious emotional satisfaction. By watching characters in films and TV shows experience justice and retribution, or laughing heartily at funny videos, users can achieve vicarious emotional release and satisfaction, alleviating their own negative emotions. Scholar Guo Shengnan describes digital junk food as a sanctuary for Generation Z in the digital age, a safe space to temporarily escape the storms of reality. Short web dramas and similar content provide a pleasurable experience that helps ease the anxiety caused by social competition, directly reflecting its psychological adjustment function.

Therefore, digital junk food is not only a side dish for meals but also a digital tranquilizer for contemporary youth.

4.2 Community Belonging: The Self-Presentation Mechanism in Content Consumption

In atomized modern society, seeking a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need. Consuming shared cultural products is an important way to build and maintain community identity. The consumption of digital pickles similarly carries strong social attributes and identity-construction functions. When users talk about the same comfort show or the same humorous blogger, they are not only exchanging information but also confirming that they belong to the same taste community.

Today, relationships in cyberspace are no longer one-way links between information receivers and senders; instead, they are interactive exchanges of information in real-time, with the identities of receivers and senders gradually blurring and a greater freedom of information flow. This also facilitates the development of digital pickles. When users spend their leisure time watching digital pickles, they create a kind of electronic het-

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erotopia. Interface systems generally unfold on a flat plane, presenting a cyber world constructed from code and digital information in the form of screens. Typically, the interface mainly includes audiovisual systems integrated within the screen and a virtualized world of data and meaning, presenting a perceptible and understandable world while also connecting to a world of significance.

Moreover, popular digital pickle content itself functions as efficient social currency. Researchers Yu Kaixuan and Liang Xiaoying point out that such content provides material for both online and offline conversations, lowering social barriers. A popular meme or a classic storyline can quickly bridge the gap between strangers, forming a tacit we all get it understanding. In this way, individuals, while consuming content, also connect with interest-based communities, gaining valuable community belonging and identity recognition.

5 Conclusion

From the popularity of digital pickles to the widespread discussion in academic circles, this phenomenon has clearly transcended its initial entertainment value, becoming a multifaceted prism that reflects the complex landscape of content ecology in the fragmented age. Behind this is the deep-seated desire of contemporary youth to seek mental relief and build a sense of community belonging. Looking ahead, the evolution from digital pickles to scenario-based content is already a clear trend. The core value of content will no longer be merely information or entertainment, but whether it can seamlessly integrate into specific scenarios and efficiently accomplish particular tasks within those scenarios, such as relaxation, sleep aid, motivation, and more.

With algorithms and commercial logic deeply embedded in our daily lives, how can we avoid the solidification of information cocoons? How can we protect the diversity and innovative vitality of the content ecosystem? How can we address and guide the potential negative effects of lightweight content consumption, such as shallow cognition and fragmented attention? These questions require deeper exploration by both academia and industry.

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