



Navigating Privacy and Creativity in Short-Video Use: A Three-Wave Study of Chinese Communication Students

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ABSTRACT

Short-form video platforms offer communication students vital avenues for self-expression and professional experimentation, yet privacy concerns may inhibit active participation. This study investigates the longitudinal relationship between privacy concerns and creativity, exploring the mediating roles of short-video use motives and information-technology identity (IT identity). A three-wave survey was conducted with 1,217 students in Chongqing, China, across three time points in 2025 (January, April, and July). Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). Results indicate that privacy concerns are negatively associated with creativity. This relationship is mediated by both short-video use motives and IT identity. Furthermore, a sequential mediation pathway suggests that privacy concerns diminish use motives, which subsequently weakens IT identity, ultimately reducing creative output. These findings highlight the need for educational interventions that balance data privacy with digital creative engagement.

KEYWORDS: Privacy Concerns; Short-Form Video; Douyin; Creativity; Media-Use Motives; Information-Technology Identity; Communication Students; Longitudinal Mediation.

INTRODUCTION

Short-form video applications, such as Douyin, have transitioned from mere entertainment hubs to essential environments for digital storytelling and professional skill development. For communication students, these platforms serve as “digital laboratories” where they can practice visual composition, audience engagement, and narrative construction. However, the pervasive collection of personal data introduces a psychological barrier.

According to Privacy Calculus Theory, individuals perform a subjective cost-benefit analysis before engaging in online behaviors. When the perceived risks—such as unauthorized data sharing or persistent digital footprints—outweigh the perceived benefits of self-expression, students may adopt a passive “lurking” stance. This withdrawal is not merely a loss of social interaction; it represents a missed opportunity for creative growth.

This study addresses how these concerns translate into long-term creative deficits through two specific mechanisms:

- The erosion of active media-use motives.
- The weakening of a student’s information-technology identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Privacy Concerns and Creativity

Creativity requires a “safe space” for experimentation and

the freedom to fail. High levels of privacy can lead to self-censorship, where students avoid publishing original content for fear of surveillance or social judgment.

H1: Privacy concerns regarding short-form video platforms are negatively associated with creativity.

The Mediating Role of Use Motives

Drawing from Uses and Gratifications Theory, we posit that motives (e.g., seeking recognition or self-documentation) drive the creative use of technology. Privacy concerns act as a “motivational dampener,” reducing the drive to use platforms for anything beyond passive consumption.

H2: Short-video use motives mediate the negative relationship between privacy concerns and creativity.

The Mediating Role of IT Identity

Information-technology identity is the extent to which an individual views technology as an integral part of their self-concept. If a student perceives a platform as a threat to their privacy, they are less likely to integrate that technology into their professional or personal identity, thereby reducing their creative confidence in digital spaces.

H3: IT identity mediates the relationship between privacy concerns and creativity.

Participants and Procedure

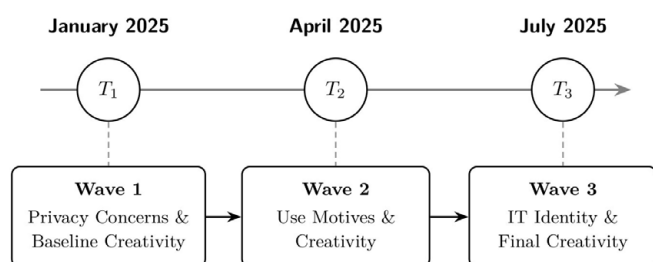
The study employed a three-wave longitudinal design to

establish temporal precedence. Participants ($N = 1,217$) were recruited from two universities and one vocational college in Chongqing, China.

Wave 1 (T1 - January 2025): Measured privacy concerns and baseline creativity.

Wave 2 (T2 - April 2025): Measured short-video use motives and creativity.

Wave 3 (T3 - July 2025): Measured IT identity and final creativity levels.



Measures

All constructs were measured using validated Likert scales (1-5 or 1-7 range).

Privacy Concerns: Assessed using a scale adapted from Dinev and Hart (2006), focusing on data collection and unauthorized secondary use.

Creativity: Measured via the Williams Creativity Assessment Packet (CAP), focusing on fluency, flexibility, and originality.

IT Identity: Measured using the scale developed by Carter and Grover (2015).

Structural Equation Modeling

We utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized paths. The model fit indices were within acceptable ranges (e.g., CFI > 0.95, RMSEA < 0.06).

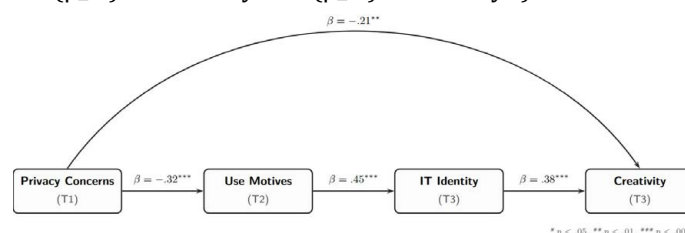
The direct path from privacy concerns (T_1) to creativity (T_3) was significant and negative:

$$\beta = -0.24, p < 0.001$$

Mediation Analysis

The sequential mediation was tested using bootstrapping (5,000 samples). The indirect effect of privacy concerns creativity through the chain of use motives and IT identity was significant.

(“Total Effect” &= “Direct Effect” + “Indirect Effects” @ [“Path”]_“sequential” &= “Privacy” → +(β_1) “Motives” → +(β_2) “IT Identity” → +(β_3) “Creativity”)



The “privacy-creativity gap” is real and measurable. When students fear for their data privacy, their motivation to engage with short-video platforms as creative tools diminishes. This lack of engagement prevents the formation of a robust IT identity, which is a critical precursor to creative output in the digital age.

Universities should not only teach technical skills but also provide “privacy-safe” environments where students can experiment without the fear of permanent, public data exposure. Strengthening a student’s IT identity through purposeful, secure digital practice may mitigate the negative effects of privacy concerns.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that privacy concerns exert a longitudinal negative influence on creativity among communication students. This effect is partially explained by a reduction in media-use motives and a weakened information-technology identity. As digital platforms become central to creative professions, addressing the psychological barriers of privacy is essential for fostering the next generation of media creators.

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