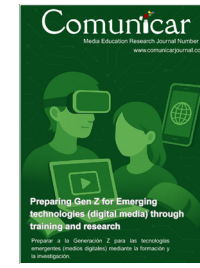
Comunicar, n. 85, v. XXXIV, 2026 | Media Education Research Journal | ISSN: 1134-3478; e-ISSN: 1988-3478
www.comunicarjournal.com



Perceived Media Affordances on TikTok and YouTube among U.S. College Students

Afordancias mediáticas percibidas en TikTok y YouTube entre estudiantes universitarios

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ABSTRACT
This study examined how users perceived media affordances on TikTok and YouTube, adopting a middle-ground perspective between technological determinism and social constructionism. Building on affordance theory, the study aimed to disentangle platform-specific technological features from sociocultural patterns of use and to provide a systematic framework for cross-platform comparison of social media affordances. An online survey was conducted with U.S. college students (*N*=351). Respondents evaluated perceived affordances of TikTok and YouTube across multiple dimensions. Multivariate analyses of variance were employed to assess differences in perceived affordance salience between the two platforms while demographic factors were controlled. The results showed that YouTube's affordances were perceived as more salient in three dimensions: editability, searchability, and signaling. In contrast, TikTok was perceived as more salient in six dimensions: awareness, persistence, personalization, pervasiveness, visibility, and sharing. Two affordances—association and evaluability—were perceived as equivalent across platforms, suggesting functional convergence in social connection and feedback mechanisms. The findings contributed to affordance research by systematically organizing overlapping affordances and enabling more precise comparative analyses across platforms. By unconfounding media from their affordances, this study advanced theoretical clarity and offered methodological guidance for future research on social media use, platform design, and media literacy in digitally mediated environments.

RESUMEN
Este estudio examinó cómo los usuarios percibieron las afordancias mediáticas en TikTok y YouTube, adoptando una perspectiva intermedia entre el determinismo tecnológico y el construccionismo social. Basándose en la teoría de las afordancias, el estudio tuvo como objetivo distinguir las características tecnológicas específicas de cada plataforma de los patrones socioculturales de uso y proporcionar un marco sistemático para la comparación multiplataforma de las afordancias de las redes sociales. Se llevó a cabo una encuesta en línea con estudiantes universitarios de Estados Unidos (*N*=351). Los participantes evaluaron las afordancias percibidas de TikTok y YouTube en múltiples dimensiones. Se emplearon análisis multivariados de varianza para evaluar las diferencias en la saliencia de las afordancias percibidas entre ambas plataformas, controlando los factores demográficos. Los resultados mostraron que las afordancias de YouTube fueron percibidas como más salientes en tres dimensiones: editabilidad, capacidad de búsqueda y señalización. En contraste, TikTok fue percibido como más saliente en seis dimensiones: conciencia, persistencia, personalización, omnipresencia, visibilidad y compartición. Dos afordancias —asociación y evaluabilidad— fueron percibidas como equivalentes entre las plataformas, lo que sugiere una convergencia funcional en los mecanismos de conexión social y retroalimentación. Los hallazgos contribuyeron a la investigación sobre afordancias al organizar sistemáticamente afordancias superpuestas y permitir análisis comparativos más precisos entre plataformas. Al desentrañar los medios de sus afordancias, este estudio avanzó la claridad teórica y ofreció orientación metodológica para futuras investigaciones sobre el uso de redes sociales, el diseño de plataformas y la alfabetización mediática en entornos digitalmente mediados.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE
Social Media, YouTube, TikTok, Mediated Communication, Media Affordances, Cross-Media Analysis.
Redes sociales, YouTube, TikTok, comunicación mediada; afordancias mediáticas, análisis entre medios.

Received: 2025-08-18 | Reviewed: 2025-10-02 | Accepted: 2025-10-18 | Online First: 2026-04-11 | Published: 2026-04-15
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19690421 | Pages: 114-127

1. Introduction

Both TikTok and YouTube are popular visual social media platforms. Their users may perceive technological affordances and what they can or cannot do with them (i.e., their functions & constraints) differently and similarly due to distinct as well as common affordances of each medium. Affordances are about what technology users can do with them and how different users may perceive and actualize those affordances distinctively depending on their individual and social contexts (e.g., skill level, situational factors; Gibson, 1986; Norman, 1999). Media affordances can be defined as "relationships among action possibilities to which agents perceive they could apply a medium within its potential features/capabilities/constraints, relative to the agent's needs or purposes within a given context" (Rice et al., 2017, p. 109).

Examining such media affordances and comparing their similarities and differences between TikTok and YouTube will not only clarify the theoretical application of the media affordance framework for studying social media, but also deepen our understanding of each medium and its usage patterns. The definition and application of media affordance concept had been inconsistent and unruly in the existing literature (Evans et al., 2017; Manata & Spottswood, 2022). However, scholars such as Evans et al. tried to clarify the conceptualization of media affordances by distinguishing them from purely technological features or media users' personal or social characteristics.

The current study examined and compared affordances of two visual social media platforms: TikTok and YouTube. Media affordance provides a useful tool for such comparison as it does not lean on just the technological or social nature of media adoption and usage but captures both aspects. All media share various kinds of affordances to some extent and the level of such affordances or saliences of them can vary by distinct media in the context of use.

TikTok is a relatively newer social media platform (launched in 2016 in China with a name, DouYin), which became very popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, partially because people had to stay home and socially distance themselves (Unni & Weinstein, 2021). Using media became more of a major entertainment activity during the pandemic (Eden et al., 2020; Wulf et al., 2022). TikTok provided many short and enjoyable contents (i.e., "snack" contents) for people to consume and share with their social networks instantaneously and allowed users to edit existing videos and add their own take on them. By 2021, TikTok was expected to reach one billion users (Iqbal, 2023). YouTube, on the other hand, has been around for almost two decades by now (started in 2005), and many users worldwide (2.21 billion) are using the platform daily (Statista, 2023). As a well-established visual social media platform, YouTube became a channel for many diverse groups of people from politicians to micro celebrities, and became a repository for a huge amount of user-generated content in various genres (e.g., music, documentary, news, sports, memes; Burgess & Green, 2018).

Motivated by the fact that both TikTok and YouTube are popular visual social media platforms but have distinct characteristics and usage patterns perceived by their users, this study examines how users of both media perceive their affordances similarly and/or differently based on their experiences. Exploring how TikTok and YouTube differ from each other based on the media affordance approach becomes a meaningful application of the theory and provides practical insights about both popular platforms. Assessing the similar and different affordance ratings of these two visual social media platforms may provide practical insights for UX designers and social media developers.

2. Theoretical Background & Literature Review

2.1. Media Affordances

The concept of affordances has been explored by researchers in various fields, each offering unique perspectives on its implications for technology use and interaction with the environment. Early interpretations by Gibson (1986) and Norman (1999) emphasized physical action possibilities and design choices while overlooking cultural aspects and user agency. Hutchby (2001) proposed a middle-ground view, considering both technological determinism and social constructivism, while McVeigh-Schultz and Baym (2015) focused on user interpretation of social media affordances. Nagy and Neff (2015) introduced imagined affordances, considering users' emotional involvement, and Costa (2018) emphasized affordances-in-practice, highlighting the role of users in shaping affordances within specific social and cultural contexts.

Building on this foundational work, Bucher and Helmond (2018) provided a comprehensive analysis of the affordances specific to social media platforms. They argued that these affordances are not static

but dynamically evolve as platforms update their features and as users adapt their behaviors. This fluidity highlights the interplay between platform design and user agency, which is crucial in understanding how users interact with social media. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2021) explored how affordances are theorized in the context of information practices, emphasizing the engagement among people, technology, and sociocultural environments. Their work underscores the importance of considering the sociocultural context in which affordances are actualized, particularly in diverse and globalized settings like social media platforms. Ronzhyn et al. (2023) called for a more standardized approach to affordance research in the context of social media by highlighting the diversity of definitions and applications of affordances across different studies.

The Needs-Affordances-Features (NAF) perspective (Karahanna et al., 2018) further enriches this discussion by linking the inherent features of social media platforms with the specific needs of users, which ultimately drive how affordances are actualized. This model underscores the importance of understanding that users' needs dictate the selection and utilization of particular features within a platform, which in turn, shapes their interaction experience and perception of affordances. This perspective helps bridge the gap between technology-centric and user-centric views on affordances by recognizing the interplay between user needs, platform features, and perceived affordances.

2.2. Platform-Specific Affordances

Media affordances encompass communication and the designer's attempt to convey a media artifact's capabilities to users (Norman; cited in Rice et al., 2017). This communication occurs through inherent affordances within the artifact itself and the information provided about its affordances. The concept of media affordances also involves the co-construction and sharing of intersubjective meaning, particularly among organizational members. Researchers have applied this concept to understand how organizations use and contextualize media, resulting in a wide range of possible and overlapping affordances.

Affordances are often measured in relation to specific information and communication technologies (ICT) at the individual level and sometimes at a single point in time. Additionally, some propose general affordances that are not tied to specific media, like Sundar's MAIN model (2008), which includes modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability as broad media affordances. Overall, media affordances refer to the relationships among action possibilities perceived by agents to apply a medium's features to their needs or purposes within a given context (Rice et al., 2017).

2.3. Research on TikTok, YouTube, and their Affordances

Both TikTok and YouTube provide diverse contents created in short-form videos. While 60 seconds video is a typical form of TikTok video, YouTube has adopted this form of short videos relatively recently. TikTok now allows videos to be as long as 3 minutes. Kaye et al. (2022) consider TikTok as a space for creative expression and cultural representation, which transformed contemporary social media dynamics, shaping trends, behaviors, and interactions among its users. The researchers show how TikTok fosters the creation of online communities and subcultures, as well as how it has influenced the broader media landscape.

Ever since its inception as a platform for sharing everyday videos in 2005, YouTube has evolved into a globally influential digital media platform. Over the past two decades, YouTube has expanded in scope and matured as a corporate entity and its operational framework revolves around balancing the interests of content creators, audiences, advertisers, and media collaborators to extract value within a commercial landscape where YouTube now contends with other social media and streaming television competitors (Burgess & Green, 2018). Burgess and Green show how YouTube's parallel dynamics of commerce and community have endured over time, giving rise to varieties of popular culture, innovative professional identities, and business models within the media.

The following sections review existing research findings about TikTok and YouTube, particularly focusing on studies applying the media affordance framework, and propose our own research question in comparing between TikTok and YouTube affordances. While traditional mass communication theories such as the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989) or uses and gratifications theory (U&G; Katz et al., 1973) may be useful in helping us understand why technology users decide to adopt or not adopt these platforms (i.e., identifying the motivating factors), and their level of satisfaction regarding use of these platforms, such older theoretical approaches do not necessarily take into account how media affordances

influence people's perceptions of these platforms. Those theories focused simply on examining users' perceptions of the technology's ease of use or utility (TAM) and subjective evaluations of their own use experiences (U&G) rather than on perceptions regarding what specific actions they enable and/or restrict (i.e., affordances). Studies exploring media affordances have been using qualitative approaches more frequently. However, to provide a more thorough review of previous studies on both TikTok and YouTube, we decided to include both qualitative and quantitative findings.

2.4. Research on TikTok Affordances

Studies on TikTok affordances examine how its unique features relate to self-presentation norms (e.g., Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Bhandari & Bimo, 2020) and their use in addressing social issues, such as climate change (Hautea et al., 2021). While some researchers applied the media affordance framework (e.g., Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Song et al., 2021), quantitative studies often adopt theories like TAM or U&G to compare TikTok with other platforms.

Bhandari and Bimo (2020) explored TikTok's affordances for self-presentation, identifying unique design features that enable users to interact with their "algorithmized self." These affordances allow for engagement with trending algorithms that curate content based on user preferences, enhancing self-presentation. Authenticity, a normative standard on TikTok, is shaped by features such as the "For You" page, video modality, and user anonymity (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). This "just be you" attitude normalizes expressions of various emotions and fosters social support.

Bibeva (2021) expanded the focus beyond young users, exploring older adults' motivations for using TikTok. Her ethnographic study revealed that older adults use features like Duets and Live Streams for social connection and community building, enabled by TikTok's association affordance. Association affordance in social media refers to the capacity of these platforms to create, display, and maintain connections between individuals, content, or organizations (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). This affordance highlights how social media technologies facilitate the visibility and organization of relationships, enabling users to identify and interact with relevant social ties. Similarly, Hautea et al. (2021) highlighted TikTok's role in facilitating discussions on social issues, such as climate change.

Qualitative studies have identified various affordances of TikTok, including association, awareness, self-presentation, and anonymity. These affordances allow users to present themselves authentically, engage with algorithmic content, and exchange social support. Awareness refers to the ability of social media to make users conscious of others' activities, content, and interactions (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). TikTok's design, particularly its "For You" feed, prioritizes exposing users to trending videos, creators, and audience engagement metrics (e.g., likes, shares, comments). Some scholars claim "self-presentation" as one of social media affordances (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020; Ellison & Vitak, 2015), while others treat it as an outcome or behavior facilitated by other affordances (Evans et al., 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). In a similar vein, anonymity can be viewed as a technological feature or platform design element that enables other affordances rather than an affordance itself (Evans et al., 2017; Karahanna et al., 2018).

Song et al. (2021) integrated four affordances—searching, meta-voicing, live streaming, and recommending—into a model that links user experiences to continued TikTok use for health information. Searching (or searchability) affordance refers to the capability of a platform to enable users to locate specific content, people, or information efficiently through mechanisms such as search bars, filters, tags, and algorithms (Rice et al., 2017; Song et al., 2021; Sundar, 2008). This affordance shapes how users interact with digital environments by facilitating access to relevant or desired materials. Meta-voicing affordance refers to the capacity of digital platforms, particularly social media, to allow users to interact with and respond to content in ways that add layers of meaning or context (Song et al., 2021). This affordance is characterized by the ability to amplify, modify, or contextualize existing content through user-generated actions like commenting, sharing, liking, or reacting. However, similar to the case of live streaming and recommending, meta-voicing can be considered as an outcome arising from interaction of other affordances (Evans et al., 2017; Rice et al., 2017).

TikTok's unique affordances foster more frequent video uploads, less reliance on follower counts for virality, and greater interaction with users' own content compared to YouTube (Guinaudeau et al., 2022). This aligns with Bhandari and Bimo's (2020) conception of the "algorithmized self" and connects with broader findings on narcissistic motivations for social media use (e.g., Große Deters et al., 2014). Some

studies conflate affordances with technological features (e.g., live streaming), but Karahanna et al.'s (2018) NFA framework, introduced earlier, distinguishes between the two, emphasizing the need for standardized measures of affordances to enhance conceptual clarity.

2.5. Research on YouTube Affordances

Research on YouTube affordances is more extensive, reflecting its long-standing prominence as a video-sharing platform. Studies analyze YouTube within specific contexts, such as political deliberation (e.g., Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Maia & Rezende, 2016), or compare it with other platforms (e.g., Matamoros-Fernández, 2017). Common affordances identified include visibility, anonymity, association, and sharing, with evaluability highlighted as particularly relevant to YouTube. Evaluability affordance refers to the capability of social media platforms to enable users to assess, rate, or judge the quality, relevance, or credibility of content, interactions, or entities (Rice et al., 2017; Sundar, 2008). Sharing (or sharability; boyd, 2010) affordance refers to the capacity of social media platforms to enable users to distribute, forward, or make their content or others' content accessible to a wider audience (Evans et al., 2017). This affordance facilitates social interaction, content dissemination, and community-building by providing tools for collaboration, redistribution, and amplification of information. Finally, visibility affordance in social media refers to the capability of these technologies to make behaviors, knowledge, preferences, connections, or other aspects of individuals or groups observable to others (Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

Adami (2012) demonstrated how YouTube's features, such as video responses, support creative and non-linear communication, enabling unexpected uses through user interaction. Sanders (2020) explored influencers' reliance on affordances like visibility and evaluability to grow their careers, noting challenges from algorithmic biases. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2021) identified risks associated with these affordances, including networked harassment and the amplification of harmful content. Political communication studies revealed mixed outcomes for YouTube affordances. Halpern and Gibbs (2013) found anonymity on YouTube reduced civility compared to Facebook, while Maia and Rezende (2016) showed online norms, not just anonymity, influenced the tone of political discussions. Matamoros-Fernández (2017) highlighted how YouTube's low publication barriers and recommendation algorithms facilitate extremist content and "platformed racism." Table 1 summarizes affordance types studied by previous and current research. It is revealed that affordances overlap between previous and current research; however, a few were excluded from the current study due to the room for argument whether they are truly social media affordances or just technological features or interactional outcomes (Evans et al., 2017; Rice et al., 2017). A few affordances (e.g., self-presentation, meta-voicing) were considered more general media affordances that could facilitate some of the outcomes.

Table 1: A Summary of Affordance Types Studied by Previous and Current Research.

Affordance Types of TikTok Studied by Previous Research	Affordance Typess of YouTube Studied by Previous Research	Affordance Types Chosen for the Current Study
Association, Searching (Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Bibeva, 2021),	Association (Lewis et al., 2021) Visibility, Sharing, Evaluability (Sanders, 2020) Copy-and-paste/ forwarding (Adami, 2012)	Association, Visibility, Sharing, Evaluability, Editability, Searchability, Awareness, Personalization
Anonymity (Barta & Andalibi, 2021) Self-presentation (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020) Live streaming (Song et al., 2021) Televised medium, Mobile-only interface (Guinaudeau et al., 2022) Recommendation (Guinaudeau et al., 2022; Song et al., 2021) Meta-voicing (Song et al., 2021)	Anonymity (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Maia & Rezende, 2016; Matamoros-Fernández, 2017) Identifiability, Networked information access (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013)	Pervasiveness Persistence Signaling

Overall, YouTube affordances, such as sharing, visibility, and evaluability, foster diverse user interactions but also enable misuse, from harassment to the spread of disinformation. A standardized approach to

affordance analysis could provide greater consistency across studies and clarify the interplay between technological features, affordances, and user needs.

2.6. The Present Study

The media affordances research on TikTok or YouTube has predominantly utilized qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnography and examined rather unique aspects of each platform and what users perceive as their action possibilities within particular contexts (e.g., self-presentation, being an influencer, or political discussion). Through these findings, media affordances seem largely affected by research contexts; but the affordances themselves are rather consistent, and their perceived levels can vary across media and contexts (Karahanna et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2017). Thus, we could use a general typology.

However, such quantitative approaches to TikTok or YouTube affordances, especially comparison of the two platforms side by side, are less common. While both platforms afford users the capability to express themselves in unique and authentic ways, TikTok users were more engaged in "self" presentation while YouTube users seemed to care more about how "others" (or audiences) would look at them. Research on political discussion or deliberation via TikTok evaluated its use more positively (Bibeva, 2021; Guinaudeau et al., 2021; Hautea et al., 2021; Simpson & Semaan, 2020) based on affordances of *awareness*, *association*, *and editability*, whereas YouTube studies highlighted its negative uses in political deliberations based on affordances such as *anonymity*, *sharing*, *and evaluability* (i.e., promoting greater incivility and impoliteness in interactions; Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Matamoros-Fernández, 2017).

Existing studies provided empirical knowledge and insights about unique as well as common affordances and diverse usage of each platform, but application of the theoretical concept and its measurement were not consistent across the varying media. Some research mentioned specific affordances relevant to their study contexts, whereas others only covered affordances in general without specifying which dimension of media affordances users perceived and actualized in their activities and related outcomes.

To fill the gap in the previous literature, the current study aims to make a valid and reliable comparison of media affordances of the two visual social media platforms. By applying the same set of criteria of affordances consistently to both platforms and comparing the extent to which users agree with the level of the affordances provided by the two platforms (TikTok and YouTube), we expect to gain further understanding of specific media affordance dimensions perceived more salient by users and what kinds of communication behaviors were enabled by those affordances. The study could reveal how users engage with TikTok and YouTube, providing valuable insights into the distinct roles these platforms play in digital communication. Thus, the present study proposes the following research question:

RQ1. How do media affordances of TikTok and YouTube compare to each other?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Once acquiring an IRB approval, a cross-sectional online survey (Qualtrics) was conducted for this study. Participants - who were 18 years old and over and users of both TikTok and YouTube - were recruited from a large US Southwestern university through a departmental research pool system. They were targeted as college students are active TikTok and YouTube users (Pew Research Center, 2021). Of a total of 395 responses, 44 cases were removed as they were incomplete (N=351). There were 125 males (35.6%), 220 females (62.7%), three non-binary or third gender (0.9%), and three preferred not to answer (0.9%). Most participants described themselves as White (74.4%) with the remainder identified as Hispanic (8.5%), Asian (6.0%), African American (4.8%), multiracial (3.7%), Native American (1.4%), and others (1.1%). Their age ranged between 18 and 36 years old (M=20.03, SD=2.02). When agreeing to participate in the survey, after reading informed consent, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire along with their demographic information. Participation took approximately 15-20 minutes, and students received course credits for completion of the survey.

3.2. Measures and Data Analysis Procedure

The measurement of media affordances, developed by Rice et al. (2017) and validated by Manata and Spottswood (2022), were adopted by filling the blanks in item statements left by Rice et al. to change with

either TikTok or YouTube and editing the statements to reflect each platform's characteristics (see Table 2). All the responses were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 2: Construct Items and Factor Loadings of TikTok and YouTube Affordances.

Affordance	Item Factor Loading	
	TikTok	YouTube
Association		
1. Watch video(s) from content creators I know or am aware of, to find new videos I did not know or wasn't aware of	.81	.85
2. Watch video(s) from people I know or am aware of, to find new people I did not know or wasn't aware of.	.78	.75
Awareness		
1. Be aware of the information others in my social network have.	.79	.82
2. Be aware of the information others outside of social circle have.	.79	.81
3. Be aware of activities, opinions, or locations of others	.67	.71
4. Keep up-to-date with current news and social issues.	--	--
5. Keep up-to-date with current trends and social norms	--	--
Editability		
1. Edit others' information after they have posted it	--	--
2. Edit my information after I have posted it.	.53	.79
3. Create or edit content collaboratively	.78	.82
Persistence		
1. Find history about a topic of interest.	--	--
2. Maintain relations with others despite changes in activities, work, or location.	.64	.62
3. Have my information or comments stay available after I post them	.70	.64
Personalization		
1. Include the information, photos, and other content that present my personal identity.	.65	.73
2. Adjust my personal or social media profile to my preferences	.54	.62
Pervasiveness		
1. Get responses to my requests from others quickly.	--	--
2. Communicate with others while moving, commuting, traveling.	85	.91
3. Communicate with acquaintance	.68	.88
Searchability		
1. Search for information or people by entering search words.	--	--
2. Search for information or people by following links between contents.	.70	.84
3. Search for tags or keywords that someone else has added to content	.75	.77
Sharing		
1. Create groups for sharing information about specific topics, events, or people.	--	--
2. Obtain and use others' video contents.	.55	.46
3. Share my video contents with people	.70	.84
Evaluability		
1. Evaluate other people's video content by providing my recommendations, comments, liking, or tagging.	.79	.87
2. See other people's evaluation of video content through their recommendations, comments, liking, or tagging.	.72	.71
Visibility		
1. See other people's replies to other people's video posts and/or comments.	--	--
2. See who has interactions or links with particular people or their video posts.	--	--
3. See the number of others who have "liked" or linked to the same content.	--	--
4. See the number of followers to the contents created by me.	.77	.79
5. See the number of views who have watched the video content I watched.	.81	.77
6. See the number of followers to contents I liked.	.76	.79
Signaling		
1. Receive notifications about other video content or updates that are similar to what I have just been looking at.	.90	.89
2. Receive notifications about other people's information or updates.	.80	.85

The reliability and validity were examined by using SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 24.0. Specifically, we determined whether each measurement was valid and reliable with the following criteria, as Hu and Bentler (1999) and Kline (2023) suggested: Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7, Chi-square/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df)<3, comparative fit index (CFI) ≥.90, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) ≤.06, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) ≤.08. When the results were not satisfied, we modified the model by dropping items that displayed poor factor loadings such as factor loadings less than .40 (Hair et al., 2010).

TikTok affordances. To assess TikTok affordances, we asked participants to think about the extent to which certain activities are possible when using *TikTok*. Then, we presented statements representing the affordances of TikTok. This modified 11-dimensional scale included 33 items (e.g., awareness: "be aware of the information others in my social network have", persistence: "have my information or comments stay available after I post them") with higher scores on each dimension indicating participants perceiving TikTok enabled such affordance strongly. (Table 3)

Table 3: Correlation, Reliability, and Validity Scores of TikTok Affordances.

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Association											
2 Awareness	.53***	-									
3 Editability	.21***	.26***	-								
4 Persistence	.37***	.30***	.38***	-							
5 Personalization	.36***	.29***	.38***	.51***	-						
6 Pervasiveness	.24***	.22***	.35***	.39***	.43***	-					
7 Searchability	.32***	.31***	.26***	.33***	.31***	.34***	-				
8 Sharing	.35***	.27***	.29***	.35***	.48***	.42***	.30***	-			
9 Evaluability	.38***	.33***	.21***	.41***	.31***	.22***	.37***	.41***	-		
10 Visibility	.39***	.31***	.24***	.35***	.41***	.33***	.36***	.39***	.37***	-	
11 Signaling	.24***	.31***	.22***	.18**	.25***	.13*	.29***	.37***	.29***	.38***	-
Cronbach's α	.78	.79	.59	.62	.52	.73	.69	.56	.73	.82	.84
CR	.78	.80	.61	.62	.52	.74	.69	.56	.73	.82	.84
AVE	.64	.57	.45	.45	.36	.59	.53	.40	.57	.61	.73

Note. ***p<.001, *p<.05. Pearson's r; two-tailed significance. CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted

The initial TikTok affordances model showed a poor model fit, $\chi^2(472)=1067.27$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=2.26$, CFI=.86, RMSEA=.06 and SRMR=.07. We found eight items had poor factor loadings: Sharing's item #1, editability's item #1, visibility's items #2 and #3, awareness' items #4 and #5, pervasiveness' item #1, and persistence's item #1. After removing them, the trimmed TikTok affordances model produced an excellent fit: $\chi^2(244)=383.37$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=1.57$, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.05 and SRMR=.04 (see Table 3).

YouTube affordances. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement to the same affordances (33 items for 11 affordance dimensions), when using *YouTube*. The initial YouTube affordances model exhibited a poor fit: $\chi^2(472)=1683.68$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=3.57$, CFI=.81, RMSEA=.09 and SRMR=.09. There were nine items with poor loadings: sharing's item #1, editability's item #1, visibility's items #1 and #2, awareness' items #4 and #5, pervasiveness' item #1, persistence's item #1, and searchability's item #1. We found that this trimmed YouTube affordances model produced a good fit: $\chi^2(220)=584.34$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=2.67$, CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06 and SRMR=.06 (see Table 4).

To ensure consistent comparisons of TikTok and YouTube affordances, problematic 10 items — seven common items from both models, one item from TikTok model (i.e., visibility's item #3) and two items from YouTube model (i.e., visibility's item #1 and searchability's item #1) were excluded from both models and tested them again. The revised models fitted well, respectively: TikTok: $\chi^2(197)=310.59$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=1.58$, CFI=.96, RMSEA=.04 and SRMR=.04; YouTube: $\chi^2(197)=531.13$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=2.70$, CFI=.92, RMSEA=.06 and SRMR=.06). Both TikTok and YouTube affordances models were also reliable: TikTok's Cronbach's — $\alpha=.89_{total}$; YouTube's Cronbach's — was $\alpha=.91_{total}$. Thus, it was valid and reliable to compare the two platforms' affordances using exactly the same retained items.

Table 4: Correlation, Reliability, and Validity Scores of YouTube Affordances.											
Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Association	-										
2 Awareness	.33***	-									
3 Editability	.26***	.29***	-								
4 Persistence	.26***	.29***	.58***	-							
5 Personalization	.30***	.31***	.62***	.64***	-						
6 Pervasiveness	.24***	.29***	.37***	.60***	.46***	-					
7 Searchability	.39***	.31***	.26***	.30***	.35***	.16**	-				
8 Sharing	.32***	.28***	.49***	.34***	.50***	.33***	.36***	-			
9 Evaluability	.30***	.30***	.43***	.36***	.45***	.22***	.43***	.51***	-		
10 Visibility	.35***	.22***	.43***	.38***	.46***	.21***	.50***	.46***	.54**	-	
11 Signaling	.22***	.35***	.38***	.33***	.47***	.23***	.33***	.33***	.45***	.47***	-
Cronbach's α	.78	.82	.78	.57	.62	.89	.78	.56	.77	.83	.78
CR	.79	.82	.78	.57	.63	.89	.79	.61	.77	.83	.79
AVE	.65	.61	.65	.40	.46	.80	.65	.46	.63	.62	.65

Note. ***p<.001, *p<.05. Pearson's r; two-tailed significance. CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted

4. Results

4.1. Comparisons of Affordances between TikTok and YouTube

For RQ1, MANOVA was performed to examine significant differences between 11 affordance dimensions across the two platforms. As shown in Table 5, nine out of 11 dimensions — *awareness*, *editability*, *persistence*, *personalization*, *pervasiveness*, *searchability*, *sharing*, *visibility*, and *signaling* - were significantly different between TikTok and YouTube. No statistically significant differences were identified for *association* (F=.53, p=.81, η_p^2=.01) and *evaluability* (F=1.69, p=.10, η_p^2=.05).

Affordances perceived as significantly higher for YouTube than for TikTok included editability (F=4.73, p<.001, η_p^2=.13), searchability (F=2.59, p=.01, η_p^2=.08), and signaling (F=5.19, p<.001, η_p^2=.14). On the contrary, affordance perceptions were significantly higher for TikTok on the dimension of awareness (F=4.74, p<.001, η_p^2=.18), persistence (F=3.02, p=.003, η_p^2=.09), personalization (F=6.12, p<.001, η_p^2=.16), pervasiveness (F=4.23, p<.001, η_p^2=.12), sharing (F=2.38, p=.02, η_p^2=.07), and visibility (F=2.67, p=.003, η_p^2=.10). (See Table 5)

Table 5: Comparison of 11 Dimensions of Affordances between TikTok and YouTube.								
	Levene's Test	TikTok		YouTube		*F*	*p*	η_p^2
	p	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Association	.88	3.86	.74	4.09	.78	.53	.81	.01
Awareness	.90	**3.56**	.84	3.41	.98	4.74	<.001	.18
Editability	.73	3.03	.91	**3.13**	1.05	4.73	<.001	.13
Persistence	.73	**3.59**	.82	3.34	.97	3.02	.003	.09
Personalization	.27	**3.64**	.81	3.42	.98	6.12	<.001	.16
Pervasiveness	.79	**3.78**	.83	3.01	1.13	4.23	<.001	.12
Searchability	.98	3.82	.78	**3.94**	.87	2.59	.01	.08
Sharing	.99	**3.66**	.84	3.48	.99	2.38	.02	.07
Evaluability	.98	3.80	.84	3.60	1.03	1.69	.10	.05
Visibility	.80	**3.83**	.89	3.82	.95	2.67	.003	.10
Signaling	.98	3.17	1.11	**3.32**	1.21	5.19	<.001	.14

Note: N=351; means in bold are significantly higher

This persistence affordance is about how one's communication on social media stays available after one posts them (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). This trend was similar with other affordances such as personalization, pervasiveness, sharing, and visibility. The personalization affordance was about being able to include information, photos, and other content that present one's personal identity, and pervasiveness was about getting responses to one's requests from others on the same platform quickly and being able to communicate on the move (Rice et al., 2017). The difference in pervasiveness between TikTok and YouTube was larger than that of other dimensions of affordances, which suggested participants perceived their communication

on TikTok more pervasive. The possible reasons why we found these statistically significant differences in the level of affordances perception between the two visual social media platforms will be discussed in more detail in the next section along with their theoretical and practical implications.

5. Discussion

The present study compared a total of 11 dimensions of affordances between TikTok and YouTube. While previous qualitative studies of social media affordances enhanced our understanding of unique affordances of various platforms and highlighted users' diverse relationships with the media, research was lacking in applying the general operationalization and quantitative measurement, especially in the context of comparing distinct platforms. Motivated by the fact that TikTok and YouTube are the most popular visual social media available in the current media landscape, but users of each platform or both may perceive what those media can do for them or how they can use them differently, we examined US college students' experiences of such affordances.

The original 11-dimensions media affordances scale by Rice et al. (2017) was replicated in the context of two visual social media platforms. With this quantifiable measure of media affordances, the study could compare the two popular platforms in clear and consistent ways, which provided an improved understanding about how social media users perceived these two platforms' action possibilities differently. That is, the 11-dimension affordance typology allows one to compare different media on a common set of criteria, allowing for media comparison research to progress in a more consistent way. Taking a media affordance approach enables more precise discussion about specific comparisons across distinct social media platforms.

Overall, in three dimensions (i.e., editability, searchability, and signaling), participants reported higher levels of perceptions for YouTube's affordances, whereas in six dimensions (i.e., awareness, persistence, personalization, visibility, sharing, pervasiveness), they perceived TikTok's affordances more salient. In two dimensions of affordance (i.e., association, evaluability), there was no significant difference. Association, for example, was about being able to directly connect with other network members or interact with common contents on social media (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Thus, participants of both TikTok and YouTube seemed to perceive the level of association about the same between the two platforms. In sum, our findings showed that the two platforms manifest different (user-perceived) levels of those nine dimensions of media affordances based on this validated and reliable multidimensional scale (Rice et al., 2017).

Editability, as conceptualized by Treem and Leonardi (2012), refers to the ability to modify content after its creation. YouTube's design provides extensive editing options for both creators and commenters, including trimming, annotations, and the ability to delete or modify comments. TikTok, on the other hand, focuses on quick, casual content creation, with fewer tools for post-publishing edits (e.g., users cannot edit captions freely or modify videos once posted). This aligns with TikTok's ethos of authenticity and immediacy. Participants of our study likely associate YouTube with more formal, polished content that necessitates robust editing capabilities. In contrast, TikTok's emphasis on short-form, low-barrier content creation diminishes the perceived need for editability.

Searchability, tied to affordances like visibility (Treem & Leonardi, 2012) and information retrieval (Sundar, 2008), is inherently stronger on platforms designed as repositories for diverse, long-form content. YouTube functions as a searchable archive, supported by sophisticated metadata (titles, tags, descriptions) and an algorithm that prioritizes relevance. TikTok's design prioritizes discovery via the "For You" algorithm, which pushes content to users without requiring active searching. While TikTok does allow searches, its primary engagement mechanism is passive content consumption. Participants of our study may perceive YouTube as a more effective platform for intentional content retrieval (e.g., tutorials, reviews, or documentaries), while TikTok's algorithm-driven browsing feels less conducive to systematic searching.

Finally, signaling refers to the ability to notify or inform users of relevant updates or content (e.g., notifications, recommendations). YouTube emphasizes signaling through notifications about subscriptions, recommended videos, and activity updates. Its integration with Google's ecosystem also enhances its signaling capabilities (e.g., email notifications or cross-platform alerts). TikTok's notifications are more limited to interactions (e.g., likes, comments, or mentions), with less emphasis on broader, proactive signaling mechanisms. Participants likely perceive YouTube as better at signaling because its notifications are varied and tied to diverse content categories (e.g., newly uploaded videos, personalized recommendations),

whereas TikTok's signaling is perceived as more narrowly focused on social interactions or trending videos.

One reason why participants perceived more dimensions of affordances sailiently in TikTok could be that it is a newer and more popular platform among younger generations. While YouTube has been around for 20 years and many users are familiar with it, TikTok has been around less than 10 years (at this point of time), and users are still exploring its various uses. Thus, we might be able to say the affordances of TikTok are still being discovered by its users. Another reason could be that TikTok's affordances enabled by its technological features may better satisfy college students' psychological needs. Karahanna et al. (2018) proposed the NAF model to explain how psychological needs motivate individuals to use social media that have features and affordances to satisfy their needs.

Participants likely perceived TikTok as fostering greater awareness because its algorithm actively surfaces content based on real-time trends and user behavior, ensuring users are continuously updated on the latest activities (Guinaudeau et al., 2022). In contrast, YouTube's reliance on search and subscriptions makes awareness more user-driven and less immediate (Burgess & Green, 2018). While both platforms allow content to persist, TikTok's persistent display of trending or popular videos on the "For You page" reinforces its visibility and reach, even for older content (Kaye et al., 2022). YouTube's long-form content is also persistent, but its relevance depends on user-driven search or direct links rather than algorithmic resurfacing. Thus, participants may have perceived TikTok's persistence as higher because its algorithm frequently resurfaces older, relevant videos, making content feel continually present in the digital space.

The affordance of personalization was perceived more strongly in TikTok's case, resonating with findings about self-presentation via TikTok (Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). Studies found TikTok users, especially teenagers, engaged in self-centered self-presentation and were guided less by social feedback (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020). Presenting an 'authentic' self became a social norm in TikTok (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). Aligned with these findings, participants may have perceived the personalization affordance of TikTok more strongly and actualized it to present their authentic identity on TikTok.

The study participants seemed to have perceived affordances of pervasiveness and sharing more positively on TikTok, which meant they felt they received quicker responses from other users on their requests and communicated while moving, commuting, or traveling. They also perceived communication with acquaintances and sharing video contents easier through TikTok than YouTube. Regarding this sharing affordance, TikTok video clips are readily observed on other various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Thus, users have higher exposure to the content and become more familiar with the TikTok platform itself. But when it comes to YouTube, we barely see the full length of a specific YouTube video on other social media platforms as they do not have the bandwidth or features to include such a large size file (though of course many people do refer to YouTube links). Most YouTube videos are at least 5 minutes-long whereas the maximum length of a TikTok video clip is 60 seconds. While one can set a YouTube video to be embedded or linked, or even sampled, it is still not the same as the simple TikTok link.

Visibility refers to the ability of users to observe and engage with content or interactions (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). TikTok's design makes user interactions (e.g., likes, comments) and content metrics (e.g., views) highly visible and integrated into the user experience. Participants likely perceived visibility as higher on TikTok because its feed prominently displays engagement metrics, trending content, and active participation, making the platform's activity more transparent and engaging (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020).

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Participants perceived TikTok as offering stronger affordances in awareness, persistence, personalization, pervasiveness, sharing, and visibility due to its algorithmic design, mobile-first approach, and emphasis on immediacy and interactivity (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). These features maximize engagement through tailored, accessible, and highly visible content, fostering habitual use and discovery-oriented behaviors (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). In contrast, YouTube emphasizes editability, searchability, and signaling, aligning with intentional, long-form content consumption (Burgess & Green, 2018; Rice et al., 2017). YouTube's repository-like design supports goal-driven behaviors like information retrieval but requires more active user participation.

The differences in affordance salience reflect the platforms' distinct purposes: TikTok prioritizes entertainment and spontaneity, while YouTube focuses on knowledge and structure (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). TikTok's algorithm seamlessly integrates affordances like visibility and interactivity into the user experience,

while YouTube's affordances rely on deliberate user actions, fostering less frequent but more purposeful engagement (Burgess & Green, 2018).

These findings highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of affordances, demonstrating how platform design and user interaction influence affordance salience (Evans et al., 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). TikTok's strong personalization affordance supports discovery-oriented behaviors, operating as a distinct affordance rather than just a feature. Conversely, YouTube's design caters to intentional, goal-driven use, reinforcing the role of searchability and editability (Sundar, 2008).

TikTok's heightened visibility and sharing affordances also carry sociocultural implications, influencing digital identity construction and participatory culture through casual, real-time interactions. These contrast with YouTube's formal, structured engagement norms, shaped by its affordances and cultural expectations (Bhandari & Bimo, 2020; boyd, 2010; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Finally, the study underscores the importance of analyzing affordance interactions and standardizing comparative frameworks (Rice et al., 2017). The observed interplay, such as personalization enhancing visibility, highlights the co-construction of affordances by technology and user behavior, reinforcing the need to refine theoretical models to account for technological and behavioral shifts.

5.2. Limitations and Future Directions

The current study utilized a cross-sectional design of an online survey to examine participants' perceptions of distinct affordances of YouTube and TikTok, the two most popular visual social media platforms. While both Rice et al. (2017) and we found an acceptable measurement fit for 11-items version of the media affordance scale, the two studies commonly identified some problematic items that may have to be dropped from the initial list and some dimensions need additional items that would distinguish their unique affordances better from the others (Rice et al.). In particular, the dimensions of editability, persistence, personalization, searchability, and sharing had less than ideal reliability and construct validity scores according to our analysis for TikTok affordances (see Table 3, highlighted with red). For the case of YouTube affordances, dimensions of persistence, personalization, and signaling showed low scores (see Table 4, highlighted with red). Thus, the dimensions of persistence, personalization, and sharing were problematic for both platforms and may need more attention.

Based on these results, we believe future research should develop and add more measurement items to these affordance dimensions and verify the measurement fit again with a representative sample. While the initial scale was proposed for media usage in the organizational context (Rice et al., 2017), more studies can adopt this affordance scale to varying contexts (e.g., relational, health, romantic; see, for example, Fox & McEwan, 2017) and media platforms (Manata & Spottswood, 2022) involving action possibilities and constraints of any medium as they can keep being discovered or actualized by different users and usage contexts; but certain platforms that share common features like TikTok and YouTube can be compared based on their common affordances as perceived by many users.

6. Conclusion

The current relationship between technology and society can be understood as a midpoint between technological determinism and social constructionism, reflecting a nuanced perspective on how technology and sociocultural forces shape one another (Rice & Leonardi, 2013). Historically, scholars and public discourse emphasized the agentic power of technology to transform society (Baym, 2015; Sturken et al., 2004). This view was later challenged by social constructivists, who highlighted the influence of sociocultural forces on technological development and use (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006).

The concept of media affordance (Gibson, 1986; Norman, 1999) bridges these perspectives, addressing both the implications of technological features and the sociocultural factors influencing their adoption and use. Related frameworks, such as social shaping (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006), sociomateriality (Leonardi, 2013), and sociotechnical systems, reinforce this middle-ground approach. Media affordances have been applied to research on emerging technologies like mobile and social media, revealing novel affordances not found in traditional mass media (Schrock, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012).

While identifying new affordances is valuable, it is equally important to systematically organize overlapping affordances and establish frameworks for comparative analyses across media types and contexts. This

study contributes to the latter effort, providing a foundation for theoretical and methodological advances in affordance research.

Funding Agency

College of Media and Communication, Korea University

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