



Policy-Driven Audience Migration from Broadcast Television to New Media: Psychological Trajectories and Underlying Logic

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Abstract : This study aims to construct an integrative psychological framework to uncover the underlying psychological mechanisms and operative logic of audience migration from broadcast television to new media, driven by policy shifts. Employing theoretical reasoning and literature analysis, this paper synthesizes and integrates literature from psychology, communication studies, and policy research. With Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as its theoretical core, supplemented by theories from cognitive and social psychology, it conducts a deep conceptual analysis and logical deduction of the audience migration phenomenon. The paper posits that the essence of audience migration is not a simple media substitution but a profound process of “psychological need rebalancing” driven by a significant “psychological potential difference” between old and new media. By systematically shaping infrastructure, industry structure, and the content ecosystem, policy creates a structural advantage for new media in satisfying individuals’ basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby forming the core driver of behavioral migration. The study constructs an integrated “Policy-Environment-Psychology-Behavior” analytical model and identifies cognitive shortcuts and social influence as key catalysts that accelerate and solidify this process.

Keywords: Media Migration; Self-Determination Theory; Psychological Needs; Psychological Potential Difference; Algorithmic Recommendation; Social Identity

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Origins: Phenomena and Puzzles

The contemporary Chinese media ecosystem is undergoing a profound structural transformation. Since the State Council initiated the “Three-Network Convergence” strategy in 2010, a series of new media development policies have been introduced. From the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Integrated Development of Traditional and Emerging Media (2014) to the Opinions on Accelerating the Deep Integration of Media (2020), policy guidance has continuously injected powerful momentum into the new media industry. Academia widely regards these measures as a landmark process that marks the transition of China’s media industry from “shallow integration” to “deep integration.” These policies are not singular directives but a complex policy mix, encompassing infrastructure policies like the “Broadband China” strategy that lowered access costs, industrial policies encouraging content innovation and copyright protection, and regulatory policies standardizing the online order. Catalyzed by these policy dividends, short-video platforms, streaming services, and social media have shown explosive growth.

In stark contrast is the “desertion of the living room” for traditional broadcast television. According to the authoritative report from the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), as of the end of 2023, online audio-visual services had

become the second-largest internet application after instant messaging, with both user scale and usage rates reaching historic highs (Zhongguo Hulianwangluo Xinxi Zhongxin, 2024). Industry data also reveals a precipitous decline in the daily viewership rate of television in recent years, with audiences becoming increasingly elderly. This data reflects not just the media landscape changes brought by technological iteration, but a profound restructuring of the relationship between audiences and media.

However, existing research often follows a “technological determinism” path, simplistically attributing audience migration to the technological advantages of new media. While intuitive, this explanation fails to answer deeper questions: Why can technological advantages translate into behavioral changes so rapidly? Why do some audience segments show a strong willingness to migrate, while others exhibit significant “media inertia”? This inertia itself constitutes an important theoretical issue, often stemming from an automated “media habit” that bypasses rational decision-making a sharp contrast with migration behavior driven by active gratification-seeking. What role does policy play in this process? Specifically, what is the policy’s transmission pathway? How does it transform from macro-level documents into micro-level forces influencing individual psychological choices? More importantly, what are the psychological mechanisms behind audience migration? And what is their intrinsic psychological evolutionary path (psychological trajectory)?

1.2 Literature Landscape and Theoretical Gaps

Current research on media migration is primarily concentrated on three levels. First, the industrial economics perspective focuses on market competition and resource allocation, but this view “values objects over people,” often reducing audiences to passive consumer units and ignoring their psychological complexity as agentic subjects. Second, the traditional Uses and Gratifications Theory, while emphasizing audience active choices, understands “gratification” at a functional level—such as information acquisition, entertainment, and social needs —lacking an exploration of deeper psychological motivations. Finally, the recent rise of algorithm studies focuses on how recommendation systems shape user behavior, but most research centers on the technical mechanisms themselves, lacking a systematic explanation of the psychological mechanisms behind user acceptance of algorithmic recommendations.

In summary, existing research exhibits a critical theoretical gap: the lack of an explanatory psychological model that can integrate the macro policy environment with micro individual motivations. This gap not only limits our deep understanding of the audience migration phenomenon but also renders related policy recommendations and industry strategies often lacking in depth.

1.3 Research Path, Objectives, and Value

This study adopts a theory-building approach, aiming to propose a novel explanatory framework. Specifically, it uses Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as its theoretical core (Deci & Ryan, 2000), integrating concepts from cognitive psychology such as the attention economy and cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 1998), as well as social psychology theories like social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 2001) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), to construct a multi-dimensional, multi-layered integrated analytical framework.

The research objectives are threefold: (1) to clearly articulate the three-dimensional psychological drivers of behavioral migration—motivation (centered on SDT’s three basic needs), cognition (attention and information processing), and social factors (identity and imitation); (2) to construct an intrinsic logical transmission model of “Policy-Environment-Psychology-

Behavior,” revealing how policy indirectly acts on audience psychology by reshaping the media environment; and (3) based on this, to propose a series of theoretical propositions for future empirical testing.

The theoretical value of this study lies in contributing an original, explanatory analytical perspective to the field of media psychology, filling the theoretical void in integrating macro and micro, structure and agency, and laying a solid theoretical foundation for subsequent empirical research.

2. Theoretical Foundations: A Psychological Lens for Interpreting Media Migration

2.1 The Core Driver: Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Proposed by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s, Self-Determination Theory is one of the most influential theories in contemporary motivational psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Its core assertion is that humans possess three innate, universal basic psychological needs, the satisfaction of which directly determines the quality of an individual’s motivation, psychological well-being, and behavioral choices. These three basic needs are:

Need for Autonomy: The desire to be the master of one’s own actions, to be able to choose one’s course of action freely according to one’s values and interests, rather than being controlled by external pressures or others. In the context of media use, autonomy is reflected in the user’s degree of control over “what to watch, when to watch, where to watch, and how to watch.”

Need for Competence: The desire to feel effective and capable in one’s interactions with the environment, to successfully meet challenges and receive positive feedback (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the media context, competence can stem from successfully finding desired content, effectively expressing opinions that gain others’ approval, or even creating content that attracts attention.

Need for Relatedness: The desire to establish meaningful connections with others, to feel cared for, understood, and to belong to a community. In the media context, relatedness comes from interactions with other users, participation in communities of shared interests, and the identity formation that results.

SDT emphasizes that satisfying these three needs is not a luxury but a necessity for human psychological health and optimal functioning. When an environment or activity can better satisfy these needs, individuals are naturally drawn to it and invest more time and energy—this is the key entry point for explaining media migration behavior.

2.2 Cognitive Accelerators: Attention, Cognitive Load, and Decision Shortcuts

In the information-saturated digital age, attention has become the scarcest resource. The core insight of the attention economy is that when information supply far exceeds an individual’s processing capacity, competing for user attention becomes the primary task of media competition. Different media forms have fundamentally different strategies for capturing attention: traditional broadcast television uses an “appointment-based” strategy, requiring audiences to invest long, continuous periods of attention at fixed times; new media, on the other hand, employs a “sniping” strategy, continuously “attracting” the user’s attention system through instant notifications, fragmented content, and infinite scrolling designs (Marek, 2023)

Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller et al., 1998) reveals another dimension of information processing. The theory states that human working memory is limited, and three types of cognitive load are generated during information processing: intrinsic load (the complexity of the material itself), extraneous load (additional burden caused by the presentation format), and germane load (beneficial load that promotes learning). Algorithmic recommendation systems significantly reduce the

extraneous cognitive load of content searching by accurately matching user interests, but the endless “waterfall” of content can also lead to “cognitive overload” and decision fatigue.

Furthermore, faced with massive amounts of information, users often rely on heuristic decision-making—quick judgments based on simple rules rather than deliberate, rational analysis. Algorithmic recommendations capitalize on this psychological mechanism, guiding users to make quick choices through heuristic cues like “social proof” (number of likes from others) and “authority cues” (platform recommendation tags).

2.3 Social Catalysts: Identity, Imitation, and Group Dynamics

Humans are social animals, and individual behavior is deeply influenced by the social environment. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 2001) suggests that individuals tend to categorize themselves as members of certain social groups and derive self-esteem and a sense of belonging from this group membership. In the context of media use, deep engagement with a specific platform (like Bilibili or Douyin) gradually internalizes into a social identity marker—“I am a Bilibili user” not only describes a behavior but also represents a cultural affiliation and value orientation.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes that individuals learn new behaviors by observing others (especially similar or high-status role models) and the consequences of their actions. In the context of media migration, when individuals observe their peers, opinion leaders, or family members using new media and deriving significant satisfaction from it, a strong motivation to imitate is generated.

“Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) is a unique social psychological phenomenon of the digital age. It refers to the anxiety an individual feels about missing out on rewarding experiences that others are having. The real-time and visible nature of social media greatly enhances FOMO, driving users to stay constantly online to avoid social isolation (Elhai et al., 2020).

Finally, the Echo Chamber Effect describes the phenomenon of information homogenization that can result from algorithmic recommendations (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). When users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their own views, their existing beliefs are reinforced, and they become psychologically distant from those with different opinions, which can lead to group polarization in the long run (Törnberg, 2022).

Table 1: Integrated Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Dimension	Core Theory	Key Concepts	Role in Media Migration
Motivational Drive	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness	Core Driver: Explains “Why migrate”
Cognitive Acceleration	Attention Economy, Cognitive Load Theory	Attention Scarcity, Cognitive Load, Heuristics	Accelerator: Explains “How to migrate quickly”
Social Solidification	Social Identity Theory, Social Learning Theory	Group Identity, Imitation, FOMO, Echo Chambers	Solidifier: Explains “Why migration persists”

3. Core Argument (I): Psychological Need Rebalancing as the Core Driver

3.1 The Psychological Need Satisfaction Model of Broadcast Television and Its Limitations

As a product of the industrial age, the technological characteristics of traditional broadcast television have profoundly shaped its model for satisfying psychological needs. From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, broadcast media have structural limitations in fulfilling the three basic psychological needs.

On the autonomy dimension, broadcast television uses a linear broadcasting model, with programming rights held entirely by media organizations. Audiences can only “passively receive” content from a predetermined schedule. Even with time-shifting via recording devices, their choice is limited to content that has already been broadcast. This “we broadcast, you watch” one-

way communication model essentially strips audiences of their autonomy, placing them in a state of “heteronomy” rather than “autonomy.”

On the competence dimension, traditional broadcast television positions its audience as “silent spectators.” Aside from the rare opportunity to participate via call-in shows, the vast majority of the audience cannot effectively interact with content producers or other viewers. More importantly, audiences cannot showcase their abilities, express unique insights, or gain recognition from others through any form of creative participation—making the need for competence difficult to satisfy.

On the relatedness dimension, broadcast television can indeed create a certain sense of collective belonging through “synchronicity”—a family gathered in the living room to watch the Spring Festival Gala, or the entire nation watching the evening news simultaneously. These scenes carry the emotional value of family reunion and national imagination. However, this sense of belonging is limited to physical space (the home) and imagined communities (the nation), lacking the “interest-based” connections for those with niche interests. For audiences with niche hobbies, the “mass-oriented” approach of broadcast content often means it’s hard to find “kindred spirits.”

It should be clarified that “broadcast television” in this analysis mainly refers to its traditional media logic and user experience centered on linear broadcasting. In recent years, broadcast institutions themselves have been actively pursuing digital transformation, such as launching apps like “Yangshipin.” However, this transformation itself corroborates the paper’s argument—they are reacting to the perceived massive “psychological potential difference” with new media, making adaptive responses to compensate for their structural deficiencies in satisfying audience psychological needs.

Table 2: Psychological Need Satisfaction Characteristics of Broadcast Television

SDT Dimension	Satisfaction Level	Structural Features	Psychological Experience
Autonomy	Low	Linear broadcasting, one-way communication, fixed schedule	A sense of being “scheduled,” passivity
Competence	Low	Lack of interaction, no creative space, feedback deficit	A sense of being a “bystander,” powerlessness
Relatedness	Medium	Family co-viewing, imagined community, but lacks interest-based connection	A paradoxical feeling of being “lonely in a crowd”

3.2 The Psychological Need Empowerment Mechanisms of New Media

Through their technological features, new media have established a significant comparative advantage in satisfying the three basic psychological needs.

New media empower users in terms of autonomy. On-demand services (like Netflix, iQIYI) have completely broken the spatio-temporal constraints of linear broadcasting; users can watch “any content, anytime, anywhere, on any device”. More importantly, users can also control playback speed (binge-watching at 2x speed), select subtitle languages, and even skip intros and credits—every detail reinforces a sense of “I’m in charge.” Short-video platforms push this autonomy to the extreme: no commitment to watch a full video, swipe away instantly if unsatisfied, with each swipe being a declaration of sovereignty. Although algorithmic recommendations have sparked debates about “algorithmic manipulation,” from a user’s subjective experience, precise personalized recommendations are perceived as “understanding me” and “respecting my uniqueness”—a deep-level satisfaction of autonomy. This perception doesn’t arise from nothing; users develop their own “algorithmic folk theories” about how algorithms work based on their interactions with the system. Recent research shows this psychological construction process is common across domains; when an algorithm’s output aligns with a user’s self-perception and needs, it greatly enhances their trust and engagement with the system (López et al., 2025). However, this algorithm-granted autonomy also hides a paradox: users seem to be choosing freely, but their range of choices has been pre-

set by the algorithm, potentially trapping them in a filter bubble without their knowledge, thus losing the true autonomy to explore the unknown and challenge existing biases at a deeper level.

New media effectively stimulate users’ sense of competence. The most revolutionary change of the Web 2.0 era was converting the audience into “participants” and even “producers”. “Bullet comments” (danmu) and comment sections allow every user to have a voice, while social currency mechanisms like likes and shares provide immediate, quantitative feedback for these expressions. Furthermore, short-video and live-streaming platforms have completely dismantled the technical barriers to professional content production, allowing anyone to become a creator, streamer, or influencer. When an ordinary user’s video receives thousands of likes and comments, they experience not just social recognition but a profound sense of “I have the ability to influence others”—a feeling of competence. Yet, this satisfaction of competence must be viewed dialectically. When users become overly reliant on external quantitative metrics like likes and follower counts to evaluate their self-worth, their self-esteem becomes fragile. In their pursuit of competence, their unpaid creative labor can also be converted into commercial value by the platform, becoming a form of hidden “digital labor.” Its underlying logic is highly similar to the mechanisms that attract players in digital games, which efficiently satisfy players’ need for competence by providing clear challenges, immediate feedback, and visible progress .

New media have reconstructed users’ patterns of relatedness. New media have created a completely new model of belonging—the “virtual community” based on shared interests rather than geographical location or kinship. No matter how niche your interest—be it classical music, handicrafts, or anime culture—you can find “kindred spirits” on the internet. These communities form strong collective identities and emotional connections through continuous interaction. The “Little Broken Station” culture of Bilibili and the “spiritual corner” positioning of Douban are concrete expressions of this sense of belonging. At the same time, this algorithm- and interest-based belonging can also lead to an “echo chamber effect,” causing community members’ views to become increasingly homogenous and extreme, weakening contact and dialogue with heterogeneous viewpoints and posing a challenge to broader social integration.

Table 3: The Psychological Need Empowerment Mechanisms of New Media

SDT Dimension	Satisfaction Level	Empowerment Mechanism	Psychological Experience
Autonomy	High	On-demand, speed control, algorithmic recommendation, infinite scroll	A sense of sovereignty, “I am in control”
Competence	High	Interactive comments, content creation, instant feedback, quantitative recognition	A sense of efficacy, “I am capable”
Relatedness	High	Interest-based communities, identity tags, cultural rituals, group interaction	A sense of connection, “I’ve found my tribe”

3.3 The Formation of a “Psychological Potential Difference”: The Fundamental Driver of Behavioral Migration

A juxtaposition of the ways broadcast television and new media satisfy the three basic psychological needs reveals a clear picture: a massive “Psychological Potential Difference” has formed between the two media forms. This concept is borrowed from the “electric potential difference” in physics—when a potential difference exists between two points, electric charge spontaneously flows from high potential to low potential. Similarly, when a significant disparity exists in the ability of two media to satisfy psychological needs, audiences will spontaneously “flow” from the low-satisfaction environment to the high-satisfaction environment to seek a “Psychological Equilibrium.”

According to Self-Determination Theory, humans have an innate tendency to actively seek satisfaction of their psychological needs. When broadcast television fails to meet the awakening needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, audiences

experience a psychological “deficiency” or “imbalance.” At this point, if an alternative (new media) that can better satisfy these needs appears in the environment, migration becomes an adaptive behavior aimed at restoring psychological balance.

The theoretical value of this perspective is that it transforms behavioral migration from an externally observed phenomenon into an inevitable outcome of an internal psychological logic. However, the perceived strength of this “psychological potential difference” is not uniform for everyone; it is moderated by a range of individual and situational factors. At the individual level, individuals with a lower Need for Cognition and a higher tendency to seek novelty may be more sensitive to the instant gratification provided by new media, thus perceiving a greater psychological potential difference. From a social context perspective, if an individual’s social network has largely migrated to new media, their perceived lack of relatedness will be more intense, also amplifying the psychological potential difference. These moderating variables explain why migration speed and willingness vary significantly among individuals in the same media environment.

The role of policy in this process is not to directly “push” audiences to migrate, but rather to allow the “psychological empowerment” capacity of new media to be fully unleashed by lowering entry barriers (e.g., broadband popularization), improving content supply (e.g., copyright protection), and creating space for technological innovation (e.g., 5G construction). This, in turn, widens the “psychological potential difference” between the two media forms, promoting the “flow” of audiences. This driving mechanism, formed by the disparity in psychological need satisfaction, can be visually represented by the psychological potential difference model below (see Figure 1).

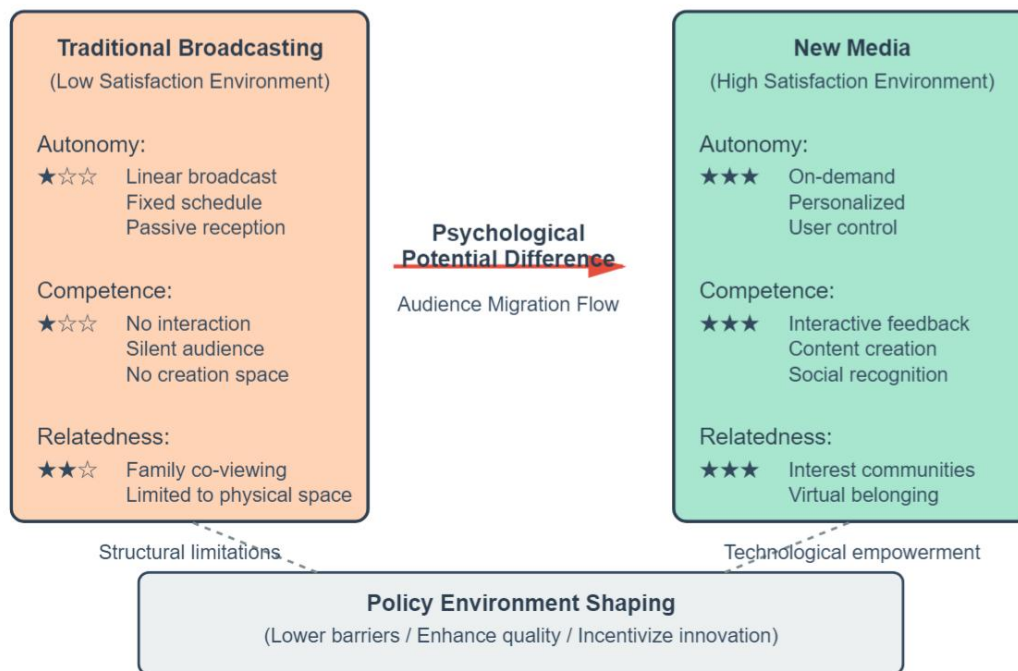


Figure 1: Diagram of Audience Migration Model Driven by Psychological Potential Difference

4. Core Argument (II): The Accelerating and Solidifying Roles of Cognitive and Social Factors

4.1 The Accelerating Mechanism of the Cognitive Pathway

If the potential difference in psychological needs constitutes the “potential energy” for behavioral migration, then cognitive accelerators convert this potential energy into “kinetic energy,” significantly increasing the speed and efficiency of migration.

4.1.1 The “Temptation” of Algorithms: Reducing Cognitive Load

In an era of information overload, the very act of finding desirable content is a cognitively demanding task. Traditional broadcast TV guides offer limited choices, forcing users to “make do” with what’s available. Even when turning to the internet, searching through vast amounts of content requires a clear goal and high information literacy.

The revolutionary aspect of algorithmic recommendation systems is that they transform “searching” into “precision delivery.” By analyzing users’ historical behavior, social connections, and real-time feedback, algorithms can predict content a user might like with astonishing accuracy and proactively push it to them. This mechanism drastically reduces extraneous cognitive load (Sweller et al., 1998)—users no longer need to think “What do I want to watch?” but simply make a “yes/no” judgment on the pushed content.

This cognitive “convenience” is powerfully habit-forming. Research in behavioral economics shows that humans tend to choose the path of least cognitive effort when faced with complex decisions. This tendency to rely on simple rules for quick judgments, known as “heuristics,” is a universal psychological mechanism for judgment under uncertainty (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Algorithmic recommendations precisely caters to this “cognitive miser” tendency, leading users to form a dependency without even realizing it.

4.1.2 The “Hijacking” by Fragmented Content: Continuous Attention Capture

The success of short videos lies not only in their content richness but also in their precise design targeting the attention system. Psychological research finds that human attention is naturally drawn to “novelty” and “variability”. The “infinite scroll” design of short videos leverages this trait: each swipe brings a new stimulus, and every video promises a different emotional experience (humor, emotion, surprise). This continuous “micro-dopamine release” keeps the brain in a state of anticipating the next stimulus .

In contrast, the long-form narratives of traditional television programs require users to invest sustained, high-intensity attention, with a longer delayed gratification cycle (a full episode or even a full season is needed for the complete experience). To digital natives accustomed to instant gratification, this model seems “too slow” and “too tiring,” making it difficult to compete with the immediacy of fragmented content—a phenomenon that has become a common concern in media psychology (Zhang & Li, 2025).

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of Cognitive Mechanisms

Cognitive Dimension	Broadcast Television	New Media (Algorithms + Short Videos)	Psychological Effect
Information Seeking	Active search, high cognitive load	Algorithmic push, low cognitive load	Convenience addiction
Attention Investment	Long-duration, high-intensity, delayed	Fragmented, low-intensity, instant	Dopamine-driven loop
Decision Mode	Planned choice	Heuristic quick judgment	Preference for cognitive ease

4.2 The Solidifying Mechanism of the Social Pathway

Once cognitive accelerators have “brought” users into the new media environment, social psychological mechanisms begin to play a “solidifying” role, turning the migration behavior from an experiment into a habit, and eventually internalizing it as part of their identity.

4.2.1 The “Gravitational Pull” of Imitation: Social Learning and Social Pressure

Many human behaviors originate from observing and imitating others (Bandura, 1977), and media use behavior is particularly susceptible to this. When individuals observe their peers, friends, or family members frequently using a new media platform and deriving clear entertainment, informational, or social value from it, it creates what is known as “vicarious reinforcement.” Even without personal experience, simply observing the positive outcomes of others is enough to spark a motivation to try it.

The visibility of social media greatly amplifies this mechanism. Shared short videos on social feeds, trending topics on Weibo, and memes in group chats continuously “showcase” the existence and enjoyment of new media, forming an invisible social norm pressure. Those who don’t use these platforms may feel “out of the loop” in daily conversations, unable to participate in others’ topics, and thus experience anxiety from social isolation (Elhai et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022).

4.2.2 The Drive of “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO)

“Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon unique to the social media era, referring to the anxiety and unease an individual feels about others having rewarding experiences in which they are not participating. The psychological root of FOMO lies in the need for relatedness—humans need to feel they are part of a group, and when they perceive they might be “excluded,” it causes strong psychological discomfort.

The real-time, instantaneous, and social nature of new media greatly stimulates FOMO. Trending lists are constantly refreshing, friends are updating their statuses in real-time, and influencers are live-streaming sales... every piece of information implies “something important is happening right now.” To alleviate the anxiety caused by FOMO, users feel compelled to stay online and refresh frequently, thus forming a “compulsive use” pattern (Elhai et al., 2020).

In contrast, the “appointment-based” nature of traditional broadcast television is mechanistically opposite to the formation of FOMO. Even if a program is missed, it can be watched via replay or recording, and the lack of real-time interaction means there is no social anxiety of being “left out.”

4.2.3 The “Anchoring” of Identity: From Behavior to Identification

When users engage with a new media platform long-term and deeply, this usage behavior gradually transcends its instrumental level and rises to become an identity marker. Social Identity Theory states that individuals tend to define themselves through group affiliation (Tajfel et al., 2001). In the media context, “I am a Bilibili user” or “I am a Xiaohongshu girl” describes not just a behavioral preference but also represents a cultural taste, value orientation, and lifestyle.

Once formed, this identity is highly stable and exclusive. Users will actively maintain the positive image of the group, resist external criticism, and create a psychological separation from “others” (like “the older generation who watches TV”). The platforms themselves continuously reinforce this collective identity through symbolic systems (like Bilibili’s “cheers” icon), ritualistic events (like New Year’s Eve galas), and cultural narratives (like the “Houlang” speech). At this point, a complete logical loop is formed, from initial observation and imitation to final identity anchoring, solidifying the audience migration. The process can be summarized as shown in Figure 2.

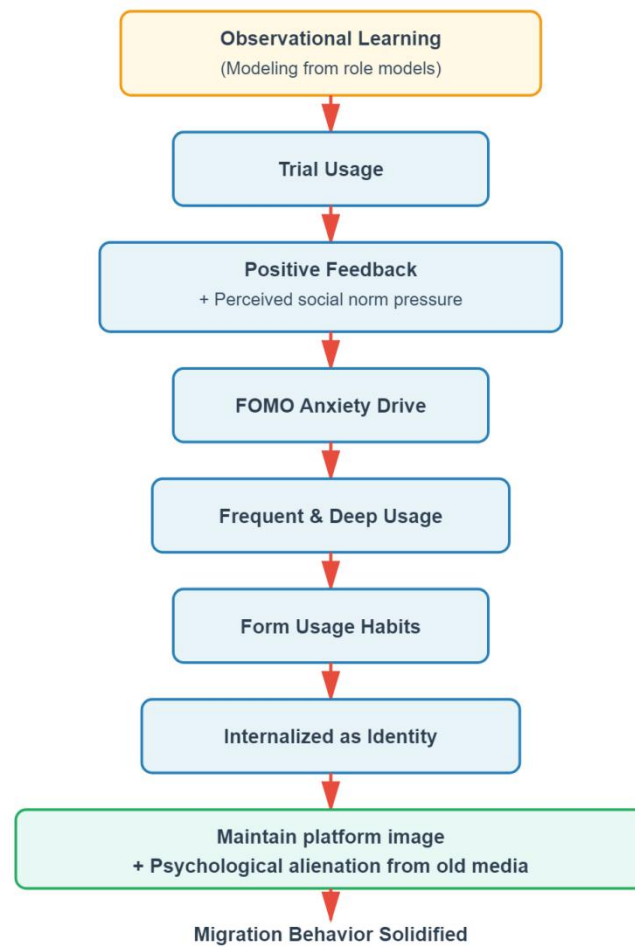


Figure 2: Flowchart of the Social Solidification Mechanism

4.3 The Synergistic Effect of Cognitive and Social Factors

It is crucial to emphasize that the cognitive accelerator and the social solidifier do not operate independently but produce a synergistic effect through complex, mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Algorithmic recommendations not only reduce cognitive load but also provide social psychological cues through “social proof” (displaying likes, view counts). Community interaction not only satisfies the need for relatedness but also provides new data inputs for algorithms through peer recommendations. More importantly, when a user’s entire social network migrates to new media, sticking with broadcast television becomes inefficient cognitively (unable to get personalized content) and isolating socially (unable to participate in group topics). This dual pressure makes a return to traditional broadcast television extremely difficult.

5. General Discussion: Constructing an Integrated Model and Deep Reflection

5.1 Constructing the Integrated Model: A Three-Layer “Drive-Accelerate-Solidify” Model

Based on the preceding theoretical analysis and logical deduction, this paper proposes an integrative “three-layer nested model” to explain audience behavior migration driven by new media policy.

Core Layer (Driving Layer): The Potential Difference and Rebalancing of Psychological Needs. This is the “prime mover” of the entire model. As previously discussed, a structural disparity exists between broadcast television and new media in satisfying the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, forming a significant

“psychological potential difference.” As agentic subjects, audiences have an innate tendency to spontaneously seek satisfaction of their psychological needs and restore a state of psychological equilibrium. This intrinsic drive is the fundamental cause of behavioral migration.

Middle Layer (Accelerating Layer): Cognitive Shortcuts and Social Influence. This layer contains two accelerators. The cognitive accelerator (algorithmic recommendations, fragmented content) drastically reduces the “psychological cost” of migration and increases its speed and efficiency by lowering cognitive load and providing instant gratification. The social accelerator (social learning, FOMO, social norms) generates a “contagion effect” through imitation mechanisms and group pressure, turning individual migration into a collective one.

Outer Layer (Contextual Layer): The Shaping Role of New media Policy. Policy does not act directly on audience psychology but exerts its influence indirectly by shaping the media ecosystem (Poell et al., 2025). This shaping process can be detailed across three dimensions:

Infrastructure Development: Infrastructure policies represented by “Broadband China” and “Speed-Up, Fee-Cut” have significantly lowered the economic and technical barriers for users to access high-quality streaming media and participate in content creation. This directly enhances the foundational capacity of new media to satisfy the need for “autonomy.”

Content Ecosystem Construction: Industrial policies such as guiding opinions encouraging UGC (User-Generated Content) development and regulations strengthening online copyright protection have provided new media platforms with a rich and diverse content supply. This also incentivizes user creation, effectively empowering platforms to satisfy users’ needs for “competence” and “relatedness.” This content ecosystem is not entirely free but is formed under a specific platform governance logic. Recent research points out that, taking Douyin as an example, its governance model is a complex interactive process combining platform self-regulation and content creators’ “participatory surveillance” (Ye et al., 2025). This shows that policy not only shapes rules but also a specific environmental interaction model in which users are deeply involved, thereby profoundly affecting the pathways to satisfying user psychological needs.

Adjustment of Competitive Landscape: Competition policies, such as anti-monopoly guidelines for the platform economy, aim to maintain market diversity and innovation vitality. By preventing single platforms from stifling competition, they indirectly preserve the audience right to “vote with their feet” among different platforms, thus safeguarding their “autonomy” of choice.

Through these multiple pathways, policies work in concert to enhance the “psychological empowerment” capacity of new media, thereby amplifying the “psychological potential difference” between them and traditional broadcast television. These three nested layers—core, middle, and contextual—together form the integrative explanatory framework for audience behavior migration, with their structural relationship depicted in Figure 3.

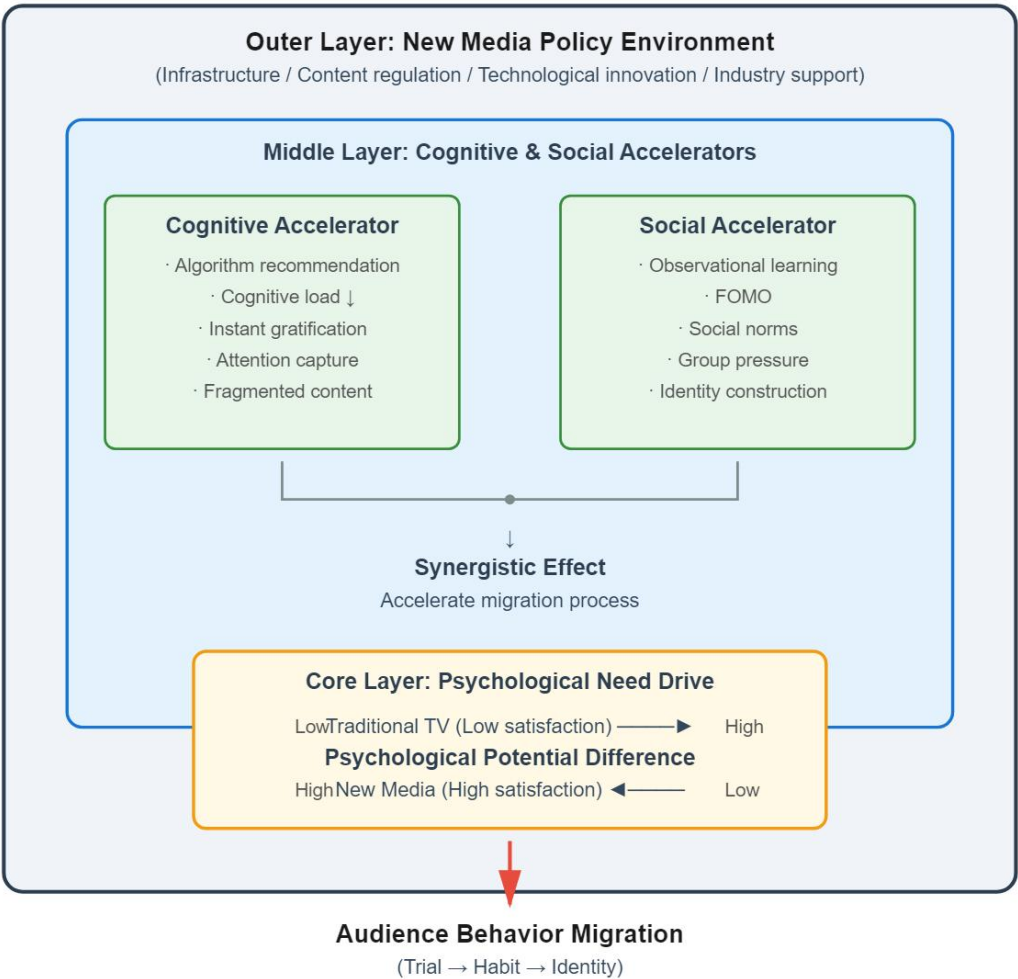


Figure 3: The “Drive-Accelerate-Solidify” Three-Layer Nested Integrated Model

5.2 Unveiling the “Underlying Logic”: From Behavioral Choice to Psychological Restructuring

Based on the three-layer model above, we can clearly unveil the “underlying logic” of audience migration—this is not merely a simple process of media substitution but a profound psychological restructuring involving multiple dimensions.

First, at the motivational level, migration represents a shift from external to internal motivation. In the era of traditional broadcast television, audiences watched programs largely because “there was no better choice” (extrinsic motivation). In the new media era, users engage with platforms because “this truly satisfies my needs” (intrinsic motivation). According to Self-Determination Theory, behaviors driven by intrinsic motivation are more persistent, more engaging, and much harder to reverse.

Second, at the cognitive level, migration signifies a reshaping of attention patterns and information processing habits. There is a shift from linear, sequential deep reading to fragmented, jumpy shallow browsing; from planned, active searching to algorithm-driven, passive reception. Once this cognitive pattern is formed, it creates “path dependency”—even if one recognizes the drawbacks of fragmented reading, it is difficult to re-adapt to long periods of focused attention.

Finally, at the social psychological level, migration leads to a restructuring of identity and social patterns. There is a shift from traditional communities based on geography and kinship to virtual communities based on interests and values; from “I am a person from X place, a child of Y family” to an expanded identity of “I am a user of Z platform, a member of W circle.” This diversification and virtualization of identity greatly enriches an individual’s self-concept but also brings risks of identity fragmentation and social atomization. In the Chinese context, this group is precisely the one actively pursuing autonomy and lifestyle restructuring through the deep use of digital technology, and their experience of well-being is directly linked to the degree of satisfaction of their psychological needs in this process (Li & Zhong, 2025). They represent an ultimate practice of identity restructuring and psychological rebalancing under the logic of media migration.

5.3 The Tensions of the Theory: A Critical Reflection on the Migration Process

Any theoretical construction should not stop at explaining phenomena but should also possess the capacity for critical reflection. While the model constructed in this paper reveals the psychological logic of audience migration, this process is not a one-dimensional “progress”; it contains profound paradoxes and risks.

First is the paradox behind the promise of autonomy. New media promise users unprecedented autonomy, but is this autonomy real? Algorithmic recommendations may seem to “understand you,” but they are actually projecting your past onto your future, solidifying accidental behaviors into preference tags, and ultimately trapping you in a “filter bubble” built from your own data. The deeper paradox is that once users become dependent on algorithms, they lose the ability to actively explore and expand the boundaries of their interests—which constitutes the true essence of autonomy. Of course, in recent years, some scholars have questioned the actual strength of the “filter bubble” effect, arguing that most users still obtain information from multiple channels and the isolating effect of algorithms may be exaggerated (Jürgens & Stark, 2022). However, the algorithmic (in)visibility itself becomes a form of power, affecting creators’ experiences (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). While technology enhances some abilities, it also weakens others, and cultivating “critical ignoring” may be a core competence for digital citizens (Kozyreva et al., 2023).

Second is the trap hidden behind the satisfaction of competence. The likes, comments, and followers users gain on new media can indeed provide instant satisfaction of competence. But this satisfaction is often shallow and extrinsic, not deep and intrinsic. Psychological research shows that over-reliance on external validation weakens intrinsic motivation, causing self-esteem to be built on others’ evaluations rather than real achievements, which can be detrimental to mental health in the long run. For example, “upward social comparison” on social media significantly affects users’ self-esteem and subjective well-being, especially for individuals with a high tendency for social comparison (Meier & Johnson, 2022). Furthermore, the platform economy transforms users’ creative labor into data and traffic; in their pursuit of competence, users are actually creating value for the platform for free—a form of “digital labor” exploitation (Jones, 2023), as has been exposed by the politics of vulnerability in the influencer economy (Erin Duffy et al., 2024). When these psychological needs are frustrated in the digital environment, it can even trigger destructive maladaptive behaviors. The latest research has found that the frustration of basic psychological needs (especially competence) is significantly correlated with aggressive behavior in online dating (Valachová & Lisá, 2025). This reveals the dark side of the psychological need satisfaction paradox: the pursuit of needs can not only lead to internal anxiety, but its frustration can also be externalized as harm to others.

Finally, there is the illusion that virtual relatedness may bring. Although virtual communities provide emotional connection, the quality of this connection is questionable. The echo chamber effect leads community members to be exposed only to

similar viewpoints, lacking the clash of diverse perspectives, which can lead to group polarization and social fragmentation (Rodilosso, 2024). More importantly, online belonging often has a “performative” quality—people display a carefully curated “persona” rather than their authentic selves. This “authenticity deficit” can lead to existential anxiety and a loss of meaning. The latest research precisely captures this contradictory mindset, pointing out that when users engage in “social grooming” behaviors, they are filled with concerns about the costs of investment and privacy disclosure, which greatly affects their well-being. Users often find themselves in a dilemma of “I want to share this, but...”, which shows that the satisfaction of relatedness by new media is not a free lunch but is accompanied by continuous psychological costs and trade-offs (Lin et al., 2024).

Table 5: Analysis of the Paradoxes in Psychological Need Satisfaction

SDT Dimension	New Media’s Promise	Potential Paradox/Risk	Long-term Impact
Autonomy	Personalized recommendations, on-demand access	Algorithmic manipulation, filter bubbles, degradation of exploratory ability	Cognitive narrowing, weakening of critical thinking
Competence	Everyone can have a voice, instant feedback, becoming a creator	Dependence on extrinsic motivation, fragile self-esteem, digital labor exploitation	Mental health risks, loss of intrinsic sense of value
Relatedness	Finding kindred spirits, virtual communities, cultural identity	Echo chamber effect, performative self, authenticity deficit	Social polarization, existential anxiety

These reflections remind us that although audience migration is a “rational” choice driven by psychological needs, the way new media satisfy these needs may not be the healthiest or most sustainable. Policymakers and platform operators should be aware that technological design not only affects user behavior but also shapes human psychological structures and social relations at a deep level.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

6.1 Main Research Conclusions

From a psychological perspective, this study systematically constructed an integrated theoretical framework to explain audience behavior migration from broadcast television driven by new media policy. The core conclusions can be summarized as follows:

First, the essence of audience behavior migration is a process of “psychological need rebalancing” catalyzed by changes in the media environment. The significant structural differences between broadcast television and new media in satisfying the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness create a huge “psychological potential difference,” which constitutes the fundamental driving force for behavioral migration.

Second, cognitive mechanisms (algorithmic recommendation, fragmented content) and social mechanisms (social learning, FOMO, social identity) act as two “accelerators,” significantly reducing the psychological cost of migration and amplifying the social contagion effect, thereby transforming individual migration into a collective, hard-to-reverse trend.

Third, new media policy indirectly enhances the ability of new media to satisfy psychological needs by shaping the media ecosystem (infrastructure, content supply, technological innovation), thus creating the “structural conditions” for audience migration at the macro level.

Fourth, audience migration is not just a behavioral media choice but a comprehensive restructuring of motivational patterns (from extrinsic to intrinsic), cognitive habits (from linear to fragmented), and social identity (from geographical to interest-based), with profound psychological and social significance.

Fifth, the satisfaction of psychological needs by new media contains profound paradoxes: autonomy can turn into algorithmic manipulation, competence can devolve into digital labor, and relatedness can become an echo chamber. These risks remind us to maintain a critical vigilance towards technology-driven psychological restructuring.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions and Research Significance

At the theoretical level, the main contributions of this study are:

Perspective Innovation: Departing from traditional technological determinism or industrial economics perspectives, this paper systematically introduces psychological theories (especially Self-Determination Theory) into the study of media migration, providing a new analytical path for understanding audience behavior in the digital age.

Framework Integration: It constructs a “Drive-Accelerate-Solidify” three-layer nested model, organically integrating multiple theories from motivational, cognitive, and social psychology, offering an explanatory and heuristic analytical framework.

Conceptual Innovation: It proposes new concepts such as “psychological potential difference,” “psychological rebalancing,” “cognitive accelerator,” and “social solidifier,” providing new theoretical tools for subsequent research.

At the practical level, the significance of this study is reflected in:

Providing “Demand-Side” Insights for the Transformation of Broadcast Television: The key to transformation lies not in simply imitating the forms of new media but in understanding the real psychological needs of the audience and creating new satisfaction pathways based on its own strengths (such as content quality and credibility).

Providing a Psychological Basis for New Media Policymaking: Policy should not only focus on technical infrastructure and content regulation but also on how to guide technological design to meet the public’s psychological needs in a healthy and sustainable way, avoiding risks such as algorithmic manipulation and filter bubbles.

Providing a Theoretical Foundation for Media Literacy Education: It helps the public understand the psychological mechanisms behind new media use, cultivate critical usage skills, and avoid passively falling into technological dependency.

6.3 Research Outlook and Theoretical Propositions

As a theoretical construction study, one of the core values of this paper is to propose a series of testable theoretical propositions for future empirical research:

Proposition 1: Compared to the need for relatedness, the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy and competence has a stronger predictive power on the intention of audiences to migrate from broadcast television to new media.

Proposition 2: There is an inverted U-shaped relationship between the degree of personalization of algorithmic recommendations and user satisfaction—moderate personalization enhances satisfaction, while excessive personalization reduces it due to the filter bubble effect.

Proposition 3: An individual’s level of “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO) is positively correlated with their intensity of new media use, and this relationship is moderated by social network density.

Proposition 4: The strength of identity with a new media platform positively predicts the degree of psychological alienation from traditional broadcast television.

Proposition 5: The stronger an audience intrinsic motivation orientation (relative to extrinsic motivation), the lower their dependence on algorithmic recommendations.

Proposition 6: Different generational cohorts have different priorities for the three psychological needs: younger cohorts place more emphasis on autonomy and competence, while older cohorts prioritize relatedness.

Future research directions could include:

Longitudinal Tracking Studies: Tracking the dynamic changes in psychological needs, usage behavior, and identity of the same group during the media migration process.

Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies: Examining whether the influence of psychological needs on media migration differs across different cultural backgrounds (e.g., collectivist vs. individualist cultures).

Special Population Studies: In-depth exploration of the media migration barriers and their psychological roots for “digitally disadvantaged groups” such as the elderly and rural residents.

Intervention Experiment Studies: Designing media literacy education or algorithmic transparency interventions to test their effects on restoring user autonomy and critical use.

Future Challenge: How Will Generative AI (AIGC) Reshape the Theoretical Model? This paper’s model is based on the Web 2.0 era, centered on algorithmic recommendations and social media. However, generative AI, represented by ChatGPT, Sora, etc., is bringing about a new technological paradigm shift. Future research needs to explore how AIGC will further reconfigure the audience psychological need satisfaction patterns:

Subversion of Competence: When anyone can use AIGC to generate professional-grade text, images, and videos with a single click, will the sense of competence from “everyone can be a creator” experience “inflation” or even devaluation due to the extremely low barrier to entry?

The Ultimate Question of Autonomy: When media content can be “real-time generated” based on your fleeting emotions and hidden desires, does this grant you unprecedented ultimate autonomy, or does it place you in an inescapable “super-cocoon” driven by data?

Redefinition of Relatedness: To what extent can the emotional connections established with highly anthropomorphic AI companions and virtual idols satisfy the human need for genuine relatedness? Academia has begun empirical exploration of this cutting-edge issue. For example, some studies have found that the interaction design of AI chatbots intended for friendship (FAIC) is closely related to enhancing users’ continuous usage intention and engagement, suggesting AI’s potential in satisfying some social and relatedness needs (Li et al., 2023). What kind of substitution or supplementary effect will this “computational relatedness” have on real interpersonal relationships? Applying this study’s “psychological potential difference” framework to analyze the competition between AIGC and existing media will be a highly valuable frontier topic.

6.4 Research Limitations

As a purely theoretical study, this paper has the following limitations:

First, it lacks direct empirical data verification. Although the theoretical model constructed in this paper has internal logical consistency and is indirectly supported by existing literature, its explanatory and predictive power still needs to be verified and refined through systematic empirical research (questionnaire surveys, experiments, ethnography, etc.).

Second, the complexity of theoretical integration may pose challenges to the operationalization of the model. How to transform abstract psychological needs into measurable variables and how to distinguish the independent and interactive effects of different psychological mechanisms need to be further detailed in empirical research.

Third, this study focuses on the “emigration” of audiences (from broadcast TV to new media), but the psychological mechanisms of the minority who still stick with broadcast TV or “wander” between the two media may have unique characteristics that warrant dedicated exploration. For example, for some elderly audiences, sticking with television may not

be simple “inertia” but an active psychological choice: gaining a sense of control (competence) from familiar operations, obtaining life certainty (a special form of autonomy) from fixed programming, and maintaining emotional bonds (relatedness) with family members who co-watch. A deep understanding of the psychological logic of these “resisters” or “waverers” will be a key step towards the maturation of this theoretical framework.

Fourth, the media ecosystem and technological forms are still rapidly evolving (e.g., Metaverse, generative AI). Whether the theoretical framework proposed in this paper can be applied to future emerging media forms requires continuous theoretical iteration.

Despite these limitations, this study still provides an insightful theoretical perspective for understanding media change and audience psychology in the digital age. It is hoped that future scholars can deepen, expand, and verify it on this basis, jointly promoting the theoretical development of media psychology.

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