


Life-oriented Dependency of Short-Video Platform: Unconscious Behavior, Algorithmic Intimacy and Ecosystem Integration

Tong Jin¹, Kim Hua Tan^{1*}, Siyu Mao² 

¹ School of media and communication, Faculty of Social and Leisure Management, Taylor's University, Selangor, MALAYSIA

² Department of Radio and Television Directing, Geely University, Chengdu, CHINA

*Corresponding Author: KimHua.Tan@taylors.edu.my

Citation: Jin, T., Tan, K. H. and Mao, S. (2025). Life-oriented Dependency of Short-Video Platform: Unconscious Behavior, Algorithmic Intimacy and Ecosystem Integration, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 1843-1856. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.1880>

Published: November 15, 2025

ABSTRACT

As short-video platforms evolve from entertainment tool to super app which integrating content consumption, social interaction and life services, their media-oriented effects are deepening increasingly. This study aims to deeply explore how short-video platforms can transcend their initial entertainment functions through their inherent composite functional collaboration mechanisms. By integrating online shopping, local group buying and other life service functions, they can build a composite functional ecosystem, thereby inducing users to develop a deep dependency. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 Chinese college students, this study identified three core themes of dependency experience: (1) Unconscious experiences from entertainment to consumption; (2) Emotional dependency shaped by algorithms; (3) The integration of the platform ecosystem with daily life. This study proposes the concept of "life-oriented dependency" in combination with the media system dependency theory, revealing that the platform creates a deep dependency experience for users through functional collaboration rather than a single function, and provides theoretical inspiration for understanding new media dependency.

Keywords: short-video platform; media dependency; life service; multiple function; user experience

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society where the digital media ecosystem is increasingly complex, short-video platforms have evolved from a single entertainment platform into a comprehensive digital life service platform integrating multiple functions. With the rapid development of mobile Internet technology and the diversification of user demands, short-video platforms represented by TikTok are no longer confined to content creation and consumption. Instead, they have built a digital ecosystem covering multiple dimensions such as social interaction, e-commerce, and life services through functional expansion and integration (Kaye et al., 2021; Su, 2023; Z. Zhang, 2021). The diversified development of short-video platforms shows significant life-oriented characteristics. This trend of functional integration reflects the development logic of media applications in the era of platform economy, that is, by providing one-stop services to enhance user stickiness and platform value, and successfully transform into a super app (Goggin, 2021; Huang & Miao, 2021; Lucas Júnior & Lopes, 2024). This evolution marks a paradigm shift from a single-purpose media platform to an integrated digital infrastructure that meets users' diverse everyday needs. The initial entertainment-centric platform has evolved into a comprehensive digital ecosystem that fundamentally changes the relationship between users and media technology (Hasselwander & Weiss, 2024). The transition from entertainment-centric applications to integrated lifestyle platforms represents what scholars call platform convergence—the phenomenon of the integration of different digital services into a unified user experience (Salehi et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2025). This transformation

goes far beyond the expansion of platform characteristics and represents a qualitative change in the degree of mediation - media logic no longer only affects social life, but actively constructs and organizes social life (Hepp et al., 2014). Unlike traditional media platforms that cultivate dependencies through a single function, contemporary short-video platforms generate complex dependencies through functional synergy, that is, the coordinated interaction of multiple platform functions, creating a seamless user experience in entertainment, social and commercial activities (Chandramouli & Margetis, 2024; Dhote, 2021). Although more and more people recognize the phenomenon of “super app”, current research lacks a comprehensive framework for understanding how functional complexity produces new forms of user dependency beyond traditional media consumption patterns.

Current research on short-video dependency mainly adheres to the positivist paradigm, emphasizing the use of quantitative measurements of behavioral indicators such as time and frequency, and their correlation with psychological variables such as procrastination and anxiety (Cao et al., 2025; Sun & Zhang, 2021). Although these empirical methods offer valuable insights into usage patterns, they fail to capture the empirical nature and phenomenological significance of dependencies. The quantitative orientation of existing research neglects the subjective life experiences that form the basis of the user-platform relationship, especially in the context where the platform has become an indispensable part of users' daily life practices (Gong et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2023). As short-video platforms evolve into "All-in-One platforms" integrating entertainment, social interaction, e-commerce and local life, users' reliance is a complex phenomenon resulting from the interweaving of multiple factors such as functionality, emotion and structure. Dependency in the context of an integrated platform is a complex phenomenon resulting from the intersection of functional, emotional and structural factors (Owilla et al., 2023). However, the existing literature on short-video platforms mainly views this phenomenon from the perspective of usage patterns or consumer behavior, lacking in-depth analysis of how functional complexity reshapes users' media dependency from the perspective of users' subjective experience. Users' reliance on short-video platforms has evolved from intentional use to unconscious integration, as a shift that requires more thorough research to understand its implications (Dong et al., 2025; Paiman & Fauzi, 2023; Sheldon et al., 2021). The traditional media dependency research framework also needs to be re-examined and expanded in the context of multi-functional platforms (Steinberg et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2024). Based on the above background, this study aims to explore how short-video platforms induce and strengthen users' life-oriented dependent behaviors through the synergistic effect of their composite functions. As a new framework for understanding users' dependency on short-video platforms, it is conducive to the theoretical understanding of digital media dependency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Contemporary Review of Media System Dependency Theory

Media system dependency (MSD) theory conceptualizes dependency as a structural relationship between individuals, media systems and broader social systems (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). In the traditional media environment, the dependency relationship is mainly manifested as the instrumental demand of individuals for media information resources, and the degree of dependency is influenced by factors such as social stability, media centrality and individual goals. However, the rise of the digital media environment, especially short-video platforms, has significantly redefined the explanatory boundaries of this theory. The emergence of short-video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts has fundamentally changed the essence of media dependency.

Traditional MSD theory emphasizes the dependency based on information scarcity and institutional control. Definition of media dependency manifests itself in the relationship between individual goals and to what extent these goals depend on the media system resources used to create, collect, process and disseminate information (Zhang X. & Zhong, 2020). Dependency relationships are often regarded as a passive response driven by external social structures or the scarcity of media resources. However, digital media trends indicate that hyperscale social video platforms are shaping digital media trends, challenging traditional media and redefining content consumption. This transformation represents a fundamental shift from an information-seeking reliance model to an attention-capturing reliance model characterized by platform capitalism. Compared with other social media platforms, Tik Tok has one of the most advanced algorithmic systems and is also the most addictive. This complex algorithm creates personalized dependencies and also reflects the initiative and strategy of dependencies (Airoldi & Rokka, 2022). User behavior research on short-video platforms show that the generation mechanisms they rely on increasingly highlight users' Intentionality. Intentional dependency not only corrects the underestimation of individual initiative in the original theory, but also reveals that the strength of dependency relationships in the digital environment depends on the mutual construction results between users and platform

technologies. In the context of short-video platforms, users' intentionality is not simply directed towards specific content, but is entangled with algorithmic recommendation systems, constantly reshaping the possible perspective of experience. This indicates that through platform interaction, user intentions are simultaneously fulfilled and redirected.

Based on individual characteristics and the features of new media, studies have identified different forms of media dependency (Vozab et al., 2023), including surveillance dependency, interaction dependency and escapism dependency. However, the participatory characteristics of new media enable users to actively select information rather than passively accept it. To meet individual dependency, the framework centered on mass media gradually leans towards being centered on user needs (Ball-Rokeach & Jung, 2009). Short-video platforms have evolved into an embedded ecosystem, deeply integrating multiple functions such as information acquisition, social interaction, identity construction and economic transactions. This ecological shift has expanded the dependency relationship from a single media-user dimension to a multi-dimensional dependency network of user-platform-social network (Büchi, 2024; Vanden Abeele, 2021). Short-video platforms have significantly enhanced user stickiness through the "super app" model, extending the reliance from content consumption to daily life practices (such as shopping, learning, and work), thus forming a full-domain reliance (Giudice, 2025; Lucas Júnior & Lopes, 2024). Therefore, the transformation of short-video platforms from tools to ecosystems is a fundamental challenge to classic media dependency theory. Contemporary short-video platforms may have created a new form of dependency, creating personalized dependency through multiple function drives and ecosystem integration, highlighting user intention rather than relying on information and institutions in the traditional sense to maintain dependency.

Functional collaboration from mediatization perspective

Mediatization involves the integration of various interaction modes among users of social media platforms, emphasizing that media is a positive force in constructing social reality (Barry et al., 2024). Contemporary mediatization theory emphasizes the positive role of media in constructing social reality. The meta-process of the time of essay communication is changed by digital media technology, and social media platforms have fundamentally changed the logic of social interaction and cultural production (Hepp, 2019). This theoretical framework has gained new relevance in the context of the deep mediatization process, in which the public domain has become increasingly digital and transformed through the integration of social media platforms and mobile devices, thereby fostering reimagined social interactions (Goldman et al., 2025).

The exponential growth of short-video platforms reflects the contemporary manifestation of the mediatization process. This remarkable expansion reflects not only the adoption of technology, but also represents a fundamental shift in the ways media content is produced, distributed and consumed. The platform, through algorithmic recommendation, interface design and ecological closed loop, enables users to be deeply embedded in the media system it builds unconsciously (Maher & Monaci, 2024). The "video + service" model provided by short-video platforms is not merely a simple superposition of functions, but rather a profound mechanism of collaboration and guidance. This mechanism cannot be simply understood as a functional superposition or parallelism. On the contrary, it represents a profound mechanism of collaboration and induction, and is the core manifestation of the platform's promotion of the in-depth mediatization of social processes. Short-video content serves as a trigger for services such as local life and e-commerce. Through embodied visual narrative, emotional resonance and scene-based presentation, it effectively stimulates users' consumption desire, identity recognition and situational imagination, and lowers users' decision-making threshold and psychological defense (Hjarvard, 2013; Schröder, 2017). At the same time, seamlessly embedded online services (such as group buying, booking, payment) instantly give content the ability to monetize, directly converting instantly aroused viewing interest and emotional impulses into measurable and traceable consumption behaviors (Dijck et al., 2018). This closed-loop collaboration of content and services essentially compresses the traditional long chain of "viewing - interest - offsite search - consumption" into an instantaneous behavior of viewing and consumption, greatly enhancing the efficiency of conversion.

This deeply integrated media logic has profoundly reshaped the way users practice. It not merely offers a new consumption tool, but also reorganizes users' consumption habits and ultimately permeates and reorganizes their daily life rhythms and time allocation (Bengtsson et al., 2021; Couldry & Hepp, 2018). User behavioral data is continuously captured and feedback in this process, thereby optimizing the platform's collaboration mechanism to form a cycle of continuous self-reinforcement. At the same time, the closed-loop integration of content and services built by short-video platforms significantly strengthens users' structural dependency on the platform: users not only rely on the platform to obtain information, but also rely on them to complete consumer decisions, social interaction and daily life management. This media logic reshapes users' consumption habits, urban exploration methods and even daily life rhythms, and is a typical manifestation of the platform's deep mediation. In this process, the platform no longer only reflects social reality, but actively constructs social reality and reconfigures the relationship between resource flow and power (Couldry & Hepp, 2018). From the perspective

of mediatization, the functional synergy of short-video platforms and the "video + service" model not only reflect passive consumption but also active participation in media practices. These practices have blurred the boundaries between entertainment, information search and service utilization, and also indicate that platform engagement has been deeply integrated into users' daily lives.

Applicability of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) focuses on exploring how individuals understand and interpret their life experiences. It involves exploring human life experiences and the meanings people attribute to them, that is, interpreting the experiences in life (Smith, 2011). This method has three core characteristics: the phenomenological orientation focuses on the subjective experience world of the participants, the hermeneutic tradition emphasizes the dual interpretive process between the researcher and the text, and the individualistic stance values each person's unique way of meaning construction (Firdaus et al., 2025; Mahmood & Kalo, 2024). The main advantage of IPA lies in its ability to deeply reveal the complexity and richness of human experience. It enables researchers to capture participants' deep understanding and emotional experiences of specific phenomena through meticulous text analysis. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring sensitive topics such as health, identity, and interpersonal relationships, as it respects the subjectivity of individuals while acknowledging the active role of researchers. IPA emphasizes deep analysis of small samples, which can generate insightful discoveries (Smith et al., 2022).

As the methodological framework of this study, IPA is dedicated to understanding how individuals perceive their life experiences (Smith et al., 2022). This directly corresponds to the central goal of this study, which is exploring the subjective experience of users' lifestyle dependency on short-video platforms. Unlike positivist approaches that attempt to measure observable behavior, IPA prioritizes the phenomenological dimensions of human experience, making it ideal for capturing the nuances and subjective nature of digital platforms dependency (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). The dual interpretation of IPA (where researchers attempt to understand the process by which participants try to understand their own experiences) is highly suitable for dissecting the complex experience of dependency, which is full of personal significance and focuses on individual perception, emotion and cognition. IPA's commitment to semantic analysis enables researchers to delve into individual cases while identifying convergence and divergence patterns among participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This approach is particularly valuable for understanding how different users navigate the complex ecosystem of integrated platform functions and for developing personalized dependencies. Does IPA allow for the exploration of how individual participants can negotiate between broader cultural influences and personal experiences in their relationships with digital platforms, while having the flexibility to adapt to different communication styles and cultural expressions, thereby better promoting interaction with participants (G. Chan et al., 2025; Vitvitskaya et al., 2022). The sensitivity of this approach to content nuances, cultural meaning generation processes, and individual differences makes it particularly suitable for studying the lifelike dependency caused by short-video platforms in the digital ecosystem, while also facilitating a broader theoretical understanding of contemporary media-user relationships.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study, from a mediatization perspective and in combination with media system dependency theory, explores how short-video platforms meet users' life service needs through their inherent composite functional collaboration mechanisms and induce users to develop deep dependency. The research will take life service functions such as online shopping and local group buying as typical features. TikTok will be used as the main short-video platform for this research. The research subjects are Chinese college students, a group that represents an important user group of short-video platforms and may be highly involved in smartphone technology. This study has been approved by the ethics review committee. The research adopted semi-structured in-depth interviews as the main method and strictly followed the steps of interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Participant

College students are the ideal population to study the contemporary phenomenon of digital dependency, as they represent digital natives who mature with the development of mobile technology, often early adopters of emerging platform capabilities (Reid et al., 2023). Their interaction model with short-video platforms provides important insights into the development of digital dependency, which may become increasingly common among a wider population as platform convergence continues to expand (Chen, 2023; Filho et al., 2021). This research

adopted a purposeful sampling strategy and recruited 12 short-video users, who used TikTok for more than one hour per day, providing rich information for the research questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, with the interview outline designed to openly guide participants to share their usage experiences, key events, emotional fluctuations, and perceptions of the platform. The interview outline is centered around several core thematic areas: First, explore the participants' usage experiences; Secondly, deeply explore the turning points and critical moments during the usage process; Thirdly, pay attention to the trajectory of changes at the emotional level.

Data analysis is an iterative, bottom-up process. The entire process will follow the IPA analysis steps (Smith et al., 2022). First, read the single transcript repeatedly and make detailed comments and annotations; Then transform the annotations into innovative themes; Then look for the connections between themes and build a personal theme table; Finally, a cross-case analysis was conducted to distill the shared themes in the experiences of all participants.

RESULT

Unconscious Experiences from Entertainment to Consumption

This study identified the core mechanism by which short-video platforms drive users from entertainment browsing to consumption: that is, through the collaborative design of implicit behavior induction and seamless connection processes, a highly smooth conversion path is constructed. Participants generally reported that their initial behavioral intentions were focused on non-utilitarian entertainment, but they naturally completed the consumption behavior without a clear decision-making awareness (see the Table 1 below).

Table 1: "Unconscious experiences from entertainment to consumption" Narrative

Meaning making	Theme statement
Hidden consumption behavior induction	Many video contents will have product shopping links under it, which will make people unconsciously click in to view details.
Seamless payment process	The process from viewing products to placing an order is very convenient, and it also feels simplified a lot of the process. Many times, the payment is successful without reacting.

All participants vividly described an almost unconscious and smooth experience of state transition. Users' initial intentions are usually to relax and have fun. However, the design of the platform has completely dissolved the traditional boundary between entertainment and consumption. The elements embedded in the video content, such as shopping carts, geographical location tags, and group-buying coupon links, form a seamless conversion process.

"TikTok doesn't need to be forced to sell. It just shoots the life you yearn for into a 15-second short film, and then plants the purchase link at the bottom like a seed. It's attracted without realizing it and then buys it casually." (P05)

"TikTok will use my curiosity and herd mentality to make me pay for an impulse. This kind of consumption is 'invisible', and I can't calculate how much I spent on TikTok, because it happens in every unconscious swipe and click, which penetrates dozens of dollars and quietly empties my living expenses." (P03)

This hidden behavioral induction model represents a carefully designed user experience that aims to promote subconscious behavioral inertia by reducing operational friction and cognitive resistance, automating consumer decision-making, thereby enhancing users' path dependency on the platform as a consumption channel. In addition, the relevant visual components of behavior guidance are deeply embedded in the video narrative, becoming an integral part of the content itself and operating below the threshold of consciousness through rapid, automatic, and intuitive decision-making. This platform design architecture for integrated entertainment and commercial content represents a persuasion technology that creates a choice architecture that drives users to consume without explicit mandate (Fogg, 2009).

The seamless process ensures that the behavioral chain from interest stimulation to payment completion is highly smooth. Technical strategies that reduce transaction friction, such as one-click jump, automatic user information filling, and a minimalist payment interface, together form a seamless behavioral pattern.

"The system defaults to the address and payment method I set before. The final payment is also a face recognition or fingerprint payment. In this second, the payment is successful. There is almost no psychological construction process of 'I am spending money'." (P07)

"This is simply tailor-made for impulse consumption. It is not helping shop, but helping complete the action of order, so as not to disturb impulse as much as possible. The pleasure of spending money is there, but the real feeling of spending money is gone." (P02)

This usage process, through a series of meticulously optimized technical interventions, such as one-click jump, intelligent address filling, and a minimalist payment interface, significantly reduces the cognitive effort and time cost that users need to invest in the decision-making process. Its essence is to construct a frictionless conversion path, thereby enabling users to naturally complete the purchase behavior in activities that were originally mainly for entertainment or social interaction and were not intended for consumption (Arrivé, 2022; Yoon et al., 2025). Users do not need to go through traditional decision-making processes, and their consumption behavior is increasingly manifested as a highly automated experience embedded in the browsing stream. This experience not only reduces the possibility of users abandoning orders, but also creates a nearly conditioned reflexive behavioral inertia.

The research results show that the traditional consumer behavior model assumes thoughtful information processing and conscious choice, while the nature of consumer agents has changed in the digital environment (Hadi et al., 2024). The seamless experience brought by this functional collaboration mechanism reveals the ability of digital platforms to implicitly regulate user behavior through architectural design, and also represents the digital practice of integrating purchasing behavior into habitual behavior (Erizal, 2021). The entire process not only strengthens the user's functional dependency on the platform, but also reconfigures the symbolic boundary between entertainment and consumption, which means that consumption is no longer an independent intentional behavior, but a natural extension of media experience.

Emotional Dependency Shaped by Algorithms

Short-video platforms have created an unprecedented content consumption experience through complex recommendation algorithm systems, and at the same time, they have also given rise to new emotional dependency patterns. Algorithmic dependency is not only reflected in the repeated use at the behavioral level, but also more deeply involves the satisfaction of users' emotional needs, the reinforcement of cognitive preferences, and the reconstruction of social interaction patterns. A complex emotional attachment relationship has formed between users and algorithmic recommendation systems. This relationship is far from a simple instrumental use, but is filled with the contradictory tension of personification projection, emotional investment and power transfer (see the Table 2 below).

Table 2: "Emotional dependency shaped by algorithms" Narrative

Meaning making	Theme statement
Real-time content push	The application can push various information to me at any time, and can feel that I am not out of touch with this society.
Satisfy interest	The content displayed on the homepage is about what I am interested in, and I don't need to actively search.
Interaction and content creation	TikTok provides a lot of interactive space and content creation space. While gaining feedback from others, I also get satisfaction.

The algorithm's real-time push function creates a continuous emotional flow and sense of companionship. For users, the continuous update of information flow means keeping in sync and connected with the outside world, thus alleviating information anxiety and loneliness. This always-on experience makes the algorithm play a tireless companion role with which users will become situational.

"College is completely different from high school. When I first entered university, there were many lonely and confused moments. I was afraid of being excluded from the common dialogue. Platforms like TikTok pushed the hottest topics, the latest memes, and the challenges that everyone was playing directly to me in real time. It gave me a sense of security, making me feel that I was still in a huge and lively cultural community, rather than a lonely individual." (P04)

The uncertainty reward mechanism pushed by algorithms activates the reward circuit of the user's brain, producing an intermittent reinforcement effect (Liu et al., 2025). The alternating cycle of expectant pleasure and consumptive pleasure experienced by users during the process of swiping and browsing forms a strong basis of

emotional dependency (Liao et al., 2024). Especially when users are in a state of low mood or anxiety, the type of content pushed by the algorithm will also be adjusted accordingly to have a more soothing effect on emotions. Algorithms provide users with convenient emotional regulation tools, but at the same time, they also strengthen users' emotional dependency on algorithmic systems.

The algorithm achieves highly personalized services by precisely capturing and meeting users' interest preferences. Users view the content recommended by algorithms as an understanding and recognition of their personal tastes and concepts. This personified algorithmic cognition generates a deep emotional connection (Shin, 2020; Zhan et al., 2023).

"I once watched several videos about the renovation of desk. The next day, my homepage was filled with relevant video content. I didn't need to search at all. This sense of satisfaction is extremely strong. It saves me the trouble of actively thinking and screening information, and makes me feel very dependent on it." (P03)

"It is not like a tool, it is more like a friend who knows you more and more, and even knows where your next interest is earlier than you. The content on my homepage is all about my interests or more frequently. But on the other hand, I almost have no access to information outside my interest range." (P08)

This precision band causes users to actively entrust cognitive labor to screen information to the algorithm, thereby significantly reducing decision-making costs. Users gradually transfer the initiative of content discovery to the algorithm system, resulting in weakening of independent selection capabilities and excessive dependency on algorithm recommendations (Lv et al., 2025). At the same time, algorithmic emotional homogeneity deepens users' dependency on specific recommendation models and limits the diversity of their emotional experience. When the quality of algorithm recommendations declines, users show significant disappointment and anxiety, which is more intense than what objective content quality differences can explain.

At the level of interaction and content creation, the combination of the interaction function of the short-video platform and the algorithm recommendation system creates complex social and emotional dynamics. Users gradually learn to acclimate algorithms through interactive behaviors such as likes, comments, staying time, and consciously create specific content, aiming to guide them to push content more in line with their own preferences (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Algorithm-driven social feedback has formed a new digital social identity model.

"I occasionally upload my highlights of playing games on TikTok. Then someone will like and comment, and even look forward to my next game video. This makes me feel like I am seen and appreciated. It gives me a channel to quickly gain a sense of accomplishment, making me feel that my creation is valuable and will prompt me to continuously upload relevant content. But at the same time, it will make me pay attention to the number of likes, comments and fans, and will also think about what kind of content will be easier to get traffic." (P06)

The interactive mechanism of short-video platforms has created a circular model of "feedback - creation - feedback". This process gives users an illusion of controlling the algorithm and a sense of participation, further strengthening their emotional investment. Algorithm-driven interactive feedback has become an important source of emotional satisfaction for creators, but this reliance also increases emotional vulnerability and the degree of platform binding (Hödl & Myrach, 2023). Algorithms thus become an invisible disciplinary force. While users enjoy the pleasure of creation and interaction, they also feel the risk of their creativity being confined and alienated.

The Integration of the Platform Ecosystem with Daily Life

Participants deeply experienced that the platform is no longer an application in mobile phones, but has evolved into the infrastructure and central hub of its digital life. This dependency stems from a powerful network effect and ecological lockdown. Social relationships, business activities, and even work and learning needs are all gathered here, creating huge migration costs. The difficulty of users' sense of escape comes from their lives being deeply nested into the platform's ecosystem (see the Table 3 below).

Table 3: "The integration of the platform ecosystem with daily life" Narrative

Meaning making	Theme statement
Satisfaction of multiple demands	It carries out all my activities, leaving it means I have to re-download other four or five apps and lose all the offers and conveniences.
Occupy fragmented time	TikTok has been completely bound to my life. Especially when waiting for the car, queuing, and before sleep, these fragmented times are occupied by TikTok.
Online communication and quasi-social relationships	I enjoy communicating with my family and friends through TikTok. We often have some topics due to popular videos.

Short-video platforms, through algorithm-driven content distribution systems, precisely match users' diverse demands, thus forming a strong structural dependency. Short-video platforms use machine learning algorithms to analyze user behavior data and achieve personalized content recommendations. Users seek multiple satisfactions such as entertainment, information acquisition, social interaction and self-expression on short-video platforms.

"For me, TikTok is no longer an app. It is more like the operating system of my digital life. (...) If I leave it, it means my entertainment, information, consumption and even social rhythms will be disrupted. I need to download different applications to see hot spots, order takeaways, and buy things, and each app needs to retrain the algorithm to understand me. This is not only a hassle, but also the price is too high."
(P01)

This multi-dimensional demand satisfaction mechanism significantly enhances users' dependency on the platform. This multi-dimensional satisfaction model creates huge user stickiness and reduces the migration cost for users. Once users get used to meeting multiple demands through a single interface and switch to other solutions that require collaboration among multiple applications, they will experience significant inconvenience and efficiency losses, and thus be locked within the platform by the ecosystem (Seraji et al., 2021). This structural design makes it difficult for users to actively leave the platform, forming an addictive behavioral pattern.

The duration design of short-videos cleverly adapts to the fragmented time characteristics of modern life. By occupying the tiny time gap of users, structural control of the user's daily life rhythm is gradually realized. The popularity of mobile devices has fundamentally changed people's perception of time. Short-video platforms effectively occupy all the fragmented time of users by providing the right content length (Violot et al., 2024).

"The time is short enough to do anything serious, but it is enough to watch more than a dozen short-videos. Its algorithm is too efficient and can instantly capture my attention and immediately withdraw from the real world. Now, if I forget to bring my headphones or my phone is about to run out of power, I will become very anxious when queuing up, and I feel that this period of time has been wasted and I have no idea how to deal with this sudden time gap."
(P04)

The platform not only captures the idle time of users, but further erodes and colonizes their core attention periods, realizing the temporal embedding of users' daily lives. This colonization of time deeply intertwines users' rhythm of life and platform usage habits. The platform uses algorithm-driven "instant feedback-intermittent reinforcement" mechanism (Mondal et al., 2023), converting users' scattered time into exploitable resources. Time schedules are platformized. Over time, getting out of the platform means that one needs to re-plan and manage one's own time, facing a vacuum of a time structure, which forms another invisible barrier to exit.

Short-video platforms achieve structural embedding at the level of users' social identity recognition by building virtual social networks and cultivating quasi-social relationships, allowing users' social capital to accumulate within the platform ecosystem and making the platform an inseparable part of users' social lives. Short-video platforms have created a large number of virtual communities through mechanisms such as topic tags and challenge activities. During the process of participating in these virtual community activities, users gradually build up a digital identity related to the platform. This identity recognition makes it difficult for users to give up using the platform easily (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021).

"In addition to real friends, I have followed many book bloggers and knowledge sharing people on TikTok. I will communicate with other users with the same hobbies in their comment section. This sense of belonging based on interest connection is difficult to find in reality."
(P06)

"The greatest source of vitality for my family now is to forward TikTok videos. My parents have learned to use videos instead of words to express concern and humor. Many of our common topics come from this. It has created a constant stream of common topics for us."
(P02)

Parasocial relationships developed between users make users feel a sense of social belonging, and even when the real social network is weak, they can still obtain a sense of social support through the platform (Akhtar & Islam, 2023). In addition, the social relationships established by users on the platform require continuous emotional investment and maintenance, which creates additional platform stickiness and becomes an important driving force for users to keep using the platform (Cuesta-Valino et al., 2022). Users' social networks and emotional connections have been platformized on a large scale. Migration means not only the possibility of losing connections with some weak ties, but also giving up a quasi-social relationship that has been infused with genuine emotions. This relational switching cost and the sense of emotional loss are among the most solid shackles of platform construction, firmly locking users within their social ecosystem.

DISCUSSION

The traditional media system dependency theory emphasizes the dependency relationship of individuals on media information resources to achieve specific goals (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1984). It mainly focuses on the three motivational dimensions of understanding, positioning and entertainment. However, the user's dependency experience has far exceeded the traditional theoretical explanatory framework. Based on the core assumption of media system dependency theory, that is, the degree of dependency on media determines the importance and influence of media in their lives (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), a new concept of life-oriented dependency is proposed. The core of the concept of life-oriented dependency lies in its embeddedness characteristics, which is used to describe a new type of dependency relationship formed by short-video platforms through functional collaboration and ecological integration, deeply embedded media use into users' daily practices. Unlike the functional orientation that traditional media rely on, the reliance on daily life is reflected in the deep integration of the platform with users' daily lives, forming an omnipresent interdependent relationship. Life-oriented dependency emphasizes that the platform, by dissolving boundaries and integrating scenarios, enables users to unconsciously transition from functional use to a structural dependency. This reliance is no longer based on a single function, but stems from the seamless, smooth and multi-functional overall experience provided by the platform as a digital life infrastructure (Caliandro et al., 2024). Users do not actively choose to rely on it but quietly emerge during the smooth transition of the platform's design. Their daily life practices (such as socializing, consumption, and information acquisition) are closely intertwined with the platform's ecosystem, forming an inseparable state of life. This dependency is not only reflected in the satisfaction of functional requirements, but also in the reconstruction of users' lifestyles and the reshaping of their cognitive frameworks (Jin et al., 2025). As recent research points out, current digital platforms create unprecedented user experiences through algorithmic personalization (Obiegbu & Larsen, 2025), an experience that has become the infrastructure for users' daily lives.

For short-video platforms, the life-oriented dependency system it builds for users is more reflected in the synergy of multiple functions. The functional collaboration of short-video platforms goes beyond the simple aggregation of independent functional modules, but rather through algorithmic centralization and data flow convergence, it arranges an organic integration. This integration ultimately forms a highly personalized and non-replicable system immersive experience, establishing a strong user substitution cost and exit barrier (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). The composite architecture of short-video platforms incorporates communication, entertainment, business and payment functions from an integrated life service ecosystem, enabling users to meet multiple needs without switching applications, this convenience gradually deepens the reliance on the platform (Wang et al., 2015; Wangqu et al., 2024). The coordinated interaction between these composite functions does not simply accumulate but increases in user stickiness. Entertainment functions are the initial attraction mechanism that attracts users into the time investment cycle, while integrated commercial and payment functions extend the duration of the session and increase the frequency of use (Sherman et al., 2018). At the same time, online interaction further strengthens the connection and social relationship between users, creating what is called online intimacy in the platform ecosystem (G. H. Chan, 2020). This synergistic effect enhances the stickiness of the user platform and continuously pushes up the audience's emotional arousal. The increased time and emotional investment generates psychological exit costs, which may be manifested as addictive behavior.

Over time, short-video platforms has evolved from a simple application into a central hub for users' digital social management, entertainment consumption, and lifestyle management (Kennedy, 2020). Functional synergy and emotional dependency jointly lead to the structural embeddedness of users. Short-video platforms have become a fundamental social technological infrastructure by building a one-stop digital ecosystem (Dijck et al., 2018). This deep embedding of daily life makes it very challenging to leave the platform, because leaving the platform requires giving up a complete set of customized lifestyle practices while accepting interruptions from social relations networks, content information flows and consumption patterns (Barta & Andalibi, 2021). System immersion generated through functional collaboration ultimately upgrades user platform dependency from habitual use to structural addictive behavior. Therefore, Tik Tok did not inadvertently form user stickiness, but actively promoted the process of in-depth mediation of users' daily lives through a carefully designed systemic strategy driven by data and functional collaboration and integration, and finally successfully built an addictive trap that is difficult to escape. This transformation reflects the gradual damage of user agents through algorithmic mediation of daily life experiences (Kant, 2020; Shin et al., 2020). The initial convenience of the platform gradually turned into compulsion, and user autonomy was eroded in the seemingly personalized experience. This infrastructure-like status makes the cost of escaping the platform extremely high - it is not only about entertainment, but also about users' social connections, consumption habits and even lifestyles. The sense of unescapable in this study is precisely a manifestation of this structural power. The user is trapped in a passivity situation. Although individuals may be aware of potential addiction or privacy risks, since the platform has been deeply integrated into the structure of their social life and daily routines, detachment means having to change an entire set of living habits and bear the corresponding social opportunity costs (Abeele et al., 2018). Therefore,

life-oriented dependency essentially reveals a new form of power in platform capitalism which providing ultimate convenience and deep integration through the synergy of complex functions, allowing users to enjoy services while also giving up autonomy and consolidating the platform's structural dominance.

This study also has certain limitations and requires further research. Firstly, the different cultural backgrounds in which Tik and Tok are used in various global markets may lead to different patterns of functional synergy and dependency formation. All the samples are from the group of Chinese college students, and the universality of their conclusions needs to be tested in different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, further longitudinal research is still needed to track the trajectory of individual users from their initial participation to the use of potential problems. Finally, through comparative analysis with other short-video platforms, it can be clarified whether the identified synergy represents a unique phenomenon of short-video platforms or a broader industry model.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research provides important insights into the transformation of short-video platforms from simple entertainment tools to comprehensive super app, which fundamentally reshape user behavior and dependency patterns. The research results show that these platforms have multiple mechanisms that generate deeply rooted user dependencies, which far exceed the traditional media consumption model. Contemporary platform dependency operates through complex functional collaborative mechanisms that create profound structural embedding in users' daily lives. The concept of lifestyle dependency provides a theoretical framework for understanding how modern digital platforms create dependencies that are qualitatively different from those of traditional media. In addition, the research has put forward the concept of "life-oriented dependency" to summarize this new type of dependency model that integrates instrumental, emotional and structural features. The insights generated by this study contribute to a more detailed understanding of the relationship between people and platforms in the digital age and provide a foundation for future research on the complex dynamics of contemporary media dependency. Although the research has basically determined the mechanism of dependency formation, it has not examined the psychological, social and behavioral consequences of these dependencies on the overall health of users. Future research should explore the relationship between life-related dependencies and users' health outcomes, and can conduct cross-cultural comparisons or adopt longitudinal tracking designs to examine the long-term evolving consequences of such dependencies.

Competing Interests

The author ensured there were no potential conflicts of interest associated with this article's research, authorship, and publication.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of Taylor University, Malaysia, with approval number HEC 2025/144.

Informed consent

All participants received informed consent forms. All participants agreed that they could take part in the project and agreed to use the data and publish the relevant results for scientific research.

REFERENCES

- Abeele, M. V., Wolf, R. D., & Ling, R. (2018). Mobile Media and Social Space: How Anytime, Anyplace Connectivity Structures Everyday Life. *Media and Communication*, 6(2), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i2.1399>
- Airoidi, M., & Rokka, J. (2022). Algorithmic consumer culture. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 25(5), 411–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2022.2084726>
- Akhtar, N., & Islam, T. (2023). Unveiling the predictors and outcomes of TikTok addiction: The moderating role of parasocial relationships. *Kybernetes*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-04-2022-0551>
- Arrivé, S. (2022). Digital brand content: Underlying nature and rationales of a hybrid marketing practice. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 30(4), 340–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1907612>
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J., & DeFleur, M. L. (1976). A Dependency Model of Mass-Media Effects. *Communication Research*, 3(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027600300101>
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J., & Jung, J.-Y. (2009). The Evolution of Media System dependency theory. In *Sage Handbook of Media Processes and Effects* (pp. 531–544). SAGE.
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J., Rokeach, M., & Grube, J. W. (1984). The great American values test: Influencing behavior and belief through television. <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/801055>

- Barry, W. I. A., Abdellatif, M. A. M., & Moayad, H. G. (2024). Mediatization and patterns of social interaction on social media. *Global Media and Communication*, 20(2), 237–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665221135094>
- Barta, K., & Andalibi, N. (2021). Constructing Authenticity on TikTok: Social Norms and Social Support on the 'Fun' Platform. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 5(CSCW2), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3479574>
- Bengtsson, S., Fast, K., Jansson, A., & Lindell, J. (2021). Media and basic desires: An approach to measuring the mediatization of daily human life. *COMMUNICATIONS-EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH*, 46(2), 275–296. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2019-0122>
- Bhandari, A., & Bimo, S. (2022). Why's Everyone on TikTok Now? The Algorithmized Self and the Future of Self-Making on Social Media. *Social Media + Society*, 8(1), 20563051221086241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221086241>
- Büchi, M. (2024). Digital well-being theory and research. *New Media & Society*, 26(1), 172–189. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211056851>
- Caliandro, A., Gandini, A., Bainotti, L., & Anselmi, G. (2024). The platformization of consumer culture: A theoretical framework. *Marketing Theory*, 24(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931231225537>
- Cao, X., Yu, L., Yu, Y., & Cheng, B. (2025). Understanding the mechanism of social media addiction: A socio-technical systems perspective. *Information Development*, 41(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02666669231218685>
- Chan, G., Banire, B., Ataguba, G., Frempong, G., & Orji, R. (2025). A Panoramic View of Socio-Cultural Sensitivity in Digital Technologies: A Comprehensive Review and Future Directions. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 41(4), 1917–1945. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2024.2372135>
- Chan, G. H. (2020). Intimacy, friendship, and forms of online communication among hidden youth in Hong Kong. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 111, 106407. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106407>
- Chandramouli, K., & Margetis, G. (2024). Entertainment and Interactive Media. In *Human-Computer Interaction in Various Application Domains* (pp. 214–233). CRC Press.
- Chen, L. (2023). Exploring the impact of short videos on society and culture: An analysis of social dynamics and cultural expression. *Pacific International Journal*, 6(3), 115–118. <https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v6i3.420>
- Cortés-Ramos, A., Torrecilla García, J. A., Landa-Blanco, M., Poleo Gutiérrez, F. J., & Castilla Mesa, M. T. (2021). Activism and Social Media: Youth Participation and Communication. *Sustainability*, 13(18), 10485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810485>
- Couldry, N., & Hepp, A. (2018). *The mediated construction of reality*. John Wiley & Sons. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=yJ9RDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Couldry,+N.,+%26+Hepp,+A.++\(2017\).+The+mediated+construction+of+reality.&ots=ByqtIHb0Jm&sig=FZfkDZf3p94fRjQN3PMSVj60Q7k](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=yJ9RDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=Couldry,+N.,+%26+Hepp,+A.++(2017).+The+mediated+construction+of+reality.&ots=ByqtIHb0Jm&sig=FZfkDZf3p94fRjQN3PMSVj60Q7k)
- Cuesta-Valino, P., Gutierrez-Rodriguez, P., & Duran-Alamo, P. (2022). Why Do People Return to Video Platforms? Millennials and Centennials on TikTok. *MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION*, 10(1), 198–207. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4737>
- Dhote, T. P. (2021). Review of Consumer Engagement and Digital Entertainment on Over the Top Platforms. In S. Das & S. Gochhait (Eds), *Digital Entertainment: The Next Evolution in Service Sector* (pp. 23–44). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-9724-4_2
- Dijck, J. van, Poell, T., & Waal, M. de. (2018). *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford University Press.
- Dong, R., Yuan, D., Wei, X., Cai, J., Ai, Z., & Zhou, S. (2025). Exploring the relationship between social media dependence and internet addiction among college students from a bibliometric perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1463671>
- Erizal, N. (2021). The Influence Of Tiktok Applications On The Consumption Behavior Of Adolescents In Online Shopping. *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science*, 2(1), 39–43. <https://doi.org/10.53806/ijcss.v2i1.84>
- Filho, E. J. M. A., Gammarano, I. de J. L. P., & Barreto, I. A. (2021). Technology-driven consumption: Digital natives and immigrants in the context of multifunctional convergence. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 29(3), 181–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2019.1656278>
- Firdaus, A., Aksar, I. A., Gong, J., Zaiamri Zainal Abidin, M., ur Rasheed Baloch, H., & Gomez, E. (2025). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for Journalism Studies: Making Sense of Journalists' Sense-Making of Digital Disruptions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24, 16094069241309274. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241309274>
- Fogg, B. (2009). A behavior model for persuasive design. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Persuasive Technology*, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1541948.1541999>

- Giudice, F. (2025). WeChat: The impact of the super app on Chinese society. <https://unitesi.unive.it/handle/20.500.14247/4664>
- Goggin, G. (2021). *Apps: From Mobile Phones to Digital Lives*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Goldman, I., Davis, C. H., & Clark, R. A. (2025). Exploring subjective sociocultural understandings of “fear of missing out” (FoMO) and the unsettled self in a time of deep mediatization. *New Media & Society*, 27(1), 480–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231177966>
- Gong, M., Wagner, C., & Ali, A. (2024). The impact of social network embeddedness on mobile massively multiplayer online games play. *Information Systems Journal*, 34(2), 327–363. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12479>
- Hadi, R., Melumad, S., & Park, E. S. (2024). The Metaverse: A new digital frontier for consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 34(1), 142–166. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1356>
- Hasselwander, M., & Weiss, D. (2024). Key Factors Influencing Consumer Adoption Intentions of Super Apps in Germany. *IEEE Access*, 12, 101985–101998. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2024.3431950>
- Hepp, A. (2019). *Deep Mediatization*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351064903>
- Hepp, A., Berg, M., & Roitsch, C. (2014). Mediatized Worlds of Communitization: Young People as Localists, Centrists, Multi-localists and Pluralists. In A. Hepp & F. Krotz (Eds), *Mediatized Worlds* (pp. 174–203). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137300355_11
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203155363>
- Hödl, T., & Myrach, T. (2023). Content Creators Between Platform Control and User Autonomy. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 65(5), 497–519. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12599-023-00808-9>
- Huang, Y., & Miao, W. (2021). Re-domesticating social media when it becomes disruptive: Evidence from China’s “super app” WeChat. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 9(2), 177–194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920940765>
- Jin, T., Tan, K. H., Nor, N. L. M., Alias, J., Mat, N., & Yunus, N. (2025). The Mediatization Effect of Tiktok and Smartphone Addiction: A New Role of Mediatization Effect Uncovered. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5(6), 1959–1969. <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2305>
- Kant, T. (2020). *Making it Personal: Algorithmic Personalization, Identity, and Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Kaye, D. B. V., Chen, X., & Zeng, J. (2021). The co-evolution of two Chinese mobile short video apps: Parallel platformization of Douyin and TikTok. *Mobile Media & Communication*, 9(2), 229–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157920952120>
- Kennedy, M. (2020). ‘If the rise of the TikTok dance and e-girl aesthetic has taught us anything, it’s that teenage girls rule the internet right now’: TikTok celebrity, girls and the Coronavirus crisis. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(6), 1069–1076. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420945341>
- Larkin, M., & Thompson, A. R. (2011). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Mental Health and Psychotherapy Research. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Mental Health and Psychotherapy* (pp. 99–116). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch8>
- Liao, Y., Gao, Y., Wang, F., Xu, Z., Wu, Y., & Zhang, L. (2024). Exploring emotional experiences and dataset construction in the era of short videos based on physiological signals. *Biomedical Signal Processing and Control*, 96, 106648. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bspc.2024.106648>
- Liu, C., Wang, J., Li, H., Shangguan, Q., Jin, W., Zhu, W., Wang, P., Chen, X., & Wang, Q. (2025). Loss aversion and evidence accumulation in short-video addiction: A behavioral and neuroimaging investigation. *NeuroImage*, 313, 121250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2025.121250>
- Lucas Júnior, D., & Lopes, E. (2024). Defining a Super App and Analyzing It from an Ecosystemic Perspective. *AMCIS 2024 Proceedings*. <https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2024/adoptdiff/adoptdiff/7>
- Lv, X., Li, J., & Wang, Q. (2025). The Dark Side of Recommendation Algorithms in Chinese Mass Short Video Apps: Effect of Perceived Over-Recommendation on Users’ Cognitive Dissonance and Discontinuance Intention. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 41(11), 6701–6715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2024.2383038>
- Maher, S., & Monaci, S. (2024). Media Technologies and Epistemologies: The Platforming of Everything | Media Technologies and Epistemologies: The Platforming of Everything—Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*, 18(0), 13.
- Mahmood, S., & Kalo, Z. (2024). “Virtual counseling was a lifeline” - Lived experiences of adolescent cyberbullying victims during the COVID-19 pandemic: An IPA study. *Acta Psychologica*, 251, 104637. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104637>

- Mondal, Md. K. H., Chakraborty, S., Jaiswal, N., Nishchal, N., & Roy, P. (2023). Comparing the Use of Short Video Sharing Applications for Optimizing User Engagement. 2023 IEEE 3rd International Conference on Technology, Engineering, Management for Societal Impact Using Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Talent (TEMSMET), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEMSMET56707.2023.10149964>
- Obiegbu, C. J., & Larsen, G. (2025). Algorithmic personalization and brand loyalty: An experiential perspective. *Marketing Theory*, 25(2), 199–219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931241230041>
- Owilli, H., Mogere, C., & Booker, N. (2023). Media consumption in an evolving digital world: Millennials and digital natives' consumption habits and implications for legacy media in Kenya. Graduate School of Media and Communications. https://ecommons.aku.edu/eastafrica_gsmc/103
- Paiman, N., & Fauzi, M. A. (2023). Exploring determinants of social media addiction in higher education through the integrated lenses of technology acceptance model (TAM) and usage habit. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 16(3), 776–803. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-03-2023-0114>
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal*, 20(1), 7–14.
- Reid, L., Button, D., & Brommeyer, M. (2023). Challenging the Myth of the Digital Native: A Narrative Review. *Nursing Reports*, 13(2), 573–600. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nursrep13020052>
- Salehi, S., Miremadi, I., Ghasempour Nejadi, M., & Ghafouri, H. (2024). Fostering the Adoption and Use of Super App Technology. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 71, 4761–4775. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2023.3235718>
- Schröder, K. C. (2017). Towards the “Audiencization” of Mediatization Research? Audience Dynamics as Co-Constitutive of Mediatization Processes. In O. Driessens, G. Bolin, A. Hepp, & S. Hjarvard (Eds), *Dynamics Of Mediatization: Institutional Change and Everyday Transformations in a Digital Age* (pp. 85–115). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62983-4_5
- Seraji, F., Habibzadeh, A., & Rezazadeh, A. (2021). Solutions for Social Media Harms: An Media ecological perspective. *International Journal of Information Science and Management (IJISM)*, 19(1), 187–206.
- Sheldon, P., Antony, M. G., & Sykes, B. (2021). Predictors of Problematic Social Media Use: Personality and Life-Position Indicators. *Psychological Reports*, 124(3), 1110–1133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120934706>
- Sherman, L. E., Hernandez, L. M., Greenfield, P. M., & Dapretto, M. (2018). What the brain ‘Likes’: Neural correlates of providing feedback on social media. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 13(7), 699–707. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsy051>
- Shin, D. (2020). How do users interact with algorithm recommender systems? The interaction of users, algorithms, and performance. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 109, 106344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106344>
- Shin, D., Zhong, B., & Biocca, F. A. (2020). Beyond user experience: What constitutes algorithmic experiences? *International Journal of Information Management*, 52, 102061. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.102061>
- Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 9–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2010.510659>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. SAGE.
- Steinberg, M., Mukherjee, R., & Punathambekar, A. (2022). Media power in digital Asia: Super apps and megacorps. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(8), 1405–1419. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221127805>
- Su, C. (2023). *Douyin, TikTok and China's Online Screen Industry: The Rise of Short-Video Platforms*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003261056>
- Sun, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2021). A review of theories and models applied in studies of social media addiction and implications for future research. *Addictive Behaviors*, 114, 106699. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106699>
- Tang, R., Inoue, Y., & Tsujimoto, M. (2025). Synergy Effect in Platform Ecosystem: A Quantitative Analysis of Smart Home Products. *IEEE Access*, 13, 13482–13506. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2025.3531993>
- Vanden Abeele, M. M. P. (2021). Digital Wellbeing as a Dynamic Construct. *Communication Theory*, 31(4), 932–955. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtaa024>
- Violot, C., Elmas, T., Bilogrevic, I., & Humbert, M. (2024). Shorts vs. Regular Videos on YouTube: A Comparative Analysis of User Engagement and Content Creation Trends. *Proceedings of the 16th ACM Web Science Conference*, 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3614419.3644023>

- Vitvitskaya, O., Suyo-Vega, J. A., Meneses-La-Riva, M. E., & Fernández-Bedoya, V. H. (2022). Behaviours and Characteristics of Digital Natives Throughout the Teaching-Learning Process: A Systematic Review of Scientific Literature from 2016 to 2021. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11(3), 38. <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0066>
- Vozab, D., Mihalec, M., & Uremović, L. H. (2023). Media dependency in a multiple crisis: Information seeking and media trust after an earthquake during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Društvena Istraživanja: Časopis Za Opća Društvena Pitanja*, 32(1), 93–114. <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.32.1.05>
- Wang, C., Lee, M. K. O., & Hua, Z. (2015). A theory of social media dependence: Evidence from microblog users. *Decision Support Systems*, 69, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2014.11.002>
- Wangqu, J., Xue, Z., & Chen, L. (2024). Media dependency, platform-swinging, and psychological depression among young college students in the polymedia environment. *Scientific Reports*, 14(1), 30539. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-82303-z>
- Xiao, L., Wang, J., & Wei, X. (2023). Effects of relational embeddedness on users' intention to participate in value co-creation of social e-commerce platforms. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 410–429. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-02-2023-0055>
- Xu, X., Tayyab, S. M. U., Luo, X. (Robert), Lee, F. C., & Jia, Q. (2024). Investigating social streaming app dependency: A mixed-methods analysis. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, 26(2), 304–326. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-04-2024-0113>
- Yoon, Y., Kim, H., Choi, J., & Cho, H. (2025). Click, sign-up and purchase: Consumer responses to real-time mobile promotions along the consumer decision journey. *International Journal of Advertising*, 44(6), 1040–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2024.2444857>
- Zhan, Z., Ou, Y., Hu, Z., & Yang, H. (2023). Exploring the Effect of Intelligent Recommendation Systems on Users' Emotional Attachment: The Moderating Role of Personality Trait. In Y. Tu & M. Chi (Eds), *E-Business. Digital Empowerment for an Intelligent Future* (pp. 23–34). Springer Nature Switzerland. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32302-7_3
- Zhang, X., & Zhong, Z.-J. (2020). Extending media system dependency theory to informational media use and environmentalism: A cross-national study. *Telematics and Informatics*, 50, 101378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101378>
- Zhang, Z. (2021). Infrastructuralization of Tik Tok: Transformation, power relationships, and platformization of video entertainment in China. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(2), 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720939452>