Media Platform is "Passive": the Study of the User's Re-domestication Behavior of the Algorithm

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Abstract: While digital platforms control user behavior through algorithms, users are also using algorithms to achieve their own goals. Based on the domestication theory, this paper explores the mechanism of algorithmic behavior when users use social platforms through in-depth interviews. This paper finds that under the influence of platform content, privacy management, platform functions, and personal emotions, users will adopt the re-domestication strategy of transfer, resistance, and reconstruction. This study extends the explanatory power of domestication theory to social platforms and also provides new thinking on the relationship between humans and technology.

Keywords: Platform; Re-domestication; Algorithm recommendation

1. Introduction

In the era of intelligent communication, social platforms such as Douyin, Toutiao, and Xiaohongshu use their algorithm recommendation technology to create a personalized information environment that belongs only to specific users. But at the same time, algorithmic recommendations have also confused users to a certain extent. More and more people question that the push of social platforms not only satisfies users' personal feelings but also brings problems such as "information cocoon" and privacy invasion. The phenomenon of "algorithm anxiety" caused by social platforms and the algorithmic recommendation technology behind them has also attracted widespread attention from the academic community.

It is worth mentioning that current users will choose to flee the current social platform due to concerns about issues such as privacy infringement by algorithms. In the face of the "anti-domestication" of users by algorithm technology, the domestication of current users is far from enough. Therefore, how users can further re-domesticate the technology has become a question worth exploring.

Based on the above social phenomena, this paper explains how users should give full play to their subjective initiative to re-domesticate algorithm technology in the face of the anti-domestication of algorithm

technology. Specifically, this paper examines the reasons for users to re-domesticate social platforms and what strategies are used in the process.

2. Related concepts and their literature review

Domestication refers to how individuals tame wild animals so that they can be productive for humans [1]. Silverstone divides the domestication of people by information technology in family life into four stages: possession, objectification, integration, and transformation [2]. Since then, the theory of domestication has been applied to study the impact of various digital media on people's daily lives and perceptions [3]. Wang researched IM instant messaging software and found that users will gain control of the platform by hanging up and other methods [4].

In addition to focusing on the domestication of technology by humans, scholars have also paid attention to the process of anti-domestication of humans by technology. Anti-domestication is a kind of alienation of the relationship between people and the media, which mainly refers to the fact that in the process of the development and use of the media, people's consciousness and behavior will also be imperceptibly affected by the media, which will produce disorders such as desubjectivization and behavioral alienation [5]. This process is the process of reverse acclimation of the medium. Anti-domestication believes that the medium has humanoid characteristics, and in the process of human domestication of the medium, it will also reverse domestication and reverse manipulation of human life.

At present, more and more scholars have paid attention to the process of user re-domestication. Jiang and other scholars used in-depth interviews to investigate the four stages of the practice of re-domestication of Douyin users, and scholars referred to Roger Silverstone's domestication theory and proposed that Douyin users can achieve re-domestication of the platform through four steps: re-appropriation, re-objectification, re-integration, and transformation [6].

In the era of intelligence, social platforms rely on algorithms to accurately and personalize users, and the visibility of content largely depends on the logic of algorithms. This led to the concept of algorithmic visibility, which Bucher argued was a threat to communicators in the network [7]. However, in the process of this research, most scholars do not pay attention to the subjectivity of users and ignore the possibility that users also use the algorithm recommendation mechanism when using the platform to publish content, which is a certain deficiency in the current research.

Through the literature review, this study summarized the limitations of the current research on domestication theory. First of all, theoretical studies in the past often regarded the domestication process as a static and unchanging process. The domestication process should be a dynamic and continuous process, and there is a process of re-domestication in this process. Secondly, in the theory of domestication, the user is considered to be a person with subjective initiative. In previous studies, most of the discussions focused on the relationship between algorithms, platforms, and users, without emphasizing too much the subjective initiative of users. Finally, the current domestic scholars have a pessimistic attitude toward the visibility of algorithms. Therefore, it is the focus of this paper to investigate the subjective initiative of user groups in the process of domestication based on the domestication theory. This paper will use the in-depth interview method to select users from multiple social platforms for interviews to explore the reasons for users' re-domestication and action strategies.

3. Study design

This paper uses an in-depth interview method. That is, the interviewer designs the interview outline in advance and asks questions according to the outline, but during the interview, the questions will be flexibly adjusted according to the interviewee's answers, and the most real thoughts and feelings of each interviewee will be recorded to ensure the integrity and validity of the interview results.

In this study, a purposeful sampling method was used to selectively select those users who use platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, or Xiaohongshu, and have uninstalled the software after using it for some reason, and now have reused it. Through interviews with research subjects, it is determined that there are subjects with the same behavior around them and a snowball method is adopted to provide research subjects who also meet the requirements based on their interview results, and so on, and the interview sample is gradually expanded.

From October 2023 to November 2023, a total of 20 subjects were selected for interviews, and the interviewees were mainly aged 18 to 35. The interview format was mainly an online audio interview, and only one respondent was conducted in the form of online text. Before the interview, the specific content and purpose of the interview were not provided, but through questions and exchanges, the interviewees were allowed to give free rein to their use of each platform and to maintain the objectivity of the selected subjects. The interview time of each interviewee is controlled to about 1 hour, and the subsequent second interview is decided according to the actual situation of the interview to ensure that the information is saturated.

4. Study findings

4.1. The reason why users re-domesticate the algorithm
4.1.1. Burnout of platform content

Social media burnout refers to the emotional emotions such as tiredness, boredom, and lack of interest that occur after social media users experience information, technology, and communication overload in the process of using the platform. After interviews, it can be seen that users' social media burnout on social platforms is more of an emotion.

After using various social platforms for a long time, users have a certain understanding of the algorithmic recommendation mechanism of the platform. Respondents said that when using each platform, they feel that the platform will make relevant content recommendations based on user's past searches and viewing history. Under such a recommendation mechanism, users are often overwhelmed by homogeneous information, resulting in the feeling of information overload. In addition, the algorithmic recommendation mechanism of the platform cannot fully grasp the interests of users. Respondent 8 said: "Sometimes I am curious to search for the entertainment gossip of celebrities, and the platform will keep pushing the content of various marketing accounts, but I am not interested in this content." Therefore, when there is a contradiction between the information pushed by the platform and the user's own needs, the user will have negative emotions such as impatience and feel burned out of the platform content.

4.1.2. Loss of trust in the platforms

In the face of various social platforms, the dominant position of users is being weakened, and users will feel that the platform violates their personal privacy, as it is difficult for individuals to successfully protect their privacy, which can be unsettling.

During the interview, most of the interviewees felt that social platforms were invading their privacy. This is reflected in the fact that in the process of using the Douyin platform, there will be an option to recommend "Contacts Friends", and if you talk about a certain topic with your friends in reality, or frequently search for

certain words on the platform, and then open social platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin, you will see similar content recommendations. In such a situation, most respondents will feel that the platform is monitoring them and even have a deep fear and powerlessness, that is, a privacy boundary shock.

When the strong and weak relationships of users converge on the platform, and the boundary between the two gradually becomes blurred, the pressure on users' boundary management will increase, and users will feel that privacy protection is no longer possible, and thus their trust in the platform will also decrease.

4.1.3. Restructuring of platform value

Silverstone believes that the subjective initiative of the individual can be better reflected in the transformation stage of domestication, and the individual's intention to use and the initial intention of the producer deviate, and the individual will give different functional characteristics and social meanings to the technical object. In the process of re-domestication, there are also similar stages of transformation.

Compared with the initial stage of using the platform, users are "enslaved" by the platform and browse the content pushed by the platform aimlessly. Later, as time goes on, users have a deeper understanding of the platform's mechanics and individual usage needs become better understood, at which point users will transform the platform into a tool that specializes in achieving a certain meaningful value.

Many respondents said that at the beginning, they only downloaded Xiaohongshu to follow the trend or for entertainment, but after continuing to use it in the later stage, what they saw on Xiaohongshu was more about sharing life experiences. Respondents said that Xiaohongshu is now open to learning more experience, and the Xiaohongshu platform has become a platform for them to learn about professional knowledge.

In addition to improving their professional knowledge, some respondents also used the platform to improve their language skills. Respondent 17 said: "When I open the Douyin app now, the main content I get is English speaking practice, English word memorization, or English listening practice."

In other words, the media platform that has gone through the reconversion stage not only has the value functions provided by the platform for users but also has the value characteristics assigned by individual users. Users will re-domesticate the platform for learning and other purposes.

4.2. Strategies for user re-domestication
4.2.1. Transfer: The material strategy of user re-domestication

In the process of re-domestication, users eliminate affordability by adding restrictions or subtracting conditions to the media platform, making the use of the platform less convenient.

The first transfer strategy is to reduce usage or uninstall and adopt a temporary strategy to not use social platforms. In the interview, many interviewees said that after feeling addicted to the Douyin and Xiaohongshu platforms, they would take the initiative to adjust the usage time of the platforms. In addition to not using social platforms for a longer period and less frequently, they will also adjust the time for browsing Douyin, and often only use these social platforms during fragmented periods such as between classes, queuing, and waiting for the bus. In addition, several respondents said that they would uninstall the software to gain a sense of security after feeling the platform's invasion of individual privacy and a sense of privacy shock.

The second transfer strategy is to find alternative software and adopt a platform transfer strategy. Many respondents said that they felt that the content of the Douyin platform was seriously homogeneous, which was not helpful for personal improvement, and that using the Douyin platform was easy to be addictive. In such a situation, users will choose to move to a short video platform similar to Douyin or choose the Xiaohongshu platform with multiple functions. At the same time, interviewer 8 also said: "If there is a platform that emphasizes the attribute of text similar to the function of Weibo, I am also very willing to transfer to the

platform."

In short, social platform avoidance or platform transfer is a material strategy often used in the process of user re-domestication. The implementation of this strategy can also prompt users to re-examine and reconsider the meaning and value of the platform to themselves.

4.2.2. Resistance: A text strategy for user re-domestication

In the process of re-domestication, the first reason for users' resistance is often because the platform pushes too much homogeneous content. In this scenario, users will resist algorithmic recommendations by actively searching or reviewing their watchlists. Many respondents said that after feeling that the platform is constantly pushing some homogeneous and uninteresting topics and content, they will take the initiative to search for content. Instead of browsing the recommended content pushed by the platform, they resist by browsing the content of the bloggers they follow.

The second reason for users to resist is to protect their privacy, and the resistance strategy is to create redundant information and confuse the algorithm. Respondent 13 said: "No matter what kind of content is recommended on the homepage of Xiaohongshu, I will click on it and take a look." This method can make it difficult for the algorithm to find out the real information of the user, and it can also play a role in resistance to a certain extent.

4.2.3. Reconstruction: Situational strategies for user re-domestication

In the process of user re-domestication, the situational strategy is embodied in the user breaking the original platform use situation and creating a new situation in practice.

In the process of reconstruction, platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin are not only platforms for users to share their lives and be entertained but are endowed with more value and meaning by users. Some respondents said that learning on platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu has become their daily habit. For them, these platforms are not just entertainment platforms, but also learning platforms. This also shows that their re-domestication of the algorithm has been successful.

The implementation and success of the reconstruction strategy also show that in the context of users being recommended by a large number of algorithms on platforms, spending a lot of time browsing, indulging in entertainment, and even becoming "algorithm prisoners", users can still give full play to their subjective initiative and realize the re-domestication of technology.

5. Conclusion

Based on the theory of domestication, this paper explores the formation mechanism of user re-domestication behavior in the era of social media. The study found that after users felt the de-domestication of the platform, they would re-domesticate the platform through the strategies of transfer, resistance, and reconstruction.

The theoretical contribution of this study is that, by focusing on the theory of re-domestication, the process of re-domestication is explained to be a dynamic and changing process, so that re-domestication can more completely reveal the subjective initiative of the user. On the other hand, by focusing on the re-domestication of algorithms by users on social platforms, the explanatory power of domestication theory on social platforms can be further improved. At the same time, this paper also provides new thinking about the relationship between people and technology to a certain extent. In the face of the powerful power of algorithm technology, people also play a large role, and people's subjective initiative also has a powerful force that cannot be ignored.

In addition to human beings themselves maintaining sufficient rationality, platforms should also shoulder

a sense of responsibility and adhere to the principles of "content is king" and "user first." In addition to chasing economic interests, major platforms also need to have a sense of social responsibility and use algorithm technology to recommend socially positive and inspiring videos. The platform needs to deeply realize that users are not tools at the mercy of others, but rational people with thoughts, and only by fully respecting users, understanding users, and providing valuable content required by users can long-term development be achieved.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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