

Engaging Users, Building Loyalty: Behavioral Insights from Bilibili

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ABSTRACT

In the era of digital interaction, video-sharing platforms such as Bilibili have become key ecosystems for marketing, entertainment, and user engagement. This paper explores how behavioral and psychological factors contribute to user engagement and the development of long-term loyalty on such platforms. Drawing from theories of customer engagement, social identity, and expectation-confirmation, the study identifies core factors including interactivity, trust, community belonging, and content quality that foster deeper user participation and sustained loyalty. By integrating insights from marketing and digital behavior literature, this paper proposes a framework that explains how engagement mediates the relationship between platform success factors and user loyalty. The study contributes to both academic theory and managerial practice by offering a foundation for future empirical testing and practical strategies for enhancing user retention in the rapidly evolving video-sharing landscape.

KEYWORDS: User Engagement, User Loyalty, Bilibili, Video-Sharing Platforms, Digital Behavior, Online Community

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital video-sharing platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and Bilibili have grown from niche entertainment services into full-fledged marketing and social ecosystems. These platforms enable not only content consumption but also active user participation, co-creation, and real-time interaction, transforming how brands, creators, and audiences engage. For instance, Bilibili's community-style model and unique features such as "bullet-screen" (danmu) comments have fostered a sense of belonging and high user stickiness among younger Chinese users (Wang, 2022; Tian, 2021).

Yet, despite the surge in user engagement on such platforms, sustaining user loyalty remains a pressing challenge in a hyper-competitive digital environment. High volumes of content and low switching costs mean that even highly engaged users may not translate into long-term loyal users (Yang & Lee, 2022). In the context of Bilibili, while the platform boasts strong engagement metrics, research indicates that user retention beyond the initial novelty remains uncertain (Sun, 2023).

Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on understanding how user engagement behaviours influence user loyalty within Bilibili's unique participatory culture. Specifically, the study explores how behavioural engagement such as commenting, sharing, interacting with content and affective engagement such as sense of belonging to the platform community serve as mechanisms that convert initial engagement into sustained loyalty. By examining these dynamics in the Bilibili environment, the paper aims to identify underlying success factors and develop a framework for transforming user engagement into lasting loyalty.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the behavioral mechanisms, psychological factors, and platform success drivers that transform user engagement into loyalty on digital video-sharing platforms. Specifically, it examines how various success factors such as content relevance, interactivity, trust, and perceived value facilitate engagement behaviors, which in turn foster long-term loyalty among users. This exploration is particularly significant in the context of Bilibili, where user participation, community culture, and platform design converge to create a dynamic environment for engagement and retention. Prior research highlights that engagement is a necessary precursor to loyalty, but the underlying platform-related and psychological drivers remain under-explored in the context of digital sharing platforms (Kulikovskaja et al., 2023; Giang et al., 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances knowledge on the user engagement–loyalty linkage by integrating insights from digital marketing, consumer behavior, and platform management literatures. It builds on recent developments in customer engagement theory (Kumar et al., 2025) and digital loyalty research (Pereira et al., 2025) to propose a framework tailored to platform environments. From a practical viewpoint, the findings offer actionable insights for digital marketers, content creators, and platform strategists seeking to design features and campaigns that convert engagement into sustained loyalty. In an era when user attention is fragmented and switching costs are low, understanding how to build a loyal user base through engagement behaviors is critical for platform success (Giang et al., 2024; Mulyono, 2025).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. User Engagement in Digital Platforms

User engagement in digital platforms has been widely conceptualised as a multifaceted construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. Cognitive engagement refers to the mental investment and effort that users expend in processing information, making sense of content, and actively participating in platform activities. Emotional engagement captures affective states such as interest, enjoyment, or attachment that users experience when interacting with the platform. Behavioural engagement denotes observable actions such as liking, commenting, sharing, and returning to the platform (Ma et al., 2022; Dubovi et al., 2021). These three dimensions underscore that engagement is more than mere usage frequency it reflects a deeper connection and value co-creation process between users and platforms (Brodie et al., 2011).

User motivations play a central role in driving engagement. Drawing on uses and gratifications theory (UGT), media users are seen as active participants who seek out content and platforms to satisfy psychological and social needs (Du, 2023). For instance, users may turn to video-sharing platforms for entertainment, social interaction,

information seeking or identity expression. Flow theory further complements this perspective by suggesting that users who experience deep immersion and enjoyment in digital content are more likely to sustain engagement over time (Qu et al., 2022). Together, these theoretical lenses point to why some users engage more substantively because their motivations are met, and the experience fosters a state of flow or optimal user experience.

Emerging empirical studies confirm the relevance of this multidimensional view of engagement in social media and streaming platforms. For example, research on online behavioural engagement found that symbolic actions such as commenting and sharing function as behavioural engagement and often stem from cognitive and emotional engagement in social media contexts (Dubovi et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in the context of video or short-form content platforms, the challenge remains in cultivating cognitive investment users' deep attention since platforms tend to emphasise quick consumption, making emotional and behavioural dimensions easier to activate (Ma et al., 2022). Thus, the existing literature suggests that an integrative approach to engagement is vital for understanding how digital platforms can move beyond transient interaction to sustained user loyalty.

B. User Loyalty in Digital Communities

In digital communities, user loyalty has been conceptualised in two complementary dimensions: attitudinal loyalty which refers to a user's psychological commitment, preference, and positive attitude toward a community or platform and behavioral loyalty the observable actions such as repeat visits, continuous use, and advocacy (Yang & Lee, 2022). For example, digital platform research demonstrates that attitudinal loyalty (e.g., strong preference) often precedes and drives behavioral loyalty (actual usage and advocacy behaviours) (Yang & Lee, 2022). Understanding this distinction is critical for online communities where high engagement does not always translate into loyal behaviour.

The determinants of user loyalty in online communities are multifaceted. Satisfaction (users' positive evaluation of their experience) is a foundational driver; satisfied community members are more likely to develop loyalty (Chen & Lin, 2023). Trust both in the community platform and among community members further strengthens loyalty by reducing perceived risk and enhancing commitment (Amoah, 2022). Identification, or a user's sense of belonging and shared identity with the community, fosters emotional connection and retention (Al-Khasawneh et al., 2023). Additionally, engagement behaviour involving cognitive, emotional and behavioural interactions like commenting, sharing or creating content acts as a key mediator between the above determinants and loyalty outcomes (Lim, 2022). Research indicates that deeper engagement (rather than mere usage) is more strongly associated with loyalty (Lim, 2022).

Emotional bonding and habit formation play a critical role in the conversion of engagement into loyalty. Emotional bonding refers to the affective attachment a user develops toward a community, which can drive both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty through mechanisms such as intrinsic motivation and identity (Cheng, 2020). Habit formation occurs when user actions become automated and routine for example, regularly engaging with a platform without conscious decision which then supports ongoing behavioural loyalty. Together, emotional bonding and habitual engagement help explain why some digital community users remain loyal over time even

in highly competitive or novel environments. The synergy of commitment, emotion and habit thus ensures that user engagement leads not only to temporary activity but to sustained loyalty.

C. The Link between Engagement and Loyalty

User engagement has increasingly been recognised as a crucial mediator linking platform experiences and long-term user loyalty in digital ecosystems. Recent research indicates that engagement behaviours such as contributing content, interacting with other users, and forming emotional connections with a platform serve as the mechanism through which positive experiences are converted into loyalty outcomes (Ebrahimi, 2023). Engagement thus bridges the gap between antecedent success-factors and loyalty by facilitating deeper cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement (Winell, 2023; Xiao, 2025). In the context of Bilibili, the platform's distinct subculture featuring bullet-screen comments (*danmu*), fan-co-creation, and community identity gives rise to strong sense of belonging and participatory fandom factors that intensify engagement and in turn reinforce loyalty (Wang, 2022; Tian, 2023). For example, Bilibili's *danmu* comment system enables real-time shared viewing and peer interaction, fostering immersion and group identification collective experiences that help turn active participation into committed loyalty (Wang, 2022). Given this, user engagement is not merely a behaviour but a dynamic process influencing how individuals internalise platform identity and manifest loyalty in interactive video communities.

D. Critical Success Factors in Bilibili's User Ecosystem

Bilibili's success as one of China's most dynamic video-sharing platforms lies in its ability to integrate interactivity, trust, content relevance, community governance, and social identity into a cohesive digital ecosystem. These elements form the critical success factors (CSFs) that shape how users engage, co-create value, and ultimately develop loyalty toward the platform. Unlike traditional social media, Bilibili encourages participatory behaviors such as *danmu* (real-time bullet comments) and fan co-creation, which deepen user involvement and transform consumption into collaboration. Hawlitschek (2024) emphasizes that such co-creation mechanisms are essential in digital platform ecosystems because they enable users to transition from passive content consumers to active value contributors. Similarly, Wang et al. (2024) found that higher interactivity levels significantly enhance user value co-creation and perceived community vitality, reinforcing engagement and long-term loyalty within online innovation platforms.

Trust, content relevance, and effective moderation constitute another layer of success in Bilibili's ecosystem. Trust influences how users perceive the credibility and fairness of the platform, especially regarding data handling, community norms, and creator compensation. Steffen (2023) argues that transparent governance structures are foundational for sustainable platform growth, as they foster user confidence in institutional integrity. On Bilibili, trust is further strengthened through community-driven moderation and algorithmic personalization that deliver relevant content while curbing misinformation and toxic behavior. Content relevance, when aligned with user interests, creates a sense of satisfaction and emotional attachment that promotes repeat engagement (Öztürk, 2024). The platform's balance between algorithmic curation and community input allows users to feel both guided and empowered, cultivating a participatory culture that reinforces belonging.

Equally important are the social and psychological mechanisms including social influence, gamification, and identity signaling that drive user commitment. Gamified elements such as badges, ranking levels, and participation scores satisfy users' intrinsic motivations for achievement, recognition, and enjoyment. Li (2025) found that such gamification features substantially enhance engagement and foster brand or platform loyalty by evoking positive affect and a sense of accomplishment. Habachi (2024) similarly noted that gamified interactions facilitate social connections and strengthen behavioral loyalty by creating a community of shared identity. On Bilibili, these mechanisms extend beyond simple play: users engage in *identity signaling* by expressing subcultural belonging through their content choices, fan interactions, and symbolic markers such as profile icons and fandom tags. This identity expression, amplified by social influence from peers and follower networks, transforms Bilibili into a hybrid space where engagement and loyalty are mutually reinforcing outcomes.

Bilibili's ecosystem thrives because it integrates structural (interactivity and co-creation tools), relational (trust and relevance), and psychological (social influence and identity signaling) success factors. Together, these dimensions not only stimulate user engagement but also sustain loyalty, demonstrating that the platform's success stems from its ability to align technological design with human motivation and cultural participation.

III. METHODOLOGY

E. Theoretical Foundations

The concept of user engagement has gained significant attention in marketing and digital-platform research, particularly under the umbrella of Customer Engagement Theory. For example, Hollebeek, Sharma, Pandey, Sanjal, and Clark (2021) indicate that customer engagement reflects a multi-dimensional state of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural investment in platform interactions. This idea builds on earlier work by Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, and Ilic (2011), which argued that customer engagement not only involves interactions but also value co-creation, meaning that users become active participants in their engagement experience and thereby contribute to the platform's value generation. In the context of a video-sharing platform, this implies that user engagement behaviours such as content contribution, commenting, sharing, and interaction constitute more than passive viewing; they form part of the value co-creation process and set the stage for deeper loyalty.

Complementing the notion of engagement is Social Identity Theory, which posits that individuals define part of their self-concept by membership in social groups and communities. In online brand or platform communities, when users identify with the community (or platform) and perceive themselves as part of a shared in-group, this can enhance loyalty through a sense of belonging, common identity, and shared values (He & Li, 2012; Zhang & Li, 2022). Online platforms like Bilibili with fandom cultures, shared content sub-cultures, and interactive communities are fertile grounds for social identity processes. Users who feel part of that culture are more likely to engage and, over time, become loyal advocates.

Another relevant theoretical basis is Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT), originally developed in consumer behaviour and then adapted in information systems (IS) continuity research. The adaptation by Bhattacharjee (2001) introduced the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM) which suggests that users form initial expectations of a system or platform, evaluate whether those expectations are confirmed through actual

use, and that confirmation (or disconfirmation) influences satisfaction, which in turn drives continuance intention or loyalty. In the video-sharing platform milieu, this implies that when users' expectations of interactivity, content relevance, or community participation are met or exceeded, this confirmation contributes to user satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, Flow Theory, first conceptualised by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), describes a psychological state of deep involvement or immersion in an activity where challenge and skill are balanced, attention is focused, time seems to pass quickly, and the experience is intrinsically rewarding. Recent reviews (Peifer et al., 2022) reaffirm that flow experiences are strongly linked with sustained engagement and repeat participation in digital environments. For a platform like Bilibili, features that support immersive content, interactive feedback loops, and gamified participation may help trigger flow states, thereby enhancing user engagement and reinforcing loyalty.

Together, these theories form a cohesive foundation for exploring how critical success factors within marketing advertisement-sharing platforms can foster engagement and loyalty. Customer Engagement Theory explains *how* users invest cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally; Social Identity Theory elucidates *why* community membership fosters loyalty; Expectation-Confirmation Theory clarifies *when* satisfaction and loyalty emerge through expectation alignment; and Flow Theory addresses *how deeply* users can engage and repeat their participation. By integrating these theoretical lenses, the paper is well positioned to build a model that links platform success mechanisms, user engagement behaviours, and loyalty outcomes.

F. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework in this study illustrates the relationships among platform success factors, user engagement behavior, and user loyalty within digital video-sharing platforms such as Bilibili. The model posits that platform success factors including trust, interactivity, and personalization serve as key antecedents that drive user engagement. In turn, user engagement behavior acts as a mediating mechanism that transforms positive platform experiences into sustained user loyalty. This framework aligns with prior research emphasizing that well-designed and interactive platforms enhance user engagement, which subsequently contributes to loyalty formation (Islam et al., 2022; Chen & Lin, 2023).

Platform success factors refer to the technological, social, and experiential attributes that determine how effectively a platform satisfies user expectations and encourages participation. Among these, trust is essential for reducing perceived risk and fostering long-term relationships between users and digital platforms (Gefen et al., 2022). Interactivity enhances the sense of control and connectedness, increasing users' cognitive and emotional involvement with content (Saini & Singh, 2022). Personalization, meanwhile, strengthens user satisfaction by tailoring experiences to individual preferences, thereby promoting continued use (Lim et al., 2021). Together, these factors create a value-rich environment that stimulates meaningful engagement with platform content and community features.

User engagement behavior is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of user involvement (Hollebeek et al., 2022). Cognitive engagement reflects

mental attention and absorption, emotional engagement denotes affective attachment, and behavioral engagement captures participation activities such as commenting, sharing, or co-creating content. Prior studies show that engagement not only influences users' platform satisfaction but also mediates the relationship between experience and loyalty (Dwivedi et al., 2021). On platforms like Bilibili, interactive participation and community identification amplify engagement intensity, leading to sustained behavioral loyalty.

Finally, user loyalty represents users' long-term commitment to a platform, manifested through repeated usage, positive word-of-mouth, and resistance to switching. The linkage between engagement and loyalty has been well-established in digital marketing literature, where engagement serves as a critical bridge between initial experience and enduring commitment (Kaur et al., 2021). When users experience trust, interactivity, and personalized content, they are more likely to engage deeply with the platform; this engagement, in turn, strengthens loyalty by fostering satisfaction and emotional attachment (Islam et al., 2022).

Based on these relationships, the proposed model can be represented as:

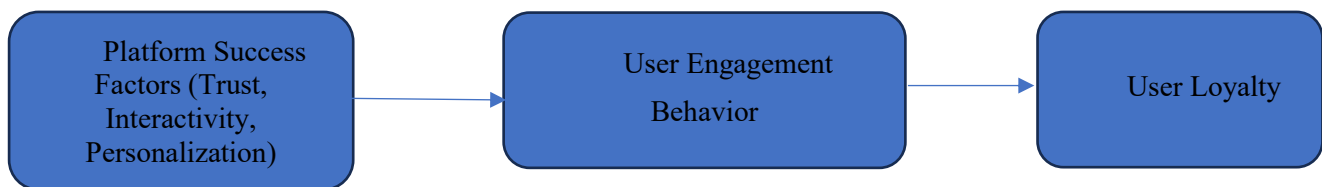


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

This framework highlights engagement as a mediating variable, suggesting that enhancing platform features alone is insufficient without promoting meaningful engagement. It contributes to theory by integrating marketing, information systems, and consumer psychology perspectives, and to practice by offering a guide for managers and content developers to design strategies that enhance user retention and loyalty in competitive digital ecosystems such as Bilibili.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

G. Theoretical Implications

The present study advances the literature on user engagement and loyalty by extending these constructs into the specific context of Chinese digital platforms, thereby offering novel theoretical contributions. Past research has typically explored engagement–loyalty linkages in Western contexts; by focusing on a culturally distinct environment, this paper demonstrates how behavioural theories such as social identity theory and expectation–confirmation theory apply within a Chinese user base (Chen, Guo, Xiong, & Ye, 2023). This cultural extension not only broadens the scope of engagement–loyalty scholarship but underscores the necessity of contextualising behavioural models to reflect region-specific digital platform dynamics.

Moreover, by bridging the disciplines of marketing and information systems, this work integrates insights on platform design, interactivity, and user behaviour areas historically siloed across fields. The paper leverages marketing notions of customer engagement and loyalty alongside information systems concepts of human-technology interaction, thus offering an interdisciplinary framework for understanding how digital platform capabilities influence behavioural outcomes (Kulikovskaja, 2023). This synthesis enables a richer theoretical lens for future research into how success factors embedded in platform architecture translate into sustained user engagement and loyalty.

H. Managerial Implications

For platform managers at Bilibili, a key strategic insight is the necessity of designing features that actively promote user engagement rather than simply content consumption. Empirical research indicates that interactive and personalized experiences significantly boost user involvement on digital platforms, which in turn enhances loyalty outcomes (Roy, 2023). Thus, Bilibili managers should prioritize functionalities such as real-time community interaction (e.g., live comments or “danmu”), gamified rewards, and layered personalization algorithms to deepen the users’ behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. These design decisions should also embed transparency and ease-of-use to support trust and perceived value, foundations for long-term engagement and loyalty (Pereira et al., 2025).

For advertisers operating on Bilibili, the implications point to crafting emotionally resonant and socially embedded campaign experiences. Traditional banner-advertising methods are increasingly insufficient; instead, research shows that interactive advertising campaigns which integrate storytelling, community co-creation, and user-generated responses yield higher loyalty and advocacy (Yousaf et al., 2023; Peña-García et al., 2025). Advertisers should therefore leverage Bilibili’s unique cultural ecosystem by designing campaigns that invite user participation, peer sharing, and micro-influencer collaborations to build emotional loyalty, not just transactional retention.

For content creators on Bilibili, sustaining audience communities demands more than frequent uploads: the most resilient creators foster ownership and co-creation among their followers. Research into digital platform engagement underlines that users who feel part of a community, contribute content, or influence platform mechanics develop stronger affective bonds and loyalty (Bui, 2023). Hence, creators should adopt strategies such as audience challenge-driven content, collaborative live sessions, and feedback-integration to maintain tight-knit follower communities. By doing so, they not only boost their own platform presence but contribute to the ecosystem’s overall engagement–loyalty cycle.

I. Challenges and Future Research Directions

A key challenge facing marketing advertisement-sharing platforms is data privacy and advertisement fatigue. As platforms intensify targeted advertising, users increasingly report privacy concerns, emotional exhaustion, and disengagement. For instance, Bright and colleagues (2022) found that privacy fatigue arises when users perceive over-monitoring and limited control over their personal data, which leads to reduced engagement and trust in digital environments. Additionally, Chebbi’s (2025) study of ad clutter underscores how excessive and

intrusive advertising contributes to user fatigue and advertising avoidance behaviors. Together, these phenomena pose serious obstacles for platform managers seeking sustained user engagement and loyalty. Addressing them requires platforms to balance personalization with transparency and consent, and to mitigate fatigue through content moderation and ad frequency management.

Another critical area is cultural variability in engagement behavior. Digital platforms operate across diverse markets, but little is known about how cultural differences (e.g., individualism vs collectivism, power distance) alter engagement patterns. Han (2024) explored national culture's impact on social media usage, finding significant variance in motivations and interaction behaviour across countries. Meanwhile, Alwuqaysi et al. (2024) argue that single-platform studies obscure deeper cultural nuances and call for more comparative work. For advertisement sharing platforms like yours, this implies that user engagement and loyalty models developed in one cultural context may not generalize to another without adaptation.

A further gap is the need for cross-platform comparison (e.g., comparing TikTok and Bilibili). Existing research often focuses on single platforms, limiting our understanding of how platform architecture, community norms, and algorithmic governance shape user behavior differently. For example, the study by Matassi (2021) emphasizes that comparative multi-platform research enhances the heuristic power of social media scholarship. As platforms differ in functionalities and user bases, examining multiple platforms in parallel can help isolate platform-specific versus general phenomena regarding engagement and loyalty.

Finally, there is a call for empirical validation of the conceptual framework put forth in this paper. While this study offers a theoretical model linking critical success factors, engagement behavior, and user loyalty, only empirical research can confirm and refine these relationships. Future research should adopt quantitative or mixed-method designs preferably longitudinal or cross-cultural to test the proposed linkages in real-world settings, such as Bilibili, TikTok, or other video sharing platforms across different markets. This will not only enhance theoretical robustness but also offer practical insights tailored to specific platform contexts and cultural environments

J. Conclusion

This paper set out to explore how user engagement behavior drives user loyalty within digital video-sharing platforms, using Bilibili as a focal context. The purpose was to synthesize theoretical and empirical insights from marketing, information systems, and consumer behavior research to understand how critical success factors such as content quality, interactivity, trust, and community participation contribute to long-term user retention. As digital platforms increasingly rely on user participation and co-creation, understanding the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that transform engagement into loyalty is essential for sustaining growth and competitiveness (Islam et al., 2022; Kaur & Paruthi, 2023).

The key argument proposed in this paper is that user engagement acts as the primary bridge between platform experience and loyalty outcomes. Engagement comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components strengthens users' attachment to the platform, encouraging repetitive interaction and sustained membership.

Prior studies confirm that when users experience meaningful interactions, perceive social belonging, and trust the platform environment, they are more likely to develop loyalty (Chen & Lin, 2023; Liu & Wang, 2024). In Bilibili's case, features such as danmu (real-time comments), user-generated content, and participatory fandom cultures enhance interactivity and social connectedness, which, in turn, nurture loyalty behaviors including advocacy and continued usage.

From a theoretical standpoint, this paper contributes to the literature by integrating Customer Engagement Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Expectation-Confirmation Theory to explain the engagement-loyalty link in digital communities. The synthesis advances understanding of user behavior by positioning engagement not merely as a short-term reaction but as a mediating construct that transforms interactive experiences into lasting relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2021). Practically, the discussion offers valuable implications for platform managers and marketers: designing culturally resonant, interactive, and trust-based user experiences can strengthen emotional bonds and long-term loyalty.

Finally, as a conceptual contribution, the proposed framework linking platform success factors → user engagement → user loyalty provides a foundation for future empirical testing. Researchers are encouraged to validate the relationships through longitudinal or cross-platform studies comparing, for instance, engagement patterns between Bilibili, TikTok, and YouTube to generalize findings across digital ecosystems. Such empirical validation would not only substantiate the theoretical propositions but also inform the development of more effective engagement and loyalty strategies in rapidly evolving digital markets (Lim et al., 2020; Rockstuhl & Van Dyne, 2023).

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