Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Financial Technology and Business Analysis
DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

Architectures of Persuasion: Framing Bias, Decision-Making and Platform Governance in China's Digital Entertainment Economy

Muyao Zhang

School of Social and Political Science, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
s2668709@ed.ac.uk

Abstract. In the fast-growing digital entertainment industry, framing bias has become a widespread option design tool that can influence decisions made by users, sometimes at the cost of users' autonomy. Based on the empirical case of iQiyi's membership and PVOD (premium video-on-demand) services, this paper investigates the two-sided effects of information presentation: it can lower the decision costs, but also poses structural decision risks. The research is based on a theory of "information presentation- cognitive emotional processing-behavioural outcomes," and it is through these three different frames—attribute, default, scarcity and social proof—that it dissects how user conversion happens. This paper proposes practical solutions to address the associated damages, such as compulsory transparency labelling, dynamic cooling-off regulations, and enhanced public digital literacy. The results highlight the need to rethink platform governance in order to ensure consumer autonomy is maintained while also preserving the revenue streams that drive content production. This study applies the affect-heuristic and choice-architecture theories to China's entertainment platform context and provides practical suggestions for regulators, platform operators, and consumer advocates aiming to promote a sustainable and well-regulated digital entertainment economy.

Keywords: Framing Bias, Choice Architecture, Consumer Autonomy, Dark Patterns, Digital Entertainment Platforms

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background: institutional context and market landscape

In the context of the global transition to a digital economy, China's cultural and entertainment, as well as telecom and IT sectors, have maintained sustained growth. In recent years, China's cultural and economic development has reached new heights. The entertainment business has been growing steadily. Online video constitutes a major segment of online cultural entertainment: 96.6% of China's internet users, totalling 1.07 billion people, access online video services [1]. Within this massive market, users are extremely sensitive to information presentation when they click, make payments and subscribe. Framing bias describes the phenomenon where different presentations of

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

identical information led individuals to form divergent risk preferences and make contrasting choices. It illustrates how divergent risk perceptions and decisions concerning the approval of genetically engineered rice are shaped by different ways of presenting identical information. Individuals make choices aligned with their preferences and may also arrive at contrasting decisions. Socio-cultural and entertainment platforms extensively leverage this bias. For instance, video platforms present identical statistics in alternative forms: "90% of users choose to renew their subscriptions" and "10% of users cancel subscriptions". The first is based on social proof and designed to convert, and the latter on loss aversion and to get the user to take action. It challenges them to take action. The words "Sold out" or "Only 2 tickets left" are common in concert ticket sales to invoke scarcity framing that can encourage impulsive purchases.

China Youth Daily Social Survey Centre revealed that numerous consumers end up regretting their purchases after paying [2]. Framing strategies such as pre-checked options and pop-up windows have an impact on their purchasing decisions on online cultural entertainment platforms. This framing effect negatively affects users' finances, such as when users are tempted to make hasty purchases of virtual gifts. In addition to the individual losses, the pay-on-demand streaming may also lead to irrational herd behaviour at the society level and help to create filter bubbles. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse how the presentation of information influences the behaviour of users. The framing effect in the cultural/entertainment domain has important implications for individual choices, both in commercial and in social value. Through this research, it is possible to develop a platform interface design with more refinement and ethical aspects, to protect the rights of consumers, and to ensure the cultural and entertainment market develops in a healthy manner.

1.2. Literature review: theoretical foundations and research gap

There is a strong body of scholarship available on which to build a theoretical base for bias and decision-making. Levin et al.recognise three different types of which attribute framing is most common in marketing: risky-choice, attribute, and goal framing; it is found that valenced descriptions produced substantial changes in consumer evaluations [3]. In Digital Entertainment, Cialdini and Goldstein's social proof theory explains "popularity framing", where labels like "Most Popular" serve as outside triggers to herd mentality [4]. In addition, the elements on the interface, such as progress bars and likes, form visual framing, and this has been empirically shown to influence engagement time and willingness to interact with [5]. Nelson believes that experiential products are more easily manipulated than search-based physical products. Literature on the subject is still largely text-focused, which means that the importance of multimodal elements (bullet comments, thumbnails, algorithmic tags) in jointly forming framing bias largely remains unaddressed. Also, frames are generally assumed to be static; real-time, cumulative effects in a dynamic interface are not considered. There is also a dearth of empirical studies that are rooted in China's entertainment market, on issues such as strategic choice architecture, ethical limits, and debiasing measures, such as transparency mandates or cooling-off periods. This theoretical abstraction is not very useful for platform governance and consumer protection.

Taking iQiyi's membership and premium on-demand service as an example, this study has established a theoretical model on information presentation and cognitive-emotional processing, decision bias and behaviour. It outlines the platform's existing presentation logic, how it helps to lower the cost of decision-making and motivate revenue, as well as its pathological mechanisms (default, scarcity and social proof framing). Finally, the study suggests strategies for optimising the platform and for sustainable platform governance.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

1.3. Research framework

Taking the example of iQiyi's membership subscriptions and premium on-demand content, this study constructs a theoretical model based on the processes of information presentation, cognitive processing and emotional responses, decision bias, and behavioural outcomes. It first explores relevant theories and conceptualises operational definitions for key constructs. It then plots out the current state and characteristics of information presentation used by the platform. The positive effects (e.g., savings in decision-making costs, an increase in revenues) are then discussed along with three key problematic mechanisms, namely default framing, scarcity framing, and social proof framing, that lead to irrational subscriptions, impulsive consumption, and herd decisions, respectively. Finally, this paper proposes concrete optimising measures such as the required use of transparency labels for persuasive frames, the introduction of a dynamic cooling-off period and educational programmes to enhance digital literacy. These measures are aimed at promoting the healthy and sustainable development of cultural and entertainment platforms.

2. Case study: iQiyi's monetisation architecture

The Chinese streaming service, iQiyi, is a dominant service in the region, which generated RMB 5.012 billion in membership revenue in the third quarter of 2023, representing 62.5% of total quarterly revenue [6]. The platform uses framing biases in a systematic way to convert users and generate premium purchases [3]. As shown in Table 1, loss-framed standard pricing is part of the marketing strategy of iQiyi for flagship dramas such as The Knockout, which can elicit loss aversion and increase conversion. Digital dark nudging (default framing) encourages auto-renewal, whereas digital sludging (making the cancelling options opaque) discourages them. The coupled design takes advantage of the status quo bias and imposes a lack of users' autonomy, leading to unexpected recurring financial deductions [7-9]. Moreover, social proof and scarcity details on playback interfaces boost decision biases [4]. The case provides valuable empirical information about how information presentation is created in online entertainment.

Table 1. Operational typology of framing mechanisms on iQiyi

Framing Type	Interface Feature	Behavioural Mechanism
Attribute Framing	Juxtaposing discounted vs standard pricing (e.g., ¥3/episode vs ¥6/episode)	Activates loss aversion to increase payment conversion
Default Framing	Pre-selected auto-renewal; low-visibility cancellation text	Exploits status quo bias, leading to unintended recurring charges
Social & Scarcity Framing	"XX people watching" labels; "Limited spots" alerts	Triggers herding tendencies and impulsive consumption

3. Dual mechanisms: functional utility and structural risks

3.1. Functional utility: enhancing efficiency and market viability

3.1.1. Cognitive heuristics and information cost reduction

In highly information-rich entertainment contexts, framing techniques can be used to enable efficient filtering of information [3]. For instance, sites use terms like "This Week's Top Rated List" and "Editor's Picks". These tools filter vast amounts of information and deliver trustworthy

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

suggestions, and save search times for users [3]. These selected displays thus serve as "mental short-cuts" that save a lot of information processing.

This kind of presentation in a framed form is a cognitive heuristic. If users do not have the knowledge to evaluate the quality of the content themselves, they would be able to use this information, which the platforms simplify, to choose accordingly, making the entertainment experience as a whole smoother [7]. The work in Decision Making under Choice Overload also shows that cues such as rankings and charts have a positive effect of reducing cognitive efforts caused by too many alternatives and facilitate audiences to distinguish between the available offers [10].

3.1.2. Revenue optimisation and ecosystem sustainability

Framing bias can greatly improve platforms' payment conversion rate, securing stable income for content creators. By using frames such as "limited-time discounts" and "member-only access", iQiyi has been able to successfully transform free users into paying subscribers. Subscription funds are put back into the original production of the drama and variety, enabling great productions like The Bad Kids and The Long Night to occur. The business model is viable, and it contributes to the cultural and entertainment market, increasing the range of cultural products that can be presented to the users. This establishes a positive feedback cycle, with the platform's profitability contributing to the quality of the content, which then leads to increased user satisfaction and retention.

3.1.3. Social proof and the construction of virtual communities

As mentioned in the section above, social proof framing - say, "XX people have purchased" or "your friends are watching" - creates a virtual community on entertainment sites. Users who are able to see other users' options feel a sense of belonging and are motivated to participate in the existing conversation, thereby creating interactive behaviours such as comments and bullet-screen messages. These social drills, as a result of framing, help to cement users to the system. Cultural consumption is thereby transformed from a one-way consumption of content to a social experience, and thus, the lifetime value of users is raised.

3.2. Structural deficits: consumer vulnerability and market distortion

3.2.1. Default framing and the erosion of consumer autonomy

Despite being one of the most common strategies employed by culture and entertainment industries, default-option framing is a serious violation of consumers' right to know. Platforms like iQiyi have a button to cancel the service, but it is difficult to find, and on the platform's membership subscription page, the option to cancel is automatically checked. This design takes advantage of the users' status quo bias, that people stick to pre-set options. This is an example of a classic "dark pattern" that undermines consumer autonomy by hiding important information and shaping choice architecture. This means many users pay repeat charges without knowing the conditions of subscription [11].

China's Beijing Consumers Association (BCA) released a survey in 2024 that reveals 86.53% of respondents have faced pre-ticked auto-renewal boxes while signing up for apps. Some users were not aware of the continuous charges, and some users only found out about these deductions months later [12]. These are examples of dark patterns. Platforms take away consumers' freedom of choice by tilting the presentation of information on interfaces, which is in conflict with the requirements of

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

the E-Commerce Law that operators must give clear notice and affirm consumers' rights to make independent decisions.

3.2.2. Scarcity cues, loss aversion and post-purchase dissonance

Limited-time and limited-quantity advertisements are commonplace in entertainment consumption to help build a sense of urgency. For example, concert livestreams and fan meetups can have virtual tickets with countdown timers and text that says "Only X seats left". Even if there are enough items in stock, platforms can make use of dynamically reduced numbers to create a sense of scarcity [13]. Such framing elicits loss aversion, which nudges a user to make irrational purchasing decisions in a short period of time [7].

When it comes to purchasing performance tickets online, empirical studies have shown that scarcity marketing creates fear of missing out (FOMO). It leads some consumers to purchase tickets without serious consideration for their ability to attend the event. Many participants admitted that they would never watch the show after paying, causing them to feel some remorse afterwards. These binges also inspire the use of automated ticket-buying scripts. It is with these tools that scalpers are able to purchase large quantities of tickets and resell them at a higher price on other ticket resale platforms, giving rise to the ticket price hike and breaking the order of the entertainment ticketing market [14].

3.2.3. Social proof, herd behaviour and algorithmic echo chambers

Social proof framing is a technique that can influence individual decisions by showing other people's behavioural choices. In the entertainment fields, in conjunction with algorithmic recommendation systems, this framing can lead to herd behaviour, group polarisation and eventually can sink users into filter bubbles. If platforms are displaying messages such as "Everyone is watching", individuals will follow the lead of others and act against their own true desires. This is further strengthened by algorithmic suggestions that repeatedly show users trending, homogeneous content and limit them to only a small subset of content.

This is supported by a systematic review of 30 peer-reviewed studies, which reveals that algorithmic systems structurally amplify ideological homogeneity, reinforce selective exposure and limit viewpoint diversity [15]. For instance, on Douyin, trending mechanisms enable a single song or internet meme to go viral in a short amount of time. The same type of content is being used again and again, causing user fatigue and a diminished ability to create new content. Even worse, using a social proof framing effect is a tactic that can be used to sway public opinion by creating fake social proof, which will lead people to pay for content that isn't very impressive. This kind of framing bias is bad for user experience and poses a threat to the health of the online information ecosystem.

4. Intervention strategies

4.1. Mandatory transparency labelling and regulatory compliance for interface design

This is not done through default settings, and compliance requirements for the design of platform interfaces need to be clear and unambiguous, and implemented by regulators. To begin with, platforms should be required to place transparency labels right next to auto renewal options. These labels (in a highly visible font) will include the words "you may cancel your subscription at any time", and spell out where the cancellation page is to provide full and balanced information.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

Further, there is a need for government authorities to impose provisions to ban dark patterns. Platforms should no longer be able to "faint text," or obscure cancel options in a menu; those types of deceptive practices should be regulated as such. Platforms should adopt an "equal access principle" – the colour intensities and position on the screen and in visual prominence of the buttons for subscription and cancellation should be comparable. This way, platforms can't manipulate the user's actions with misleading cues. These technical measures help curb manipulative uses of status quo bias and meaningfully protect consumers' rights to make free choices and conduct fair transactions [11].

4.2. Dynamic cooling-off mechanisms and anti-bot technical defences

In times of scarcity, these prompts can cause many to act out and purchase tickets, and they could be one of the culprits behind tickets being resold by ticket scalpers. To reduce these damages, platforms should have a dynamic cooling-off system. For high-priced livestream event tickets and flash sale membership offers, there should be a required 15–second to 30–second reading window on payment pages. They give the user that small delay, which enables them to quell their loss aversion impulses and lowers the risk of impulse buying [7].

In parallel with this, there must be greater risk control systems in place by the platform technical teams. Captcha tools or behaviour detection can be used to prevent automated purchasing bots and make sure that the "limited in supply" designation is a true one, and not simply artificially induced to give the perception of urgency. Platforms should also include a straightforward "right to regret" provision to ensure that if there was no good reason to keep the item, but the user had problems with it, it can be returned for a short-term refund. This might reduce the negative consequences of post-purchase dissonance, constrain predatory speculation of the secondary markets and be assisted by monitoring for anomalies in transactions [14].

4.3. Reframing social-proof displays and fostering digital literacy

Filter bubbles and herd-driven decisions, in part, happen because of the way that platforms display social proof information. To tackle these issues, platforms ought to revise the way they surface social validation cues. Services should look beyond metrics like "XX users are watching right now" and use multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks to be persuasive. Neutral rating distributions can be used to combat group polarisation when displaying both sides of the issue.

Recommendation algorithms should be more "exploratory and exploitative". Systems should be encouraged to add a certain percentage of different content, away from the popular, high-trending content, while continuing to serve popular content, to extend user horizons. Regulators should also continue to incentivise the industry to ensure algorithmic accountability, with regular transparency reports detailing the main recommendation logics being published.

Urgent digital literacy programmes must be developed in the wider society, not just on platforms. Ordinary users can be taught to identify common framing bias techniques through public service ads and curricula in schools. This work is a contribution to mitigating the influence of fake social proof from the ground up.

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key findings

This study breaks down the dual framing bias mechanisms based on iQiyi's membership subscription and premium on-demand streaming service. The reduction in the decision-making burden of the user and hence the increase in community engagement can impact the income of the platform, which in turn has an impact on the content ecosystem. Nevertheless, this study highlights specific structural risks. Default framing takes advantage of consumers' status-quo bias and infringes on their right to know, which leads to unknowing charges. When scarcity framing is in play, there is an artificial sense of urgency, which can lead to impulse purchases and disruption of the secondary-market order. Put another way, algorithmic social proof further reinforces filter bubbles and enhances group polarisation. All these results indicate that the benefits to the commercial sector from bias in framing do not necessarily correspond to benefits to the consumer.

5.2. Research significance

It is a work that provides theoretical insights and practical implications. Theoretically, it develops an integrated model of "information presentation → cognitive processing → decision bias → behavioural outcomes". It fills in the gap of the current scholarship, which neglects the multimodal, interactive and dynamically changing aspects. Practically, the proposed measures, such as mandatory transparency labels, dynamic cooling-off periods and the filter-bubble mitigation based on algorithms, provide workable solutions that could be used to regulate dark patterns. The results can help drive the industry's transition from traffic-chasing to value-driven operation. They also provide real-world data to aid regulators in developing platform governance policies.

5.3. Limitations and future research

This analysis draws largely on secondary materials and a single case study. Without large sample empirical testing, it cannot capture how different user groups respond heterogeneously to framing bias. Future work could adopt questionnaire surveys or behavioural experiments to quantify the exact impact size of various framing tactics on user decisions. Comparative studies may also be extended to other platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili, to examine how framing effects vary across different product formats. Further research could also explore whether these mechanisms hold true across different cultural contexts.

References

[1] China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). (2025). The 55th statistical report on China's internet development. https://www.cnnic.net.cn/NMediaFile/2025/0117/MAIN1737106895767 21DFTGKEAD.pdf

[2] China Youth Daily Social Survey Center. (2026). Nearly 80 % of respondents have encountered hidden deductions in applications [Online]. https://news.cctv.cn/2026/03/12/ARTIi9m5Ol1CZjmTyNYxDqZP260312.shtml

[3] Levin, I. P., Schneider, S. L., & Gaeth, G. J. (1998). All frames are not created equal: A typology and critical analysis of framing effects. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 76*(2), 149–188. https://doi.org/10.1006/obhd.1998.2804

[4] Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). Social influence: Compliance and conformity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55*(1), 591–621. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.142017

[5] Jin, Z., & Tao, X. (2026). Framing the future: How AI's creation versus generation visuals affects consumer willingness to pay. *Psychology & Marketing, 42*(10), 2496–2508. https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22242

DOI: 10.54254/2754-1169/2026.38510

[6] QIYI. (2023). iQIYI announces third quarter 2023 financial results [Online]. Available at: https://ir.iqiyi.com/news-releases/news-release-details/iqiyi announces third quarter 2023 financial results
[7] Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica, 47*(2), pp. 263 291. https://doi.org/10.2307/1914185
[8] Pasupuleti, M. K. (2026). Metaverse and spatial-computing business models for entertainment, live events and immersive cultural economies. National Education Services. https://doi.org/10.62311/nesx/rb35ag-978-81-68314-65-8
[9] Kollmer, T., & Eckhardt, A. (2023). Dark patterns: Conceptualisation and future research directions. *Business & Information Systems Engineering, 65*(2), pp. 201-208.
[10] McShane, B. B., & Bockenholt, U. (2025). Multilevel multivariate meta-analysis with application to choice overload. *Psychometrika, 83*(1), 255–271. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11336-017-9571-z
[11] Samuelson, W., & Zeckhauser, R. (1988). Status quo bias in decision making. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty, 1*(1), 7–59. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00055564.
[12] Beijing Consumers Association and The Beijing News. (2024). Questionnaire report on APP auto-renewal and consumer rights protection. Report covered by Guangming News. Available at: https://legal.gmw.cn/2024-05/31/content_37356200.htm
[13] Gong, T. I., & Guo, R. (2026). Making scarcity believable: How consumers interpret scarcity cues based on authenticity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1108/APJML-09-2025-1966
[14] James, M., & Osborn, G. (2024). A new dawn for ticket regulation? *Entertainment and Sports Law Journal, 22*(1). https://doi.org/10.16997/eslj.1582
[15] Ahmmad, M., Shahzad, K., Iqbal, A., & Latif, M. (2025). Trap of social media algorithms: A systematic review of research on filter bubbles, echo chambers, and their impact on youth. *Societies, 15*(11), Article 301. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15110301