



# Analysis of the Coordination Mechanism between Psychological Drivers and Brand Strategies Based on the User Migration from TikTok to Rednote

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**Abstract.** Since its launch in 2017, TikTok has rapidly become a global social media giant. However, due to the implementation of the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (2025), TikTok faces a potential ban on its operations in the United States, which has prompted large-scale TikTok-to-Rednote platform migration. This phenomenon shows the complexity of social media competition. Platform migration involves not only the mutual shaping of user psychology and brand relationships, but also changes at the technical level. This paper investigates the psychological factors and brand strategies that drive users to migrate from TikTok to Rednote, focusing on the role of emotional attachment, social identity, and cross-cultural adaptation. In addition, it proposes an integrative framework bridging psychological drivers and brand influence mechanisms. It further analyzes how platform can enhance user retention and loyalty through emotional connection, user habits and personalized strategies. The findings suggest that user migration is not simply a reaction to political factors or platform features, but a response to deep psychological motivations, including fighting against control and the pursuit of a more inclusive social identity.

**Keywords:** User Migration, Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Psychological Factors, Brand Strategy, User Retention

## 1 Introduction

Since its launch in 2017, TikTok has rapidly grown into a global leader in the social media industry. However, its operations in the United States face the risk of a ban under the Protecting Americans from *Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (2025)*, which directly triggered a large-scale migration of users to alternative platforms such as Rednote, Lemon8, and Instagram Reels. This phenomenon underscores the complexity of competition among social media platform. The migration is not merely a matter of technological substitution, but rather a dynamic interplay between user psychology and brand relationships.

Platform migration is not simply about users switching to a new social tool, but it is a multi-layered psychological phenomenon that involves shifts in emotional attachment, cognitive evaluations, and social needs. Beyond user-driven psychological factors, social media migration also offers valuable insights for global brands, highlighting the varying degrees to which brand strategies can adapt to and influence user behavior across cultural contexts. Jeong et al. examined cross-platform migration from Twitter to Mastodon, emphasizing the relationship between platform architecture and user psychology [1]. In addition, Wang et al. developed a model of factors influencing social media user migration behavior, finding that user satisfaction is directly linked to their functional needs from social media platforms [2]. While psychological factors predominantly drive users' initial migration decisions, brand personality traits and emotional connections with users play a critical role in shaping post-migration engagement and loyalty. Brand attachment theory suggests that users' emotional investment in a brand can strengthen their sense of belonging to the brand or the platform, and increase their willingness to continue using it [3]. Shahbaznezhad et al. further point out that the sustainability of user engagement following platform migration depends not only on functional compatibility, but also by contextual content characteristics, such as information relevance to users' current social contexts and emotional resonance in content presentation [4].

While existing studies have examined the initial drivers of user migration, such as political factors and platform functionalities, there is still a lack of in-depth exploration into the psychological and brand-related factors that influence users' long-term retention and loyalty on the platforms where users migrate to. These factors not only shape users' short-term choices but also determine their long-term engagement and loyalty on these platforms. This study aims to explore the psychological drivers and underlying brand influence mechanisms behind user migration from TikTok to Rednote through a literature review and case analysis. It will reveal the synergistic mechanisms between psychological drivers and brand strategies, providing user retention strategies for global brands.

## **2 Psychological Drivers of Platform Migration**

### **2.1 Migration Driven by Psychological Reactance**

Psychological reactance theory states that when individuals perceive a threat to their behavioral freedom, they are likely to exhibit reactance behaviors, which are characterized by attempts to regain a sense of autonomy [5]. In the context of digital platform migration, this theory can be applied to explain two distinct phenomena: reactance driven by policy interventions, or by social or community pressure.

Policy-driven reactance is evident when users perceive government-imposed bans on platforms like TikTok as a restriction of their behavioral freedom, thereby triggering psychological reactance. Such reactance may promote users to migrate to alternative platforms, like Rednote, another social media application developed in China, and see it as a less controlled space.

The resistance driven by community pressure is reflected in the recent phenomenon of Chinese social media users migrating from Weibo to Rednote. An article once interviewed those users about their reasons for discontinuing the use of Weibo. It pointed out that Weibo's community circles had become increasingly insular, with the open and free discussion atmosphere is gradually disappearing. As a result, Weibo users became hesitant to express personal opinions for fear of being attacked by the certain crazy group. According to psychological reactance theory, reactance migration behavior is also triggered when users perceive that their freedom of expression has been deprived by social group attacks, rather than by policy restrictions.

Brehm's theory assume reactance as psychologically inherent, overlooking technological infrastructure's moderating role in contemporary digital contexts. A research indicates that platforms may intervene in user behavior through algorithms [6]. For example, by recommending content with contentious tags such as "Escape Weibo" or "TikTok Refugee", to indirectly guide users to migrate, allowing brands to leverage reactance psychology [7]. Therefore, platform migration is not only a voluntary choice of users, but also a strategic response of brands to user psychology through technological interventions.

## 2.2 The Role of Social Identity and Conformity in Migration Decisions

Psychological reactance theory reveals the individual motivations behind user migration, while social identity theory further explains how such behavior spreads through group interactions [8]. Social identity theory posits that individuals construct their self-identity through group affiliation. This perspective complements psychological reactance theory: users migrate is not only due to perceived threats to their freedom (reactance), but is also because the sense of group identity on the new platform reinforces their willingness to migrate (social identity). This theory also explains why some users in other countries have migrated to Rednote even though they are not facing the ban on Tik Tok. For example, an article once investigated the reasons behind social media user migration, revealing that new users switch their platforms mainly because their friends are using them, which supports the role of social identity as a driving factor [9].

## 2.3 Cross-Cultural Adaptation Strategies and User Psychological Coupling

During the initial stage of TikTok users migrating to Rednote, their psychology and behavior shift due to the exposure to an unfamiliar culture, which is a phenomenon called "acculturative stress" [10]. They did not post content immediately but chose to remain silent and observe community interactions. However, when early migrant users (such as those who use #TikTokRefugee) received positive responses from native users after posting "cat tax" (sharing their pet photos), the conformity effect drove more users to break their silence, establishing a Perception-Behavior link [11-12].

When a large number of TikTok users migrated to Rednote, the platform implemented a series of strategies. First, the platform provided exclusive tags for migrating users and adjusted its recommendation algorithm based on user location, language preference, and interaction content to help match proper content that they might be interested in, thereby reducing the cost for users to filter information [13]. Secondly, Rednote provided a translation service to reduce language barriers, facilitating communication among users with different languages and enhancing user retention. In addition, the platform adjusted the design of short video pages to make them more similar to TikTok's layout. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) emphasizes that the usability (e.g., translation feature) and the practicality (e.g., Tik Tok-like interface) [14]. Finally, based on user language preferences and interaction situation, the content of original users and migrated users is gradually mixed and pushed. This strategy draws on the theory of cultural integration and reduces cultural shock through gradual cross-cultural information exchange [15].

Although the above strategies meet the needs of different users in the short term, some risks still remain, such as algorithmic bias and mechanical translation issues. Kordzadeh and Ghasemaghaei pointed out that algorithms can replicate even reinforce existing biases in society, amplifying these biases during the decision-making process, which can adversely affect certain groups [16].

### **3 The Impact of Emotional and Cognitive Perception on User Loyalty**

#### **3.1 The Strengthening Effect of Brand Trust and Emotional Bonds**

After a large influx of migrating users, enhancing user retention and fostering platform commitment became the primary concerns for Rednote. Reddit users highlighted Rednote's apolitical and supportive community culture, with one migrant stating: "I downloaded the APP and posted a 10-second video introducing myself as an American who's new and looking to make friends and learn. Almost immediately, I was flooded with hellos and warm welcomes..." Such experiences reflect how positive social reinforcement cultivates brand trust and emotional bonds [17-18].

#### **3.2 Media Usage Habits and Learning Costs**

Rednote updated the video browsing page to match TikTok's layout, allowing migrating users to effortlessly transition into their previous social media habits without spending too much time or effort adapting to the new platform. A Reddit user mentioned that Rednote's user interface and interaction flow are similar to TikTok's, and they are currently having a very positive experience. As Anderson and Wendy pointed out, social media operation habits can reinforce the "context-response" association in users, thus, the response to using the platform is automatically brought to mind. User loyalty can be enhanced by strengthening users' operation habits and reducing the learning costs [19].

### **3.3 The Potential Threat of Algorithmic Bias to Loyalty**

Algorithmic bias, due to its nature, may adversely affect certain users, thereby lowering their brand loyalty [16]. When some migrating users first download Rednote, algorithmic bias may lead the platform to recommend content that primarily reflects the preferences of the existing Chinese user base, rather than contents that aligns with the user's preferences. Such mismatched recommendations risk may trigger user attrition [20]. Fiesler and Dym identified three platform-related migration drivers: contents, functional design, and values and policies [20]. Nearly all participants prioritized content first, followed by functionality, and lastly, values. Therefore, it can be seen that users' demand for accurate content recommendations is of primary importance. To mitigate bias, platforms can adopt algorithmic fairness strategies by adjusting recommendation logic through mechanisms such as user feedback and IP-based localization [21].

## **4 The Behavioral Outcomes of the Synergistic Effect Between Psychological Drivers and Brand Strategies**

### **4.1 Behavioral Characteristics and Patterns of Users After Migration**

Based on psychological reactance theory and social identity theory, it is evident that users' initial migration was a form of passive phenomenon driven by the resistance to policy changes and the imitation of group behavior [5,8]. As those users began using Rednote, they were gradually enabled to adapt to and become familiar with the new platform through engaging content, a friendly community, a familiar interface, and advanced translation. As Wood and Neal's research shows, when repeated operations occur in a stable environment, users tend to form context-behavior associations in memory, which directly triggers future habitual reactions [22].

After migrating to the new platform, users tend to engage through specific tags (such as #TikTokRefugee) or ritualistic behavior imitation (such as "paying cat tax") to quickly integrate into the new community and actively participate in its reconstruction, driven by the effect of social identity [9]. Such behaviors can be seen as adaptive strategies within the framework of social identity theory, accelerating the process of community integration by reinforcing a sense of group belonging.

In addition, most early migrating users may experience a "lurking phase" due to acculturative stress, characterized by a low posting frequency [10]. However, as the algorithm of platforms began recommending highly interactive content (such as the #TikTokRefugee tag) and imitative behaviors spread among users, the conformity effect significantly boosted user activity [11].

### **4.2 User Loyalty and Its Impact on the Global Expansion of the Brand**

The loyalty of migrating users is influenced not only by psychological factors but also by the reinforcing effects of brand strategies. On the psychological level, user retention is driven by emotional attachment and media usage habits. As mentioned by

Reddit users, when migrating to a new platform, they could receive a warm welcome from many existing users. Such positive social feedback enhanced migrating users' emotional attachment to the platform, forming a sense of belonging [23]. Strategically, the platform cultivates a "warm community" brand image through curated content delivery, fostering trust that sustains long-term retention [24].

Cross-cultural User Generated Content production (e.g., hybrid cuisine narratives, localized travel vlogs) propels Rednote's transition from a monocultural community to a glocalized one. In addition, some users have criticized algorithmic bias, such as the repeated recommendation of homogenized content, which has prompted the platform to improve its recommendation logic, the platform may be able to achieve fine-grained content adjustment by distinguishing between users with different geolocation-based through language tag weights, thereby demonstrating bidirectional user-brand influence [25]. Rednote also lowers the usage barrier for global users through technological support, such as translation and interface design.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Theoretical Limitations

Current research emphasizes the dual-pathway model of user migration, "psychological reactance–social identity", but how platform's technological intermediaries (such as algorithmic recommendation and interface design) modulate this process still requires further exploration [5,8]. For example, Rednote leverages tag-based recommendations (such as #TikTokRefugee) to transform users' reactance and their behavior into brand growth momentum, which challenges the premise of "resistance is autonomy" in Brehm's theory, which reveals the platform's strategic manipulation of user psychology.

The platform may manipulate search engine optimization (SEO) to alter the visibility of specific cultural groups on the platform. However, this strategy is often confined within the algorithmic framework, which may inadvertently reinforce the dominance of mainstream culture over marginalized cultures. For example, on platforms like Rednote, new immigrant users seeking to enhance the visibility of their content often have to conform to mainstream aesthetics and popular expressions, which allows the platform to further promote this culture and marginalize non-mainstream culture on the grounds of "user preference" [26].

Although emotional connections and usage habits can improve brand loyalty in the short term, the long-term impact of algorithmic bias has not been fully explored [16]. The phenomenon of user attrition due to content homogeneity suggests that brand trust highly depends on technical fairness.

### 5.2 Future Directions

Current literature largely relies on cross-sectional data (e.g., user surveys) or case descriptions (e.g., Reddit comments), lacking longitudinal tracking of migration be-

haviors. It is recommended that future research adopt mixed methods (e.g., data analytics) to capture and analyze the dynamic process from user migration to retention.

In the context of globalization, brands need to maintain consistency in core functions while customizing content for different regions to achieve dynamic cultural adaptation. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory provides a framework for understanding cultural differences, helping brands develop adaptive strategies in the global market [27]. In addition, Kim's "Stress-Adaptation-Growth" dynamic model of "S-A-G" emphasizes that cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process, and brands should flexibly adjust their strategies based on the cultural context and consumer needs of different markets. Through a tiered strategy, brands can maintain global consistency while meeting the unique needs of local markets, enhancing brand acceptance and loyalty across different markets [28].

Given the impact of algorithmic bias on brand trust, it is suggested that future research develop a user lost prediction model to analyze how factors such as content homogenization and decreased recommendation transparency serve as precursors to the breakdown of brand trust. Further investigation is needed to explore whether platforms can mitigate or reverse this process through algorithmic optimization.

## 6 Conclusion

This study explores the psychological driving factors behind user migration from TikTok to Rednote and the role of brand strategies in this process, revealing the synergistic mechanism between psychological factors and brand strategies. The research indicates that platform migration is not merely a technical substitution but a complex psychological process involving emotional, cognitive, and social needs.

The contribution of this study lies in enriching the theoretical framework on social media platform migration, particularly by providing a new perspective on the interaction between psychological factors and brand strategies. By integrating various psychological theories, this study reveals the underlying motivations for user migration and provides new explanations for the behavioral patterns of social media platforms in the context of user mobility.

However, the study still has certain limitations. It mainly relies on cross-sectional data and case analysis, lacking longitudinal tracking of the user migration process. Future research could adopt a mixed-method approach, such as data analysis combined with user behavior tracking, to further explore the dynamic process of user migration to long-term retention, and to verify the long-term effects of brand strategies and psychological drivers on user loyalty. In addition, the psychological patterns of user migration across different countries and cultural contexts, as well as the moderating role of platform algorithms, still require further investigation to understand how platforms can optimize strategies based on regional differences.

From a practical perspective, the study provides valuable insights for brands in adjusting their strategies within the context of globalization. Brands should not only maintain consistency in core functions but also make adjustments based on the cultural characteristics of different markets. By deeply understanding different cultural

dimensions, brands can enhance global user loyalty and satisfaction more effectively, establishing stronger user relationships in cross-platform competition.

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