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A Study of the Relationship between the Spiral of Silence and Online Group Stress in the Perspective of Orientation Needs

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Abstract:
This paper explores the relationship between the spiral phenomenon of silence and network group pressure from the perspective of oriented demand. Based on the theory of oriented needs, this paper uses questionnaires and interviews to reveal the individual's choice behavior in network information and its impact on the silence spiral. The study found that the directional demand and network group pressure interact: directional demand weakens the influence of group pressure, and group pressure will in turn affect individual directional demand. This paper not only enriches the theory of the spiral of silence and network group pressure, but also provides a new perspective for understanding the network. The combination of questionnaires and interviews provides comprehensive and in-depth data support for relevant research, which has important theoretical and practical significance.

Keywords:
Orientation needs, Spiral of Silence, Online group pressure

1 Introduction

With the popularity of social media and the impact of digitization, people are increasingly involved in various online social media. The heterogeneity and plurality of groups in a pluralistic and inclusive online platform make opinions complicated. In a world where online accounts and platforms can be switched at will, the spiral of silence phenomenon should not exist. However, we observe that the spiral of silence still exists. Even on different platforms, netizens can still feel similar group pressure and dare not easily express views that are contrary to the mainstream opinion. It is only after a period of fermentation that different voices gradually emerge. And cyber violence and social death all exist in this "period of time". This is incredible, we can not help but ask: why in the anonymity of the network environment, netizens still feel the group pressure? What is the operating mechanism of this group pressure?

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2 Literature review

2.1 Structuration theory

Structuring theory is Anthony Giddens' theory to explore the relationship between individual social action and its initiative and social structure. Structure has duality, that is, social structure not only restricts human action, but also is the premise and intermediary of action, which makes action possible; The actions of actors not only maintain the structure, but also change the structure. The interdependent and dialectical relationship between action and structure is reflected in the social practice in time and space.[1] Structuring theory has caused research from multiple perspectives in academia. Kang, a foreign scholar, and others made a general analysis of the structural theory from the perspective of power dynamics between the government and citizens, and pointed out the public value that can be created by using the structural theory.[5]Selgi Park conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with Korean immigrants in the United States from the perspective of structural theory, and its research revealed how participants' experiences were shaped by structural forces.[6]Liu Shouwen combines education and teaching with structural theory, grasps the knowledge structure and cognitive structure, and explores the path of structured unit teaching.[7]

However, these studies have not examined the problems of communication through online platforms from a sociological perspective that combines structuration theory and oriented demand, nor have they answered the question of why group pressure still exists in the current anonymous online environment.

2.2 Theories of oriented demand

The guiding demand is the demand that the audience is guided by the agenda setting. The individual guidance needs of social members are the social psychological premise for the media agenda setting function to play its role.[2]Kashumi Madampe, a foreign scholar, proposed to address the key emotional challenges of software practitioners according to the change of emotional orientation of practitioners in agile software engineering[8]. Zhang Xingrong and Xia Yan, domestic scholars, guided by the agenda setting theory, proposed that mass media could set an agenda according to the audience's needs and strengthen cooperation with various media through oriented needs, Improve the communication effect.[9]In addition, Yu Benhai proposed to guide teachers and students to deeply grasp the historical logic, theoretical logic and practical logic through research oriented needs, so as to speed up the high-quality development of the school.[10]

Most of these researches aim to improve the communication effect, but they have not answered the mechanism problems in the communication effect, for example, why the group pressure and the spiral of silence have existed for a long time under the perspective of oriented demand, which will be explored in this paper.

2.3 The phenomenon of group stress

Group pressure refers to the pressure exerted by the majority opinion in a group on the individual or minority opinions of its members. According to Liu Cheng, the developmental tasks and role adaptation challenges of the individual system, the risks of the microsystems such as family and school, the interactions and conflicts between microsystems within the mesosystem, the environmental effects of the external system such as mass media and community environment, and the social structure and cultural changes of the macrosys-

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tem, all together constitute the complex ecosystem of youth group stress[11].Considering the environmental factors of group pressure, Hwaseng Cai proposed a viewpoint dynamics model combining bounded trust rules and group pressure.[12]

These studies have proposed novel systems and models from the perspective of group pressure, but have not focused on the group pressure problem existing in the network environment from a special perspective.

2.4 The spiral of silence phenomenon

According to the theory of the "spiral of silence", when people express their views, if they feel that their views are in line with those of the majority, they will express them boldly, thus contributing to the proliferation of such views; conversely, they will remain silent for fear of being isolated. As a result, one side's voice becomes stronger and the other weaker.[3]People's Daily pointed out more than ten years ago that "in today's China, the 'Robin Hood complex' is a common mentality, and when conflicts involving officials and the rich occur, netizens often do not distinguish between right and wrong, and public opinion appears to be 'lopsided'. The public opinion tends to be 'lopsided', i.e. most of them are on the side of the disadvantaged groups."[4] This is a manifestation of the "spiral of silence".

Foreign scholar Dong In Shin supplemented the silence spiral theory through social capital theory and proposed a new framework for the process of public opinion expression[13].Xu Yifeng, a domestic scholar, examines the current situation of online public opinion from the perspective of the "silent spiral" communication theory, and urgently demands to effectively improve the credibility of the official online public opinion field.[14]The scholar also set out from the perspective of the network, but focused on the official network public opinion rather than the whole network platform communication process. This article will look at the spiral of silence from the perspective of the network environment communication process mechanism.

2.5 Problems raised

1. Why do Internet use: The more platforms the audience pays attention to, the weaker their perception of account similarity

2. What is the mechanism by which this group pressure operates?

3 Research methodology

3.1 Building hypotheses

H1: The more platforms the audience follows, the weaker their perception of the similarity among the followed accounts will be.

H2: The longer the audience uses the platform, the weaker their perception of the similarity among the followed accounts will be.

H3: The older the audience, the weaker their perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow.

H4: The higher the income of the audience, the stronger the perception of the similarity of the concerned

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accounts.

In order to proved the hypotheses, this study utilized the questionnaire method by sampling the total population and creating a questionnaire.

3.2 Selection of interviewees

This study conducted 15-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with each of the 10 interviewees who use multiple social media platforms. The interviews began in August 2024 and ended in October 2024. According to the maximum sampling principle of qualitative research methodology, by the time the 10th respondent was recruited, the interviews were sufficient to answer the research questions and the sample collection was closed. The interviewees differed in age, occupation, education level, and location, and the degree of homogeneity was low.

The interview was conducted by telephone. The interview results were compiled into a verbatim draft, with a total of 15 000 words. The processing of interview content is completed by the document processor.

4 Analysis and discussion

4.1 The phenomenon of group pressure on online social platforms

4.1.1 The phenomenon of group stress based on the influence of algorithms and social psychology

During the interviews, it was found that audiences follow similar accounts or content on multiple social media or content platforms, which usually indicates that there is some commonality in their information acquisition and interest preferences. This commonality may stem from a variety of factors, including but not limited to personal interests, professional needs, social circle influence, and the role of platform recommendation algorithms. Social platforms use complex algorithms to analyze users' browsing history, clicking behavior, liking, commenting and other interactive data, in order to predict users' interests and preferences, and recommend similar content for them. Since the design of algorithms is often based on big data analysis and user behavioral patterns, different users may be recommended similar content due to similar interests or behavioral patterns.

In addition to the platform algorithm as an influencing factor, we learned through interviews that users' social connections on social platforms also affect the content they see. For example, when a user's friends or followers frequently share certain types of content, such content may appear more often in the user's recommendation list. In addition, users' social circles and cultural backgrounds may lead them to follow similar content. With the rise of hot topics and popular trends on social platforms, it will also lead to the emergence of a large number of similar content, these hot topics may involve current news, entertainment gossip, technology products and other areas, and users may unconsciously browse to similar content due to the general concern about these topics. In terms of content creators, content creators and media organizations may choose to create and publish content related to current hot topics in order to attract a wider audience. The similarity of these contents is not only reflected in the topics, but also in the style and presentation.

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Due to the influence of personalized recommendation algorithms and social networks, users may be unknowingly exposed to content with similar interests to their own, and influenced by the information and values conveyed by such content. This influence is subtle, creating an information cocoon effect and group pressure.

4.1.2 Causes of weak similarity perception

It is due to the influence of personalized recommendation algorithms and social networks that, subconsciously, it may be difficult for users to realize that they are being subjected to group pressure.

Through the results of the questionnaire survey, we know that the more platforms the audience follows, the weaker the perception of account similarity. When the number of platforms that the audience follows increases, the sources of information they are exposed to become more diversified. This diversity is not only reflected in the content, but also in the viewpoints and positions. Different platforms may have different content ecosystems and user groups, so the accounts and contents that audiences see on different platforms may be quite different. Such differences make it difficult for the audience to form a unified perception among multiple platforms, thus weakening the perception of account similarity.

In an information-dispersed environment, audiences' attention is easily attracted by a variety of fresh, interesting or urgent information. They may switch their attention frequently within a short period of time, resulting in a decrease in their attention to a single account. In addition, with the continuous optimization of platform algorithms, personalized recommendation systems will push relevant content based on audience browsing history and interest preferences, which further aggravates the dispersion of audience attention. The combined effect of diversified and dispersed information makes the audience's perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow weaker as they use the platform for a longer period of time. On the one hand, diversified content forms and a wide range of information sources provide audiences with rich information choices, reducing their dependence on a single account; on the other hand, the explosive growth of information and the dispersion of attention make it difficult for audiences to maintain a sustained focus on a specific account for a long time. Therefore, in the process of using the platform, the audience tends to gradually dilute the perception of account similarity, and instead pursues a broader, more diversified and personalized information experience.

Similarly, the reason why the older the audience is, the weaker they perceive the similarity of the accounts they follow can also be attributed to the combined effect of information diversity and decentralization. On the one hand, older audiences are exposed to more colorful content through diversified information acquisition channels and broader interests; on the other hand, they are affected by the decline of information processing ability and increased distraction, and pay more attention to the practicality and value of information. These factors together make the elderly audience pay more attention to the diversity and personalization of content rather than the similarity between accounts when choosing which accounts to follow.

It should be noted that the above analysis is based on general speculation and is not applicable to all older audiences. In fact, everyone's information access habits and preferences are influenced by a variety of factors, including personal experience, cultural background, education level, etc. Therefore, the specific analysis needs to be considered in the context of the actual situation. Therefore, comprehensive consideration should

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be given to the actual situation when analyzing the specific situation.

In analyzing the phenomenon that the higher the income of the audience, the stronger the perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow, although the diversity and dispersion of information are important factors influencing the audience's behavior, it is not a direct and linear relationship to link them directly with the income level and the perception of the similarity of the accounts. However, we can explore the possible reasons for this phenomenon from the side and consider other possible influencing factors. For example, higher-income groups tend to have greater access to information, including more advanced devices, higher-speed Internet connections, and more time and energy to explore and sift through information. This ability gives them access to a more diverse set of information sources and accounts, but it does not mean that they are less likely to perceive account similarity as a result. On the contrary, they may be more inclined to look for accounts that match their interests, needs, or values in a diverse range of information. Higher-income groups may pay more attention to the quality and depth of information, rather than just pursuing quantitative diversity. They may be more likely to pay attention to accounts that provide high-quality content, unique insights or in-depth analysis. If these accounts have a high degree of similarity in content or style, they may be more likely to recognize and perceive them. While information fragmentation may result in the audience's attention being distracted by multiple sources of information, high-income groups may be more able or willing to allocate more attention to focusing on and analyzing this information. They may be able to manage their information sources through specialized tools, software or methods to more effectively filter out accounts with a high degree of similarity.

In summary, the combined effect of information diversity and dispersion makes the audience's perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow weaker the longer they use the platform and the more platforms they follow. On the one hand, diversified content forms and a wide range of information sources provide audiences with rich information choices and reduce their dependence on a single account; on the other hand, the explosive growth of information and the dispersion of attention make it difficult for audiences to maintain continuous attention to a specific account for a long time. Therefore, in the process of using the platform, the audience tends to gradually dilute the perception of account similarity, and turn to pursue a broader, more diversified and personalized information experience. High-income groups have stronger information acquisition ability, pay more attention to the quality and depth of information, and the depth of thinking has reached a certain level, so they are more likely to be affected by the diversification and decentralization of information, and the more sensitive they are to the high similarity of attention accounts. On the contrary, the elderly audience is more sensitive to the high similarity of the accounts they follow because their demand for information becomes more and more diversified as they grow older, but their ability to process information decreases, resulting in the complexity of the accounts they follow, but they seldom pay attention to the similarity of the accounts they follow. It is important to note that the relationship between these factors is not absolute and monolithic, but rather intertwined and mutually influential.

4.2 The Spiral of Silence in Relation to Online Group Stress

4.2.1 Changes in needs and perceptions

In the process of multi-platform usage, audiences will selectively follow and interact with each other ac-

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cording to their needs and interests. They may look for different types of content and accounts on different platforms to satisfy their different needs, thus reducing their focus on the similarity of accounts on a single platform. As the audience spends more time on the platform, their personalized needs become clearer and deeper. Through the algorithmic recommendation mechanism, the platform continuously learns and optimizes to provide audiences with content that better meets their personal interests and needs. This kind of personalized content push makes it easier for audiences to find accounts with similar interests, but at the same time, it may also lead to a decrease in attention to other accounts that are not as similar.

As the number of platforms that audiences follow increases, the sources of information they are exposed to become more diverse. Different platforms may have different content ecosystems and user groups, so the accounts and contents that audiences see on different platforms may be quite different. This diversity makes it difficult for audiences to form a uniform perception of account similarity across multiple platforms.

Long-time use of the platform has made the audience have a more in-depth understanding and selection of the content on the platform, they no longer rely solely on the similarity of the account to filter the information, but pay more attention to the quality of the content and its relevance to themselves. As a result, the perception of account similarity gradually diminishes.

4.2.2 Combining a synthesis of needs and perceptions

Under the perspective of oriented demand, we can analyze these four hypotheses in greater depth, especially in the context of the "spiral of silence" phenomenon and the influence of network group pressure. Orientation demand refers to an individual's tendency to actively select, acquire and process information in the information environment based on his or her own needs and goals.

H1: The more platforms the audience pays attention to, the weaker their perception of account similarity.

When the number of platforms followed by the audience increases, their sources of information become broader and their exposure to content becomes more diversified. From the perspective of oriented demand, such diversification helps to satisfy the multiple information needs of the audience, so that they are no longer confined to a single platform or account, which helps to break the "spiral of silence", as different views and opinions can be expressed more freely, reducing the suppression of minority opinions by mainstream opinions. At the same time, a diversified information environment also reduces the impact of group pressure, making it more likely that the audience will maintain independent thinking and not blindly follow the majority opinion. Therefore, this diversified information environment may further weaken the audience's perception of account similarity.

H2: The longer the audience uses the platform, the weaker their perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow.

Although prolonged use of the platform may expose the audience to a large amount of information, oriented demand emphasizes the individual's information selection and processing based on his or her own needs. Therefore, the length of use does not directly determine the intensity of the audience's perception of account similarity. On the contrary, if the audience can maintain their sensitivity and selectivity in the process of using the platform, they may still be able to clearly perceive the differences and similarities between different

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accounts.

Prolonged use of platforms may cause audiences to suffer from information overload or fatigue, but this does not directly determine their perception of account similarity. However, if audiences gradually lose their sensitivity and selectivity to information during prolonged use, they may be more susceptible to the "spiral of silence" and group pressure. In this case, they may be more inclined to accept mainstream opinions and similar content, thus reducing the perception of account similarity. However, this also depends on the individual's information processing ability and habits.

H3: The older the audience, the weaker their perception of the similarity of the accounts they follow.

The impact of age on information needs and processing styles is complex. From the perspective of oriented needs, audiences of different ages may have different information preferences and needs. However, this does not mean that the older the audience, the weaker the perception of account similarity. On the contrary, due to the accumulation of life experience and hobbies, older audiences may have more in-depth knowledge and awareness of accounts in specific fields or topics, and thus more easily perceive the similarities and differences between these accounts. Of course, this is also affected by individual differences and the background of the times. In addition, older audiences may pay more attention to the authenticity and authority of information, and their perception of similarity may be affected by these factors.

However, older audiences may also be more susceptible to the "spiral of silence", as they may be more inclined to follow traditional social norms and values. At the same time, because they may be less active on social media, they may be more susceptible to group pressure, which in some cases may diminish the perception of account similarity.

H4: The higher the income of the audience, the stronger the perception of the similarity of the concerned accounts.

High-income audiences tend to have higher information consumption capacity and stronger information demand. From the perspective of oriented demand, they may be more inclined to pursue high-quality and specialized content and services, and have higher loyalty and stickiness to specific accounts or content. Therefore, high-income audiences may be more likely to detect similarities and differences between different accounts, as they have richer information resources and higher information processing capabilities to analyze and compare. In addition, high-income audiences may pay more attention to the fit of personal brand and values, and have a stronger perception of and identification with accounts that match their interests, needs or values. This perception may be influenced by the "spiral of silence" phenomenon, as high-income audiences may be more susceptible to online group pressure, and thus tend to align themselves with the majority opinion or pursue content that is in line with their own identity.

However, high-income audiences may also be more susceptible to the "spiral of silence" and group pressure, as they may be more inclined to integrate into high-income social circles and accept the dominant opinions and similar content within those circles. This may further enhance their perception of account similarity.

In summary, the "spiral of silence" and "group pressure" play an important role in influencing audience perceptions of account similarity. They interact with other factors such as the number of platforms they follow,

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the time they use, their age and income, and together they shape their behavior and psychology in the social media environment. Therefore, when analyzing the audience's perception of account similarity, we need to take these factors and their interactions into consideration. When analyzing these four hypotheses from the perspective of oriented demand, we need to take into account the combined effects of the audience's individual differences, information processing ability, information demand, and network environment.

4.3 The spiral of silence and the interaction of network group pressure

4.3.1 The Weakening of the Spiral of Silence and the Reduction of Pressure on Network Groups

Audiences who have been using the platform for a long time have accumulated more experience and knowledge in the process of participating in discussions and exchanges, and they have a clearer and firmer understanding of their own views and positions. This self-confidence makes them more likely to express their own views when confronted with content that is inconsistent with their own, rather than choosing to remain silent or agree with the mainstream. Similarly, as the number of platforms they follow increases, audiences may no longer be confined to a particular group or circle. They may participate in the discussion of multiple topics and the interaction of multiple social circles at the same time, resulting in a relatively weakened sense of belonging to a group. This weakening makes audiences more comfortable and confident in the face of online group pressure, and less worried about being ostracized for not agreeing with a particular group.

With the satisfaction of their individual needs and increased confidence in expressing their opinions, audiences feel less pressure in online groups. They are no longer overly concerned about being isolated or ostracized for not conforming to the mainstream, and are therefore more likely to maintain independent thinking and expression. Multi-platform usage makes it easier for audiences to access different views and voices, which helps break the spiral of silence. When audiences find content that does not match their own views, they can find supportive and agreeable voices on other platforms, thus strengthening their courage and confidence to express themselves. Such cross-platform communication and interaction can help to alleviate the spiral of silence and promote a more open and inclusive online discussion environment.

4.3.2 The weakening of group belonging and the emergence of the anti-silence spiral

When following different content on multiple platforms, audiences may no longer be confined to a particular group or circle. They may participate in discussions on multiple topics at the same time and communicate with people from different backgrounds. This cross-platform communication makes the audience's sense of belonging to a group relatively weaker, and they no longer feel the pressure from a certain group as strongly as they did in the traditional media era. As a result, they may be more inclined to maintain independent thinking and expression in the face of content that is inconsistent with their own views, rather than being forced to remain silent or change their views.

From the interviews, it is easy to see that users find it difficult to express their opinions when they perceive group pressure on the platforms. When following content on multiple platforms, audiences have more opportunities and freedom to express their views and opinions. They can choose to express their views on different platforms and communicate with like-minded people without fear of being isolated or ostracized on a single

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platform. This freedom makes it more likely that audiences will choose to speak out rather than remain silent in the face of content that is inconsistent with their own views. Therefore, the spiral of silence may be alleviated to a certain extent in a cross-platform environment.

As the number of platforms that audiences pay attention to increases, the opinion climate they come into contact with becomes more diversified. Different platforms may present different public opinion trends and opinion distribution. This diversity makes it more difficult for the audience to judge whether a certain point of view occupies a dominant position. They may need to integrate information from multiple platforms to form their own judgments, rather than simply making decisions based on the public opinion atmosphere on a certain platform. Therefore, under the influence of a diversified opinion climate, the spiral phenomenon of silence may no longer be as significant as in the era of traditional media.

Audiences who have been using the platform for a long time and actively participate in it tend to be more confident and independent. They have accumulated a wealth of experience and knowledge through constant communication and interaction, and have a clearer and firmer understanding of their own views and positions. As a result, they are more likely to express their own views rather than remain silent when confronted with content that is inconsistent with their own views. This increased confidence and independence makes their perception of account similarity less important, as they are more concerned with the expression and dissemination of their own views and positions.

At the same time, with the passage of time and the development and growth of the platform, its public opinion environment tends to become more diversified and inclusive. Accounts and contents with different viewpoints and positions coexist and co-prosper on the platform, providing audiences with a broader space for discussion and dimension of thinking. In this diversified public opinion environment, audiences are more likely to accept and respect different voices and opinions, rather than pursuing accounts and contents similar to their own. As a result, their perception of account similarity will gradually diminish, which also proves the hypothesis that the longer the audience uses the platform, the weaker the perception of account similarity will be.

5 Summarizing and reflecting

Research has found that the audience's oriented needs greatly influence their selection, processing and expression of information. When the audience's personalized needs are satisfied, they are more likely to think independently and express their personal opinions, thus weakening the spiral of silence to a certain extent. At the same time, the diversity of oriented needs also encourages audiences to seek information on multiple platforms, further reducing their reliance on the similarity of accounts on a single platform.

Group pressure plays an important role in the spiral of silence theory. However, this study finds that as the audience's use of the platform deepens and the scope of their attention expands, they are gradually able to resist the pressure from the group and express their views more confidently. To a certain extent, this breaks the traditional spiral of silence and presents a more open and inclusive online discussion environment.

Through questionnaires and interviews, we have collected a large amount of primary data, which provides

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strong support for the theoretical hypotheses. At the same time, we also found the inadequacy of the existing theories in explaining certain phenomena, such as not being able to fully explain the behavioral choices of all audiences in the face of group pressure.

However, while the spiral of silence theory explains the process of opinion formation to a certain extent, the limitations of its assumptions are gradually becoming apparent. For example, the theory overemphasizes people's fear of isolation and ignores other factors that may influence the expression of opinions, such as expectations of interests and knowledge of the issue. With the rise of new media, the way and speed of information dissemination have changed dramatically, and the applicability of the spiral of silence theory in the new media environment has been questioned. For example, the anonymity and diversity of the Internet make it easier for audiences to find voices in support of their own views, thus weakening the spiral of silence effect.

Some studies have been conducted from the single perspective of communication science or social psychology, but lack of comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis. For example, by combining the theories and methods from sociology, psychology, computer science and other disciplines, we can more comprehensively understand the behavioral choices and psychological mechanisms of the audience under the perspective of oriented demand. My future research can further explore the inner logic and assumptions of the spiral of silence theory, and explore its applicability and limitations in different media environments. At the same time, I can also try to construct a new theoretical framework to better explain the process of public opinion formation in the new media era. In addition to the traditional questionnaire survey and interview method, we can also try to collect and analyze the data by using new technological means such as big data analysis and social media monitoring. These new methods can more accurately capture the behavioral patterns and psychological changes of the audience and provide more powerful support for theoretical research.

To sum up, this paper has conducted an in-depth study on the spiral of silence and online group pressure from the perspective of oriented demand, and revealed the audience's behavioral patterns and psychological mechanisms in specific media environments. However, the existing theories are still insufficient and limited in explaining certain phenomena. Future studies should further deepen theoretical research, strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation, innovate empirical research methods and pay attention to individual differences in order to understand the process and mechanism of public opinion formation more comprehensively.

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