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Отже, емоційний інтелект є фундаментом для розвитку емоційних компетенцій, які, у свою чергу, забезпечують професійний успіх і гармонійні соціальні відносини. Емоційна компетентність виступає практичним проявом EI, що втілюється у поведінці, спілкуванні та здатності до адаптації. У сучасних умовах саме вона стає вирішальним чинником лідерства, ефективного менеджменту й особистісного добробуту.

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THE EVOLUTION OF MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Media psychology is found at the critical intersection of psychological science, human communication, and technology. Broadly defined, media psychology is the application of psychological theories, research, and science to the use, development, distribution, and research of mediated communication and technology throughout society (Luskin, 2012; Rutledge, 2026). As technology increasingly saturates human existence, understanding the psychological effects of media has become paramount. To illustrate the invisible yet omnipresent influence of media on modern life, Bernard Luskin (2016) introduced the evocative metaphor that “a fish only notices the water when it is gone.” In today’s world, should media and communication technologies suddenly disappear, individuals would experience a profound, systemic social and emotional sense of loss, underscoring how deeply embedded these systems have become in human psychology (Luskin, 2016).

Historically, the field has undergone a major institutional and conceptual evolution. A significant milestone occurred in 1998 when the American Psychological Association (APA) Media Psychology Division (Division 46) published a landmark Task Force Study defining career opportunities in the emerging field of media psychology and new technologies (Luskin, 2012; Luskin & Friedland, 1998). This formalized the discipline as a distinct branch of academic and applied inquiry.

As society shifts from passive mass consumption to agentic, interactive, and intelligent environments, a major theoretical gap has emerged. Traditional communication models are largely inadequate because they assume sentient human-to-human partners. Today, users interact directly with non-sentient, generative artificial intelligence systems that act as social agents. To address this gap, this paper synthesizes several foundational and modern theoretical models.

2. Methods

This study employs a systematic qualitative-theoretical synthesis and meta-analysis of foundational and contemporary literatures in media psychology. As the research objective requires tracing a paradigm shift from traditional mass media to immersive and agentic technologies, we established a strict selection and inclusion criteria to assemble our primary source corpus.

Our analysis represents key historical milestones, empirical breakthroughs, and the latest theoretical frameworks. The sources were categorized into three distinct technological epochs:

✓ Epoch 1: Systems Definition & Traditional Mass Media (1998–2016) Luskin, 2012; Luskin, 2016; Media Psychology Research Center, 2026; Rutledge, 2010; Rutledge, 2026; Ferguson, 2015).

✓ Epoch 2: Virtual Environments & Digital Interaction (2004–2009) (Suler, 2004; Yee & Bailenson, 2009).

✓ Epoch 3: Agentic Systems & Artificial Intelligence (2025–2026) (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026; Verta, 2025; Kostak, 2026).

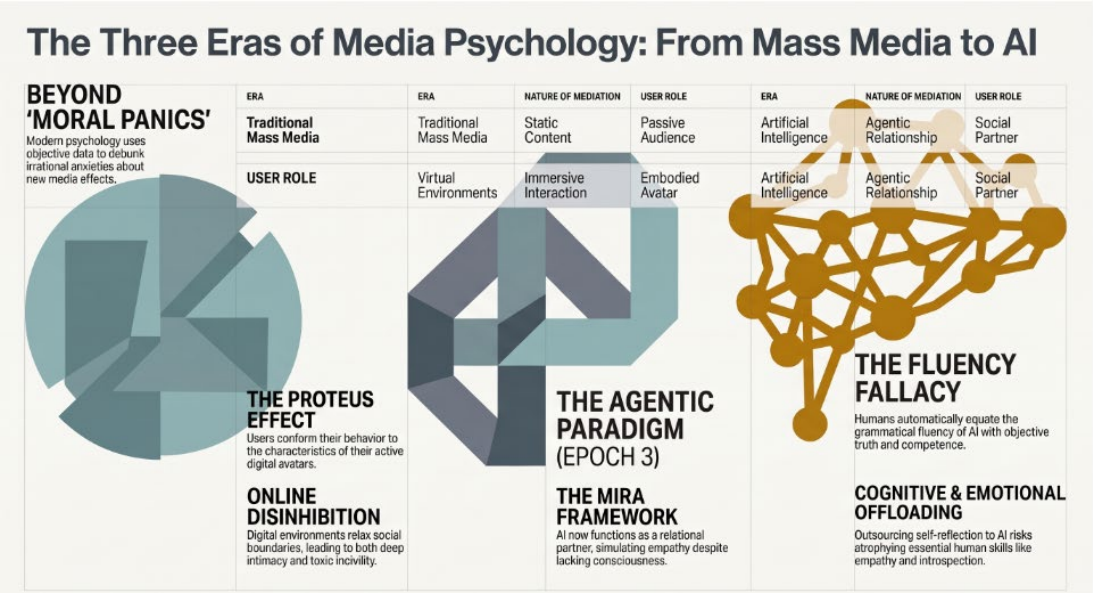


Figure 1. Three Eras of Media Psychology

The synthesis was executed through a multi-step conceptual mapping process. First, we extracted the primary psychological mechanisms defined by each epoch's models (e.g., dissociative anonymity from Suler; self-perception from Yee & Bailenson; linguistic reciprocity from Boyd & Markowitz). Second, these mechanisms were mapped against their respective level of technological mediation: static content, immersive interaction, or agentic relationship. Third, we cross-referenced these categories to identify structural tensions—specifically focusing on the cognitive and

ethical risks of human-AI integration, including the fluency fallacy, confirmation bias, and cognitive offloading (Kostak, 2026). This structured matrix forms the basis of our results and discussion.

3. Results

The systematic synthesis of our corpus revealed distinct cognitive and behavioural shifts corresponding to technological advancement. These findings are organized below into three primary levels of technological mediation.

Analysing the first epoch of our corpus reveals that media psychology's early struggles were primarily institutional and epistemological. As mass media saturated the 20th century, a major challenge was separating empirical, scientific facts from public hysteria. Christopher Ferguson's (2015) research highlights how easily society falls prey to moral panics, attributing complex societal ills (e.g., violent crime, declining academic performance, body image issues) directly to new media platforms. Media psychology, when conducted with rigorous objectivity, acts as an essential corrective to these popular ideologies (Ferguson, 2015).

Rather than accepting simplistic cause-and-effect assumptions, media psychology applies cognitive, social, developmental, biological, and evolutionary frameworks to examine media consumption (Ferguson, 2015). For instance, when evaluating television's impact on academic achievement, or video game violence on actual behaviour, objective research demonstrates that individual predispositions, family dynamics, and socioeconomic factors play a far more significant role than media exposure alone. Furthermore, when longitudinal data is examined, societal violence rates frequently show no correlation—and in some cases, an inverse correlation—with the consumption of media, directly refuting the sensationalized claims of popular advocacy groups (Ferguson, 2015). The MPRC's (2026) systems-level loop supports this finding, showing that audience perception and user response are highly mediated by the broader social environment, meaning that content is never consumed in a vacuum.

As media evolved from passive consumption to interactive, digital environments, the nature of psychological mediation shifted. Two seminal models in our corpus explain how digital environments alter human behaviour: John Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Effect and Yee and Bailenson's (2009) Proteus Effect.

John Suler (2004) observed that when people communicate online, they frequently relax their normal social boundaries, self-disclosing or acting out far more intensely than they would in face-to-face settings. Suler categorized this phenomenon into a vital dichotomy:

✓ Benign Disinhibition: A positive release of inhibitions where users share deep personal secrets, explore their identity, express repressed feelings, and seek therapeutic support, facilitating rapid intimacy and social connection.

✓ Toxic Disinhibition: A negative release characterized by hostile language, aggressive acting-out, flaming, cyber-incivility, and harassment, which fails to lead to personal growth and often inflicts emotional harm.

Suler identified six distinct, interacting factors that drive this disinhibition: (1) dissociative anonymity ("You don't know me"); (2) invisibility ("You can't see me");

(3) asynchronicity ("See you later"); (4) solipsistic introjection ("It's all in my head"); (5) dissociative imagination ("It's just a game"); and (6) minimization of status and authority ("Your rules don't apply here") (Suler, 2004).

Expanding upon self-representation, Yee and Bailenson (2009) investigated the Proteus Effect—the phenomenon where users conform to the behavioural characteristics of their digital avatars (e.g., attractive avatars increase friendliness; tall avatars increase negotiation confidence). While the Proteus Effect is conceptually grounded in Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972), which suggests that individuals infer their own attitudes by observing themselves from a third-person perspective, critics argued that the behaviour could be a simple by-product of Behavioural Priming (Bargh et al., 1996), where merely viewing a visual stimulus activates related semantic and behavioural concepts.

To experimentally isolate these mechanisms, Yee and Bailenson (2009) utilized immersive virtual environment technology (IVET) to cross embodiment (first-person control and observation of one's avatar in a virtual mirror) with mere observation (viewing an identical avatar in front of oneself without controlling it). Their empirical results demonstrated that embodiment produced significantly larger and more durable behavioural changes than mere observation of the same visual stimuli (Yee & Bailenson, 2009). This critical finding confirmed that the active digital self-representation of an avatar provides a unique psychological lever to behavioural change, driven primarily by self-perception and embodiment rather than simple passive semantic priming (Yee & Bailenson, 2009). Thus, the medium shifts from a passive window to an active, embodied extension of the self.

The latest paradigm shift represents the transition to agentic, conversational technologies. Utilizing Ryan Boyd and David Markowitz's (2026) landmark paper, we analyse the Machine-Integrated Relational Adaptation (MIRA) framework. MIRA is a middle-range theoretical framework designed to explain how humans psychologically adapt to artificial intelligence systems that act as social partners and mediators. Boyd and Markowitz (2026) argue that AI now occupies a unique in-between space—producing language that is highly adaptive, personalized, and socially responsive despite the complete absence of mental states, consciousness, or lived experience.

MIRA establishes a foundational structural distinction between two modes of AI interaction:

- ✓ AI as Relational Partner means Direct human-AI interaction where the machine acts as a social agent (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026; Kostak, 2026).
- ✓ AI as Relational Mediator involves AI-Mediated Communication (AI-MC),

where AI filters, reformulates, or alters human-to-human communication. (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026; Kostak, 2026).

MIRA outlines four core principles governing how AI alters social adaptation: (1) linguistic reciprocity; (2) psychological proximity; (3) interpersonal trust; and (4) relational substitution versus enhancement (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026).

Boyd and Markowitz (2026) ground MIRA by extending three established psychological theories to the AI domain: Attachment Theory; Social Exchange Theory;

and Epistemic Trust. This theoretical engine explains *why* and *how* human-AI bonds form so rapidly.

Nuriye Sultan Kostak (2026) translates MIRA into the domain of user experience (UX) design, identifying severe psychological and ethical vulnerabilities that product designers must address: The Fluency Fallacy (Kostak, 2026),The Echo Chamber / Confirmation Bias (Kostak, 2026, Butko & Butko, 2026), Cognitive and Emotional Offloading (Kostak, 2026), The Illusion of Intentionality (Kostak, 2026).

4. Discussion

The shift from static mass media (Epoch 1) to interactive virtual spaces (Epoch 2), and ultimately to agentic AI interfaces (Epoch 3), represents a profound evolution in human-technology relations. Historically, media psychology focused primarily on the content-driven effects of mass communication, working to debunk moral panics through objective empirical science (Ferguson, 2015). In the digital era, however, the medium is no longer a passive container. With John Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition and Yee and Bailenson's (2009) Proteus Effect, the medium became a space of identity exploration and embodied self-representation, capable of altering offline attitudes and behaviours. Today, with the advent of generative AI, the medium has become a relational partner and social mediator (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026).

This evolution introduces critical challenges for modern well-being and digital habits in the 21st century. As Jennifer Verta (2025) notes, as technology infiltrates every aspect of daily life, understanding its impact on mental well-being is vital. Modern media psychologists are increasingly tasked with helping individuals manage digital habits, screen time, and short-form video addictions (Verta, 2025). The integration of MIRA highlights a deeper, more insidious threat: cognitive and emotional offloading (Kostak, 2026). When individuals offload self-reflection and emotional interpretation to AI, they risk the atrophy of core socio-cognitive skills. If AI is utilized as a relational substitute (displacing human-to-human connection) rather than a relational enhancement (bridging individuals back to their physical communities), society faces an unprecedented epidemic of digital isolation and superficial bonds (Boyd & Markowitz, 2026; Kostak, 2026).

While our synthesized framework provides a comprehensive overview, several limitations in the current literature remain. First, Boyd and Markowitz's (2026) MIRA framework is explicitly 'provisional and middle-range' (Merton, 1968), acting as a scaffold that requires rigorous empirical testing across diverse demographics. Second, much of the current AI-relationship literature is language-centric, leaving a gap in understanding how multimodal AI agents (voice-activated, video-capable, and embodied robotic systems) will impact human attachment. Third, the long-term cognitive and emotional consequences of emotional offloading remain completely unstudied.

We propose that future media psychology research focus on two key agendas: (1) empirical testing of MIRA's four principles using longitudinal, behavioural data to measure the actual rate of relational substitution in vulnerable populations; and (2) investigating how virtual embodiment (the Proteus Effect) and agentic AI interact—for example, does controlling an avatar that interacts with an AI partner accelerate or decelerate trust calibration?

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