

The Role of Social Media in Female Gender Construction Under Feminism A Case Study of Xiaohongshu APP

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ABSTRACT

In this rapidly developing new media era, a variety of social media is popping up. This paper takes Xiaohongshu as a case study to investigate the correlation between Xiaohongshu development and female users as well as analyse its impact on female construction. Based on data evaluation and literature research, the paper discusses the historical origin, development process and current situation of Xiaohongshu. According to the results, as one of the most popular apps in China, the success of Xiaohongshu is closely related to women, which also promotes women's construction. It also confirms that the success of a media or a platform is based on the user's grasp. These results shed light on how social media affected gender construction.

Keywords: *Constructivism, Female, Social media, Xiaohongshu.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Xiaohongshu was founded in 2013, where are more than 90 million users in Xiaohongshu, and female users highly account for 90.41% of total users. Xiaohongshu was valued at 200 billion Yuan and ranked 367th in Hurun Private Enterprises in China in 2019 [1]. Jock Trout and Al Ries, in the early 1972s, put forward a theory together called "Positioning". Positioning is the first body of thought that comes to grips with the difficult problem of getting heard in our over-communicated society. The theory was spread to marketing planning in China. A tremendous number of distinguished applications applied the Positioning, so did Xiaohongshu.

Primarily, the definition of Xiaohongshu is a social shopping platform, and the target consumers of Xiaohongshu is a young female. When females want to shop around and share moments, Xiaohongshu is the primary choice. In 2018, Xiaohongshu generated 700 million Yuan in half annual sales and sales increase every year. The deep reason for the successful phenomenon is the more accurate orientation of female consumers.

2. THE HISTORY OF XIAOHONGSHU AND ITS ATTENTION TO FEMINISM

With the rapid economic growth, the consumers' advancing consciousnesses, behaviours and psychologies of the population in today's Chinese society are more and more obvious, owing to the intervention of the media. At the beginning of the 21st century, the e-commerce platform quickly seized the e-commerce market and launched sub-sections of overseas shopping. Contemporarily, most forms of shopping are oriented by media. Media can maximize and optimize the effect of publicity and effectively condense the concept of the social collective. One of the successful examples is Xiaohongshu, which has a precise grasp of consumerism and highlights feminism. Xiaohongshu has a positive impact on society.

Now Xiaohongshu is experiencing its growth period, and its initial period is relatively smooth. In October 2013, Wenchao Mao, the founder of Xiaohongshu, and his team launched the first product of Xiaohongshu, the "Xiaohongshu Outbound Shopping Guide" App, with a

wide array of summaries of the trading area introductions of brands written by local shopping talents. Between 2014 and 2015, Xiaohongshu expanded rapidly. To begin with, Xiaohongshu Welfare Club was launched, which solved the problem that customers were not able to buy overseas goods. Secondly, Xiaohongshu had added the shopping notes in the Xiaohongshu community to encourage users to share and communicate their shopping experiences. Meanwhile, Xiaohongshu had reached strategic partnerships with many foreign brands, such as Blackmores and @Cosme. From 2016 to 2017, Xiaohongshu expanded third-party platforms and brand marketers, which helped all categories in Xiaohongshu grow rapidly. In 2018 and 2019, Xiaohongshu had won many awards and gained more attention. Until January 2019, Xiaohongshu had more than 200 million users.

Xiaohongshu has successfully entered the public's view and become one of the most popular shopping platforms because it shows feminism and the concept of women's independence through new media and produces a positive influence. As an online shopping platform, Xiaohongshu mainly focuses on female consumers, aging between 18 and 34. According to the report, female users of Xiaohongshu account for 90.41%, while male users account for only 9.59% [2]. Thus, as an e-commerce shopping platform with the largest proportion of female users, Xiaohongshu is crucial for constructing women's identity. From the perspective of Xiaohongshu, feminism has been extended and sublimated in Xiaohongshu, and the concept of women becomes broader and softer. By contrast, in the past, women needed to make many efforts to defend and fight for their rights. From the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, women launched three waves of feminism to achieve the same social status as men. The first wave of feminism advocated basic civil rights for women, including voting and gaining education and employment. The second wave, in the 1960s, championed all aspects of women's rights, narrowed the gender gap, helped women break through the cages of stereotypes, and brought about various feminist schools, e.g., liberal feminism, socialist feminism, and radical feminism. As for the third wave, post-modern feminism, respects the differences and diversity of individual women and rejects the black-and-white theory. It subverted the three major schools of feminism [3]. In this regard, Xiaohongshu mainly extended the second and third waves of feminism. Xiaohongshu is a platform for women to express themselves to society, showing all aspects of women's rights and interests. It takes advantage of the idea that males and females now have equal opportunities and focusing only on individual abilities regardless of gender difference to create a discussion community where female users can share their positive or negative comments about purchases they've made, according to their user experience. Then, along comes that modern women's aesthetic standard and fashion concept

gradually increasing and clear. Outfit of the day, delicate makeup, etc. shared by users in the community all suggest that women are becoming more positive and confident about their identity.

All in all, the achievements of Xiaohongshu cannot be separated from the theme of female identity construction: the operation of Xiaohongshu, analysis on the female identity and purchase intention of female users of Xiaohongshu, and the similarities and differences between the female image created by the Xiaohongshu and the Chinese female image.

3. THE OPERATION OF XIAOHONGSHU AND HOW DO PEOPLE AND HOW DO THEY GAIN TO PROFIT BY POSITIONING WOMEN

Xiaohongshu's positioning basically aims at the young post-90s girls in the first and second-tier cities who love beauty and pursue a refined life and provide them with relevant content guidelines [4]. The platform also covers a wide range of contents, e.g., fashion, skincare, make-up, hairstyle, etc. Xiaohongshu's positioning of consumers has gradually become clear from the original fuzziness and finally turned into an app with women as the main consumer [5].

Since its establishment in 2013, Xiaohongshu has gradually transitioned from the initial outbound shopping community to the current community e-commerce platform with the changes of the market and its own development. The slogan of the little Xiaohongshu book is also changing over time. From "good things abroad" in 2014 to "good things all over the world" in 2015 to "good life all over the world" in 2016, which has finally become the current "mark my life". From the evolution history of the slogan, we can also see the gradual change of its positioning. At first, Xiaohongshu was only a strategic community for overseas shopping. At the end of 2014, Xiaohongshu began to enter the e-commerce market. Later, with the increasing demand of users for cross-border goods in the market, Xiaohongshu began to make efforts in the cross-border e-commerce market and stand out from many competitors. The number of users of Xiaohongshu is increasing. With the influx of young users, e-commerce brands are gradually expanding from overseas to local, more third-party brands are entering, and the market boundary is expanding. Community notes cover all categories from overseas shopping to beauty makeup, and now skin care, mother and baby, fashion, sports, travel etc. The content has become more and more diversified, the consumer is changing from vague content to more concrete. Xiaohongshu wants to serve as an entrance to the lifestyle of young people through two platforms: community and e-commerce.

The operators of Xiaohongshu mainly start with some needs in women's lives, e.g., promoting the content of

beauty, mother and baby and other life types. Meet users' aesthetic and psychological recognition of their promotion content to obtain traffic from it. Therefore, if one wants to successfully operate this app, one needs to understand women's aesthetics and needs and arouse their recognition. Xiaohongshu has become a platform for beauty brand marketing investment and grass planting from the perspective of commodity categories sold. Unlike traditional e-commerce consumption mode, Xiaohongshu accelerates user decision-making, shortens the purchase path and enhances the marketing effect by planting grass [6]. The content mainly focuses on the bloggers' sharing of things they love and use in life so that women can buy things because they like to share things, to bring profits. The Xiaohongshu itself is also a shopping platform, i.e., one can buy their favourite things directly and conveniently.

Because a large number of bloggers basically operates Xiaohongshu, hence we also call bloggers operators. Different contents provided by them also enrich the Xiaohongshu app. The process of attracting customers to buy by bloggers planting grass has also shaped women's self-awareness and changes in some values. Operators portray the groups of these users by understanding women's preferences, their love of dressing up, their pursuit of beauty and their desire to buy. Therefore, the characterization of women in Xiaohongshu also reflects women's identity. For some dressing sharing, shopping sharing, and beauty makeup sharing reflected in the Xiaohongshu, we can see the aesthetic trend of women, which bloggers influence. This kind of aesthetic influence due to the famous task in Xiaohongshu can also depict their changes in self-cognition. It may be said that they are now starting from the stereotype of women in the past and then think that women have more possibilities to pursue different beauty. The appearance that operators hope to present is also a process of their self-identity construction.

Xiaohongshu meets the needs of women in use and shows that women's identity has been respected. For example, many posts in Xiaohongshu now have some words, e.g., things that girls must buy and good things that girls should not miss. These contents are specially set for girls. In this process, women's identity is also constructed. If they have to do something, they depict women's identity and limit their aesthetics to a box. Moreover, this topic also deepens the group aesthetics of women, and people will buy these things that may not be suitable for themselves because of the herd mentality, resulting in aesthetic changes.

This platform has lots of role models for each kind of person. These kinds of role models provide women ways to follow, to better adjust themselves. They can have a better standard of themselves. They may not be sure about what they really like and what they need to be like before, but after using the Xiaohongshu, they can find people

from different fields and can choose to follow. In this way, they can better construct themselves and know which way they need to do or how they can do [7].

4. ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE IDENTITY AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF FEMALE USERS OF XIAOHONGSHU

Xiaohongshu is a mainstream social medium based on the User Generated Content (UGC) model in China and a cross-border e-commerce platform that targets young women, the main social consumer group. One of the abundant reasons why Xiaohongshu has been dominating the Internet in two major areas is that Xiaohongshu enhances or builds the self-identity of modern female users and thus increases the purchase intention of the Xiaohongshu users. Thus, users are the first oriented that Xiaohongshu build female identity.

Based on social constructivism theory: People's cognition of social identity is constructed from interpersonal interaction and social environment [8]. Both the active and passive users of Xiaohongshu will be more or less affected by the contents of the little Xiaohongshu book and then change the female identity in the using process. Xiaohongshu, a mainstream social medium in China, the ideal female image built by the content will not deviate from the social environment. Modern female image is independence, confidence and strength. Almost "notes" are positive if searching "female" as a keyword in the Xiaohongshu. For example, there is the advice of being an independent female, knowledge of physical safety and calls to ease anxiety about appearance. Most Xiaohongshu users agree with this point of view, judging from the huge number of likes and shares. This aspect makes users willing to know more about the characteristics of women and construct modern female identity. Some unique female characters are shown from the sharing "notes", and thus female identity is built.

In the early period of founding China, many reasons involved traditional culture caused women to pay more attention to take care of family than men. Therefore, the life and food expenditure around the husband and children will take up a large proportion of traditional women's consumption. Meanwhile, due to economic backwardness and lack of consumption power, women pursue the actual value of goods [9]. Since China's reform and opening up, women's disposable income and social status have gradually improved, increasing women's consumption power. However, the female subject consciousness is vague, and the aesthetic style is single, and the female consumption method is still in the exploration stage. Consumerism, take Xiaohongshu as an example, plays a crucial role in the purchase intention of modern women. Modern women refer to women who have their own work, career, and income in today's society, who are financially independent, free from men's

constraints, and have a strong sense of self-domination. Female users of the book account for 90.41%, and most of them are metropolitan white-collar workers aged between 18 and 34. They pursue high quality of life and have strong consumption needs and power. Up to 70 per cent of Xiaohongshu customers are women, and their average age is 29. They represent the economically independent segment of modern women [10].

Beneath the surface of success, Xiaohongshu do very well in female consumer orientation. Traditional females purchase products because of active psychology and practical psychology. That is, female consumption is household chores and family expenditure. Based on consumerism, modern women are more likely to buy products on account of emotional psychology and self-esteem psychology [9]. Brands or bloggers give products a feminine meaning. For example, as marketing planning of French vogue brand Rouje in the Xiaohongshu, it combines brand position with female image management and holds female marketing activities. Moreover, Rouje becomes a social instrument. Brands and bloggers in the Xiaohongshu built emotional bonds with the female through “note”. In this case, females prefer a brand that accords with their value. Female consumption choices are limited to basic goods and spending in health consumption and tourism, etc.

Active users, e.g., popular bloggers and marketing accounts, will share good products and experiences because of five motivations: social, utilitarian, reciprocal, showoff and altruistic [8]. Passive users can learn about the product and user experience by others’ “notes” and thus would likely buy the product. It is very successful that Xiaohongshu transformation from a shopping guide application to e-commerce. “Notes” transform the Xiaohongshu value of the information into the value of the commodity transactions. Since women dominate Xiaohongshu, “notes” on women’s topics such as skin care, beauty, and handbags make up two-thirds of the content. Such rich recommendations on women’s topics further enhance the use feeling of female users. Xiaohongshu opinion leaders, which includes popular bloggers and commercial accounts, also play an important role in users’ purchase intentions. The deeper reason for the main popular bloggers’ (opinion leaders) behavior is attracting more followers and thus transforming the following value to businesses value through doing advertising or creating their own brand. Compared with other e-commerce platforms, Xiaohongshu itself has a weak shopping orientation and will not guide users to buy through too many advertisements. Xiaohongshu’s word of mouth marketing, which includes sharing “notes” based on users’ personal experience and personalized recommendations, makes the Xiaohongshu’s contents more reliant on female users. Potential female users are also more likely to buy and repurchase products from the Xiaohongshu. In the shopping festivals, it is acquiescent

for Xiaohongshu users to enter the shopping pages, which relative enables to eliminate women’s hesitant consumer psychology. In addition, based on the topic of female interest, Xiaohongshu divides different parts at the top of the home page such as Vlog, Painting, Vogue and Cosmetic. This strategy enables female users to find kindred spirits accurately and communicate experiences and knowledge about products. Therefore, the businesses loop behind each “note” about female topics make the prosperity of Xiaohongshu.

5. THE IMPLICATIONS BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF XIAOHONGSHU AS A PLATFORM FOCUSED ON WOMEN CONSTRUCTION

Due to Xiaohongshu is a local APP in China, and the main users of Xiaohongshu are in China, so we aimed a relationship between Xiaohongshu and the situation in China.

As of August 2020, Xiaohongshu had more than 450 million registered users and 100 million monthly active users. It is undeniable that Xiaohongshu as a female-dominated APP is successful, and precise market position plays a great role in it.

There are 3 basic perspectives of Xiaohongshu’s orientation. Firstly, the grasp of the social situation. As society developed and ideological emancipation, the status of females gained a significant improvement. Women are no longer consider Xiaohongshu to play a secondary role in society. More and more women start chasing after their own careers nowadays instead of devoting themselves to their families. Her economy appears Xiaohongshu.

According to the ‘2021 Xiaohongshu Active User Portrait trend Report’, it turned that the active users are younger, and 90.41% of users are female. It pointed out that ‘white-collar women’, ‘Urban elite females’ are their main user groups. Thus, this group has strong consumer demand and substantial purchasing power [2].

The founder of Xiaohongshu caught the opportunity behind this phenomenon and created the platform at the right time. After launched the e-commerce function, the superiority of Xiaohongshu became even more obvious. Therefore, we have to mention another essential function here-Community. Xiaohongshu users are most concerned about cosmetics, fashion, skin care, and baby products among all Xiaohongshu communities. Users always recommend some related supplies in there. To solve the problem of “visible but not available”, Xiaohongshu launched online shopping in 2014, transforming from a content community into content e-commerce. A closed business loop is formed. This increased the competitiveness of the platform and helped Xiaohongshu grow.

The second perspective is about the group effect. Through the hierarchical theory of needs, we can find that as the economic development and improvement in the standard of living, people's basic needs have been fully satisfied. This case leads their desire for middle and upper levels of needs gradually strengthened, including social demand. Consistent with the paragraph mentioned above, the community is the feature of Xiaohongshu.

“User Generated Content (UGC)” is the operation model of the Xiaohongshu community. It provides a platform for users to discuss the supplies. UGC is related to the concept Henry Jenkins raised in 1992, which is called “participatory culture”. This culture focuses on relationship building and self-identity, advocate personalized text, and emphasises collective wisdom [11]. It means that the role of users has changed. Users are not only the recipients of information but also the producers and promoters [12]. Therefore, Xiaohongshu users can show themselves easily and gain identity in the community. At the same time, female identity occurs in a multivariate way under this atmosphere. Therefore, an Intelligent algorithm is a way to helps Xiaohongshu build a highly sticky community in this digital age. It tracks and analyses the data from the personal information filled in by users and the content they often browse and search, and finally presents a customized home page.

Lastly, the judgment of the users' mentality is also an important part. “You are what you buy” is a well-known classical saying of consumerism. Xiaohongshu always helps consumers attach labels and bring social value in this way since consumers trust social relationship reviews more than brand advertising.

There is a new concept called “public image economy” in the economy, which is an act of inducing others to think of the person as a more popular image. A part of users in Xiaohongshu will describe products as necessities they should buy to become what they want to be. Take small endowment the life as an example, and it is a lifestyle that a part of women is pursuing. Therefore, some people label certain goods as essential items of small endowment the life, attracting them to focus on relative content in this way.

In conclusion, Xiaohongshu's success stems from its recognition of the value of modern women and the accuracy of the current form of analysis and the bold prediction of the future.

6. CONCLUSION

As the most popular online shopping platform in China, the success of Xiaohongshu is bound to be inseparable from the successful control of female identity and the construction of modern women of the time. Whether it is Xiaohongshu's operation direction or their precise grasp of female users' purchase intention, women on Xiaohongshu possess more identities and rights to

pursue different beauty and have a clearer cognition and positioning of themselves. The subject consciousness of women is no longer vague, and their aesthetic style is no longer single because. In the 21st century, e-commerce is more receptive, which will make groups that were not taken seriously become powerful. These results offer a guideline for many more platforms that are developing.

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