The Impact of Gendered Content on Social Media Platforms on Users' Gender Consciousness: A Case Study of Xiaohongshu

Wei Qiang

School of International Business, Zhejiang International Studies University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310023, China

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Abstract: This study analyzed the content ecology and communication characteristics of social media platforms and explored their impact on users' gender cognition, attitudes, and behaviors. Social media enhances user interaction through visual content and algorithmic recommendations, both driving gender diversity expression and reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. Through a literature review, this paper summarizes the dissemination mechanisms of gender-related content, including the prevalence of consumerism, fragmented dissemination, and the shaping of user experience by algorithmic personalization. The study found that social media provides an opportunity to break down traditional notions of gender, but at the same time exacerbates appearance-related anxiety and drives consumption-driven gender identity. This paper provides theoretical support for the cross-perspective of gender and media research and also puts forward suggestions for optimizing social media content production. By reducing algorithmic bias and promoting media literacy, social media platforms can play a more active role in advancing gender equality and building an inclusive digital environment.

1   INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the Internet, social media has become an important part of People's Daily life. Social media is not only a tool for people to disseminate and obtain information but also has a profound impact on social culture and individual values. As one of the most popular social media platforms among young Chinese users, Xiaohongshu has attracted a large number of female users with its beauty and lifestyle topics. In recent years, social issues on gender equality have attracted a lot of attention in China, and the XiaoHongshu platform also contains a lot of discussions on gender issues. As a social platform with wide influence, its content may also have an impact on users' gender awareness. Among them, opinion leaders and high-impact users provide users with behavioral paradigms of gender roles. Based on the above background, this study takes Xiaohongshu as an example to explore the dissemination characteristics of gender stereotypes in social media and its potential impact on users' gender perceptions. This study aims to integrate existing literature, reveal the dissemination rules of gender stereotype content, and put forward suggestions to

improve the platform content ecology and enhance public awareness of gender equality.

2   CONTENT AND COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS OF XIAOHONGSHU

As a popular social platform rising in recent years, Xiaohongshu has attracted a large number of users with its unique content ecology and communication mechanism. This section will focus on the analysis of Xiaohongshu's user attributes, content types, and communication mechanisms, and reveal the uniqueness and potential influence of its content ecology, so as to provide background support for the subsequent discussion on the impact of the dissemination of its gendered content on users' gender consciousness.

2.1   User Attributes

Xiaohongshu is a comprehensive UGC (user generated content) platform that focuses on sharing

lifestyle and integrates social networking and e-commerce shopping. As of February 2024, Xiaohongshu has more than 300 million monthly active users, of which female users account for nearly 80%. Community sharers exceed 80 million, daily user search penetration reaches 60%, and UGC content accounts for 90% (Qiangua Data, 2024). Data shows that the main active users of Xiaohongshu are young women in first - and second-tier cities. This group not only has a high consumption power but also pursues a high quality of life. This makes the content of Xiaohongshu highly focused on the needs of women, such as beauty, dressing, home improvement, etc. This content ecology has strengthened the dominance of "gendered" content to a certain extent. Although the proportion of male users has increased in recent years, its main active areas are digital, fitness, and tourism, which has not significantly changed the overall gendered trend of the platform.

2.2 Content Ecology

The content ecology of Xiaohongshu presents three characteristics: gendered communication, consumerist orientation, and fragmented visual communication. These features not only constitute the core content logic of the platform but also shape the way users experience and interact with content.

Gendered communication is a significant feature of the content ecology of Xiaohongshu, especially in the themes of beauty, dressing, and skin care. These contents repeatedly reinforce the traditional framework of specific gender roles through visual expression and symbolic language (European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2024). For example, the labels "delicate makeup" and "women in the workplace" imply that women need to reflect their value through appearance management, further consolidating gendered perceptions (Gill, 2007). Although male content is gradually emerging, the theme is mostly focused on fitness and digital fields, and the gender division of labor is obvious. This form of communication not only meets the needs of users but also subtly shapes social expectations of gender roles.

The consumerism orientation runs through the content ecology of Xiaohongshu. As one of the birthplaces of "seeding culture", the platform promotes the wide dissemination of commodity information through UGC and binds consumption to users' lifestyles (Nguyen, 2024). While enhancing the appeal of content, this model conveys implicit values through emotional narration, such as the social expectation of "exquisite life" or "perfect image"

(Swim et al., 1995). Although users may realize self-expression in consumption behavior, this binding relationship also invisibly deepens the path of gendered consumption behavior.

Fragmented visual communication is another important feature of Xiaohongshu content. The platform is dominated by short videos and pictures, which quickly attract users' attention through intuitive and vivid communication (Frontiers, 2023). This fragmented form suits the browsing habits of mobile users and can deliver complex information in a short period. For example, wearing notes intuitively shows the matching effect through pictures, and short videos use "before and after comparison" to strengthen the impact of communication. Although this efficient communication method improves the information flow rate, it limits the in-depth discussion of complex topics (Preacher et al., 2007).

2.3 Communication Mechanism

The communication characteristics of Xiaohongshu are mainly reflected in three aspects: algorithm recommendation, user interaction, and fragmented communication.

Algorithm recommendation is the core of the platform propagation mechanism. By analyzing users' browsing, liking, and commenting behaviors, the platform achieves an accurate push of personalized content (Nguyen, 2024). This mechanism, while improving the user experience, also makes the high-frequency distribution of content and user preferences form a cycle. However, the recommendation logic of the algorithm may exacerbate the "information cocoon" effect, and the content types exposed to users tend to be simple, further strengthening the existing gender role cognition (European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2024).

User interaction drives the secondary distribution of content. Interactive forms such as likes, comments, and retweets not only enhance user engagement but also directly affect the recommendation priority of content. High interactive notes can often obtain greater exposure, forming the communication logic of "user feedback - content push - high interaction" (Marsh, 2010). While users' participation in social media can promote multiple discussions, it may also cause the spread of negative emotions due to controversial events (Luo, 2023). In addition, social interaction among users builds a stronger sense of belonging through discussion and sharing in the comments section. For example, in the "seeding" note, users often provide their own consumption

experience by leaving messages to further promote the spread of relevant content.

Fragmented communication is an important manifestation of the characteristics of Xiaohongshu communication. Short videos and pictures convey information in a concise and intuitive form, which improves the efficiency of content communication (Frontiers, 2023). The use of visual symbols enhances the impact of the content, but may also weaken the user's overall understanding of the topic (Preacher et al., 2007). Short video content, for example, often in a few seconds to show product effect or collocation technique, through symbolic expression to catch the user's attention, and weaken the possibility of a deep discussion.

3 INFLUENCE

Gender stereotypes in social media platforms affect users' gender awareness through cognition, attitude, and behavior. Research has shown that social media content can not only shape users' perceptions of gender roles but also subtly change individuals' attitudes toward gender equality through long-term exposure. The following will be combined with the communication characteristics of social media such as Xiaohongshu, and specifically analyze the impact of gendered content on users' gender awareness.

3.1 Cognition

Social media platforms have profoundly influenced users' gender perceptions, and their content ecology both provides space for the spread of diverse gender roles and reinforces traditional role frameworks through gendered content. On the one hand, the platform relies on short videos and pictures to lower the threshold of knowledge acquisition, helping users to access diverse gender expressions in a shorter time (Frontiers, 2023). Themes such as fitness, career planning, and skill learning gradually show non-traditional gender images such as "power beauty" and "women in the workplace", providing users with the possibility to broaden their gender cognition (Gill, 2007). User-generated content further enriches these expressions, and personal growth stories or gender-equal experience sharing encourages more users to rethink the limitations of gender roles (Lin et al., 2013). This kind of diversified dissemination based on UGC makes the boundary of gender cognition continue to expand, and some users gradually get rid of the shackles of traditional gender roles.

However, the spread of gendered content also deepens the solidification of traditional gender roles to some extent. Through the repeated transmission of symbolic language and visual symbols, the platform implicitly transmits gender stereotypes (Preacher et al., 2007). For example, content labels such as "delicate makeup" and "elegant women" strongly bind the female image to appearance management, making these concepts gradually internalized as part of users' cognition (European Journal of Cultural Studies, 2024). Algorithm recommendation plays an important role in this process. User behavior data is used to screen content that meets interests and preferences, while the high-frequency push of gendered transmission further limits users' access to diverse information (Nguyen, 2024). For young users, this repetitive visual symbol reinforces the homogeneity of gender cognition and makes them gradually accept the passively constructed definition of gender roles.

3.2 Attitude

At the attitude level, social media platforms have promoted diversified changes in users' attitudes toward gender roles through emotional narration and community interaction (Marsh, 2010). The comment section and the like mechanism provide a space for users to participate in the discussion of gender issues. This group interaction not only helps users understand different gender expressions but also enhances their tolerance of non-traditional gender roles (Frontiers, 2023). For example, content under topics such as "Women in the workplace" and "strength training" not only shows the diversity of gender roles but also further conveys the identity of diverse gender roles through communication between users. This mode of interaction enables more users to re-evaluate the social meaning of traditional gender roles in emotional resonance.

The implicit impact of social media's consumerist narrative on attitudes towards gender roles cannot be ignored either. Many "seeding" notes link beauty with success through emotional expression, implicitly reinforcing traditional gender biases (Swim et al., 1995). Skincare and beauty content bundles appearance management with social acceptance, making it easier for users to accept the idea that beauty is valuable (Gill, 2007, Kumari & Joshi, 2015). This implicit narrative model is further amplified by users' recognition of gendered content and gradually consolidates the traditional division of gender roles. The contradiction of this dual attitude is particularly prominent among young women, who on

the one hand are attracted by diverse gender expressions, and on the other hand, unconsciously identify with the shaping of gender values by consumer behavior.

3.3 Behavior

At the behavioral level, social media platforms both promote diverse practices and reinforce gendered consumer behaviors. Short video and picture content improve the efficiency of behavior imitation through fragmented dissemination, helping users to contact and try new fields in a shorter time (Lin et al., 2013). Such as fitness content, and short videos of strength training promote the popularity of the concept of "strength beauty" through intuitive visual presentation and specific operation guidance (Gill, 2007). This kind of content not only drives more female users to engage in healthy behaviors but also inspires a broader interest in practice through interaction and imitation. Some users share their behavioral changes in content interactions, such as breaking through gender bias through fitness challenges, trying new skills, or planning career paths, which further reinforce the positive cycle of behavior in the dissemination of the platform.

On the other hand, consumer behavior remains the core area where social media platforms influence gender role behavior. Seeding culture uses visual communication and emotional narration to shape consumption behavior as an important way to practice gender roles (Preacher et al., 2007). Skincare, beauty, and other contents promote the cycle of "anxiety-driven-consumption practice-identity internalization" by constructing appearance anxiety (Nguyen, 2024). This consumption behavior pattern is particularly prominent among young users, and some users gradually regard consumption as the main way to achieve gender role identity. Although this consumption-dependent behavior pattern can satisfy immediate needs, it limits users' deep exploration of diverse gender role practices to a certain extent.

4 ADVICE

4.1 Platform

Social media platforms need to balance commercial interests with social responsibility in promoting the distribution of content. The algorithm recommendation mechanism should give priority to social values, including gender equality, public good, and multiculturalism. For example, in special periods

such as International Women's Day, to improve the exposure of relevant content and guide users to pay attention to social issues. Platforms also need to avoid algorithms that over-reinforce user preferences, reduce the formation of "information cocoons," and provide users with more diverse content.

Content diversity needs to be reflected in the recommendation strategy. Recommendation mechanisms should not only push traditional gendered content that conforms to user preferences but also increase the proportion of content related to multiple gender roles and social issues. For example, career-themed content can simultaneously present different gender narratives, helping users reach a wider range of information. This recommendation strategy not only enriches the user experience but also helps to promote the change in social attitudes.

In addition, the platform can optimize the recommended content by strengthening the data analysis of users' likes, comments, tags, and other functions. Quality content should receive more traffic support due to positive user evaluation, and encourage creators to produce more socially valuable content. At the same time, establish a transparent evaluation and feedback mechanism, so that user behavior directly affects content recommendation and promotes the optimization of content ecology.

In global operations, platforms need to be culturally sensitive. Cultural backgrounds in different regions have different levels of acceptance of gender issues, and a single strategy may lead to cultural conflict. The platform should adjust the way of content promotion according to the local social context, and adopt a progressive promotion strategy for regions with strong traditional gender concepts to ensure that the content is widely accepted.

In response to potential problems with gendered content, platforms need to step up censorship and limit the spread of content that may reinforce stereotypes or appearance anxieties. Through thematic activities or educational columns, users are gradually guided to pay attention to positive issues such as gender equality and social welfare and improve the content ecology.

4.2 Content Production

Social media platforms can encourage creators to break gender stereotypes and explore diverse narratives through traffic incentives and technical support. For example, traditional gendered themes such as beauty and dressing are integrated into diverse values such as competence and responsibility sharing. Such content not only attracts a wider

audience but also leads users to re-examine gender roles.

The improvement of content quality requires a more explicit reward mechanism. The platform can also establish a "social benefit scoring" system, and give traffic tilt and special rewards to content such as gender equality and female empowerment. For example, highly rated content can get more exposure, thus motivating creators to take the initiative to express social issues. This mechanism can effectively improve the overall quality of the platform content ecosystem.

Content producers should also focus on the social impact of their content. Creators can resolve the intensification of appearance anxiety by gendered content through a more authentic and closer narrative approach to users. When recommending a product, it should not only show its appearance value but also emphasize its functionality or practicality, reducing excessive attention to appearance. Through the adjustment of content language and visual presentation, producers can invisibly promote positive changes in social concepts.

4.3 User

In the social media ecosystem, users are both recipients of content and participants in its dissemination. Users need to be able to think critically, identify and analyze the information they are exposed to, and avoid being influenced by gender stereotypes and consumerist narratives. When contacting appearance management content, rationally assess whether the content meets the actual needs, and do not blindly follow the implicit values. Users should also take the initiative to combine offline knowledge and interaction to improve cognition. Understand multiple gender roles and avoid relying on a single source of information by participating in readings, workshops, social events, etc. Multi-channel access to information not only improves cognitive depth but also enables a more comprehensive understanding of social issues.

Users should also pay attention to the improvement of self-expression ability. By commenting, sharing, or creating, users can express their true views and promote the spread of gender diversity. Especially in the case of gender equality or social good, sharing personal experiences can help spark discussion and deepen awareness of the issue. This positive expression has a positive impact on both the user and the social media environment.

Healthy content consumption habits are also crucial. Users should reduce their reliance on algorithm recommendations, take the initiative to find a variety of topics, and break the "information cocoon". Wider access to content can broaden cognitive boundaries and also help to change the limitations of one-way algorithmic push on user thinking. When using social media, users should control their time reasonably, avoid indulging in fragmented content, and protect attention and cognitive ability from negative effects.

Users should also take a more active social responsibility. Liking and retweeting good content helps it spread more widely while being alert to bad content avoids spreading negative emotions.

5 CONCLUSION

This study based on social learning theory, combined with the previous literature, the gender of Xiaohongshu platform content and transmission characteristics is analyzed, and further explores the platform's gendered effects on the user's gender concept. The study found that Xiaohongshu, through its highly gendered content, algorithm recommendation mechanism, and user interaction mode, profoundly affects users' gender awareness at the level of cognition, attitude, and behavior. By strengthening the cognition of traditional gender roles, enhancing the recognition of traditional gender roles, and promoting the consumption behavior driven by appearance anxiety, gender stereotype content gradually solidifies users' stereotyped expectations of gender roles. At the same time, the consumerist orientation of content weakens users' focus on gender equality issues and makes them more inclined to cater to society's traditional expectations of gender roles.

By analyzing the communication mechanism of gendered content, this study puts forward a series of optimization suggestions, including introducing communication value factors, supporting gender-diverse narratives, and improving users' digital literacy. These strategies aim to promote the optimization of the platform content ecology, reduce the negative impact of gender stereotypes, and promote the promotion of public awareness of gender equality. In the future, social media platforms should assume greater social responsibilities with a more open and diverse perspective, and contribute to the spread and realization of gender equality.

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