

Identity Construction of Generation Z Women on China's Social Media Platform Xiaohongshu

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Abstract:

With the development of social media in the world, Xiaohongshu has turned into one of the most popular lifestyle platforms for young Chinese women, and because of its rich features and information, it has also allowed more and more users to try to show themselves on the platform and carry out self-identity construction on the social platform. Therefore, this paper is aimed at researching the identity construction of Generation Z women on the Xiaohongshu platform, through a quantitative questionnaire survey and a targeted invitation to young women of Generation Z to answer the questionnaire, and through the study of the questionnaire questions and the data obtained, it summarises the influences and adverse influences of Generation Z women on the platform in the process of identity construction, as well as the different balanced attempts made by them, and points out what needs to be paid attention to. The content of the study is summarised in the questionnaire and data. This research bridges the gap of previous studies and provides new perspectives and empirical research for Generation Z women in identity construction.

Keywords: Generation Z Women; Xiaohongshu; Identity Construction; Social Media

1. Introduction

Generation Z specifically refers to young people born between 1995-2010, and social media is one of the main online platforms they use to socialise. With the development of the Internet in the 21st century, young people of Generation Z rely more and more on online social media for their self-expression as well as identity construction, and online social media

largely influences their way of thinking, shopping habits, self-perception, and other aspects. Xiaohongshu is an information-sharing platform for Chinese users. Starting from a community-based approach, Xiaohongshu attracted a group of users to share their overseas shopping experiences in the early days of its creation, and in the following years it started to gradually broaden its scope to beauty, personal care, sports, traveling, eating and live broadcasting, with

life as its core, and now it has become a community-based e-commerce platform attracting a large number of young Chinese women. Users are free to express their interests and tastes, as well as browse for the information they need on Xiaohongshu.

According to the research industry-wide active user data, as of 2024, the proportion of women in the small red book is nearly 80%; the age distribution of users, 18-24 years old accounted for more than 39%, 25-34 years old accounted for more than 38%. Generation Z women, as the main user group of Xiaohongshu, try to construct their self-identity by displaying their personal life, consumption habits, experience sharing, and popularisation of science, which not only expresses their personal self-presentation, but also reflects the complex process of self-identity construction in terms of their interest identity, consumption symbols, gender roles, collective identity, and obsession with data.

Identity construction belongs to a social psychological phenomenon that makes different changes according to different cultural contexts and social environments. Goffman suggests in *The Theory of Dramaturgy* that 'Individuals reveal their identities and social roles through self-expression on specific occasions [1].' When social media is combined with identity construction, users shape and reinforce their self-identity based on displaying specific symbolisations for identity construction. At the same time, Xiaohongshu, which is also involved in 'e-commerce', also influences the choices of young women of Generation Z to a certain extent, so their identity construction is not one-dimensional. Baudrillard suggests that the act of consumption is not just a material exchange, but a symbolic consumption in which individuals express their self-identity and social status by consuming specific brands and goods [2]. Xiaohongshu, as a highly consumer-oriented social platform, female users similarly display and recommend a variety of fashion items in order to follow current trends, reinforcing the shaping of a persona in the virtual space, and in the construction of self-identity, also reflecting the quest for balance between social expectations and personality expression.

2. Literature Review

In the digital age, the social world can no longer be fixed on a map in the form of symbols, but becomes a cultural stream reproduced by flickering LCD screens, crystallised in intelligent dots into 'racial landscapes, technological landscapes, financial landscapes, media landscapes, and landscapes of consciousness [3]'. Social media platforms are not only a place for users to express their opinions and share their lives but have also become a key medium for

identity construction. Several studies have shown that social media provides individuals with a dynamic platform for self-presentation, where users continuously adjust and shape their self-identity by posting pictures, texts, and videos [4]. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory states that individuals form their self-identity through connections to particular groups, and on social media, these group connections are more complex and diverse [5]. When using Xiaohongshu, Generation Z women engage in corresponding behaviours to show their pursuit of identity in social media. Young people of Generation Z will be more influenced by the Internet and social media in their self-identity construction because their upbringing belongs to a generation with a high degree of Internet development [6]. Because of the diversified nature of social media, the identity of Generation Z women is also characterised by a high degree of individualisation and fragmentation, and social media has become an important platform and medium. As of 2022, China's Generation Z female mobile Internet active users have exceeded 120 million and show a steady growth trend, favouring Weibo and Xiaohongshu in terms of social entertainment [7].

As a lifestyle-sharing platform, Xiaohongshu's unique 'social + e-commerce' model provides a multi-dimensional identity display space for female users [8]. Because the platform is dominated by female-oriented content such as fashion, beauty, travel, and pets, many users share content to create an idealised self-image and even sign up with MCN to create their own accounts for other users to follow and emulate. Feedback through data and traffic makes young women more reliant on interaction and recognition with others. Regarding women's identity construction, Butler's study emphasised the impact of gender roles and social expectations on women's self-identity [9]. To a certain extent, Xiaohongshu has prompted young women to cater to mainstream aesthetics and social standards through stereotypical impressionistic lifestyles. However, this process of 'self-presentation' often brings with it gendered pressures and contradictions, with women wanting to conform to societal expectations, but also wanting to express their individuality through the construction of unique identities [10].

Although there have been many studies covering Generation Z, young women's identity construction, and the influence of social media, there is a gap in empirical research on Generation Z young women's identity construction on the Xiaohongshu platform. Under China's unique cultural background and gender role expectations, there is still a lot of room to explore the interplay between Generation Z young women's self-expression, self-identification, and persona construction through this platform, as well as their habits, gender identities, and social roles.

Therefore, this research aims to fill the research gap and provide new perspectives and empirical evidence to understand the identity construction of Generation Z young women in social media.

In summary, the identity construction of Generation Z young women on Xiaohongshu is influenced by many aspects, yet further empirical research is still needed to support the study about the unique role of Xiaohongshu, which is different from other social media, and how Generation Z young women balance the process of self-molding and social expectations.

3. Methodology

The questionnaire was designed through quantitative research methods, created through Questionnaire Star, and targeted young women born in Generation Z were invited to respond on the Questionnaire Star and Xiaohongshu platforms. The questionnaire was designed with 20 single-choice questions to ensure the accuracy of the responses and the distribution period was 7 days. Questionnaires were considered invalid when they were answered too quickly and the answers showed obvious regularity and 71 valid questionnaires were returned.

4. Results

The purpose of this survey was to study the identity construction of Generation Z women on the Xiaohongshu platform, and through the questionnaire, data information on the participants' own use of Xiaohongshu was collected in a targeted manner to facilitate the research at a later stage.

The year of birth of Generation Z was divided into three categories, with 36.62% of respondents born in 1995-1999 in the second place, 52.11% of respondents born in 2000-2004 in the highest place, which was significantly higher than the other years, and 11.27% of respondents born in 2005-2009 in the lowest place.

In terms of the distribution of occupations, office workers were the group with the largest number of visits to this question, accounting for 53.52%, or more than half. The student group was the second largest with 29.58%. The percentage of freelancers (self-publishers, self-employed, and others) was 11.27%. The share of the 'other' group was 5.63 %.

Respondents' frequency of using the Xiaohongshu software was mainly concentrated on the options of daily and several times a week, accounting for 50.7 % and 36.62 % respectively, while the options of several times a month and less were relatively few, accounting for only 7.04 % and 5.63 % respectively.

In terms of the main purpose of using Xiaohongshu, the largest percentage of respondents used it as a search engine, 26.76%, 18.31% of respondents chose to learn skills, 16.9% of respondents chose to share their lives on the platform, the same percentage of respondents chose to operate an account and browse other people's information, both 12.68%, the number of people who chose to go shopping was smaller, accounting for 8.45%, and for the search for self-identity Only 2.82 % chose to do so, and other reasons accounted for 1.41 %.

In terms of psychological changes caused by the relevant content, 45.07% of the respondents felt anxious about their looks because of the relevant content on the Xiaohongshu, while 54.93% of the respondents did not feel anxious about their looks. 43.66 % of the respondents felt inferior in skills because of the content related to Xiaohongshu, while 56.34 % said that they did not feel inferior in skills because of it. 61.97 % of the respondents said that they had fantasies of a refined life because of the relevant content on Xiaohongshu, while 38.03 % said that they had not. 46.48% of respondents cared about their image of Xiaohongshu, while 53.52% did not.

In terms of the impact triggered by the relevant content, the majority of respondents believed that the relevant content on Xiaohongshu had a small impact on their appearance anxiety, with the proportion of very small and small impact being 36.62 % and 40.85 %, respectively, while 12.68 % of respondents believed that there was no impact, and 9.86 % believed that there was a large impact. More than 70 % of the respondents said that the content related to Xiaohongshu had an impact on their skills and low self-esteem, with 18.31 % of them saying that it had a greater impact. Content related to fine living on Xiaohongshu has little or very little impact on the lifestyles of the majority of respondents, accounting for 28.17% and 38.03%, respectively. Only a small number of respondents, totaling 19.72 %, said that they had been affected a lot or a great deal. 52.11 % believe that relevant content on Xiaohongshu has influenced their spending habits, while 47.89 % believe that it has not. Over 80% of respondents felt that Xiaohongshu had little or very little impact on their consumer behaviour, with 19.72% saying it had no impact. Less than 20% of respondents felt that Xiaohongshu had a big or huge influence on their consumer behaviour. The majority of respondents (84.52%) felt that relevant content on Xiaohongshu had little or very little impact on their self-image, with the highest percentage (30.99%) having very little impact. Only a few respondents (15.49 %) felt that the content had a greater impact on their self-image.

The number of people who chose 'yes' to questions about their account data was 30, or 42.25 %, and the number

of people who chose 'no' was 41, or 57.75 %. More than two-thirds of respondents felt Xiaohongshu had a very small or small impact on their data obsession, while no respondents felt Xiaohongshu had a huge impact on their data obsession.

52.11% of participants sought like-minded people on Xiaohongshu, while 47.89% denied seeking like-minded people on Xiaohongshu. The proportion of relevant content on Xiaohongshu that had a large and small impact on respondents' interests was high, at 32.39 % and 23.94 %, while the proportion of those who had a very small and no impact was relatively low, at 26.76 %, and 12.68 %, respectively.

Overall satisfaction with the content on Xiaohongshu was high, with the highest percentage of those who were relatively satisfied at 47.89%, 16.9%, and 29.58% were very satisfied and average respectively, while the percentages of those who were relatively dissatisfied and very dissatisfied were low at 4.23% and 1.41% respectively. 73.24% of people said they would recommend Xiaohongshu to their friends, while 26.76% said they would not.

5. Discussion

From the questionnaire survey, it can be clearly observed that Xiaohongshu has a higher attraction to Generation Z women, with most of the respondents' year of birth centred after 2000, and office workers as the occupational group of more than half of the respondents. It can be inferred that Xiaohongshu's platform is more attractive to younger groups and has a certain influence among office workers, as most Gen Z women have already entered the working stage, and going to work is the choice of most of them, except for a small number of people who choose to start their own business. The majority of respondents are dependent on the Xiaohongshu platform and use it on a daily basis, showing a high-frequency habit of using the platform.

The main purpose of respondents using Xiaohongshu is mainly to share their lives and use it as a search engine, which shows the importance of Xiaohongshu in information sharing and access and proves that the Xiaohongshu platform has a certain degree of attractiveness and accuracy in information retrieval and information recommendation.

The Xiaohongshu platform has a dual impact on young women's identity construction. About half of the respondents believe that the relevant content on Xiaohongshu will trigger their own psychological changes such as appearance anxiety, skills inferiority complex, data obsession, and so on. Under the high-frequency push of content such as beauty make-up, photo-taking, studies, and pow-

der increase, the user will also have a series of psychological impacts, and although these impacts play a relatively small role in real life, the accumulation of a small number of people will also contribute to the qualitative change. Female users are often influenced by multiple domains in the formation of their identities on the platform, and under the influence of the 'Internet famous person effect', they tend to demand multiple aspects of themselves, which is also the influence of social media on people's perceptions, but on Xiaohongshu, such influence is targeted. This is also the effect of social media on people's perceptions, but on the Xiaohongshu platform, this effect is targeted at Gen Z women. The good side is that women will be inspired by the relevant content and can find a suitable field and favorite style for themselves in a short period of time, break down their information fortress, get out of the misunderstanding caused by poor information, and perfect the cultivation of their hobbies and self-improvement. Xiaohongshu platform also plays a bad influence in that such psychological influence will make some users add unnecessary psychological burdens, anxiety, overload receiving information, and even blindly follow the crowd. In the follow-up questionnaire questions, it can be seen that a part of the respondents' concept of life is beginning to change, there will be fantasies of exquisite life, slight changes in consumption concepts, and even data obsession with their own accounts, for public figures, operating an account is an occupational necessity, but for ordinary users, over-obsessed with false prosperity may lead them into unnecessary obsessions, and some women even choose to follow the trend and create undesirable content (e.g. sexualised self, inflammatory content, and so on) in order to gain more exposure and attention, bringing negative impacts to themselves and the platform.

For the construction of self-identity, this paper gives the following suggestions through the research: because of the accuracy of the push of big data, people should remain calm when browsing some of the content, and should calmly and objectively analyse content that is provocative (here 'provocative content' includes advertisements, provocative remarks, as well); they should boldly make attempts to find content that really suits them when they are exploring their interests and looking for like-minded people; they should maximise the use of the 'community-based' features of the Xiaohongshu platform when they are building skills. When exploring one's own interests and looking for like-minded people, one should make bold attempts to find content that really suits one's own needs, and maximise the use of the Xiaohongshu platform's 'community-based' features; when it comes to the establishment of skills, one should not only look at the outside, but also take into account the inside, and strive to

cultivate both inside and outside, and be alert to the ‘community-based’ features of Xiaohongshu. The individualism behind the ‘persona’; for ordinary users who just like to share their life experiences, the gain and loss of account data should be correct, and rationally treat the feedback of other users on their own content. In terms of life concepts, although the Xiaohongshu platform only plays a role in influencing consumption habits, the overall impact on the lives of young women is not significant, but in the usual shopping should be wary of being brainwashed by the ‘consumerism’, which increases many unnecessary expenses and affects their lives.

6. Conclusion

Through a targeted questionnaire survey, this essay examines the self-influences and possible problems that may arise from Generation Z women’s identity construction in Xiaohongshu and presents the strengths and weaknesses of these influences as well as the parts that need attention. The research in this paper fills the research gap between the Xiaohongshu platform and Generation Z women in previous studies and presents the concepts and practices in a new perspective. However, because the scope of the study was limited and the sample size could not cover all suitable interviewees, the study has many shortcomings,

and these remaining issues need to be further addressed.

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