A Study of Xiaohongshu as an Important Decision-Making Platform - Based on the Perspective of Audience Commodity Theory

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Abstract. Under the digital media communication environment, the traditional audience commodity theory can no longer explain the logic of digital labor production. Therefore, this paper takes Xiaohongshu as an example, and explores how Xiaohongshu users carry out digital labor production from three perspectives: "producer and seller", "your media" and "philia". As "producers and sellers", Xiaohongshu users are attracted by Xiaohongshu's one-screen, multi-column page setup and the attraction of traffic to unconsciously produce content and data for the capital; as free "marketers", users not only produce content and data for the capital, but also produce data for the media, like the traditional "audience commodity" theory. As free "marketers", users not only attract audiences by providing free programmers and resell the audience ratings to advertisers for profit, as pointed out by the traditional "audience commodity theory", but also extend the chain of reproduction, and re-consume media with great power.

Keywords: Xiaohongshu, users, decision-making platform, audience commodity theory.

1   Introduction

In 2020, Xiaohongshu was selected as "China's new economy unicorn TOP100" list, and the download volume on the iOS download list social category climbed to the first place in February when the COVID-19 epidemic was the most serious. The "2022 thousand Guan active user portrait trend report (Xiaohongshu platform)" shows that Xiaohongshu monthly active users of more than 200 million people, of which 70% are "90", and maintain a continuous growth trend. Today, Xiaohongshu has become a content community that influences the lifestyles and consumption decisions of hundreds of millions of people, and it is almost impossible to find competitors of the same type. Xiaohongshu as young people's most important lifestyle and consumer decision-making portal, attracting many users in Xiaohongshu to share and discuss their own shopping experience and life experience, it is these users to support a huge Xiaohongshu, what role do they play in it?

At present, scholars' research on Xiaohongshu platform mainly has the following aspects. One is the concern for the operation mode and marketing strategy of Xiaohongshu's "social + e-commerce".Duan Peng discovered the platform's user participation-driven approach to monetization by dissecting user behaviors on Little Red Book. He posits that building rapport, creating a platform scenario, and generating emotion all facilitate user engagement.[1]Wei Ruqing and co-researchers conducted an empiric study on user-generated content (UGC) on Little Red Book and depicted the societal transmission mechanism through which UGC impacts buying intentions in community e-commerce. They deduced that relationship and cognitive capital have implications for UGC traits and subsequently impact user buying decisions.[2]

The second is to study the content production mechanism of Xiaohongshu. Li Qian conducted a comparative study of Xiaohongshu and Mushroom Street from the perspective of collaborative content production mechanism, and found that its content production is characterized by the coexistence of UGC (user-generated content) and PGC (professional-generated content), and that it efficiently integrates multiple subjects, focuses its content on life, beauty, hot spots and continuously deepens the formation of a focused community of content, emphasizing the integration of resources, the building of users' trust, and the collaborative win-win situation. [3]Luo Peiming examines the influencing factors of user-produced content in Xiaohongshu from three dimensions: technology, individual and society, and finds that the empowerment of users by Internet technology mobilizes their content production, and that altruistic psychology, self-image perception, and interactions between users in the community also positively influence their content production behavior. [4]Ye Yu and Chen Jinxi believe that the content production of Xiaohongshu is influenced by three main factors: users' own "sense of identity" needs, KOL's "persona" building needs, and brands' "topic" marketing needs. The influence of the three main bodies of content production.[5]

There is also a study on the self-presentation behavior and social behavior of Xiaohongshu users on the platform as an entry point. Pei Wuhao discusses the self-presentation behavior of Xiaohongshu users from the perspective of mimetic theory, analyzing the environment, process, motivation and dilemma of their behavior. [6]Liu Shan and Liu Ling study the "momo phenomenon" of anonymous social networking in Xiaohongshu group and find that it has gone through the "assimilation and copying stage" and the "mutation and flux stage", which is both the "assimilation and copying stage" and the "mutation and flux stage". It is a manifestation of the herd and anonymity of netizens, as well as the release of netizens' self-emotions.[7] Wu Xiaolu takes the "unboxing video" of Xiaohongshu platform as the starting point, and argues that the encounter between individuals and tribes on social e-commerce platforms is a subjective interaction driven by collective emotions, and the tribal consumption cycle is driven by the emotional mechanism of identity, trust and intrinsic benefits. Behind the "unboxing" is a circular mechanism in which interaction and consumption are embedded in and promoted by each other, and social e-commerce relying on social emotions to reach the positive cycle of "consumption-planting-consumption".[8]

2   The Audience Commodity Theory Perspective of Xiaohongshu Users

In 1977, Dallas Smethe put forward the commodity theory of the audience in his article Communication: The Blind Spot of Western Marxism, which used the secondary communication theory of the media to explain how the audience was transformed by the media and advertisers into an exchangeable commodity. [9]The article reveals the harsh reality of capitalism: what appears to be leisure and entertainment through media such as television after work is essentially a form of non-professional labor, a labor whose value is based on attention, which transforms the audience into a commodity that can be sold. "The objective reality is that in a monopoly capitalist society the Most people's non-sleep time is labor time. These labor hours are used in the production of common goods and in the Production and reproduction of labor. Within non-professional labor time, the largest chunk of time is the audience time sold to advertisers. The people who sell it are not the laborer's themselves, but the mass media.

2.1   "Producers and Sellers" Held Hostage by Platforms

With the continuous development of network technology, more and more people are participating in the network, and more and more digital laborers are being incorporated. The concept of "Presumption" is not a new concept. In 1980, the American futurist Alvin Toffler first proposed the concept of " Presumption" in his book "The Third Wave", predicting that the roles of producers and consumers will be more and more ambiguous, and eventually become "Producers and Sellers". producers and consumers, and eventually become "producers and sellers". This also reveals that the boundary between work and free time is disrupted in a society where production and consumption are united, and free time is more largely taken up by the production of goods and services that one needs.

The production of information content through audience labor can be divided into two specific categories, one as a "producer" creating information content; the other producing user data in the use of the media. Xiaohongshu relies on a large amount of content produced by users "unconsciously and consciously", and the concept of "producers and sellers" implies that audiences are becoming more and more proactive, gradually changing from passive acceptance to two-way interaction. Smyth's "Audience Commodity Theory" is controversial because it views the audience as completely passive, so in the new media environment, is the audience as free labor active or passive? Some scholars believe that under the digital media communication environment, the logic of labor production has been expanded, turning the passive audience into "active leeks". However, I believe that the seemingly active "leeks" are essentially being held hostage by the platform for production and marketing.

The platform society has become increasingly prosperous, with the rise of MCNs, the popularity of live broadcasting, and the packaging of major platforms becoming more and more exquisite and attractive to audience labor. On the surface, the audience is eager to use the media, but on a deeper level, the audience's growing demand for and

use of the media and platforms is also being forced by the development of the platform society. Xiaohongshu encourages "civilian bloggers" by adopting a decentralized traffic distribution method that "focuses on content, not on celebrities", which makes it easier for ordinary people to get traffic on Xiaohongshu than on other platforms. And any user can add a link to a product in the release of notes and cash. Therefore, the audience is tempted by the platform's capital, "actively" edited their own lives, integrated into notes published in Xiaohongshu, to obtain traffic and share the platform's benefits. However, under the manipulation of the platform's monopoly, users' interests are unfairly distributed, and the platform's protection of the rights and interests of the audience's labor is also potentially exploiting the audience.

Another type of productive act of audience labor is the user data generated. When using the medium, such as a review of a theory, likes, favorites, etc. are appropriated by the platform as data capital. Xiaohongshu's one-screen, multi-column page format is more effective in capturing users' attention, as a page contains more content that can attract users' The greater the likelihood that the user will browse one and then keep slipping and refreshing, on the one hand generating a more user data, on the one hand, brings more advertising benefits to Little Red Book. At the same time in the browsing of the notes interspersed with advertising notes of the platform partners with the Little Red Book, is also due to the user's clicked to create a huge advertising interests.

2.2   Acting as a Marketing "You Medium"

Digital media technologies have brought social relationships into the range of capital surveillance, and the act of socializing and maintaining social relationships has been alienated into marketing activities. The behavior of social media users in building their personal interpersonal social circles on the platforms transforms them into "you media", automatically engaging in advertising and marketing activities within the relationship network.

Xiaohongshu users share most of the display of a product, evaluation, etc., and the uniqueness of this type of content is that one of its important functions is to help users make decisions, which is equivalent to a preconception "encyclopedia", jittery voice and other platforms are also moving in this direction, to become a kind of life decision-making search engine, to become a shopping software, like Taobao Jingdong, but in this regard, Xiaohongshu is still the leader. Taobao Jingdong shopping software, but in the decision-making platform, Xiaohongshu is still the leader. The next step in decision-making is consumption, so Xiaohongshu is the platform closest to consumption. That is to say, the users on Xiaohongshu open the software interface with the purpose of consuming a certain product to seek some opinion information. In terms of the media use needs of Xiaohongshu users, the release of "planting","pulling","evaluation" type of notes is the direction of the heat.

Therefore, users become "you media" by posting notes based on social and traffic purposes, and "you media" is the most common way for users to publish their notes.

The effect of marketing and publicity carried out by the "body" is extremely powerful. For example, some clothing, food, etc. will add their own name in front of the

"Xiaohongshu explosive" prefix to increase the popularity of this product and "authority". Spontaneous shopping by ordinary Xiaohongshu users to share, the formation of a lively discussion, can directly promote the sales of a commodity surge. For example, if you post a dress to share, the comment area will be filled with many comments urging to send a link to the dress, the blogger is slow to reply to the comment area, there will even be bad words, which many bloggers know that they are doing free marketing, but under the pressure of having to send a link to the product. In this way, "you media" for businessmen to complete the production to consumption of the thrilling leap, while other users not only carry out the media consumption, but also actively complete the media re-consumption.

2.3   Users Under "Philia"

" Philia is a positive, emotional community bonds. It is the use of audience emotions" by media platform companies. By providing users with a "free lunch" and increasing the "emotional quality "of the social media platform and the advertising brand, they try to build "philia "and invisibly create a "philia". Corporate branding. One of the key reasons why Little Red Book has become an important platform for decision-making and consumption is that it hits the more moderate and open social atmosphere created by the company.

For example, its founder, Qu Fang, defines "Xiaohongshu" as "a place where you can always find a place for yourself". will have a good life"", Little Red Book is the largest community for sharing lifestyles", and "When we were designing this neighborhood in 2013, we didn't use celebrities but ordinary people like you and me ". That is to say, Xiaohongshu is creating a warm atmosphere of ordinary people helping ordinary people and helping each other, as a result of which users can freely share their life experiences and shopping tips, so that each user can obtain effective decision-making information in the diversified content notes. And this openness helps users build real and trusting social relationships, which increases the influence of Xiaohongshu and the ability to make lifestyle-oriented purchases. On the other hand, Xiaohongshu audits the quality of notes and comments, and reduces the exposure or deletes controversial notes and negative comments, thus building a friendly community environment, enhancing the inclusiveness of Xiaohongshu, and prompting users to become emotionally dependent on Xiaohongshu.

3   Conclusions

As we revel in the spectacle of the media, we should also remember the value of critical communication. The perspective of political economy of communication can help us avoid indulging in the phenomenon of mass culture itself and analyze the deeper structural motives behind it beyond cultural criticism. At the same time, as an important decision-making platform, Xiaohongshu has a unique operating mechanism that is different from other platforms, which also provides a rare opportunity to think about the development of political economy of communication in the new media environment.

Xiaohongshu users as "producers and sellers" are attracted by Xiaohongshu's multi-column page setting and traffic flow, and so on, and they unconsciously produce content and data. As free "marketers", users not only attract audiences by providing free programmers and resell the audience ratings to advertisers for profit, as pointed out by the traditional "audience commodity theory", but also, in the era of digital capitalism, users of Xiaohongshu are prolonging the reproduction of content and data. In the era of digital capitalism, users of Xiaohongshu extend the chain of reproduction, re-consume the media with great power, and directly supply real money to businesses through purchases; under the "folia" constructed by Xiaohongshu, users form a deep emotional connection with Xiaohongshu, and actively engage in emotional labor.

At the time of Smyth's media commodity thesis, perhaps he failed to realize that under a monopoly capitalist system, the worker Work time is not confined to the hours when we don't sleep. Today, with what Jonathan Clary has called "the end of sleep", we are moving into an era of ubiquitous digital labor. No longer restricted to traditional working hours, the use of digital media has completely merged lifetime with media time, leaving the individual in a state of near-constant exploitation. [10]The interactive technologies of the digital age have introduced media audiences into the information production sector, engaging in free information production work, and the "free time" of the digital age has been substantially transformed into labor time exploited by the media companies for capital appreciation, which confirms Smyth's assertion that "monopoly capitalism has no leisure time". Smyth's assertion that "monopoly capitalism has no leisure". The worst thing is that we are addicted to it without even realizing it. The powerful defenders of the exploitation of surplus value are precisely the ones who are being exploited. The cutters themselves. We know that we are the "leeks", the exploited, but still, like moths to a flame. You will endlessly brush through Xiaohongshu, and even finish shopping after being planted, voluntarily contributing the fruits of your labor to the merchants.

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