

The Trust Building of Beauty Bloggers on Xiaohongshu and the Impact of the ‘Seeding’ Mechanism from the Perspective of ‘She Economy’

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Abstract:

Based on the background of the ‘She Economy’, this study focuses on the beauty field of Xiaohongshu. It introduces Howard Becker’s Art World Theory as an integrative analytical framework, regarding the platform ecosystem as a dynamic ‘Art World’. The world relies on the collaborative network and sharing Convention among beauty bloggers (creators), the platform (art institution), female users (audiences), and brands (sponsors), this study systematically investigated how the three core Convention of professionalism, authenticity and empathy were collectively constructed and negotiated in the world, so as to build user trust. The research further revealed the operation logic of the ‘seeding’ mechanism operating along the path of ‘convention-driven content production→negotiated user interaction→trust-based transformation’. Research finds that while this collaborative network has positive effects in promoting consumption and creating value, there were also inherent risks from the erosion of business Convention, such as content homogenization, trust overdraft, and irrational consumption triggering. Accordingly, this study puts forward targeted governance suggestions to all stakeholders to promote the healthy development of the ecosystem under the routine maintenance.

Keywords: She economy; Xiaohongshu (RedNote); beauty blogger; trust building; ‘seeding’ mechanism

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

'She Economy' refers to the unique economic circle and phenomenon formed around women's financial management and consumption as their economic and social status improves [1]. According to relevant data, as of January 2025, the number of active female users in China's entire network has increased by 2.6% year-on-year, reaching 624 million, accounting for nearly half of the total network share. Their willingness to consume heavily online and their ability to consume high-priced products are significantly higher than those of men [2]. This powerful consumer force has made the 'She Economy' an important engine driving economic growth in China and even globally.

As a cross-border e-commerce and social media platform, Xiaohongshu has built a consumer community that integrates discovery, seeding, decision-making, and purchasing by incentivizing users to share product content, shopping experiences, and lifestyles on the platform. It has attracted over 260 million monthly active users and has become a key field for the development of 'She Economy' [3]. Among them, the beauty industry particularly exemplifies the operational logic of this platform.

1.2 Findings and Limitations of Existing Literature

The existing related research has mainly focused on three core directions: the ecosystem of the Xiaohongshu platform, women's consumption behavior, and KOL marketing and seeding mechanism, laying the foundation for this study.

Pemaratna pointed out that Xiaohongshu, with the slogan 'Discover Global Good Things', uses UGC to integrate content and personified terms to build a closer connection with users [4]. Female consumption behavior is gradually shifting towards deep self-enjoyment and empathetic consumption [3]. Dong used the SOR model to confirm that the 'seeding' mechanism can drive purchasing behavior by creating flow experiences [5].

In terms of research methods and theories, Cui and Wang employed social capital theory to analyze the impact of social interaction on consumer willingness [6]. Zeng, Ye, and Li explored the 'visibility' of women in the beauty community through text analysis and in-depth interviews [7]. Zhu analyzed the KOL 'self-branding' phenomenon from the perspective of 'emotional labor' [8].

However, these research perspectives mostly focus on a single variable and lack an integrated theoretical framework to systematically explain the intrinsic connection

and comprehensive impact between 'trust building' and the 'seeding' mechanism. Meanwhile, most studies have failed to deeply focus on the beauty field, a core category of 'She Economy', and lack theoretical tools that can integrate multiple roles within the Xiaohongshu platform's beauty field. Therefore, systematically clarifying the pathways and impact of trust-building and seeding mechanisms employed by beauty bloggers has become a necessary direction to fill the existing research gap.

1.3 Research Purpose and Significance

Focusing on the beauty sector on Xiaohongshu, this study aims to explore the practical strategies of trust building among beauty bloggers, the operational logic of the 'seeding' mechanism, and their combined impact on users, platforms, and industries from the perspective of 'She Economy', using Howard Becker's Art World Theory as an analytical tool. This will help optimize content creation for beauty bloggers, assist the platform in improving governance mechanisms, and provide strategic references for brands to develop precise and responsible marketing strategies. Moreover, the study findings also help guide platform users and consumers to improve their media literacy and maintain a critical perspective when consuming.

2. Research Framework and Design

2.1 Theoretical Basis

Several key frameworks have been established in the research on trust-building and the 'seeding' mechanism. Zhu believes that 'influencers' acting as 'insiders' within the Xiaohongshu community, foster users' emotional identification and rational trust. Their reputation ensures the warmth and credibility of the content they produce. Zhu's core viewpoint provides a theoretical reference for the setting of the 'empathy' trust dimension in this study [8]. Chen et al. clarified in their research on marketing strategies for knowledge influencers that users require more professional, in-depth, and accurate production of professional content, and that consumer attitudes have gradually returned to rationality and pragmatism in recent years, emphasizing the actual value of products. This provides a direct basis for defining the two trust analysis dimensions of 'professionalism' and 'authenticity' in this study [9].

2.2 Research Design

2.2.1 Research methods

Based on the existing research, this study adopts the content analysis method to analyze the content of the beauty bloggers' notes on Xiaohongshu from three subcategories:

professionalism, authenticity, and empathy. The aim is to objectively present the strategic distribution of trust-building by beauty bloggers. Professionalism is not only about introducing products, but also involves explanations of product ingredients and effects, interpretations of makeup techniques, and the demonstration of makeup steps. Authenticity refers to imperfect and real beauty narratives, such as emphasizing the absence of filters in the shooting scenes, actively mentioning the shortcomings of the product, and sharing personal usage experiences. It emphasizes the blogger's truthful and objective expression when sharing beauty products. Empathy refers to the beauty blogger's concern and emotional resonance towards users, such as being able to predict users' needs, using intimate

terms such as 'family' and 'sisters', designing makeup suitable for specific scenes, etc., and using soothing language to encourage users to try and accept imperfections. As shown in Table 1, this study constructed a structured coding framework for beauty bloggers' trust-building strategies, using a binary coding method ('1' for existence, '0' otherwise). The text, image, and oral content of the notes were then manually judged and encoded based on the three subcategories: professionalism, authenticity, and empathy. After all data were entered into SPSS 26.0, descriptive statistical methods were used for frequency analysis to present the adoption and distribution characteristics of each strategy.

Table 1. Content Analysis Coding Framework and Operational Definition

Core Dimension	Subcategories of Analysis	Operational Definition (standard encoded as ,1')
Trust-building	Professionalism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explanation of Techniques and Principles: Describing the underlying principles behind the makeup steps and product usage. 2. Systematic Methodology: Providing a self-consistent and logical makeup process or problem-solving approach. 3. In-Depth Product Analysis: Examining the product design logic, texture, makeup effect, and applicable scenarios.
	Authenticity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal Usage Experience: Sharing personal usage feelings, purchase background, or anecdotes related to the product/technique. 2. Negative feedback and Limitations Claims: mentioning product shortcomings, usage barriers, unsuitable people, and scenarios. 3. Unedited Claims: Emphasizing ,original camera' and ,no filters' in the text or voice-over. 4. Proof of Use: Displaying verifiable evidence such as empty bottles, stockpiling, or the results of makeup longevity tests.
	Empathy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pain Point Prediction and Resolution: Identifying common confusion or makeup difficulties of target users and providing solutions. 2. Scene/Skin Declaration: Specify one's own skin type, face shape, or indicate that the makeup look is designed for a specific scene. 3. Reduce User Anxiety and Encourage Experimentation: Using soothing language, lowering the threshold for practice, and encouraging users to try and accept imperfections.

2.1.2 Research subjects and sample composition

Based on the research design and objectives, this study adopts a purposive stratified sampling strategy to ensure the representativeness of the research subjects and the validity of the content data.

Firstly, in terms of object selection, this study selected 10 beauty bloggers from Xiaohongshu through stratified sampling based on their fan base. As shown in Table 2, the sample is evenly distributed between top bloggers (with over 1 million followers) and middle bloggers (with

10000 to 1 million followers). This layering ensures that research can capture the dynamics of trust building under different levels of influence, avoiding the limitations of only focusing on top celebrities.

Secondly, in terms of note selection, this study specifically focuses on content that has successfully established user trust. Therefore, three notes with significantly higher interaction levels (likes and favorites) than their average were selected from the output of each blogger from 2024 to present. The reason for this efficiency oriented standard

is that, within the theoretical framework of the art world, high interaction data is an objective indicator of user verification and trust acceptance. Analyzing these ‘best practice’ samples can more accurately identify effective trust building mechanisms, while low interaction notes may not reflect the successful operation of seeding mechanisms. In terms of note type distribution, makeup display and follow-up exercises account for the highest proportion, exceeding half, followed by sharing favorite items and beauty tutorials. These three types of notes cover the core

content forms in the beauty field on Xiaohongshu.

Finally, the sample size of 30 notes was determined based on the theme saturation principle. During the coding process, it was observed that by the 24th sample, the core categories of trust building strategies (professionalism, authenticity, empathy) had stabilized and no new significant topic codes emerged. This confirms that the sample library of 30 notes provides sufficient information density for this qualitative study.

Table 2. Overview of the Sample Population

Category	Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Blogger Hierarchy	top bloggers	15	50.0	50.0	50.0
	waist bloggers	15	50.0	50.0	100.0
Note Type	makeup tutorials	6	20.0	20.0	20.0
	favorite items sharing	7	23.3	23.3	43.3
	makeup display and follow-up exercises	17	56.7	56.7	100.0

3. Comprehensive Impact Analysis of Trust Building and the ‘Seeding’ Mechanism Based on Art World Theory

In order to analyze the comprehensive influence of the establishment of trust and cultivation mechanism and the collective collaboration logic behind it, this study uses Howard Becker’s “art world” theory as the analysis framework. The concept of the Art World was proposed by American sociologist Howard Becker. He contends that Art is not the product of isolated individuals, but an interactive network of relationships where meaning constantly communicates and exchanges, and the Art World is a network of relationships in which the public in the art world collaborates through negotiation [10]. The efficiency of such cooperation depends on the practice of sharing, that is, the standardized practice of promoting coordination.

The established network of relationships, formed through collaboration and interaction, following certain consensus or agreement, has brought structural framework characteristics to the analysis of art production, that is, it unfolds according to convention or routine practice principles, with a certain degree of fluidity and relatively stable organizational mode. The response of art audiences to works is equally important in the construction of the status of artworks as ‘presentation or exhibition’ [11]. The Art World is composed of all these individuals whose actions are necessary for the production of specific works [12].

In the context of the beauty field of Xiaohongshu, beauty bloggers (creators), platforms (art institutions), female users (audiences) and brands (sponsors) constitute a specific cooperation network as shown in Figure 1. The operation efficiency of the system does not depend on the creativity of individuals, but on the trust Convention established by these participants through continuous negotiation and the effective management of potential conflicts.

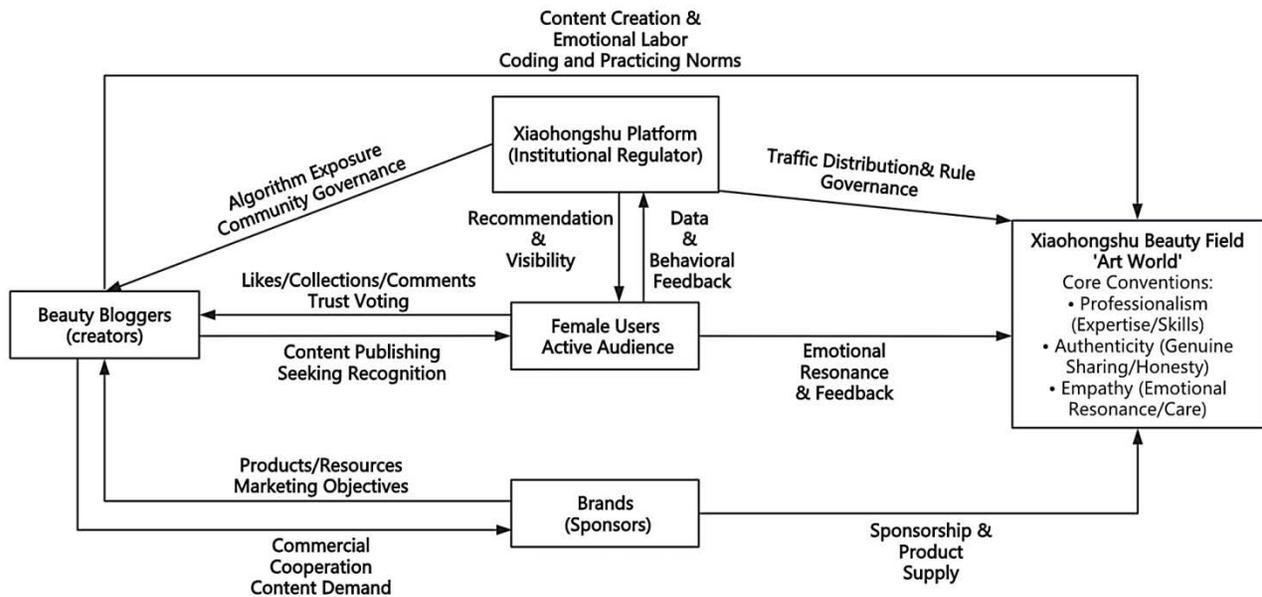


Fig. 1 The ‘seeding’ mechanism pathway of Xiaohongshu beauty bloggers within the Art World Theory Framework.

3.1 The Construction and Structural Constraints of Trust Convention

In the collaborative network, the process of trust building is essentially the process of creators’ coding and compliance with community sharing Convention. The content analysis data in Table 3 intuitively reflects the leading Convention and binding force strength of the art industry. Data analysis shows that the authenticity strategy has reached one hundred percent coverage rate in the samples. This absolutely universal statistical result shows that authenticity has gone beyond the scope of personal style selection and evolved into a mandatory access practice in the art world. The formation of this practice stems from the double negotiation mechanism between users and the platform, that is, users express aesthetic demands by refusing over modified commercial content, and the platform establishes the institutional norms to encourage true sharing through algorithm weight, uses user interaction

data to identify high trust content created by bloggers as valuable content, and provides exposure incentives and official recommendations[1]. Therefore, as creators, bloggers must obey this structural constraint unconditionally, and obtain the basic qualification to participate in content distribution by displaying imperfect details.

In addition, the data shows that ninety-three point three percent of notes use empathy strategies, and eighty-three point three percent of notes use professional strategies. These two high-frequency data reveal the strong bargaining power of the audience in the collaborative network. Users exert influence on creators through interactive data such as praise and collection, and successfully establish emotional comfort and practical value as the necessary conditions for community status. This high rate of strategy adoption confirms that a contractual relationship based on emotional labor and knowledge sharing has been established between bloggers and users through negotiation.

Table 3. Distribution of Trust-Building Strategies by Xiaohongshu Beauty Bloggers

Core Dimension	Category	Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Trust Building Strategies	Professionalism	Non-existence	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
		Existence	25	83.3	83.3	100.0
	Empathy	Non-existence	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
		Existence	28	93.3	93.3	100
	Authenticity	Existence	30	100	100	100

3.2 Dynamic operation of ‘seeding’ mechanism driven by convention

Based on the established conventions mentioned above, the ‘seeding’ mechanism operates as a collective collaborative value production process. As shown in Figure 1, this mechanism dynamically collaborates and negotiates along the path of content production, user interaction, and trust conversion.

The content production stage constitutes the customary coding process. The main task of the blogger in this stage is to transform abstract business information into symbolic forms that conform to community conventions. By integrating professional analysis and personalized storytelling, bloggers have achieved the goal of hiding their product promotion intentions under real sharing conventions, thus completing the symbolic transformation from commercial advertising to community content.

The user interaction stage constitutes the negotiation and verification process in the network. At this stage, users are not just recipients of information, but active participants with decision-making power. They review the content for authenticity and empathy conventions through interactive behavior. Content that conforms to conventions receives algorithmic recommendations through positive feedback from users, while content that violates conventions is marginalized due to a lack of interaction. In addition, user feedback in the comment section will be transmitted to the brand through bloggers and platforms, becoming an important basis for optimizing product formulas and innovating categories[5]. This screening mechanism ensures that grass planting behavior always operates within the framework of community negotiation.

The trust conversion stage constitutes the final output link of the collaborative network. After the content successfully passes the customary verification, users’ trust capital in the blogger’s personal identity is transferred to specific brand products. At the same time, the platform relies on the functional design of ‘note seeding-product link-live streaming conversion’ to establish a direct link between content and consumption, greatly reducing the decision-making cost of users and transforming the interaction between bloggers, users, and brands into consumer traffic, thereby improving the commercial closed loop of social and e-commerce[13]. The brand provides verifiable product efficacy as material support in this process, and utilizes the blogger’s trust capital for precise marketing, reducing customer acquisition costs and user resistance[14], thus completing the value loop from community trust to commercial consumption.

3.3 Invasion of Heterogeneous Conventions and

Systemic Conflicts

Although the collaborative network maintains basic operational order through conventions, there are still fundamental system conflicts within it. This conflict is essentially the invasion and erosion of the original authenticity conventions of the community by the heterogeneous conventions of commercial marketing logic.

Commercial sponsors often demand flawless product displays, which are directly driven by commercial interests and have inherent tension with the community’s tradition of genuine sharing. For beauty bloggers, although ‘authenticity’ is currently measured by all samples (100%), when faced with economic pressure from the brand, they are often forced to sacrifice adherence to community conventions. This compromise has led to the formalization of authenticity, where bloggers use performative means to simulate realism for algorithmic review, rather than engaging in substantive and authentic sharing.

The alienation of this convention undermines the trust foundation of collaborative networks. With a large number of creators mechanically copying successful conventional templates to meet commercial indicators, the phenomenon of content homogenization has emerged. When users perceive that conventions have become a disguised tool for commercial marketing, their trust in the entire art world will shift from a state of negotiation to a state of opposition, leading to a decline in the effectiveness of the seeding mechanism. Therefore, the sustainable development of this ecosystem depends on maintaining a dynamic balance between commercial goals and community practices.

4. Suggestions

4.1 Beauty bloggers: identity reconstruction and professional supervision in collaborative networks

Given that authenticity constitutes a mandatory entry convention into the art world, beauty bloggers must transform their functional roles from mere commercial intermediaries to professional gatekeepers of the ecosystem. Adopting a negative disclosure strategy targeting product limitations is not only a means of content differentiation, but also a fundamental mechanism for bloggers to reconstruct their identity as trusted arbitrators in collaborative networks. By actively maintaining structural autonomy in negotiations with brands, bloggers can strengthen their professional authority and prevent authenticity conventions from degenerating into performative compliance, establish differentiated competitive advantages, and achieve the unity of content value and emotional connection[9]. This identi-

ty reconstruction ensures that the blogger's output always exists as a valid proof of trust rather than a derivative of commercial marketing.

4.2 Platform: Transformation of Governance Paradigm and Consultation Infrastructure Construction

As institutional regulators, platform must transform its governance paradigm from post violation supervision to pre negotiation infrastructure construction. This transformation requires the implementation of a standardized disclosure system for interests, thereby institutionalizing the transparency of the business negotiation process. In addition, the optimization of algorithm distribution mechanisms should function as a structural incentive system, prioritizing substantial value analysis over homogeneous visual stimuli. By embedding the maintenance of professional and empathetic practices into the technological empowerment of the system, the platform can establish a stable ecological environment that supports the long-term reproduction of trust capital.

4.3 Users: Awakening of Collective Rationality and Balancing of Data Power

As the ultimate verifier of value, users must elevate their participation from individual emotional reactions to collective rational governance. This requires users to consciously utilize interactive data feedback mechanisms to exercise their bargaining power within the art world. By systematically refusing to provide data support for content that violates authenticity conventions and requesting evidence support in the comment section, users can effectively build a data barrier against false seeding. This collective training action transforms the user group from passive traffic consumers to active subjects with data sovereignty, maintaining the ecological balance of the collaborative network through distributed supervision.

4.4 Brands: Deep involvement and long-term value investment in the art world

Brands must adjust their intervention strategy from short-term traffic acquisition to deep involvement in the value system of the art world. Strict adherence to community conventions should be seen as a strategic investment in the long-term sustainability of collaborative networks rather than a limitation on marketing efficiency. Brands need to integrate the feedback generated during the user interaction phase into the product iteration system, in order to transform the seeding mechanism into a channel for value co creation. By strategically aligning business goals with established professional and empathetic practices in

the community, brands can avoid systemic risks caused by customary erosion and gain lasting legitimacy for their business activities.

5. Conclusion

This study is based on the economic background and focuses on the beauty field of Xiaohongshu. Howard Becker's theory of the art world is introduced to reconstruct the platform ecosystem into a collaborative network composed of bloggers, platforms, users, and brands. Unlike previous univariate studies that focused on individual influence sources or consumer psychology, this study confirms that digital trust is not a personal trait of a single creator, but rather arises from the joint adherence and maintenance of specific community practices by multiple participants. The shift in theoretical perspective reveals that the essence of the seeding mechanism is a collective value production process based on customary operations. Research has confirmed that professionalism, authenticity, and empathy constitute the core conventions for the effective operation of this collaborative network. The tradition of authenticity has a fundamental admission status and has evolved into a universal code of conduct for network participants. These conventions are established through continuous interaction and data negotiation between creators, users, and platforms, and their degree of execution directly determines the algorithmic visibility of content and the accumulation of trust capital. The effectiveness of the grass planting mechanism depends on the strict implementation of the above conventions in all aspects of content production, user interaction, and commercial conversion.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is to reveal the systemic fragility of the digital consumption ecosystem through art theory. The analysis points out that the main risks within the ecosystem, such as content homogenization and trust dissipation, essentially stem from structural conflicts between external business logic and internal community practices. The strong intervention of commercial capital may lead to the alienation and formalization of customary practices, thereby weakening the trust foundation of online collaboration. Therefore, the key to maintaining the stability of this ecosystem is to ensure that its core practices have the resilience to defend against systemic erosion during the negotiation process.

The limitations of this study lie in two aspects. Firstly, although the sample size has reached thematic saturation, it is relatively small and focuses on qualitative depth. Future research can expand the sample size to cover more social e-commerce platforms, thereby verifying the universality of the research results. Secondly, in order to identify suc-

successful trust building mechanisms, the sampling criteria focus on highly interactive notes, which inevitably introduces a certain degree of survivorship bias. This study did not analyze low interactive content or failed grass planting attempts. Therefore, future research can use comparative methods to analyze negative samples, explore the determinants of trust failure, and examine the boundaries of customary violations.

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