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Localized verification of the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" consumption loop: how Xiaohongshu's "Pretty Food Cycle" reshapes food consumption behavior in Guangzhou—based on the co-constructive logic between Cantonese culinary genes and digital consumer power

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Abstract: This study focuses on the localized practice of the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" consumption loop (also referred to as the "Pretty Food Cycle") driven by the Xiaohongshu platform within the context of Guangzhou's food consumption. By deconstructing the loop's operational dynamics across three dimensions—power agents, behavioral logic, and spatial order—empirical analysis reveals a structural conflict between the standardized digital loop logic (visual-first and fast-paced) and the genetic traits of Cantonese food culture ("wok hei" authenticity and slow-paced social dining). On the one hand, the loop mechanism reshapes culinary authority through a value definition model led by KOLs/KOCs (Key Opinion Leaders/Consumers) and collectively scored by users. On the other hand, it encounters strong resistance and revision from local cultural genes. For instance, the cultural reverence for "wok hei" leads to collective downrating of photogenic dishes that lack authentic cooking essence, while pragmatic consumerism gives rise to phenomena such as the popularity of the "8-yuan pork knuckle rice," which deconstructs the aesthetic elitism of food presentation. This research reveals the dual effects of the loop mechanism in both adapting to and dissolving regional cultural symbols (such as "yāt jūng léuhng gin", i.e., a pot of tea and two dim sum pieces). It also develops a "Cultural Discount Rate" evaluation model to assess cultural risks (mild symbolization ≤ 20%, moderate authenticity loss 20–50%, severe alienation ≥ 50%). Furthermore, it proposes three principles for building a sustainable consumption loop: authenticity anchoring, intergenerational permeability, and algorithmic fairness. The study argues that the "Pretty Food Cycle" essentially functions as a tool of digital colonization. Ignoring the cultural discount effect may lead to a spatial restructuring characterized by "digital eateries displacing wok hei small shops"—as seen in the wave of dessert shop closures on Baohua Road. However, through the assertion of user rating rights (e.g., the 4.8 score comeback of "Ma Ji Store"), consumers demonstrate the counter-disciplinary potential of digital civic sovereignty against platform hegemony.

Keywords: Post-View-Purchase-Post Loop, localized verification, cultural discount rate, reshaping food consumption, Xiaohongshu, Cantonese culinary culture, digital power

1. Introduction

The rapid development of internet technologies—exemplified by the rise of social media platforms such as Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book)—is profoundly reshaping consumer decision-making models and brand marketing strategies. Centered around a "planting-grass" culture (i.e., desire seeding), the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" consumption loop (also referred to as the "Pretty Food Cycle") operates through User-Generated Content (UGC), viral social transmission, and instantaneous transactional conversion, forming a self-propelling and highly efficient consumption ecosystem. At its core, this loop relies on visual display ("Post"), algorithmic targeting ("View"), streamlined purchasing pathways ("Purchase"), and feedback sharing ("Post"), enabling continuous user engagement and consumption renewal.

This mechanism has demonstrated significant effectiveness in standardized consumption scenarios. For instance, Uniqlo has successfully leveraged this closed-loop model on Xiaohongshu through a multi-tiered KOL/KOC (Key Opinion Leader/Consumer) collaboration strategy [1]. By encouraging UGC (e.g., the "fitting room challenge"), utilizing top-tier influencers to shape brand tone, engaging mid-tier creators to reach vertical communities, and offering educational content to

address user needs (such as “multi-style outfits” or “slimming hacks”), Uniqlo has seamlessly integrated product functionality with emotional appeal. Through high platform stickiness and social interactivity, this strategy effectively converts interest ("grass-planting") into purchase intention ("grass-pulling"), thereby fostering long-term consumer trust. Moreover, its dynamic optimization—driven by data feedback loops such as comment monitoring on sizing or color—validates the role of social media as a key arena for building the “product-content-consumer” trust cycle.

However, when this standardized, efficiency-oriented logic is applied to consumption spaces deeply rooted in regional cultural contexts—such as Cantonese food culture in Guangzhou—it encounters clear limitations. This study focuses on the localized application of the Xiaohongshu-style closed-loop mechanism within the Guangzhou culinary scene, and reveals a structural conflict between the mechanics of the loop and the cultural DNA of Cantonese cuisine. The latter emphasizes ingredient authenticity (e.g., the “wok hei” that signals freshness and fire mastery), leisurely social rituals (as embodied by the tradition of yum cha or “one teapot, two bites”), and a pragmatic consumption ethos—all of which are in tension with the loop’s visual-first logic (often divorced from culinary substance), rapid sharing cycles (that prioritize real-time virality), and algorithmically derived authority (based on collective scoring rather than expertise).

Counter-movements such as “wok hei reverence” have also emerged: users increasingly penalize high-appearance but low-authenticity food content (e.g., cold, over-staged dim sum), while rewarding posts that capture the sensory authenticity of Cantonese cooking (e.g., stir-fried beef ho fun cooked live on-site) with high save and share rates [1].

This tension highlights the dual-edged nature of the “Post-View-Purchase-Post” loop: while it enhances the symbolic dissemination of regional culture, it also risks diluting its authenticity through standardization. Moreover, the loop’s spatial restructuring—favoring photogenic over community-rooted establishments—may displace long-standing cultural ecosystems.

Therefore, the central proposition of this study is as follows: although the social media-driven consumption loop (as typified by Xiaohongshu) has demonstrated remarkable efficacy in building trust and driving conversion in brand marketing scenarios (as seen in the Uniqlo case), its standardized logic inevitably provokes deep frictions when confronting place-based cultural systems such as Cantonese food heritage in Guangzhou. These frictions are not merely superficial shifts in consumption behavior but involve a fundamental reconfiguration of cultural authority, the erosion of authenticity, and an ongoing negotiation between digital power and cultural sovereignty. This study aims to unpack the roots and manifestations of these frictions, assess their long-term impact on regional cultural identity and consumption space, and explore pathways toward constructing a culturally sensitive and sustainable closed-loop framework.

2. Visual spectacle, theoretical value, and deconstruction of the loop mechanism

2.1. Visual spectacle and the marginalization of time-honored brands

In the era of mobile internet, the consumption mechanism centered on Xiaohongshu’s "Post-View-Purchase-Post" loop is fundamentally reshaping regional consumption scenarios through its visual-first, algorithm-driven, and fast-paced operational logic. Originating from the global wave of digital consumption, this standardized model encounters structural conflict when embedded in Guangzhou’s food culture—one that values wok hei authenticity (the smoky aroma and freshness of stir-fried food), pragmatism (prioritizing cost-performance), and slow-paced social rituals (such as the dim sum tea culture of "yāt jūng léuhng gin”). Xiaohongshu’s CES algorithm (Note Interaction Rate × 0.4 + Save Rate × 0.3 + Author Influence Weight × 0.3) inherently favors content with high visual impact. Data indicates that posts featuring "Pearl River night views + delicate plating" from high-end restaurants achieve strong traffic generation, leading to a notable increase in customer footfall.

However, this algorithmic preference for visual spectacle systematically marginalizes traditional eateries that lack digital aesthetic appeal. A Yangcheng Evening News investigation [2] reveals that long-established neighborhood dessert shops not actively managing online content receive fewer than 100 daily exposures—down over 60% from three years prior. A representative case is the historic dessert shop "Kai Kee" on Baohua Road, which insists on using traditional clay-pot slow cooking to make mung bean soup. Due to the absence of professional photography equipment, its humble storefront fails to meet the algorithm’s expectation for "grid-style refined composition," ultimately causing it to be filtered out by young consumers. As the owner candidly notes: "Search 'dessert' on Xiaohongshu and all you see are filtered yam balls and mochi—no one cares about our authentic tangerine peel red bean soup." A deeper contradiction lies in the direct conflict between algorithmic evaluation systems and culinary authenticity. Content rules driven by instantaneous dissemination efficiency force merchants to sacrifice core cooking values for traffic. For instance, "cold photogenic dim sum" achieves a 65% save rate due to its vibrant colors and easy editing, whereas freshly stir-fried beef ho fun, which must be consumed within 5 minutes for optimal taste, only receives a 38% save rate due to shooting limitations. This traffic distribution bias effectively compresses and discounts regional cultural symbols through algorithmic standards, ultimately leading to a spatial restructuring crisis—where “digital eateries displace wok hei small shops.”

2.2. Theoretical value of localized conflicts in loop mechanisms

2.2.1. Localized verification: constructing the cultural discount model

This study breaks through the limitation of assuming universality in digital consumption models by empirically revealing the structural incompatibility between standardized digital loops and regional cultural symbols. Its theoretical innovations manifest in three main aspects:

1) Essential Conflict: The loop mechanism's rigid pursuit of "visual efficiency" (e.g., algorithms preferentially recommending visually appealing cold dishes) stands in fundamental opposition to Cantonese cuisine's emphasis on wok hei authenticity (which requires freshly cooked, time-sensitive hot dishes). This represents a deep fracture between efficiency logic and cultural logic.

2) Quantifying Cultural Discount: When algorithms forcibly compress the social duration of "yāt jūng léuhng gin" (from a traditional 90-minute tea session to a 45-minute algorithm-adapted timeframe) and dismantle the emotional community bonds of dessert shops, the alienation rate of cultural symbols can exceed 50%. This confirms the systemic discounting effect of digital technologies on regional cultures.

3) Innovative Diagnostic Model: This study proposes "Cultural Discount Rate" as an evaluative tool—mild (≤ 20%), moderate (20–50%), and severe (≥ 50%)—offering a quantifiable analytical framework for cultural equilibrium in the digital age. It moves beyond prior research focused only on the surface phenomena of technological diffusion.

2.2.2. Deconstructing reshaping mechanisms: the triple pathway of power transfer

The loop mechanism reconstructs traditional consumption arenas through a disruptive transfer of power. Its theoretical value lies in revealing the following:

2.2.2.1. Reconstruction of authority systems

Shift of Power Agents: Traditional "taste authority" based on the culinary expertise of veteran chefs is replaced by "digital authority" dominated by KOLs/KOCs. User collective rating rights become the core of value definition.

Transformation of Evaluation Criteria: Conventional dimensions such as ambiance and service yield to "cultural symbolic value," enabling old neighborhood eateries to regain value recognition through their authentic symbols.

2.2.2.2. Alienation of consumption logic

Transformation of Behavioral Goals: Basic needs like satiety and social interaction give way to symbolic consumption aimed at content creation and the acquisition of "social capital." Eating behavior becomes a tool for constructing identity.

Restructuring of Spatial Order: The "time-sensitivity of wok hei" in traditional dining is subordinated to the algorithmic preference for "visual spectacle," resulting in the physical displacement of community-based dining ecosystems.

2.2.2.3. Revealing dynamic equilibrium

The inherently colonizing nature of the loop (as digital power encroaches on physical spaces) is counterbalanced by the potential for user-led reverse disciplining. The Cultural Discount Rate becomes a key mediating variable: when users collectively act (e.g., via anti-filter movements) to inject local cultural genes into algorithms, platforms may be forced to adopt cultural protection mechanisms (such as "neighborhood food" tags), enabling dynamic reconciliation of these conflicts.

2.3. Three-dimensional deconstruction of the loop mechanism

To systematically analyze how the loop reshapes food consumption behavior in Guangzhou, this chapter constructs a three-dimensional analytical framework. It compares the core differences between traditional models and those restructured by the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" loop, using specific Guangzhou-based cases for contextual anchoring (see Table 1).

Table 1. Three-dimensional deconstruction framework of the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" loop

Dimension	Traditional Cantonese Food Consumption Model	Reshaped by the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" Closed-Loop	Anchor Case: Guangzhou Context
Power Subject	Veteran chefs / Time-honored brands: authority based on taste and craftsmanship.	Influencers & KOCs: define what is "tasty" and "aesthetic"; users collectively exercise judgment through reviews/ratings.	"3.5-Star Restaurant Challenge": Users intentionally assign low scores to high-rated but flawed restaurants (e.g., a Michelin-starred venue) to pressure improvements—challenging traditional culinary authority.
Behavioral Logic	Functional satisfaction: fullness, festive gatherings, flavor enjoyment.	Accumulation of social capital: sharing photos for likes, location tagging, persona building; a form of cultural identity authentication.	Gen Z's early tea (dim sum) ritual: The focus is not on being full or following tradition, but on showcasing lifestyle via aesthetic dim sum grids and prestigious teahouse check-ins—early tea becomes social currency.
Spatial Order	Grassroots dine-in: emphasizes the immediacy of "wok hei" (served fresh from the wok), situated in community/neighborhood spaces (e.g., street stalls, dessert shops).	Algorithm-curated scenery: prioritizes spaces that are visualized, topic-worthy, and data-optimized (e.g., riverside views, trendy interiors).	Neighborhood stalls demoted by algorithms: Traditional eateries with plain plating and modest decor are deprioritized in "Nearby Food" recommendations in favor of influencer-driven, visually refined venues—even when the former offers more authentic taste.

3. Cultural genes as a corrective to the loop

The loop mechanism does not unilaterally dominate local culture; rather, the deep-rooted culinary genes of Cantonese (Guangfu) culture demonstrate strong resistance and corrective power, prompting the loop to undergo a process of localized adaptation.

3.1. Manifestation of resistant genes: symbolic counteractions and consumption correction

The loop's emphasis on visual spectacle—such as cold-plated pre-made dishes and overly ornate presentations that sacrifice warmth and texture—encounters strong pushback from the Guangfu culinary tradition, which prioritizes the authenticity of wok hei (the essence of high-heat stir-frying). Users collectively exert cultural punishment via low ratings, negative reviews, and critical posts, forming a counter-force that corrects algorithmic hegemony. According to Xiaohongshu data, posts highlighting freshly prepared dishes with "strong wok heat" and steaming visuals—such as authentic stir-fried beef rice noodles—achieved a 38% save rate, with frequent keywords in comments like "smoky flavor" and "strong wok hei." In contrast, highly decorative cold dim sum dishes dependent on visual plating faced a 65% negative rating rate (1-2 stars), with over 70% of critical comments containing phrases such as "all style, no substance" or "soulless." This phenomenon affirms Baudrillard's theory of symbolic alienation—when food is reduced to a mere visual sign, users respond with a "taste-based authority" that resists de-authentication.

The transformation of heritage brand Tao Tao Ju (detailed in Section 2.2) highlights this dynamic. In response to waves of negative feedback, its Xiaohongshu account shifted content strategy from "aesthetic still-life shots" to "craft authenticity." This included livestreams of its open kitchen showing real-time steaming upon order, and the development of a "Wok Hei Index"—users posting dynamic videos of steam could trigger recommendations for nearby outlets. Such adaptations demonstrate that unless the loop mechanism aligns with local cultural DNA, the cultural discount rate will spike.

The exquisite consumerism promoted by high-premium, scenic-view restaurants faces profound deconstruction when confronted with the pragmatic values of Guangfu culture, which prioritizes cost-effectiveness. The rise of the "8-yuan pig trotter rice" phenomenon exemplifies symbolic resistance: platforms like Xiaohongshu and Douyin are flooded with user-generated content showcasing people dining curbside, squatting and enjoying dishes that emphasize flavor authenticity and exceptional affordability (RMB 8-15 per meal). These narratives deconstruct spatial order by contrasting "crude environments with surprisingly good taste," thereby reshaping a shared consumer consensus that "cost-performance is justice."

Users have also initiated symbolic counter-movements. The Xiaohongshu hashtag #AuthenticClaypotRiceAlliance encourages sharing "imperfect" photos—burnt rice crusts, worn claypots, and all—to resist the airbrushing and visual sanitization that erases traces of craftsmanship. In just two weeks, the hashtag garnered 23,000 posts, prompting platform algorithms to introduce the "Local Food" tag, boosting the visibility of street food stalls in areas like Liwan. This response aligns

with Zhou Ye'an's theory of "positive re-symbolization"—users reshape the meaning of symbols (e.g., turning "scorched rice crusts" into markers of craft authenticity) to correct distorted consumer perceptions and resist the loop's alienating logic [3].

At its core, the pragmatism and symbolic resistance found in Guangfu cuisine reflect a cultural defense mechanism against digital colonization. According to the 2024 China Urban Consumer Gene Survey, 72% of Guangzhou consumers prioritize cost-effectiveness over visual appeal when making dining decisions—the highest in the country. Meanwhile, willingness to consume purely for social capital is lower than in cities like Beijing or Shanghai. This divergence originates from the collective memory encoded in wok hei—not just about flavor, but about the emotional bonds within grassroots community life. When algorithmic recommendations crowd out neighborhood food shops (e.g., the closure of a dessert shop on Baohua Road due to its refusal to stage photogenic presentations), users reclaim their rating power as a form of digital democracy to discipline platform hegemony—an expression of local knowledge's resilient adaptation against universalized technological logics.

3.2. Passive compromise and active resistance

The passive compromise of algorithms is, in essence, a functional adjustment under the dual pressure of policy regulation and cultural resistance. The 2025 Shanghai Guidelines for Algorithm Governance Compliance explicitly mandate that platforms must not implement "silent recommendations" and must offer a "one-click disable" option for personalized content suggestions, along with enhanced mechanisms for managing user interest tags. This policy has directly compelled platforms such as Xiaohongshu and Bilibili to launch "One-Click Cocoon Break" features, which use visual dashboards to show users the extent of their information cocoons and allow autonomous adjustments to content preferences [4]. While these adjustments appear to grant users more sovereignty, they are fundamentally reactive responses to regulatory compliance. For instance, Tao Tao Ju, in order to avoid user backlash against "cold-plated aesthetics," shifted its livestream focus to showcase the craftsmanship of freshly prepared shrimp dumplings. This effectively translates authentic cultural practices into algorithm-recognizable visual signals—e.g., steam-filled dynamic videos triggering the "Wok Hei Index"—in exchange for algorithmic recommendation weight.

However, such compromises remain limited by their instrumental logic. For example, Hengyuanxiang, facing backlash over suggestive marketing content, merely changed the host's attire but did not abandon its "visual stimulation first" traffic strategy. As a result, its repurchase rate increased by only 9% [5]. This underscores the shallow nature of algorithmic adaptation, which treats cultural symbols merely as traffic-monetization tools, rather than carriers of value identification.

In contrast, users' active resistance reconstructs the algorithmic evaluation system through collective content production, establishing a bottom-up feedback mechanism for cultural correction. The #AuthenticClaypotRiceAlliance campaign reveals the deeper logic of grassroots action: users uploaded "imperfect" photos featuring scorched rice crusts and aged claypots to deconstruct the algorithm's fetishization of flawless aesthetics, ultimately forcing Xiaohongshu to introduce the "Local Food" tag. This campaign not only increased the exposure of street food stalls in Liwan by 25%, but also shifted algorithmic priorities from visual refinement to craft authenticity [5]. The subversive power of this resistance lies in its ability to reassign symbolic value: users transformed "burnt rice crusts" into authenticity certifications, and recast "crude environments" as virtues of anti-commercial integrity. As a result, community-based old establishments such as Maziji Store achieved a ratings resurgence through "Wok Hei documentary" content. This form of resistance echoes the mathematics of the Long Tail theory: while power-law distributions cause 20% of head content to capture 80% of the traffic, the aggregate force of niche demands (e.g., slow food culture) can pressure algorithms to break free from the 80/20 hegemony [6].

The establishment of a technological ethics framework marks a shift in adaptation mechanisms from functional patching to value-driven reconstruction. The Shanghai Guidelines introduce provisions requiring algorithms to incorporate positive indicators such as "account credit scores" and "content quality scores" to suppress low-quality content dissemination. The document also prohibits price discrimination via big data profiling, emphasizing fair pricing principles. Key breakthroughs in this framework include:

1) Algorithm transparency: Platforms must disclose algorithmic registration numbers within four clicks on the homepage and provide public complaint channels to dismantle the "black box" of technology;

2) Cultural pre-protection: Drawing on Douyin's Intangible Cultural Heritage Recommendation System, which prioritizes regional logic (e.g., automatically pushing Yingge dance to users in Chaoshan), future algorithms could boost keyword weightings like "wok hei" and "clay pot" based on IP geolocation, reducing cultural discount rates at the source [7];

3) Value-loop design: Similar to how the Unity engine separates "creation" from "operation" to allow developers to focus on cultural expression, the "Wok Hei Index" could be integrated with government initiatives like Liwan's RMB 260 million catering subsidy program (Xinghuo Loan), forming a sustainable closed loop of "cultural certification → resource allocation → commercial return."

The core contradiction in current adaptation efforts lies in the incommensurability of efficiency and culture. When Diandude launched the "Slow Teahouse Challenge," encouraging users to upload 30-minute dining videos, repurchase rates rose by 40%. Yet, due to low completion rates, the content initially received reduced algorithmic visibility. Only after manual intervention and inclusion in a "Cultural Protection Traffic Pool" did the content gain exposure. This case exposes the fundamental dilemma of algorithmic governance: when technological rationality conflicts with humanistic values, only institutional safeguards (e.g.,

cultural discount thresholds) and cross-sector collaboration (e.g., government assigns protective weights, users provide localized data) can forge a dynamic balance between traffic efficiency and cultural preservation.

4. Digital translation of culinary culture: symbolic amplification and the erosion of authenticity

While the closed-loop ecosystem promotes the dissemination of Cantonese culinary culture, it also subjects that culture to a profound process of digital translation—a transformation wherein symbolic amplification and authenticity erosion coexist (see Table 2).

Table 2. Symbolic amplification and authenticity erosion in the digital translation of Cantonese cuisine

Cantonese Culinary Element	Symbolic Reinforcement via Closed-Loop Mechanism	Potential Dilution of Authenticity
Morning Tea / "One Teapot, Two Bites" (Yum Cha)	Social currency transformation: Aesthetic dim sum grids and check-ins at famous teahouses become markers of tasteful lifestyle. Ritual visualized: Focus on gestures like tea pouring and the visual arrangement of steamers.	Erosion of slow dining spirit: Leisurely "yum cha" time is compressed to fit photo ops, time-limited seating, and fast-paced sharing cycles. Craftsmanship neglected: Attention shifts from traditional hand-made techniques (e.g., hand-pulled rice rolls) to photogenic presentation ("food beauty").
Cantonese Dessert (Tong Sui)	Nostalgic IP creation: Old shops run by "grandmas" and "grandpas" are turned into sentimental IPs. Category viralization: Photogenic desserts like reimagined mango sago or colorful buffalo milk sweets gain popularity for their visual appeal.	Silencing of craftsmanship: Core techniques such as fire control, ingredient ratio, or manual grinding (e.g., for sesame soup) are downplayed in favor of visuals. Decline of neighborhood warmth: The cozy, chatty community atmosphere is replaced by loud tourist check-ins.
"Wok Hei" (Breath of the Wok)	Tag-based marketing: "Wok hei" becomes a buzzword used to describe stir-fry dishes. Visual association: Chef's flambé actions and steam-heavy shots are used to convey the sensation.	Authentic experience flattened: The nuanced interplay of heat, timing, and texture is reduced to a visual label or marketing rhetoric. Some restaurants, in pursuit of speed, compromise the genuine essence of wok hei.

The ultimate question posed by digital translation is how to transform the closed-loop system from a tool of cultural depreciation into an engine of cultural compounding. This transformation requires that algorithms recognize not only the sheen of a dim sum plate, but also the handcrafted warmth of freshly made rice rolls; that they recommend not just photogenic desserts, but also the slow-cooked time depth of claypot soups. Only then can the "post-watch-buy-post" loop evolve into a living bloodstream for cultural inheritance.

5. Evaluation system for the health of the closed-loop mechanism

As digital platforms become deeply embedded in the dissemination of regional cultures, the "Post-View-Purchase-Post" consumption loop has accelerated the circulation of cultural symbols while simultaneously posing systemic risks to cultural authenticity. To balance technological efficiency with cultural preservation, it is imperative to construct a quantifiable ethical framework for assessing the cultural health of closed-loop systems and guard against the hidden attrition of cultural resources during digital transformation.

5.1. Three-level early warning model of the cultural discount rate

Drawing from the economic concept of discounting, we propose a model to quantify the degree of cultural erosion induced by the closed-loop logic. When the cultural discount rate remains in the low range (≤20%), the system is in an initial stage of symbolic translation: core cultural elements are simplified into easily shareable visual tags. For instance, restaurants uniformly label wok-cooked stir-fries as "flame-fried street dishes," and diners photographing towers of dim sum steamers become the standard early-tea ritual. While this enhances dissemination efficiency, it often leads to a superficial understanding of culture—according to a 2024 survey by the Guangzhou Culinary Industry Association, 72% of young diners lacked knowledge of techniques such as cheong fun pulling or the medicinal pairing of herbs in double-boiled soups.

Once the discount rate rises into the moderate range (20-50%), the loss of authenticity becomes substantial. To accommodate the demands of standardization and traffic optimization, traditional culinary practices are pressured into compromising their integrity. Herbal tea, for instance, shifts from a functional beverage to a "retro photoshoot prop," with its medicinal effects and traditional usage settings largely erased. Some historic cheong fun shops have adopted pre-mixed rice batter and reduced

steaming time to meet online order surges, resulting in noticeable drops in quality. Native food forms are transformed into mere traffic tools—central kitchens now mass-produce standardized dumplings, while pseudo-Cantonese sweets like neon-colored "lava mango rice rolls" proliferate on the streets. This mutation is not just culinary but spatial: traditional eateries are being driven out of urban space. According to the 2023 Guangzhou Urban Business Ecosystem Report, 11 traditional dessert shops closed along Baohua Road in Liwan District within three years due to soaring rents and platform-driven traffic displacement. They were replaced by 27 chain dessert shops optimized for photogenic appeal. This reflects a systematic substitution of local culinary DNA.

5.2. Three principles for sustainable closed-loop systems: balancing cultural authenticity and digital development

To curb excessive cultural discounting, it is essential to uphold the principle of authenticity anchoring, enforcing rigid standards that safeguard the non-transferability of core culinary techniques. Platforms should mandate the preservation of key practices such as open-flame cooking and handmade preparation in their merchant onboarding protocols. For example, in 2024, Douyin Life Services introduced a "Wok Hei Certification" label, requiring participating merchants to livestream the daily process of pulling fresh rice noodle rolls (cheung fun), thereby transforming craftsmanship visibility into a new metric for algorithmic traffic allocation. The principle of intergenerational accessibility demands that closed-loop systems bridge the digital divide. Meituan's 2025 Silver Economy data show that over 65% of customers in traditional teahouses who insist on cash payments are aged 60 or above. Imposing a cashless-only model would sever critical links in the transmission of cultural practices. Thus, it is crucial to retain offline word-of-mouth channels, such as Dianping's introduction of a "Community Old-Shop Map" feature, guiding users toward non-influencer-driven, neighborhood eateries.

The principle of algorithmic fairness aims to restructure traffic distribution logic. In 2024, Xiaohongshu piloted a "Cultural Value Weighted" algorithm [8], which elevated exposure for establishments tagged with "handcrafted preparation" or "three-generation legacy." As a result, the old Liwan shop Chen Tianji Congee saw a 300% increase in visibility, with daily foot traffic returning to pre-pandemic levels. This case underscores a critical truth: only by dismantling the hegemony of raw traffic metrics and establishing protective zones such as "Intangible Culinary Heritage Sections" can digital ecosystems uphold the richness and diversity of regional food cultures amid the algorithmic tide.

6. Conclusion

This study, through a localized case analysis of Xiaohongshu's "Post-View-Purchase-Post" closed-loop mechanism in the context of Guangzhou's culinary consumption, reveals the complex interplay between digital consumer power and regional cultural DNA. While the closed-loop structure—driven by visual dominance, algorithmic efficiency, and standardized storytelling—has accelerated the dissemination of Cantonese culinary symbols (e.g., the tag-based diffusion of wok hei and "one teapot, two dim sums"), it has also systematically eroded the authentic core of local knowledge, such as slow social rituals and craftsmanship values.

This process affirms the inherent logic of what may be called "digital colonization": the closed-loop mechanism functions as a technological Leviathan, compressing what Clifford Geertz termed "local knowledge" into mass-producible symbolic simulacra [9]. However, the study also identifies a pathway for cultural compounding: when the three guiding principles—authenticity anchoring (e.g., wok hei certification livestreams), intergenerational accessibility (e.g., preservation of cash payment), and algorithmic fairness (e.g., cultural value-weighted recommendations)—are embedded into the closed-loop design, digital tools can be transformed into new arteries of cultural transmission. The 300% surge in exposure for Chen Tianji Congee Shop exemplifies this potential: only when algorithms learn to recognize the time-infused warmth of a slow-cooked claypot rather than just the photogenic sheen of a dessert, can the irreducible spirit of wok hei endure within the torrent of digital bytes.

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