The Influence of User-Generated Beauty Content on Xiaohongshu on the Purchase Decisions of Generation Z Chinese Women

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Abstract: User-generated content (UGC) has become a major factor in shaping consumer buying behavior. In China, Xiaohongshu is a prominent platform, particularly for Generation Z women, with a strong emphasis on beauty content. This study examines the influence of user-generated content on Xiaohongshu on the purchasing decisions and brand loyalty of Generation Z Chinese women within the beauty sector. Through a survey of 98 active Xiaohongshu users aged 15-30, the research highlights the significant impact of visual content (short videos and images) and textual reviews on consumers' purchase decisions. Visuals provide immediacy and engagement, while text adds detailed product feedback, contributing to informed decision-making. Additionally, the quality of UGC interactions, including original poster responses and high engagement, enhances trust, credibility, and community belonging. The study finds that content types like tutorials, product reviews, and regular updates play a critical role in fostering brand loyalty. The results offer strategic insights for beauty brands to leverage UGC by fostering active engagement, promoting authentic content, and cultivating a sense of community. This approach can drive purchase conversions and long-term brand loyalty among Generation Z women, providing a sustainable marketing strategy in China's competitive digital landscape.

Keywords: User-Generated Content, Xiaohongshu, Generation Z, Beauty, Purchasing Decisions.

1. Introduction

As the digital age evolves, people increasingly rely on social media for connection and communication [1]. Social media has become an integral part of daily life, where individuals interact not only with their personal networks but also with brands and influencers. The interactive nature of these platforms allows users to contribute to the content ecosystem, creating a participatory culture that encourages the sharing of personal experiences and opinions. Users are not only recipients of information but also creators of content, a phenomenon referred to as user-generated content (UGC) [2]. UGC refers to content such as reviews, experiences, and feedback on products or brands that are spontaneously posted by regular users rather than professional marketers [3]. Unlike traditional marketing efforts, UGC presents authentic and diverse perspectives on products and services. It has

become a crucial source of product information and decision-making for consumers on social media platforms.

As digital natives, Generation Z (born between 1995-2009) has grown up in a world dominated by digital technologies and social media, making them highly adept at navigating these platforms for both entertainment and informational purposes. They are more inclined to gather information from social media compared to previous generations [4]. Moreover, they tend to trust traditional advertising less and rely more on UGC when making purchase decisions [5]. Among them, female consumers are particularly interactive during shopping, making them more susceptible to the influence of UGC [6]. In China, Xiaohongshu (Red) has emerged as one of the most influential social platforms among Generation Z female consumers.

Xiaohongshu is a social media platform that combines social networking with e-commerce, primarily targeting the female consumer market [7]. As of 2023, over 70% of Xiaohongshu's users are women, with 50% born after 1995. Approximately 90% of the platform's content is user-generated, and Xiaohongshu's algorithm ensures that high-quality content from regular users spreads quickly, fostering a strong sense of community. Users share authentic product experiences and recommendations, particularly in the lifestyle, beauty, and fashion sectors, which builds trust. User-generated beauty content has been a core feature of Xiaohongshu since its inception, encompassing a wide range of formats such as product reviews, makeup tutorials, skincare tips, and beauty trend recommendations. This content is shared through various formats including text-image combinations, short videos, detailed guides, and comments. Users provide comprehensive demonstrations of product performance or share their personal experiences with others on the platform. Interaction among users occurs through features such as likes, comments, collections, and reposts, allowing them to ask questions, exchange opinions, or save valuable content for future reference. These interactions not only enhance community engagement but also assist users in making more informed purchasing decisions. By prioritizing user experiences and authentic reviews, Xiaohongshu has effectively cultivated an environment where consumers feel empowered to make informed purchasing decisions. This makes Xiaohongshu the go-to platform for Generation Z women to discover and evaluate products, and the platform holds significant advertising value in China's digital media landscape [7]. Understanding Generation Z women's shopping behaviors and preferences on Xiaohongshu is crucial for brands seeking to reach and engage this group in the highly competitive digital market.

This study will focus on the beauty industry to explore how UGC on the Xiaohongshu platform influences the purchasing decisions of Generation Z women in China. The research will enhance the understanding of the impact mechanisms of UGC in a digital consumption environment and reveal the dimensions of how Generation Z women perceive brand image. Specifically, it will examine the psychological and social factors that drive engagement with UGC on Xiaohongshu, including trust, perceived authenticity, and community belonging. The results will offer valuable strategic insights for brands, especially those in the beauty sector, providing guidance on how to effectively utilize social media platforms like Xiaohongshu to generate impactful UGC strategies, increase brand awareness, build consumer trust, and drive purchase conversions. In short, this study will not only contribute to academic discussions on digital marketing but also provide practical recommendations for brands aiming to create authentic connections with Generation Z consumers and foster long-term loyalty in an increasingly digital world, thereby thriving in the rapidly evolving digital marketplace.

2. Literature Review

User-generated content as a form of user-initiated creation and sharing of information, has gained significant influence on social media platforms in recent years. Numerous scholars have extensively explored how UGC affects consumer behavior and developed various theoretical models to explain its impact on purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and impulse buying. For instance, Geng and Chen's

research indicates that the quality of interaction within UGC significantly influences consumers' purchase intentions. Their analysis revealed that when UGC includes a high level of interaction, such as comments and likes, it substantially increases the trust consumers place in the content, thereby enhancing the likelihood of purchase decisions [8]. Similarly, Anderson argues that the source and credibility of UGC directly affect consumer purchase decisions, particularly in the beauty and fashion sectors, where authenticity becomes a critical factor for product selection [9].

The impact of UGC generated by micro-celebrities and regular users on consumer behavior has also drawn substantial attention. Halliday's research suggests that UGC produced by micro-celebrities, due to their higher credibility and influence, can significantly affect purchasing decisions among Generation Z women, especially on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Micro-celebrities often share personal experiences with products, which enhances trust and credibility in the eyes of consumers [10]. On the other hand, Trzaskowski emphasizes that while regular users' UGC may lack the broad influence of micro-celebrities, its authenticity, spontaneity, and viral spread can still resonate with consumers [11].

Rajamma et al. further analyze UGC's evaluative characteristics, establishing a direct link between the quality of UGC and consumer purchase decisions. They argue that the level of detail and transparency provided in UGC are crucial drivers of purchase decisions. If UGC offers comprehensive product feedback and real user experiences, consumers are more inclined to make a purchase [12]. Tseng et al. explore how UGC quality influences brand loyalty, finding that high-quality UGC not only facilitates first-time purchases but also enhances brand loyalty through long-term interactions [5]. This effect is especially prominent among Generation Z women, who often use platforms like Xiaohongshu to continuously follow user feedback on a specific brand, gradually building trust and reliance on that brand [13].

In addition, Munsch's research on Generation Z's digital marketing preferences reveals that they favor emotionally driven content, especially when it includes humor or music. Due to their relatively short attention spans, brief and engaging ads are more effective in capturing their interest and driving consumption [14]. Building on this, Ohlsson and Ringborg examined how TikTok UGC influences Generation Z's impulse buying behavior, particularly regarding beauty products. Through qualitative interviews, they found that Generation Z women tend to trust authentic, non-commercialized UGC, especially short videos showcasing real product use. Such content, through its visual appeal and emotional resonance, can quickly trigger impulse purchases, and frequent exposure to these videos significantly increases purchase intentions [15].

However, despite the extensive research on UGC's role in generating consumer engagement, enhancing brand loyalty, and driving impulse buying, several research gaps remain. First, existing studies primarily focus on the credibility and authenticity of UGC but lack in-depth analysis of the differential impact of various types of UGC (e.g., long videos, short videos, text reviews). Additionally, most research has concentrated on UGC's short-term effects, particularly on impulse buying, with insufficient exploration of how UGC contributes to long-term brand loyalty, especially among Generation Z female consumers. The mechanisms through which UGC fosters sustained trust in a brand remain unclear.

Thus, this study aims to address these gaps by focusing on how UGC in the beauty sector on Xiaohongshu influences Generation Z Chinese women's purchase decisions. Specifically, it seeks to explore the following research questions:

1. How do different forms of user-generated beauty content (e.g., images, videos, comments) influence the purchase decisions of Generation Z women?

2. Is the quality of interaction in user-generated beauty content a decision-making factor that influences Gen Z women's consumption?

3. How does user-generated beauty content on Xiaohongshu foster long-term brand loyalty among Generation Z women through continuous interaction?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study implemented a quantitative research design, utilizing a questionnaire to explore how user-generated content (UGC) within Xiaohongshu's beauty domain influences the purchasing behaviors of Chinese Generation Z women. The sample consisted of Chinese women aged 15-30 who actively use Xiaohongshu, selected through purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. The criteria for participation required engagement with beauty-related UGC on Xiaohongshu in the past six months and at least one purchase decision based on the platform's content. These criteria were deliberately chosen to ensure the collected data would be directly relevant to the research questions and would accurately reflect UGC's influence on this demographic's consumer decisions.

3.2. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed via the Questionnaire Star platform and promoted across Xiaohongshu and Weibo to ensure extensive coverage and encourage participation. The survey included a mix of question types, including multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions, aiming to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The Likert scale questions were designed to assess participants' perceptions of UGC authenticity, the frequency of interactions with such content, and its perceived impact on their purchasing decisions. Open-ended questions offered participants the opportunity to elaborate on their views, providing additional qualitative insights to complement the quantitative findings.

The data collection spanned four weeks, allowing sufficient time to gather a representative sample size. During this period, regular preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that the data collected met validity and reliability standards. At the end of the data collection phase, 110 questionnaires were completed, with 98 meeting the inclusion criteria for valid responses. The criteria for determining the validity of responses were all specified questions needed to be fully answered, and participants had to satisfy the selection criteria concerning engagement with Xiaohongshu. Invalid responses were carefully screened and excluded based on several factors, such as incomplete surveys, response patterns that indicated low effort or inconsistency (e.g., selecting the same response across all items on the Likert scale), or participants not falling within the intended study population. These quality control measures ensured the robustness, integrity, and representativeness of the dataset, thereby supporting the reliability of the study's findings.

4. Results

The results of the survey provide a detailed understanding of how user-generated content (UGC) on Xiaohongshu impacts the purchasing behavior of Chinese Generation Z women in the beauty sector. The majority of respondents were female (94.5%) and aged 23-26 (50.91%). Nearly all respondents (98%) indicated they had made at least one beauty product purchase based on UGC within the past six months, with 54.08% having done so 3-5 times.

Different forms of UGC were found to have varying degrees of influence on purchasing decisions. Short videos (65.31%), images (58.16%), and textual reviews (61.22%) were identified as the most helpful types of content, with mixed media (i.e., text and images) also playing a significant role. When asked to rate the impact of these different forms of content, visual content, such as product photos

and makeup demonstrations, scored highest (4.07/5), followed by short videos (3.94/5), textual comments and discussions (3.96/5), and detailed pictorial reviews (3.94/5).

In terms of the perceived quality of UGC, the factors that contributed most to its perceived reliability included interaction from the original poster (64%), a high engagement rate (likes, comments, shares) (62%), and detailed replies from other users (50%). These responses emphasize that community engagement and authenticity play a crucial role in shaping trust in UGC.

The participants also indicated that seeing meaningful interactions, such as high likes and comments, increased their likelihood of purchasing beauty products, with 83% of respondents rating this as "likely" or "very likely." Furthermore, regular updates and new comments on beauty product posts were considered significant for maintaining brand loyalty, with an average importance rating of 4.15/5.

The survey also assessed which UGC types are most effective in fostering brand loyalty, with tutorials (71%), product reviews (68%), and user recommendations (63%) ranking as the most influential. This reflects the importance of not just product promotion but also educational and personal content in building sustained engagement and loyalty among users.

Overall, the results indicate that visual content, user interaction, and the authenticity of UGC significantly influence purchasing decisions and brand loyalty among Generation Z women on Xiaohongshu.

5.   Discussion

The survey data indicates that different forms of UGC, including visual content like short videos (65.31%) and images (58.16%), as well as textual content such as comments and discussions (61.22%), have a substantial impact on the purchasing decisions of Generation Z women. This is largely attributed to Xiaohongshu's visual-centric platform, where users can quickly consume content related to beauty products through rich media formats. Short videos, in particular, serve as a dynamic medium for tutorials, product demonstrations, and user experiences, providing an immersive and immediate way to understand a product's use and benefits. Images complement this by offering static but highly aesthetic visuals of products, makeup looks, and outcomes, which can capture the attention of users rapidly. On the other hand, textual content plays an essential role by adding depth to these visual representations, offering detailed product descriptions, user experiences, and honest feedback that aid in a more informed decision-making process.

The interplay between these content types provides a holistic approach to information gathering on Xiaohongshu. Visual content hooks users with its engaging appeal, while textual reviews and discussions offer the necessary background, allowing users to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of a product. Generation Z women, who are known for their preference for transparency, immediacy, and authenticity, rely on this combination to assess the value of beauty products. The quick and transparent nature of UGC helps users feel that their purchasing behavior is well-considered and based on real user experiences.

Brands looking to leverage this dynamic can implement strategies that encourage the creation of authentic and diverse UGC. By incentivizing users to post real product reviews that combine both visuals and text, brands can amplify their reach. Official brand accounts can further support high-quality posts by reposting and promoting them, effectively broadening the content's visibility and enhancing the brand's credibility on the platform.

The study also reveals that although UGC interaction quality may not be the sole deciding factor for purchasing, it exerts a significant influence on the consumption habits of Generation Z women. A considerable number of respondents identified replies from original content creators (64%) and a high rate of interactions (62%) as key markers of high-quality UGC. This preference underscores the importance of authenticity and community involvement in Xiaohongshu. Interaction between content

creators and users is seen as a validation of UGC's credibility, indicating that the content is not only trustworthy but also endorsed by others who share similar interests. For a demographic that highly values transparency and peer recommendations, this level of engagement serves as a confidence boost in both the content and the product.

High-quality interactions play a pivotal role in building trust between users and content creators. The active involvement of the original poster—by responding to comments and engaging with users—signals that the content is authentic and aligns with the users' interests and needs. This sense of trust can substantially increase the likelihood of a purchase. Therefore, for brands aiming to optimize the influence of UGC on Xiaohongshu, it is crucial to prioritize meaningful interaction. Brands can actively participate by responding to comments, encouraging discussions, and providing expert advice in the comments section. Furthermore, initiating interactive activities such as Q&A sessions, where brand representatives or influencers (KOLs) provide answers and insights, can elevate the perceived quality of UGC. Such proactive engagement helps to build an image of the brand as trustworthy and accessible, thereby enhancing user confidence in the products.

The study further examines the role of UGC in fostering brand loyalty through continuous interaction with Xiaohongshu. Respondents rate the importance of regular content updates highly, with an average score of 4.15 out of 5, demonstrating that consistent and meaningful exchanges are pivotal in maintaining brand loyalty. Certain content types, such as tutorials (71%), product reviews (68%), and user recommendations (63%), are particularly effective in promoting sustained brand affinity. This finding is consistent with the behavior patterns of Xiaohongshu users, who frequently return to the platform to access up-to-date information, explore recommendations, and learn about product applications. The platform's continuous flow of fresh and diverse UGC reinforces positive associations with a brand, encourages repeat visits, and builds a sense of community among users. This ongoing exposure to brand content not only influences immediate purchase decisions but also cultivates a deeper connection and brand loyalty over time.

Moreover, the nature of the beauty market, characterized by rapid product updates and diverse brand offerings, aligns well with the exploratory and trend-following behavior of Generation Z consumers. They are constantly on the lookout for new products that best match their needs and preferences, often relying on peer experiences and recommendations to guide their purchases. Xiaohongshu acts as a bridge for this exploratory behavior, providing an open forum where users and brands can engage in a stable dialogue. Continuous interaction ensures that brands remain visible to their target audience and gradually build a positive brand image.

To develop long-term brand loyalty, brands need to maintain an active presence on Xiaohongshu. Regularly posting tutorials, usage tips, and authentic user experiences can keep the content fresh and provide ongoing value to users. Moreover, by launching online events, giveaways, and interactive challenges, brands can stimulate user participation and sharing. This will not only broaden brand exposure but also build a dedicated community that actively engages with the brand. The strategy of continuous interaction helps to create a loyal user base that is more inclined toward repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth, ultimately enhancing the brand's appeal and fostering a strong sense of brand affinity among users.

In short, the survey findings underscore the significant impact that various forms of UGC—visual content, textual reviews, and interaction quality—have on the purchasing behavior and brand loyalty of Generation Z women on Xiaohongshu. To harness the full potential of the platform, brands must focus on creating high-quality, interactive, and frequently updated UGC, engaging in meaningful discussions, and fostering an environment that encourages user-generated content and brand engagement. By doing so, brands can build strong connections with their audience, influence purchase decisions, and cultivate long-term loyalty within this influential demographic.

6. Conclusion

This study investigates how user-generated content (UGC) on Xiaohongshu influences the purchase decisions and brand loyalty of Chinese Generation Z women in the beauty sector. Findings reveal that visual content like short videos and images plays a critical role in shaping buying decisions, providing immediacy and engaging visuals. Text reviews add depth by offering detailed product feedback, enhancing the visual experience. The study emphasizes the importance of quality interactions, showing that replies from original posters, high engagement, and active discussions boost credibility and trust in UGC, fostering a sense of community and authenticity.

Additionally, forms of UGC such as tutorials, product reviews, and frequent content updates are key to cultivating brand loyalty. They provide valuable insights, helping Gen Z consumers build strong brand connections in a rapidly evolving beauty market. Such content builds brand affinity, enhances brand image, and drives long-term loyalty.

For beauty brands and companies aiming to leverage this trend, maintaining an active presence on Xiaohongshu is vital. They must not only generate their own content but also monitor and support the UGC produced by their customers. Encouraging meaningful discussions around their products, reposting and highlighting popular UGC posts, and interacting with high-quality content can help build a positive brand perception. By boosting the visibility of trusted UGC through likes and comments, brands can enhance their credibility and influence among Gen Z users. Consistently promoting engaging, authentic, and community-driven content can turn casual viewers into loyal customers, solidifying brand identity and loyalty in a highly competitive digital space.

Additionally, offering incentives like exclusive information, and interactive campaigns can further motivate users to share their experiences and contribute to UGC. This can create a snowball effect, where satisfied consumers not only make repeat purchases but also become brand promoters. This cycle of creating authentic content and interacting with users aligns with Generation Z Chinese Women's values and consumption habits, making it a sustainable strategy for brands to thrive on platforms like Xiaohongshu.

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