

The Impact of Evolving Regulatory Policies on Content Strategies: A Case Study of Xiaohongshu (Red Note) Bloggers

Wenyue Chen *

Metro international secondary academy, Toronto, ON L3T 4L1, Canada

* Corresponding author Email: wenyue055@gmail.com

Abstract: With the rapid growth of the digital economy, content platforms have become increasingly important in information dissemination, consumer decision-making, and shaping social opinion. However, issues like content proliferation, false advertising, and algorithmic manipulation have become more prominent, leading the government to enhance oversight of these platforms. This study examines how changes in regulatory policies influence the creative strategies, commercial collaborations, and platform migration of Xiaohongshu (Red note) bloggers. Through a literature review and empirical observation, the research aims to provide insights into the impact of digital platform governance from a micro perspective and offer practical recommendations for optimizing content ecosystems and improving governance effectiveness. The findings suggest that, in response to stricter regulations on advertising compliance and content authenticity, Xiaohongshu has transitioned to a platform focused on trust, user engagement, and a more authentic lifestyle. Bloggers have shifted from direct product promotion to more subtle, context-driven expressions. Additionally, there has been a significant shift in commercial collaborations and revenue models. This study focuses solely on Xiaohongshu. Future research could extend this analysis to cross-platform comparisons, explore regulatory impacts across different platforms, further investigate user engagement and trust, and examine the long-term sustainability of these new content strategies.

Keywords: Digital Platform Governance; Xiaohongshu (Red Note); Content Creation Strategy; Platform Regulation; User-generated Content (UGC).

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of the digital economy, content platforms play an increasingly important role in information dissemination, consumer decision-making and social opinion. However, the problems of content proliferation, false propaganda and algorithmic inducement have also become increasingly prominent, prompting the government to strengthen the regulation of digital platforms. In particular, since 2021, the State Internet Information Office and the General Administration of Market Supervision have issued several policies to promote platform content compliance, including strengthening the labelling of advertisements, restricting false advertising, and regulating the dissemination of medical and beauty information [1]. This high-pressure policy not only poses a governance challenge to the platform itself, but also directly affects the creative path and business model of content producers.

As China's leading lifestyle content community, Xiaohongshu (also known as Little Red Book or Red Note) has long been favoured by users and brands for its UGC-led "grass-planting economy" model. However, as the regulatory system continues to tighten, Xiaohongshu has had to adjust its platform rules, such as keyword blocking, flow restriction mechanisms, and enhanced content auditing [2]. At the same time, content creators have been forced to restructure their strategies to adapt to the new regulatory environment. Most of the existing studies focus on the platform's algorithmic recommendation mechanism, content consumption behaviour or macro governance structure, while there are relatively few studies on how creators adapt to policy changes and adjust their content strategies at the micro level. This paper attempts

to explore how the evolution of regulatory policies shapes the strategic changes in content style, business cooperation and platform migration from the creative practices of Xiaohongshu bloggers. Through a combination of literature combing and empirical observation, this paper hopes to provide a microscopic perspective for understanding the actual influence mechanism of digital platform governance, as well as a feasible reference for optimizing the content ecology and enhancing the effectiveness of platform governance.

2. Regulatory Policy Landscape of Xiaohongshu

2.1. Governance Structure of the Xiaohongshu Platform

Under the background of the national strengthening of cyberspace governance, Xiaohongshu has gradually built up a governance system combining government supervision and platform self-regulation. Its content ecological governance is mainly centred on the three core elements of "compliance", "authenticity", and "community norms", taking into account the implementation of policies and the maintenance of the community atmosphere [1]. In terms of government regulation, Xiaohongshu needs to implement a number of regulations issued by the State Internet Information Office, the General Administration of Market Supervision and other departments, such as the "Measures for the Administration of Internet Advertising", "Provisions for the Ecological Governance of Network Information Content", "Measures for the Administration of Network Live Streaming and Marketing" and so on . For example, in response to false

"grass" content, the regulator requires platforms to implement the responsibility of information authenticity audits and strictly prohibit unmarked commercial promotions and unauthorized medical and beauty publicity content. The government's policy guidance provides legal boundaries and direction for the platform's content management.

At the same time, Xiaohongshu has continuously strengthened the platform's self-discipline and content review mechanism through both technical and institutional means. On the one hand, the platform has a keyword review and content identification system through algorithms to automatically identify illegal content and implement flow restriction, shelving and other penalties; on the other hand, Xiaohongshu has formulated a "Community Convention", "Creator's Code of Conduct Manual" and other codes of conduct, to guide the production of users to produce "real, useful and friendly" content. In addition, Xiaohongshu also set up a "compliance classroom", "blogger support program", and other mechanisms to help creators understand the platform policy and enhance awareness of content compliance. The governance system of Xiaohongshu exemplifies the concept of embedded platform governance, which not only complies with mandatory regulatory requirements but also considers user experience and content diversity, striving to strike a balance between control and incentive [3]. This model has emerged as a crucial mechanism enabling platforms to navigate regulatory pressure while maintaining competitiveness in the market.

2.2. Recent Developments in Regulatory Policies

2.2.1. Advertising Content Compliance Management

Since 2021, the state level has continuously strengthened the regulation and management of Internet advertising, especially the content of "soft advertising" on social platforms [1]. Xiaohongshu, as a content platform known for its "grass-planting" model, has long wandered between authentic sharing and commercial promotion, resulting in frequent problems with the authenticity of content and advertisement transparency, which is of great concern to regulators. According to the "Measures for the Administration of Internet Advertising", "Advertising Law", and other relevant regulations, platforms are required to clearly identify content of an advertising nature to prevent misleading consumers. Xiaohongshu has also correspondingly introduced the "commercial content specification", which requires bloggers to use the words "cooperation", "promotion", and "advertisement" when posting commercial cooperation content. In 2021, Xiaohongshu also issued a "commercial content specification", requiring bloggers to use labels such as "cooperation" and "advertising" when posting commercial cooperation content, and to take responsibility for reviewing the authenticity of information on cooperating brands and product information.

2.2.2. The Progressive Strengthening of Content Audit Standards

In line with the increasing focus on public opinion guidance and the tightening of industry regulatory policies, Xiaohongshu has consistently strengthened its content auditing standards, particularly in sensitive areas [4]. In 2021, the State Internet Information Office launched a series of "clarification" initiatives aimed at addressing issues such as false information, inappropriate content, and excessive marketing behaviors across online platforms. In response to

national governance requirements, Xiaohongshu has gradually established a multi-level review mechanism, including content grading, keyword blocking, graphic and text review, etc., and has demonstrated higher audit thresholds, especially in key areas such as medical care, food, beauty, and children. In terms of specific implementation, in 2021, Xiaohongshu first launched a special governance for "grass-raising content", restricting "flow-inducing copy" and exaggerated descriptions, such as "the magic weapon that saves the rotten face" and "7 days to lose 10 pounds". In 2022, the platform launched the "Information Authenticity Enhancement Mechanism" and established the "Fact Checking Team" to strengthen the screening of content that describes products and their efficacy. In 2022, the platform launched the "Information Authenticity Enhancement Mechanism" and set up a "Fact Checking Team" to strengthen the screening of product descriptions. For example, it restricts the use of words such as "whitening" and "blemish removal" in skin care products and beauty tutorials, and requires creators to cite authoritative evidence or avoid absolute expressions.

By 2023, Xiaohongshu will further increase the auditing and standardization of medical and health content, especially limiting the medical experience and beauty recommendations published by non-qualified bloggers. According to the platform's announcement, all content involving the medical and health field needs to be pre-audited for the record, and some of them need to provide doctor's certification or third-party information support to ensure information compliance. This series of policy changes has significantly impacted bloggers' content styles, with creators gradually abandoning exaggerated expressions and shifting to a more moderate, life-oriented and intellectualized way of expressing themselves, while reinforcing "experience-based sharing" and "personal perspective" narratives. This not only improves the quality of platform content, but also makes the user experience more rational and trust-oriented, reflecting the trend of platform governance from "controlling content" to "promoting ecology".

From 2021 to 2023, under strengthened national regulations, Xiaohongshu shifted from utilitarian "grass-planting" content to more authentic, lifestyle-oriented expression. The platform cleaned up false ads, exaggerated claims, and unverified medical info, leading to penalties for marketing-heavy bloggers. This pushed creators to focus on personal sharing and reduce overt promotion. Light commercialization strategies like subtle scene-based recommendations emerged. Popular topics have moved from hype-driven product pushes to honest reviews and consumer awareness, fostering a content ecology centered on trust, credibility, and diversity.

3. Current Creative Strategies of Xiaohongshu Bloggers

3.1. Adaptation of Content Style

As platform supervision tightened and content review became stricter, Xiaohongshu bloggers made major adjustments to their content styles. Previously, the content strategy of relying on "explosive copywriting" and "direct recommendation" is no longer effective, and creators have turned to a more contextualized, life-oriented and realistic path of expression. To avoid the keyword blocking and flow restriction mechanism, bloggers generally adopt the "fuzzy

expression" strategy, such as using pinyin and harmonic words instead of sensitive words and replacing direct product promotion with situational narratives, such as "my skincare routine" instead of "skin whitener test". For example, "my skincare routine" instead of "whitening tool review".

At the same time, emphasizing "real sharing" has become the mainstream narrative logic. Bloggers build trust with users by presenting daily life, before and after comparisons, failure experiences, and even "anti-weeding" content. Research shows that users are more likely to like and comment on content that presents "integrity of persona" and "emotional resonance" rather than single product recommendations. Interactivity has also become an essential factor in increasing content weight, with bloggers adding questions, polls, or comments to their copy to enhance user engagement. The technological advancement of the platform's content auditing mechanism has led to a trend of "compliance optimization" in the graphic layout and composition of words and phrases. For example, avoiding the use of sensitive images, adjusting the order of keywords, and moderately reducing the tone of emphasis have all become elements that bloggers must consider in their creation. This style transformation is not only a response to the policy but also reflects that the content ecosystem is gradually moving from "traffic-oriented" to a new stage of "trust-oriented".

3.2. Optimization of Collaboration and Revenue Structure

As Xiaohongshu strengthens the regulation of advertising compliance, the business cooperation model between bloggers and brands has also changed, showing a more standardized, diversified and long-term trend. The traditional marketing strategy of relying on one-time product implantation and short-term exposure is gradually declining, replaced by "deep-binding" content cooperation, such as brand-created content, scene-based soft implantation, and serialized product reviews. This kind of cooperation not only meets the platform's compliance requirements but also helps improve user trust and conversion efficiency. Regarding revenue structure, bloggers' dependence on platform traffic cash is gradually decreasing. On the one hand, due to the instability of the algorithmic recommendation mechanism and the uncertainty of the penalty for restricting traffic, some bloggers have started to turn to the "fan economy" and the "private traffic" mode, through the WeChat community, the small program mall, and the "private traffic" mode [5]. On the other hand, more and more bloggers are trying multi-platform operation strategies, distributing the same content on platforms such as B-station, Shake Tone and Xiaohongshu to realize traffic synergy and risk diversification.

Brands also tend to be cautious in the cooperation mode, pay more attention to the quality of the content and the matching degree of the blogger's personality, no longer blindly pursue the number of followers, but are more inclined to establish a long-term cooperative relationship with bloggers in the middle waist, who have "real content style, high user interaction and clear vertical fields". This change promotes the transformation of content creators from "content producers" to "brand partners", enhances their professionalism and market value, and builds a more sustainable content-commercial synergy model [2].

3.3. Transformation Trend from KOL to KOC

Under the dual background of tightening platform governance and rational user consumption, the ecology of Xiaohongshu bloggers is undergoing a structural transformation from KOL (Key Opinion Leaders) to KOC (Key Opinion Consumers)[6]. KOLs tend to have high fan bases and brand appeal, but they are also susceptible to user resentment due to frequent commercial cooperation and content routinization. KOC, on the other hand, starts from the identity of an "ordinary user" and pays more attention to the truthfulness and personalized expression of the content, which is more likely to be recommended by the platform and the trust of users. Xiaohongshu in the content recommendation mechanism is also tilted to KOC creators [6]. The platform in the "decentralized traffic distribution" mechanism weakened the weight of the number of fans, enhance the content interaction, the rate of likes and read rate recommended priority, which makes a large number of "non-head" of the ordinary user content also have the opportunity to get high exposure. According to the "2023 Xiaohongshu Content Trend Report", the active users of Xiaohongshu are mainly young women in first- and second-tier cities. This shows that the vitality of the platform content comes from a diversified user group, including a large number of mid- and long-tail bloggers [7]. Brands are recognizing the value of KOCs in word-of-mouth marketing by engaging many KOCs for product trust through real user feedback. This trend minimizes visible commercial content and integrates promotion naturally into user experiences. The KOC model also lowers content creation barriers for bloggers, offering diversified monetization options like CPS distribution, brand tasks, and content commissions. Additionally, KOCs enjoy more flexibility, reducing regulatory risks and increasing content creation autonomy.

4. Challenges of Regulation and Coping Strategies for Xiaohongshu Bloggers

Against the backdrop of stricter platform regulation, Xiaohongshu bloggers face unprecedented compliance challenges. The opaque platform rules, especially content restrictions, bans, and delistings, force creators to rely on trial and error, reducing their sense of security and initiative. Frequent policy adjustments add to the risk. For example, the recent sudden tightening of medical and beauty content regulation caught some bloggers off guard, resulting in bans and loss of business partnerships. Traffic and monetization restrictions have become a common problem, as traffic restrictions directly affect exposure and commercial value. Even if violations are successfully appealed, the original traffic level is often not restored, weakening the brand's trust. In addition, the increase in compliance requirements, such as clear advertising labels and avoiding the use of sensitive words, requires creators to invest more time and energy, reducing content efficiency. These challenges highlight the need for clearer guidelines and a more stable creation environment.

Faced with regulatory pressures and platform rules, bloggers are diversifying strategies to balance compliance with commercial demands. They avoid high-risk content like medical and beauty topics, focusing on "life sense" and "emotional value" content, such as daily records and workplace experiences, to maintain traffic. Bloggers enhance

originality and use fuzzy language and empathetic narratives to evade censorship and algorithmic restrictions. To reduce platform dependency, many are expanding across platforms like Jittery Voice, B Station, and mini-program malls, creating a "multi-platform content matrix" to mitigate risks and ensure content exposure. Bloggers are also building fan communities via WeChat mini-accounts and brand mini-programs to foster direct connections with users, increasing engagement and content conversion. Mid-level bloggers are shifting to knowledge-based content, like career planning and personal finance, to enhance content authority and attract stable audiences while ensuring compliance.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined the impact of evolving regulatory policies on the content strategies of Xiaohongshu bloggers. The findings reveal that, in response to the increasing regulation of digital platforms, especially regarding advertising compliance and content authenticity, Xiaohongshu has transformed from a platform driven by flashy, promotional content to one centered on trust, user engagement, and a more authentic, lifestyle-oriented approach. Bloggers have adjusted their content creation strategies, shifting from direct product promotions to more subtle, context-based expressions. These changes not only reflect compliance with stricter regulations but also signal a broader shift towards content that fosters emotional resonance and credibility. The study also highlights the evolution of business collaborations and revenue models among content creators. With platform algorithms becoming less predictable and traffic restrictions more frequent, many bloggers are diversifying their revenue streams and experimenting with multi-platform strategies and the "fan economy." Brands are increasingly prioritizing long-term collaborations based on genuine content and user engagement, rather than simply seeking mass exposure through high-followerhip influencers.

However, this study focuses on Xiaohongshu and does not examine how changes in national regulatory policies affect

content strategies on other platforms. Future research could extend this analysis to compare regulatory impacts across different digital content platforms, explore user engagement and trust in more detail, and examine the long-term sustainability of these newly adopted content strategies.

References

- [1] Chen, B., & Liu, Y. (2024). Promotion and Advancement of Data Security Governance in China. *Electronics*, 13(10), 1905.
- [2] Qin, M., Qiu, S., Zhao, Y., Zhu, W., & Li, S. (2024). Graphic or short video? The influence mechanism of UGC types on consumers' purchase intention—Take Xiaohongshu as an example. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 65, 101402.
- [3] Jin, Y., & Yu, H. (2021, March). Content governance mechanism of social e-commerce platform from the perspective of information ecology: A case study of Xiaohongshu. In *2021 2nd International Conference on E-Commerce and Internet Technology (ECIT)* (pp. 159-162). IEEE.
- [4] Meng, J., & Zhao, H. (2023). Research on the Development of Audio-Visual Content and Platforms in China's Short-Form Video Industry. In *Videolised Society* (pp. 325-343). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- [5] Bilin, Y. (2023, May). The Implication of Marketing Communication Strategy on Personal Branding and Audience Consumer Behavior: A Case study of Li Jiaqi's Double Eleven Shopping Show "All Girls' Offer". *The 14th Hanyai National and International Conference*.
- [6] Zhu, Q., & Ratasuk, A. (2024). Impacts of Key Opinion Consumers on Customer Purchase Intention: A Study of Social Commerce Platforms in China. *Journal of ASEAN PLUS Studies*, 5(2), 55-74.
- [7] Xiaohongshu, & Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. (2023). *2023 Xiaohongshu Annual Lifestyle Trend Report*. Retrieve from <https://socialbeta.com/campaign/14413>.