

Post-truth and Social Media: Distinctive Narrative Ecologies for Social Platforms with Targeted Users

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Abstract: Social media, regarded as one of the major sources of information in modern times, has also caused perplexing problems in communication and the post-truth is on the list. Defined as “appealing to emotion and personal belief has a greater impact on public opinion than objective facts”, people are getting more and more aware of the negative influence of the post-truth phenomenon which is the starting point of this work. This paper focuses on the users’ experience on popular social media which reflects the role of post-truth in shaping public opinions and narrative vibes, in order to appeal to the rising awareness of solid truth and real information in the digital media era. In this work, an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews are both adopted to support the credibility of the research. The accuracy of the information and the concerns on truth are supposed to be strengthened for social media consumers from this work.

Keywords: social media, post-truth, narrative ecology.

1. Introduction

The contemporary information environment is dominated by digital communication technologies and social media platforms. Still, while social media has become a vital source of news and information, it is a severely problematic sector as a whole, according to Numerato, and one that deserves our attention [1]. For the general public, social media has become an essential source of news and information. However, as a rapidly expanding industry, social media inevitably exposes several problems that require our attention.

One of the major concerns on social media is the authenticity and legitimacy of the information and the spreading content, which brings about the concept of the post-truth to discuss -- relating to or describing situations in which objective facts are less prominent in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief, according to the Oxford definition. The post-truth can appear at any point in the dissemination of information, from the very beginning of recording the news to any possible chance of retelling. More importantly, what the post-truth can lead to is beyond the participants' control, as it may be extensively distributed through newspapers, chats, and the internet. The component of the post-truth is intricate, and so is its influence which would directly reflect on the information environment. Furthermore, considering social media represents a new literacy in contemporary days, where information spread can also be regarded as an emerging narrative environment.

The narrative environment is also known as the narrative ecology. Similar to natural ecologies in the real world, it symbolizes not only social media's features from users' groups but also their operating mechanisms in communication. If the narrative ecology of social media is well-functioning, the news and information included will work to their strengths and build connecting bridges among people. Vice versa, problems like misunderstandings occur, deterring users and the public from the truth. During the entire term of processing information, users of social media are the creators as well as the receivers. They construct the distinctive communicating environment as a whole, and then are affected within. A post from Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg depicting his daughter getting vaccines is a good example of illustrating the connections between social media and consumers. It demonstrates how the post-truth phenomena affect the narrative ecology in various ways, as well as its negative consequences.



Figure 1. Mark Zuckerberg's post of his daughter, accompanied by a comment "Doctor's visit – time for vaccines!" received tons of feedback.

Firstly, based on the data shown on the figure 1, Mark Zuckerberg's post deserves to be a hit. In this case, Facebook is the online environment that allows users to check the post and leave comments. Aside from that, there are two pieces of information displayed: the primary one is directly relevant to the vaccine while the secondary one is more about Mark Zuckerberg's behavior as a worldwide celebrity. By reading the most relevant comments below, it is not hard to find that where information appears, the post-truth phenomenon follows. On the one hand, a user who focuses on the vaccine comments, "*Injecting newborns and infants with disease and neurotoxins is*

disgusting science that injures millions every year..... How dare any of you say that if there's even 1% chance of adverse event than this child should carry that on their backs! Herd immunity is bullshit.” However, she shows little scientific proof but more anger and resentment which can not be a supportive appeal for his anti-vaccine idea. But she wins 292 likes and 667 replies. On the other hand, a user who pay attention to Mark Zuckerberg’s identity says, *“There is no way he is vaccinating his child. It's all for show!”* She wins 163 likes and 73 replies, but still, offers no persuasive view and nothing related to the vaccine. To sum up, these are the evidence that reveals the problem that digital social media is confronting – the post-truth. Comments that show no scientific proof about vaccine drawbacks and that show little concern about the core issue both do receive a lot of attention from other users. Nevertheless, to any degree do they contribute to the discussion of vaccines? The answer is a resounding NO. The present information crisis on social media corresponds to Rochlin's concerns about post-truth in his research, “Facts and evidence have been replaced by personal beliefs and emotions. The nature of news, and what people accept as news, is also shifting toward a belief and emotion-based market [2].”

Secondly, reading responses to the most relevant comments is an excellent approach to observing Facebook's narrative ecologies. Are they friendly? Are they concerned about the subject that was previously discussed? Do they show evident personal preferences? On distinct social media, short comments might effectively expose solid narrative vibes. In terms of the anti-vaccine comment, users leave harsh remarks to show disagreements, *“This woman is the devil incarnate”* which appears to be pure oppose to another user but paying no attention to the vaccine. Even worse, a heated debate has been evoked, with only two users leaving cursing words that make no other sense. As a result, conclusions like “Facebook is not an appropriate social platform to communicate with civil society about sustainability issues [3]” can be made to describe one part of the narrative ecologies on Facebook. Still, this is precisely one of the typical narrative environments on most contemporary social media, where people seek immediacy and fun, eschewing the process of learning the facts.

Thirdly, when it comes to studying who causes such a turbulent narrative ecology, the answer is quite sure as mentioned before: users. Despite previous proposals that blamed the authorities and hegemony [3], users themselves are the ones that create content and subsequently cause chaos. Thanks to the vast development of the internet world, everyone can easily access social media anytime and anywhere to obtain the most up-to-date information nowadays. But the problem is, not everyone has the ability to judge right from wrong, especially when facing the compulsion of sensational headlines. Even worse, busy lifestyles may not even offer them adequate time and patience to go through the entire news before the next one pops up on their screens. The dramatic expansion of available information has contributed to an “information overload” for the public [4]. Simultaneously, modern social media platforms such as Tik-Tok have been accused of propagating fake material and frauds, and flexible and broadly open platforms may be seen as permitting fake news to enter the media ecosystem [5]. Additionally, over time, the nature of information has altered. In contrast to prior information that merely served to inform people about the news, the derivative uses of information on social media that generate commercial benefits are far from the previous. For instance, clickbait is known as a representative feature of the post-truth era. People would click a page that they found to be attractive, and the number of clicks and views would be misunderstood as a measure of value to this page. Besides, clicks-as-reward allows fake news and other clickbait to gain unobstructed virality, enhancing the distrust of social media [2]. That’s why deeper insights are supposed to be put into the evolution of social media’s expression, to both see the cause of post-truth and misunderstandings and seek ways to lower the negative influence on social media.

2. Literature Review

Social media has always been a tool for connection and solidarity, informing but also amplifying certain voices and issues [5]. Social platforms, on the other hand, are not all the same: different sources serve different objectives, and the features of each uniquely target its consumers, typically based on their culture or hobbies. Some social media platforms are heavily populated by women, while others are dominated by teenagers. To summarize, these platforms promote a variety of viewpoints on the same subject, as a result of their respective narrative ecologies.

Digital interdependence and vast interconnectivity among the public with the help of social media have significantly changed the structure and component of public opinions [6]. Besides, owing to the rapid development of multi-media, the inaccuracies through different forms of social media should also be taken into consideration. Authors on social media make sensational headlines to earn more clickbait, such as sources that provide generally credible content, but use exaggerated, misleading, or questionable headlines, social media descriptions, and/or images [2]. When facts are mixed in with these transferred and secondary-processed messages, a massive volume of information emerges on the Internet, sometimes even contradicting themselves. An individual user is most likely to be overloaded with information, unable to distinguish between truth and secondary news. Also, the amount of information available would go beyond his cognitive capacity. When this all happens at once, the user is facing the problem of information overload problem [7]. Furthermore, when it comes to reposting and sharing information, people can make alterations based on their own perceptions of the facts. The truth becomes muddled through the transfer of words, and hence becomes deceptive. The content's legitimacy is in trouble. Viewers can also use social media to keep up to date on the latest news, both actively and passively. Debates on the comments then occur. Viewers may even use their common-people-knowledge which is also learned on the internet to challenge the experts in medical areas such as debates on vaccination [1]. And those subjective ideas and polishing words leading to misunderstandings during the dissemination from authors to viewers to the public, are the so-called post-truth on social media.

Post-truth is an indispensable topic for historical transformations of media systems and journalism, "relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief [8]". Facts and evidence have been replaced by personal belief and emotion, the nature of news, and what people accept as news, is also shifting toward a belief and emotion-based market. The truth of the story no longer matters [2]. As a heated discussion in 2016 amplified in the election of a president, scholars have once associated this topic with hegemony on the internet [3]. Nevertheless, with the growing heavier consumption of social media among the public, post-truth has been widely seen from political disputes like elections to daily issues under the pandemic, penetrating every part of modern society. This disorder in the digital era could be represented as rumors, fake news, or lies, intended to cause harm or simply misinterpreted [6]. However, no matter whether the misinterpretation or the misinformation should be to blame, the false connection of information on various social media is always the topic worth further study.

The concept of narrative ecology has been used to describe spaces where, by analogy to natural ecologies, different types and populations of narrative emerge, interact, fight, compete, adapt, develop, and die [9]. As with natural eco-systems, different narrative eco-systems may display greater or lesser fragility, may contain greater or lesser diversity, and may entail greater or lesser competition and conflict [10]. To extend this research, specific attention should be paid to a wide range of users from popular social media, so as to meet the need for comprehensive and multi-layered analysis "to explore the complexity of topics and arguments rather than to provide a representative overview of different positions [1]." Samples would be categorized for a clear

contrast on narrative ecologies based on the gender ratio, preferred orientations, and preferred forms of expression from users on social media. A critical component of the research would be to determine how all of these aspects contribute to the spread of misleading information or false connections among the general population.

Moreover, social background and events back then when those social media win the growing trends of catching the public's attention and dominating the public's voice would also be included. Giordani has proposed a similar theory of critically situating the denial of science in the pandemic context to observe how the post-truth phenomenon is characteristic of the post-factual era [6]. However, in such an era with advancing technologies and changing events making noises almost every second, acknowledging the expression evolution on social media would be a great assist to study the current circumstance. Notably, the main subject who takes the job of expression is the users. That's why it can be concluded that, with the undeniable massive consumption of social media in modern lives, starting the research from social media consumers' views and patterns might lead to a brand new perspective.

3. Research Questions

1. How do different social media platforms generate distinct narrative ecologies?
2. What is the connection between different narrative ecologies and information gaps and thus post-truth?
3. How can social media users avoid being affected by post-truth in literacy and expression?

4. Methods

Narrative ecology has indeed been widely investigated in the past as a controversial subject. Since its debut, there have been continuing arguments and debates about the authenticity of social media information and the effects of the post-truth phenomenon.

Previous researchers concentrated on the operating mechanisms, such as the function of hegemony activities, when conducting this project [3]. This research, on the other hand, would considerably alter the investigating views of users' experiences, reflecting narrative ecologies on various social media platforms, and exerting further effect on current trends such as e-commercial activities and important opinion leaders. Following research would compare two Chinese social media platforms, Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, both of which have a huge popularity and distinct operating functions.

This study adopts mixed methods through conducting surveys and in-depth interviews. Firstly, the online survey asks users on their first impressions and recent experiences with Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, with ratings ranging from quality, expressiveness, and useful functions to personalized content pushes through development and progress. The major purpose of this survey is to hear from users on Chinese-based social media and analyze their feedback, experiences, and suggestions for future changes. Secondly, in terms of selecting participants, the young generation is the primary focus. Given that the questionnaire is published and spread on Chinese social media like Weibo and Douban, participants consist of a large percentage of active groupies of fan culture and We-media influencers. Thirdly, participants are also requested to pass on and share this questionnaire with others in order to increase the response scale as much as possible. However, more significantly, all of the relevant samples demonstrate that they are users of both Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, allowing for a fair comparison. Participants are categorized based on their gender and preferred or interesting content to highlight the link between targeted users and the basic functioning mechanism of the two social media.

The questionnaire receives 323 replies in total. According to the resources shown, WeChat is responsible for 57 percent of the collected samples. Due to the general high reliance on real, critical, and active feedback from options, online questionnaires have minimized the reflection of users' personal biases and preferences to some extent. Participants are involved by sharing the URL and QR code with others who may be interested in this subject, which demonstrates the unpredictability of participants' credibility. Furthermore, there is a flaw in an open-ended question that cause the results to fall short of expectations. Even if responses to easy options are promising, responses to open-ended questions, which are supposed to solicit more suggestions from social media users, provide only a few thoughtful answers. This limitation necessitates the addition of more supportive interviews with more complex and accurate reactions in order to contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of social media and existing issues such as narrative disorder, which leads to the post-truth phenomenon. A face-to-face group interview is then brought up as the improvement. The three women and two men interviewees, who represent five different majors, offer not only their current experience on Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, but also their insights from majors to respond to their preferred content, demonstrating the close connections between narrative ecologies and targeted users.

As this study aims to explore the post-truth and narrative ecology on two popular social media in China, the questionnaire and interview are both conducted in Chinese. All respondents are also from China. The questionnaire has been proofread and translated for reference and the interview is recorded, transcribed, and translated throughout.

5. Findings

5.1. Xiaohongshu and Its Development

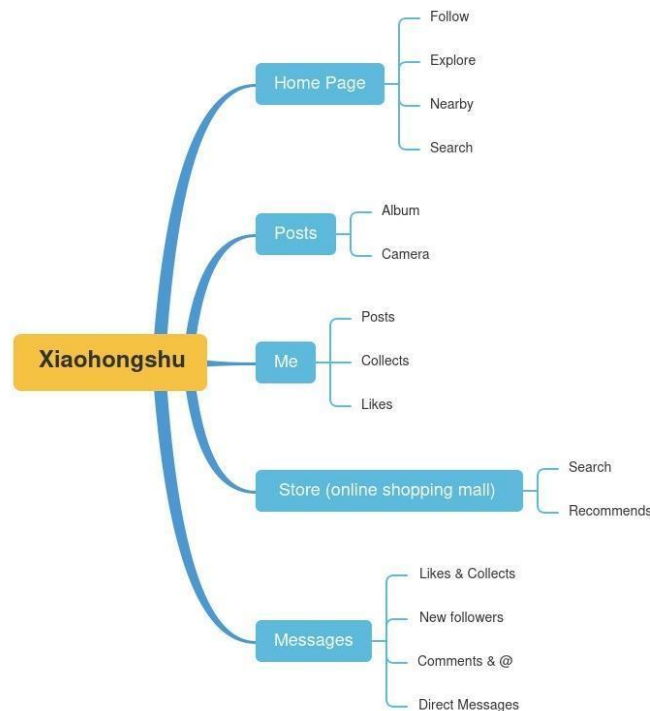


Figure 2. Xiaohongshu's homepage with its main functions

Xiaohongshu is a social media and e-commerce platform founded in 2013, described as China's answer to Instagram owing to a similar mechanism consisting of sharing photos and short videos with descriptive words. Figure 2 shows its homepage where users can easily access every function of it once they start. Xiaohongshu, which has hundreds of millions of subscribers, began as an online community for people to upload postings about beauty and shopping, but has since evolved into a far more diverse social media that covers practically every field. It also runs an online shopping mall that sells overseas goods to Chinese customers. More than 90% of its users are women, according to its annual report from 2021.

The very beginning of Xiaohongshu is straightforward — a PDF file named "Xiaohongshu International Shopping Guide", which is posted on the Xiaohongshu website for users to download and read. This shopping guide was downloaded 500,000 times in less than a month after it was published in October 2013. However, since the information was limitedly based on general facts, it cannot meet the further needs of fracturing or customizing. Also, PDF instruction has difficulties fostering rapid, mutual, and sticky interaction among users. To solve those problems, "Xiaohongshu Shopping Notes" App was released in 2013.

From the start, Xiaohongshu built the prototype of the UGC (the abbreviation of User Generated Contents) community, not only focusing on shopping transactions but also providing a platform for all kinds of international shopping and interactive communication. The international shopping market at the time was far from mature in terms of product knowledge and the purchase process. Except for Taobao, Xiaohongshu is a new platform for women consumers to shop and share. Actual customers and markets quickly established Xiaohongshu's reputation and recognition, as well as a diverse social community.

After attracting and stabilizing a large number of solid women users, Xiaohongshu began to expand to other fields. Starting from make-up tutorials, it does not take long for Xiaohongshu to find other related fields that might catch women users' attention, such as traveling, cooking, painting, etc. In addition, the key for Xiaohongshu to remain active and attractive for such a long time is that it has built a bridge between online and offline in this era of online shopping. For all the sharing content on Xiaohongshu, no matter it's about shopping and food or some tips and recommendations about traveling, users would have to go back to real life to experience.

"At Xiaohongshu, we are able to listen directly to the real voices from consumers. Real feedbacks and comments are the strongest bonds between brands and consumers." Said L'Oréal representative Stephan Wilmet.

However, problematic content comes along with the great benefits from massive content creators in diverse fields. The more creators there are, the more difficult it would be to organize such a popular online neighborhood with a significant amount of users. Copying others' original contents, on a wide scale, for example, has become a severe problem on Xiaohongshu, which has come up with the term "xi gao" to represent the situation. It means that bloggers copy the popular ideas and original content by changing the titles and some details in order to increase the number of views of their own accounts and thus become one of the KOLs (key opinion leaders) who could benefit from their posts. A major negative consequence of this problem should be reflected on users as they might believe and follow those who make little effort in creating useful content, taking in some non-original, or even worse, misinterpreted ideas which can be the cause of post-truth to some extent.

5.2. Zhihu and Its Development

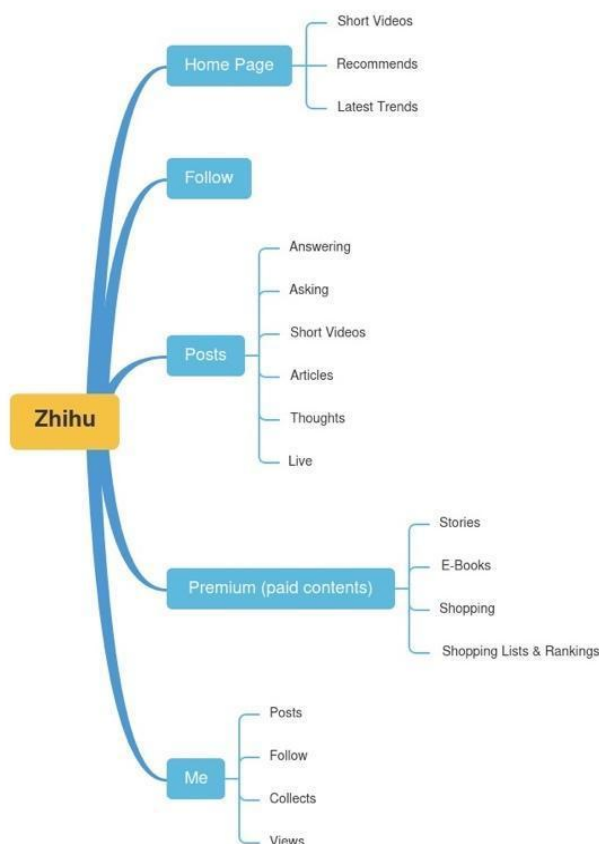


Figure 3. Zhihu's homepage and its main functions

Zhihu is a question-and-answer forum in China where answers to categorized questions would be organized into a community for users to share, established in 2011. Figure 3 above shows its homepage and introduces its main functions. Starting as an invitation-only platform (open to everyone now), Zhihu has been maintaining its high quality for long periods of time and generates revenue by advertising and charging experts' questions. However, official reports show that Zhihu has been suffering from a serious loss of users since 2015.

The development of Zhihu can be divided into two clear phases: forum and social media. Zhihu was first designed to be an invited-only question-and-answer social platform, aiming at elite users to share knowledge and experience. The initial goal for Zhihu is to create a knowledge-sharing community with high quality, which explains the invitation code at the starting periods of it.

In the infancy of the Internet in China, the information environment was almost dominated by forums which had an evident drawback -- providing information but lacking communication among users. But Zhihu, to some degree, had made up this problem. It was more likely to be a social forum where users engaged in relevant discussions based on an interesting topic, following others who share their interests. For conceptual explanations, the online encyclopedia covered almost all your questions. What's more, the integration of divergent thinking was one of Zhihu's shining points. It encouraged discussion during the Q&A process to broaden the perspectives of the questions and this function was an undoubted hit.

Zhihu's social features not only made up the shortcomings of the forum era but also paved the way for its later transformation. When releasing the mobile app, Zhihu directly broke the limits of

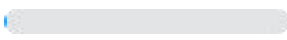
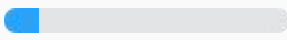
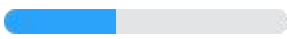
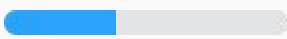
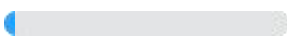
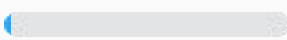
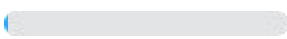
the forum pattern and opened up the social media section. Nevertheless, as a social media, Zhihu had no choice but to cancel the invited-only mechanism and became open and available to everyone. Growing concerns follow its steps and have been challenging the further development of Zhihu. The increasing number of users mean the declining quality of the platform. Users who only ask questions but prefer not to bother thinking and answering greatly reduce the number of valuable questions in Zhihu; the proliferation of repetitive and similar questions also reduces the exposure of high-quality posts; the leaving of original solid users contributes to the severe blow to Zhihu, since it would dramatically alter the professional narrative ecology in previous times. Furthermore, as a knowledge platform, a drop in content quality could contribute to the spread of disinformation. The challenge of maintaining high-quality information would be aggravated by the loss of original solid users. These two obvious concerns, which play the roles of potential causes of post-truth, will deal a significant blow to Zhihu, which is known for its specialized knowledge system.

Still, even with so many unsolved problems, Zhihu remains active till now. The main reason accounted should be the simultaneous running of the website and the mobile application. Website users are able to access information as easily as by texting the keywords on google, while application users take advantage of the social features to relate with others. data and resources on both parts are synchronized and updated.

5.3. Gender Differences of Users

According to the annual report of Xiaohongshu in 2021, its active users tend to be among young generations, mainly aged between 18-34 years old, accounting for 83.31%. Mostly are women users, making up 90.41% in total, while men users only account for 9.59%. On the Baidu Index (one of the most authoritative data-sharing platforms in China, based on collecting internet users' retrieval behavior), data about Zhihu shows that 72.36% of users are men while women users take up 27.64% of the total. Besides, 66.98% of Zhihu users are in the age group of 20-29. And according to the data from the questionnaire, the age range of the respondents is concentrated between 18 and 30 years. This is exactly in line with the dominant age group of the main audience of Xiaohongshu and Zhihu. Check table 1 for details.

Table 1. Age groups of participants

Options	Sub-total	Proportion
A.Under 15	3	 0.93%
B.15 ~ 28	39	 12.07%
C.18 ~ 24	128	 39.63%
D.25 ~ 30	128	 39.63%
E.30 ~ 35	12	 3.72%
F.35~40	8	 2.48%
G.Above 40	5	 1.55%
Total number of responses	323	

Cross-tabulations is used to explore the connections between users' gender and their impression, experience, and preference for Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, and it does come up with notable results. Users tend to show great interest in these two social media because of their advancing functions, both the shopping guides and the questions-and-answers mode for sharing knowledge and experience are so closely related to people's daily life. Under the significant improvement of digital technologies that bond people together online, Xiaohongshu and Zhihu are both attractive platforms at the beginning, proved by figure 4 which shows users' initial impressions.

Though slight differences exist, women users show more interest in Xiaohongshu while men users have greater expectations on Zhihu. However, according to figure 5 which shows users' latest experience, their attitudes have changed widely. Not only does the rating from women users is rising, but men users' rating is also moving towards higher ones for Xiaohongshu. On the contrary, the ratings for Zhihu are vice versa. Among all the data, the most distinct one is the extremely low ratings from women users for Zhihu.

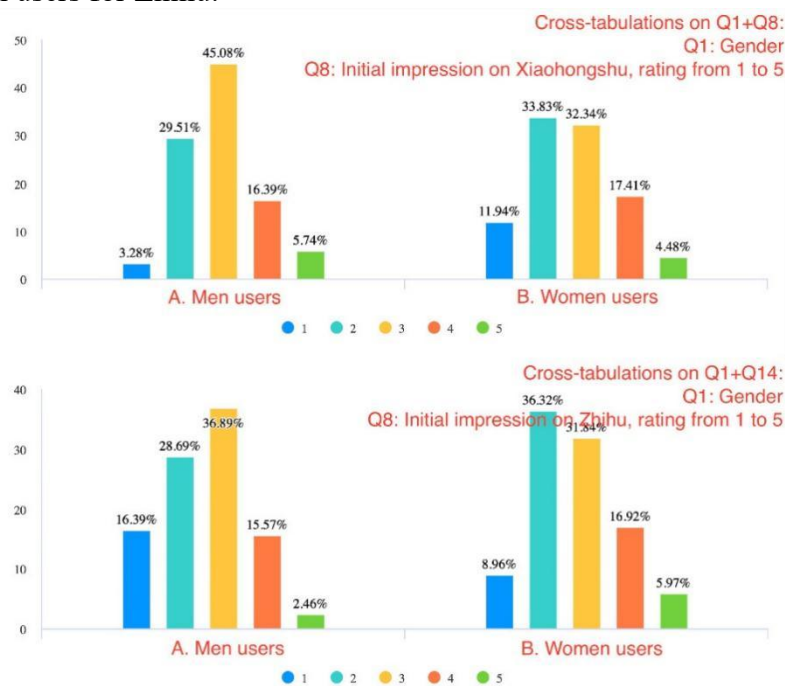


Figure 4. Users' initial impressions

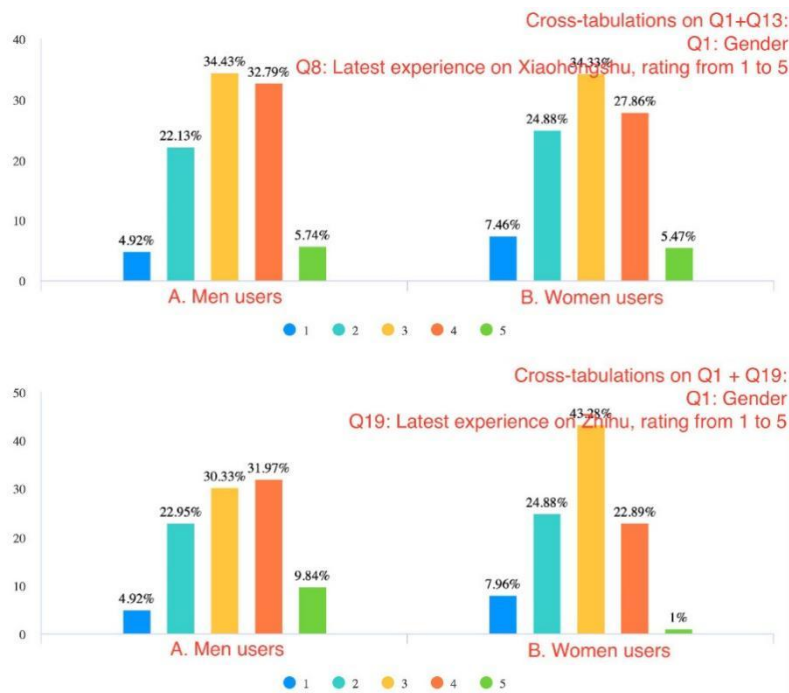


Figure 5. Users' latest experience

By the end of the questionnaire, Q20 is designed to see the general connection between users' genders and their preferences. It is apparent that Xiaohongshu and Zhihu have their preferred and targeted users that affect the agenda-setting and narrative ecologies to make them more specified in certain fields, formed at the beginning owing to the attributes and throughout the development on account of the general narrative vibe and ecology.

Firstly, in its early periods, Xiaohongshu aims to attract women users because of its attribute -- a shopping guide website which later generates into an online community. Additionally, its growing diversity is the key that welcomes more men users, proved also by existing data. One man interviewee gives his insights into the improvement of Xiaohongshu in its diverse-oriented changes. He used to regard Xiaohongshu as nothing but a shopping recommendation website, so he only checks it when he was about to choose some gifts for acquaintances. Nevertheless, Xiaohongshu has gradually expanded its content to other fields such as photos-sharing to make up an online community. As a photography-major student, he spends hours and hours looking for aesthetic photos that could bring about inspiration, and the advent of photos-sharing has indeed met his demands.

He cannot be the only one that feels the same as there was no specialized website designed to share aesthetic pictures. Xiaohongshu came up first as a sharing platform and then opened the comment board to gather people around, exchanging opinions on areas that they were interested in. The more hours that he spent on Xiaohongshu, the closer connection he built with his like-minded online fellows. The more one field got to develop on Xiaohongshu, the more fields would be coming up to it, the more well-rounded it could become. This is the developing strategy and growing mode of Xiaohongshu, it now consists of even more trendy but niche parts to hold like-minded people tightly.

Analogous to the idea of this interviewee, the other four have shown similar views. The journalism student looks for the latest news on Xiaohongshu while the filmmaking student praises it for the well-developed video sharing mechanism. More importantly, all the interviewees agree that the fascinating point of Xiaohongshu is that they can access both entertaining things and

professional knowledge and works. And thanks to the diverse culture and fields included, Xiaohongshu offers a friendly and opinions-welcoming online social community, they feel at ease to express their thoughts, trouble and debating ideas as they would always be responded and welcomed to come up with their own voices.

The situation for Zhihu, on the other hand, is extremely different. One of the female interviewees was once a regular user of Zhihu but now appears to be completely cut off from it. The high quality of the questions and answers was what drew her in. However, the current circumstances for Zhihu include the repetition of questions and deteriorating quality of replies, which has resulted in a significant loss of its loyal customers. The open question at the end of the questionnaire asks for suggestions for Xiaohongshu and Zhihu's possible improvements. Most users say that the declining quality of Zhihu content is making them increasingly disappointed with these previously critical questions-and-answers social media built on knowledge. But currently, they still maintain to use Zhihu from time to time as it offers direct answers on its website when users are searching on browsers with keywords which is really helpful and efficient.

Yet, another group of similar answers to this open-ended question brings the study to a new perspective. The cross-tabulations shown in figure 6 support this idea. Apart from the declining content quality, the second commonly stated term on Zhihu is the potentially hostile environment for women users. To some extent, this view may help to explain the population decline, since women users are without a doubt an essential component of social media nowadays. Zhihu has made them uncomfortable, in contrast to Xiaohongshu, which is growing with diversity and inclusivity. According to a woman respondent, she was annoyed of Zhihu's so-called intellectual vibe, which was always picky and blamed everything on women's faults. For instance, when it comes to the topic on car accidents, dominant voices on Zhihu stigmatized women drivers to be road-killers while the fact was that there was nothing to do with gender but the driving skills and their concentrations. There is no doubt that such sensational descriptive words would lead to quarrels and debates, which also represents the lower quality of content. With multiple similar incidents happening from time to time, users like the interviewee would choose to step away from this platform as they see less and less attention on truth and knowledge while being disturbed by unfriendly narrative ecology. Users moving to Xiaohongshu not only shows their demands for diversity but also represents the common need for friendly narrative ecology to concentrate on incidents themselves.

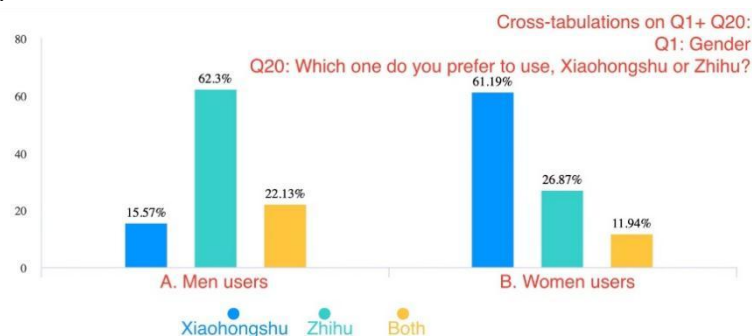


Figure 6. Choosing between Xiaohongshu and Zhihu

5.4. E-commerce and Social Media

With active users increasing year by year, Xiaohongshu is no wonder a successful example of social media with a sophisticated online community based on users' interests. Nonetheless, the achievement of Xiaohongshu is far from just news and information. The distinct online shopping mall is a symbol of Xiaohongshu's triumph of marching into the e-commerce industry.

Xiaohongshu has a well-organized home page, where users can easily access their interested content, following influencers, and personalized recommendations. In order to show its creativity-encouraging characteristic, Xiaohongshu also sets the posting function on the notable page. But among all these functional bottoms, the store – the online shopping mall is the most significant change that happens in recent years. Just like any other industry's thriving because it is profitable, social media is no exception. Xiaohongshu's tagline of "an online community of friends" attracts a large number of users which generates profits. Fully aware of a large amount of women users making up the users group, Xiaohongshu targets to sell beauty and cosmetics products to lay the foundation of its e-commerce development. This notable character has led to a special narrative vibe on it—influencers advertise for make-up products as well as make recommendations, which at the same time help to sell the products at Xiaohongshu's store. Similar to its expanding model of content, the online shopping mall is continuously growing. It begins firstly with beauty products because with massive women users, it is the option that can never go wrong. Afterward, it sets up new product categories by sourcing corresponding products based on what users have recently been interested in. with targeted users to ensure its popularity and sales, Xiaohongshu builds its unique store and until now, it is still ongoing.

To earn a profit, almost every social media has developed a way to make the best use of its traits to join the e-commerce trends: Xiaohongshu begins with selling beauty products, Weibo sets Ad-share program to make profits on clickbait, and Zhihu, has chosen to take advantage of the high-quality contents from celebrities and intellectuals. The e-commercial model of focusing on the distinctive characteristics of every social media can never be wrong, but what distinguishes Xiaohongshu's store and Zhihu's pro-users is the accurate targeting of users and their consumption competence.

Zhihu concentrates on the market of paying-for-knowledge, users would have to upgrade their accounts into pro ones to read certain answers or papers which show great value. Besides, Zhihu also sells e-books and online courses to meet its market positioning. Unfortunately, the rushing steps to start the e-commercial business drags it back, with the lack of ensuring the targeted users precisely and dealing with the current problems in content quality. According to the five interviewees, they all have shopped on Xiaohongshu before, because the recommendations on the store's front page meet their demands at that period of time. Additionally, four of them show the willingness to have a pro account on Zhihu. Women interviewees tend to not spend money on a platform where they find it to be quite offensive. The other men users propose that rather than spending time reading complex articles from experts, they prefer to look for other related knowledge online and save money. In this digital era with massive information, fewer and fewer people would be willing to pay for something that they can access on other platforms. As for the only interviewee that has once subscribed to be the pro-user, he feels not that worthy of this purchase. In accordance with his words, Zhihu recommends some experts' work that has nothing to do with his interests. The e-books and online courses section also make him disappointed as they are not categorized in order and the options are quite limited. Without the support of targeted users, Zhihu's e-commercial business is now stuck.

5.5. General Users' Habits and Patterns on Social Media

Responses to a questionnaire about Xiaohongshu and Zhihu's current problems reveal a major problem about users' habits in common: they all have the growing demands for clear and vivid information but their patience and concentration are deteriorating.

The inception of short videos is the most direct evidence of following such psychological desire of social media consumers. Accompanied by audio and images, information from short videos can be shown in much more eye-catching ways. For instance, suppose that a piece of news about an

earthquake comes to the front page or push notifications. With only words descriptions, people might pay no other attention except for knowing where and when. However, if the news comes with a picture of the destroyed site, people are likely to click and zoom in to see how serious the catastrophe is. More compassion and concerns would come up to their minds. Furthermore, a short video could provide every detail that people are interested in which even has the potential to trigger more curiosity. About an earthquake, there is a lot to tell, such as the cause, scale, degree, number of the injured, rescue operations, and so on. And with the help of short videos, people can acquire more information easily as creators would prioritize and categorize the information in order to make their content intense and intriguing. People are getting more and more used to seeing short-video content and this tendency has led to the formation of the latest narrative ecology dominated by short videos. However, there is little guarantee of accuracy and credibility as all the short-video creators around are hurrying to be the first for more clickbait and views. This process of users' waiting and creators' hurrying could be greatly attributed to the post-truth phenomenon in a negative way. Yet, according to the answers from the questionnaire, even though most people are fully aware of such a disadvantage on social media, they still tend to check short videos before searching for long texts or articles because it is way more 'time-saving'. They all agree that short videos on Xiaohongshu and Zhihu are more capable of clarifying things and issues. So is the operating mechanism of Tik-Tok, another worldwide popular social media.

Besides the legitimacy of information on social media which is facing challenges, the concentration of users is also deterring them from knowing the truth as much as possible according to common responses from the questionnaire. Despite the fact that they all believe that films on Xiaohongshu and Zhihu are more effective and clearer when illustrating a point or sharing personal experiences, the participants complain that watching short videos on social media takes up too much time. Even worse, some people claim that they don't have the patience to watch an entire video, so they only watch half of them and then quit for others coming up. In this information explosive time, not only the creators are competing for faster upload, but also the users are rushing to read the news as much and quickly as possible to stay active on their social media to talk with someone else. The unstable intake of information would lead to misunderstandings, and social media impatience might be the main cause for catastrophic post-truth phenomena across the entire information environment. This issue can be demonstrated in a much more severe way on Zhihu because it comprises of well-structured articles and responses, and even one misunderstanding or ignorance might contribute to users having a negative experience. Aside from the worsening material quality, how to make content more appealing and clearer so that people pay more attention and become more immersed is also an urgent problem to be solved.

6. Conclusion

In this information-explosive social media era, each user's behavior represents the associated user group behind it and their preferences. For every social media with precise market positioning, they need to do more than just provide platforms for people to express their ideas. More importantly, social media is supposed to grasp the demands of its targeted users and provide an inclusive and diverse environment. At the same time, as part of the evolution of the media system, existing social media also ought to consider how to achieve effective content output and establish a trusted brand image in the era of information fragmentation and entertainment.

6.1. Strength and Limitations

This research fills the gap in Chinese latest and trendy social media with relatively adequate samples from the questionnaire and detailed responses from the interview, paying specific attention

to comparing Xiaohongshu and Zhihu which have not been studied in particular. However, the participants' background, finance, and marriage were not included in this study which is all thoughtful aspects. And it might exist deviation in participants' credibility as the questionnaire is carried out online. In addition, since this study is conducted during the 2022 Winter Olympics, the emotional expressions of social media users become more prominent and might diverge from their previous usage behaviors.

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