

The Impact of Xiaohongshu UGC Negative Public Opinion on Beauty Brand Trust and Repair Strategy

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Abstract. This study focuses on the impact mechanism and repair path of the negative public opinion of Xiaohongshu user-generated content (UGC) on the beauty brand trust of female consumers aged 20-30 in the first and second-tier cities from 2023 to 2026. In recent years, Xiaohongshu has become the main platform for beauty consumption decisions by virtue of the decentralized UGC ecology. In the context of "acquaintance trust", its content dissemination mode is essentially different from that of traditional social platforms; consumers' trust in "real experience of similar people" is much higher than the brand's official advertisements. At the same time, the excessive commercialization of the platform has led to the proliferation of hidden advertising and doubts about the authenticity of the content. The destructive power of negative public opinions has been significantly amplified. This paper adopts the method of literature research and questionnaire survey, and a total of 287 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed. The study found that 92.0% of respondents had been exposed to negative UGC of beauty brands, and 68.3% experienced a significant decline in trust. The content related to product safety has the strongest impact. The effectiveness of the repair strategy follows the rule that "substantive action is better than a sincere gesture or a symbolic statement", and the trust damage caused by negative public opinion is long-term and incompletely reversible. This study extends the trust anchor drift theory to the consumer empirical level, and provides reference for the trust management of beauty brands.

Keywords: Negative public opinion, UGC, brand trust

1. Introduction

As of 2025, Xiaohongshu had more than 350 million monthly active users and had become a core platform for beauty purchasing decisions. Its user-generated content (UGC) ecosystem serves 120 million users seeking purchase advice every month. As one of the three core categories, it covers 190 million users. At the same time, the annual revenue of Xiaohongshu is about 42 billion yuan, with advertising revenue accounted for 76%. Commercialization continues to accelerate; the proliferation of commercial content density and the proliferation of hidden advertising seriously threaten the trust foundation of the platform. "CSS olive event", "False publicity storm one by one", and a series of negative public opinions on cosmetics fermented in Xiaohongshu have repeatedly

confirmed a fact: in the context of "acquaintance trust", there is a strong correlation between the spread of negative information and the vulnerability of consumer trust.

This study focuses on this practical dilemma, examining the impact of negative UGC public opinion on beauty consumers' trust and the corresponding repair pathways among women aged 20–30 in first- and second-tier cities from 2023 to 2026. The reason behind choosing this group is that they are not only the main group of beauty consumers, but also the core active users of Xiaohongshu. The swing of their trust attitude has the most research value. This study is mainly carried out from two dimensions: the trust shock mechanism of negative UGC, and the effectiveness of brand repair strategy. Methodologically, firstly, the existing researches at home and abroad are sorted out by using the method of literature analysis, so as to clarify the theoretical context and identify the research gap in the specific context of Xiaohongshu; Then through the questionnaire survey method, with the help of the questionnaire star platform, 287 valid questionnaires were collected for the target group, and the data were analyzed by descriptive statistics. The reason why this hybrid design is adopted is that the literature alone cannot reveal the real perception of consumers, while the first-hand data can make the theoretical framework fall to the ground, and the two complement each other to make the conclusion tenable. The ultimate goal of this study is to reveal the impact of negative UGC on brand trust, clarify the effectiveness boundaries of different repair strategies, and provide a practical analytical framework and practical reference for the trust management of beauty brands in the UGC era.

2. Literature review

The current research landscape contains extensive academic discussion of social media, user-generated content, and brand trust, providing multidimensional theoretical support and analytical tools for this study. Zhou Xingchen's dynamic analysis of UGC's influence on brand attitude in the microblog brand community reveals the differential communication law of positive and negative content. The communication model constructed by Zhou Xingchen provides a direct reference for this study in terms of methodology. Although microblog is different from Xiaohongshu in platform logic, its core judgment that negative UGC requires enterprises to be vigilant and prevent in advance also has early warning significance for thinking about the trust impact in the Xiaohongshu scenario [1]. Huguimei and Zhangsixin's case study on the strategy of "planting grass" in Pollaya's Xiaohongshu based on sips model is closer to the platform context of this study. Its refinement of the closed-loop path of "demand insight, trust cultivation, interaction deepening and communication fission" provides a clear analytical framework for understanding the normal process of brand trust construction in Xiaohongshu ecology. It also paves the way for future thinking about how this trust mechanism can be broken under negative public opinion [2]. Gonghui's observation on the tension between Xiaohongshu's commercialization and user experience [3]. As well as Guo Ruiqi's analysis of the characteristics of hidden beauty ads and the trust crisis, it reveals the structural hidden dangers of Xiaohongshu's trust environment from the two dimensions of platform ecology and content form. These insights directly support the presupposition of the negative UGC impact mechanism in this study. That is, Xiaohongshu itself has the institutional root of trust vulnerability [4]. In terms of the theoretical resources of crisis public relations and trust repair, the trust anchor drift theory proposed by Liang JieFei is quite enlightening. It points out that there are three trust anchors in the beauty industry, namely, safety, value and morality, and that there will be instantaneous drift in the crisis, which provides an important theoretical reference for this study to consider the strategic direction of brand trust repair after the negative UGC impact [5]. Xia Shiqi's discussion on crisis public relations from the perspective of corporate social responsibility and panwenlei's modeling on the

communication of negative public opinions of enterprises supplement the analytical perspective required for this study at the strategic level and the communication mechanism level respectively [6]. In addition, Peng sun Benyu, Chen Chen and Li Dan made a multi-dimensional analysis of the psychological characteristics of young women's consumption [7-10]. And the empirical findings of international research on the core role of advertising credibility in brand trust provide a theoretical basis for this study to focus on the specific group of women aged 20 to 30 in the first and second tier cities [11, 12]. However, when these documents are examined together, it can be found that most of them set their research scenarios on microblogging, YouTube or general e-commerce platforms, or more from the perspective of marketing strategy or user experience in the context of Xiaohongshu. No research has integrated the characteristics of Xiaohongshu platform, the communication mechanism of negative UGC, the trust psychological structure of the target population and the brand trust repair strategy into a coherent analysis framework. This study is trying to find a starting point at this intersection, and based on the existing theoretical resources, build a systematic analysis path that takes into account the impact mechanism and repair strategy, so as to provide a more targeted theoretical response for the trust management of beauty brands in Xiaohongshu ecology.

3. Research methods

3.1. Questionnaire design

The reason why the questionnaire is applicable to this study mainly stems from the nature of the research question itself. Trust perception, attitude evaluation and repair strategy preference are typical individual subjective variables, and questionnaires are good at transforming such abstract concepts into measurable indicators, so as to obtain evaluable empirical data. Considering the geographical distribution of Xiaohongshu's core user groups, the advantages of online questionnaires in coverage and collection efficiency are particularly prominent. In addition, the anonymity of the questionnaire helps to reduce the respondents' concealment of real ideas when evaluating negative brand events, and improve the authenticity and reliability of the data. In recent years, the questionnaire research in the field of brand trust repair has accumulated many scale resources that can be used for reference, such as the strategic distinction between emotional repair and functional repair, and the test of perceived sincerity as an intermediary variable. These results provide a theoretical reference for this research. The questionnaire finally set up six core items around three dimensions to measure the intensity of negative public opinion contact and trust impact, the acceptance of repair strategies and the judgment basis of trust recovery, all using the Likert five scale. A small-scale pre-test was conducted for about 20 people before the official release, and some unclear statements were corrected according to the feedback to ensure the accurate transmission of the meaning of the item.

3.2. Data collection

Stratified sampling and snowball sampling were used for sampling. The target population was first identified according to city tier and age: female beauty consumers aged 20–30 in first- and second-tier cities. This group is both among the most active content producers and consumers on Xiaohongshu and a core customer segment of greatest concern to beauty brands, so changes in their attitudes provide direct market signals for brands. The questionnaire was created through Wenjuanxing and distributed selectively through online channels including WeChat groups, Xiaohongshu direct messages, and Weibo, while respondents were also encouraged to forward it

through their social networks to expand coverage. This combination strategy is not perfect in terms of sampling preciseness, but for exploratory research on specific online communities, it is a compromise to be able to obtain sufficient data in a limited time. The questionnaire was distributed for about two weeks. A total of 287 valid questionnaires were received. The total number of questionnaires distributed was 300, and the recovery rate reached 95.7%. This proportion is at a high level in the online survey, which also reflects the reasonable control of the question load to a certain extent.

After data collection, SPSS statistical software was used for basic analysis. This software is widely used in quantitative social science research and is convenient to operate, meeting the needs of descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, cross-group comparisons, and other routine analyses. The analysis was primarily based on descriptive statistics, focusing on the frequency and percentage distributions of scores for each item to portray the overall pattern of changes in trust among the target population under negative public-opinion conditions. At the same time, a cross grouping comparison was conducted by age group and city level to investigate the possible differences in the repair strategy preferences of consumers from different backgrounds.

The goal of this study is not to build a complex causal model, but rather to use basic statistical methods to clearly present the attitude structure and internal differences of the target population, and provide a data-supported reference for brands responding to negative UGC public opinion.

4. Research results

Among the sample, 42.5% were 20-24 years old and 57.5% were 25-30 years old; users in first tier cities accounted for 51.9%, and those in new first tier and second tier cities accounted for 48.1%. 92.0% of the respondents have browsed the negative UGC of beauty brands, of which 56.4% have frequent or relatively frequent contact. Home page recommendation (61.3%) and active search (28.9%) are the main contact channels, indicating that the algorithm significantly enlarges the exposure of negative content. After exposure to negative UGC, 68.3% of respondents' trust decreased significantly or substantially. The impact of content related to product safety is the most severe, and 84.6% will directly give up buying; False propaganda followed (72.4%); The impact of price or service experience is weak (43.1%). 67.2% of the respondents gave up buying after seeing more than three negative comments. 42.9% said that the negative public opinion of a brand will reduce their trust in other brands of the same category, and there is a cross brand spillover effect. The repair strategy score (1-5 points) is: product recall and compensation (4.21), third-party inspection report (3.98), founder apology (3.85), progress real-time update (3.72), KOL launch (3.14), and official statement (2.86). 76.7% believed that "the brand should face up to problems and take the initiative to take responsibility" was the primary factor for re trust. 78.3% of the respondents believed more in "flawed but sincere" plain people's sharing than brand promotion. On average, respondents thought it would take 3.7 months for the brand to restore trust, but 53.3% said it was difficult to restore trust completely.

The above data shows a structural phenomenon worthy of attention: The negative UGC of beauty brands on the Xiaohongshu platform is no longer an accidental individual event, but a systematic challenge to consumer trust. More than 90% of the respondents have been exposed to the negative content of beauty brands, and more than half of them were not obtained through active search, but were continuously pushed to the information interface by the algorithm recommendation mechanism. This shows that under the current operating rules of the platform, negative content naturally gains communication advantages due to its higher interaction rate, and the information environment in which consumers are located has tended to receive negative signals. In this context,

the review environment faced by brands tends to be harsh, and subtle product or service problems may evolve into a trust crisis through algorithm amplification.

The impact of negative UGC is not limited to the brands involved. More than 40% of the respondents' trust in other brands in the same category also declined after contacting the negative information of a brand. This spillover effect shows that the crisis of individual brands has risen to the trust problem at the category level. When similar negative events occur frequently in an industry, consumers often question the credibility of the entire category rather than a single brand. For the beauty industry, this means that any single brand crisis may have a ripple effect on other market participants, and the overall trust base of the industry faces the risk of weakening. The ranking of repair strategies shows a clear rule: product recall and compensation, third-party inspection reports are among the top, while official statements have the lowest score. Consumers' attention to brand words has decreased significantly, replaced by a high degree of attention to substantive actions. After repeated baptism of a large number of formatted public relations scripts, young consumers have a relatively mature screening ability. They are no longer easily moved by the words, but will focus on the actual actions of the brand. It is noteworthy that the score of the founder's apology is significantly higher than the official statement, indicating that consumers have a clear preference for personalized communication. There is a specific way for individuals to bear responsibility, which is easier to obtain the recognition of consumers than the agency statement with official seal.

Consumers' judgment standard of "sincerity" has changed. More than three-quarters of the respondents' regard "facing problems and taking the initiative to take responsibility" as the primary premise for reestablishing trust, and nearly eight adults trust "flawed but sincere" plain people to share, rather than the carefully designed publicity content of the brand. This result shows that under the background of the continuous decline of trust in commercial content, "imperfect but true" has become a quality valued by consumers. Consumers' perception of sincerity has changed from superficial brilliance to internal honesty. The transparency and sense of responsibility shown by the brand in crisis response are more convincing than refined image management.

As for the time expectation of trust recovery, the data show a dislocation between cognition and emotion. The average repair period given by respondents was 3.7 months, but more than half of them also said that it was difficult to fully restore trust. These two sets of parallel data reveal a deep fact: consumers are willing to reserve time and space for brand correction at the rational level, but at the emotional level, once trust is broken, it will leave traces that are difficult to completely heal. The cost of brand crisis is not a one-time financial loss, but a long-term deposit in consumer cognition. For beauty brands, the most fundamental coping strategy is not the repair means after the crisis, but the continuous control of product quality and the long-term accumulation of trust in consumers in daily operations. Real word-of-mouth and brand behavior that can stand scrutiny are the effective barriers to resist the trust erosion caused by algorithm amplification effect.

5. Conclusion

Through the questionnaire survey of female cosmetic consumers aged 20-30 in the first and second tier cities, this study systematically investigated the impact of the negative public opinion of the little red book platform UGC on brand trust and repair strategies. The results show that negative UGC has a significant impact on consumer brand trust through the systematic amplification of algorithm recommendation mechanism, and this impact has a cross-brand spillover effect. In terms of repair strategies, consumers pay much more attention to substantive actions than brand words, and the acceptance of specific measures such as product recall and third-party testing is significantly better than traditional public relations forms such as official statements. At the same time,

consumers' judgment standard of "sincerity" has shifted from superficial image management to internal honesty and responsibility. Personalized communication is more recognized than institutional statement. The repair of trust has time expectation at the rational level, but it is difficult to fully recover at the emotional level. The tension between the two constitutes the deep dilemma of brand crisis management.

This study provides an empirical basis for understanding the brand trust crisis in the era of social media, verifies the spillover effect mechanism of negative UGC and the differential effect of repair strategies at the theoretical level, and points out the direction of action for beauty brands to respond to platform public opinion at the practical level. Future research can further expand the sample range to investigate the attitude differences of different gender, age groups and urban grade groups; longitudinal tracking design can also be introduced to observe the dynamic evolution of trust repair. In addition, the specific mechanism of the platform algorithm in the dissemination of negative information is also worth further investigation.

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