

# A Study on Chinese Social Media Xiaohongshu Users' Attitudes Toward Offensive Comments

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**Abstract.** With the rapid development of emerging digital technologies, social media platforms have proliferated like mushrooms after rain. Xiaohongshu is among the highly trusted "word-of-mouth libraries" for Chinese social media users, offering numerous conveniences while also subjecting users to disruptive offensive language. This study analyzes the various emotions and behavioral mechanisms exhibited by Xiaohongshu users when confronted with offensive language, as well as the underlying reasons for these reactions. It underscores the positive impact on society of enhancing online supervision, safeguarding user privacy and security, optimizing service functionalities on social media platforms, increasing user engagement, and fostering media literacy among users to promote moderate use of social media. Through questionnaire surveys, the study reveals that offensive language on Xiaohongshu induces negative emotions such as anger, sadness, confusion, and anxiety among users. Consequently, users employ strategies such as rebuttal, reporting, and even reducing their frequency of using Xiaohongshu to counteract the harm caused by offensive language.

## 1 Introduction

Xiaohongshu is a social e-commerce platform catering to a youthful demographic interested in shopping. Established in June 2013, it offers avenues for sharing, communication, and purchasing. Users can explore a wide array of global products, browse product guides curated by influencers, share their own product experiences, and conduct online shopping directly on the platform. It initially focused on shopping guides and user experiences, bridging offline shopping scenarios to an online platform endorsed by authentic consumer endorsements. Users share personal insights on products, such as skincare efficacy or restaurant quality, aiding others in their purchasing decisions. Beyond shopping, Xiaohongshu encompasses diverse content including travel, fashion, beauty, food, films, literature, and fitness, empowering users to produce and share their own experiences. This interactive environment fosters mutual assistance and exploration of a vibrant, authentic, and diverse world.

In recent years, with the widespread adoption of social media and the rapid development of digital technologies, more individuals seek assistance and express opinions on social media platforms. According to the 53rd Statistical Report on China's Internet Development

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by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), Up to December 2023, China had 1,092 billion netizens, its Internet penetration had reached 77.5% and The proportion of China's netizens accessing the Internet via their mobile phones was 99.9% [1]. Reported by Financial Times, Xiaohongshu achieved historic profitability in 2023, recording \$3.7 billion in revenue, an 85% increase from \$2 billion in 2022, and a net profit of \$500 million compared to a \$200 million loss in the previous year. Monthly active users grew to 312 million in 2023, a 20% increase from 260 million in 2022. Celebrating its tenth year, Xiaohongshu has evolved from a community sharing overseas shopping tips to a multifaceted lifestyle hub, balancing content, user experience, and commercial viability, appealing across generations as a encyclopedia of contemporary living.

However, as a user-generated content-based platform monetization model, Xiaohongshu's comment sections often witness offensive language. Any form of content that offends individuals or groups, including expressions of rudeness, insults, threats, or sacrilege based on characteristics such as race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, is deemed offensive language. When one party uses offensive language to attack another, it is perceived as unfriendly and disrespectful, causing emotional harm and undermining dignity. This behavior not only disrupts relationship building but also has the potential to incite social unrest. Hence, whether in public spaces, workplaces, or social media, individuals must conscientiously avoid offensive language in interpersonal interactions. Yet, perceptions and tolerance towards offensive language vary across cultures, societal contexts, and personal habits, where statements considered acceptable in one culture may offend in another.

Presently, Xiaohongshu serves as a primary search engine for many users, facilitating independent content searches to obtain vivid and precise conclusions. Nonetheless, it remains an algorithm-driven platform, profiling users accurately, where comments on each post often include offensive language, such as irrational criticism, insults, derogatory remarks, or inappropriate comments involving sensitive topics.

## 2 Literature review

As social media continues to play an increasingly significant role in people's lives due to the rapid development of digital technologies, many scholars have conducted research on offensive language and user attitudes within social media platforms. Some scholars argue that users' negative emotions and detrimental usage behaviors on social media are influenced by factors such as information resources, technological environments and individual characteristics. These influences manifest in emotions like fatigue, anxiety, or depression, alongside behaviors such as lurking, ignoring, blocking, withdrawing, or resisting [2]. Sagioglou and Greitemeyer found a positive correlation between the time users spent on Facebook and feelings of low mood. If users refrain from using social media, they will not experience low moods. However, users often perceive an improvement in their mood after using Facebook, whereas in reality, their emotions tend to worsen [3]. Researchers investigated offensive comments sparked by Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign videos posted from January to April 2016. The findings revealed that parental offensive comments often elicited similarly offensive remarks from children, indicating the contagious nature of offensive comments and their impact on shaping community norms for online user interactions [4]. Other scholars noted that exposure to higher levels of offensive comments on social media significantly increases users' aggressive responses. Moreover, anonymity has been shown to have no effect on the emergence of aggressive reactions. Interestingly, users continue to mimic these behaviors even when aware they are engaging in an artificial social system [5].

While there is limited research specifically on comments within Xiaohongshu, studies on Weibo comments are abundant. Wu categorizes subjective Weibo comments into extremist,

retaliatory, rationalized, and radical nationalist categories, with marketing-driven comments further segmented into water army and advertisement categories [6]. Scholars studying comments on Weibo have found that rational rebuttals diminish the credibility of articles more significantly than abusive comments. In other words, abusive comments do not have a substantial impact on the credibility of articles, whereas the presence of rational rebuttals lowers the credibility of articles written by female authors [7].

Another critical aspect to consider regarding user comments on social media is the emergence of group polarization. Scholars provided a comprehensive overview of group polarization, emphasizing that it occurs when team members engage in collective discussions about their pre-existing views, leading individuals to move further towards extreme viewpoints over time [8]. Researchers assert that in the presence of media hostility, an increased number of extreme opinion leaders make it challenging for objective or somewhat biased media reports to persuade the public, thereby intensifying group polarization [9]. Group polarization often accompanies conformity behavior, where individuals, after seeing numerous comments aligning with their own viewpoints, are subtly influenced by similar perspectives in subsequent actions. Studies indicate that conformist users subjected to offensive comments are more likely to exhibit heightened hostility and tendencies towards aggressive comments [10].

These studies and theories above help us understand some background information in advance. However, there still exist some research gaps. Although there is much literature about attitudes towards Weibo comments, there is limited research on attitudes towards Xiaohongshu comments. Furthermore, the emotions and behaviors of users in social media comment contexts have not received sufficient attention. This study focuses on users of the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu, analyzing various behavioral mechanisms and underlying reasons when confronted with offensive comments. The study aims to have a positive impact by advocating for enhanced online supervision, safeguarding user privacy and security, optimizing service functionalities on social media platforms, enhancing user engagement, and promoting media literacy and moderate social media usage among users. To achieve these goals and realize the significance of this study in practice, a questionnaire survey will be conducted to investigate Chinese Xiaohongshu users' attitudes towards offensive comments.

### **3 Methodology**

This study investigates the factors contributing to the generation of offensive comments on Xiaohongshu and explores users' attitudes and behaviors through a questionnaire administered via Questionnaire Star. Participants were selected from 18 to 25-year-old active social media users. The survey was conducted over a period of 14 days, with a total distribution of 75 questionnaires. After excluding invalid responses where all answers were consistently the same or exhibited clear patterns, 62 valid responses were collected. The questionnaire comprised both single-choice and multiple-choice questions, with logical skips between related but distinct inquiries aimed at understanding the occurrence of offensive comments and user attitudes toward Xiaohongshu.

The survey first investigated the basic demographics of the respondents. Subsequently, it categorized users' different emotional responses and levels of activity following encounters with offensive comments on Xiaohongshu. Then, gathered further information on user behaviors, including whether they responded to such comments and the manner of their responses. Finally, the study explored the reasons individuals express offensive remarks and discussed users' satisfaction with and suggestions for Xiaohongshu's approach to handling offensive comments.

## 4 Results

The survey revealed that out of 62 respondents, 45 individuals (72.6%) reported encountering offensive comments on Xiaohongshu, while 13 respondents (21.0%) admitted to posting offensive comments on the platform for reasons such as emotional release, seeking attention, following trends, expressing opinions, and others. Among the offensive comments encountered, regional discrimination and gender discrimination were most prevalent, with 80.0% and 68.9% of respondents, respectively, indicating encountering such comments on Xiaohongshu. Additionally, 8.9% of respondents reported encountering racial discrimination comments.

The majority of respondents reported that offensive comments negatively impact their activity on Xiaohongshu. Specifically, 53.2% of users indicated that such comments decreased their engagement with the platform. In contrast, 30.7% believed that their activity increased in response to these comments, while 16.1% noted no significant impact on their activity. Regarding the frequency of platform use, 72.6% of users stated that encountering uncomfortable comments would reduce their usage frequency, while others felt their usage patterns were independent of encountering various types of offensive comments. Approximately 79.0% of respondents believed that offensive comments would induce negative emotions to some extent, including anger, sadness, confusion, and anxiety. Researchers classified these emotional responses into five levels: none, mild, moderate, strong, and very strong, and recorded the intensity of each respondent's emotions. The results show that the number of respondents experiencing different levels of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, confusion, and anxiety follows a normal distribution, with only a small portion of respondents experiencing either no negative emotions or very strong negative emotions.

Furthermore, most respondents believed that the impact of offensive comments extends beyond individual levels to affect user relationships and societal norms. Regarding user relationships, 43.6% believed that offensive comments exacerbated conflicts and opposition, while 33.9% viewed it as fostering more discussion, and 16.1% believed it encouraged cautious expression on social media. In terms of societal norms, 27.4% felt that offensive comments encouraged people to express their true thoughts, 30.7% believed it intensified social divisions and opposition, and 19.3% thought it made people more conscious of their speech and behavior.

When asked about responding to offensive comments on Xiaohongshu, 56.5% of respondents agreed to respond, with 74.3% preferring to refute the comments, 54.3% choosing to report to the platform, and a smaller fraction (22.9%) opting for more aggressive responses, including direct insults towards the commentators. Additionally, 69.4% of respondents indicated their willingness to help and support others who encounter offensive comments on Xiaohongshu.

Regarding the platform's management of offensive comments, 58.0% of respondents believed that Xiaohongshu's handling of such comments was neither timely nor effective. Furthermore, 41.9% of respondents think the platform should strengthen review and management, strictly punishing users who post offensive remarks, 29.0% believe that providing more mental health support and guidance to users is a better way to reduce such phenomenon, and only 25.8% believe that the platform should not intervene in these comments, implying that issues arising during communication should be resolved by the users themselves.

## 5 Discussion

The survey findings underscore the prevalent existence of offensive remarks on Xiaohongshu. Over 70% of respondents reported encountering offensive comments, with regional and gender discrimination being the most common types. This phenomenon highlights the blurred boundaries between freedom of speech and respect for others on social media platforms, indicating that some users lack sufficient self-discipline and moral restraint when using social media.

Several factors contribute to the generation of offensive comments on Xiaohongshu. Firstly, the anonymity provided by the internet fosters a sense of psychological safety among users, making it easier for some to express negative emotions without concern for potential consequences. They perceive comments made in online spaces do not extend to the real world and thus do not impact one's standing in reality overlooks the potential harm inflicted on those targeted by offensive remarks. Secondly, the phenomenon of following trends and imitation on Xiaohongshu exacerbates the spread of offensive comments. Emotions or viewpoints rapidly propagate throughout the community under certain implicit mechanisms, leading to a contagion effect among groups. At times, individuals break out of the "spiral of silence," choosing not to remain silent even if they fear isolation, and may engage in aggressive speech or behavior. Thirdly, the algorithmic recommendation mechanism on Xiaohongshu platform may exacerbate the spread of offensive comments. Because algorithms typically prioritize recommending content that aligns with users' interests and offensive comments tend to attract high click rates and discussions. It is easy for public opinion to form on the platform, inevitably drawing more users into the process of generating offensive comments. It is noteworthy that social media platforms may have shortcomings in monitoring and managing user comments, which could hinder their ability to promptly and effectively prevent the spread of offensive comments.

Offensive comments on Xiaohongshu negatively impact users' emotions and behaviors. Specifically, these comments not only affect people's engagement on Xiaohongshu but also may lead to the emergence of negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, confusion, and anxiety, multiple emotions coexist in response to these comments. Consequently, under the influence of these negative emotions, many users adjust their behaviors by decreasing their engagement on Xiaohongshu to avoid further emotional distress. Continued exposure to such comments may lead a significant portion of users to reduce their frequency of platform usage over time. Importantly, not all users respond to offensive comments, and those who do often choose to refute or report them, with a minority resorting to offensive behavior in retaliation. Moreover, when witnessing others subjected to offensive comments, a majority of users express readiness to support and defend them.

In fact, if offensive comments are not promptly and properly addressed, they can impact the entire social media environment and society. Offensive comments often contain elements of discrimination, insults, and demeaning language, easily provoking feelings of discontent among users, thereby exacerbating conflicts and divisions, and undermining social harmony and stability. However, under certain circumstances, offensive comments can also serve as a catalyst for societal reflection and discussion. For instance, when such comments expose certain social issues, they may swiftly draw public attention and stimulate discourse, thereby promoting societal progress and change.

To address the issues caused by offensive comments on the Xiaohongshu platform, concerted efforts are needed from individuals, the platform, and society at large to cultivate a healthy, harmonious, and positive social media environment.

Firstly, individuals encountering offensive comments should maintain composure and restraint, avoiding emotional reactions that may unnecessarily escalate conflicts. They should refrain from sharing or commenting on offensive content and instead actively report it. It is crucial to enhance one's digital literacy, discerning the authenticity of online information and refraining from spreading unverified content, particularly that which is offensive or

discriminatory. If friends or family members post inappropriate remarks online, private guidance can help them recognize the impact of their words and encourage corrective action.

Secondly, Xiaohongshu should strengthen the scrutiny and management of all types of posts. This includes developing generalized templates for identifying offensive comments based on a chain-of-thought approach, utilizing advanced natural language processing and machine learning technologies for automated detection and filtering of such content. Combining technological measures with human oversight can more accurately identify and address various forms of offensive comments. Establishing enhanced community guidelines and regulatory mechanisms is essential, encouraging users to actively report offensive comments, promptly responding to and addressing user complaints. Adequate rewards and protections should be provided to those who report offenses, while strict penalties should be enforced against users who engage in offensive comments, ensuring that user voices are valued to maintain a positive platform environment.

Furthermore, all sectors of society should actively engage in addressing offensive comments. Governments can introduce specialized laws and regulations aimed at combating increasingly covert forms of offensive comments, thereby safeguarding the rights and dignity of social media users. Mainstream media should enhance public scrutiny by exposing and criticizing offensive comments on social media platforms. Through publicity and educational campaigns, efforts can be made to raise awareness among users about the importance of vigilance against offensive comments, fostering a societal environment where offensive speech is collectively resisted. Additionally, given that adolescents are prominent users of social media and susceptible to its influences due to their developing cognitive maturity, schools and families should intensify educational efforts. Initiatives promoting psychological well-being and counseling can help adolescents navigate negative emotions and pressures online, fostering an understanding of the consequences of irresponsible online speech and cultivating their sense of self-discipline and ethical awareness.

## **6 Conclusion**

As one of China's most popular social media platforms, Xiaohongshu has long been plagued by instances of offensive comments, which often involve discriminatory content based on region, gender, and race. This issue is exacerbated by the anonymity of the internet, trends of imitation and emulation on Xiaohongshu, and inadequacies in the platform's algorithmic mechanisms. Such discriminatory content significantly impacts users' emotions and behaviors. When confronted with offensive comments, users not only experience negative emotions such as anger, sadness, confusion, and anxiety but also tend to reduce their engagement and frequency of use on Xiaohongshu. Users typically respond through reasoned approaches like rebuttals and reporting, actively assist others in resisting the harm caused by offensive comments, and rarely resorting to aggressive verbal attacks.

Offensive comments on Xiaohongshu have a dual impact. From a negative perspective, such comments further exacerbate the generation of societal discord factors. And positively, it can catalyze societal change through the waves it stirs. Nevertheless, its overall impact tends to be more detrimental than beneficial. To address these issues, users must enhance their media literacy and influence those around them to collectively uphold a positive environment on the platform. On the other hand, Xiaohongshu should utilize more advanced technological means to refine its algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and establish effective rules for post-moderation and supervision. Furthermore, societal efforts are crucial, including the government's enhancement of relevant laws and regulations, media's strengthening of oversight over offensive comments, and families and schools actively improving methods for educating young people about internet conduct. By fostering such

collective efforts, a wholesome and positive social environment can be cultivated on Xiaohongshu.

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