

Dynamic Construction of Chinese College Students' Online Identities Through Hashtags in Xiaohongshu: from A Contextual Adaptation Theory Perspective

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Abstract: In the era of social media, user-generated content (UGC) has become a significant field for constructing online identities. Based on pragmatic identity theory and contextual adaptation theory, the study focuses on the usage of hashtags on the emerging social e-commerce platform Xiaohongshu, aiming to explore the relationship between its characteristic, that is combining social communication with e-commerce attributes, and the strategies of pragmatic identity construction through hashtags. Consequently, the study collects and analyzes 537 hashtagged posts from 20 Chinese college students between January 2024 and March 2025, and then, reveals the strategies and mechanisms of identity construction through hashtag usage. The findings indicate that college students use hashtags to promote their diverse online identities construction by adapting context, the culture of a certain community, psychological needs, and algorithmic traffic. Moreover, the study summarizes the instrumental, social, and identity functions of hashtags. By expanding the application of contextual adaptation theory in new media scenarios, the research provides new insights into understanding the digital survival of youth and platform economy interactions, while offering references for content ecosystem governance on social platforms.

Keywords: Contextual Adaptation Theory; Pragmatic Identity Theory; Hashtags

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

With the continuous development of internet technology, social media platforms have become significant spaces for creating virtual social capital, especially for college students (Fang et

al., 2023) [5]. As of March 2025, Xiaohongshu's monthly active users exceed 200 million, making it an indispensable social tool for college students. Based on pragmatic identity theory (Chen, 2018) [1], college students can construct real or virtual pragmatic identities through linguistic practices such as speech acts and stance-taking, thereby achieving specific communicative goals. In terms of user-generated content (UGC) in Xiaohongshu, not only does multimedia expression contribute to identity construction, but hashtags in the main text also play a significant role, forming a "main text–hashtag" collaborative mechanism. Sometimes, hashtags even serve as the decisive factor in identity construction.

Consequently, by focusing on the users who frequently use hashtags in Xiaohongshu, the research aims to explore the strategies used by college students to shape pragmatic identities through hashtag use. Furthermore, by combining with the main text content, this study analyzes the identity construction mechanism of hashtag use and explores the role and function of hashtags in pragmatic identity shaping.

1.2 Previous Studies on Pragmatic Identity and Its Construction

Identity has been a hot topic in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and literature. Since the 1960s, social psychologists and linguists have conducted extensive research on identity construction (Sun & Li, 2020) [8]. Among them, constructivism posits that identity is dynamically, actively, and online constructed through discourse, with negotiability and variability, directly related to the constructive role of discourse (Ge, 2020) [7]. Building on previous research, Chen (2013) [3] further proposed the concept of "pragmatic identity" to specifically refer to situational and dynamic communicator identities, distinguishing them from individuals' inherent and static social identities. Since its

proposal, scholars have widely studied pragmatic identity in various fields such as daily discourse, institutional discourse (news, courtroom, etc.), and commercial discourse (Yuan, 2013) [21]. However, most studies focus on communicators' pragmatic identities at the macro-social level (Zhang, 2023) [22].

The pragmatic identity construction of college students has also attracted academic attention. Previous studies have examined identity construction in academic and social media contexts. For instance, Sun (2015) analyzed pragmatic identities in master's thesis abstracts, while Liu (2020) and Pan (2024) explored pragmatic identities of college students on WeChat and Douyin, respectively. However, the majority of scholars in China have not explicitly analyzed hashtags as a key element of pragmatic identity construction [12,14,15]. In contrast, Bucholtz (2007) investigated the role of repetitive hashtag usage in identity sedimentation, and Evans (2016) examined the interactivity of hashtags in Twitter, focusing on how users dynamically construct identities through hashtags [2,4].

Due to the e-commerce characteristics of Xiaohongshu, which differ from previous platforms dominated by social attributes, users may exhibit distinct characteristics in hashtag usage. This study aims to explore how college students in the Chinese internet context use hashtags to facilitate or achieve dynamic identity construction.

1.3 Contextual Adaptation Theory

Jef Verschueren (1999) proposed the linguistic adaptation theory, arguing that language use is a continuous process of selection, and identity is reflected through speech acts. Language choices are adaptive to cultural contexts and communicative intentions. Verschueren highlighted four core concepts: selectivity, variability, negotiability, and adaptability, indicating language must adapt to users' communicative intentions and contexts. When it comes to the Xiaohongshu UCG community, consumers, content creators, and the platform are closely linked. The platform's decentralized algorithm emphasizes balancing content flow with user interests [8]. Thus, users' content - posting behavior essentially involves adapting to both the platform's social nature and audience community culture. For instance, user 20 frequently uses *#CollegeStudentTravel*, aligning

with algorithmic traffic - pool rules and the characteristics of the college student group, which integrates tags, algorithms, and communities.

Moreover, Verschueren (1999) notes that, in specific communicative processes, individuals' language choices generally exhibit four characteristics, that is adaptation to contextual relationships (including linguistic context and cultural context), adaptation to language structure, dynamic adaptation, and the salience of adaptation awareness [18]. [9] He et. al (2006) further clarify that adapting to language structure mainly involves choices in language, style, and code, discourse components, discourse types and speech acts, and discourse construction rules. In Xiaohongshu, these features are specifically reflected in:

First, users will select style, layout, and tag combinations that match the intended audience and platform aesthetics. For example, user 6 employs *#AutumnInUmbra* to align with youth expression habits.

Second, content always matches specific scenes and responds to community expectations. For instance, user 16's post titled *X University's Crazy Finals / How to Cram Effectively??* with the tag *#NoFailInUniversityFinals* establishes authority through a university background, as well as resonates with the universal need of college students to avoid failing finals [10].

Third, users usually adjust tag choices based on data feedback like likes and comments. For example, after user 1 used the tag *#StickyCinnamonFlavor* and received significant interaction (11 comments), they reused it in subsequent posts.

Overall, in the Xiaohongshu UCG community, users' dynamic adaptation to the platform's social and community cultural contexts runs through the entire process of social interaction and identity construction. By producing content and selecting tags, users actively adapt to the platform's social characteristics, embodying an interaction model, consisting of platform creators, algorithms, and communities. The model can be shown as the following figure 1.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

This study recruited 20 frequent hashtag users in Xiaohongshu and collected 537 posts containing hashtags from January 2024 to March 2025. To

ensure representativeness, the samples meet the following criteria:

- 1) Balanced gender distribution (10 males, 10 females).
- 2) Primarily undergraduate students to minimize the impact of different academic levels. By

March 2025, only one user transitioned from senior undergraduate to graduate student.

While the sample is somewhat representative, its 20-user scale is limited, and future studies should expand to multi-platform users.

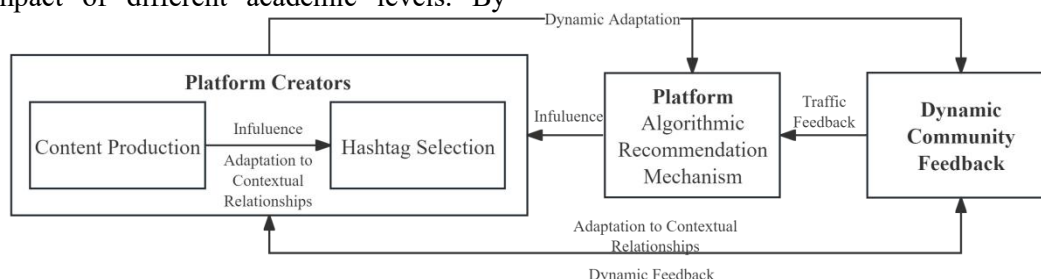


Figure 1. Interaction Model of Platform Creators, Algorithms, and Communities in Xiaohongshu UGC Community

2.2 Corpus Processing and Analysis

After obtaining the corpus, this study classifies the pragmatic identities constructed by college students through analyzing text and hashtag content. These classifications serve as the specific social purposes of hashtag use, allowing us to explore the strategies used by college students to construct identities through hashtags based on contextual adaptation theory.

3. Findings

3.1 Various Pragmatic Identities Constructed by the College Students Users

Through annotation and analysis of the collected 537 corpus entries, college students primarily construct four types of pragmatic identities in Xiaohongshu: pursuer of the good life, social-cultural participant, experience sharer, and self-media entrepreneur. The distribution of these identities is shown in the following table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Proportion of Various Pragmatic Identities Constructed by the College Students Users

Types of Pragmatic Identities	Number of Posts	Proportion (%)
Pursuer of A Better Life	220	40.87
Social-Cultural Participant	134	24.95
Experience Sharer	142	26.44
Self-Media Entrepreneur	41	7.64
Subtotal	537	100

Overall, among the four identities constructed by college students through speech acts, the “pursuer of a better life” identity accounts for the largest proportion (40.87%), followed by “social-cultural participant”(24.95%), and

“self-media entrepreneur” is the least frequent (7.64%) [11]. These pragmatic identities form specific contexts for college students' hashtag use.

3.2 Linguistic Context Adaptation: Symbolic Hashtagging

In Xiaohongshu, hashtags and text form a dynamic language system with "explicit functional complementarity". The text establishes a basic identity framework, while hashtags reinforce identities through secondary symbolization. For example:

(1) *User 5*: 早起吃健康早餐~插花读书开启一天好心情! #健康早餐 #阅读 #养生 #治愈系 #阅读疗愈 #阅读随时随地 #吃干净的食物 #美好生活方式

Translation: Early morning healthy breakfast ~ Arranging flowers and reading to start a good day! #Healthy Breakfast #Reading #Wellness #Healing Vibes #Reading Therapy #Reading Anytime #Clean Eating #Good LifeStyle

The text describes daily routines, while hashtags abstract these into cultural symbols like #Wellness and #Good Life Style, reinforcing the “pursuer of a better life” identity. Here’s another example:

(2) *User13*: 你要悄悄上早八, 然后惊艳所有人/救命!! 五天早八[石化][石化] #X大(用户所在大学) #男大学生 #早八人

Translation: You'll secretly attend six early mornings, then amaze everyone. Help!! Six days of early mornings [frozen] [frozen] #XUniversity #MaleCollegeStudent #EarlyBird

While the text expresses conflicting attitudes toward early mornings, the hashtag #EarlyBird symbolically summarizes these emotions by

adapting to the internet meme structure of “打工人” (laborer).

3.3 Cultural Context Adaptation: Identity Solidarity

It is believed that, after entering college, students experience heightened sociality and loneliness (Tu, 2005) [17], leading them to strategically select hashtags for identity identification. Drawing on Tajfel's (1971) social identity theory, social identity is formed through categorization, identification, and comparison [13]. And the users are using hashtags to achieve that, except their aim is not to form a social identity. Take one of the user 14's posts as an example:

(3) *User 14*: 重生之我在x (用户所在大学) 六天早八/大学生六天早八, 真想好好睡一觉 #X大学 (用户所在大学) #X (用户所在大学简称) #当代大学生精神状态 #心情有点复杂 #有多少人和我一样

Translation: Reborn as a six-day early riser at X University — Six days of early mornings as a college student, just want to sleep well #XUniversity

*#ContemporaryCollegeMentality
#MixedFeelings #HowManyLikeMe*

In this example, the hashtag “#ContemporaryUniversityStudentMood” implies that disliking early classes is a common trait within the group, thereby satisfying the need for belonging, as well as strengthening identity recognition.

(4) *User 8*: 大学, 我打死你。/突然想起上高中的时候, 南方的12月, 下午五点就天黑了, 窗户起雾。晚自习所有人都埋着头, 仿佛每个人的未来都贷给了“大学”, 现在已经不用活了。“大学”这个概念, 是我苦涩高中止痛的巧克力。……本科生是没出路的, 研究生是难考的, 实习是难找的, 学历是贬值的, 考公是变态难度的, 老师是与实际脱节的, 大学教育是完蛋的。#大学 #大学生 #大学生精神状态 #当代大学生现状 #大一 #大二 #大三 #大四 #高中 #想死

Translation: College, I'll kill you.../Suddenly remembering high school in the south, where December afternoons turn dark by five, and windows fog up. Everyone in evening study sessions buries their heads, as if their futures were mortgaged to the concept of 'college,' and life no longer matters. The idea of 'college' was the chocolate that numbed the bitterness of my

high school years. Undergraduates have no way out; graduate school is hard to get into; internships are tough to find; degrees are devalued; civil service exams are insanely difficult; teachers are disconnected from societal realities; and college education is a lost cause.

*#College #CollegeStudent
#CollegeStudentMentalState
#ContemporaryCollegeStudentReality
#Freshman #Sophomore #Junior #Senior
#HighSchool #WantToDie*

Similarly, in Example (4), User 8 employs repetitive tags such as #CollegeStudentMentalState and #ContemporaryCollegeStudentReality, alongside the opinionated tag #WantToDie, aligning with the expressive norms of college student communities. Here, the phrase “WantToDie” does not literally mean to die, but conveys intense dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the reality of college education through its emotionally charged wording.

As active participants in subcultures, users also strengthen their identification with specific groups by using exclusive tags that exclude outsiders. For instance:

(5) *User 17*: 啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊费加罗好事做尽/封你为最新内鱼(娱)婚庆!!!!!!/哥哥弟弟太帅了, 表现力太强了啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊啊/孩子又幸福了呜呜呜呜呜呜 #张康乐 #马柏全 #全糖可乐

Translation: Aaaaaaaahhhh! Fei Jia Luo has done it again!/I crown you the latest 'Nei Yu' (short for “内地娱乐圈”, referring to China's mainland entertainment industry) wedding celebration!!!!!! The brothers are so handsome, with such strong presence—ahhhhh! The child is blissful again, sniffle sniffle.” #ZhangKangLe #MaBoQuan #QuanTangKeLe

As it shown in the example, user 17 uses the tag “#QuanTangKeLe”, a coded term recognizable only to fans of this CP (couple), aligning with the social norms of subcultural communication. By excluding outsiders, the user achieves a sense of belonging. Such tags are subculture-specific, enhancing interaction within the group while reinforcing cultural boundaries with outsiders.

3.4 Psychological Adaptation: Emotional Marketing

As a platform that leverages “social interaction” to drive “platform economy” (Zhu, 2021), emotion is one of the marketing strategies used

by Xiaohongshu influencers (Gao & Zhou, 2023) [6]. Indeed, college students also exhibit distinct psychological adaptation when using hashtags. For example:

(6) *User 18*: 穷游乌兰察布/去年盛夏来到了乌兰察布,看到了一望无际的大草原,感受了不羁浪漫的草原风情。现分享我的消费账单和穷游攻略市区住的北官驿宿,草原住的蒙古包。.....#乌兰察布 #乌兰察布火山 #乌兰察布旅游 #旅行 #旅游 #穷游 #旅行攻略 #旅游攻略 #穷游攻略 #大学生旅行 #大学生旅游 #大学生穷游 #草原 #夏天总要去趟草原吧 #荒凉又浪漫的大西北

Translation: Budget travel in Ulanqab/Last summer, I visited Ulanqab and saw the vast grasslands, experiencing the free-spirited and romantic grassland culture. Now I'm sharing my expense account and budget travel guide: stayed in a guesthouse in the city, and in a yurt on the grasslands... #Ulanqab #UlanqabVolcanoes #UlanqabTravel #Travel #Tourism #BudgetTravel #TravelGuide #TourismGuide #BudgetTravelGuide #CollegeStudentTravel #CollegeStudentTourism #CollegeStudentBudgetTravel #Grasslands #SummerMustVisitGrasslands #DesolateYetRomanticNorthwest

(7)*User 18*: 买对不买贵!被夸爆的热门新品除螨仪都在这/还有新手小白不知道怎么选除螨仪吗?/先别急着入手!千万要记得做功课啊!!.....#除螨仪 #除螨仪推荐 #除螨仪测评 #除螨好物 #生活小家电 #又好又便宜 #李佳琦直播间 #双十二 #双十二应该买什么 #双十二小红书买买节

Translation: Buy smart, not expensive! All the trending new mite-removal devices are here!/Still confused about how to choose a mite-removal device?/Don't rush to buy! Always do your homework first!!... #MiteRemovalDevice #MiteRemovalDeviceRecommendation #MiteRemovalDeviceReview

#MiteRemovalEssentials #HomeAppliances #GoodAndAffordable #LiJiaqiLiveStream #DoubleTwelve #WhatToBuyOnDoubleTwelve #XiaohongshuDoubleTwelveShoppingFestival

Both example (6) and example (7) are from User 18. However, user 18 uses different tags in different situation. In terms of experience-sharing content, this user chose tags like #SummerMustVisitGrasslands and #DesolateYetRomanticNorthwest, which conveys personal suggestions while explaining why

he/she recommend the grasslands as a good place to travel. By using these tags, the assertiveness of the suggestion is reduced and the recipient's negative face is protected as well. In contrast, in example (7), the same user employs #MiteRemovalDeviceReview, a neutral and objective term, to enhance credibility and meet the recipients' psychological needs for balanced advice. This strategy reflects the dynamic nature of the user's hashtag choices. While this dynamism improves the precision and effectiveness of identity construction, it may also lead to the "instrumentalization" of hashtags, potentially undermining content authenticity (Gao & Zhou, 2023) [6].

3.5 Algorithmic Adaptation: Traffic-Driven Hashtagging

To align with Xiaohongshu's algorithmic recommendation mechanisms, users, driven by the need to enhance interactivity and promote marketing, often select high-traffic hashtags. These hashtags may bear varying degrees of relevance to the main content. While their direct purpose is not to refine the content or construct identity, they indirectly reflect users' social objectives. For instance:

(8)*User 1*: 京东五折 雅鹿羽绒服/上午纠结,中午下单,晚上就拿到快递了,飞速/布料我挺喜欢的,没有想象中硬/版型我觉得挺好的,就是拿到手一侧有点皱巴巴的 #贴上就是桂花味 #羽绒服推荐 #京东五折券 #京东五折券买什么 #京东五折抄作业

Translation: JD (an e-commerce platform) 50% off Ya Lu down jacket/Bought it in the morning, received it in the evening—so fast! The fabric is nicer than I imagined, and the fit is good, though one side is a bit wrinkled.

#StickyCinnamonFlavor #DownJacketRecommendation #JD50PercentOff #JD50PercentOffWhatToBuy #JD50PercentOffHomework

In example (8), user 1 employs the trending but content - unrelated hashtag #StickyCinnamonFlavor to drive traffic. Under this post, other users leave interactive comments: *Commenter 1: Is the scent strong? Commenter 2: How did you get this deal? Besides the 50% - off clothing voucher. Commenter 3: Are the sizes normal? Could you share your height and weight, sis?*

In comparison, there is another simultaneous post on the theme of makeup skills sharing

without similar traffic - driving tags, which gains less engagement. The content is as follows:

(9)User 1: 最近发现快速提亮的化妆法: 绿色隔离+肤色防晒+两滴精化(华)混匀后上脸(隔离要略微多一点点), 粉扑扑开再加一层粉饼定妆, 满持久的哦(加精油是防止太干) #伪素颜 #快速上妆 #快速化妆

Translation: Recently discovered a quick skin - brightening makeup method: green primer + skin - colored sunscreen + two drops of essence mixed evenly before applying to the face (use a little more primer), blend with a powder puff and set with compact powder. It's super long - lasting (adding essence is to prevent dryness). #FakeNo MakeupLook #QuickMakeup #FastMakeup

This post has no feedback from other users, which means the effect of traffic - driving method is closely related to the content. At the same time, user 1 also posted another post titled *fighting back against a travel platform's ticket - refund fee* with the tag #StickyCinnamonFlavor. But this post also has no likes or comments. This again confirms that hashtags mainly assist the main content. If the content lacks support from popular platform topics like shopping recommendations, the hashtag's traffic - driving ability is limited.

In addition, users may use tags unrelated to the content but reflecting personal characteristics. These tags are not for traffic but for personal classification. For example:

(10)User 19: 洗澡的花, 洗掉坏坏的心情/武汉连着一个星期的下雨/校园里的花也在雨水的滋润下从花骨朵中绽放/醒来, 就洗个痛痛快快的澡吧/春雨绵绵, 洗掉坏心情!/不仅是花, 还有你哦~ #生活美学 #华中科技大学 #校园里的花 #infj #盛开的花朵 #花朵 #那些花儿 #春天 #花 #花朵的生机

Translation: Bathing flowers wash away bad moods. Wuhan has been rainy for a week. The flowers on campus bloom with the nourishment of rain. Wake up and take a refreshing bath. Spring rain, washing away bad moods! Not just flowers, but you too ~ #AestheticsOfLife #HuazhongUniversityOfScienceAndTechnology #CampusFlowers #infj #BloomingFlowers #Flowers #ThoseFlowers #Spring #Flower #VitalityOfFlowers

In example (10), the #infj is also unrelated to the content. However, the term infj actually refers to a certain personality, which makes #infj highlights personal personality traits. As a result,

the unrelated tag #infj, in fact, is used to achieve one's identity recognition in the digital world.

3.6 Identity Stability Strategies in Fixed Hashtags

As Bucholtz (2007) points out, repeated use of hashtags can help users develop a more fixed identity. This is actually the result of users' subjective consciousness adapting to various contexts [2]. As active users in the self-media era, college students consciously shape their online persona and operate self-media through the "non-adaptation" of hashtags.

Take user 20's three posts as an example:

(11)最近学习浓度超级高/11月初有力学的期末考试, 10月还有一大堆事, 所以最近超级忙, 真的学习强度拉满, 感谢我的学习搭子兼女朋友陪伴学习! #今天也有好好学习 #一周学习打卡 #我爱学习 (The pursuer of a better life)

Translation: Lately, my focus has been super high. I have a mechanics final in early November, plus a ton of stuff in October, so I've been swamped. My study intensity is maxed out, and I'm grateful my study partner and girlfriend has been with me through it! #StudiedWellToday #WeeklyStudyCheckIn #ILoveLearning (The pursuer of a better life)

(12)985 期末复习满满干货/相信最近很多同学都进入了期末周, 所以在这里关于期末周复习阐述一下我个人的看法。大学期末复习不同于高中, 大学只要期末周复习的好, 即使平时没认真学也可以取得不错的分数。以下就是复习的 tips: #学习方法很重要 #神奇学习方法在这里 #学习日常 #小红书礼物季 #小红书礼物季 #小红书成长笔记薯条小助手 (The experience sharer)

Translation: 985 final review is packed with practical content. Many of you must be in final exam week, so here's my take. College finals are different from high school. If you review well during finals week, you can score well even if you didn't study hard 平时. Here are some review tips: ... #StudyMethodsMatter #AmazingStudyMethodsHere #StudyDaily #XiaohongshuGiftSeason #XiaohongshuGrowthNotesFriesHelper (The experience sharer)

(13)生命是有光的/6.22 日, 去看了期待了六年的云边有个小卖部, 六载青春岁月, 我也马上度过了一半的大学时光, 时间很快, 快到我

不及反应，时间也很慢，慢到我忘记不了当下的痛苦。.....#瞬间 #时光 #读书推荐 #读书记录 #X (the user's college) (Social-Cultural Participant)

Translation: Life has its light. On June 22nd, I watched "A Little Shop of Clouds," which I'd been looking forward to for six years. Six years of youth, and I'm about to finish half of my college life. Time flies, too fast for me to react, yet it's also slow, making me unable to forget the current pain.... #Moments #Time #BookRecommendation #ReadingRecord #X University (The social and cultural participant)

As shown in the example, there are a group of hashtags related to studying, like #WeeklyStudyCheckIn, #ILoveLearning, #StudyMethodsMatter, #AmazingStudyMethodsHere, #StudyDaily, and #X University. These tags together form a hashtag cluster and are scattered across the user's various identity constructions. This consistent choice of fixed hashtags, accumulated across multiple posts, shapes an overall image of a college student who is academically strong, hardworking, and reflective, creating a personal IP and a form of self-branding (Zhu, 2021). By packaging personal narratives into sellable persona modules with hashtags, users promote self-media development and strengthen fan engagement.

4. Further Discussion

4.1 The Pragmatic Functions of Hashtags

Based on the findings, the study can summarize that hashtags serve the following functions in the construction of pragmatic identity among college students:

- 1) Instrumental Function: Hashtags can direct traffic, boost exposure, classify content, and gain traffic, all while adapting to platform algorithm rules.
- 2) Social Function: Users can strengthen their sense of group belonging through hashtags, building a community identity in online social settings. These hashtags often present and summarize interactions with imagined others and one's own online identity.
- 3) Identity Function: By using hashtags, users can supplement or emphasize content or communicative purposes they wish to express, thereby strengthening and even completing the construction of their pragmatic identity.

4.2 Tensions Between Commercialization and Identity Construction

Under the influence of commercialization and the influencer economy, the use of hashtags in Xiaohongshu has a dual role in identity construction. On the one hand, their ability to adapt to cultural contexts helps college students "perform" their identities. On the other hand, the deep integration of algorithmic recommendation mechanisms and the logic of the influencer economy into self - media operations causes a distortion in identity construction. Especially when shaping the identity of "self - media entrepreneurs", users need to constantly adjust their hashtag strategies to balance the dual roles of college student and commercial blogger. This tension reflects the discipline of platform economies on individual self - expression (Zhu, 2021) [23]. In addition, the "traffic - first" orientation of hashtags may increase content homogenization and weaken the individual expression of Generation Z (Pan, 2024) [14].

4.3 Conclusion and Prospects

Overall, Xiaohongshu's image - text content ecosystem and hashtag recommendation mechanisms offer a digital platform for young people to showcase their ideal self. College students mainly construct four diverse pragmatic identities on this platform: seekers of a better life, social and cultural participants, experience sharers, and self - media entrepreneurs. They select different hashtags based on the unique social goals of each identity. By adapting to linguistic, cultural, psychological, and algorithmic contexts, and sometimes deliberately "non-adapting", users drive the construction of these identities. Hashtags exhibit three key pragmatic functions: instrumental, social, and identity - related. This reflects college students' active expression of individuality, formation of identity, and participation in platform - based economic development.

However, this study has limitations.

First, the sample was limited to one platform with few data points. cross - platform identity consistency wasn't examined. As a consequence, the sample of the study may be lack of representativeness.

Second, the analysis didn't fully explore the algorithmic recommendation mechanism's impact.

Future research will expand and optimize the

corpus, conduct multi - platform comparisons, and explore the link between the emotional labor and the identity sustainability.

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