When Digital Migration Meets Platform Capitalism: How Human and Material Agencies Affect TikTok Refugees on rednote

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In early 2025, a digital migration was initiated by TikTok users as a response to the unsettling results under the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (PAFACAA) for a potential ban on TikTok. They identify themselves as TikTok Refugees. Among other social media platforms as destinations, rednote has sheltered the most. This digital migration is fundamentally constrained and facilitated by the imbrication of human and material agencies on rednote, but how TikTok Refugees interact with these agencies, especially the material agencies, under platform capitalism remains unveiled. This research integrates quantitative modelling, walkthrough of apps, analytic autoethnography, computational sentiment analysis and topic modelling, and digital ethnography to reveal the imbrication of human and material agencies on rednote with TikTok Refugees by triangulation of multiple data sources, methods, and researchers. The findings reveal that rednote altered its technical features for this digital migration, producing not only effective cultural adaptation of TikTok Refugees, but also conflicts between native rednote users and TikTok Refugees, which is exacerbated under commercial interest of rednote and the agencies. This research makes a theoretical contribution to current studies on digital migration by explaining the role of technical design and platform capitalism in digital migration, and a practical contribution to inform relevant regulatory bodies and platform operators about challenges of platform governance during digital migration.

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DEDICATION

To Wenjia Zhao—my wife, my heart, my home. Every page of this dissertation reminds me of our time in Eugene, the good and the bad, the delicious dishes you made, the slopes at Willamette Pass, and the quiet sacrifices you made so I could chase this dream.

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TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Xiaohongshu: The original Chinese name of a Chinese social media platform (小红书). It is specified as the legal operating entity for users who registered before December 8, 2024, with a Chinese phone number starting with international dialing code of +86.

rednote: The official English name designated by Xiaohongshu. This name is specified as the legal operating entity that applies to those who registered after December 8, 2024, with a non-Chinese phone number. It is used interchangeably in this study with the name Xiaohongshu when the context is related to functionality.

TikTok Refugee: TikTok users in the US who are actively seeking alternative platforms under the potential TikTok ban in the U.S. in 2025. In this context, it is narrowed down to U.S. users of rednote who registered after December 8, 2024, with a non-Chinese phone number.

Native rednote Users: Xiaohongshu users who register before December 8, 2024, with a Chinese phone number starting with international dialing code of +86.

WeChat and QQ: Two dominant instant messaging software in China developed and operated by Tencent, a leading software company in China.

Digital Migration: Digital-native movement of social media users from platform to platform without physical movement.

Freemium Model: An operating business strategy where a business offers basic product features at no cost while charging a premium fee to access advanced or additional features.

Multichannel Network (MCN): Companies that partner with content creators across content creation platforms to offer services such as audience development, rights management, monetization strategies, analytics and cross-promotion.

Imbrication: The interwoven pattern of interactions between human and non-human actors.

The Thucydides Trap: Originally coined by Greek historian Thucydides to describe the rising force of Sparta threatened the established power of Athens. In contemporary context, this term is commonly used to describe the precarious situation when an ascending power threatens to displace an established one, a situation that historically has often led to war. American political scientist Graham Allison first used this term to describe the rising power of China that threaten the established power of US in his book.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> I'm a normal user, with even a random anonymous name I.e. the share "momo" name, just to browsing. But one day my account is suspended quoting I'm trying to get users off platform for money. What????
>
> -A comment left by a TikTok Refugee on Apple App Store

In April 2024, former President Biden signed the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (PAFACAA), mandating that ByteDance divest TikTok's U.S. operations by January 19, 2025, or face a ban from U.S. app stores and web hosts. When the deadline passed with no final sale, enforcement was temporarily frozen due to litigation, and current President Trump, upon inauguration on January 20, 2025, issued a series of extensions—first 90 days, then 75 days in April, and another 90 days in June 2025. This uncertainty pushed TikTok into a degraded and "walked-off" state with severe operational issues, even resulting in a temporary shutdown hours before the ban (Pellish & Stelter, 2025), leaving nothing but a cold window on the main screen of all blacked interface, "A law banning TikTok has been enacted in the U.S. Unfortunately, that means you can't use TikTok for now" when opened (Rijo, 2025). When the last extension was near expiration, TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC was established to comply with the Executive Order signed by President Trump on September 25, 2025 (TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC, 2026), a key driver to an agreement between the parent company of TikTok, ByteDance, and the U.S. government on January 22, 2026. This agreement entails the sale of 80.1% of TikTok's US operations to a group of US investors, including institutional investors, such as Oracle, Silver Lake, and MGX, and representative entities of individual investors, such as family office of Michael Dell and

Vastmere Strategic Investments (Tewari & Jamali, 2026). Although it restored service before long, this has triggered a mass migration of over half a million "TikTok Refugees" to other social media platforms, among which is Red Note (Baptista et al., 2025), a Chinese female-oriented social media and e-commerce platform (Guo, 2022). This migration has persisted even after the sale.

Such digital migration is not uncommon in contemporary social media environments. For example, many have left X (formerly known as Twitter) and migrated to competing social media platforms, such as Threads, Bluesky, and Mastodon because of ownership and policy changes (Jeong et al., 2024). These digital migrations signal that social media platforms are now part of real-world infrastructure rather than mere entertainment spaces. When users relocate virtually to another platform, they carry with them social networks, creator livelihoods, political conversations, cultural practices, and expectations about platform governance. These migrations reveal how regulatory uncertainty, geopolitical tensions, content moderation, algorithmic trust, and user dissatisfaction can rapidly reshape where communities gather and how information circulates. Studying such digital migrations therefore helps explain not only changing platform preferences, but also broader questions about digital citizenship, cross-border communication, economic dependence on platforms, and the fragility of online publics in an era when policy decisions and platform ownership can redirect millions of everyday social lives almost overnight. However, little is known about these digital-native migrants making solely virtual moves between digital platforms, especially how they adapt to host platforms with the help of human and non-human agencies on host platforms, leaving several research gaps uncovered. First, although past studies have concluded that familiarity of technical features of source platforms (Jeong et al., 2024; Zhao et al., 2026) and hospitality on host platforms (Xiao & Zhang, 2025)

may be drivers for subsequent user behavior during such migrations, the synergy of both human and non-human agents, especially functionality of specific technical design, are largely unknown. Second, past studies have fallen into a fallacy that these migrations are a one-time come-and-go situation, while they are dynamic, a product of the interactions between the sociality of people and materiality of technology over time, namely, imbricated by human and material agencies (Leonardi, 2011, 2013). For example, Jeong et al (2024) concluded that migrants return to Twitter after they cannot succeed on alternative platforms in the long run, but what happened on alternative platforms that drive them away from long-term success? Such imbrication produces cultural affordance (Sun & Suthers, 2023), which may lead to precarity of users and form an "in and against the platform" positionality (Ju, 2022; Fan, 2024; Xiao & Zhang, 2025). Therefore, it is problematic to assume this cultural activity as static (Sun & Suthers, 2023). Similarly, when TikTok Refugees migrated to rednote, although the overall migration follows a pattern of pre-ban, refugees surge, and stabilization (Feng et al., 2025), as the situation of TikTok evolves, many have arrived at rednote at different phases repeating the wave. That is to say, the pattern of each batch of TikTok Refugees may have their own characteristics, let alone on individual level, but the pattern itself may have similarities. Third, past studies have largely ignored the platform logic primarily as a business and how such commercialization, or monetization schemes may affect user behaviors, neglecting that money is "a generalized symbolic medium of interchange in the processes of social interaction" (Parsons, 1968). In the light of the commercialized logic of social media platforms, monetization agencies and their role on changes in social interactions on social platforms must be assessed. Therefore, this research is motivated by the following research question: How do the technological

affordances, social environment, and commercialization of rednote affect TikTok Refugees and their engagements on rednote, especially the content creators?

To answer the research question, the present research adopts a mixed-method approach, including walkthrough method of apps, analytic autoethnography, quantitative content analysis, sentiment analysis, topic modelling, and digital ethnography. This study makes a theoretical contribution to current research on digital migration by integrating the concept of sociomateriality and imbrication of human and non-human agents to provide new analytical lenses, and the practical significance of this research is provide guidance to platform operators and regulatory bodies on how to balance between commercial interest and user-centered governance, therefore to resolve conflicts between various user groups in digital migrations for protection and retention of users.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The rapid evolution of digital technologies and global communication platforms has fundamentally transformed online communication and cultural exchange. As social media platforms increasingly displace offline institutions and mediate economic, social, and cultural interactions, boundaries of the conceptualization of place are further blurred. Therefore, understanding the social media logic and user behaviors, particularly those cross-border and cross-platform environments, has become essential for contemporary research on social media. In this specific context of TikTok Refugees, the Theory of Affordances, the Integrative Theory of Cross-cultural Adaptation, and the Communication Accommodation Theory can serve as the theoretical foundation to guide the study. This section synthesizes scholarships on social media and digital migration. It explores how interdisciplinary concepts intersect in the context of cultural exchange on social media. The literature review highlights key theoretical debates, empirical findings, and gaps in the literature.

Theoretical Foundation

The Integrative Theory of Cross-cultural Adaptation

The Integrative Theory of Cross-cultural Adaptation (Kim, 1988, 2008) provides a theoretical framework that depicts the psychological transformation of the individual, conceptualized as a journey from enculturation toward assimilation through the process of acculturation and deculturation. According to Kim (2001), enculturation is the process when "persons adapt to surrounding cultural forces throughout the years of socialization" (p. 47). Entering a new culture embarks a new enculturation process (p. 50), for instance, the

enculturation process of Chinese American adolescent can be shaped by day-to-day lifestyle and behaviors (Wang et al., 2016). This process is facilitated by host communication competence, defined as "the overall internal capacity of a stranger to decode and encode information in accordance with the host cultural communication practices" (Kim, 2017b, p. 7). This competence consists of three interrelated dimensions: cognitive, affective, and operational. Cognitive competence entails knowledge of the host language, history, and social norms, with language proficiency being paramount for effective participation in society, a fact supported by research showing rapid language acquisition in immigrant communities (Spörlein & Kristen, 2019; Kristen & Seuring, 2021). Affective competence involves the emotional and motivational capacity to engage with the new culture, including openness and a positive attitude. Operational competence is the ability to execute contextually appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors. This triad of competencies is cultivated and applied through direct host interpersonal communication, which builds relational support, and through host mass communication, which enables indirect learning of cultural practices through media.

The variability in adaptation outcomes is explained by Kim's structural model (2017a, 2017b), which identifies key facilitating or constraining factors from both environmental and internal factors. Environmental factors include host receptivity, or the degree of openness and support offered by the host society, which can be unevenly distributed based on prejudice; host conformity pressure, or the societal demand for strangers to adopt local norms, which is often lower in diverse, pluralistic societies (Kim, 2017a, 2017b); and ethnic group strength, which refers to the size and status of the stranger's co-ethnic community. Predispositional factors, or internal factors, are collectively termed adaptive potential that include 1) the stranger's preparedness for change, 2) ethnic proximity, specifically, perceived cultural and physical

similarity, where technology acceptance eases acceptance and learning (Chao et al., 2021; Dalle et al., 2024); and 3) adaptive personality, such as openness and tolerance for ambiguity, which enable non-ethnocentric engagement with new situations. The model also acknowledges that while ethnic social communication offers necessary initial support, overreliance on it can impede the development of host communication competence.

Intercultural transformation, another key factor for cross-cultural adaptation as an internal change manifested in three facets: increased functional fitness for daily life, improved psychological health marked by reduced alienation and more satisfying relationships, and the emergence of an intercultural identity (Kim, 2001, p. 191) that transcends the original cultural self-concept (Kim, 2017a, 2017b). The above process depicts successful cultural adaptation of strangers in a host culture, but the adaptation process can face barricades, such as culture shock, the anxiety and confusion that arise when acculturation is not smooth in the new context (Oberg, 1960). This shock typically progresses through 5 stages: 1) an initial "honeymoon" phase that is full of curiosity and enthusiasm about the new cultural environment, 2) disintegration phase that stems from the feelings of differences between the host culture and home culture, characterized by uncertainty, confusion, alienation, or frustration, 3) reintegration phase that attributes these issues to individuals in the host culture, and develops understandings of cultural norms and values of the host culture, which leads to 4) autonomy phase where there are less distressed feeling and more feelings of acceptance by the host culture, and 5) interdependence phase that they deem the adaptive ability in different cultures as a blessing; highly adapted individuals may even experience reverse culture shock because of increasing in cultural intelligence upon returning to their home country, finding their native culture strangely unfamiliar but forming new identity (Capella, 2015; Presbitero, 2016; Samira et al., 2024).

Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (Giles, 1973; Giles et al., 1973) is an interpersonal communication theory that posits language as a primary mechanism in "a process concerned with how we can reduce (and, in some cases, magnify) communicative differences between people in interaction (Giles & Soliz, 2015, p.159), acting as a "barometer of the level of social distance" (Giles & Ogay, 2013). Convergence and divergence are two core strategies of accommodation: convergence is deployed "as a strategy whereby individuals adapt their communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., speech rate, accents), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance length), and non-verbal behaviors (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutors' behaviors" (Giles & Ogay, 2007, p. 295), often to gain approval or signal empathy; where divergence accentuates differences to emphasize distinct group identities, sometimes to express disapproval or rejection (Soliz & Giles, 2014, Soliz et al., 2021). Both convergence and divergence are directional, characterized by upward or downward accommodation. Giles et al. (2011) proposed four principles to conceptualize this theory and characterize the directional flows of accommodation by valence of intent: 1) should speakers aim for attaining more positive outcome, such as demonstrating positive image or empathy, eliciting positive feedback, engaging in closer relationships, refraining from unfriendly conditions, or expressing similar social identities, they will be more willing to accommodate to communication patterns in the host culture; 2) with positive intent, recipients can benefit from a higher level of self-esteem, performance satisfaction level, perceived image, partnership opportunities, mutual understanding, perceived supportiveness, life satisfaction, politeness, empathy, competence, and benevolence; 3) speakers will increasingly non-accommodate if they wish to express disaffection , dissatisfaction, or disrespect; 4) the

intent in non-accommodation will be perceived as unfriendly, impolite, therefore receiving negative feedback because of perceived lacking of empathy and trust. In other words, accommodation is not always positive, and it should be evaluated with caution since it signifies perceived status, authority, and social and cultural identity (Penocova, 2020, p. 61). Even though accommodation is frequently motivated by pursuits that yield benefits, such as gaining social approval and fostering relationships, the reverse causal pathway is also a possibility. For example, full convergence can lead to identity loss (i.e., deculturation) (Detrez & Plas, 2005; Bhandari, 2021) or be perceived with distrust (Giles & Ogay, 2007, p. 297; Stewart & Gonzalez, 2023).

The Theory of Affordances

The term affordance was first introduced by James Gibson (2014 [1979]). It represents a radical departure from traditional perceptual psychology, positing that the environment is directly perceived in terms of its potential for action. Gibson defined affordances as what the environment "offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 2014[1979], p. 119). The development of this concept was a direct challenge to the dominant cognitivist and behaviorist paradigms at that time. Gibson (2014[1979]) argued that perception was not a process of constructing mental representations from ambiguous sensory inputs, but rather a direct digest of information that is specified in the ambient array of light, sound, and other energy patterns. He termed this information "invariants," which remain constant despite changes in the observer's perspective or conditions (Gibson, 2014[1979], p.104). Affordances, for Gibson, are perceived directly through the detection of these invariants, like that we see a chair as a seat without needing to infer its function through a cognitive process (Gibson, 2014[1979], p.120).

The theory has been fruitfully expanded and sometimes critiqued within the field of design and human-computer interaction (HCI), most notably by Donald Norman. For Gibson, affordance is an action possibility or offering, but for Norman, affordance is a perceived suggestion. In Norman's term, "affordance refers to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used. For example, "a chair affords support and, therefore, sitting, and a chair can also be carried." (Norman, 1988, p. 9). Norman (1988) popularized the term but diverged from Gibson's original definition of "real affordances" by focusing on "perceived affordances," which are cultural conventions and clues that suggest how an object can be used. For Norman, affordance is the relationship that reveals how an object can be used, both in its actual (i.e., real affordance) and its perceived (i.e., perceived affordance) properties. He emphasizes that these two do not have to be identical; a user might perceive an affordance (e.g., that a screen is touch-sensitive) based on its appearance, regardless of its actual capabilities. Meanwhile, cultural conventions and level of expertise of a user can affect perceived affordances in terms of usability (McGrenere & Ho, 2000). This is consistent with Norman's idea that cultural conventions and learned behaviors greatly affect both real and perceived affordances (Norman, 1988). Norman argues that the critical role of a designer is to leverage the psychology of the user to make these perceived affordances clear, ensuring the user knows what to do simply by looking (Norman, 1988, p. 82).

Middle-range Theories of Affordances

Between Gibson and Norman, Hutchby (2001a, 2001b) offers a complementary definition of "communicative affordances" as a middle ground, the "functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object"

(Hutchby, 2001a, p. 444), which can change by contexts while the materiality does not. Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) (1987, 2005) extends the understanding of affordances in sociotechnical studies (STS), claiming that the social and material are inseparable in sociotechnical processes, so that human and non-human agencies should not be distinguished in such studies. Latour (2005) argues that the social is not a special domain of reality but is instead an unstable network of associations between human and nonhuman actors (or actants). ANT posits a principle of symmetry: both humans and nonhumans (e.g., artifacts, technologies, documents) possess agency and are integral to the construction and stabilization of social networks. Agency is not an inherent property but an effect of these networks. For Latour, to explain a social outcome is to trace the blurred network of heterogeneous relations by human and material agencies that made it possible, thereby "reassembling the social" from the ground up (Latour, 2005). However, the claim on interchangeability of human and material agency sparked tensions between scholars that are in favor of only human or material agency over the other (Leonardi & Barley, 2008). Orlikowski and Scott (2008) contend that this pervasive "separate and interact" model in the past manifests in two dominant, yet equally problematic, streams of literature: technological determinism and social constructivism.

As a potential resolution between the dichotomy, a series of middle-range theories were developed. Orlikowski (2007) developed the term *sociomateriality* to denote this relational and functional entanglement of the social and material organizational practice, as she further explains that "all practices are always everywhere sociomaterial, and this *sociomateriality* is constitutive, shaping the contours and possibilities of every organizing." (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1445). While seemingly opposed to each other, both approaches share a common ontological commitment to *a priori* separation: they both take the categories of "the technological" and "the social" as pre-

existing and independent, thereby framing research questions around how these separate entities influence or are influenced by each other (Orlikowski & Scott, 2013). Leonardi (2011) provides a complementary explanation to reconcile the dilemma of this *a priori* separation of *sociomateriality*. In the studies of daily routines with the CrashLab of Autoworks, he termed *imbrication* to describe the interweaving relationships between human and material agencies in repeating patterns that produce the impact.

In such similar repeating patterns that yield different outcomes, Fayard and Weeks (2014) proposed to integrate the concept of *habitus* as a middle ground to further explain differences of affordances in practice. *Habitus* is "an acquired system of generative schemes of perception, thought, and action that tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) that leads to choices of necessity to guide practices, resembling the original objective conditions and functioning as a structure. In the light of this plurality in theoretical approaches, Orlikowski and Scott (2023) proposed the concept of "digital undertow", which is "generating a set of dynamics that are displacing institutional apparatuses from their positions of primary and authority within industries" in this digital era. Therefore, *sociomateriality* of the host platform and the *imbrication* of human and material agencies in host environments may determine how newcomers perceive host environment in the cross-cultural adaptation process, and this perception is largely catalyzed under the influence of both perceived affordances of the material agencies and perceived interactions with social groups in host environments.

Literature Review

Media, User, and Platform

The Mass Media and Social Media Logic. Social media emerged as a divergence from traditional mass media because the content created is largely generated by users, and it possesses the power to affect the production of traditional mass media (Notara, 2024). Schuessler et al. (2026) argued that large, centralized, profit-driven social media platforms can shake the foundations of the liberal-capitalist and democratic societies by strategic initiatives that appropriate and subvert the logics of the market, the corporation and the community. Therefore, considering the potential reach and impact of social media platforms, they should first be comprehended in the logic of mass media. Mass media logic refers to the set of principles and rationalities cultivated by media institutions, shaping public domains and organizing structures (Altheide & Snow, 1979) through various formats (Mazzoleni, 2008). Institutional maintenance in media is achieved through relationships with political processes, technological innovation, and audience choices between traditional and alternative media (Katzenbach, 2018). Social media logic, on the contrary, as articulated by van Dijck and Poell (2013), encompasses the processes and practices by which platforms process information and channel social traffic, which is shaped by users, technologies, economic structures, and institutional bodies (van Dijck, 2013). Social media platforms are socio-technical instruments for constructing sociality, connectivity, and creativity but also assimilate structural inequality by promoting digital divide (Yang & Zhang, 2023). Unlike passive audiences in mass media, users are participatory and active in co-creation of content and value (Jenkins, 2006). Social media platforms displace interactions from physical locales but foster new virtual communities (boyd & Ellison, 2007), enabling both personal connections and impersonal, algorithm-driven relationships. Under intervention of algorithms,

they require users to navigate opaque expert systems while enabling creative reappropriation; and they blur the lines between passive consumption and active participation (Bucher, 2017, 2020; Cotter, 2019; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Following technological development patterns in the past decade, media studies have shifted from legacy media to online media, from BBS in the 1970s, through the dotcom boom, to social networking sites (SNS) in the 2000s, and now to content creation-based social media platforms (CCBP) or user-generated content (UGC) platforms (boyd & Ellison, 2007; van Dijck, 2013; Cunningham & Craig, 2016). Content on these platforms is classified as rational, emotional, and transactional, with influencer marketing and sponsored advertising now central to the digital media economy (Abidin, 2015; Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Technologies and algorithms are increasingly recognized by their regulatory and constitutive roles in shaping communication and social interaction (Katzenbach & Ulbricht; Napoli, 2014; Mendonça et al., 2024).

The Platform Logic. Platforms have emerged as powerful institutional actors, mediating interactions among users, advertisers, governments, and other stakeholders (Gorwa, 2019). Platform governance encompasses both delegated responsibility and community-driven moderation, with varying degrees of centralization and democracy (Hallinan et al., 2024; Friedl & Morgan, 2024), which constitutes multisided platforms. Multisided platforms are increasingly forming new types of organizations that house various types of stakeholders, including consumers, marketers, and content creators (McIntyre et al., 2021). In this multisided structure, content creation is crucial that it mediates digital followership, monetization schemes, and product placement, structuring the relationships among all actors on the platform under the intervention of algorithms (Keller & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2018; Arvidsson & Bonini, 2015). Online community governance and algorithmic governance are ubiquitous under such orientation

of relationships. Online community governance, as seen in online gaming and Reddit communities, can be both empowering and imperative (Kumar et al., 2023; Baier, 2024). Algorithmic governance adds complexity, with algorithmic imaginaries, folk theories, and decoding practices shaping user perceptions and behaviors (Bucher, 2017, 2020; DeVito et al., 2017; Lomborg & Kapsch, 2020). Algorithmic systems automate platform governance, often in opaque ways, leading to unpredictability and sometimes favorable outcomes for content creators (Duffy & Meisner, 2023), but in most cases, content creators will develop an "in and against platform" positionality because of "algorithmic imagination" that attempt to please and fight against algorithms (Ju, 2022; Fan, 2024). Besides, platform strategies can also influence user behavior. Because of the censorship of the Great Fire Wall of China (Li, 2025), where western social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram are banned in China, Ju (2022) found that rednote has successfully capitalized this as an advantage by embracing it as a community that connects geographically dispersed Chinese people around the globe. Similarly, Bluesky successfully capitalized on the conflicts between X and other alternative platforms to retain users (Jeong et al., 2024).

The User Logic. Guided by the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1973; Katz et al., 1974), Whitting and Williams (2013) concluded that consumers use social media for 10 purposes: social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others. Scholars have engaged in continuous debates about these participatory activities in terms of activeness/passiveness.

Posters, Lurkers, and Prosumers. A common typology of users in past studies is by posting behaviors, presumed as an indicator to specify active participation, and it continues so in recent

research. Under this typology, users are often categorized into posters and lurkers based on their relative frequency of posting (Giermindl et al., 2018; Speily et al., 2019). For example, Nonnecke and Preece (2000) defined lurkers as those who have not posted in the last three months. For posters, from a social interaction perspective, Jung et al. (2012) stated that impression management and voyeuristic surveillance are two major psychological factors that incentivize social network site users to post and blog. In terms of expression of opinion and information sharing, Whitting et al. (2019) identified 6 positive motives (i.e., help company, altruism, help employees, express positive feelings, product involvement, and self-enhancement) and 6 negative motives (i.e., altruism, resolution seeking, express negative feelings, vengeance, want to be heard, and help make changes) for posting towards an organization. From a social exchange perspective, people who post seek to express emotions (Lin & Utz, 2015), build social relationships and social capital (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison et al., 2011; Sanchez-Arrieta et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2023) that expect reciprocity (Molm, 2010) in the forms of social rewards (Wadsley et al., 2022). This also brings about a phenomenon in contemporary social media that posters in a highly commercialized and reward-based environment (Wadsley et al., 2022), such as online brand communities, are widely recognized as content creators, creating and commodifying content and audience attention (van Dijck, 2013; Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; McLaughlin & Haverlia, 2023), and serving as co-creators of contents and value for rewards (Brey, 2019). The performance of content creators is primarily characterized and evaluated by their sharing frequency (Tafesse & Dayan, 2023), post quality, creativity, and relationship with followers (Martinez-Aguirre et al., 2025). Therefore, I hypothesize that their engagements on rednote contribute to their subsequent behavior of leaving or staying, which can be formalized as the following hypothesis:

H1: More engagements on rednote leads to higher likelihood of staying on rednote.

On the contrary, lurking has long been associated with negative connotations of peripheral participants of selfish freeriders without reciprocity and nonparticipation, such as potentially identified as "online parasites" (Bu & Koh, 2023), and such lurking behavior may impede participation of others due to insufficient feedback to active contributors (Lim & Tan, 2001). For lurkers, Preece et al. (2004) summarized motives that lurkers don't post in an online group: absence of need for post, information inquiry about the group, perceived helpfulness of self in the group, and negative emotion about the group/poor dynamics. Moreover, computer anxiety (Osatuyi, 2015), privacy concerns, such as information leakage (Ortiz et al., 2018; Mutimukwe et al., 2020), and satisfied information needs (Preece et al., 2004; Ngyuen et al., 2024) are also motives behind lurking. Liu et al. (2024) posits that intrinsic motives, such as social comparison and privacy concern, and extrinsic motives, such as functional overload, information overload, and social overload, cause anxiety and social media fatigue, which eventually lead to lurking. However, many have argued that lurking is also an active form of participation and valuable online behavior that has genuine interest (Edelmann, 2013; Han et al., 2013; Kuhn et al., 2021). As an information seeking venue, Nonnecke et al. (2004) and Nonnecke et al. (2006) discovered that lurking was initiated by active information seeking first to read conversations and stories in online communities. Besides, lurking is a literary practice (Sipley, 2024a) that serves as an active behavior of learning (Zhu & Dawson, 2023), a mode of listening (Adjin-Tettey & Garman, 2023), even social eavesdropping (Bighash et al., 2020), and some of them are active posters in other communities (Muller, 2012). Therefore, lurkers should be studied as a continuum (Fullwood et al., 2019; Ellison et al., 2020), because they are de facto invisible learners (Honeychurch et al., 2017) and potential consumers of products (Chiang & Wang, 2015) that are

the “silent majority” of active participants in online communities (Wirtz et al., 2013). In a transnational context, lurkers may lack confidence in their competence to contribute to host community, therefore, they lurk as a strategy and an attempt to fit (Hsiao, 2021). Surprisingly, the satisfaction level of experience and performance outcomes of lurkers in educational context (Zhu & Dawson, 2023) and brand communities (McLaughlin et al., 2022) do not differ significantly from those who post more frequently. Thus, a more comprehensive typology based on participatory behaviors needs to be developed by posting frequency (McLaughlin & Haverlia, 2023) as well as the source of motives, such as intrinsic motives and extrinsic motives (Liu et al., 2024). In this case, the concept of “prosumer,” introduced by Toffler (1980), may be more suitable to denote the evolving state of social media users under “prosumer capitalism” (Ritzer, 2015), as the boundary has becoming increasingly blurred between producers and consumers (i.e., posters and lurkers) of contents as consumers/lurkers are increasingly engaged in co-creation of contents (Fuchs, 2013; Brey, 2019). Therefore, lurkers, their lurking behavior, and the motives for lurking should all be accounted for in social media participation research, otherwise it could compromise the validity of results and findings (Sipley, 2024b).

Digital Migration

Migration, Digital Communication, and Digital Diaspora. The notion of digital migration is inclusive of a broad research agenda that examines 1) the power relations of digital infrastructures across migrant recruitment, transportation and communication, 2) migrant connections and the use of digital devices, platforms and networks, 3) dominant digital representations of migrants, and how they’re resisted, and 4) the affect and emotion of digital migration, from digital intimacy to transnational family life, 5) how histories of pre and early-digital migration help us situate and rethink contemporary research (Leurs, 2023). Because

such notion is largely concerned with migrants and the use of digital communication, past research on digital migration is elaborated through the lens of digital diaspora. Diaspora is defined as a transnational community dispersed from its homeland but oriented toward it and maintaining a group identity (Grossman, 2019). Built on Castell's notion of Networked Society that borders have been replaced by networks of flows (1996), one research stream on diaspora focused on the use of information and communication technology by physically dispersed communities, including blogs, fora, websites, and social media (Bernal 2014; Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009; Trandafoiu, 2013; Aziz, 2022, 2024; Oltmann & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2024). Many past studies have been conducted under the name of digital diaspora, or synonyms such as E-diaspora, web diaspora (Kumar, 2018), online diaspora (Ignacio, 2013), etc., yet, as Ponzanesi (2020) states, scholars have not reached a consensus on digital diaspora, but it is "not a catch-all term but a relational one that operates around the unfolding of new identity and virtual communities that are informed by new forms of communication that recalibrate and intensify patterns of mobility and hybridity" (p. 987). Most notably, although the overarching argument of digital migration is that "people on the move mediate their being and belonging in increasing conditions of datafication and digitization" (Leurs and Ponzanesi, 2024, p. 17), those who are on the move merely through online networks without physical migration are not counted in current notion of digital migration.

Recent studies on digital diaspora are increasingly shifted to digital diaspora that are not initiated by physical relocation by recognizing media as "affective network space" (Candidatu et al., 2019; Aziz, 2022). Royston (2020) argues that digital diaspora is not merely virtual extensions of pre-existing communities but are "new assemblages" shaped by the interplay of technology, gender, race, and class. For example, because of the ownership and policy change of

X, many X users developed a diaspora status and migrated to competing platforms, such as Bluesky, Mastodon, and Threads (Jeong et al., 2024). Similarly, during the zig-and-zag of TikTok ban in 2025, many TikTok users have identified themselves as "TikTok Refugees" and migrated to other platforms (Hongchen et al., 2025). The movement of TikTok Refugees to rednote is conceptualized as a digital migration (Zhao et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2026), a "performative resistance against state territorialization while evoking the tension of visibility on the destination platform" (Xiao & Zhang, 2025).

It is widely recognized that digital diaspora benefits from communication through various forms of media, so that they are able to form online communities (Mpofu et al., 2022), stay informed with people in home countries (Hillyer, 2021), build social capital (Fergusen et al., 2016; Ayanzu, 2024), form new identities (Candidatu & Ponzanesi, 2022), and make collective actions for activism and advocacy (Arafat, 2022; Aziz, 2024). Social media platforms, especially the comment section and algorithms (Dutceac Segesten et al., 2022), have played a vital role in assisting with translation and adaptation of linguistic and cultural symbols during the transition process (Mele et al., 2021), especially by providing translation tools between languages (Shadieve et al., 2018; Shadiev et al, 2019). Recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been increasingly deployed in global media ecosystems, both online (Sun, 2025) and offline (Yang and Mustafa, 2024; Prakash et al., 2025), to facilitate cross-cultural communication in various contexts. Specifically, it enhances emotional connections and improves appreciation of cultural diversity, which produces good experiences and form stronger emotional ties (Fangni, 2025). For example, in the context of TikTok and rednote, while TikTok's interface solicits a "watch, scroll, repeat" pattern that impose passive and limited consumptive curation (Entrena-Serrano, 2025),

Zhao et al. (2025) found that platform features are significant to affect emotional contagion and interaction frequency with platform for native Chinese rednote users.

It has been noted on major social media platforms that perceived affordance usually deviates from real or intended affordance, which is conceptualized as imagined affordance by Neff (2015) that emerge "between users' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations; between the materiality and functionality of technologies; and between the intentions and perceptions of designers" (p. 5). Imagined affordance is found in mainstream social media platforms, especially on female, such as the multimodal affordances on Instagram offer Gulf-Arab female influencers with "bricolage identities for individuals and communities navigating contradictions of a neoliberal imaginary" (Hurley, 2019). In the context of rednote, the user-imagined affordance emerges between envisioned affordance of the platform and anti-affordance of users as a form of resistance under user agency (Liu, 2025), or with the influx of TikTok Refugees, informal language learning is cultivated as an expanded affordance (Liu et al., 2026). However, the real and perceived affordances from material agency on rednote have not been studied, and how the real and imagined affordances affect TikTok Refugees remain unveiled.

What is rednote? Rednote is one of the English variations of the original Chinese name, Xiaohongshu, it has also been called Little Red Book by literal translation, or RED (Ju, 2022; Fan, 2024; Jing, 2024). It was founded in June 2013 in Shanghai by Miranda Qu and Charlwin Mao (Xiaohongshu, n.d.), positioned as a sharing platform that served as a guide for elite females in metropolitan areas in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, on navigating luxury shopping overseas. However, some rednote content creators are constantly facing censorship by rednote's algorithms on certain topics such as luxury trips (Ju, 2022). This contradiction in platform philosophy over time illuminates some changes inside rednote.

Indeed, rednote has made three major transformations since, which can be interpreted from changes in slogans, which can effectively construct corporate identity and inspire desired consumer responses (Strutton & Roswinanto, 2014; Anwar, 2015). These slogans together depict the strategic transitions of rednote from material-centered towards social-oriented (Wu, 2021). Specifically, the slogan of rednote went through a series of updates: in phase 1, it changed from its initially proposed "Finding good stuff overseas" in 2014 to "Mark your beautiful things", refined but still material-oriented (Wan, 2022); in phase 2, the slogan was stated as "Mark my life" (Liu et al., 2022), a lesser material-oriented but more social-oriented that implies live experiences, and refined as "Your lifestyle interest guide" in 2022; in phase 3, the slogan was explicitly stated as "Your life interest community" in 2025 (Wang, 2025), raising the voice to emphasize as an online community. However, although rednote publicly positions itself as user-and-community-centered, Liu (2025) disclosed that user interest is only embraced when it is aligned with rednote's interest; once user interest is not aligned with rednote's interest, or having conflict with rednote's interest, the user may be subject to various levels of coercive platform response, from no platform-side response to correction, or even suspension of account. For example, although users have found soft ads, which are ads but in the disguise of "friendly recommendation" from users, across the platform, they are consistently recommended to users even though users are reluctant to see them.

The Digital Migration of TikTok Refugees to rednote. This migration evolves from a pre-ban phase (before Jan 19, 2025) to a refugee surge phase (Jan 19 to Apr 4, 2025) and reached a stabilization phase (after Apr 4, 2025) (Feng et al., 2025). These TikTok Refugees adopt five distinct public-facing personae: Refugee, Witness, Connector, Mediator, and Collaborator, each of which is upheld by specific impression-management tactics: Translation, Emotion,

Comparison, Ritual, and Authenticity (Yang & Li, 2026). These strategies collectively form a toolkit of cross-cultural practices that induce place representations and negotiation between TikTok Refugees and others, specifically, discourses and practices centered on algorithmic governance, depoliticized solidarity, cultural ownership, and neoliberal precarity under the influence of linguistic, cultural and political boundaries (Xiao & Zhang, 2025). Feng et al. (2025) demonstrated that TikTok Refugees with high influence and low influence have polarized engagement on certain topics: those with high influence tend to have a targeted positive tone for lifestyle related topics but neutral and negative tone on political and ideological content, whereas those with low influence are more expressive on all topics with less strategic planning. From a technical point of view, rednote facilitates cultural exchange by offering flexibilities in handling multilingual activities, including interface selection from automatic detection of language preferences based on geographical location, IP address, and account settings, operational guideline in multiple languages, translational tool for content creation, AI tools and NLP processing for content moderation and recommendation. Yet, no studies have examined the affordances of these technical features on TikTok Refugees in their daily use of rednote. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to provide a holistic view of such digital-native migrations, especially how the flocks interact with new and old spaces before and after (de)formation of their diasporic identity, in other words, the intercultural transformation during the cross-cultural adaptation process.

In the US-China context, while China is a high context culture (compared to most Western countries as a low context culture, such as the US) that Chinese people are less direct than Americans in expressions (Chen, 2023), cross-cultural adaptation can be bridged by accommodation strategies via linguistic-centered and audiovisual contents. social media as

language learning and teaching environment (Barrot, 2022). For example, designed by completely by a Chinese team, *Black Myth: Wukong* rendered an environment that "abstract cultural elements are transformed into perceivable, operable digital entities through first person orientation" (Chuang, 2025). For non-resident immigrant in Macau (SAR) China, Ju and Sandel (2019) found that precarity, discrimination, and isolation can be alleviated by building social connections on WeChat, but also it accelerates anxiety for prolonged working hours to standby on WeChat, and this has cultivated struggling in mobility of such immigrants (Ju et al., 2022). Despite the valence of these outcomes, they indicate successful adaptation to host culture by accommodation strategies enabled by technologies to become similar and perceivable by host culture.

Nevertheless, the consequences of media use for diaspora groups should not be overlooked. For example, in the Rohingya diaspora case, Facebook does not only serve "as nodes of socialization and interaction" (Marino, 2015) that affords the Rohingya diaspora to make collective actions for identity construction and political resistance (Ansar & Maitra, 2024), reaching "digital togetherness", but it also contributes to the genocide of Rohingya group with hate speech, misinformation, military propaganda, and human right abuse (Whitten-Woodring et al., 2020; Shissler, 2025), which are consequences by ignorance of the role of service providers for such digital communication (Maulana & Julyazti, 2025).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The present research adopts a mixed-method approach to increase the credibility of this study by triangulation (Vogl et al., 2019). A pilot study by quantitative modelling demonstrates that TikTok Refugees, especially those who post relatively more frequently, also view more content on rednote; they keep their posts on rednote more up-to-date than TikTok. To further investigate what aspects of rednote has led to such preference on posting and viewing behaviors, Study 1 adopts a walkthrough method (Light et al, 2018) of rednote in combination with analytic autoethnography to dive into how the app is used from a technical perspective. Study 2 is a study combining content analysis, sentiment analysis, and digital ethnography to depict the interactions TikTok Refugees made with rednote and native rednote users. Specifically, Study 2a is a sentiment analysis on reviews left on Apple App Store and Google Play Store from one month before the first TikTok ban to one month after TikTok completed the ownership transfer (2024/12/19 to 2026/02/22, inclusive of the pre-ban to stabilization phase) to gauge emotions of TikTok Refugees about rednote; followed by a topic modelling, Study 2b further dives into topics discussed by these users. Lastly, Study 2c integrates participant observation and digital ethnography accompanied by asynchronous interview 14 TikTok Refugees who actively engage with the technical features and native rednote users under the influence of commercial interest in various technical environments, such as group chat and livestreaming.

A Pilot Study for Platform Preference Detection

A pilot test of TikTok Refugees who post on rednote (n = 60) is conducted in April 2025 to test if there is a preference for TikTok Refugees to use TikTok and rednote (d = 1.15). The

sample is randomly selected from the result using a search by the hashtag #tiktokrefugee and its meaningful variations (e.g., #TikTokRefugee, #Tiktokrefugee) on rednote, then these accounts are traced back on TikTok. Only those who have accounts on both rednote and TikTok are selected. The preference of using these platforms is operationalized by the date of latest post (α = 0.63): under the "permanently online, permanently connected" era, if a user favors one platform over another, this user is more inclined to constantly update their profiles and content on that platform to manage how they are perceived by others, which elevates the level of perceived authenticity (Kreling et al., 2022). In this study, for example, if a TikTok Refugee made a post on rednote at least 7 days later than that on TikTok, he or she is considered staying on rednote, otherwise left.

The pretest is performed in an OLS model in R Studio. It confirms that there is a discrepancy in date of post ($M = 53.6$, $p < 0.01$) between the two platforms: while 56 (93.3%) have different date of latest post with different content on rednote and TikTok, only 4 (6.7%) have consistent posts between TikTok and rednote, that they posted same content for their latest posts on the same day for both platforms. Specifically, 46 (76.7%) have their latest posts on TikTok, while only 14 (23.3%) have their latest post on rednote. This indicates that most TikTok Refugees may have already left rednote, where only 5 (8%) have their latest post on rednote that is at least 7 days later than TikTok ($M = 196.4$), in other words, stayed.

The sum of posts and accounts followed on rednote ($M = 124.7$, $t(58) = 3.33$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta 2 = 0.16$) is positively correlated to staying on rednote. Interestingly, the number of accounts followed ($M = 75.15$, $t(58) = 3.61$, $p < 0.01$) has a significant effect on the preference of rednote whereas the number of posts ($M = 49.5$, $t(58) = 0.97$, $p = 0.36$) does not. Because the number of accounts followed has a positive correlation to the likelihood of staying on rednote, this implies

that native rednote users and their content may be attractive for TikTok Refugees. However, a reverse relationship is tested and found for total engagements ($p < 0.01$), posting ($p = 0.33$), and following ($p < 0.01$), respectively. As longitudinal design can reduce the risk of reverse causality (Besser et al., 2021), although the reverse relationship is statistically significant, but the longitudinal and accumulative nature of engagements can rule out the reversal relationship between engagements and the post date, because such engagements inherently precede the date of latest post.

Study 1: A Walkthrough of Xiaohongshu with Analytic Autoethnography

Study 1 follows the analytical framework of the walkthrough method of apps as "a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences" (Light et al., 2018, p. 882). Because platforms do not stay static but update over time, the study of apps must also take the changes into consideration (Duguay & Gold-Apel, 2023). The walkthrough method offers a systematic approach for researchers to study mobile applications. Rather than simply using an app, this method positions the researcher as an investigator who critically interrogates the app's interface, features, and surrounding materials. According to Light et al. (2018), a walkthrough of apps includes two essential parts: environment of expected use and technical walkthrough. The environment of expected use investigates the app's purpose, target user base and scenarios of use (i.e., vision), business strategy and revenue streams (i.e., operating model), and how it regulates users to sustain such vision and operating model (i.e., governance) (p. 889-891). The technical walkthrough requires the researcher "assume a user's position while applying an analytical eye to the process of acquiring the app, registering, accessing features and functionalities and discontinuing use." (p. 891)

Environment of Expected Use

The most up-to-date Xiaohongshu official documents and external media reports are integrated as the basis for the study on environment of expected use. To be more specific, the official documents used in this study are Xiaohongshu Community Guidelines 2.0, Trending Topic Guidelines, Infringement and Complaint Guidelines, Xiaohongshu Terms of Service, and rednote Terms of Service.

Vision. The vision of an app is commonly communicated in organizational materials, clarifying "activities it is supposed to provide, support or enable", including but not limited to app store descriptions, website, company blogs, marketing materials, press releases and public statements from representatives of the organization that provides the app (Light et al., 2018, p. 889). Xiaohongshu was founded in June 2013 in Shanghai by Miranda Qu and Charlwin Mao (Xiaohongshu, n.d.), positioned as a sharing platform that served as a guide for elite females in metropolitan areas in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, on navigating luxury shopping overseas, affiliated with a Chinese legal entity, Xingin Information Technology (Shanghai) Co., Ltd. The name rednote is used as the official English name that appears in the Terms of Service. rednote is one of the English variations of the original Chinese name, Xiaohongshu, it has also been called Little Red Book by literal translation, or RED elsewhere (Ju, 2022; Fan, 2024; Jing, 2024).

However, this positioning strategy does not remain static after genesis: Xiaohongshu has made three strategic transformations, which can be interpreted from the changes in its slogans, for they can effectively construct corporate identity and inspire desired consumer responses (Strutton & Roswinanto, 2014; Anwar, 2015). These slogans together depict the changes in strategic vision of Xiaohongshu from material-centered towards social-oriented (Wu, 2021).

Specifically, the slogan of Xiaohongshu went through a series of updates: in phase 1, it changed from its initially proposed “Finding good stuff overseas” in 2014 to “Mark your beautiful things”, refined but still material-oriented (Wan, 2022); in phase 2, the slogan was stated as “Mark my life” (Liu et al., 2022), a less material-oriented but more social-oriented that implies live experiences, and refined as “Your lifestyle interest guide” in 2022; in phase 3, the slogan was explicitly stated as “Your life interest community” in 2025 (Wang, 2025), raising the voice to emphasize as an online community.

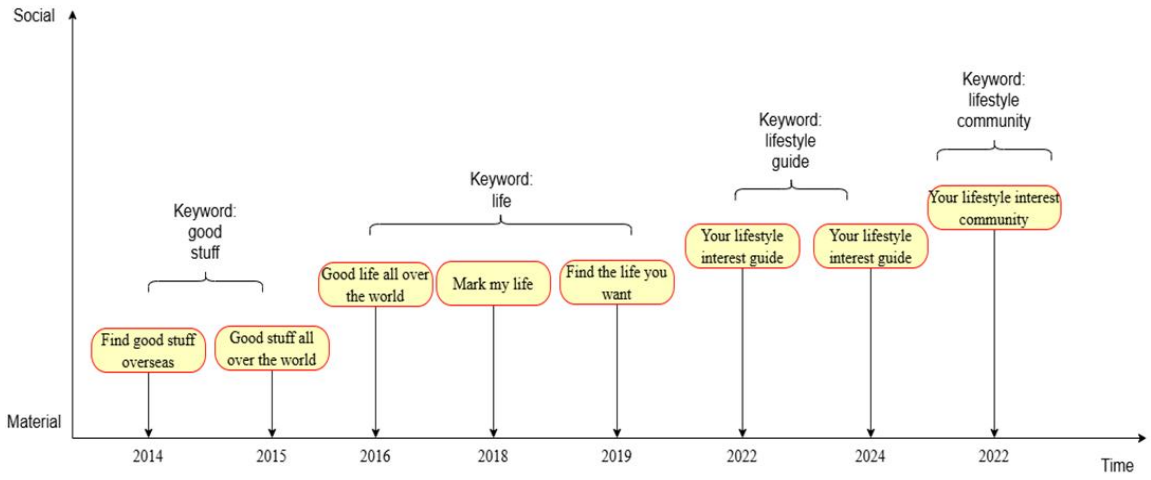


Figure 1: Changes of Xiaohongshu’s slogans over time

As an app that has its roots connected to China and overseas, it is not surprising that The Terms of Service is curated in both Chinese and English versions. However, the official name used deserves some attention. First, the official translation of Xiaohongshu is written as “rednote” on the Terms of Service, and this separates rednote from Xiaohongshu as two independent platforms of operations, conceptually and legally. To be more specific, Xiaohongshu Terms of Service and rednote Terms of Service are different legal documents that apply to inform different user groups: the rednote Terms of Service are not effective on those who created an account on Xiaohongshu Platform (1) before December 8, 2024, and (2) using a

phone number starting with the dialing code of +86, which is the area code for Chinese Mainland mobile number. That is to say, the rednote Terms of Service was purposefully developed for those non-Chinese users coming onto Xiaohongshu after December 8, 2024, not surprisingly, a large dominant group being TikTok Refugees.

Likewise, Xiaohongshu has different setups on Apple App Store for the Chinese and US market, even different display in the same store but with different default language on the underlying cell phone operating system. For example, when the operating system of the cell phone is set as Chinese, Xiaohongshu has 7 pictures to showcase what a user can expect inside the app on the Chinese Apple App Store (in the order of actual appearance): 1) discover diverse lifestyle interest (*发现多元兴趣生活*), 2) share your notes and showcase your passion (*笔记分享热爱高光*), 3) discover interest and aspirations through videos (*视频探索兴趣灵感*), 4) express your love with all your heart (*抒发表达热爱心声*), 5) tag every touching moment (*标记每个心动瞬间*), 6) chat to have fun together with people who share common interest (*聊天畅享同好乐趣*), and 7) cross unwanted item from past wish list (购物拔草心动好物), but there are only 6 pictures on the US storefront: 1) share your vibe, find your tribe; 2) discover ideas, inspire lives; 3) real reviews, real results, 4) connect passions, build connections; 5) tips that work, shared by real people; and 6) your stories, our community. One distinct difference is that the US version has no mentions of any commercial activities in the introductory pictures, whereas the Chinese version emphasized separately. Besides, the demonstration on the Chinese side is action-oriented that calls for actions using the features to satisfy a specific purpose, while the story on the US side delineates a collective sense that implies authentic peer sharing. Moreover, the US version of demonstration does not only adhere to English expressions phonetically, but the

aesthetical design is curated highly identical to popular social media platforms in the US, Tik Tok and Instagram.

When the default language is changed to English, the landing pages for the same storefront are still different: not only the name switched to rednote, but also 6 different images are posted to demonstrate what a user can do in the app, which are 1) explore the global village, 2) search for experiences & tips, 3) without language barrier, 4) make international friends, 5) get curious about their lives, and 6) here on rednote, share, connect, and love. Unlike any Chinese-based storefront that emphasize the functionalities of the app, the pure English-based storefront portrays the app as a conduit for socializing on an international scale with features that facilitate such process. These functionalities resonates with the functionalities listed on rednote Terms of Service: "rednote provides various functions or services through the Platform, including but not limited to content (User Content) distribution, goods and services transactions, live streaming, and other functions or services such as collection, comments, sharing, forwarding, search, and other platform activities, which depend on the actual services or functions provided by rednote.", which is the same as that introduced in Xiaohongshu Terms of Service word from word. Therefore, when speaking of functionality of Xiaohongshu and rednote, the two names can be used interchangeably, but Xiaohongshu is more suitable to be referred as the Chinese version, and rednote for the English version. And when discussing topics that involve different user groups, the name of each user group must be specified as they are subject to different platform regulations legally and conceptually. In this research, those who registered before December 8, 2024 are under the name of native rednote users to distinct from those who registered after that time, specifically, TikTok Refugees.

Operating Model. Since Xiaohongshu remains a private company, no mandatory disclosure of financial statements can be found on public sources, especially about its revenue streams. The analysis of its operating model is conducted based on third-party reports, Xiaohongshu's official guidelines (including those released during its offline events), and the researcher's exploration of its technical features where charges occur in the interface for product and services in-app.

It is essential to dissect how Xiaohongshu is structured and operated before diving into its revenue generation. On the one hand, in terms of platform structure and functionality, Xiaohongshu is a platform and multisided market that aggregates and coordinates direct interactions among multiple groups of users, including marketers and consumers, through content creators and content they created, which are affiliated with the platform (Evans, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006; Hagiu & Wright, 2015). On the other hand, Xiaohongshu is a business that has been through a series of fundraising activities and aims for profit maximization from operations and capital markets (Mao, 2024). With such multisided structure, Xiaohongshu adopts a freemium model, where it entices a large user base to use the service for free but only a small portion of users to pay a premium to unlock premium features for enhanced experience (Bullard, 2025). This model is prevalent for revenue generation of digital platforms through the accumulation of a large user base via network effects (Bourdreau et al., 2022). Thus, the free side and premium side must be closely examined to reveal how direct interactions of the two user groups generated revenue from inside and outside the platform. As content creation and e-commerce are the two pillars of Xiaohongshu, the freemium model is deployed on both. The next section will elaborate how the freemium model is applied on each segment, respectively.

The free side of content. In this case, the large user base for free service on Xiaohongshu are those who post and view content on Xiaohongshu. According to Xiaohongshu's 2024 Platform

Marketing Brief, as of February 2023, Xiaohongshu's Monthly Active User (MAU) reached 260 million, where over 80+ million were content creators that contribute to 90% of the user generated content (UGC). 50% of the user base is younger generation that were born after 1995. Female users account for 70% of the user base, and the number of male users surpasses the overall growth rate of the user base. Therefore, Xiaohongshu was again positioned as "the gathering place of diversified lifestyle, the encyclopedia for people cross generations", and its user base is described as "the users who welcome plantation" (*乐于被种草的用户*), where the plantation here is interpreted not as its literal meaning but idea plantation (*种草*). With 37 primary categories that covers over 200 secondary categories, Xiaohongshu's content are labeled as "professional, interesting, practical, and efficient" that serve as "the references for lifestyle decisions"; all content is unlimited to those Xiaohongshu or rednote users, which is a benefit for lurkers who are primarily seeking for information on this platform. Meanwhile, users are encouraged to create content and share on Xiaohongshu if it follows the community guidelines with no violations. The number of content creators has seen more than doubled from December 2022 to September 2023, and increasing.

The premium side of content. While Xiaohongshu imposes no initial costs for ordinary users to have their content created and posted, or those who simply consume content, value-added services do come with charges, and these charges are imposed when one or more monetization activities are in place by different user personas through multiple commercial products offered on the platform, including Fries (*shutiao, 薯条*), Dandelion (*pugongying, 蒲公英)*, and Spotlight (*juguang, 聚光*).

Language: English, Store: US

Language: Chinese, Store: US

Language: Chinese, Store: China

Figure 2: Demo pages of Xiaohongshu/rednote on regional Apple App Store

Fries, the official in-platform token, can be purchased to "heat up" performance of content by specified metrics, such as views of posts, likes and saves, number of private messages,

number of follower count, profile page views, or livestreaming attendance rate, only if they qualify as promotable content that are in compliance with the Community Guidelines. An estimated result of performance enhancement will occur upon purchase, and a guarantee will be provided on minimum increase in terms of the metrics, otherwise, those who purchased the Fries can receive a refund based on how much guaranteed performance is unachieved. Specifically, the refund formula is calculated as: refund = amount consumed – (realized performance × (total budget/guaranteed minimum incremental performance)); if any coupons are redeemed, the refund will be prorated based on the percentage of original total budget deducted. Fries can be purchased not only by the author of content to promote his or her own content based on his or her sole interest, but also, anyone who has incentives to see a surge on the metrics, mostly, followers, multichannel networks (MCN), and marketers. For example, followers may use Fries to support the content creators they follow by hitting the icon "heat up for him/her". In addition, MCNs and marketers, as commercial agents on the platform, are eager to see rising metrics that can lead to more business opportunities. Paradoxically, Fries can only be redeemed to boost the performance of non-commercial content. Should the content on the heat be ruled by Xiaohongshu that involves any direct commercial interest, the heat-up request will be deemed as disqualified for promotion with Fries, thus forfeited and directed to other commercial products depending on the nature of content and the persona of content creator, one if which is, Dandelion.

Dandelion is a built-in matchmaking orderbook system for content creators and marketers. Content creators on Xiaohongshu can provide a quote for various types of content to be customized (e.g., graphics and texts, videos, livestreaming etc.), and marketers can place an order on that. On the flip side, marketers can publish a campaign recruitment ad as a

crowdsourced order with specific instructions, such as descriptions of desired content, desired qualifications of content creators, and budget (See figure for an example of recruitment ad). For both processes, Xiaohongshu charges 10% as service fee for both sides. Marketers are charged upfront when they send sponsorship requests, whereas content creators are charged upon receiving the payments from the platform.

Commercial Products Offered for Content by Xiaohongshu				
Product	**Content Type**	**Commercial Interest**	**Buyers**	**Applicable Content**
Fries	UGC, no commercial interest	No to low	Content creators, followers, marketers	UGC
Dandelion	UGC, with commercial interest	High	Marketers	UGC
Spotlight	MGC, with commercial interest	High	Marketers	MGC (marketer-generated content)

Table 1. Commercial products offered for content by Xiaohongshu

For any content creator quote, a marketer can initiate a collaboration request on Dandelion by making a full payment of the asking price plus 10% platform service fee upfront, after which

the content creator can accept or reject the request within 72 hours; if rejected, a full refund will be processed within 1-2 working days. Once accepted, the content creator can submit a draft of desired content to the platform for a further review, and affiliate them with the order in returning communication in-app. The platform conducts a final review of the content afterwards for another business day. During final review, the submission will be considered unpublished, thus invisible for other users. Once it passes the review, the marketer must confirm the content to be posted within 72 hours; otherwise, it will be deemed as a voluntary confirmation automatically. After confirmation, the content is then officially published, and it cannot be deleted within 30 days of publication. Any edits by the creator will trigger a new review. The marketer must confirm the completion of contract after 7 days from the official publication of content, or it will be automatically completed by the system, and the contracted amount will be deposited to the content creator's account.

For a crowdsourced order, content creators are notified via a pushed in-app message as a System Message, and they can sign up clicking that message and redirected to signup page. Xiaohongshu makes recommendations of orders and sends notifications to content creators based on the information they filled out in their quotes. Content creators can indicate their interest in receiving sponsorship requests from their backend features by adding up to 5 tags that indicate their status in a family, occupational status, and lifestyle interest. After signing up, the marketer will receive information about the signups and conduct a further review to determine the finalists. A marketer usually recruits multiple content creators using Dandelion with an aim to achieve network effect.

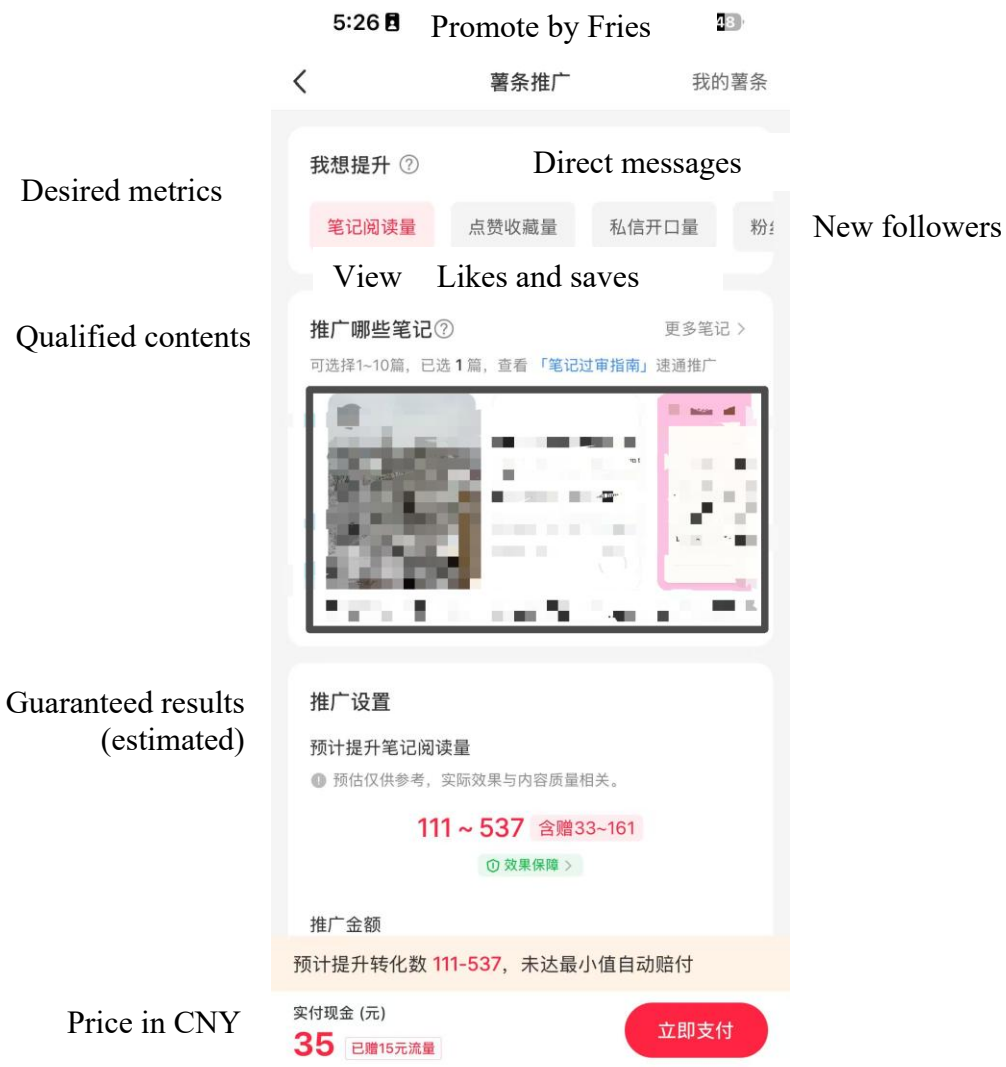


Figure 3: An example of performance optimization using Xiaohongshu Fries

As an advanced version of Dandelion, Spotlight is an enterprise-level paid advertising platform with built-in intelligence and analytical tools, designed exclusively for new brands to lower barriers to entry. One of the most highlighted features is the New Bud Boost (*新芽助推*) program, an invitation-only service for corporate clients with zero spending on Dandelion within the last 90 days or zero spending on Spotlight within the last 120 days. The service offers three compelling benefits. First, it provides high cost-effectiveness through platform-subsidized

traffic: when a content creator publishes a collaborative note, Xiaohongshu applies free organic traffic boosting, allowing brands to achieve initial traction without significant upfront ad spending. Second, it offers a one-stop, streamlined operation integrating Dandelion for content collaboration with Spotlight for paid advertising, eliminating the need for brands to manage campaigns in separate interfaces. Third, it enables batch production of content creation, brands can receive 15 to 80 pieces of user-generated content per campaign as a content matrix, solving the common dilemma of “chicken or eggs” problem that new brands start with limited budget, lack of creative advertising assets, and insufficient platform feedback for social proof.

However, New Bud Boost is subject to many restrictions. For example, priority is given exclusively to physical product sectors, such as food and beverage, beauty and personal care, apparel, maternal and child products, and small home appliances (e.g., a coffee brand or a sunscreen line). Virtual products like games or internet services, as well as high-risk categories such as medical devices, over-the-counter drugs, or health foods, are generally excluded unless they pass rigorous individual review. Before a campaign can begin, brands must deposit in both their Dandelion and Spotlight wallets to meet minimum balance requirements (e.g., 2,000 in CNY as security deposit, plus corresponding ad budget). They must also upload extensive industry-specific documentation: for example, a cosmetics brand must provide special use cosmetic permits for claims like "whitening" or "anti-hair loss," while a small appliance brand needs a 3C certification for warranty on safety.

Beyond qualification, New Bud Boost imposes rigid operational rules that demand careful commitment. Once a brand clicks "one-click promotion" on Spotlight to launch the automated intelligent ad campaign, the brand cannot pause, modify, or edit the campaign for any reason, including targeting labels and daily budget. Similarly, cancellation is prohibited once the content

creation phase begins; if a brand cancels after content creator selection but before content creation is submitted, it receives only a 75 percent refund on Dandelion, and shipped samples are voided. Finally, brands cannot opt out of the advertising component; if they fail to select enough notes for promotion, the system will automatically choose notes for them.

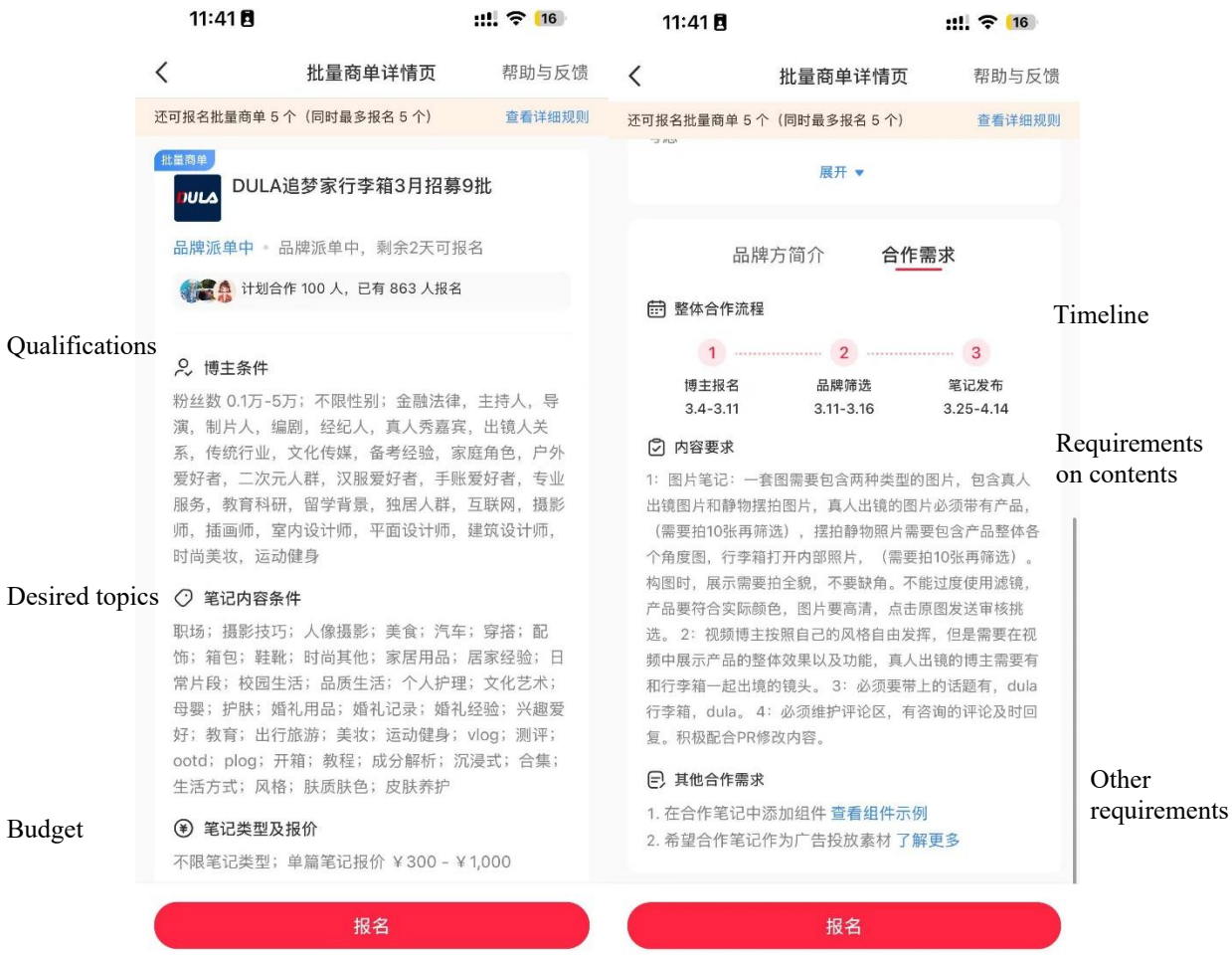


Figure 4: An example of marketer crowdsourcing order on Dandelion

The free side of e-commerce. Xiaohongshu enacts a low-threshold policy for those who can sell on the platform, even for a personal account if that account passes real-name authentication in the ID-based authentication system on Xiaohongshu. For individual sellers, they can choose from merchandising or affiliate marketing, where the former requires sellers to stock inventory,

the latter only needs to affiliate links of goods and services from other sellers in their content for viewers to click through. No matter what mode individual sellers choose, online store management tools are available, such as listing goods and services and payment processing. However, to qualify as an individual seller, an individual account must go through a verification process, where a security deposit is required. Since it is refundable if the account does not violate selling policies for individual sellers or have any outstanding orders with complaints, security deposit is not considered a fee, thus free. For non-individual sellers, they are determined as commercial accounts, and they are subject to a higher security deposit based on what they intend to sell. For example, an individual seller's security deposit ranges from 500 to 1000 in CNY, while it starts at 20k and goes up to 50k in CNY for commercial accounts; if the account is intended as a cross-border e-commerce store, the security deposit will be set in US dollars starting at 3500 in USD. In addition to third-party sellers, Xiaohongshu has in-house e-commerce stores that compete with third-party stores and profit from direct sales of goods.

The premium side of e-commerce. While an individual seller account does not incur a fee for verification, a mandatory fee of 600 in CNY is charged for verification of a commercial seller account regardless of successful verification or not. By paying this fee, a commercial seller account can be recognized as a privileged account with visual recognition on the account profile with blue icons, which is, according to Xiaohongshu, the Blue VIP account. Such verification endows these accounts with communicative privileges that are conducive to commercial interests, such as posting commercial content, sending unlimited direct messages to other users without restrictions, and using premium features of official marketing tools, such as business intelligence and customer relationship management (CRM) functions on Xiaohongshu's Thousand Canvas (*Qianfan*, *千帆*) and Rhino (*Lingxi*, *灵犀*), real-time bidding (RTB)

marketplace (Adikari & Dutta, 2015) where advanced features of paid advertising can be implemented to optimize performance indicators, such as click-through rates (CTRs), conversion rates (CR), return on investment (ROI), win rates, cost per mille (CPM), and effective cost per click (E-CPC) (Jha et al., 2024). Besides the revenue from advertising, Xiaohongshu charges 2% to 5% from gross merchandise volume (GMV, net of sales revenue minus returns outstanding) of non-livestreaming sales. For example, for those goods with higher sale price and profit margin, such as cosmetics, fashion, and furniture, Xiaohongshu charges 5%; for those with lower selling price and profit margin, such as accessories of electronics, the rate is as low as 2%. For sales from livestreaming, similar to non-livestreaming, Xiaohongshu imposes a "commission on commission", which is 10% to 20% from the commission earned by the livestreaming account, based on specific categories of goods sold in the livestreaming session and follower base of that livestreaming account. Although these charges are also under the name of service fees, like that for advertising, they are de facto commission payable to the platform.

Governance. Platform governance refers to the "rules, norms, and civic labor governing an online community" (Matias & Mou, 2018) that explain "how the app provider seeks to manage and regulate user activity to sustain their operating model and fulfil their vision" (Light et al., 2018, p. 890). Xiaohongshu's governance architecture is multi-layered, which integrates normative guidelines, technological detection, human moderation protocols, sanction mechanisms, and user participation frameworks. Specifically, Xiaohongshu deploys its governance through content moderation, algorithmic governance, and community co-governance. For Xiaohongshu, the governance rules are documented and elaborated through Terms of Service and Community Guidelines for both personal and commercial users.

Phase 1 Initiation	Phase 2 Platform Review	Phase 3 Officially Published	Phase 4 Completion
1.1 A **marketer** pays the full amount asked plus 10% service fee by the content creator to send a sponsor request	2.1 If accepted, the **content creator** should submit a draft of intended sponsored content to the platform for review	3.1 After confirmation of the **marketer**, it will be officially published. Before this step, the intended content remains unviewable for other users if not confirmed and officially published. It cannot be deleted for the first 30 days after publishing.	4.1 The **marketer** confirms completion of the sponsorship; the amount will be deposited to the content creator's account. If not confirmed 7 days after the sponsored content is officially published, it will be automatically confirmed.
1.2 The **content creator** makes a decision to accept or deny the request within 72 hours, or the amount paid will be refunded to the marketer.	2.2 It takes the **platform** 1 business day to conduct a content review, then an ad review afterwards. Each edit by the content creator will trigger a new review.		
	2.3 The marketer confirms completion within 72 hours, otherwise it will be automatically deemed satisfactory by then.		

Table 2. The process of content sponsorship for marketers

Terms of Service. As aforementioned, whether a user is subject to Xiaohongshu Terms of Service or rednote Terms of Service depends on the time of account registration and method of

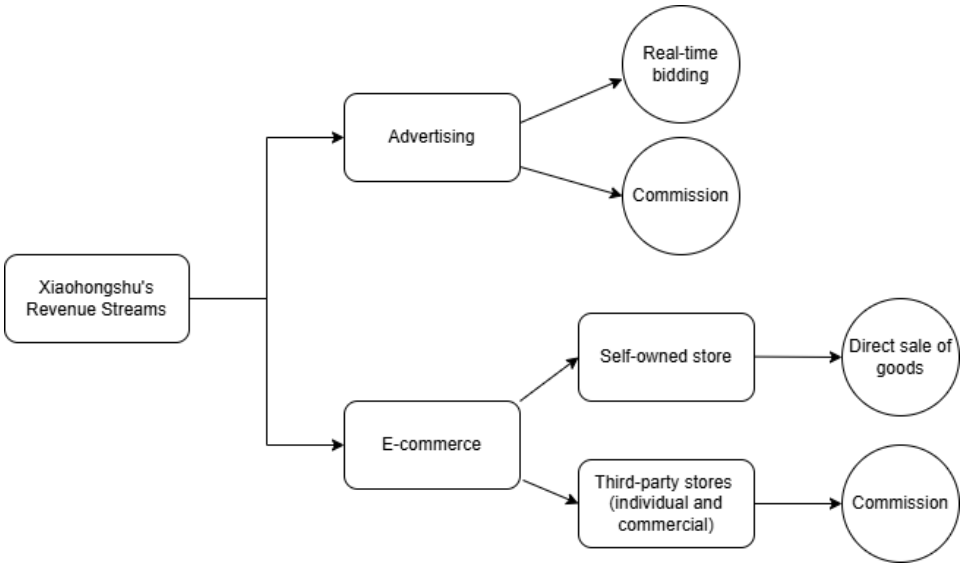


Figure 5. Xiaohongshu's revenue streams

verification for registration, specifically, if the account is registered (1) before December 8, 2024, and (2) using a phone number starting with the dialing code of +86, which specifies the number as Chinese Mainland mobile number. With a comparison of Xiaohongshu Terms of Service and rednote Terms of Service, a conclusion can be drawn that Xiaohongshu Terms of Service serves as an overarching guiding document that apply to Chinese and non-Chinese users registered before December 8, 2024, whereas rednote Terms of Service is tailored to a narrower user group who registered after December 8, 2024 with non-Chinese phone number under the judicial and legal framework in the US.

While the services provided are identical under the two names, rednote Terms of Service represents a US-Law-centered framework, while Xiaohongshu Terms of Service adopts a Chinese-centered framework that embrace Chinese socialism value system. For example, at the beginning of Xiaohongshu Terms of Service, it clearly states that anything that falls under the regulation of current Chinese law and regulations are also regulated on Xiaohongshu, such as "violating the basic principles established by the Constitution of the People's Republic of China,

inciting resistance or undermining the implementation of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and other laws and regulations" will be deemed as malicious information, while there is no mention of such information on rednote Terms of Service. This is consistent with previous literature that Xiaohongshu content creators claimed they are constantly facing censorship by algorithms on certain topics such as luxury trips, which is against the core value of the socialist baseline (Ju, 2022).

In addition, it is indicated on both rednote and Xiaohongshu Terms of Service that the platform has "the right to develop (the word "add" is used on Xiaohongshu Terms of Service), suspend, or otherwise alter (the word "adjust" is used on Xiaohongshu Terms of Service) the functions or services", such as content browsing, content publishing, conduct transactions of goods and services, share and forward content, participate in online and offline activities, and conduct live streaming. Simply put, any user activities within the platform are subject to the platform's scrutiny and censorship. The complication of different user groups under the same functional system yet subject to different value and regulatory frameworks, introduces another challenge: these names and terms are arbitrarily drafted by Xiaohongshu, so that if they are receiving the same service but different platform regulations, some of the users cannot avoid being systematically discriminated against. For example, some native rednote users expressed that it is "no longer our place" after Tik Tok Refugees arrived (Xiao & Zhang, 2025).

Community Guidelines 2.0 vs 1.0. The Xiaohongshu Community Guidelines was released in 2021, aiming to establish a comprehensive and hierarchical framework to maintain a platform that is "authentic, constructive, and diverse", implying a normative principles-based governance mechanism that is concerned with social justice (Gorwa, 2019, p. 865), and a new version was

released on January 19, 2026, a coincidence that it is one exact year after the first TikTok ban was enacted in the US.

The ground level for both versions is rules-based that is rooted in contemporary mainstream socialism values and strict adherence to legal standards, shaped by "the policy and regulatory constraints on the corporate entities which deploy these platforms" (Gorwa, 2019). The ground rules mandate that all content uphold socialist core values, respect public order and good customs, and rigorously prohibit any material that threatens national security, harms social stability, or promotes violence, terrorism, or extremism. To cement normative principles, special emphasis is placed on safeguarding minors and prohibiting all forms of illegal, fraudulent, and gambling-related activities. The platform strictly forbids the dissemination of obscene or vulgar content, as well as any commercial conduct that jeopardizes consumer rights, such as the sale of counterfeit goods, price fraud, and unauthorized promotional activities. Additionally, the guidelines prohibit a range of inappropriate behaviors, including defamation, the dissemination of pseudoscience, and glorification of dangerous acts, while also safeguarding intellectual property and personal privacy rights. To enforce these standards, Xiaohongshu employs both algorithmic monitoring followed by human review, with violations resulting in penalties that can range from content level (e.g., content removal and restricted visibility) to account level (e.g., the suspension or permanent banning of accounts).

While the two share similarities about the normative principles that govern users and the online community, nuanced updates are embedded in the new 2.0 version to amend the old. First, the 2.0 version explicitly added rules for commercial conduct instead of separating it as an independent Commercial Activity Guidelines in the 1.0 version. For example, the two themes for the 1.0 version are sharing (*分享*) and interacting (*互动*), while the three main themes in the 2.0

version are sincere sharing (*真诚分享*), friendly interacting (*友好互动*), and orderly marketing (*有序经营*). Second, the 2.0 version adopts a more uncompromising tone compared to an imploring tone in the 1.0 version. For instance, “please do not” appears over 50% in the 2.0 version compared to that less than 30% in the 1.0 version. Third, vague terms in the 1.0 version are specified in the 2.0 version. For instance, there is one clause in the old version that implores users with “please try your best to avoid overly modification, especially on those notes about cosmetics, dressing style, or store visits, which are domains that can be considered as potential suggestions for others.”; in the new version, such “overly modification” is specified as “forged persona that fake personal wealth, education, income, and dating experience”, and “click-baits that uses exaggeration or novelty-hunting”, and “impersonating”. Similarly, technical interventions to cheat the systems are mentioned in both versions: both versions strictly forbid the use of third-party software to bulk-register accounts and manipulate interaction metrics, but the new version is updated to stay up-to-date with the diffusion of newer technologies at the time, namely, AI, that all AI-assisted content must be voluntarily disclosed by the content creator. These AI-generated content are labeled as “containing AI” to inform users, thus to “create a trusted environment for sharing” and “receive authentic replies.”

Algorithmic content Moderation. Xiaohongshu claims that the content governance algorithm operates by dynamically aggregating trending topics that reflect authentic life experiences and emerging lifestyle trends. Such governance is operated with the help of an automated system of censorship and ranking. For censorship, all content must first go through a layered screening system to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial content, as explained in the new Community Guidelines, provided that some personal content may be “soft ads” to mislead consumers. Therefore, commercial content is more heavily regulated on

Xiaohongshu with an overarching rule that everything commercial must remain on the platform. This is enforced by controlling communication and transaction processes, explained as means to protect consumers. Specifically, Xiaohongshu strictly enforces two types of communitive activities, The first being directing on-platform conversations to off-platform by sending contacts of other communicative media via instant messaging system on Xiaohongshu, for example, including WeChat account number or cell phone number during an instant chatting session on Xiaohongshu as texts. Such messages will not only be censored in the conversation, but also the account sending such information will be labeled for violating the Community Guidelines, which is subject to various levels of penalties that restrict functionality of the account usage. Moreover, direct communication without consent of users on the other side is prohibited, for example, using "@" in postings and comments to nudge users or cold messaging with commercial intention but without permission of users will be deemed as violations. Furthermore, subsequent transactions must be completed using the merchant tools provided by the platform to receive payment.

The two streams of commercial and non-commercial content do not converge but enter two different pools for further censorship. The non-commercial ranking mechanism is based on real-time analysis of user search behavior, content interactions, and click-through rates across the platform. The ranking mechanism employs a proprietary formula that weighs search popularity, content dissemination metrics, user engagement indicators (including reposts, likes, comments, and collects), and click-through rates on the trending list interface itself. Although each element factoring in the formula is explained, the weight of each element is undisclosed. The system updates rankings minute by minute to capture evolving trends, explicitly operates without commercial advertising influence or paid placement, and may display personalized variations due to functional testing and real-time computational differences, thereby establishing an

automated governance framework that prioritizes organic user behavior in content recommendation and community trend identification. But for commercial contents, they will be subject to stricter rules for censorship, not only on the compliance requirements for underlying legal business entity, such as legal registration paperwork and other relevant licenses, but also the legitimacy of content that it is not mis/disinformation and not infringing the rights of others.

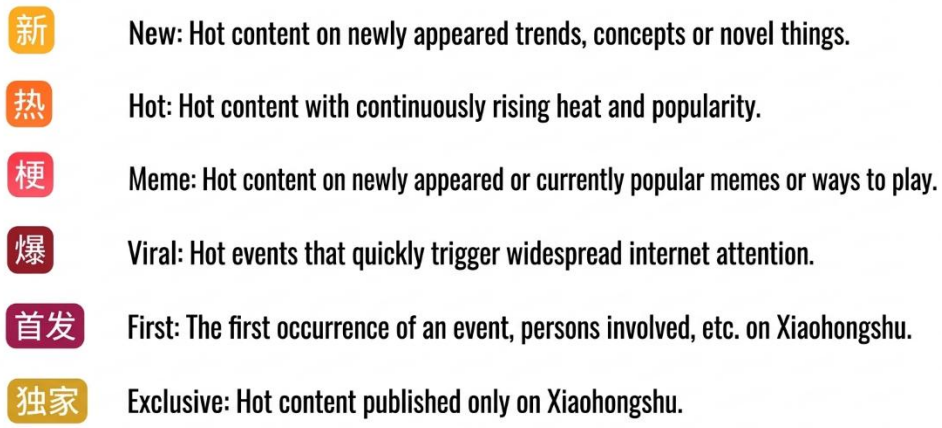


Figure 6. Algorithmic labels for non-commercial content on Xiaohongshu

Human intervention of governance. While algorithms can automate the governance of Xiaohongshu, human interventions are inseparable as a supplement, especially on cultivating content creation and enforcing violations. Human interventions are visible in two forms of appearance on the platform: the frontend and backend. Specifically, the front end is material and anthropomorphic official accounts that have direct communication with end users on the platform, while the backend remains invisible most time unless purposefully reached via internal communication venues, such as reporting violations or filing complaints.

Xiaohongshu owned over 70 official accounts with anthropomorphic cartoon characters, whose names all phonetically and semantically end with “Shu” (*薯*, meaning sweet potato in Chinese), a name commonly used as an appellation to indicate the identity being community

members of Xiaohongshu, but behind the scene are role-playing human, the Xiaohongshu official employees. These accounts provide official assistance and answers to users, mostly serving two types of functions, making official announcements, and providing guidance for commercial and non-commercial operations. As the nature of these accounts serve commercial purpose on behalf of Xiaohongshu per se, they are registered as commercial accounts under Xiaohongshu's legal entity, which are marked with "Blue VIP" icon on the profile page. For instance, the Encyclopedia Shu (*规则百科薯*) post updates and interpretations about official rules of Xiaohongshu, and the Sports Shu (*运动薯*) post contents related to trending topics and relevant events in sports. On top of this ordinary communication venue being content creators, messages from these accounts can be sent through the backend, appearing in the "ongoing conversation" section in the interface as "system messages". Other than the explicit Shu accounts, some Xiaohongshu official operators remain invisible for the most time processing customer service requests and conduct further review and appeal of censored content labeled by the algorithms, unless further human interventions are needed to complete certain platform tasks. For instance, Xiaohongshu's official operators only reveal themselves when users demand to talk to official representative regarding unsettled reporting of violations of complaints, or to provide orientation or monitor performance of content creators after they sign up for official campaigns.

Technical Walkthrough with Analytic Autoethnography

Technical walkthrough is the central data-gathering procedure for the walkthrough method, following a science and technology studies (STS) approach to interrogate key actors in the technical structure and a cultural approach to recognize discursive and symbolic representations (Light et al., p. 884). Researchers commonly register a dummy account to assume a user position and use it as a portal to glimpse into everyday use of an app. For instance,

as an investigation of the recovery identities of the orthorexia communities on Instagram, Arguedas (2022) adopted an approach of digital ethnography, registered a new Instagram account to follow these users, searched relevant contents and tapped icons on the interface to interact with the contents, participated in daily conversation in the virtual community, which led to virtual interviews with specific community members. However, what a user can see, or experience largely depends on how he or she is portrayed in the eyes of the algorithms, a clean dummy account with few data inputs may not reveal the actual day-to-day usage of apps (Duguay & Gold-Apel, 2023). Therefore, scholars have called for greater attention to the research persona and account configuration when conducting a walkthrough (Dieter et al., 2019; Weltevrede & Jansen, 2019). Therefore, the technical walkthrough in this study integrates analytic autoethnography to reveal how the researcher, being an insider member of rednote users, interacts with other informants on rednote, including non-human agencies, with a goal for theorization (Anderson, 2006). Autoethnography is particularly suitable for social media user research. For example, You (2023) shed lights on her personal experience to illustrate how being a Chinese woman makes it different in the usage of internet buzzwords from that of men in Chinese and Western contexts. Because the researcher's diverse positionality is highly relevant to the context of this research, analytic autoethnography is a suitable method to supplement the technical walkthrough to enhance credibility and foster reflexivity (Uotinen, 2010; Wilson et al., 2023; Goundar, 2025).

Statement of Positionality

I identify as an Asian male with Chinese nationality. I received my higher education in the US, including a bachelor's, master's, and PhD's degree, adding up to a total of 8 years physical living experience in the US. I am professionally identified as a PhD candidate in Communication

and Media Studies at University of Oregon, a public R1 university in the US. I am fluent in both Chinese and English. I started using Xiaohongshu in February 2023, not long after I received offers for my PhD application and decided to accept one of them. I was 32 years old at the time, and I worked in the cryptocurrency industry for 5 years before I applied for PhD programs. I was on Xiaohongshu with an aim to help Chinese prospective PhD applicants who have worked in the industry and considered a career switch to academia by sharing my own experience during my own application process. The group hesitated because they are over 30, which faces discrimination by the social clock, just like me. Knowing that providing consultations to prospective international students from China has been a mature business in China and concerned with the fact that the stipend and scholarship offered by my prospect program may not be sufficient to cover my living expense, I started posting relevant information with vague commercial interest but without a concrete plan for monetization. I have posted relevant content about higher education, life in the US, and other personal life on Xiaohongshu since registration, I have accumulated around 3100 followers and 54.4k likes and saves as of this writing. During my time on rednote, I participated in official campaigns and completed commercial transactions on and off the platform. I was residing in the US during the pre-ban phase, and I posted notes on rednote about TikTok Refugees.

Registry and Entry. Xiaohongshu/rednote can be downloaded from most app stores, including dominating global app stores, Apple App Store or Google Play, and Chinese regional third-party app stores, such as Yingyongbao (*应用宝*, app store by software company Tencent), Xiaomi or Huawei App Market (*小米应用市场, 华为应用市场*, app stores by cell phone manufacturers). To register for an account, one could use three portals for authentication: 1) cell phone number, 2) dominant software account, and 3) account provided by cell phone

manufacturer. Such registration venues integrate “what the user has” and “what the user is” (Albesher et al., 2024) to ensure effective registration from two perspectives: widest coverage of dominant software and hardware providers and real-name authentication for security and compliance purposes. First, a cell phone number is an efficient way and a convenient detour to validate one’s legal identity since one would be required to provide legal identification upon purchase or activation of telecommunications. Second, dominant software accounts include both mainstream Western and Chinese communication software, for example, Facebook and Google in the US, and WeChat and Tencent QQ in China. Since the Chinese internet regulations are strict about real-name verification for online activities, WeChat and Tencent QQ already require users to validate personal identification for daily use. Meanwhile, the two software also provide Application Programming Interface (API) for external validation of personal identification through them. Third, rednote allows users to register with an account provided by mainstream cell phone manufacturers in the US and China, such as Apple ID and Huawei ID. For Android phones, an account can be registered with a Google account, since Google is also the parent company of Android.

Everyday Use. ***Loading.*** When opening rednote, the loading page is a rednote logo with its most recent slogan embedded in a plain white canvas, but sometimes it shows a full screen ad with a small skip option on the top right corner that counts down 5 seconds for automatic skip. For this type of ad, while a small skip option is provided on the top-right corner and a call-to-action button is embedded conspicuously on the image, they are curated to increase the probability of slipping in. For example, most such ads are equipped with a wide white high-contrast arrow flowing upward as a trigger that requires a swipe-up to activate the ad to the landing page, it does not appear to be a coincidence that this swipe-up design is not only the

most frequently used gesture in any of the tabs inside rednote, but also the most frequently used gesture in other competitor apps, such as scrolling in TikTok. Such design may accidentally lead to an inertia to slide into the ad, falsely contributing to the metric "click through rate" (CTR). A user may choose to exit the ad immediately, but the CTR stays through and will be recorded "on the book". The ad may not just show up once rednote is opened from scratch, it is displayed every one hour regardless of rednote is opened from scratch without previous sessions or resumed from previous session after an hour.

Landing Page. After the giant ad, the first landing page of rednote is the "Explore" page, which is embedded as a tab that sits between the "Following" and "Nearby" tab on the top of the screen. Like the "For You" page on TikTok, this page is the main place for users to discover interested content by recommendation and scrolling, determined by rednote algorithms based on user's engagements with various contents, or the preselected interests upon registration. While the "Following" page reflects recent updates of other accounts followed by a user, the "Nearby" page utilizes location-based-service (LBS) to recommend contents posted by distance to the device. Such combination of recommendation mechanisms knits an invisible net that covers potential points of interest, virtual and physical, through online and offline networks.

Home Page. At the bottom of the screen are the four main sections of rednote: Home, Market, Messages, and Me, each comes with an icon and texts wrapped underneath; the layout of English version is identical to most western social media apps, but the Chinese version of interface comes with only texts. At default, the Home page is the first landing page and the host page for Explore; the Following page and Nearby page can be switched within the Home page by taps. As discussed above, most content, which is named a *note* by rednote, are displayed on the Home page. Unlike TikTok that is "one content per page", the "Explore" page holds two

columns that can fill 4 whole posts per page in an asymmetric manner, and 20 posts per scroll without triggering a refresh that leads to discovery of new content; continuous scrolls will trigger unceasing refreshes with unlimited new content to be shown in the screen. There are two modalities of notes: image with texts, and videos. Recall that Xiaohongshu debuted with pdf-like shopping tips, images with texts are the mainstream content and a tradition, reflected in the design of interaction buttons when clicking through. As a tradition, these buttons of interactions, such as like, save, and comment, are horizontally embroidered at the bottom of the screen. When short-formed video became prevalent, represented by TikTok, Xiaohongshu added video as a form of its notes to "keep up with the Jones", but the layout of these buttons remained where they are for a long time. However, during an update in December 2024, the interaction buttons are quietly repositioned to the right edge of the screen, lined vertically with two new buttons added, the bravo button and forward button, without any official announcements to users (Xiaoxiang Morning News, 2025). Initially, users can only resume old interface by submitting a request via customer service, but this later changed into an add-on setting under the Settings menu, a switch for new interface to be enabled or disabled.

Market Page. The name of this placeholder has changed over time, specifically from "Trending" (*热门*) to "Store" (*商城*), and then to "Market" (*市集*), a transformation from content-driven to merchandise-driven. Although "Store" and "Market" provides the same functionality that users can buy from e-commerce stores on rednote, the latter is named intentionally to communicate a higher level of community sense that as if users hang out in a free-range market by organized by users than the feeling of a cold-hearted, commercially-organized, centralized place. Whenever the Market is clicked through, a coupon of around 20% off would always pop up under the name of appreciation for new or returned customers. But

many users have stated that even after discount, goods purchased via rednote are still more expensive than the same goods by multihoming merchants on other e-commerce platforms (Jingxuan Pro, 2024). Although rednote invested more effort in weakening the sense of commercialization, users can still tell that the platform is filled with soft advertising (Liu, 2025).

Message Page. Three icons with texts wrapped underneath them are most conspicuous on the page: a red heart in a pink square-shaped box that indicates the number of "Likes & Saves", a blue person-shaped icon in a pale blue square-shaped box that signifies the number of "New followers", and a green dialogue-shaped icon in a pale green square-shaped box that notifies how many new "Comments & @" are received. Any new interactions will be presented with a number in a small circle filled in red and appear on the top right corner of respective icons, 99 at maximum. Meanwhile, the system will push a notification to the phone in the main screen if new interactions are received; this notification can be turned off by not granting rednote with this access in the system menu of cellphone. When clicking through the icons, users who made corresponding interactions in the past will be listed by their platform nickname by date.

At the top right corner of this page features two icons: an icon of a magnifying glass, the search portal for people and dialogues, and a plus sign icon, the portal to "Add Friends", "Create Group", enter "Group Square", or "Scan" a QR code. The search function operates in the form of a search bar when entered, where the dialogues or users can be searched by the name of the dialogue or simply the nickname or platform ID of users. Recent search history is displayed unless the user chooses to manually delete all of it by clicking the trashcan icon under the search bar. To create a group chat, a group name (24 characters limit) and a group description (100 characters limit) are mandatory; it is optional to include the type of this group (to be selected

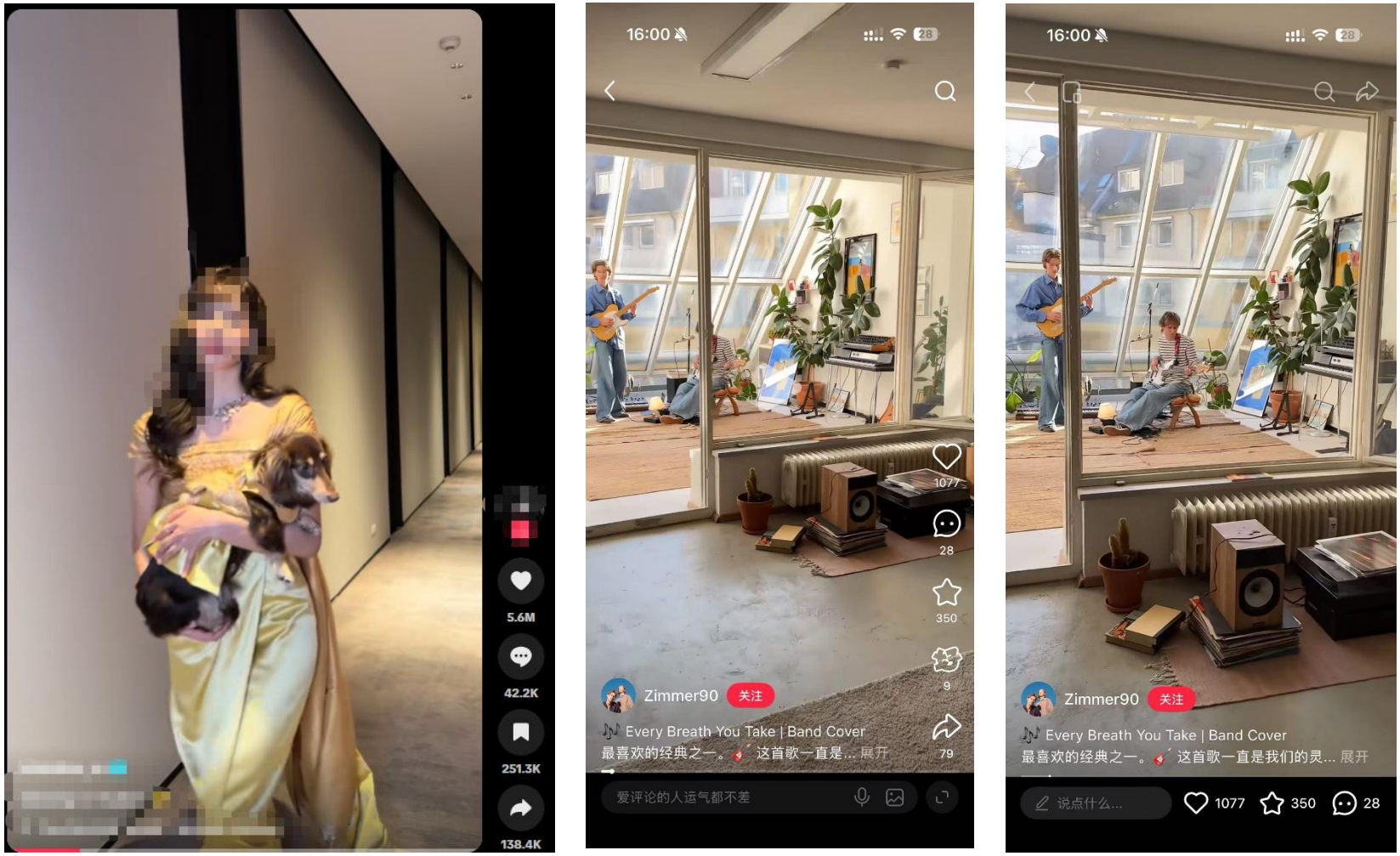


Figure 7. Comparison of interface (left to right: TikTok, rednote new, rednote old)

from a list of topics of interest), physical location of this group (to be selected a list of locations generated from LBS), group entry threshold (entry requirement and group verification method), and if there is a preference to affiliate this group chat and make it visible to the creator's profile page. The group chat and Group Square are signature features of rednote as they correspond to the emphasis of rednote being a community-driven platform. For example, followership or spendings can be set as group entry threshold to filter out users with higher or lower engagement, and the group chat creator can choose to approve the request to join or not. Each group chat can host up to 500 users. For Group Square, it is an aggregation of group chats from a wide range of topics of interest, such as job hunting, anime, gaming, and hobbies. One can voluntarily join any group chats on Group Square if the group entry threshold is met.

For the Add Friends function, friends can be added by scanning QR codes, contacts from phone contact, or by sharing the personal QR code generated by rednote to WeChat and QQ; access to such data must be granted by the user before these actions. A small exclamation mark is followed by the text "Add friends", which leads to a pop-up window of explanation when clicked on, clarifying that the user is consent about potential exposure of personal contacts, interactions with others, and following relationships to be used as input for recommendation of friends, which can be disabled by local privacy settings from the phone. Also, the user can access advanced in-app privacy settings by tapping the gear icon on the Add Friends page. Advanced privacy settings aim at nothing but one central theme of visibility, which is adjustable by interactions, contacts, permissions, and personalization. For interactions, one can choose to intercept notifications by followership or contact, for example, to receive notifications of mentions or direct message only from "people I know" or "people I follow", or a complete private mode that all direct messages, comments, and shares will be blocked from "people you

don’t know” by enabling the protection mode. Moreover, one can decide if this account may be recommended to or listed on the contact of “people I may know”, and if the notes may be recommended to be listed on the “Nearby” page or appear as a result to “Search by image”. Privacy settings can be not only deployed in such inward communication, but also outward communication, including authorizations for content to be downloaded by others, showing footprints of view and save history to others, as well as the follower and following list. Privacy settings together moderate the visibility of account activities according to the preference of the account owner. Similarly, it is subject to the sole discretion of account owner to give permission to the system for accessing contacts, location, camera, photos, microphone, and clipboard; such permission must be granted by manual consent in system settings of the cellphone. In addition, rednote, as an advertising-driven commercialized platform, asks users about programmatic ad recommendations: if this function is enabled, a user will “no longer receive these types of ads and the ads…will be less relevant”. However, the total number of ads to be received will not change. Unfortunately, the “learn more” icon followed by this is a nothing but a useless decoy that does not lead to further pages or explanations.

In general, this page holds all on-platform communication, including direct messages from other users, group chat messages, system messages, customer support messages from merchants and event notifications. For cold direct message from individuals, a user can only send one text message and affiliate one note with it to another user if no followership is present or the followership and communication is unilateral; this message will appear in a special dialogue as “Message Requests” among the list of all dialogues on the page. This dialogue will feature no headshot of both users but a red message icon as a general symbol to denote a conversation with someone, a design to create a stranger vibe that is frequently used to initiate a conversation

between strangers. For example, if a user has further inquiries about a note he or she viewed, this user can send his or her questions along with the corresponding note as a reference to the one who posts the content. Until the content creator replies, the user cannot send a second message within 24 hours, except for that if the sender is a verified commercial account. Such rules do not apply to group chat messages. One thing that pertains to any forms of on-platform chat is that, any messages that contain any forms of off-platform contact will be censored, such as WeChat account and cellphone number, commonly labeled as "directing rednote traffic to outbound resources"; such rules do not apply on verified commercial accounts either, but still effective on personal verified account (i.e., Pro account).

System messages are not only generated by the system but also considered as "dialogue with the platform", because it both answers to certain on-platform user actions and delivers messages that represent the platform, such as complaint feedback, e-commerce order processing information (e.g., logistics and payment processing), invitation to content collaboration, and periodical evaluation of account commercial settings. Invitation to content collaboration can further be categorized into platform-initiated or marketer-initiated via Dandelion. Besides desired content type for collaboration, platform-initiated invitations explicitly clarify that the reward is in the form of platform traffic, but marketer-initiated invitations specify the amount and type of reward in monetary sense.

Me Page. The me page serves as a portal to perform three main functions: editing personal profile to be displayed to other users, managing past content creation and content consumption, and modifying personal in-app settings. Besides basic demographic information, such as age, zodiac, occupation, education, the personal profile page takes the first half of the screen at static display, which consists of one background image and one headshot that can be uploaded to the

choice of the user, a personal description that can include emojis and texts up to 100 characters, a platform nickname within 2 to 24 characters that only allows 4 edits per 30 days. Modifications on such information can be made by tapping the "editing profile" tab. Next to the "editing profile" button is a scan icon and an arrow icon that forwards the profile page to other sources, including on-platform users or off-platform sources such as WeChat, QQ, Qzone, or Weibo. Ironically, although WeChat has been embedded in both account creation process and "Add Friends" function, it is not allowed to include WeChat or QQ account in the personal description section, otherwise it is deemed invalid input for violating the platform rules. However, email address can be left for contact purpose in the description section. Moreover, handles of western social media, such as TikTok and Instagram, are not illegitimate to be included in the description section either. The other half of the page displays personal creation and collections of content. Users can create folders as albums to categorize and archive notes that are created and saved in the past, so that whenever a new content is created or a new content is viewed and saved, an album can be manually chosen to store them right before the "post" or "save" button is tapped. Besides management tools for content, tools for commercial management are also horizontally displayed as tabs below the personal profile page, such as online store management, shelf management, buyer collaboration management (i.e., affiliate marketing), content collaboration management, group chats, wallet, and personal sale. Likewise, these footprints can be set to private or public.

The general settings are hidden in the sidebar menu, which can be triggered by tapping the icon with three dashes on the top left corner. Most functions in this menu are personal-related, such as content creation and consumption, and e-commerce consumption. The tabs are vertically displayed in the sidebar menu for the purpose of aesthetical design, but only three icons are

horizontally aligned to be distinct at the very bottom of the menu, namely, “Scan”, “Help center”, and “Settings”. In the first half of the sidebar menu lists the portals for the Content Creator Center and Pro Account Center, followed by a small panel that briefly displays metrics of the most recent interactions, including views, engagements, and the number of new followers. Beneath the panel, footprints of content creation and consumption can again be accessed via Drafts, History, and Downloads tabs, followed by tabs related to platform e-commerce, specifically, Orders, Cart, and Wallet. At the bottom of the sidebar menu before the “Community Guidelines” tab, two tabs are abrupt, namely “Applets” and “Hey” because it does not relate to any personal settings, nor does it connect to any platform-wide functionality such as the Community Guidelines. However, these two features are identical to functions from other platforms, for instance, the “Applets” are identical to the mini-programs on WeChat (Lu & Qu, 2024) that function as merchant-specific on-platform tools that do not demand a hard download from any app stores but simply load on-platform, and the contents on Hey page largely resembles the Reels on Instagram as the same functionality of “Capturing daily moments”.

The three icons at the bottom of the sidebar menu have more conspicuous appearance than the vertically aligned ones, highlighting the significance of these functions. While the “Scan” function is the same as that next to the “editing profile” button and in the “Add Friends” function, the repeated appearance reflects the importance of QR code being a crucial agency in mediating social connections and navigating platform features. On the contrary, the “Help center” and “Settings” are only available through this portal in the sidebar menu with least user operations. The “Help center” is a two-layered design that integrates automated agents first and human agents second (Gelbrich et al., 2026). The landing page of the “Help center” is a mix of self-service tool and frequently asked questions, which reflects the platform’s expectations for

users to solve simple issues by "do it yourself" looking up in the given corpus of "Guess what you want to ask", such as making appeals, filing complaints, configuring account issues, and resolving e-commerce-related issues. At the bottom of this page displays two tabs of "feedback" and "official support", however, these are still non-instant and request-based service that requires users to fill out a form with corresponding topics; users are expected to submit it to the platform and wait for response. The platform does not provide explanations about how long it would take to receive feedback.

Settings Menu. All in-app settings can be modified through here, including account security, content preferences, notifications, language and translation, privacy, storage, delivery addresses, widgets, and minor mode. Notably, "Help center" appears again here. Another new feature in this "Settings" menu is "Try new features", where users can sign up for new features not officially launched (i.e., a Beta test); once approved by the platform, new features will be added to existing version without any official notice. The account security integrates venues across various popular Chinese social media, such as WeChat, Weibo, QQ, and third-party authentication, such as Apple ID and cell phone number. As an alternative, users can set up a password for rednote account login without accessing other authentication venues. For "Content Preferences" and "General" settings, they can be highly customized to satisfy various conditions of users, such as network environment and content allocation rules. For example, users can select if livestreaming sessions should be automatically loaded based on the network environment under WiFi or cellular connections, because telecom data plan of users can vary, and sometimes they can be expensive; the same rationale applies on HDR videos and images. However, auto-refresh is enabled as default so that content will automatically update unless it is manually disabled. This reflects a contradictory philosophy of the platform: the seemingly user-centered

settings aims to provide flexibility based on the data plan users are on, whereas the auto-update button is set on as default, which may consume more data silently when users are unconscious, but the platform set it this way simply to incentivize more content consumption based on platform interest. A similar example is content preferences, that users can select labels of interest for content recommendations in the settings, but the recommended contents contain a large portion of content under an unspecified label of "other" that outweighs intentionally selected topics. Rednote offers its interface in multiple languages, including Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), English, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, French, and Russian. The list of languages is not sorted in alphabetical order; therefore, the order of these languages may imply main expected regional user groups by priority of service. The translation feature is added in a recent update that when is unknown; when enabled, the interface and content will be automatically translated into English. This feature is only applicable to English, but not other languages. Accordingly, if the language is set to English, content in English will be recommended more often than those made in other languages.

Content Creation. The plus sign in a filled red box is the most prominent on the main screen, lying in the middle of the four main icons at the bottom, which is the main portal to initiate content creation. New content can be created from three sources: existing content from phone album, new shootings by camera, or writing texts. After the source is determined, it proceeds to the next page for further editing, including basic modifications, such as color and brightness adjustments, and advanced features such as cropping and adding templates, filters, and music. All in-app editing functions are complementary without any charges. The modalities of new content creation can be images with texts, pure texts, or livestreaming sessions. For images, after images are inserted from a chosen source, users can write texts up to 1000

characters in the body to accompany the images as a note, including hashtags. For text-only notes, users can first compose the texts, and the system will automatically generate a sticky-note style cover page for this note using the texts as input. Users can also initiate livestreaming sessions from this portal if the minimum number of followers (i.e., 1000 followers) for livestreaming is met and the livestreamer complies with relevant platform policies, such as real name authentication. A livestreaming session can choose from options ranging from a voice-only panel discussion chatrooms that host up to nine participants on the panel including the moderator, a regular livestreaming session that has live videos and sound, or a gaming livestreaming session where a gamer can project the game synchronously to the session.

Suspension and Leaving. Users can leave rednote with a soft or hard intention. The soft intention implies an incomplete and vague will of isolation with the app, which does not involve many intentional human interventions to leave, and the personalization of settings can be retrieved if resumed. While users can leave the app by not actively participating in the app, such as losing interest or distracted by something else, some may have done so in a more active way, such as deleting the app. For example, some delete the app from the phone if somehow irritated by the app or content, some others delete the app or put restrictions on the use of app, a corrective response out of self-discipline to remain conscious about overuse of the app. But once resumed, the account remains the same setting as it once was. On the contrary, a hard intention of leaving the app demands deliberation that it must go through a series of procedures that mandate repeated human confirmation, and the personalized settings cannot be retrieved if resumed or the app is reinstalled. In addition, it is the platform's interest to retain users from abstaining from the app. Specifically, the "delete account" option is not placed in any main menus, and it is nearly invisible in daily use since it can only be accessed through the a path of

four steps via multiple taps: Me > Settings (sidebar menu) > Account Safety > Delete Account. Moreover, the system would ask for three more actions in order to complete the process: 1) another real-name verification by manually typing in the last four digits of the legal ID on record, 2) tap to checkmark a round box at the bottom to agree on two agreements of real-name verification, and 3) tap the blue-filled square box to agree the terms and conditions for the verification request to proceed, a procedure as if it were asking that "Are you sure to leave?" multiple times. Such settings separate soft and hard intention for leaving by providing more time for deliberation and higher barriers to those who are impulsive about leaving, but also as means to reassure that leaving is a deliberated decision for those who have no intention of returning.

Suspension of accounts on rednote is enforced following the Community Guidelines and Terms of Use. The enforcement is implemented in a hierarchical manner so that suspension is an accumulated penalty. To be more specific, the decision to suspension of an account depends on the frequency and severeness of violations of the Community Guidelines and Terms of Service. For instance, an account can be suspended for severe violation of Terms of Use, such as posting against mainstream socialism value or defame Chinese government officials, or a "misdemeanor" for posting unauthorized commercial content multiple times with prior history of other or similar violations. However, such terms are vague for ordinary users, sometimes imposing unexpected constraints on user interactions. For example, users complained about penalties received for participating in authorized commercial campaigns of merchants (Lian, 2024); sometimes even following someone back, which may simply be a reciprocity of hospitality to show friendliness. To respond to these users and resolve such constraints, rednote has established corresponding mechanism for appeal. Once a user disagrees with penalties

received, he or she may submit an appeal by filing a ticket through following a path through Help and Customer Service, a decision will be returned after reviewed by backend operators.

As A User and Content Creator on Xiaohongshu. Due to the flow-inducing and positive-reward mechanism, I was negatively affected by such behavioral addiction as a user and content creator. According to my 2025 year-end personalized annual usage report generated by Xiaohongshu, I have searched 1327 times and consumed 9.4 million words in content. According to my own annual report generated by Xiaohongshu, I was on Xiaohongshu for 358 days in 2025 and spent 906 hours on it, averaging 2.53 hours per day. As an active user, I frequently left comments to express my opinions, and I received many likes from my comments. Also, as a content creator, I post content related to my daily life and higher education. As of this writing, I posted 443 notes that accumulate 54.4k likes and saves, where 39k are likes and 15.5k are saves. Because comments cannot be saved, the 15.5k saves come solely from notes, while the likes are received from the combination of comments and notes. Therefore, it can be deduced that I receive more likes in my comments than my notes. I felt more exhilarated when I received likes from comments than my own notes, not only because these likes are more frequent and easier to receive, but also, they represent stronger recognition in another place that is beyond my digital territory. This can be explained from two perspectives. Primarily, this means that many have concurred with my opinions, which represent my value. Surprisingly, these likes brought me with new followers every time, but the main source for my follower base still comes from my notes. Second, this indicates that the content where I left comments became viral, so that the virality spills over to my comments, and such volume is even greater than my own posts. As a result, I purposefully left more comments under other posts, especially those with more followers than I have, or on the rise to become viral, to increase my presence and likeness by others.

Group chat is a crucial feature for me to maintain relationships with my followers and achieve my goals for monetization. I created a group chat on Xiaohongshu at the very beginning when I created my Xiaohongshu account in February 2022. The majority member of this group are Chinese who are around or over 30 years old, either in the middle of a PhD program or intend to apply for one soon; I set these criteria as the threshold to enter the group chat. The group chat is named as "30+ PhD Club". People who would like to join this group chat must send an in-app verification message to me; they can join the group chat once I approve their request. I appointed my wife and several active participants in the group as the administrators, which have the same authority to add or remove people from the group chat. The group reached gradually to around 500 members at the end of 2023, and 488 members as of this writing. The group once surpassed 500 members so that many newcomers were put into a waiting list. Everyone receives a default welcome message generated by Xiaohongshu on behalf of the host of the group chat, sent immediately when a new member joins the group chat; it reads "@new member's name, welcome to the group chat, feel free to start chatting now". The newly joined user does not always know that this message is system-generated, and they usually return with a greeting message in the group chat. Two characteristics are prominent in these group chat sessions: inactive yet trusted. First, since Xiaohongshu is not an app designed for daily communication, conversations in these group chat sessions are asynchronous and operate on a question-and-answer basis most of the time. Such asynchronous communication reduces natural flow of conversations to information-centered inquiries, which lead to anxiety and warped perceptions, eventually alienation of communicators (Begg, 2023). Second, although an individual's propensity of trust depends on how much he or she trusts the group, and this trust decreases with the increase of the group size, closed and older groups are trusted more (Ma et al., 2019). With

the intention to cement the trust level of this group and stimulate group activeness, I decided to transfer this group to WeChat, a more commonly and frequently used instant messaging software in China. However, when I sent my WeChat contact in texts via 1-on-1 session and in the group chat to the group members, their reactions are full of surprises that are as if they were not receiving the message at all. I followed up with them, they showed the screenshots of our conversation from their backend, and the fact is that they truly did not receive the message at all, while it clearly sits in my chat sessions, labeled as sent. This also happens during the initial consultation sessions with the PhD applicants as my clients. They have come to the same conclusion that my messages containing my WeChat contact are "swallowed" by Xiaohongshu. To bypass such censorship, I searched about how other content creators on Xiaohongshu deal with it. The result is rather simple, that the censorship can be bypassed by taking a detour of not sending it in texts: inserting the contact into images or customized emojis. Therefore, I wrote my contact with a black-ink pen on a napkin from a chain restaurant, took a picture of this napkin, and sent it over to users; it went through. By repeatedly sending this picture to my group members, this group was cloned on WeChat, which was far more active than the group chat on Xiaohongshu. When the first consultation sessions of my clients ended, I would introduce them to join the group chat, and they all paid in full amount not long after they joined the group chat.

On January 14, 2025, when content and discussions on TikTok Refugees flooded rednote, I posted a video while having a morning class on the Eugene campus of University of Oregon with the title "Campus encounter with a Tik Tok Refugee… alive" and only two hash tags of #yangdou (i.e., the foreign version of Douyin, the native Chinese version of TikTok) and #tiktok, this video gathered 270,527 views and 7,472 likes, the most viewed and liked note since I registered my account. While most TikTok Refugees sent greetings by posting their introductory

notes, native rednote content creators posted welcoming messages and offered tips for TikTok Refugees for their transition to rednote. I received new followers from this note, including TikTok Refugees. I started to follow these TikTok Refugees. Unlike native rednote users, I received reciprocal followership from TikTok Refugees more often. Some of them even sent me direct messages to say hi, and we went to deeper conversations such as my studies and their family, which is rare in a followership situation among native rednote users, that I never received a reciprocal follower when I followed others. The soaring metrics of that video inspired my enthusiasm, with the intention to cement the performance of that video and stimulate the growth of my account, I posted two other similar videos in the next two days with similar structure, title, and texts, but none has received comparable results as the first one. Seeing this strategy did not work well, I decided to engage in livestreaming to discuss topics related to TikTok Refugees.

However, even though I am eligible for livestreaming, when I started with the livestream session in English, a window popped up with some texts, reading that "your livestreaming language is not approved in your location; please adjust your livestreaming language, or your session will be suspended in 30 seconds." Fearing of penalties on my account, I terminated the livestreaming session immediately. Shortly after that, I was approached by an official from rednote via system messages, asking me to file with them regarding "English livestreaming in the US", which is an administrative process I must go through if I were to continue livestreaming in English. I added the personnel's enterprise WeChat account from rednote. This request was filed on a questionnaire from a third-party questionnaire service by a link shared by this official rednote personnel. In the next couple of days after the completion of filing, I was still not able to conduct livestreaming in English. I approached to the official personnel, the answer was "still processing". The official personnel put me into a group chat on WeChat that is full of others who

reported about the same issue. Because it was unresolved for a long time, I lost my passion about "chasing the heat" of this topic.

But due to my special interest in this topic as a scholar and a rednote content creator, I kept an eye on this topic. The topic of TikTok Refugees gained momentum during the Chinese Spring Festival around January 29, 2025, the most celebrated cultural activity in China in a year. The cultural exchange culminated that TikTok Refugees posted videos about cultural exchange dressing in traditional Chinese garments, cooking Chinese dishes, decorating their houses with Chinese symbolic representations, and saying "Happy New Year" in Chinese, but the fervor has subsided when the Spring Festival is over. I was inquisitive about how many have stayed and how many have left. Some native rednote users had the same confusion as I do in the meantime, including those with high influence. They posted and asked if TikTok Refugees are still here on rednote, the comment section reflected that, many of them are still here but lurking. I tracked down to their profile pages, and I was surprised that many of them, even though they do not have any posts, but they do have some followers, though not many.

Study 2: Interactions of TikTok Refugees on rednote

Study 2a: Sentiment Analysis of rednote's App Reviews

Sampling. Since IOS and Android occupied more than 99% of the smartphone market, and app stores are a common place for users to post reviews about an app, a content analysis is conducted on the reviews of rednote from two dominant App Stores, Apple App Store and Google Play App Store. 35300 reviews on rednote are crawled from the two app stores: 10013 reviews are from Apple App Store, and 25287 reviews are from Google Play App Store. With a specific focus on TikTok Refugees, a sample is selected to chronologically meet the period when TikTok Refugees are most active on rednote, which is the range between one month before the

first TikTok ban (i.e., the pre-ban phase) and one month after the official ownership transfer of TikTok (i.e., the stabilization phase). A validation of data is conducted by the researcher by randomly reading comments from the App Store within this range. A screening by the date range leaves 26843 reviews for final analysis. 1509 reviews (5.62%) are in Chinese, while 25334 reviews (94.38%) are non-Chinese.

In the context of this study, because this app originated from China targeting Chinese users, but later adopted by TikTok Refugees, which are mostly English users from the US, the reviews are mingled with Chinese and English, so that traditional models, such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and BERTopic (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers Topic) (Gootendorst, 2022) may not be sufficient to capture deep semantic structures in such multilingual short-text dataset, especially in complex non-English languages like Chinese (Chen et al., 2025). Therefore, a hybrid topic model GLM 4 is deployed in this study for sentiment analysis and topic modelling, a large language model (LLM) developed by Zhipu AI, which has higher coherence score than traditional BERTopic in processing hybrid texts in Chinese and English, thus "generate more contextually relevant and interpretable topics" (Chen et al., 2025) and potentially handle paralanguage with high arousal (i.e., escalation mark, uppercase) and emojis (Cascio Rizzo et al., 2024) by NLP processing.

Procedure. The analysis is implemented with 2 steps. First, the sample is streamlined by GLM 4 to 1) determine the overall sentiment of each review, 2) detect topics emerged from each review, 3) detect if this review is related to technical design of renote, and 4) provide further explanations if a review is related to technical design. The following prompt is adopted from Chen et al. (2025) and curated specifically for this study: "I am conducting an analysis on reviews of rednote from Apple App Store and Google Play App Store. Please help me label them

using GLM 4 in terms of: sentiment (if positive, return 1; if negative, return -1; if neutral, return 0), main topics mentioned in the text, and if they are related to technical design of the app (if yes, return 1; if no, return 0); summarize the topics mentioned about the technical design if yes. Avoid stopwords and ensure improved topic coherence. Output in English." This prompt is processed by GLM 4 in a repeated pattern using an application programing interface (API) for all reviews. When the results are retrieved, the researcher first reviewed and validated the results by conducting a random and manual review of the results in the dataset. Accuracy is ensured by random and manual reviews on all types of reviews, including Chinese reviews, English reviews, reviews with only emojis and other languages; reviews in other languages other than Chinese and English are translated using Google Translate for validation. After simple observation and validation, the researcher then conducted the second step, an analysis of the returned topics in step 1 using bigrams to extract topics.

Findings. Of all reviews, 17204 (64.09%) are positive, 3146 (11.72%) are neutral, and 6493 (24.18%) are negative. Among the reviews in Chinese (n = 1509), 776 reviews (51.4%) are negative, 198 reviews (13.1%) are neutral, and 535 reviews (35.5%) are positive. For non-Chinese reviews (n = 25334), 16689 reviews (65.8%) are positive, 2948 reviews (11.6%) are neutral, and 5717 reviews (22.6%) are negative. Figure 8 illustrates the summary of the result. The result suggests that most English-speaking TikTok Refugees have positive reviews about rednote, while most of the Chinese users are unhappy. Next, Study 2b aims to investigate what may lead to such polarized feelings about the same app by revealing details of the reviews through topic modelling.

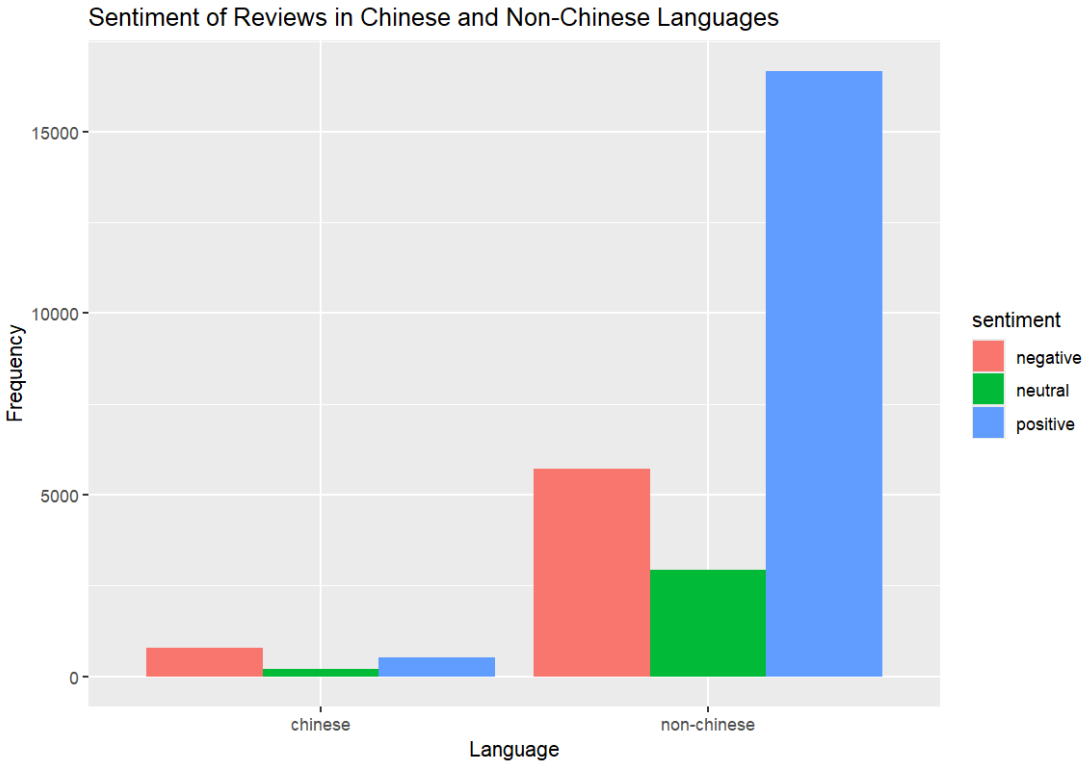


Figure 8. Sentiment of Chinese and non-Chinese reviews

Study 2b: Topic Modelling of rednote's App Reviews

Topics. First, the topic "tiktok ban" (n = 562) [1] reassures the contextual validity of the sample selection. While most of the reviews are concerned with user experience (n = 3597), a large portion of users are making comparisons between rednote and other social media they use, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, which are characterized by topics such as "app comparison" (n = 725), "social media" (n = 1561), and "media comparison" (n = 406). Many reviews are simple words of affection that are short but express user satisfaction (n = 832) about rednote (See Figure 9 for an illustration). Combined with former sentiment analysis[2], in terms of

[1] The frequency in topic modelling refers to the frequency of appearances in bigrams, the same applies to subsequent analysis.

[2] The frequency in sentiment analysis refers to total observations from the actual sample of review the same applies to subsequent analysis.

user experience, 81.55% (n = 2471) are positive, 2.38% (n = 72) are neutral, while 16.07% (n = 487) are negative. This is consistent with the discussions on social media comparison that 83.14% (n = 1505) are positive, while 7.79% (n = 141) are negative.

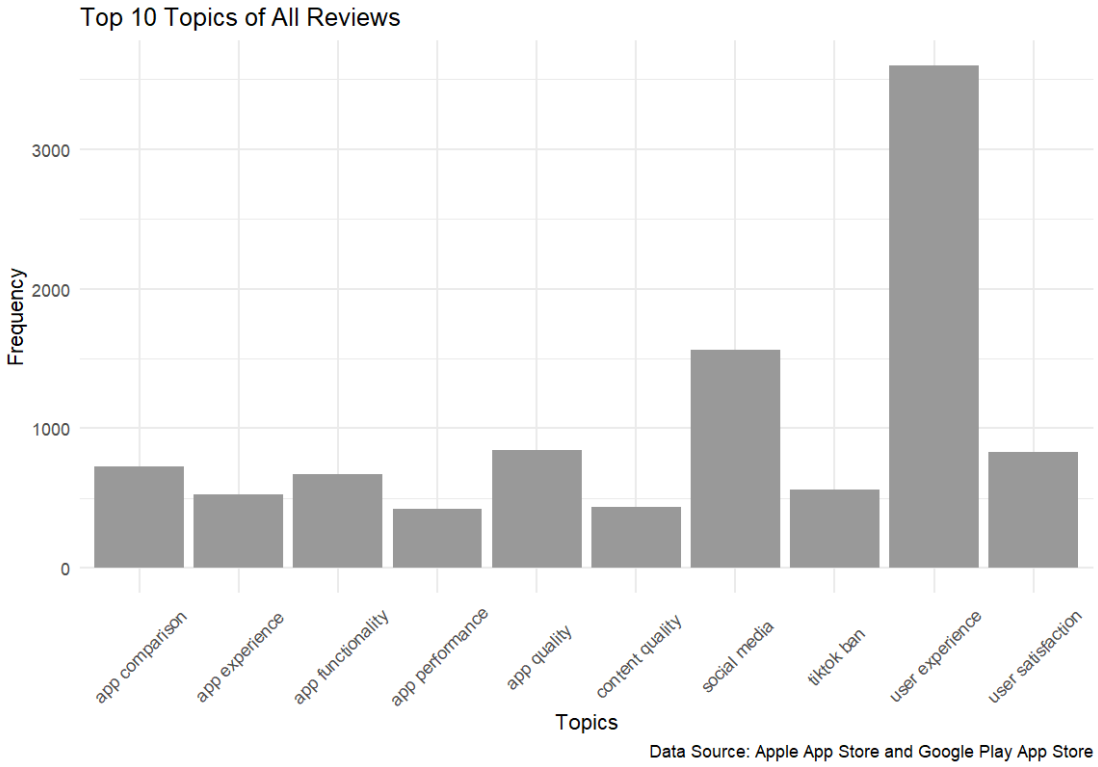


Figure 9. Top 10 Topics of all reviews

Topics of Reviews in Chinese. For reviews in Chinese, "user experience" (n = 115) is the most mentioned topic. The topics for negative reviews are "account suspension" (n = 58), "account banning" (n = 30), "user interface" (n = 23), "customer service" (n = 64), and "content moderation" (n = 82), while a positive topic is "language learning" (n = 23). Notably, many negative reviews for content moderation are discussing how rednote moderated contents to suppress critical reviews on two major Chinese events, a feminist topic of Yunchichi (*云吃吃*) and a medical accident of Xiaoluoxi in Ningbo, China (*小洛熙*) (See Figure 10 for details). Combined with former sentiment analysis, while language learning is the only positive topic

among reviews in Chinese (299 positive reviews, 93.44% vs 4 negative reviews, 1.25%), all other prominent topics are dominated by negative sentiment.

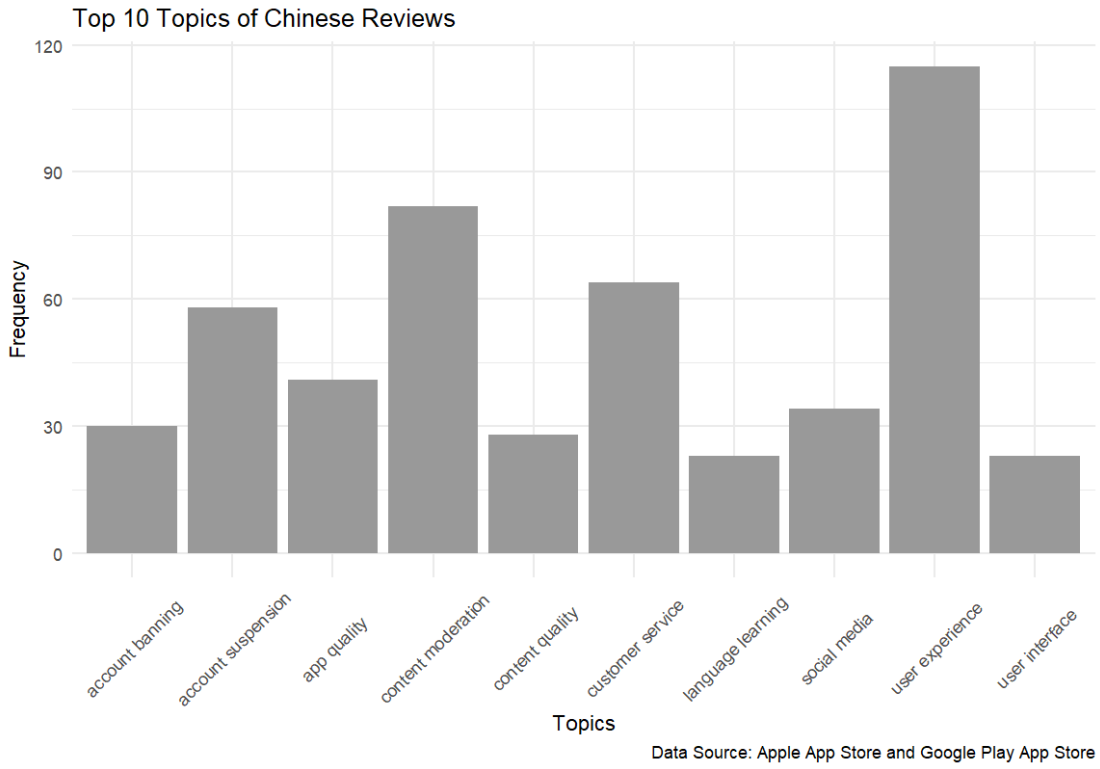


Figure 10. Top 10 Topics of Chinese reviews

Topics of Non-Chinese Reviews. Since over 95% of the reviews are non-Chinese, the topics of non-Chinese reviews are consistent with the overall distribution of all topics, that "user experience" (n = 3483) and social media comparison (n = 2631) are the leading topics; the overall "user experience" can be further categorized by subtopics that denote general feelings of the app by "app quality" (n = 805), "app functionality" (n = 652), app performance (n = 409), and app experience (n = 509). Among the comparison, comparison to TikTok is a dominant topic (n = 269). In terms of specific features, the topics of "content quality" (n = 409), "language learning" (n = 374), "user interface" (n = 353), "experience community" (n = 330), and "cultural exchange" (n = 298) are prominent topics among others, dominated by positive sentiment.

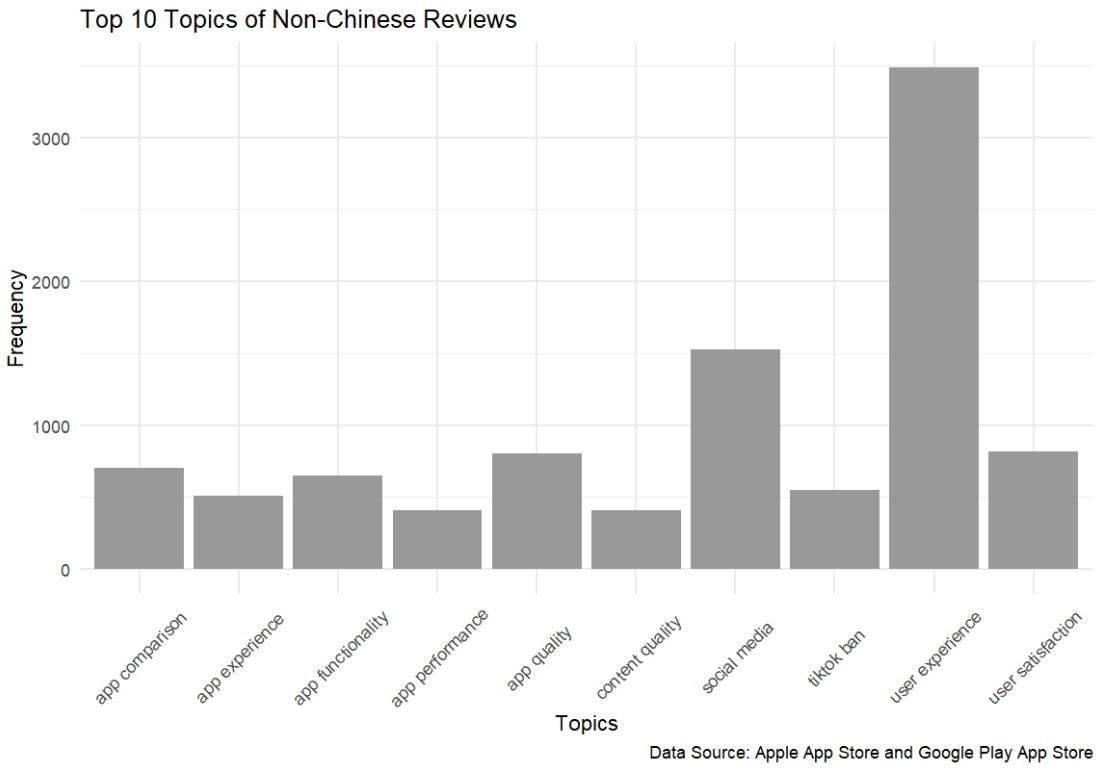


Figure 11. Top 10 Topics of Non-Chinese reviews

Topics Related to Technical Design. Verification and authentication that affect account creation are dominant topics of technical design, specifically, “age verification” (n = 381), “verification code” (n = 254), “verification process” (n = 278), “authentication system" (n = 273), “verification code” (n = 254), “phone verification” (n = 114), and “code delivery” (n = 113). Language is another dominant topic, represented by “translation feature” (n = 292), “language support” (n = 216), “language settings” (n = 152), “language localization” (n = 135), and “English language” (n = 121). Except for account and language related issues, content moderation (n = 169) is another prevalent topic along with “content filtering” (n = 99). The topic related to account verification receives overwhelming negative sentiment (84.59%, n = 1334). Although 55.33% (n = 893) expressed positive sentiment to language features, 29.74% (n = 480) are negative about language features.

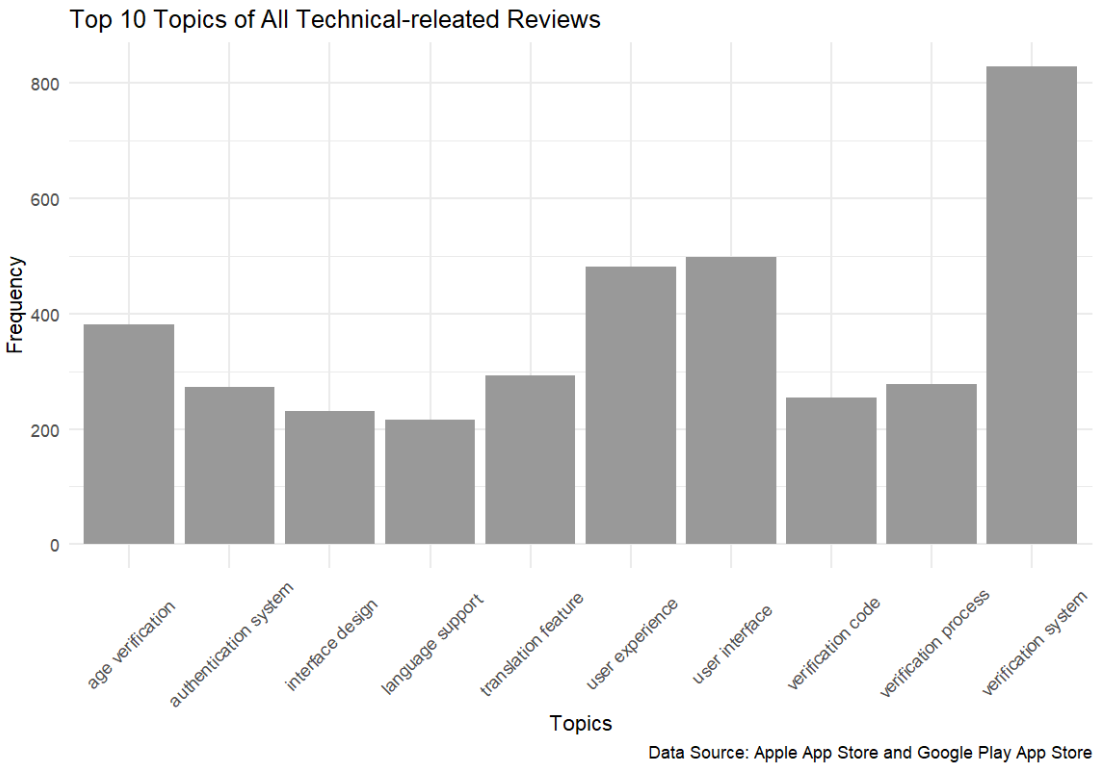


Figure 12. Top 10 Topics of all Technical-related reviews

To sum it up, negative reviews on technical features of rednote are clustered around account creation, authentication and verification systems, and content moderation, while the positive reviews of technical design are centered on translation and localization features of rednote. The underlying rationale may be that language translation features facilitate communication from both sides, while verification system and content moderation impede the process. In terms of user groups that are using different languages in the reviews, majority of technical-related reviews in Chinese are concerned with platform suppression, such as content moderation, verification system, and account suspension, whereas the non-Chinese technical-related reviews are most concerned with the verification process that involves age verification, verification code, and authentication.

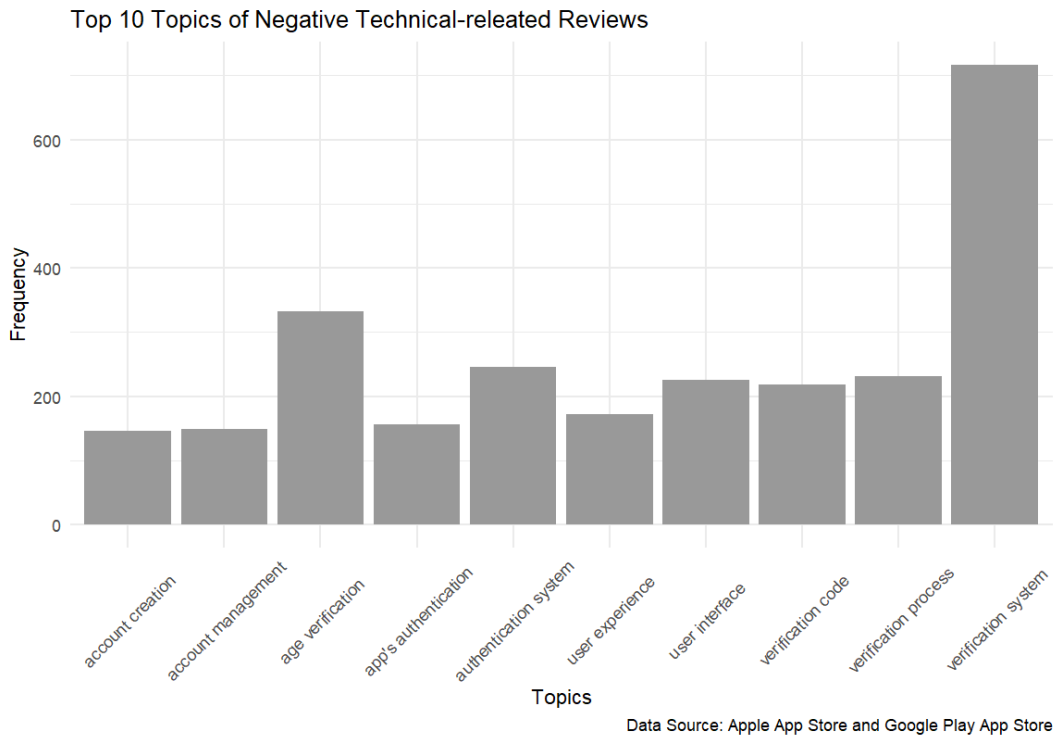


Figure 13. Top 10 Topics of negative Technical-related reviews

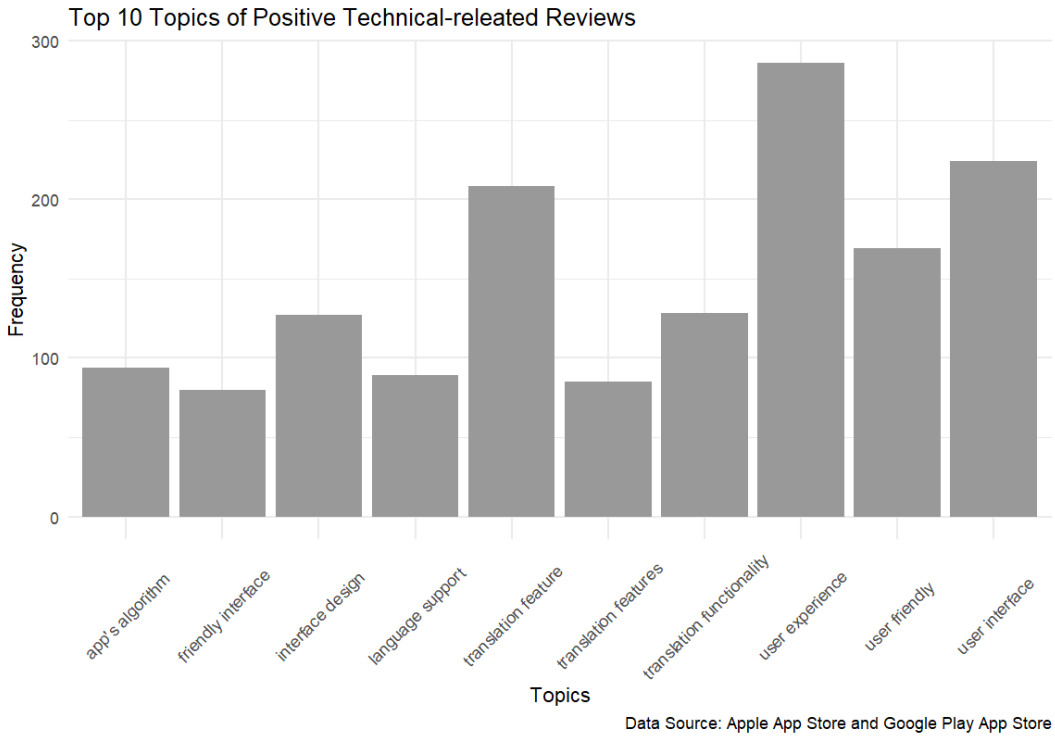


Figure 14. Top 10 Topics of positive Technical-related reviews

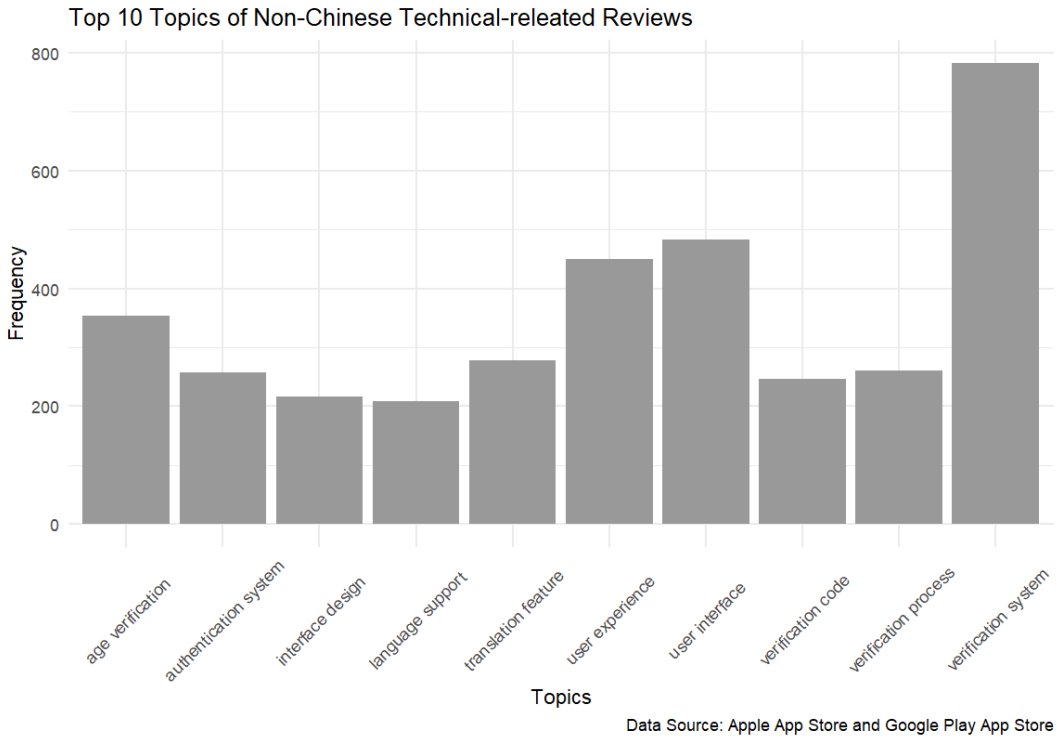


Figure 15. Top 10 Topics of Non-Chinese Technical-related Reviews

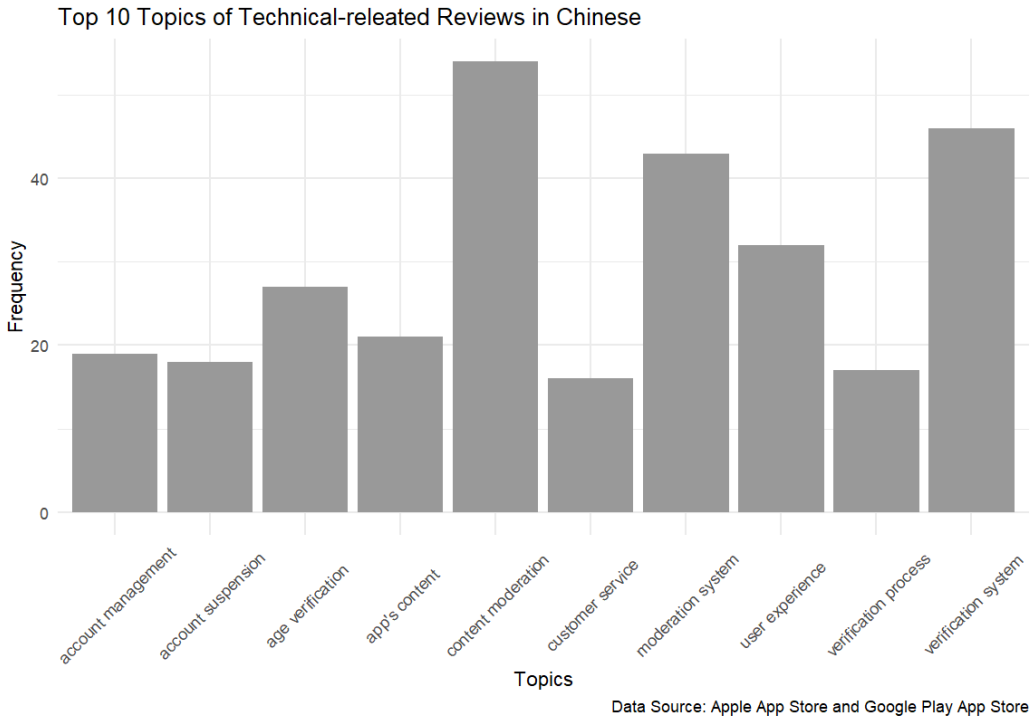


Figure 16. Top 10 Topics of Chinese Technical-related Reviews

Study 2c: Imbrication of Human and Non-human Agencies on rednote under the Influence of Commercialization

Ethical Considerations. After completing the Human Subjects Research Determination Worksheet and consultation with the Research Compliance Services of University of Oregon, this study is determined as "not considered research involving human subjects", thus, no formal institutional review board (IRB) approval is required for this study. However, although social media is perceived as public space, the concept of publicness on social media is vague and users may not know they are being studied (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Ford et al., 2021).

Therefore, I attempt to embody ethical considerations of data privacy on social media by sanitizing sensitive and identifiable information, removing personal information to de-identify subjects (Coffin, 2025). I gave pseudonyms to the subjects with an abbreviation of TikTok Refugee as TTR, with random numbering to replace their nicknames on rednote to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, provided that some users prefer to use real names that are identifiable on social media (Chen et al., 2020) (See Table 4). When necessary, I draw examples from posts and replies from the subjects who are more willing to be public facing.

Sampling. This study is based on more than 120 hours of digital ethnographic fieldwork that integrates asynchronous interviews and participant observations on 14 TikTok Refugee content creators. They are selected by self-identification on their profile page or via content they posted, who have various levels of engagement with platform features on rednote, including but not limited to basic content creation and consumption, and advanced features such as livestreaming and monetization activities. The fieldwork is mostly conducted between September 2025 and March 2026, but the posts and comments observed may date back to as early as December 2024. The sample is selected by a combination of keyword search by "TikTok

Refugee" from the universal search bar in the main page of rednote, comments left under those notes asking about the presence of TikTok Refugees on rednote, and snowball sampling. I consistently followed these intended accounts and made interactions with them, including liking, saving, commenting, chatting with them via direct messages or livestreaming sessions. Some followed back and sent private messages to express appreciation for my likes and followership. Accounts with the date of their latest post before June 2025 are not selected because they do not demonstrate an active content creation agenda.

Data Collection. The data collection is completed by participant observations and asynchronous interviews using my own rednote account, because a new dummy account may not be sufficient to reveal day-to-day use, for it cannot demonstrate authenticity, especially in a virtual online environment (Lowe et al., 2023; Duguay & Gold-Apel, 2023), which may impede rapport-building to foster trust, prolonged engagement, and persistent observation that yield "thick descriptions" (Dianiska et al., 2024; Ahmed, 2024). My observations are conducted based on their public profiles, posts, comments, replies, and livestreaming sessions, if any, as not all of them have access to more advanced features like livestreaming. Moreover, screenshots are made to document the changes in how the subjects are imbricated with the change in human and non-human agencies. 14 asynchronous interviews are implemented by leaving comments under their posts, sending questions via direct messaging, and asking questions in group chat and livestreaming sessions. These interviews are semi-structured. They do not prompt replies in an instant manner, which provide the respondents with sufficient time to answer the questions in the way they feel most comfortable in terms of location and time (Ratislavov & Ratislav, 2014), but the drawback must also be considered, that not all of them are answered. Although not conducted in the original form of emails following earlier studies because of the specific context this study

(Ratislavov & Ratislav, 2014; Harris et al., 2024), such interviews have commensurate scientific rigor with only slightly lower level of data quality compared to face-to-face interviews, which can produce data that yield "deeper insight into participants' interpretations of their experiences" (Harris et al., 2024) that the researcher would "probably never have been able to get" from traditional interview methods (Ratislavov & Ratislav, 2014), especially during livestreaming sessions, the investigators' follow-up probes "provided an opportunity to either clarify or gather more comprehensive details to fully capture participants' experiences" (Harris et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, there are nuances about the asynchrony between sessions in comments, direct messaging, group chat and those in livestreaming. While the former venues are asynchronous in nature, the interactions in the latter are synchronous. However, because one livestreaming session may host many audiences at the same time, it is unrealistic for the moderator to respond to all inquiries in the comment section, making replies in this instant session not so timely. All replies span from seconds to hours, even days, depending on the specific venue they are retrieved and the subjects' convenience. Not surprisingly, not all questions received replies. For example, direct messaging has a higher reply rate than comments and group chat sessions, as well as livestreaming sessions. Specifically, a livestreaming session is typically inundated with comments from hundreds of audiences at the same time, the moderator sometimes cannot read my comments because there are too many others prompting instantly, and the screen only displays so few, not to mention the comments section is rolling as new comments are made, and the system always display comments that are made most lately or with most likes.

Data Analysis. I applied grounded theory to inductively analyze ethnographic fieldnotes and replies generated from fieldwork simultaneously. Conceptual understandings of their daily experience are gradually developed through reflexive content analysis by iterative and refined

coding, data collections, and reflexive writing of memos (Nicmanis, 2024) throughout the development of pre-ban, surge, and stabilization phase. The RQDA package, a tool for qualitative data analysis built-in as graphical user interface (GUI) in R programming language (Huang, 2014), is used for further analysis following a timeline of pre-ban, surge, and stabilization and examine "what they do, how they do it, and why they do it interacting in the research setting" during this time period (Charmaz, 2008, p. 408).

Findings. ***Imbrication 1.*** Human→Material**.** TikTok's entry into the United States market was the product of a planned acquisition strategy. In 2017, ByteDance, the parent company of TikTok, acquired Musical.ly, a short-video app founded in Shanghai that had cultivated a substantial user base in North America. The next year, the platform was rebranded and relaunched as TikTok, formally entering the U.S. market in January 2018. The app's growth trajectory was meteoric that by 2019, it had become one of the most downloaded applications globally. As the platform became viral, the political and legal pressure followed. The first significant federal challenge was proposed in 2020, when the Trump administration, citing national security concerns, issued a series of executive orders. These orders sought to prohibit transactions with ByteDance and compel the divestiture of TikTok's U.S. operations. The administration's efforts were met with immediate legal challenges and were temporarily blocked by federal courts. Following the change in administration, President Biden formally revoked the executive orders in 2021, but directed a new, broader national security review of foreign-owned applications. Congressional action ultimately superseded executive branch efforts. In April 2024, President Biden signed into law the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act (PAFACAA), which mandated that ByteDance divest TikTok's U.S. assets within a specified time frame, a "divest-or-ban" ultimatum. When the original deadline

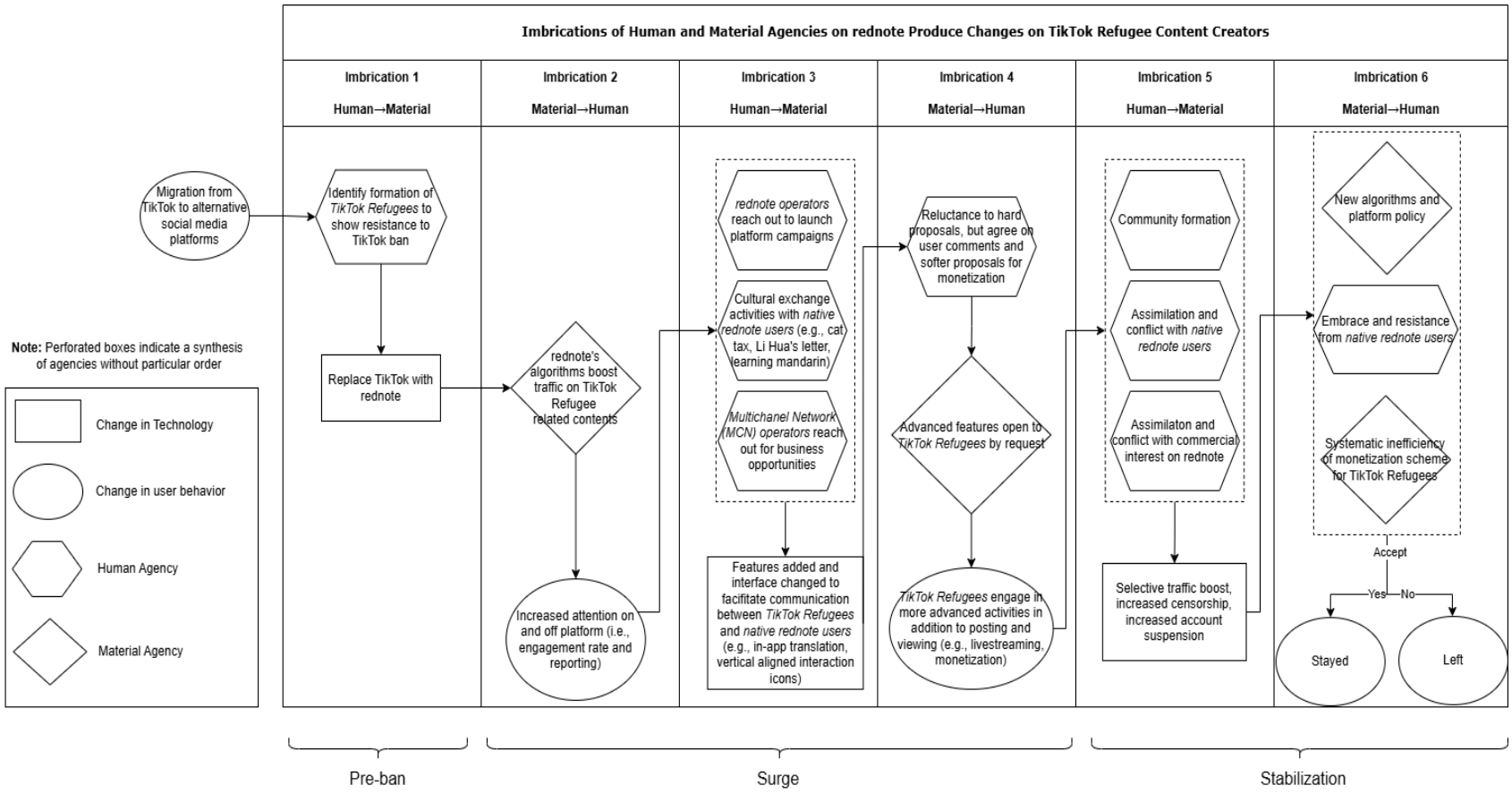


Figure 17. Imbrication of human and material agencies on rednote produce changes on tiktok refugee content creators

Table 4. Descriptive information about TikTok Refugee content creators in this study

Pseudonym	Gender	No. of Followers	Engagement (Total)	Monetization Activities	Livestreaming Sessions
TTR1	Female	269K	887K	Dandelion; Buyer Collab	49
TTR2	Male	230K	920K	Dandelion, Business Email, Buyer Collab	78
TTR3	Female	158K	1.11M	Dandelion, Business Email, MCN	25
TTR4	Female	211K	114K	Dandelion, Business Email, Buyer Collab	213
TTR5	Female	170K	181K	Dandelion, Business Email, Buyer Collab, MCN	75
TTR6	Male	69K	486K	Dandelion, MCN	9
TTR7	Male	26K	140K	Business Email, MCN	N/A
TTR8	Male	1.7K	7.7K	N/A	N/A
TTR9	Male	61K	412K	N/A	N/A
TTR10	Female	65K	226K	Business Email, Dandelion	N/A
TTR11	Male	44K	490K	N/A	N/A
TTR12	Male	3.5K	14K	N/A	N/A
TTR13	Female	68K	229K	Dandelion, MCN	N/A
TTR14	Male	368K	3.05M	Dandelion, MCN	8

Table 3. Descriptive information about TikTok Refugee content creators

approached, it was extended through a revised legislative package that gave ByteDance a total of 9 months to complete a sale, with a possible additional three-month extension. The constitutionality of the law was swiftly tested. In a unanimous decision on January 17, 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the statute, ruling that it did not violate the First Amendment rights of TikTok or its users for the regulation is content-neutral under intermediate scrutiny (TikTok Inc. v. Garland, 2025).

During this period, emotions began to ferment on TikTok, and contextual-specific buzzwords related to TikTok ban started to emerge, such as “Chinese spies”, because the US government claimed that TikTok must comply with the law of the foreign adversary, China, therefore “spying” on American users by collecting personal data and submitting it to the Chinese government (TikTok Inc. v. Garland, 2025). Content creators on TikTok bear more

burden than lurkers, for some of them have accumulated considerable number of follower base, and content creation has become an important stream of income. Xiaohongshu, or rednote, was one of the buzzwords that was virally spread on TikTok, which was first introduced by a Vancouver young man named Jerry, impersonated and mistaken as the CEO of rednote, and became widely spread later. This source of introduction to rednote is confirmed by half of the participants, while the other half have known it from trending topics on TikTok. Interestingly, the participants who were introduced to rednote earlier have more followers and higher engagements than those who were introduced later. Other than being anxious and resistance about the upcoming TikTok ban, content creators have a "fear of missing out" sentiment about existing achievements made on TikTok. As one of the participants answerd in a session of live group chatroom,

> I read and reply to private messages and comments very often from my followers because I want them to know that I am real and I care for them, some of their ideas can also provide me with some new ideas. One day I received a message from one of my followers, a man called himself CEO of rednote and says rednote CEO welcomes you, which later I found not true; this guy suggested me to check it out, so I followed along, I went there and registered an account. I know that TikTok ban has made them panic, frankly, me too, and they are angry, they just have nowhere to go. I wanted to support them, but also I had this idea of going there and see if it could be an alternative to host my followers, because that's where they go, right? So if they go there and I go there, too, it may be somewhere I can keep my follower base if TikTok is gone.Well, that's another story. When I was there for the first time, I had no idea of what to post except for saying hi and move some of my videos from

TikTok there. Those who have transfered on rednote called themselves TikTok Refugees, I used this name for my own intro there, too.

The parent company of TikTok, ByteDance, has also prepared a randezvous for the ban, a duplicate app named Lemon8, but it was not widely recognized as rednote, despite the fact that it shares more similarities with TikTok. While Lemon8 and rednote are the two trending apps at the time, rednote is ranked the first place while Lemon8 is only the second (Butts, 2015).

Imbrication 2. Material→Human. TikTok Refugees' presence on rednote prevail as the number of posts from English-speaking foreigners in the US soared. These posts were recommended to native rednote users regardless of whether they have viewed any contents related to topics from overseas or not. Native rednote users, both content creators and viewers have both expressed dissatisfaction about the unjust allocation of traffic to content posted by TikTok Refugees, as one user wrote in the post on January 14, 2025 (translated to English by the researcher),

> Starting this morning, my Xiaohongshu is flooded with ABCs (abbreviation of American-born Chinese), making me feel like I am time-travelling. They either introduce themselves by placing the camera right at their faces, or show the interior and surroundings of their houses, or seek guidance for learning Chinese, or expressing dissatisfaction about their government…but, does it mean that our poorly allocated traffic got diluted again?

The videos posted by early TikTok Refugees, as the user noted, were mostly improvised, however, these videos were more frequently recommended than those videos not only made with thorough planning that are delicately editted but also highly aligned with user interest, as another user commented under a similar video posted on January 16, 2025 that explains how many

foreigners flocked into Xiaohongshu and how disturbing it is (translated to English by the researcher),

> I came the fxxx here to learn how to cook, now it became a place to watch foreign ladies.

Quite on the contrary, the traffic boost incentivized TikTok Refugee content creators to create more contents. One of the participants disclosed in a livestreaming session,

> After I posted my introductory video there on rednote, my phone went crazy, it felt like it were to blow off any moment… it was almost midnight, and my phone never stopped vibrating. I picked up the phone and tried to see what happened, it turns out my screen was full of rednote's notifications, saying my video was liked by so many people. I opened rednote and saw a big red dot at the bottom with a number of ninety nine plus, I tapped on it and saw the same thing on the likes and new followers icon above. I never had so many followers in such a short time anywhere on my other socials, I was sort of panicked. I was curious about what comments are on there, so I opened the comments, but I can't read most of them because they are in Chinese. Then I started to figure out how to deal with the Chinese, I mean, the language. Guess what, I had an insomnia that night.

Imbrication 3. Human→Material. Although content created by TikTok Refugees received more exposure in general, those who posted earlier in the wave received more attention, and it is reflected in the engagement rate, which are abnormally higher. As a result, such enormous traffic have attracted attention of entities on and off platform, especially commercial entities that operate in this attention business, namely traditional press and multichanel networks (MCN). As an early TikTok Refugee content creator, one participant replied to my question in one livestreaming session about how the connection to these business opportunities is formed,

> I was the fourth to be invited by rednote (staff)… One day I received a message on rednote from this guy, saying that they are from this company that helps content creators, I technically don't know what that is, but from their introduction, it looks like some sort of commercial agency. They are saying that they can help with my account mangement and introduce business opportunities to me. I was thinking, why not, because I also run my own business here in the US. The other day they sent an official invitation in the app. I looked it through, it seems like some sort of contract, all I need to do is signing it by tapping some buttons…I found'em extremely helpful for me to familiarize myself with how things work on rednote, I mean, the dos and do-nots that I don't know, especially with the Chinese stuff.

Before any MCNs are engaged, TikTok content creators mainly used CapCut to dub subtitles in their videos, which is an in-house editting software of TikTok that has a built-in feature for subtitle translation. However, reading comments and private messages in Chinese remain a challenge for most of the TikTok Refugee content creators. What's more, even the official documents were still in Chinese by then. But after invitations from rednote, or voluntary registration followed the flock, bilingual operators from rednote consistently reached out to TikTok Refugee content creators in the form of surveys via the system messages to help gather feedback; some are in touch with the transition directly after filling out the surveys.

Not all TikTok Refugee content creators in this study received invitations from rednote officials except for those who arrive relatively early on rednote. Yet, all of them have received one or more invitations from MCNs, but one account can only contract with one MCN the same time unless either party is released from the contract by enforcement of violating the terms from the contract or by voluntary negotiation of termination. The decision of a content creator to contract with a specific MCN is made depending on past successful content creators under

management, business resources, revenue allocation structures, and most importantly, how helpful they can help with the transition. 8 of the 14 respondents in this study have contracted with MCN started with a cold direct message from MCNs, but two have cancelled the contract later by conflict of interest.

MCNs play a crucial role in the content creation ecosystem on social media, that they hatch influencers by finding, growing, and managing activities of the soon-to-be influencers. In this case, MCNs facilitate communication between TikTok Refugee content creators and rednote officials as well as native rednote users. Once the contract is signed, the contracted MCN assigns a representative to each content creator, who can speak fluent English and Chinese and serve as a liason between multiple stakeholders on platform. In addition, the terms usually clarify responsibilities of the corresponding MCN for assistance to be provided to the content creator, including but not limited to content creation, business development, and investment on on-platform traffic. The representative and technical assistance team from MCN is not exclusive for each content creator, instead, some content creators share one. For example, some requests for cover editting or livestreaming sessions may take days to receive feedback from MCNs.

The technical and business assistance of MCN facilitates communication with rednote officials and native rednote users. First, TikTok Refugee content creators can participate in official campaigns and receive incentives rewarded in terms of on-platform traffic and establish better communication with rednote operators in a timely manner. Second, MCNs are adept and experienced at strategies to cope with the imagined algorithms; they have established measures and analytics of trending topics on rednote that could potentially align yet-to-be-created content with what is trending on the platform. For instance, various cultural exchange activities were trending on rednote during this movement, such as that newcomers of TikTok Refugees are

asked to pay cat tax, a normative cultural exchange proposal from native rednote users that TikTok Refugees should include a picture of their favorite cat in their post of comments as a toll to be paid to use the platform. Similar examples are replying to Li Hua's letter, a fictional character writing to a US student in a hypothetical situation that were frequently used in English-teaching in China, and cross-checking cost of living in China and the US. As business assistance, MCNs reach out to various marketers for potential in-app influencer campaigns through Dandelion or off-platform by business development activities. Meanwhile, MCNs advise the content creators on what monetization activities they should participate in, and determine the pricing of quote to be listed on the platform. As an observation, those who are contracted with MCNs participate more monetization activities than those who do not. Except for the assistance offered, one of the most influential terms that impose constraints on content creators are the level of access to account, that the designated personnel from MCN must have access to the account by account login, and the content creators must fully cooperate with them. The benefit of such access is that in-app inquiries and platform campaign invitations can be handled in a timely and professional manner, but the drawback seems more evident, that the content creator may lose control over the account. As noted by one participant that is contracted with a leading MCN,

> They are nice people I work with, it is not that I don't trust them, it is just I am not comfortable with some strangers that can see what I viewed, who I talked to, and what others want to say to me, this gives me the sense that as if I were in the exact same situation when I was a child, always being watched and disciplined by my parents all the time.

TikTok Refugee content creators used to interact with users and rednote officials with the help of off-platform translation tools and human assistance from MCNs, until that one day, the built-in translation feature was added. One participant replied during a livestreaming session,

It was some day in January 2025, all of a sudden, when I woke up to check out new comments, I found that there is a little button saying “Translate” next to the comments. I was curious what happened. I went back to the home page, and this is where the magic happened. One day before my home page was filled with Chinese that I did not understand at all, but today I got English-made titles and videos all over the page, and when I clicked on one of the videos, it looks somewhat different, but I can definitely tell, because I am way too familiar with this, that the window and video made me feel like I was back to TikTok. I checked the App Store to see if there is an update, but it says my version is the latest. If I remember it right, I did not press anything to update, but something just happened in there. They must have done something in secret. I don’t like appreciate it at all, just like how they asked me for my passport for real-name verification. I mean, for real? Asking an American for a passport?

Imbrication 4. Material→Human. After the translation feature was added, TikTok Refugee content creators can view more contents and comments in the form of image and text, but not for videos that are made in Chinese. However, they saw more content recommended to them which are made in English by native rednote users. Moreover, before the translation feature was added, TikTok Refugee content creators were highly reliant on third-party translation software, such as Google Translate, especially when they would like to read comments that are liked by many but in Chinese. Such translation requires them to copy and paste the comments to Google Translate first, and when the translation is completed, if they would like to respond to these comments, they must type in their response in English to Google Translate, copy the translated text in Chinese and paste it to rednote. Interestingly, instead of calling the English name rednote, which

may be more comfortable for them to pronounce, TikTok Refugee content creators call the app by the Chinese name Xiaohonghu in their notes and livestreaming sessions.

It is through the comment sections that TikTok Refugee content creators are encouraged and inspired to conduct livestreaming sessions, although the MCNs have brought this topic up before. MCNs proposed livestreaming as a venue to accumulate a large follower base, and then they have more "chips in hand" for negotiation on more monetizing activities. Such proposals receive polarized feedbacks from TikTok Refugee content creators for two reasons. First, the pure utilitarian approach by MCNs are overly explicit and undisguised about money-making from followers, so that some content creators are feeling offended. Specifically, some have expressed that they feel guilty for potentially treating the hospitality they received from these follower with this "evil" idea to make money from them. Second, for those who has a clear mind and a track record for money-making in the past, such as having entrepreneurship background or stable monetization on TikTok, they have intentionally made the way here on rednote for moneymaking purposes, therefore, they embrace such proposals of using advanced features for moneymaking purposes with full cooperation. To be eligible using advanced features, a TikTok Refugee content creator must go through additional screening by application to existing basic threshold, such as real-name verification, two-step authentication, and having a minimum number of 1000 followers. MCNs provided assistance and coordinated this process, where TikTok Refugee content creators must submit required legal identification to MCNs. After approval from rednote, TikTok content creators can initiate livestreaming session through the plus sign on the screen for content creation. There are three options for livestreaming sessions, voice-only chatroom without camera, livestreaming with camera, or projecting the screen as

livestreaming, which can all be initiated via phone or PC, a common list of options to accommodate various livestreaming demand, including gaming.

Imbrication 5. Human→Material. As more features are unlocked, TikTok Refugee content creators engage in deeper and sustained interactions with the followers. For example, with the help of the designated MCN manager, during livestreaming sessions, participating audience in the livestreaming sessions are directed to join a group chat of this livestreamer for retention purpose, and followers can sign up for upcoming livestreaming sessions, which will be notified by system messages. For example, one of the participants have assembled 6 group chats with 500 each. What's more, TikTok content creators can invite each other, or native rednote users, to participate in one livestreaming session by invitation or requests. During the session, any audience present in the session can send a request of dialing in the conversation, which is subject to moderator's approval, which are not often picked up, because TikTok content creators are advised by MCNs not to take these calls during the session, as one of them disclosed,

> They (the MCN) advised us not to approve any incoming requests to connect because we don't know who they are and what they are gonna talk about. If they are saying something sensitive, like potilics, the livestreaming session may be shut off immediately, even I may lose access to livestreaming, and worst case scenario, my account can be suspended. I don't want to see that coming.

In addition, livestreaming imposes other constraints, noted by another participant in a chatroom,

> It kinda made me sad that I cannot connect with my followers, so I tried my best to reply to them by reading off their questions in the comment section and answer them as they come in, but god, there are too many of them, and I simply cannot reply to everyone of them, so there's always a lag between me and them (the audience). Sometimes I can feel some of

them are pissed off, and they left because simply I did not answer their questions. I can feel it, it's just like someone who has been active, but all of a sudden they disappear.

In addition to the pros and cons brought about on the matter of livestreaming between TikTok content creator and MCN, conflicts arise as the account has seen more growth. For example, one partcipant made a post explaining such conflict,

> Yesterday, one of my fan administrators wanted to move the members who spoke less in the group chat without my consent, and then moved 800 fan friends out of the group chat. Some of them were also my "old friends" who accompanied me from my first note to the present. What made me sad was that due to functional constraints, this cannot be undone, and they are gone forever. My friends can't return to the original group for the time being, and I feel very uneasy and guilty about this. This incident was due to my fault in communication with the account management team. I did not clarify the scope of authority of the administrator. I sincerely apologize to all the friends who have been moved out and to those who are still in the group.

As a result, this TikTok content creator terminated the contract with the MCN, and appointed an "old friend" as the group chat manager. The conflict is even more fierce for another participant, that on the profile page of the new account it states,

> My former MCN stole my account and deleted it [SmugShrug emoji] Follow along here…for now[wink with one eye emoji]

During the livestreaming sessions, the most frequently mentioned topics are comparisons of daily life between Chinese and US across subtopics such as education, living expense, and family, and interestingly, many comments are made to the physical apperances of the livestreamer, including the clothing style and accessories they wear. But TikTok content creators

cannot control what the incoming users would comment, such as political and ideological content, which are common topics as free speech supported by the First Amendment in the US, however, are not permitted to be discussed on rednote according to the terms and agreements of rednote for the purpose of complying with the laws in China. Such rules have put constraints for TikTok content creators in two ways. First, they cannot duplicate what they created on TikTok to rednote without revision, which would add more workload for them to edit the content, or they must create new content curated to both user interest and platform interest, which is also comsumptive in time and resources. Second, comments made in the livestreaming sessions may be ruled by the platform as violation of terms, so that their accounts are subject to various penalties, ranging from warnings and forced termination of current livestreaming session to temporary suspension of livestreaming access, even suspension of account, if such activities are still found repeatly in the livestreaming sessions after warnings and temporary suspension in the past. Most of the participants have expressed similar experience being warned and terminated when having normal conversations with the audience in a livestreaming session. After warnings and penalties, the traffic may not be as good as before, as they are more likely to be labeled by the algorithms as having "criminal history". One commented under a native content creator's post,

> It suddenly went off to a black window, I don't know what happened, and some followers sent some messages asking me about what happened, and I literally had no clue of what happened. When I tried to launch it again, it said I violated some terms, and I am not allowed to do livestreaming for a week. I never saw crazy growth in my followers like day 1.

Similarly, in another review from Apple App Store, a user claimed being punished for normal interactions,

I'm a normal user, with even a random anonymous name I.e. the share "momo" name, just to browsing. But one day my account is suspended quoting I'm trying to get users off platform for money. What????

This does not happen to those who are contracted with MCNs because the MCNs are more familiar with the platform rules, so that their designated management team is present during livestreaming sessions, and they can manually remove people who spoke about unauthorized topics out of the livestreaming session, which may be captured by the algorithms as active response to such content, therefore exempt from being warned or penalized, especially those who are also in direct contact with the platform for official events or compaigns. To be more specific, they are accustomized to the rules through repeated interactions with platform officials and MCNs, and fluently act like native rednote content creators. For instance, they solicit engagement from audiences with conditions by structured speeches, for example,

If the number of likes in this session hit 40k, I will give you a room tour.

Imbrication 6. Material→Human. Except for being listed on the blacklist of algorithm, it is commonly recognized that trending topics change over time, and this holds for the buzzword of TikTok Refugee on rednote. Compared to the very first post as introduction, many of the participants have disclosed that the views decreased dramatically, some times the interactions are countable in single digit. In other words, the algorithms seem to be reset to normal before TikTok Refugee arrived, but for TikTok Refugee content creators, it is a new challenge for them to adapt to this change and compete with native rednote users. Although some felt not confident about their journey on rednote, the others demonstrated optimism. The difference between the two groups that hold pessimistic and optimistic views about the upcoming journey is that, content creators who have connected with MCNs and native rednote content creators are more

confident about their future on rednote. As for the pessimistic group, although some of them have gained an enormous traction at the beginning, which brought about some tens of thousand of followers, they still decided to leave the platform. One of the reasons is realizatino of menetization. One of those who left the platform with around 75k in follower base further commented,

> I didn't expect to have this huge number of followers in such a short time, but I don't know how to turn this into dollars… I don't even know if they take US dollars.

When I followed up asking why not ask someone from the platform or commercial agencies for assistance, this participant answered,

> I tried contacting them, but I don't hear anything from the platform, and I don't know how to reach out to those commercial agencies you mentioned. And of course, I don't speak Chinese. Now that TikTok is still alive, I'm going back to the place I belong.

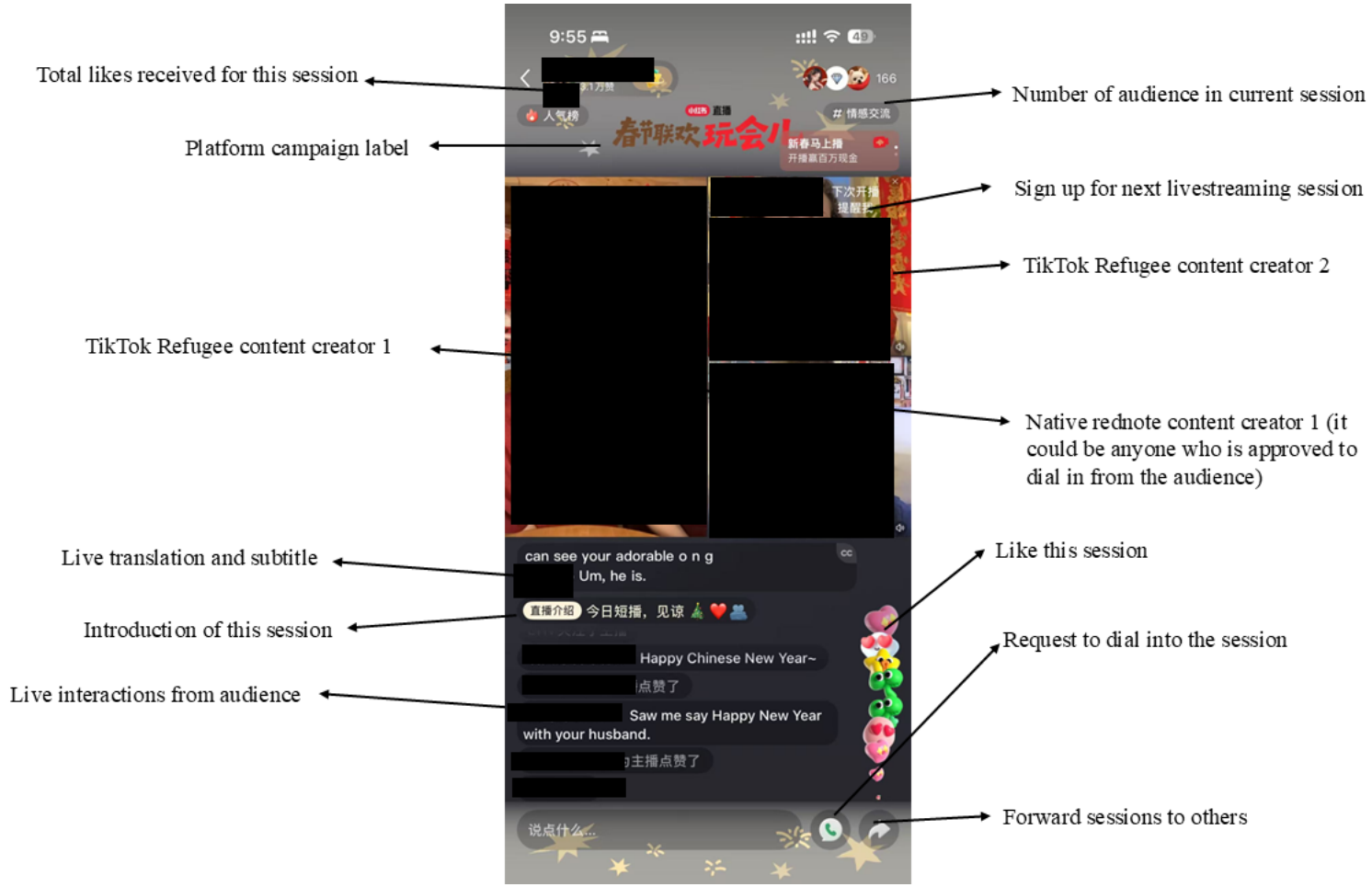


Figure 18. An example of a collaborated livestreaming session of TikTok Refugee content creator

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Conclusion

Admittedly, rednote has fostered an unprecedented cultural exchange experience between the people in the US and China, including a series of activities that spark fierce discussions on the comparison of physical living environments and social media environments. Such activities are a synthesized product under the influence of the social and material agencies on rednote that bring about both positive and negative changes to TikTok Refugees, especially those content creators, which affect their participatory activities on rednote.

From the reviews in app stores, the overall sentiment is positive because of the non-Chinese comments, which accounts for over 95% of all, are dominated by positive reviews, but the reviews made in Chinese are mostly negative. Chinese reviews are negative about content moderation and account suspension, while the translation feature contributes to the positive rating of both Chinese and non-Chinese reviews. Furthermore, verification and authentication remain a major issue for Chinese and non-Chinese users, whereas customer service is another negative factor that contributes to the overall negative sentiment of Chinese reviews.

For those TikTok Refugees content creators who stayed on rednote, they tend to have higher level of cultural adaptation, which is achieved with the assistance received from rednote official operators and MCNs. For those who are inactive on the platform, they did not receive such aid for not being as influential as the early arrivals, or they voluntarily reject such paradoxical life under conflict, not to mention the underdeveloped monetization mechanism to connect with western financial system, regardless of if they have a considerable follower base. Specifically, during this digital migration, rednote has purposefully altered its algorithms and interface

without prior notice or consent of users, for both TikTok Refugees and native rednote users, that lead to positive reactions when users benefit from such changes as a form of platform subsidy, and negative reactions of users when the subsidy disappears.

Moreover, while the monetization mechanism is established by separating the type of accounts as personal or commercial, rednote has set threshold as constraints to solicit users to engage in more commercial activities. MCNs are particularly influential in helping with the transition of TikTok Refugee content creators, but the blunt commercial interest has aggravated the conflict between TikTok Refugees and native rednote users in general, resulting in polarized subsequent actions: deepening engagements on the platform, or detaching from the platform and commercial agencies. In general, to answer the research question, during this digital migration, while the language features produced positive impact for both TikTok Refugees and native rednote users, the verification system, customer service, and content moderation are not quite satisfying. Moreover, rednote altered its technical features as a platform subsidy to please TikTok Refugees with intention to fulfill platform commercial interest without informed consent of users, which led to conflicts between native rednote users and the platform and negative sentiment of native rednote users; when the platform subsidy disappeared and TikTok Refugees were conscious, many would leave. The conflict is more severe in interactions with human agencies despite of aligned business interest.

Limitations

Although this research adopted an approach of triangulation to enhance validity and credibility through multiple data resources, methods, and researchers (i.e., human validation after machine analysis), it is not without limitations. First, even though the quantitative modelling in Study 1 has moderate level of reliability, the sample size may still be too small for causal

inference. This is due to the lack of data availability. For example, some accounts of TikTok Refugees are either suspended or set to private, but this does not mean that they are inactive or they do not have a preference between the two platforms. Second, this study may be subject to selection bias, as replies are only received from those who can be found and active on rednote, but since many of TikTok Refugees are lurkers, this "silent majority" may not be heard enough because they prefer to remain silent most of the time, and their online footprints are difficult to track. Although TikTok Refugee content creators are part of the group of TikTok Refugees, the complication of their interest may not be generalized for the whole group. Moreover, the sample selected in study 2a and 2b may contain noise, meaning that some of these contents may be made by organic users of rednote, especially the non-Chinese reviews as spillovers from the movement of TikTok Refugees since TikTok operate on a larger scale in the world. Third, although using data from app store reviews largely eliminate the possibilities of censorship from the app per se, the data may include inferior reviews since they are self-reported, and they must go through the screening of the app store operators, where some authentic reviews may fail to be posted when they are not compliant with the requirements of the app store guidelines. Furthermore, since the reviews of this research are extracted from the US app store, the reviews in Chinese may well be a corner of an iceberg, a mere spillover from the China app store. Lastly, this digital migration was a very recent event and still developing, the data collected during the period may only capture the effects of this migration in whole. For example, many of the TikTok content creators disclosed that they have plans to physically move to China, and some of them have made their trips real. Therefore, the spillover effect of rednote is not fully studied in this research.

Contributions

Theoretical. As an extension of current studies on digital migration, this research provides valuable insights on affordances and constraints one social media app may have on new and existing users. The findings of present research are consistent with existing research on this digital migration of TikTok Refugees to rednote that 1) rednote actively adjusts its technical features, such as algorithmic recommendation and content moderation, to maximize platform interest over user interest, 2) translation features are critical for the success of TikTok Refugees in this migration to rednote. The present research fills the research gap by explaining potential technical features that afford and constrain TikTok Refugees, such as the verification and authentication process at the very beginning of account registration, and insufficient customer service during daily use, and suppressions by content moderation rules. Moreover, the present research highlights how commercial agencies, both human (i.e., MCNs) and material (i.e., monetization mechanism), produce conflicts between TikTok Refugees, native rednote users, and rednote.

Practical. Digital migrations are becoming more common nowadays in the light of geopolitical conflicts, for instance, in the case of TikTok ban, it can well be understood as an epitome of The Thucydides Trap (Allison, 2015) between US and China. The increasing political and platform censorship have imposed unprecedented challenges about content creation. For example, content related to conflict in Gaza Strip are found increasingly facing systematic censorship on Instagram and Facebook (Human Rights Watch, 2023), and users strive to bypass the censorship and "trick the algorithms" by enabling and disenabling certain in-app settings (Walton, 2024). This research can provide practical guidance from three perspectives when conflicts arise between users and platform for various uncontrollable reasons. First, from the perspective of platform governance, it is nearly impossible to satisfy all users under one

mechanism by interventions to favor one group over another, even with advanced personalization techniques. Because, despite the potential culture shock that may cause conflicts, the user group which does not receive advantageous treatment would perceive such activities being discriminated against, exacerbating existing conflicts and ultimately driving both user groups to drift away, deviating from the intention for retention, where you can't have a cake and eat it. Platforms can segment user groups and content recommendation with progressive intervention under voluntary consent, for example, asking users about their willingness to receive topics they have never encountered before, avoiding creation of echo chambers but introducing new content discovery with full respect to users' will. Furthermore, platforms should pay more attention to initial steps for account registration to eliminate the friction that may stop users right there and take into full consideration of differences in perceived privacy in different cultures for personal ID provision. Second, from the perspective of commercialization, framing commercial activities as community-oriented may well receive the opposite effect, which is caused by the contradicting nature of commercialization that chases on efficiency, whereas the nature of community respects peer support; the seemingly plausible "helping someone by recommending something to buy" logic would fall apart once the disguise of utilitarian intention is pierced and duly perceived. Lastly, as platforms are becoming increasingly institutionalized, users are more powerless under platform governance, especially on content moderation and account suspension under sole discretion of the platform. As AI and advanced governance mechanisms can still have misjudgments, third-party channels for appeal should be introduced and regulated by relevant regulatory bodies. Except for legal entities that can perform the role of arbitrage, civil entities should also be in place, such as designated media outlets to increase media exposure of unaddressed and unfair platform judgements on user appeals about dominant platforms.

Discussion

As Caplan (2023) concluded, platforms increasingly use the language of inclusivity and participation, but these networked governance models often obscure accountability and reinforce power differentials, favoring already powerful actors and creating issues like information abundance and coordination problems. The transition of rednote from a material-centered to social-organized theme has brought both opportunities and drawbacks to rednote. While a social-oriented theme guided by user generated content (UGC) can boost engagement rate (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Mohamed, 2025), rednote is, at the same time, confronted with issues on monetization, encumbered by limited monetization channels, which are primarily advertising and sponsorship (Mao, 2024). Notably, rednote has actively engaged in the capital market, bearing the burden of optimistic expectations from both retail investors and institutional investors (Wong, 2025; Yu, 2025). As equity performance and changes in capital structure are closely related to operational performance and market competitiveness (Deb, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021), the pressure received from capital markets may be reflected in operational policies on rednote, especially on monetization policies, which may exert influences on user behaviors.

The findings of this research reveal that rednote has placed platform interest as a priority against user interest by imposing discriminated treatments on different user groups, and the differences in topics of technical design appropriate reflected the potential consequences. For example, although the mechanism of content moderation is disclosed publicly, it remains vague such that temporal changes may lead to a limbo situation of both user groups as if they were in exile, which may ultimately result in loss of users on both sides. Provided that it started off with a niche for female users in China, some actions of rednote have already deviated from the commitment it made to native rednote users. Ultimately, the seemingly social-oriented

philosophy of rednote is nothing but a de facto deepened commercial interest in disguise. In modern social media platforms, the power dynamic is always unilateral that favors the platform side, users can do nothing but accept once the inertia of use is nurtured to mature. However, the more users are feeling suppressed by the platform, the more disappointment and resistance to the platform, and such negative sentiment may well spill over to other places, which would make the platform not sustainable in the long run. Thus, social media platforms should conduct effective social hearing processes before taking any actions that may hurt any group of users. The dilemma of monetization and authenticity remains an everlasting topic for platforms and content creators on platforms, to be trusted by users/followers should always be the top priority for long-term growth.

Future Research

One direction of future research can be on the lurkers of TikTok Refugees on rednote. Although they remain silent most of the time, some of them are quite active in commenting under other's posts, therefore, valuable feedback may be expected through asynchrounous interviews with them. This may lead to another theoretical discussion about content creation, that how should content creation be conceptualized? Does the comment made in multimodality that may lead to likes and followership count? This may challenge traditional conceptualization of content creation on social media as deliberate posts that take more effort to produce. An example is that now many brands have started to use anthropomorphism as a strategy to resemble more engagement, such as that corporate social media accounts make comments as if they were personal accounts, and such strategic commenting produce better results than traditional post (Cook, 2025). A second future research direction is to study that, to what degree content creators and lurkers are willing to live with the commercial interest without abstaining from current

engagement with the platform. As the conflicts in this research largely emerged by discrepancy of unaligned expectations of commercial interest of various stakeholders on the platform, further studies can be conducted on potential ways to resolve such conflicts, such as characteristics of relevant personnel and duration of the communication process, communication channels and frequency, and terms of contracts with MCNs. As a third direction, as a highlighted theme from this research, future research can be conducted on social media comparison and investigate how perceptions of the use of different social media affect the degree of engagement with each platform, investigating the genes of different platforms, and particularly, under the influence of commercialized platform interest. Lastly, some spillover effects of digital migration are observed, for example, many others from non-US regions impersonate the identity of TikTok Refugee for attention, and some of the TikTok Refugees have made their physical visit or even established residence in China. Such subsequent actions derived from digital migration are worthy of further investigation.

Appendix: Questions Asked in Asynchronous Interviews

TikTok Refugees on rednote:

Social Media Comparison

1. How did you come here on rednote?
2. What do you feel about rednote compared to your other socials?
3. What are the differences between rednote and your other socials?

Social Environment of rednote

1. What do you feel about the people here on rednote?
2. What does your follower base look like? Who are they mostly?
3. How do you interact with your followers and other users on a daily basis?
4. Are there moments where you feel encouraged or disappointed by the users?

Technical Features of rednote

1. What do you feel about the technical features on rednote?
2. What are the features that you like or dislike?
3. How do you play with the features on a daily basis?
4. Are there moments that any features help you or stop you from some interactions on rednote?

Commercialization of rednote

1. How did you know about the monetization system here on rednote?
2. How did you get in touch with MCNs? (asked with specific name of the MCN as they are listed in the profile)
3. What do you like or dislike about the monetization system?
4. What do you like or dislike about the commercial agents from the platform and MCN?

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