Original Paper

Two-Way Mechanism Driving Appearance Anxiety: An Analysis of Xiaohongshu's Beauty Discourse Among Female College Students

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Abstract

Amid the deep integration of the "she-conomy" and social media, Xiaohongshu has become a primary channel for female college students to access beauty and skincare information. However, the underlying mechanism linking the platform's dissemination of "ideal appearance standards" to appearance anxiety among this demographic remains under-explored, with existing research suffering from limitations such as one-dimensional analysis and insufficient contextualization.This study employs a mixed-methods approach—including questionnaires, interviews, discourse analysis, and web scraping—with national female college students as subjects. Grounded in emotional labor theory, it constructs an "emotional labor bidirectional cycle" analytical framework. From dual perspectives of media content production and audience feedback, it reveals the internal mechanisms through which Xiaohongshu's beauty and skincare discourse shapes female college students' appearance anxiety.Findings reveal that Xiaohongshu's beauty discourse: - Reconstructs cognition through "constructing appearance flaws + implanting ideal standards"; - Generates emotions via "upward comparison + practical effect gap"; - Reinforces behavior by "anxiety-driven content dependency and consumption"; forming a vicious cycle of "anxiety confirmation-generation-reinforcement." The platform's discourse strategies synergize with algorithmic recommendations to construct an "anxiety-consumption" closed loop, further amplifying anxiety exposure.

Keywords

Female college students, Appearance anxiety, Bidirectional mechanism

1. Problem Statement

Appearance anxiety refers to non-pathological concerns arising from perceived failure to meet mainstream aesthetic standards, exhibiting high frequency and younger onset under social media influence.Xiaohongshu's beauty and skincare discourse refers to content collections—including makeup tutorials, product reviews, and appearance enhancement techniques—presented through text, images, and videos on the platform. Leveraging contextualized, interactive, and personalized dissemination features, this discourse profoundly influences user cognition and behavioral choices through strategies like symbolic construction and emotional resonance. According to Xiaohongshu's official 2023 Beauty and Skincare Industry Report, the platform generates over 200,000 daily beauty-related posts. Female college students aged 18-22 constitute 63.8% of consumers of this content, spending an average of 47 minutes daily browsing such posts. Over 72% of respondents reported that their beauty purchasing decisions are influenced by this content ("2023 Beauty and Skincare Industry Report,", 2023). Preliminary research for this study further reveals that 70% of female college students avoid social activities due to appearance anxiety, while 63.2% have engaged in impulse purchases over appearance concerns. Appearance anxiety has become a significant issue affecting female college students' physical and mental health as well as their quality of life.

Based on this, the core questions of this study focus on three dimensions: How does media content production induce appearance anxiety among female college students through discursive strategies and technical algorithms? How do female college students, as the audience, receive anxiety-inducing beauty and skincare content, and what cognitive and behavioral responses do they form，and what bidirectional interactive relationship exists between media production and audience feedback that collectively drives the generation and intensification of appearance anxiety. The aim is to reveal the logical connection and shaping mechanisms between Xiaohongshu's beauty and skincare discourse and female college students' appearance anxiety. This provides empirical support and practical strategies for establishing diverse aesthetic values among female college students, optimizing platform content ecosystems, and enabling targeted guidance from schools and society, thereby helping alleviate appearance anxiety among female college students.

2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Media Content Producers: Discourse Analysis and Algorithm-Driven Dissemination on Vertical Social Media Platforms

In studies examining media content producers, international scholars have primarily focused on the impact of algorithmic mechanisms on user cognition. Research confirms that algorithmically recommended homogeneous content and idealized images intensify users' appearance comparisons and heighten dissatisfaction with their looks (Monika, 2020; Chamberlain, 2009); Marwick (2016) further notes that algorithmic recommendations amplify "ideal standards" in the beauty sector, leading to significantly heightened dissatisfaction with one's appearance among users exposed to such content

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environments over time (Gerrard, 2016). Domestic research focuses more on the constructive role of discursive strategies. Studies by Shen Shuang and Tan Huawei (2023) and Li Siming (2023) both indicate that online discourse reshapes users' body cognition through narrative frameworks and identification mechanisms (Shen & Tan, 2023). It is pointed out that online women's health science communication reshapes female body concepts through specific narrative frameworks, reflecting the active role of discourse in constructing bodily cognition. Jia Shiwei and Yan Hui (2023) approach the issue from the perspective of algorithmic bias, noting that users' perception of algorithmic bias not only involves technical-level data and content deviations but also reflects social structural issues such as uneven information distribution and power struggles (Jia & Yan, 2023).

2.2 Audience Feedback Perspective—Related Research on Appearance Anxiety

In studies examining audience feedback, foreign research primarily focuses on individual psychological traits and external experiences. Overseas scholars have confirmed a positive correlation between self-objectification and appearance anxiety, with social appearance comparison playing a partial mediating role. Self-compassion and active physical exercise can buffer this effect (Zhang, Li, Jiang et al., 2025); XiaT et al. further found that cyberbullying triggers social anxiety via appearance anxiety, with gender moderating the relationship between self-esteem and social anxiety (Xia, Liao, Deng et al., 2023); NezirE and Muhammed's research indicates that anxious-avoidant attachment and Instagram addiction positively predict social appearance anxiety, while adolescents' positive developmental levels negatively predict it (Nezir & Muhammed, 2023). Domestic studies focus on female college students, with multiple investigations confirming that Xiaohongshu usage intensity positively predicts appearance anxiety. For instance, Zhang Yuhan (2024) combined qualitative and quantitative methods to find that higher Xiaohongshu usage intensity correlates with more pronounced internalization of ideal appearance standards, thereby accelerating negative body image formation. In-depth interviews revealed that female college students' original perceptions of appearance become narrower due to platform content (Zhang, 2024); Chen Xiaotong (2023) further observed that female college students in first-tier cities scored higher on anxiety measures than those in second- and third-tier cities, with lower-year students potentially exhibiting higher anxiety levels than upper-year students. This was speculated to relate to information exposure frequency and self-cognitive maturity (Chen, 2024). Regarding mitigation strategies, Wei Yaqiong (2024), Jiao Qiang (2015), Zhang Mannan (2024) proposed targeted recommendations from platform, educational, and social environmental perspectives respectively (Wei, 2022; Jiao, 2015; Zhang, 2024).

2.3 Bidirectional Interaction Perspective—Research on the Relationship Between Social Media and Body Image

Research from the bidirectional interaction perspective predominantly focuses on the negative impact of social media on women's body image. Vandenbosch (2022) et al. note that the idealized, edited images on platforms establish a singular standard, and frequent exposure among female college students can lead to body dissatisfaction (Laura, Jasmine, & Marika, 2021); Jasmine Fardouly (2019) et

al. further suggest that interactive features like likes and comments intensify body image concerns, with anxiety escalating when feedback falls short of expectations (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian et al., 2015). However, Rodgersa et al. (2021) also found that content promoting diverse body images and inner beauty can mitigate anxiety (Taylor & Armes, 2024). Domestic research closely examines local platforms. Wen Ying (2024) proposes that Xiaohongshu leverages four dimensions of availability—production, social interaction, dissemination, and emotion—to respectively generate, connect, and distribute anxiety-inducing content and atmospheres (Wen, 2023); Kang Shuonan (2024) found that medical aesthetics information dissemination on platforms suffers from issues like questionable credibility of sources and lack of content warnings, potentially inducing appearance anxiety (Kang, 2023).

2.4 Analytical Framework and Research Hypotheses

This study centers on emotional labor theory, integrating gaze theory and mediatization theory to construct a bidirectional analytical framework of "media production - audience feedback," forming the theoretical model of the "bidirectional emotional labor cycle" (see Figure 1). Based on this theoretical framework, the study proposes the following research hypotheses:

H1: Xiaohongshu usage positively influences female college students' appearance anxiety；

H2: Appearance anxiety positively predicts social rejection behavior among female college students；

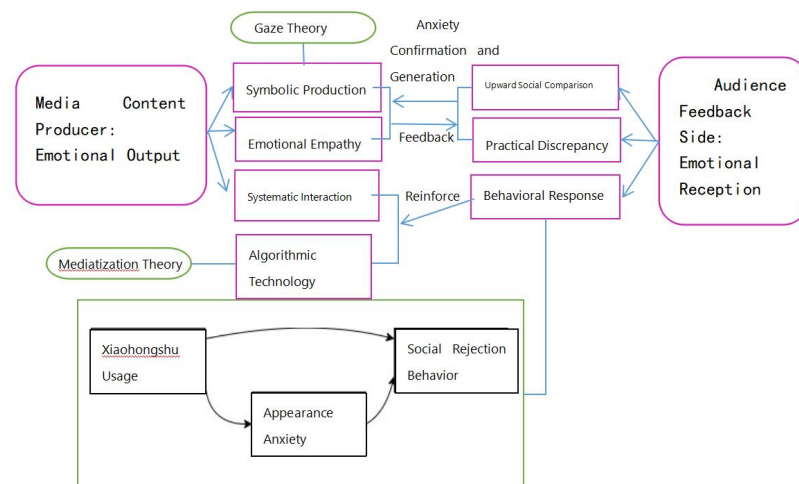H3: Xiaohongshu usage indirectly influences social rejection behavior through appearance anxiety.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework and Research Hypotheses Diagram

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research to explore the bidirectional mechanism through which Xiaohongshu's beauty and skincare discourse shapes appearance anxiety among female college students. The interplay and progressive integration of different methodologies ensure the scientific rigor and comprehensiveness of the research conclusions.

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Quantitative research methods primarily include questionnaire surveys and web crawling technology for data collection. The questionnaire survey employed a combination of convenience sampling and stratified sampling. Five universities across different regions were selected, covering female college students from various grade levels (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics of the survey participants). Questionnaires were distributed via the online platform "QuestionStar" and through on-campus intercept interviews at designated locations. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed, with 742 valid responses collected, yielding a valid response rate of 92.8%. SPSS 26.0 was used for reliability and validity testing (Cronbach's alpha = 0.962, KMO = 0.969), descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and logistic regression modeling.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Survey Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grade	Freshman	178	23.99
	Sophomore	182	24.53
	Junior year	173	23.32
	Senior	89	11.99
	Graduate	121	16.31
Viewing Duration	< 30 minutes	311	41.91
	30 minutes to 1 hour	275	37.06
	1–2 hours	123	16.58
	> 2 hours	34	4.58

Crawler technology data collection utilized search keywords strongly associated with female college students, such as "morning makeup routine," "no-makeup emergency fixes," and "facial flaw correction." It scraped 300 relevant notes published on Xiaohongshu from January to June 2025. The scraped content encompassed note text, titles, images/video captions, and comment section messages. Concurrently recorded metrics included likes, saves, and posting times. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed to deconstruct the platform's anxiety-shaping strategies through linguistic

symbols, emotional empathy, and interactive mechanisms.

Qualitative research primarily employed in-depth interviews. Based on questionnaire results, 20 participants with moderate-to-high anxiety levels (anxiety scores ≥68) were selected for semi-structured interviews focusing on "content consumption habits," "anxiety-triggering scenarios," and "cognitive and behavioral adjustment processes" (see Table 2 for respondent demographics). Each 30-minute interview strictly adhered to academic ethics standards, with all data anonymized.Using Nvivo 12.0 software and a grounded theory-based "three-level coding" approach (open coding, associative coding, core coding), typical pathways for "anxiety generation," "anxiety reinforcement," and "anxiety relief" were extracted.

Table 2. Basic Information of Interview Participants

Abbreviation of Name	Grade	Daily Browsing Time on Xiaohongshu	Mainly Focused Beauty and Skincare Content
ZJ	Sophomore	1 - 2 hours	Skincare knowledge, appearance defect correction (e.g., dark circle coverage, double eyelid application, big eye makeup, etc.), makeup tutorials, recommendations of good makeup products
WYJ	Senior	2 - 3 hours	Professional makeup tutorials, celebrity makeup imitation, skincare ingredient analysis, medical aesthetics popularization
YZK	Freshman	More than 3 hours	Beginner makeup tutorials, affordable product recommendations, student - friendly outfits, campus life sharing
XH	Sophomore	1.5 - 2 hours	Seasonal skincare, coping with dry climate in northern China, daily commuting makeup
HAK	Second - year Graduate Student	0.5 - 1 hour	Quick commuting makeup, basic medical aesthetics knowledge, anti - aging skincare for early signs
GXY	Pre - senior (will be a senior in	About 1 hour (fragmented)	Quick no - makeup look, skincare for postgraduate exam candidates, affordable products for students

		September)	
ZLW	Junior	3 - 4 hours	Early morning 8 - class fake no - makeup look, oily and acne - prone skin care, medical aesthetics popularization, outfit transformation
CF	Sophomore	30 minutes - 1 hour	Skincare knowledge, appearance defect correction (e.g., acne scar coverage, pore refinement)
ZH	Junior	1 - 2 hours	Makeup imitation (film/TV character makeup, celebrity makeup), figure management (e.g., waist slimming, leg slimming tutorials)
WMM	Sophomore	0 - 30 minutes	Basic skincare (e.g., moisturizing, sun protection), affordable color cosmetics for students
CY	Junior	More than 2 hours	Medical aesthetics popularization (e.g., intense pulsed light, hydrating injections), high - end color cosmetics reviews
YX	Sophomore	30 minutes - 1 hour	Appearance defect correction (e.g., single eyelid to double eyelid transformation, flat nose enhancement), traditional Chinese style color cosmetics
TH	Sophomore	1 - 2 hours	Figure management (e.g., vest line training, arm slimming tutorials), mild medical aesthetics (e.g., hair removal, acne scar treatment)
FSQ	Senior	2 - 3 hours	Skincare and skin improvement - related issues, European and American style makeup
CJZ	Sophomore	2 hours	Weight loss, recommendations of cosmetics (seeding grass)
Xiao Y	Freshman	1 hour	Makeup tutorials, recommendations of cosmetics (seeding grass)
WST	Senior	2 - 3 hours	Skin problems and skincare tutorials,

			European and American style makeup tutorials, recommendations of cosmetics
YZY	Sophomore	3 hours	Makeup tips, recommendations of cosmetics, plain person transformation makeup tutorials
WTT	Junior	1 hour	Makeup tutorials, makeup skills, product recommendations, outfit tutorials
XX	Junior	1 - 2 hours	Makeup tutorials, skincare tutorials

4. Research Findings

4.1 Media Content Producers: Synergy Between Discourse Strategies and Algorithm-Driven Recommendations

Critical discourse analysis of 300 Xiaohongshu beauty notes revealed that the platform employs a "symbolic production-emotional empathy-systematic interaction" discourse strategy. This strategy, combined with users' unconscious "upward social comparison" habits and the algorithm's precision-targeting capabilities, triggers appearance anxiety and induces users to alleviate anxiety through consumption.

At the linguistic level, a binary structure of "negative pain points - positive standards" emerges. Negative vocabulary is tightly bound to female college student scenarios, framing appearance issues within specific contexts to provoke anxiety. Positive vocabulary, meanwhile, is directly linked to consumption, emphasizing the notion that "consumption brings beauty."Simultaneously, the overlay of scientific discourse and exaggerated rhetoric creates an "illusion of authority" for the product while compressing the solution timeline, fostering an anxiety for "immediate action."
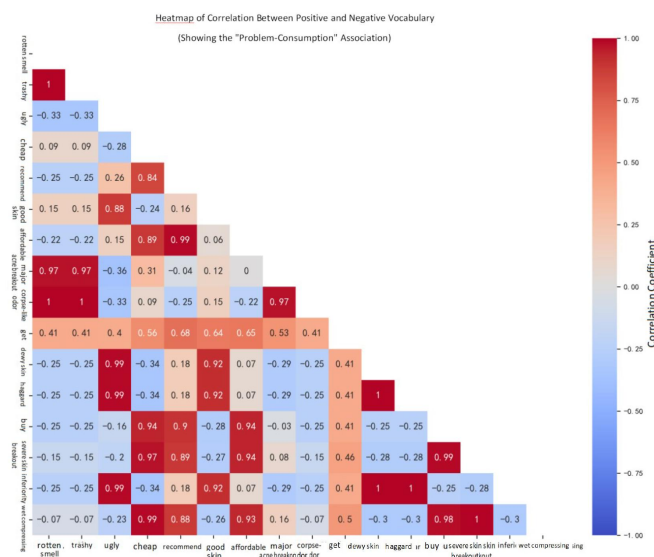

Figure 2. Correlation Heatmap Between Positive and Negative Vocabulary

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On the emotional empathy level, the platform bridges psychological distance with female college student users through "kinship-based addresses-group resonance." Terms like "sisters" and "besties" appear over 200 times per thousand texts, 72.5% of posts employ rhetorical questions like "Don't you feel the same?" to evoke shared experiences, transforming individual anxiety into collective consensus. Objectifying language is prevalent, reducing skin to a "decorative surface" and reinforcing the notion that "appearance is the core of social value." This directly explains the positive correlation between appearance anxiety and social rejection behaviors observed in the survey.
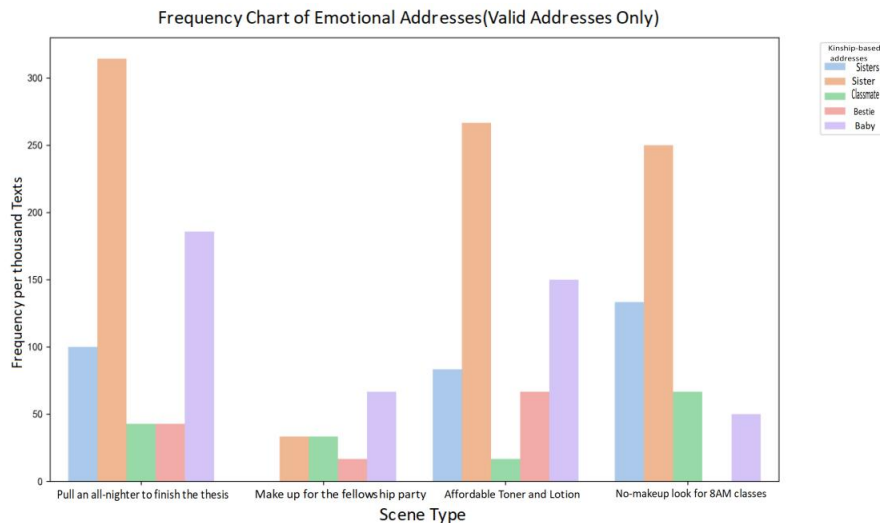

Figure 3. Emotional Address Frequency Chart

At the interaction mechanism level, comment sections function as implicit arenas for "anxiety diffusion-consumption conversion." Analysis of 372 valid samples reveals a "mildly dominant, gradiently differentiated" distribution of anxiety across three expression categories: 32.3% of comments are "help-seeking questions," while 37.6% contain "anxiety-related phrases" that validate anxiety through "upward comparison."In the top 60% of high-engagement posts, consumption-driven requests like "link needed" and "where to buy" accounted for over half of interactions. Moreover, the "consumption conversion interaction rate" for moderately anxious texts reached 83.7%, significantly higher than that of mildly anxious texts (41.2%). Algorithms further amplify this effect by capturing high-engagement content and delivering precise recommendations, creating a vicious cycle where "user likes confirm anxiety → algorithm pushes more similar content," intensifying anxiety among already anxious individuals.
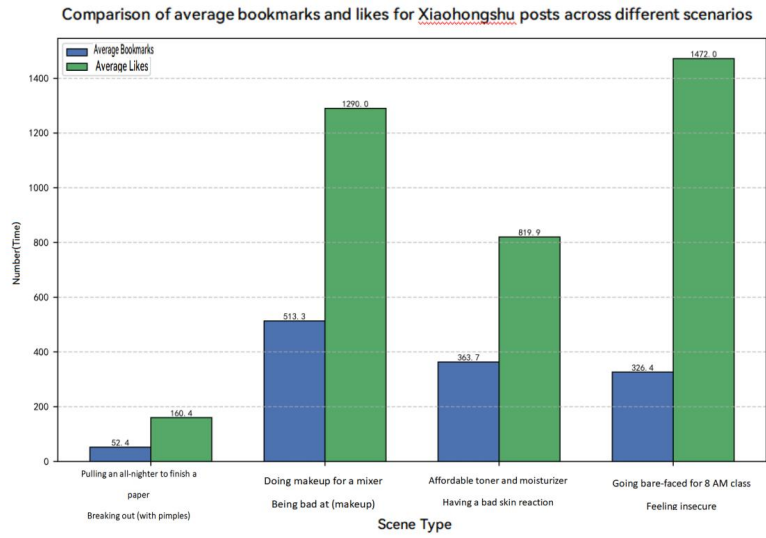
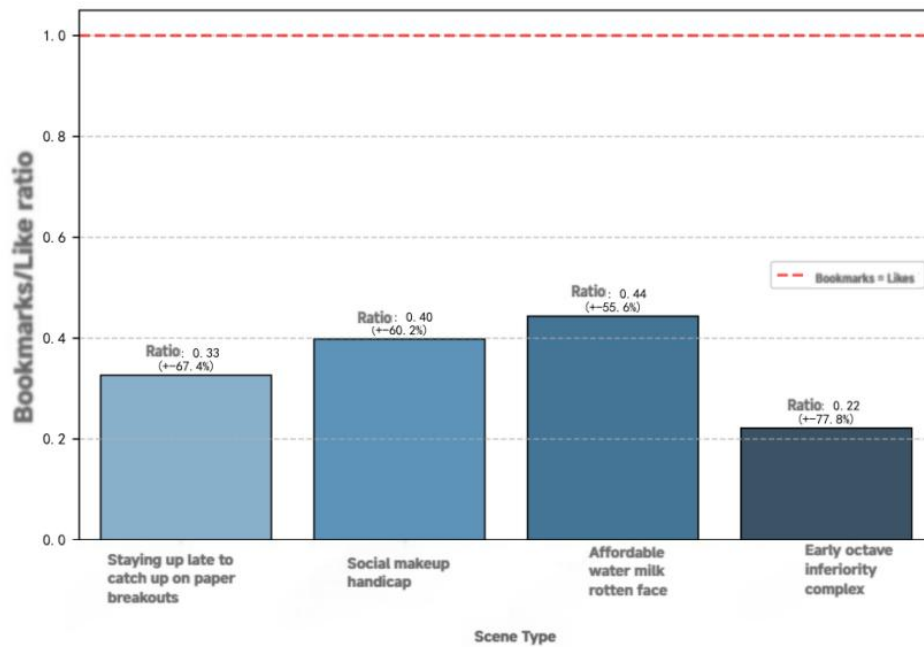**Figure 4. Comparison of Likes vs. Saves Across Different Scenarios**

Figure 5. Ratio Distribution of Bookmarks to Likes Across Different Scenarios

Anxiety Level Distribution Across Different Expression Types in the "Affordable Toner & Lotion Causing Skin Irritation" Scenario (N=372)
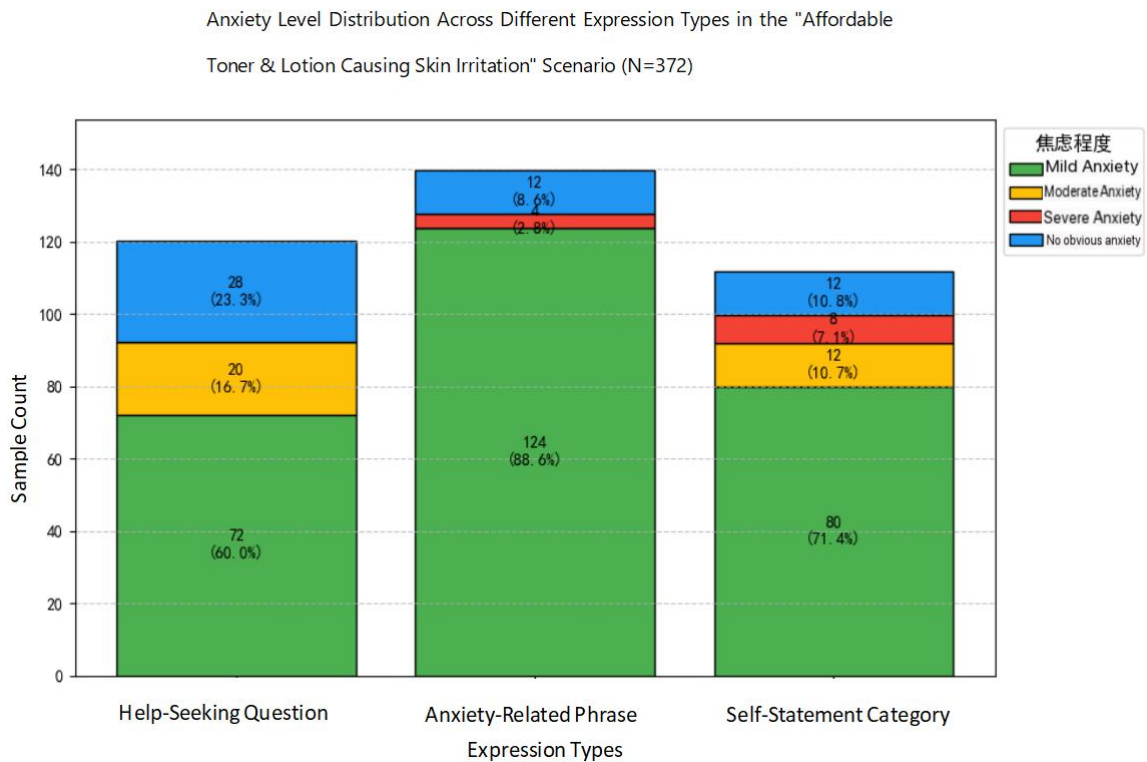
Figure 6. Anxiety Level Distribution across Different Expression Types in the "Budget Skincare Ruins Skin" Scenario

4.2 Audience Feedback: Current State of Appearance Anxiety Among Female College Students

Based on 742 valid responses from the Revised Social Appearance Anxiety Scale (SAAS) and a self-developed questionnaire, female college students exhibit overall "moderately high levels of appearance anxiety with significant group differences." Score distribution shows an average anxiety score of 68 (out of 105), with 25% of respondents in the high anxiety range; Moderate anxiety levels accounted for 62.3% of the total sample, while only 8.7% of respondents scored below 40 points (low anxiety level). Regarding influencing factors, Xiaohongshu usage behavior showed a significant positive correlation with anxiety levels. Groups using the platform 1-2 hours daily scored 8.693 points higher on anxiety than those using it less than 30 minutes daily ($p<0.001$). Additionally, significant grade-level differences emerged, with seniors and graduate students exhibiting notably lower anxiety scores than underclassmen, likely reflecting increased self-awareness. Living expenses showed no significant impact on anxiety levels. Behaviorally, appearance anxiety profoundly influenced social interactions and consumption decisions: each 1-point increase in anxiety score raised the probability of social avoidance by 4.3% (OR=1.043, $p<0.001$).
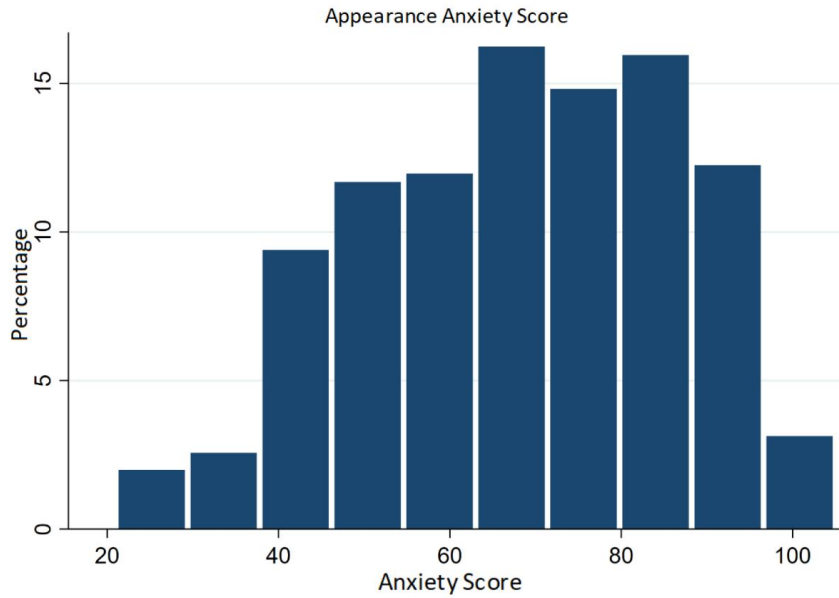
Figure 7. Distribution of Appearance Anxiety Scores Among Female College Students

Table 3. Model 1 (Xiaohongshu Usage Positively Predicts Appearance Anxiety) Validation Data Table

	(1)
	Appearance Anxiety Score
Less than 30 minutes as reference category	
30 minutes–1 hour	4.924*
	(2.57)
1–2 hours	8.693***
	(3.39)
>2 hours	7.716*
	(2.01)
Xiaohongshu Anxiety Score	9.840***
	(11.34)
Xiaohongshu exaggeration value	0.741
	(0.80)

Using living expenses under ¥1,500 as the reference category

1,500–3,000 yuan	-1.226
	(-0.67)
>¥3,000	-1.718
	(-0.55)

Freshman class as reference category

Freshman	-2.300
	(-1.02)
Junior	-2.253
	(-1.02)
Senior	-7.654**
	(-2.63)
Graduate	-8.630**
	(-3.15)
Constant	37.85***
	(8.92)
Sample size	742

T-statistics in parentheses

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 4. Model 2 (Appearance Anxiety Positively Predicts Social Rejection Behavior) Regression Results for Rejection Behavior (Odds Ratio)

	Model 2
Behavioral Rejection Ratio	

Anxiety Score	1.043***
	(4.26)
Less than 30 minutes as reference category	
30 minutes–1 hour	2.147*
	(2.35)
1–2 hours	6.318**
	(3.12)
>2 hours	0.799
	(-0.33)
Xiaohongshu Anxiety Score	1.676**
	(2.73)
Xiaohongshu Exaggeration Score	0.712*
	(-2.13)
Using living expenses under ¥1,500 as the reference category	
1,500–3,000 yuan	0.953
	(-0.15)
>¥3,000	2.450
	(1.36)
Freshman class as reference category	
Freshman	1.185
	(0.43)
Junior	0.840
	(-0.42)
Senior	1.168
	(0.30)
Graduate	1.184
	(0.37)
Sample Size	742
Pseudo R-squared	0.249

Exponentiated coefficients; t-statistics in parentheses

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001; Reported odds ratio (OR).

4.3 Bidirectional Interaction: The Pathways of Anxiety Shaping in Xiaohongshu Beauty Content

Through discourse analysis, questionnaire surveys, and interview coding analysis, Xiaohongshu beauty content shapes appearance anxiety among female college students across three dimensions—cognition, emotion, and behavior—forming a progressive process of "anxiety confirmation → anxiety generation → anxiety reinforcement."Cognitively, the platform disrupts female students' self-perception through "defining appearance flaws—implanting ideal standards," establishing a "standard-deficiency" binary framework. Survey results reveal 68.9% of respondents stated "Xiaohongshu altered their view of their own appearance," with 52.7% expressing dissatisfaction due to frequent exposure to "perfect images."Emotionally, dual pressures—"upward comparison" and "performance gap"—fuel anxiety. Homogeneous algorithm-driven content prompts female students to compare themselves with influencers, while "failed imitation" intensifies distress, transforming simple appearance dissatisfaction into "self-capability denial."Behaviorally, anxiety inversely intensifies content dependency and consumption. Surveys reveal that 60% of high-anxiety groups seek solutions by "increasing Xiaohongshu browsing time." Coded interview data further indicates that impulse buying and altering skincare routines emerge as primary coping mechanisms, while only a minority alleviate anxiety through rational approaches like "cutting off stimuli" or "confiding in peers."

5. Analysis of Research Findings

5.1 Empirical Validation of the Emotional Labor Cycle: Bidirectional Interaction Between Producers and Audiences

This study confirms through empirical findings that the "emotional output-reception transformation-cycle reinforcement" logic within the "bidirectional emotional labor cycle" model aligns with the vicious cycle of "anxiety generation-practice gap-anxiety reinforcement" observed in the survey.From the media production perspective, Xiaohongshu employs standardized strategies of symbolization, emotionalization, and interactivity, combined with algorithmic precision targeting, to establish a symbolic framework linking anxiety to consumption, thereby projecting emotional output toward female college students.From the audience feedback perspective, female college students undergo a process of "emotional expectation → practical gap → anxiety generation." The survey revealed that 52.7% of respondents felt dissatisfied due to Xiaohongshu's "perfect image." Interview participants also mentioned experiences like "following makeup tutorials but getting poor results, leading to increased anxiety and more content consumption." This further demonstrates how audiences passively engage in emotional labor, trapped in a negative "anxiety-content dependency" cycle.

5.2 Theoretical Responses to Key Questions: Refining the "Bidirectional Emotional Labor Cycle" Model

1. Why Are Highly Educated Women Also Influenced by Xiaohongshu's Beauty Discourse? — Supplementing the "Audience Variation" Dimension

Traditional assumptions suggest highly educated groups (e.g., graduate students, elite university

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students) possess strong critical thinking skills and are less susceptible to media discourse. However, our data reveals that graduate students scored only 8.630 points lower on anxiety than first-year undergraduates (p<0.01), and 40% of highly educated respondents reported "adjusting skincare habits based on Xiaohongshu content."This occurs because content producers prioritize emotional resonance over rational judgment through empathetic, relatable, and contextualized messaging that heightens emotional detection. Xiaohongshu's beauty discourse further employs "professional camouflage," packaging emotional labor as "scientific advice" to diminish critical awareness. Additionally, the platform's systematic interactions transform individual anxiety into collective pressure, compelling highly educated women to internalize anxiety.This further reveals the applicability boundaries of the "bidirectional emotional labor cycle" model—it is not solely effective for "low-cognition groups" but may also impact highly educated groups, thereby refining the theory's explanation regarding "audience differences."

2. New Characteristics of Anxiety Induction in Social Media Compared to Traditional Media — Exploring Technology's Impact on Emotional Labor Effects

Compared to traditional information dissemination methods (such as newspapers and magazines), Xiaohongshu, as a modern emerging media platform, intensifies anxiety induction through contextual embedding, algorithmic acceleration, and interactive diffusion. This represents a core discovery at the intersection of mediatization theory and emotional labor theory. Within the "bidirectional emotional labor cycle" model, Xiaohongshu frequently associates the construction of appearance flaws with common college life scenarios like "graduate school entrance exams" and "early morning classes." This contextual embedding deeply binds anxiety to perceived needs, making anxiety more readily accepted by female college students. Second, Xiaohongshu's anxiety induction exhibits an "accelerated" characteristic driven by algorithmic technology. Through real-time feedback loops of "user behavior-content push," it speeds up the emotional labor cycle. Moreover, widespread and systematic interactions in comment sections accelerate anxiety diffusion. Individual anxieties resonate collectively through sharing and venting, triggering "secondary transmission" of anxiety and forming an emotional labor process: "output at the production end → diffusion at the audience end → platform-wide anxiety atmosphere."These new characteristics indicate that emotional labor in the social media era has evolved from "unidirectional output" to a composite model characterized by "scenario-based, precision-targeted, and interactive" features. Media technology has become a key amplifier of emotional labor effects, enhancing theoretical explanations regarding "differences in emotional labor across diverse media environments."

6. Conclusions and Discussion

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research to demonstrate that Xiaohongshu's beauty and skincare discourse, through manipulative rhetorical strategies and algorithmic precision targeting, constructs a vicious cycle of "anxiety

confirmation-anxiety generation-reinforcement" vicious cycle among female college students. Grounded in emotional labor theory and incorporating perspectives such as the theory of the gaze, this study constructs a "bidirectional emotional labor cycle" theoretical model applicable to this research. It reveals the logic of anxiety generation and reinforcement within the "media production-audience feedback" bidirectional interaction, addressing shortcomings in previous studies regarding research perspectives and contextual applicability to the subject.

This study has limitations: cross-sectional data precludes establishing temporal causality, high-frequency user samples are insufficient, and proposed countermeasures require practical validation. Future research should include longitudinal tracking and cross-platform comparative studies. Additionally, proactive efforts should be made to facilitate the practical application of academic findings by linking and coordinating resources to ensure research genuinely serves society and addresses real-world issues. Furthermore, biological factors warrant attention. Neuroscience methodologies could be employed through experimental design to explore and validate the physiological mechanisms of appearance anxiety, complementing and refining this study from additional dimensions while offering new perspectives for research advancement.

Based on survey findings and extended discussions, this study proposes the following countermeasures addressing appearance anxiety among female college students and irrational guidance on social media:

For female college students themselves: - Cognitive restructuring: Actively engage in "self-narrative" by sharing positive experiences—such as life anecdotes and growth insights—amidst non-ideal appearances through social media, gradually shifting focus from external adornment to inner cultivation. - Behavioral management: Participate in campus media literacy lectures and online content analysis workshops to learn identifying anxiety-inducing elements like filter effects and exaggerated rhetoric, distinguishing genuine needs from anxiety-driven impulse consumption.

Higher education must transcend traditional "art appreciation"-based aesthetic frameworks by integrating "body image education" into general education curricula. This involves: On the other hand, create "diverse aesthetic scenarios" by hosting "unretouched portrait exhibitions" showcasing the beauty of authentic faces and organizing "bare-faced confidence sharing sessions" where students recount stories of accepting their own appearance. Simultaneously, address scenarios like "early-morning bare-faced anxiety" andexam-prep appearance neglect," counselors conduct one-on-one conversations and themed class meetings to reinforce the message that "academic performance is unrelated to appearance," emphasizing the value of intrinsic qualities like competence, character, and collaboration skills.

Xiaohongshu must optimize its ecosystem across three dimensions: algorithms, content, and community interaction. Algorithmically, it should adjust recommendation mechanisms to reduce frequent pushes of "homogeneous perfect images" while increasing exposure weight for "everyday unedited makeup looks" and "authentic skincare routines." Simultaneously, implement an "anxiety-content alert feature" to break information silos. Content standards must establish authenticity

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benchmarks for beauty and skincare content, requiring creators to clearly label filter usage, product trial periods, and effectiveness variations in images or text. A dedicated reporting channel for anxiety-inducing marketing should be established with strict enforcement of penalties. Community interactions should feature dedicated spaces for genuine product experience sharing, encouraging users to discuss reasons for product discontinuation or makeup mishaps to counter misleading "miracle effect" narratives.

Society must actively promote diverse aesthetic values and optimize cultural dissemination mechanisms and institutional arrangements. In cultural outreach, advance aesthetic education into communities through parent-child craft workshops and health-beauty lectures to instill the concept that "health and confidence are beauty" among youth. Social organizations can launch initiatives like the "Real Skin Image Project" and "Body Acceptance Campaign" to rebuild societal tolerance for "imperfections."Institutional safeguards require industry associations to establish "Cosmetic Content Dissemination Standards" to provide benchmarks for reducing anxiety-inducing content. Market regulators should strengthen routine oversight of cosmetic product promotions, targeting anxiety-inducing marketing tactics like "enlarged pores make you look older" or "uneven skin tone causes foundation to cake." Businesses and merchants engaging in false advertising or exaggerated claims must face legal penalties.

Alleviating and resolving appearance anxiety among female college students, while promoting diverse and healthy aesthetic values and beauty education, is an urgent priority requiring collective guidance and efforts from multiple stakeholders!

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