

Decoding Philosophers' Misogynistic Remarks on Xiaohongshu: A Discourse Analysis of 1,037 Comments

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Abstract. On Xiaohongshu, a Chinese lifestyle platform with a female-majority user base, misogynistic remarks associated with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Rousseau have become recurring objects of public commentary. Drawing on Hall's Encoding/Decoding model and feminist critical discourse analysis, this study uses a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to analyze 1,037 individually identifiable comment units from 19 philosopher-centered threads documented between May 2021 and August 2026. After 358 non-attitudinal or unclassifiable units were excluded, 679 comments were coded. Oppositional decoding was largest overall (41.1%), followed by dominant decoding (24.9%), playful de-authoritization (22.2%), and negotiated decoding (11.8%). Opposition predominated in the Nietzsche- and Schopenhauer-centered groups, whereas playful de-authoritization led the Rousseau-centered group (44.0%). Unlike opposition, which challenges propositions or their ideological basis, playful de-authoritization primarily lowers the philosopher's status through memes, slang, bodily or biographical satire, and wordplay. The findings show how platform vernaculars broaden ordinary readers' access to canonical interpretation and reshape epistemic authority.

Keywords: Encoding/Decoding model, audience reception, Xiaohongshu, feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, epistemic authority

1. Introduction

Digital platforms expose canonical figures to everyday judgment outside traditional academic settings [1]. Gendered claims are especially contested: Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Rousseau remain central to Western philosophy, yet their statements on women and sexual difference have generated sustained debate [2-5].

Xiaohongshu is a useful site for observing this reception. Research portrays it as a lifestyle-oriented platform where female users combine self-presentation, consumption, intimacy, and gender discussion [6, 7], while adapting expression to changing governance and moderation environments [8]. Existing work, however, rarely examines encounters between this platform culture and canonical philosophy.

The study asks which decoding orientations appear and how they are distributed (RQ1), which discursive mechanisms realize them (RQ2), and what they reveal about epistemic authority and interpretive hierarchy (RQ3). Its contribution lies in treating reception not only as agreement or

disagreement with content, but also as a struggle over who may interpret, defend, criticize, or ridicule canonical claims.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1. Philosophers' views on women as encoded discourse

Schopenhauer's "On Women," Nietzsche's discussions of "woman," and Rousseau's account of Sophie in *Emile* have prompted debates about essentialism, hierarchy, and women's social roles [2-5]. In Hall's terms, these statements can be analyzed as encoded propositions that invite preferred readings [9]. Canonical prestige can make criticism appear to require specialist knowledge, whereas digital discussion lowers this entry barrier [1].

2.2. Xiaohongshu, gender, and everyday public discourse

Xiaohongshu scholarship largely examines everyday gendered experience: body image [10], fertility and emotional communication [11], changing family roles [12], resistant vocabulary practices [13], lifestyle feminism, and identity construction [6, 7]. This literature establishes the platform as a site of gendered meaning-making, but its main objects remain health, family, consumption, and everyday identity. This gap matters because canonical texts carry institutional prestige that ordinary lifestyle content does not. The present study therefore shifts attention to how users interpret canonical philosophical authority.

2.3. Hall's encoding/decoding model and playful de-authoritization

Hall distinguishes dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional readings according to audiences' relation to preferred meaning [9]. Morley operationalized these positions in audience research [14], and later studies extended the model to interactive affordances and platform communication [15, 16]. Feminist critical discourse analysis highlights how gendered assumptions are normalized or contested [17].

The corpus also contains a recurring orientation termed "playful de-authoritization." It is not proposed as a universal fourth position. Oppositional decoding directly contests a claim or its ideological basis, playful de-authoritization chiefly alters the status relation between thinker and reader. Memes, slang, bodily satire, biography, and wordplay make a revered thinker ordinary or ridiculous. Disagreement may be implied, but the defining function is status-lowering rather than a developed counter-interpretation.

2.4. Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis treats discourse as a site where power and inequality are reproduced and resisted [18, 19]. The Discourse-Historical Approach identifies strategies such as nomination, predication, and historical-context topoi [20], while cognitive approaches help explain how readers infer motives [21]. In digital misogyny research, these tools also require attention to context and research ethics [22].

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design and data collection

The study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design. Frequencies and percentages are descriptive, the principal analysis is qualitative.

Comment sections were selected as naturally occurring records of reception. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Rousseau were included because each combines canonical status, documented controversy over women, and recurring visibility in the available Xiaohongshu material. Retrieval used the philosophers' Chinese names with 女性 and 女人 ("women"), rather than the broader 性别 ("gender"), because the study concerns statements explicitly about women.

The material was compiled from 19 philosopher-centered threads across six source files: five centered on Rousseau, six on Nietzsche, and eight on Schopenhauer. They were normalized into 1,037 individually identifiable comment units. When the platform-reported comment count exceeded the units actually retrievable from the source files, only auditable units were retained. The material spans May 2021 to August 2026. Comments were grouped by the philosopher-centered thread in which they appeared, not by whether each comment named the philosopher. Identifiers were removed, and examples were translated or lightly paraphrased to preserve anonymity and discursive function [22].

3.2. Coding framework and sample overview

Comments were first screened for an independently interpretable stance toward the disputed claims or the authority surrounding them. Pure emojis, isolated agreement, questions, @-mentions, factual fragments, and off-topic exchanges were classified as other/unclassifiable. This excluded 358 units, leaving 679 attitudinal comments. A function-oriented semantic review assigned them to oppositional, dominant, negotiated, or playful de-authoritization. Explicit counter-interpretation was coded as oppositional, primarily memetic, bodily, or biographical status-lowering as playful. Comments acknowledging objectionable content while retaining selective value were negotiated. Direct endorsement, or defenses based on context, textual accuracy, achievement, or expertise, were dominant. Ambiguous fragments were excluded rather than assigned on sentiment alone. No inter-coder reliability statistic is reported because the final review was not independently double-coded. Table 1 describes this corpus rather than generalizing to all Xiaohongshu users.

Table 1. Distribution of decoding orientations by philosopher-centered thread group

Thread group	Attitudinal n	Oppositional n (%)	Dominant n (%)	Negotiated n (%)	Playful n (%)
Schopenhauer	43	18 (41.9%)	12 (27.9%)	6 (14.0%)	7 (16.3%)
Nietzsche	470	202 (43.0%)	135 (28.7%)	62 (13.2%)	71 (15.1%)
Rousseau	166	59 (35.5%)	22 (13.3%)	12 (7.2%)	73 (44.0%)
Total	679	279 (41.1%)	169 (24.9%)	80 (11.8%)	151 (22.2%)

Note. Percentages are calculated within each philosopher-centered group. A total of 358 non-attitudinal or unclassifiable units were excluded before the table was calculated.

4. Analysis of discursive mechanisms in online comments

4.1. Oppositional decoding: rejection and structural counter-reading

Oppositional decoding was largest overall (N = 279, 41.1%). Direct condemnation and disenchantment refuse automatic deference to the "great philosopher." More structural comments use terms such as objectification, reject "historical limitation" as an adequate defense, or connect male intellectuals across periods [17]. Others recommend women philosophers and feminist texts as alternative interpretive resources.

These moves convert private discomfort into a challenge to who has historically defined reason, universality, and intellectual greatness. They also shift the evaluative standard from inherited prestige to the adequacy of the claim itself. The category is therefore identified by propositional challenge to the misogynistic claim, its defense, or the canon protecting it, humor alone is insufficient.

4.2. Dominant decoding: contextualization and canon preservation

Dominant decoding accounted for 169 comments (24.9%). Its central mechanism is historical contextualization: discriminatory claims are treated as products of another period, and present-day critics are accused of presentism [20]. Other strategies include achievement exemption, translation or quotation defense, biographical gatekeeping, collective exculpation, and the subordination of gender to class.

Some comments endorse the disputed claim directly, others defend the thinker by recasting it as metaphor, character speech, or mistranslation. The category thus includes both direct agreement and indirect preservation of authority. Across these variants, criticism is absorbed or narrowed so that canonical legitimacy remains largely intact.

4.3. Negotiated decoding: selective use without full identification

Negotiated decoding comprised 80 comments (11.8%). These readers acknowledge objectionable content while retaining parts of a work. Compartmentalization separates philosophical achievement from personal ethics or historical limitations, selective extraction recommends taking useful ideas and discarding the rest.

Skipping offensive passages and reading without moral identification also assert reader autonomy. A few comments turn this selective stance into self-empowerment by learning from the author while refusing his view of women. Unlike dominant decoding, this position does not fully protect preferred meaning, unlike opposition, it stops short of rejecting the canon.

4.4. Playful de-authoritization: memes, carnival, and status-lowering

Playful de-authoritization comprised 151 comments (22.2%). Research on carnival, memes, delegitimation, playful activism, and lightweight platform participation helps explain this orientation [23-28].

Three mechanisms recur. Generational naming uses Laodeng (老登), an ironic "old geezer" label, and Deng-flavor (登味, "geezer vibe") to recast philosophers as familiar social types. Bodily and biographical satire explains doctrine through sexual frustration, failed relationships, family conduct, or personal inconsistency. Rousseau threads are especially revealing: comments juxtapose his placement of his children in a foundling hospital with the educational authority of Emile.

Orthographic wordplay decomposes 男 ("man") into 田 and 力 ("field" and "force"), rendered as Tianli, reducing the revered author to the generic category of "man."

These expressions need not offer a philosophical counterargument. Their primary effect is to make the thinker laughable, bodily, and accessible, shifting interpretive authority from specialist expertise toward recognizable everyday experience. This also lowers the threshold for participation: users need not display specialist training before challenging the aura of the canon. Humor is therefore treated as a social action, not merely as an emotional tone.

5. Discussion: negotiating epistemic authority

The four orientations concern both meaning and the right to judge meaning. Opposition challenges gender hierarchy, dominant decoding preserves canonical legitimacy, negotiated decoding retains selective use, playful de-authoritization changes the social relation between reader and author. They coexist rather than forming a linear progression from deference to resistance.

The philosopher-centered groups show different descriptive repertoires. Opposition was largest in the Nietzsche and Schopenhauer groups, at 43.0% and 41.9%. Nietzsche discussions often disputed quotation, translation, character speech, and metaphor, whereas Schopenhauer comments responded more directly to essentialist claims in "On Women." In Rousseau threads, playful de-authoritization was largest (44.0%), frequently using the tension between Emile and Rousseau's treatment of his children. Because group sizes and thread framing differ, these are corpus-specific patterns, not effects attributable to the philosophers themselves.

Hall's model remains useful for locating audiences relative to preferred meaning, but platform rhetoric is also part of reception [15, 16]. Memes and ridicule can weaken expectations of deference before formal critique occurs, status work may therefore precede or substitute for propositional critique. Platformization broadens the repertoires through which users negotiate canonical authority without producing a single ideological outcome.

6. Conclusion

Among 679 attitudinal comments, opposition was largest overall, but aggregate figures concealed differences across philosopher-centered groups. Nietzsche and Schopenhauer threads were mainly oppositional, while Rousseau threads were mainly playfully de-authoritizing. This contrast supports the study's functional distinction: opposition contests propositions or their ideological foundations, playful de-authoritization lowers the canonical speaker's status.

Digital reception is therefore also a negotiation of interpretive hierarchy. Ordinary readers claim authority through structural argument, contextual defense, selective appropriation, and platform vernaculars. The three-group comparison further shows that the form of this negotiation varies with the framing and biographical resources available in particular threads. The study extends Hall's framework at the level of platform performance without claiming a universal fourth position. Limitations include one platform, uneven thread sizes and framing, incomplete platform archives, descriptive quantification, no independent double coding, and rapidly changing slang. Future work should compare platforms and test the reliability and transferability of these categories.

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