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Research Review on Online Identity Construction and Personal IP Commercialisation in the Digital-Media Era

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of iterative mobile internet technologies and an increasingly mature social media ecosystem, the traffic economy has gained growing prominence. Ordinary internet users are no longer passive recipients of information, through sustained online content creation, they can proactively construct digital identities and cultivate personal intellectual property (IP) to achieve commercial monetization. As a representative phenomenon in the digital media sector, personal IP commercialization has reshaped employment patterns and content production logic within the new media industry. Taking Xiaohongshu as the research context, this paper employs literature review and case study methods. It synthesizes core theories of online identity construction, personal IP, and the attention economy, and unpacks the end-to-end monetization pathway of personal IP. The study further examines practical risks including fabricated personas, user privacy breaches, and interest conflicts within multi-channel network (MCN) institutions, and puts forward targeted optimization countermeasures across four stakeholder dimensions: creators, platforms, regulatory authorities, and consumers. The findings reveal that the commercial value of personal IP is anchored in stable online personas and trust-based relationships with followers. Nevertheless, fierce competition for platform traffic tends to breed problems such as persona fabrication and excessive marketing. This study enhances understanding of the operational logic of the self-media industry in the digital era and helps identify systemic industry risks, thereby providing theoretical references for the healthy and sustainable development of the new media sector.

Keywords: digital identity, personal IP, traffic economy, Xiaohongshu, IP commercialisation

1. Introduction

Extant literature has predominantly focused on the traffic logic and monetization models of top-tier internet celebrities, examining how leading creators generate commercial returns through large fan bases. By contrast, grassroots bloggers have received far less scholarly attention. The full pathway through which ordinary creators build online identities from scratch, grow their IP influence, and achieve commercial conversion, as well as the inherent vulnerabilities and industry risks faced by grassroots IPs relative to top-tier influencers, has yet to be systematically delineated.

Against this backdrop, this study takes the Xiaohongshu platform as its specific research setting. Adopting a literature review approach, it systematically examines core theories including digital

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identity, the quantified self, and the attention economy. Drawing on growth cases of grassroots bloggers, the paper unpacks the full operational logic of personal IP from identity construction to commercial monetization. It further analyzes industry-wide practical risks including fabricated personas, MCN internal interest conflicts, and traffic rule volatility, and proposes targeted optimization strategies from four stakeholder perspectives: creators, platforms, regulators, and consumers. This research helps elucidate the underlying operational logic of the self-media industry in the digital age, identify the value foundation and potential risks of personal IP commercialization, and offer theoretical references and practical insights for guiding the healthy and sustainable development of the new media industry [1].

This study carries notable practical significance. It dissects the underlying logic of personal IP commercialization, clarifies the intrinsic link between online identity construction and commercial monetization, helps academia understand new flexible employment models in the digital age, and identifies hidden risks within the self-media industry, thereby offering insights for advancing the sound development of the new media sector. Focused on the Xiaohongshu platform, this paper synthesizes relevant theories of online identity construction and personal IP, summarizes existing pathways for personal IP commercialization, explores prevailing industry risks, and puts forward targeted optimization solutions. The primary research methods employed are literature review and case study analysis. Throughout the research, academic literature on digital identity, the quantified self, the attention economy, and personal IP from both domestic and international sources is systematically reviewed. Concurrently, growth cases of grassroots bloggers on Xiaohongshu are selected to summarize practical rules for ordinary creators to build online identities from scratch, cultivate their IP, and achieve commercial transformation.

2. Theoretical foundation of online-identity construction and personal IP

2.1. Core concepts of digital identity and quantised self

Digital identity (online identity) refers to the public image that users actively construct and display in cyberspace. Through text-and-image posts and short-videos, users present their lifestyles, aesthetic preferences and values, and complete the media-based presentation of self-images. This process is also termed the quantised self [2]. Quantised self means individuals convert private lives and personal preferences into shareable online content to build a unified and stable online image.

The formation of online digital identity heavily relies on underlying platform mechanisms. Low-threshold publishing mechanisms enable ordinary people to produce content continuously. Algorithm-driven traffic-distribution mechanisms deliver creators' content to matching audiences, expanding the reach of creators' online images and facilitating the accumulation of personal-IP influence. Online identity is not a simple copy of real-world identity. Instead, it is a media-shaped image selectively packaged by users. The inherent gap between online images and real selves constitutes the root cause of persona-fabrication problems.

2.2. Academic understanding and research context of personal IP

The core of personal IP consists of stable personas, unified personal labels and fan-attention resources, which together form the basis of personal-IP commercial value. Stable personas serve as the carrier of IP, while fan-attention resources constitute the underlying asset that can be converted into commercial gains. From the perspective of the attention-economy theory, internet users' attention is a scarce resource. Continuous content output by bloggers is used to compete for user

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attention. Once attention accumulates to a certain scale, commercial-monetisation potential emerges [3]. The digital-labour theory can explain unpaid labour behind long-term content creation by self-media creators, revealing the value extraction of creators' achievements by platforms and MCN institutions.

The self-presentation theory can interpret the behavioural logic of bloggers' online persona construction, illustrating how creators selectively present themselves and shape online images that meet audience expectations. Domestic and international scholarship has produced abundant discussions on algorithm-driven traffic mechanisms on social-media platforms. Most existing studies focus on top-tier internet celebrities' traffic logic and monetisation models, examining how top bloggers gain commercial benefits through massive fan bases. There remains room for further research on grassroots bloggers: the complete process for grassroots creators to build online identities and achieve IP growth, as well as the vulnerabilities of grassroots IPs relative to top-tier internet celebrities, deserve in-depth exploration. The above theories provide an analytical framework for understanding the operational logic of grassroots-IP commercialisation.

3. Operational logic and practical pathways of personal-IP commercialisation

3.1. Persona-shaping logic on social-media platforms

Social-media platforms contain built-in content-screening logics. Platform algorithms favour authentic and vertical content, as creators with clear personas can attract targeted audiences, build follower trust and boost follower stickiness [4]. The Xiaohongshu community emphasises real-life experience sharing, and grassroots bloggers tend to create life-oriented and vertical-review personas. Douyin leans towards entertainment-oriented personas, while Weibo favours public-oriented personas. These three platforms show marked differences. Community aesthetics and popular-content norms influence creators' output. Bloggers complete online-identity construction under the joint constraints of community atmosphere and algorithmic rules. Personas matching platform preferences are more likely to receive traffic recommendations.

3.2. General monetisation models for personal IP

Xiaohongshu has formed a layered personal-IP monetisation system, mainly including brand-cooperation campaigns, product-recommendation promotion and live-stream sales. Brand cooperation represents the most common monetisation approach for grassroots bloggers, and suits vertical-focused personas such as beauty reviews. Bloggers leverage professional-looking content to accumulate followers and secure promotion fees. Product-recommendation promotion fits life-sharing-oriented personas. Bloggers share product experiences from ordinary-consumer perspectives and drive consumption through authentic personal images. Live-stream sales suit personas with strong sales capabilities, allowing direct product sales and commission earnings. Different monetisation pathways impose differentiated requirements on creator maturity, content verticality and follower bases. Grassroots bloggers select appropriate commercial-monetisation methods according to their account-development stages [5].

3.3. Case analysis of grassroots-blogger-IP commercialisation

A large number of grassroots bloggers on Xiaohongshu achieve personal-IP commercialisation by continuously publishing life-oriented content and accumulating followers. Such cases share common

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features: low entry barriers. Ordinary people can start without professional teams and build online identities through daily content output. Once follower numbers reach a certain scale, bloggers accept brand cooperation to earn income. This paper selects the beauty-content blogger Shu Shu Ting as a case for analysis. Initially, she shared beauty-makeup content on Xiaohongshu without professional operational teams. She consistently posted beauty-haul and daily-makeup tutorials to build a sincere beauty-blogger persona. When her follower count rose to around 20 000, she began receiving domestic-makeup and skincare-brand business collaborations. Relying on fan trust, she carried out product-recommendation campaigns and completed personal-IP commercialisation. This case also reflects core risks of personal IP. The commercial value of grassroots bloggers rests entirely on trust built around authentic personas. Once bloggers exaggerate product effects or engage in excessive-marketing persona-misconduct, audience trust will be rapidly eroded, followers will leave, and the long-term commercial foundation of accounts will collapse.

4. Practical dilemmas and risks of personal-IP commercialisation

4.1. Risks in content production and persona construction

Under intense traffic competition, some bloggers fabricate personas and manufacture topics to gain attention. They may resort to exaggerated expression and false packaging to improve content recognisability. Such behaviour easily leads to distorted content, turning personal IP from authentic self-expression into performative operation. When audiences detect gaps between bloggers' online images and real-world realities, previously-established trust will be weakened, damaging follower stickiness and commercial value. Meanwhile, personal-IP commercialisation may bring homogenisation and creative exhaustion. If creators excessively rely on viral-content templates or produce repetitive content, audience fatigue will emerge and account traffic will decline. For grassroots bloggers, limited team resources and content-production capacity create challenges: balancing continuous output and authentic personas constitutes a major risk in their commercialisation process. Fake personas also trigger social problems including appearance-anxiety and body-image anxiety. Bloggers use filters and photo-editing tools to create idealised images, continuously feeding audiences with a single-aesthetic template [5].

4.2. Risks of commercial cooperation and industrial ecosystem

After signing with MCN institutions, bloggers face multi-party interest conflicts. The commercial risks for grassroots IPs shaped by MCN institutions differ substantially from those of independent creators. MCN-packaged commercial IPs have complete teams responsible for account planning, content creation and advertising arrangements. Conflicts mostly concentrate on account ownership, follower numbers and revenue-sharing terms [6]. Even if creators produce most content, teams may revise content to maintain account operation. Original grassroots IPs rely heavily on life-oriented content to attract followers. Without professional teams, creators possess weak negotiating power. They depend on institutions for commercial opportunities and are more likely to accept unfair contracts. If required to release frequent advertisements, grassroots creators cannot balance commercial and daily content, damaging their authentic personas. Once follower trust is lost, recovery is difficult. Changes in platform algorithms also create traffic instability. MCN institutions can operate multiple accounts across platforms to offset losses caused by single-account traffic declines [7]. In contrast, grassroots creators usually run only one account and lack risk-mitigation

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measures. Platform rules prioritising viral content also force grassroots creators to build fake personas, resulting in widespread advertising content [8].

5. Optimisation countermeasures for sound development of personal-IP industries

5.1. Creator dimension

Self-media creators should uphold authentic expression and reject excessive packaging and persona fabrication. Before signing with MCN institutions, creators must carefully read contract clauses, clarifying account ownership, advertising scheduling, revenue-sharing rules, breach-of-contract provisions and termination conditions, so as to avoid future disputes over account ownership and revenue distribution. When cooperating with commercial partners, creators should balance promotional and original-content proportions and reasonably control advertising frequency to prevent excessive marketing from eroding follower trust. Meanwhile, creators should continuously improve content-creation capabilities, define clear account positioning, reduce homogenised content, and strengthen user stickiness through stable, high-quality original content to support long-term personal-IP development.

5.2. Platform dimension

Platforms should improve labelling systems for commercial content, clearly distinguishing ordinary-life sharing from commercial-promotion advertisements. This helps curb implicit fake-product-recommendation practices and enables users to identify marketing content quickly. To mitigate risks of fake personas generated by algorithmic incentives, platforms should optimise traffic-recommendation algorithms. They should weaken over-reliance on viral-content logic and increase traffic support for genuine high-quality original content to suppress traffic gains from fake personas [9]. Platforms should also improve rules regarding account ownership and contract-termination mechanisms. These rules provide channels for resolving disputes over account ownership and revenue-sharing between bloggers and MCN institutions. They can ease severe traffic fluctuations caused by major algorithm adjustments and reduce income-instability risks for creators [10].

5.3. Regulator dimension

Regulatory authorities should refine institutional rules for internet celebrities and MCN industries. They need to clarify rights-and-responsibility boundaries among platforms, MCN institutions and creators, and establish standards for judging ownership of online accounts and trademarks. Such measures can reduce disputes over account ownership and revenue distribution arising from agency contracts [11]. Regulators should strengthen supervision of online advertising content. They should strictly penalise fake-product-recommendation, excessive-marketing and false-advertisement violations. Restrictions should be imposed on traffic-driven content that fuels appearance and body-image anxiety, guiding self-media industries to carry out commercial promotion in a standardised manner [12].

5.4. Consumer dimension

Ordinary platform users should improve media-literacy capabilities. They need to distinguish genuine life-sharing content from commercial-promotion material. Users should view bloggers'

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carefully-constructed online personas rationally and recognise gaps between media-shaped online images and real-world individuals. This helps mitigate appearance and identity anxiety caused by single-aesthetic fake-persona output, and foster healthy and rational media-consumption mindsets [13].

6. Conclusion

Taking the Xiaohongshu platform as a case study, this paper employs literature review and case analysis methods to explore issues related to online identity construction and personal IP commercialization in the digital media environment. The study reviews core theories of digital identity and personal IP, and summarizes the development and commercial monetization pathways for grassroots blogger IPs. The findings indicate that the commercial value of personal IP is underpinned by stable personas and follower trust. Nonetheless, traffic competition gives rise to a range of industry risks, including persona fabrication, privacy breaches, MCN interest conflicts, and traffic volatility. This study has certain limitations. Its case selection is concentrated on beauty-focused grassroots bloggers on Xiaohongshu, which constrains the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study adopts a qualitative analytical approach without supporting quantitative data. To realize the long-term healthy development of personal IP commercialization, creators, platforms, regulatory authorities, and consumers should collaborate to balance traffic benefits with content authenticity and sustain a sound online content ecosystem.

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