A Study on Information Re-editing Behavior of Gen Z Users in UGC Platform Based on Grounded Theory

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Abstract

[Objective/Significance] This study analyzes the influencing factors and behavioral characteristics of Generation Z users're-editing behaviors on user-generated content (UGC) platforms based on their own published content. It explores the online information behavior characteristics of Generation Z users, aiming to enrich and expand research in the field of user information behavior and provide references for UGC platforms to understand user needs. [Methods/Process] Grounded in grounded theory, this study investigates the influencing factors of Generation Z users' information re-editing behaviors on UGC platforms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and processed via three-level coding to construct an impact factor model for users 'information re-editing behaviors. [Results/Conclusion] The behavior of users re-editing information based on their own published content on platforms results from the interaction between individual users and environmental factors, as well as pre-and post-action factors. Key elements include: publishing purposes, self-presentation, platform mechanisms, social norms, interpersonal communication, information leakage, peer feedback, and work popularity. Additionally, Generation Z users're-editing behaviors on UGC platforms exhibit distinct goal-oriented tendencies, pronounced "internet celebrity mentality," and a tendency to filter out negative information.

Keywords

User-generated content, Information re-editing behavior, Grounded theory; Generation Z.

1. Introduction

User-generated content (UGC) platforms have become pivotal hubs for public data distribution. The evolution of Web 2.0 technologies has fundamentally transformed both the supply-demand dynamics and organizational models of digital content: users are no longer merely content consumers but have evolved into core content creators themselves [1]. As users increasingly dominate content production alongside platforms' continuous feature enhancements, repetitive modifications of original content – including frequent text and tag revisions, as well as adjustments to visibility timelines and audience parameters – have emerged as prevalent information behaviors. The research in the field of user information behavior mainly focuses on user information sharing behavior, user information acquisition behavior, user information evaluation behavior and user privacy protection behavior [2], and pays less attention to the re-editing behavior based on their own published content. Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1995 and 2009, a generation that grew up with the rapid development of the internet, often dubbed the "digital natives." The digital environment has shaped their unique worldview and behavioral patterns. Current research on this "digital native" group's information behavior remains in its infancy, particularly regarding their distinctive practices in content re-editing. Re-editing refers to users making secondary or multiple modifications to content they

originally post or edit on social platforms before repost it. This study focuses on Generation Z users' behavior in UGC platforms, employing grounded theory research strategies. Through semi-structured interviews for data collection and analysis, we explore the influencing factors and characteristics that drive this behavioral pattern among Gen Z users.

2. Research and Core Conceptual Definitions

Information Re-editing Behavior and Generation Z: Information publishing refers to the creation of original content based on personal cognition of a subject or content browsed, which is disseminated through social media platforms for viewing by all (or partial) users within the platform. This content is stored on social media profiles, allowing repeated access and representing users 'social identities. The content may exist in single formats (e.g., text-only or image-only) or combinations of multiple formats (e.g., text + images, text + links, images + links, etc.). [3] With the increasing complexity of the internet, single-content publishing can no longer satisfy users' browsing needs. Various UGC platforms have added re-editing options in publication interfaces or content expansion features, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Using keywords such as "re-editing behavior", "information modification", "information publishing", "information re-editing", "information revision", and "information repost" in databases including China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), VIP, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, no relevant research in the field of information behavior was found. Sentence retrieval using descriptive terms like "edited published content" revealed that some scholars discussing new media functions in journalism and communication fields have addressed this behavioral phenomenon. In his master's thesis, Ye Heng explored how to improve the dissemination efficacy of Bilibili APP from the perspective of affordances, arguing that the interface design of Bilibili grants users higher editability, including re-editing published content such as modifying titles or deleting posts [4]. Qi Mengying and Tan Xin investigated how the affordances provided by media platforms enhance rumor-refutation effectiveness, noting that the editability feature on Weibo enables users to promptly update published content after obtaining new information, while also facilitating timely review and revision of posted materials [5]. Some scholars have discussed how major Chinese social platforms achieve complete control over users' published content and comments through functional mechanisms, aiming to foster a more harmonious online public opinion ecosystem [6]. Features like content pinning and re-editing privileges can enhance account authority [7]. Based on search results, no studies have yet examined users're-editing behaviors regarding their own published content. Existing research in related disciplines primarily focuses on platform-centric aspects—such as whether the platform-provided editability aligns with user experience or generates revenue—but lack user-oriented exploration into motivations and influencing factors behind such behaviors. In addition, it should be noted that some literature refers to the word "re-editing" specifically to the secondary processing and creation of literary and artistic works by the creative subject. Re-editing creation [8][9][10], that is, secondary creation, editing and other behaviors, does not include this meaning in the "re-editing behavior" in this study.

Core concept definitions: Given the limited research on users 'secondary editing of self-published content on UGC platforms and the absence of a unified terminology in related fields, this study attempts to conceptualize such behavior as "information re-editing", a designation derived from media affordance theory. The concept of "affordance" was originally proposed by ecological psychologist James Gibson to describe the potential for biological agents (or subjects) to act within physical environments, arising from the interaction between subjective perception of utility and objective technical specifications[11]. Introduced into China's journalism and communication academia by scholar Pan Dangzhong in 2017, this theory is also termed "disembodiment" [12]. Disembodiment theory plays a crucial role in studying

information system users within social media platforms[13][14][15]. Pan Dangzhong's theoretical framework encompasses three dimensions of affordance: production affordance, social affordance, and mobile affordance [16]. In the study of information production availability, the concept of editability has been extensively discussed. Editability refers to the degree of freedom allowing users to modify relevant objects [17], indicating that individuals can invest considerable time and effort in conceptualizing and recreating communication behaviors before they are perceived by others [18]. It represents the ability of individuals to modify or alter content that has already been communicated [19]. This feature enables social media users to add, modify, and change published content on the internet [20]. Building on this perspective, the author defines user behavior involving secondary or multiple edits to content published on social platforms as information re-editing. Specifically, such behaviors on UGC platforms manifest in two distinct patterns: users may either save edited content as drafts for later review and modification before publication, or repeatedly refine their posts through multiple revisions before final release. After a certain period of time, the user checks the published information, modifies and other secondary editing operations, and then re-releases it. The scope of modification can include labels, text, filters, visible range, specific content and other parts that can be modified.

3. Research methods and data collection

Rooted theory is a qualitative research method that establishes theories based on empirical data, serving as a scientific and effective approach for theoretical construction when research topics are not yet fully developed [21]. This study aims to analyze the influencing factors of Generation Z users' information re-editing behaviors on UGC platforms, reveal the formation mechanisms of research questions, and construct a systematic analytical framework. Given the relative lack of prior research on this topic and limited theoretical studies related to information re-editing behavior, this study adopts rooted theory as an exploratory analytical method. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, followed by three levels of coding—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—to systematically collect and analyze data from a bottom-up perspective. The conclusions were derived through collaborative discussions with two other researchers during the coding process to mitigate subjective biases. Rooted theory has clear requirements for sample selection, which should be selected according to specific research objectives rather than simple random sampling. In order to determine the typicality and scientific nature of the sample, this study followed the following principles when selecting samples: 1. The respondents were born between 1995 and 2009. 2. The interviewees have registered and used the ugc platform for more than 3 years, and the average daily browsing time is more than 1 hour. 3. Have experience of publishing and modifying content on relevant platforms within half a year. This study employed semi-structured interviews for data collection, with participants recruited online through social media platforms. A total of 15 individuals were interviewed (8 females and 7 males), with an average interview duration of 20 minutes across both online and offline formats. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 30 years old. Prior to interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted with participants. The interview outline and questions were continuously refined based on feedback during the interviews. Post-interview transcription was performed via Tencent Meeting, followed by manual data organization and subsequent verification with interviewers, ultimately yielding approximately 35,000 words of interview data. The interviews were conducted from June to September 2024. Grounded theory coding was implemented using NVivo 12 Plus software. No new concepts emerged during interviews with the 14th participant, and no new content was generated during subsequent interviews with another participant, achieving theoretical saturation. Basic information about interview participants is shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Information table of respondents:

number	year of birth	gender	profession
1	1998	female	teacher
2	2003	female	student
3	2000	male	student
4	2001	female	student
5	2002	male	civil servant
6	2002	female	Enterprise employees
7	2000	female	student
8	2004	female	liberal professions
9	1996	female	liberal professions
10	2001	female	student
11	1995	male	sales
12	2002	male	Enterprise employees
13	1999	male	Enterprise employees
14	2001	male	Enterprise employees
15	2002	male	Enterprise employees

The thematic interviews for this research focus on three key aspects: (1) Basic usage patterns of UGC platforms, including time spent, frequency, and platform types; (2) Implementation processes of information re-editing behaviors, including their causes, specific scenarios, pivotal events, and user experiences; (3) Differences in implementation approaches and user perceptions across various platforms.

4. Level 3 coding and model construction

Open coding:The collected data was analyzed and processed using NVivo 12 Plus qualitative analysis software. During the open coding phase, we applied sentence-by-sentence coding based on research objectives and interview content, adhering to the principle of "respecting users' original expressions" to extract reference points for corpus construction. This yielded 356 initial concepts, which were then de-duplicated and systematically organized. Through further categorization, 26 core categories were identified, as detailed in Table 2.:

Table 2 Results of open coding (part)

original statement	Initial concept	Fundamental categories
A4 It's obviously a typo, and it's embarrassing if I look illiterate. I might just delete it or resend it.	embarrassing if I look illiterate	personal image
A7 It was a bit of a hassle for him to modify, and I didn't bother to study how he did it.	Modification troubles	Platform features

A2 Sometimes it just changes things like the title, and then there are errors in the content, and sometimes it can't be sent, so it's modified.	the work cannot be published	Shielding standards
A6 People around me use TikTok quite a bit, and they tend to treat TikTok as their social circle, sharing fun things on it.	Share life with friends	socialization
A15 You can also see the one I posted where I've mosaicked my own face, and I'm pretty careful about that, I mean, I'm going to deliberately protect my privacy.	Avoid exposure	Privacy awareness
A12 If someone makes a bad comment, I will withdraw it or repost it.	the request of another person	Netizen comments

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5. Axial coding

The initial concepts and categories derived from open coding are relatively independent and fragmented. During the axial coding phase, through further analysis of these preliminary categories, we identified intrinsic connections between them. Through continuous comparison and iteration, eight core categories were distilled: publication objectives, self-presentation, platform mechanisms, social norms, interpersonal interactions, information leakage, feedback mechanisms, and work popularity. The results of axial coding are presented in Table 3:

Table 3 Spindle code result diagram

Main category	Fundamental categories	Means
Objectives of the release	Life records, work needs,	The effect the user expects to achieve when publishing a work
Self-presentation	Personal image, show yourself, nobody cares, self-satisfaction	The process by which individuals influence the formation and change of others' impressions of them on social networking sites is realized through the presentation and content of operations
Platform mechanisms	Platform throttling, platform functionality, platform differences	Platform attributes, supporting functions, platform positioning, etc
social norm	screening criteria, misleading others, social values	Social conventions and unspoken rules

interpersonal interaction	maintaining relationships, finding common ground	Social interaction that users generate through the publication of their works on UGC platforms
Information leakage	disclose privacy, retain location, privacy awareness, cyber violence	Disclose information you don't want to disclose
Feedback from others	netizen comments	All kinds of feedback received from others after the content was published
Works popularity	play count, likes and retweets, attention	The attention and influence gained by the work during the process of network communication

6. Selective coding and model interpretation

In the selection and coding stage, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of 8 main category relationships, and finds that the factors affecting Gen Z users' information re-editing behavior on UGC platforms include early and late factors, as well as subject and object factors. The information re-editing behavior of Generation Z users on UGC platforms arises from both the interaction between individual user factors and objective platform mechanisms, as well as the interplay between pre-event and post-event factors. The former focuses on spatial interactions between users and their environment, while the latter examines temporal responses to different factors before and after the action. These two dimensions intertwine to collectively drive the final implementation of information re-editing. Specifically, pre-event factors include posting purposes, self-presentation, platform mechanisms, and social norms—where self-presentation and posting purposes belong to individual factors, while platform mechanisms and social norms fall under objective factors. Post-event factors encompass interpersonal interactions, information leakage, peer feedback, and content popularity—where interpersonal interactions and information leakage are individual factors, while peer feedback and content popularity are objective factors. The influence pathways of these factors are elaborated below, with the identified model of influencing factors for Generation Z users' information re-editing behavior on UGC platforms shown in Figure 1.

(1) Publishing Purpose: This refers to the behavioral direction set by users before specific actions occur. Users publish content for various purposes such as work requirements, daily records, social interactions, or seeking help. Information sharing serves these purposes, and when content fails to meet expectations, users often modify or recreate it to achieve desired outcomes. The significance and timeframes of different purposes influence users 'willingness to edit their content. For example: "A15, I initially posted about selling strawberries for my family. After posting, I felt it was too fake, so I revised it several times to make it more authentic."

(2) Self-Presentation: This describes individuals' efforts to meet others' expectations of their image (see book: Daily Life Self-Presentation). The openness of UGC platforms endows user behavior with social attributes. When users express themselves on these platforms to fulfill

emotional and social needs, they may adjust published content to better shape their self-image, attitudes, behaviors, or values if errors occur. Specific scenarios include concerns about embarrassing wording or unpopular posts. Original text: "A4, It would be embarrassing if I appear uneducated. I might make it visible only to myself or delete and repost."

(3) Platform Mechanism: The platform mechanism includes aspects such as the editing tools provided by the platform and the permission push mechanism for editing, which directly affect users 'willingness to re-edit information. The editing functions provided by the platform are incomplete, such as being unable to modify beyond a certain time limit, only allowing modification of individual content, cumbersome modification modes, and unsatisfactory modification effects, which fail to meet users' editing needs and may lead to reduced willingness or even interruption of editing behavior. Features like membership-only editing set by some platforms also prevent users from translating their editing intentions into concrete actions. For example, the original corpus states: "A2, on TikTok, I once encountered a situation where I wanted to change the cover, but he couldn't select it, so I had to delete and repost it."

(4) Social Norms: These refer to socially recognized rules and boundaries. While users enjoy significant freedom in browsing or posting content on UGC platforms, they must comply with legally binding regulations and established social conventions. Content creation isn't entirely unrestricted. Moreover, competition among platforms and imperfect AI review systems often lead to misinterpretations of ambiguous terms or incorrect sentence structures. Users may encounter issues like post-editing failures, video hiding, content removal, or reports after submission. When content gets blocked, this resistance forces users to modify their posts. To address publication challenges, users may adjust content based on posting purposes or personal preferences, adopting compromises like using homophonic expressions or subtle hints to re-post or abandon their original content. Original feedback includes phrases like "A11, its sensitivity threshold is too vague – you can't find the standard. Sometimes when you post content containing current news terms, it gets flagged."

(5) Social Interactions: The implementation of information in user editing behaviors exerts dual influences on interpersonal relationships. On one hand, users maintain social connections through interactions with their personal social circles via UGC platform updates. On the other hand, they engage with strangers online. When users encounter social challenges due to content publication—such as attracting undesirable social connections or facing browsing interference from acquaintances—they tend to modify their content to satisfy social needs and create personalized communication environments. For example: "A7, sometimes your family might not fully understand why you play this game. When they ask questions, it gets really annoying. I just don't want them to know."

(6) Information Leakage: Due to the platform's lack of transparency in privacy policies and users' negligence, content creators face risks of information leakage. Concerned about their reputation and personal safety, users often take remedial actions like modifying visibility settings or re-editing posts when discovering sensitive details (such as addresses, phone numbers, or location data) in their shared content. For example: "A2, I posted a travel request on Tourism. After my trip, I'll either make it private or delete it completely because I really don't want acquaintances to see this."

(7) Feedback from others: This refers to interactions like likes and comments received after a user posts content. Users identify inappropriate content through two main channels: self-review and feedback from others. When receiving neutral feedback—such as pointing out errors or suggestions for improvement—the user will re-examine their work to decide whether to modify it. Positive feedback like likes, collections, or compliments makes users feel satisfied and motivated to refine their work. However, negative feedback or malicious comments often lead users to take actions like deleting comments or blocking the poster. For example: "A10, if someone comments under my post, I'll check it out. If someone says my point is off, I might look

into whether I'm being too narrow-minded or if there's something else. If it's inappropriate, I'll probably delete it again."

(8)Content Popularity: Unlike traditional platforms, UGC (User-Generated Content) platforms allow every user to become an independent creator. The open browsing environment gives these platforms a distinct social dimension. Their unique content recommendation algorithms mean user-generated works can either go unnoticed or become viral overnight. The attention a piece receives after publication also influences whether users will edit their content. For highly popular content, users exhibit higher tolerance for minor errors within their control range while being more mindful of its potential impact. Original user feedback: "A2, With so many likes and shares, I won't modify this content since I consider it a success. Only failures warrant constant revisions, deletions, and reposts."

<p align="center">Figure 1 Model of influencing factors of re-editing behavior</p>
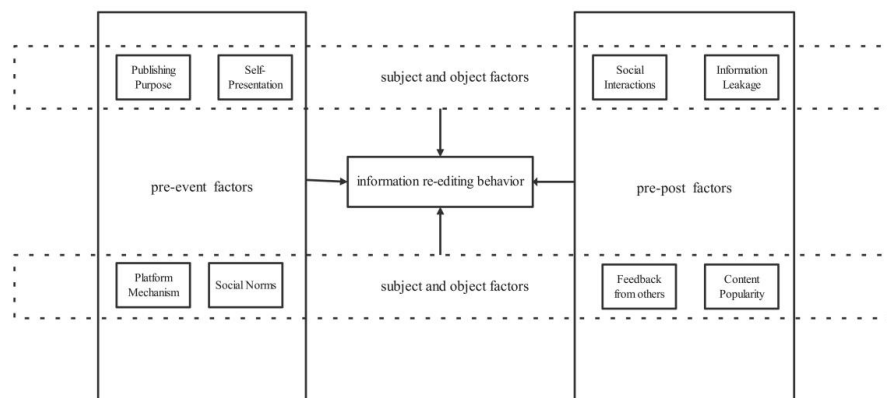
7. The characteristics of Z generation users' information in UGC platform in editing behavior

Purpose-driven: Gen Z users exhibit purpose-oriented behavior in content re-editing on UGC platforms, where the original intent behind posting serves as a key factor influencing editing decisions. When sharing work-related or career development content, users tend to refine their posts more meticulously. They carefully evaluate whether the format, timing, and quality of their content align with intended goals. If initial efforts fail to achieve desired outcomes, they may modify, redesign, or even delete and repost the content to achieve their communication objectives. The "internet celebrity mentality" is evident across various UGC platforms that inherently facilitate social interactions between strangers. Content posted on these platforms inevitably gets shared with random strangers. As a generation that grew up with the internet, Gen Z users exhibit distinct digital characteristics in content editing. Interview data reveals that even those without personal media ventures or platform accounts tend to carefully edit their popular posts. Conversely, users remain vigilant about potential negative consequences—such as cyberbullying from inappropriate comments or harmful influences. Whether fearing amplified impact or losing popularity, Gen Z users unconsciously adopt this "internet celebrity mentality." Shielding Negative Feedback: Generation Z users exhibit distinctive characteristics when responding to others' comments. Research shows that when encountering negative feedback about their posts, nearly all interviewees chose to ignore or delete the content, demonstrating their unique self-centered worldview. This generation prioritizes personal

feelings over external criticism, maintaining distinct perspectives and positions that set them apart from others.

8. Research deficiency and prospect

Due to practical constraints and researchers' knowledge limitations, this study has certain shortcomings. While examining macro-level factors influencing user information in UGC platforms, the analysis lacks platform-specific segmentation and individualized case studies. The research population selection remains broad, focusing solely on Generation Z demographics – a demographic that may exhibit distinct behavioral patterns and influencing factors. The absence of prior research provides a critical gap requiring further substantiation. We anticipate this will stimulate collaborative exploration by scholars to advance in-depth studies on this subject.

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