A Media Affordance Perspective on Digital Hoarding Behavioural Motivational Mechanisms Among Female Youth Users: A Case Study of Rednote

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Abstract

As social media's penetration into users' lives continues to deepen, individuals have increasingly engaged in digital hoarding behaviours when confronted with vast amounts of information. However, this phenomenon remains underexplored in current communication research. This study therefore focuses on female youth users of the Rednote, adopting a theoretical framework of media affordance and integrating four affordance dimensions—production, social interaction, mobility, and imagination. Through in-depth interviews, walkthrough methods, netnography, and thematic analysis of textual data, the thesis investigates motivations of digital hoarding among female youth users.

The findings reveal that four affordances—production, social interaction, mobility, and imagination—are actualised through the interaction between the platform and young female users, fostering digital hoarding via diverse pathways. This paper provides insights for subsequent social media platforms to help young female users with digital hoarding anxiety balance the relationship between self, technology, and information, ultimately achieving healthy and efficient management of digital resources.

Keywords

Digital hoarding; Media affordances; Female youth users

Introduction

In recent years, the term "digital hamster" has gained popularity online. This phrase vividly describes individuals who, in the information-saturated cyberspace, tirelessly use functions like collecting, liking, and sharing to hoard "mental aliment". digital hamsters reflect the information anxiety and media survival anxiety users experience when confronted with overwhelming data. As China's information technology infrastructure accelerates and social media diversifies, media content which is predominately structured by user-generated content (UGC) has surged, intensifying hoarding behaviors among these "digital hamsters".
As a representative mainstream UGC platform in China, Rednote generates over 70 trillion note impressions daily, with more than 95% being UGC content. According to the platform's user profile characteristics, female users account for 71.98%, and youth users aged 18-35 constitute over 79%. Therefore, this study will focus on female youth users as the primary research subjects and research on how digital hoarding behavioral motivational mechanism's function, so that social media platforms can help young female users with digital hoarding anxiety achieve healthy and efficient management of digital resources.

Backgrounds

Digital hoarding

In 2015, the world's first literature analyzing digital hoarding patients from a psychiatric perspective was published. Bennekom et al. [25] authored proposed that digital hoarding, as a distinct subtype of hoarding disorder, occurs when the accumulation of digital files overwhelms an individual's capacity to organize them, leading to psychological distress and functional impairment. Digital hoarding behavior reflects complex social contexts and evolving times. The Web 2.0 era witnessed the rise of social media, sparking a surge in UGC. Wang et al. [38] defined digital hoarding in social media environments as: "The indiscriminate saving of data and

unwillingness to delete it exhibited by users, driven by the explosive growth of data volume and reduced costs of data storage in social media." Tan et al. [24] further subdivided digital hoarding into the concept of "UGC digital hoarding," positing that UGC digital hoarding is a subset of digital hoarding specifically referring to UGC as the hoarded object. It represents a particular information behavior spontaneously exhibited by users during daily browsing or searching for information on UGC platforms. Users save, bookmark, or download UGC for reasons such as perceived utility, yet excessive hoarding and poor management hinder its reuse. Given the high degree of autonomy and diverse motivations behind users' digital hoarding on UGC platforms, Tan et al. [25] avoids terms like "indiscriminate" used by Wang et al. [38], instead defining digital hoarding from the perspective of users' active information filtering.

Compared to the Web 1.0 era where users could only passively receive information, digital hoarding has become more prevalent in the Web 2.0 and even Web 3.0 eras dominated by UGC. It exhibits new behavioral characteristics and generation mechanisms, underscoring the critical importance of focusing related research on social media platforms centered around UGC. Furthermore, while some scholars argue that digital hoarding does not cause severe psychological issues like physical hoarding, prolonged failure to organize accumulated digital content can still evolve into pathological digital hoarding disorder [37], then disrupting individuals' normal lives.

The development of media affordance

The term "affordance" originated from Gibson’s [7] research in ecological psychology is defined as: directly perceived substances, surfaces, objects, and places with the potential for action. Gale and Parchoma [19] noted that Gibson’s theory overlooks the influence of sociocultural factors on human perception and interpretation of the environment. With sociocultural development, mobile media has gradually emerged, and its unique communication characteristics have infused new connotations into affordance theory. Against this backdrop, Schrock [23] pioneered the term "communicative affordances." Communicative affordances are described "the interaction between subjective perceptions of utility and objective technical properties that alter communicative practices". Crucially, Schrock posits that the formation of perceived utility relates to individual goals, rather than the direct perception under "animal needs" proposed by Gibson. Nagy and Neff [17] incorporated emotion into affordance considerations, proposing imagined affordance. This approach further emphasizes users’ subjective perceptions and choices regarding technology from the aspects of individual psychology and social characteristics. In 2017, media affordance was introduced to China by Pan [18]. Pan [18] proposed that contemporary new media affordances can be categorized into production affordances, social affordances, and mobile affordances, corresponding respectively to the medium's support for content production, social interaction, and temporal-spatial freedom. Each affordance is further composed of several enabling forces. Pan Zhongdang's theoretical framework of media affordance demonstrates remarkable integration and inclusivity, encompassing numerous attributes and characteristics of new media. It serves as an innovative theoretical analytical tool for interpreting and evaluating new media [10].

Application of Media Affordance in Rednote Research

Chinese scholars have employed media affordance as a theoretical lens to examine various phenomena on Rednote since 2023. By using Pan Zhongdang's media affordance framework and incorporating Peter Nagy and Gina Neff's imagined affordance theory, Wen Ying [26] found that refined content on Rednote induces anxiety among female users. Zhang Yiwen and Yang Hongqi [36] contend that an imagined affordability relationship also exists between Rednote’s male user base and the platform. Despite Rednote’s female-dominated user base, the community supports male users in self-presentation. Their positive evaluations of the community's favorable atmosphere further contribute to the platform’s construction of a female-oriented community. Yan Wanying [32] posits that Rednote, functioning as a form of "social currency," not only facilitates interaction among community users but also enables non-regular users to engage in discussions through the topics it provides. This perspective aligns with Leidner’s "secondhand effect" theory [12]. Leidner [12] discovered that enterprise social media can motivate users who do not actively engage with them by transmitting through the behaviors and activities of active platform users, which is named "secondhand effect". Additionally, scholars adopting an "environment + relationship" perspective found that the construction of Rednote's platform society, the dominance of algorithmic logic, the drive of individual altruism,

and the permeation of cultural traditions collectively shape adolescents' mutual aid practices on Rednote [33]. Overall, media affordance theory offers a multidimensional framework to deeply analyze the complex relationship between Rednote's diverse ecosystem and user behavior, providing robust theoretical support for studying digital hoarding phenomena within the platform.

Methods

This study aims to explore motivational factors of digital hoarding among female youth users on Rednote. A search of CNKI using keywords "Rednote" "digital hoarding" revealed only one article employing quantitative methods to investigate the influencing factors of digital hoarding behavior among Rednote users. Although this article introduced cultural identity and physical hoarding behavior as additional factors to construct an expanded model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior [4], it narrowly defined digital hoarding on Rednote as merely "bookmarking notes," overlooking the platform's diverse digital content and functions. Therefore, this study adopts a mixed-methods research approach with a qualitative focus. It collects data through in-depth interviews while employing methods such as walkthrough and ethnography, then using thematic analysis to dispose data so that this paper can achieve a profound interpretive understanding of how technical characteristics and female youth users interact on Rednote.

Data collection

Interview outline design. Analysing Rednote’s platform ecosystem and interaction pathways through walkthrough method, the researcher integrated research questions and theoretical foundations and designed an in-depth interview outline structured around five sections: "Basic information," "Platform Features and Interactions," "Understanding of Digital Hoarding," "Digital vs. Physical Hoarding," and "Digital Hoarding and Mental Health." Considering that bloggers, as both creators and consumers, embody this dual identity more distinctly than regular users, the interview outline was adjusted accordingly for this group. For platform operators, the researcher developed a separate outline tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities. The detailed in-depth interview outline is presented in Appendix 1.

Participants. This paper defines female youth users on Rednote as those aged 18-35 who exhibit digital hoarding habits on the platform, demonstrate proficiency in utilizing its various features, and possess an understanding of its operational mechanisms and cultural context. Participants’ sampling split in two stages. In the initial research phase, interviewees were primarily selected through convenience sampling and snowball sampling. To understand digital hoarding behaviors across different educational backgrounds and occupations, the second phase employed purposive sampling to recruit and interview groups not reached in the first phase. Ultimately, the researcher interviewed 19 female youth users on Rednote exhibiting varying degrees of digital hoarding behavior, along with 3 Rednote operations staff. To protect partcipants’ privacy, participants were assigned anonymized codes: ordinary users and bloggers were randomly numbered A1-A19, while operations staff were designated Y1-Y3.

Rednote’s community. UGC on Rednote is also crucial data for examining digital hoarding. Collecting such data not only further ensures the reliability and validity but also enriches the overall research. UGC on Rednote primarily consists of two types: user-posted notes and comments under these notes. Although it is impossible to determine users’ actual ages in highly anonymous online communities, the textual materials obtained can still fairly accurately reflect the phenomenon of digital hoarding on the platform. Therefore, the paper searched Rednote for keywords such as "digital hoarding," "digital hamster," and "collecting dust in bookmarks," limiting content publication within the past six months. Ultimately, a total of 21 text materials relevant to the research theme were collected.

Data Analysis

Using qualitative analysis software Nvivo 15, the paper conducted standardized analysis of 22 in-depth interview transcripts and 21 text materials collected from Rednote following the framework of "units—clusters—categories." [27]. This process yielded 41 units, 15 clusters, and ultimately formed 4 categories: "Digital Hoarding Behavior," "Motivators of Digital Hoarding," "Psychological and Behavioral Outcomes of Digital Hoarding," and "Guidance Strategies for Digital Hoarding."

Theme Saturation Test

Saturation testing is one of the key factors in conducting comprehensive qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss [5] define "saturation" as "Do not emerge new categories or related themes." Although research can never achieve complete saturation, "when the researcher believes a category provides sufficient depth and breadth of information to understand a phenomenon, and its relationships with other categories have been clarified, the sampling can be considered adequate and the research saturated." During the initial phase of interview subject sampling, the researcher constructed a preliminary thematic coding model based on textual data from 10 participants. To further enrich the coding hierarchy, the research optimized the interview outline around developed concepts. 12 users were then specifically recruited for a second round of interviews. Subsequently, the researcher collected text materials related to digital hoarding topics from Rednote to further test theoretical saturation. Analysis revealed that all collected text materials could be incorporated into the existing model, with no emergence of new categories, clusters, or units. Therefore, the study was deemed thematically saturated.

Motivations Behind Digital Hoarding

To further explore the underlying motivations behind users' digital hoarding behaviors, this study employed Nvivo 15's cluster analysis function. Using word similarity as the clustering criterion, it calculated the Pearson correlation coefficients between hierarchical codes associated with the category "Motivations for Digital Hoarding" within the thematic coding model. The coefficient values and their corresponding correlation strength criteria are as follows: 0.8–1 indicates extremely strong correlation, 0.6–0.8 indicates strong correlation, and 0.4–0.6 denotes weak correlation [29]. As shown in the correlation tree diagram (Figure 3-1), the motivations for digital hoarding exhibit strong or extremely strong correlations with factors related to production, social, imagined affordance, individual characteristics, and the tendency toward digital hoarding triggered by physical hoarding. This indicates that all six factors are significant drivers influencing users' digital hoarding behavior. Among these, mobile affordance exhibits the highest correlation coefficient, indicating it is the most central factor influencing digital hoarding motivations. Strong or extremely strong correlations also exist between all other clusters and units. Therefore, by referencing and deeply analyzing qualitative data materials, this chapter will examine how these factors facilitate female youth users' digital hoarding interactions with Rednote.

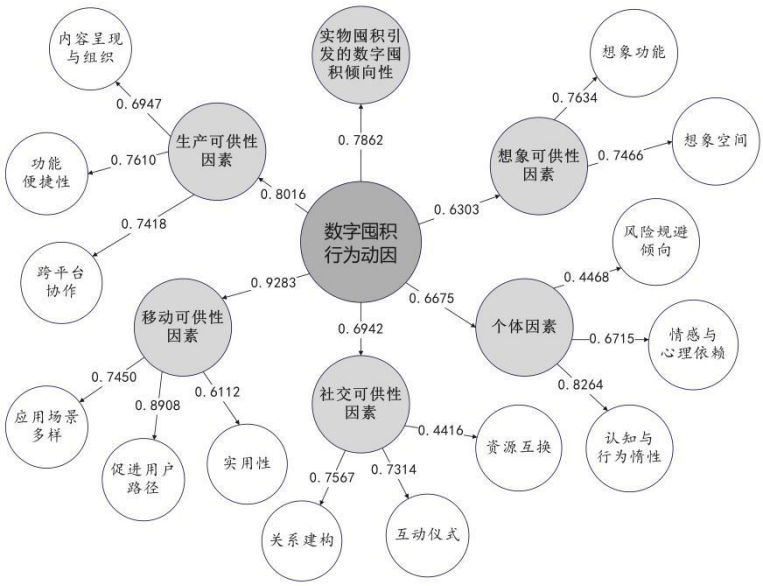

Figure 3-1

Production Affordance

Content presentation and organization. Rednote's content presentation and organization are divided into two units: content characteristics and update frequency. Both of them facilitate users'

digital hoarding behavior. As China's largest sharing community, Rednote covers virtually every aspect of practical content—from shopping, fitness, and beauty to travel, work, and learning. It has become a "Google" for many women, "Its user base is massive, and no matter what kind of information you seek, countless people share it, which allowing you to find and save exactly what you want" (A9). However, the massive user base of social media inevitably generates vast amounts of repetitive, unstructured information. The platform's image-text-focused production model further accelerates content iteration, leading to information overload among users. Information overload occurs when an individual's processing capacity cannot keep pace with overwhelming information production, with social media being a primary source of this overload [3]. When users' information absorption pace lags behind the platform's production rate, digital hoarding behavior emerges.

"For tutorials on makeup or hairstyling, I might search again when I actually need them because these trends evolve rapidly. Searching brings up new posts, making previously saved content redundant." (A6)

Beyond the practicality and massiveness, the fragmented ambiguity and refined presentation of notes also fuel users' hoarding impulses. A key factor lies in many creators employing clickbait tactics and information cramming to chase traffic. Some interviewees mentioned that when faced with such information-heavy content, they often adopt a "save first, view later" approach. However, due to the vagueness of titles, the strategy can make it difficult for users to later retrieve specific notes by searching for precise keywords. With no other choice, they end up hoarding new notes.

"I saved a note about bubble tea before, but bubble tea was just one topic within that main note. Its title had nothing to do with bubble tea, so I couldn't find it no matter how hard I searched." (A13)

Additionally, Rednote primarily serves urban women in first and second-tier cities, whose content often exhibits refined characteristics. This stems from the inherent virtuality of social networks, which encourages individuals to present their best selves. "People share their best moments on social media, but I feel this behavior is more pronounced on Rednote. Especially for someone who initially didn't even know about islands—when you see the ocean in the Maldives, it's hard not to save it." (A16) Over time, this interplay between technology and users has cultivated a content ecosystem centered on "refined living." Content that is aesthetically pleasing and challenges perceptions often garners significant user attention.

Functional Convenience. Amid the wave of digital content consumption, platform functional design profoundly shapes user behavior patterns. Rednote's "favorite" mechanism is remarkably simple: users need only tap the favorite button to save notes to their default saves or created boards. Wilbur Schramm observed that "when individuals choose information pathways, all other things being equal, they tend to flow along the path of least resistance" [22]. To explain this phenomenon, he proposed the formula: Potential Reward / Effort Required = Probability of Choice. In the context of this study, potential reward refers to the likelihood of users discovering practical content within Rednote's vast information pool, while effort required denotes the difficulty audiences face in accessing useful information. When one-click actions like saving, following, or liking replace the mental effort of memorization, making information acquisition and utilization more effortless, users' probability of saving content significantly increases. They become less inclined to rely on their own judgment to filter information value, instead evolving into a conditioned reflex of digital hoarding.

"One-click saving, following, or liking is just too easy. You might unconsciously perform these actions many times a day without even realizing it." (A12)

"Because of the 'saves' feature, I might lose patience while reading. I might just skim through it the first time, get a rough idea that it might be useful in the future, and then save it." (A19)

Meanwhile, on Rednote where the lines between likes and saves blur, likes has become another way users hoard content. "Honestly, I think likes and saves serve the same purpose. Sometimes I just instinctively hit 'save,' other times 'like.' For me, whether it's a like or a save, it has only one meaning: making it easier to find later." (A3) From the platform designers' perspective, the like function was originally intended to help users express agreement and resonance. However, interviews revealed that users often don't consciously distinguish between liking and save.

These buttons, combined with Rednote "Search my notes, collects and likes" feature, allow users to revisit content when needed. However, this inevitably leads to more scattered and disorganized digital content, increasing the difficulty of managing it later.

Cross-Platform Hoarding: Replicable and Associable. Copying as a human activity has permeated virtually every aspect of formation, exchange, and sharing within human civilization, playing a vital role in social interactions. Unlike the authoritative information and elite discourse disseminated by traditional media in the past, copying has evolved into various functional buttons on social platforms, becoming easier and more frequent to use than ever before [10]. Screenshots, as a technology enabling precise replication of screen content, offer immense convenience for users to acquire, save, and utilize digital resources. Research indicates that 98% of users engage in screenshotting nearly every day [1]. The built-in screenshot function in mobile operating systems makes this cross-platform copying behavior highly prevalent on Rednote. This phenomenon is not only a result of technological advancement but also reflects how individuals actively engage in "reproducing space" through media practices [8]. The de-authorization and decentralization of screenshots provide an entry ticket for nearly all users, which led them to develop a "screenshot habit." Local photo albums serve as either "transit stations" or "final destinations" for these screenshots, becoming another significant space where digital information gathers dust. Many interviewees mentioned cross-platform hoarding on Rednote, accumulating content like memes, wallpapers, online avatars, and user comments.

"I only clean out my album every long while, so now it's full of useless screenshots, avatars, and tons of meme." (A4)

"Like just the other day, I changed my phone wallpaper and searched through so many options. They’re still sitting on my album now. I tried each one, then forgot to delete them afterward—that happened a lot." (A8)

Beyond screen captures, respondent A6 noted: "I copy abstract captions on the spot to ‘annoy’ my friends, but I don't intentionally hoard them. Since I've copied them, they remain in my keyboard’s clipboard history—which feels like incidental hoarding." This demonstrates how Rednote integration with input method platforms enables users to engage in passive hoarding through copy-and-paste functionality.

Social affordance

Resources reciprocity. The term "reciprocity" originates from social exchanges between individuals motivated by the expectation of reward. Such exchanges encompass not only material benefits like money, compensation, or real estate, but also intangible gains derived from social relationships themselves—such as social recognition, a sense of belonging, gratitude, and affection [2]. In the social media era, mutual aid has evolved into a new form of online mutual assistance, gradually shifting from equal mutual benefit to asymmetric resource exchange. On Rednote, resource exchange extends beyond mere commodity transactions to encompass the conversion of "economic-relational" capital between users, information sharing, and experience exchange. For instance, Respondent A1 stated: "Since I also take unpaid interviews regularly, I want you all to follow me so I can secure more promotional opportunities." On one hand, A1 can accumulate followers by assisting others, converting virtual social metrics into tangible commercial opportunities. On the other hand, those aided by A1 complete their academic tasks. This demonstrates that Rednote users tend to downplay traditional notions of equal reciprocity in cyberspace, prioritizing tangible personal gains instead. This qualitative perspective enriches the quantitative findings of scholars like Zhang Fang, who concluded that the sense of reciprocal equality exerts the least influence on users’ psychological states and behavioral intentions [34].

Furthermore, Rednote group chats serve as bond connecting shared interests and online connections, mutually reinforcing digital hoarding behaviors between group administrators and members through mutual aid. Ordinary user A7 mentioned joining numerous groups:

"There’s a group for wearable nails, four shopping groups, and exam study groups... Recently, ‘A Journey of Flowers’ has been quite popular, so I joined a group where the admin shared screenshots of Liu Xiaoqing’s autobiography for everyone to see." (A7)

Users with similar interests to A7 satisfy their information needs by joining various groups, while group admins expand their influence and maintain community authority by sharing information resources—a practice that also reflects their desire to accumulate followers and group members.

However, group admins aren't always the sole information disseminators; they can also be the ones get shared with. "On Rednote groups, people mainly post seal pictures they've seen on the platform or photos they've taken while traveling. If a post gets reposted multiple times, I know that content is popular. Then I can remix it, and it'll probably go viral (A14)." Seal meme creator A14 established a group chat named "Seal's Nest," attracting numerous seal enthusiasts to share seal-related content. These chat logs indirectly became a resource repository for A14 to hoard, guiding their further creation and traffic generation.

Relationship Construction. Social cognitive theory suggests that users' behavioral choices are often influenced by anticipated outcomes. Building on this, scholars have found that people's expected internet outcomes can shape their online behaviors, with social outcomes being a component of these anticipated results. Social outcomes encompass factors such as gaining support and respect, communicating with others, and maintaining relationships [11]. When engaging in digital hoarding, users not only fulfill their social needs within the virtual world but also serve real-world social interactions. By collecting and sharing content within Rednote or sharing across platforms, they provide topics and resources for real-life social activities. "Because when you forward things to your friends, it's like even when you're on vacation and not at school, it's a way to stay connected. Plus, sharing stuff can also strengthen your relationship" (A6). Over time, cross-platform sharing accumulates content that occupies increasing storage space. Yet users often hesitate to clear it, fearing deletion of crucial information they wish to retain. Thus, forwarding is also considered an intangible form of hoarding [35].

Beyond this, users develop differentiated sharing strategies based on content and context. Digital scenarios typically involve spatial environments, real-time user states, habitual behaviors, and social atmospheres [15]. Rednote provides users with abundant communication resources, enabling them to generate a "sense of social presence" and select appropriate content for sharing based on the scenario, thereby extending real-life social relationships [30].

"For a while, I saved a ton of meme stickers... I joined a group on Rednote back then and ended up saving over 600 of these stickers (see Figure 4-1), all manually added to my WeChat... For example, when chatting with someone who loves soccer, I'd send a soccer-themed one. They have these specific logos, like mineral water or NetEase Cloud Music ones. I'd use these to replace text—like if someone says, 'you should drink some water,' I'd immediately send a water-themed one, or if they mention 'listening to music,' I'd send the NetEase Cloud Music-packaged sticker. It makes the conversation more fun and fits the context better." (A7)

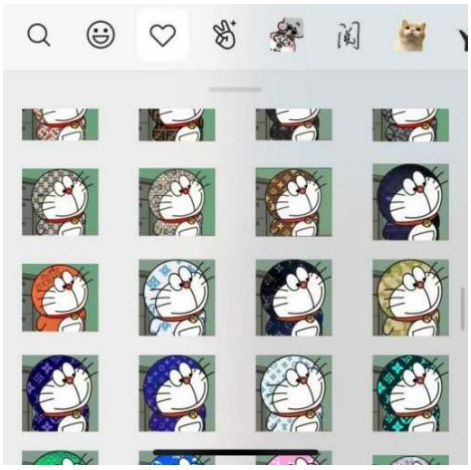

Figure 4-1 A7's WeChat Chat Interface Emoji Bar

Additionally, Respondent A6 noted: "When hanging out with friends, if we're looking for places to go or spots to visit, or if I spot something fun, I'll forward it to share. Fun stuff usually gets shared right away, but food-related content might get saved for later so we can pick together." Users often have different real-time states when encountering various content types. Fun content is typically immediate and entertaining, requiring little deliberation or filtering. Users share it spontaneously based on their current mood, seeking feedback. Food-related content—like restaurant check-ins or dining recommendations—is more practical and decision-oriented. Choosing to save it before sharing allows users to gather more comprehensive and useful information, ensuring the shared content genuinely helps friends. This approach also earns them support and respect.

Interaction Ritual. In the era of individualization, the individual has become a fundamental unit within the social relationship system and an entity in the process of social action. Online social media further transforms individuals into nodes. Users not only appear as individuals but also form interconnected network structures between one another [31]. Comment sections serve as a crucial function providing connection opportunities. Along the entire content production chain, users accumulate not only original note content but also comments posted by users in comment sections—essentially hoarding these derivative texts.

"I might save a post because the comments are particularly insightful. Since posts are also places for sharing experiences, sometimes I find comments more insightful than the main post itself, or more useful to me, so I save them too" (A7).

"I just bought an air fryer a few days ago and searched online for lots of related stuff. Many netizens' comments below felt genuinely helpful, so I saved or liked them based on that" (A8).

The Rednote comment section isn't just a place for users to express feelings and interact; it's also a vital source of knowledge and experience. Users engage in discussions here because the notes themselves contain specific topics and content. Their exchanges resemble a "free-for-all debate" centered around a given theme. Through continuous questioning and answering, users foster the creation and circulation of knowledge and experience—often more practical than the original post itself.

Mobile Affordance

Space Eliminates Time: "Usefulness" on the Timeline. Peng examines the transformation of mobile accessibility under new media technologies from both temporal and spatial dimensions. Spatially, information consumption spaces have shifted from undifferentiated "wide-area spaces" to private and fluid "micro-spaces." While people still frequently enter diverse wide-area spaces for various activities, they have long since grown accustomed to creating entirely personal media spaces through mobile devices [20]. As a product of the mobile era, Rednote satisfies users' information-seeking needs across diverse scenarios while simultaneously increasing the potential for digital hoarding.

"I feel like I'm scrolling every hour—like when waiting for buses or subways, I'll open Rednote. I even scroll during class. It feels like I'm scrolling every second, except when I'm asleep." (A1)

"My commute is quite long—over two hours round trip—so I scroll on my phone. Since I don't like using Douyin, I just scroll through Rednote." (A3)

From a temporal perspective, the continuous evolution of social media has enabled users to construct personalized timelines where public and private information intertwine, and real-world existence blends with digital life [20]. Media technology continuously deconstruct and reconstruct people's perception of time. Fragmented browsing patterns make each individual's time unique, and the information they seek becomes increasingly personalized. When discussing reasons for hoarding notes, usefulness was a factor nearly every interviewee mentioned. In the historical flow of cyberspace, users can instantly retrieve digital information useful for the present or future via Rednote. This represents media's attempt to occupy all of an individual's media usage time—the phenomenon of "space eliminating time" [9].

"I've saved many nail art designs so I can show them directly at the salon. There are also clothes I want to buy when I return home, plus some Amsterdam delicacies I plan to try later." (A1)

Moreover, the dual discipline of social acceleration and time has gradually eroded people's autonomy. "Individuals no longer choose which new experiences to pursue; instead, the emergence of novelty drives them to rush toward it without reflection" [14]. Rednote user @SuiChuanguang remarked, "I rarely save posts after reflecting on them; most are saved on impulse—drawn in by a headline or a single line. Later, when I try to delete them, I can't overcome that 'usefulness' hurdle." Amidst the overwhelming tide of digital information, gauging usefulness has become a challenge for many users. Thus, rather than expending time and effort evaluating data's utility or value, it's more efficient to store as much digital content as possible in one's "information warehouse" within limited and accelerating timeframes. However, this approach also results in an extremely low "consumption rate" of digital information.

The synergistic effect of lightweight design and algorithms. Scholar Ding Yuanyuan, in her research on data journalism production strategies, points out that design minimalism—achieved through technical and content lightness—aligns with social platform users' mobile and fragmented news consumption habits. This enhances user experience while increasing the likelihood of content sharing [6]. Rednote's design minimalism manifests across both technical and content dimensions. On one hand, lightweight product recommendation links are deeply integrated with lifestyle content, reducing users' psychological sensitivity to commercial attributes and thereby triggering purchase-adding behavior.

"Rednote makes me accept that items I add to cart via links under posts might carry a premium. They might not be the cheapest online, but I don't obsess over price comparisons or question whether my purchase is cost-effective. Instead, it's more about the vibe of the product in the post you're viewing, or the feeling that buying it could grant you that lifestyle experience—it sparks an impulse to buy." (A15)

On the other hand, every note on Rednote features a minimalist card design with a "cover image + title" layout before opening. The relatively small number of notes displayed per page reduces cognitive load, making the mobile interface better suited for information consumption in scenarios with scarce attention. The "tap-based + swipe-based" browsing method allows mobile users to effortlessly transition to the next piece of content after watching a video, fostering uninterrupted browsing habits. Notably, the dissemination effectiveness achieved through technical and content streamlining relies heavily on further activation by the algorithmic system. By precisely delivering content aligned with user interests and implementing features like "Guess What You Want to Search," the algorithm continuously fuels users' hoarding tendencies.

"Among all the social media platforms I use, Rednote's algorithm feels the most responsive. It often seems to monitor my activity—or even after I view just one or two related posts—and immediately floods me with tons of similar content. This really fuels my hoarding behavior. Since it keeps pushing exactly the type of posts I want, I keep scrolling, and once I finish viewing, I save them." (A7)

Additionally, user A7 noted, "I don't intentionally click on posts from creators I follow. I usually just randomly scroll through the homepage. If it's someone you follow, the platform sometimes proactively recommends their content to you." During interviews, many respondents admitted they habitually browse the homepage recommendations, adopting a "whenever it happens" attitude toward content from their followed creators. This stems from Rednote's platform strategy to cultivate a browsing habit centered around its discovery page. Through deliberate interface design, the platform has conditioned users to prioritize this browsing pattern [16]. This also implies that even if some creators have large followings, their fans may not promptly notice newly posted content. The "Recommendations" page cannot cover all users' follows; instead, it recommends new creators to these fan groups. These users then follow the platform's algorithmic guidance to seek out and follow new high-quality creators, leading to the phenomenon of excessive accumulation of follows.

Imagine affordance: media support for the hoarding of digital memories

Memory forms the foundation of human cognition, self-construction, and self-reflection. As Rednote's primary mode of expression, image-text notes serve not only as channels for user

sharing and interaction but also as memory carriers for the future, bearing the significance of historical reenactment [28]. Each Rednote note can accommodate up to eighteen images, accompanied by a title, lengthy text, and tags. Users can also edit notes at any time. This platform offers distinct expression methods and greater image capacity compared to WeChat Moments, thereby becoming a medium for users to reconstruct memories and preserve moments of forgetting.

Interviews revealed that many ordinary users view the "post notes" feature as "archiving memories." For instance, A5 stated, "I do it purely for my own records. I don't want to store them on cloud drives because accessing them is cumbersome. I'd rather keep them on a social platform I use regularly so I can browse them whenever I want." For food blogger A19, creating restaurant exploration notes isn't entirely altruistic: "About half the motivation comes from wanting to archive my dining experiences, while the other half is sharing my firsthand insights with a wider audience." They break free from the platform's pre-set narrative not to chase views, but out of concerns like "accidentally deleting my own photos" (A3), "losing track of my own content later" (A3), or "my own forgetfulness" (A2). Thus, the imaginative space co-created by users and the platform disrupts the linear timeline, allowing them to revisit the past at any moment. "When I opened my note about eating at Hamazushi last year, I noticed tiny details—like the service quality or how delicious it was—because it was my first time going with friends. Looking back now, it brings those memories flooding back" (A7). Through this cycle of "trace-recall-imagine," users evoke their own emotions, countering the fear of loss and forgetting.

Conclusions and Limitations

People are constantly acquiring and constantly forgetting. The evolution of digital existence has transformed individuals into "intermediary media" [21]. Individuals acquire, store, and forward knowledge and information through social media platforms, yet often remain stuck at the superficial level of "acquisition" rather than deep ‘absorption’ due to the mindset of "hoarding first, viewing later." This article integrates domestic and international theories of media affordance and imagined affordance, moving beyond previous platform-agnostic research to focus on digital hoarding behavior among young female users on Rednote. At the level of production affordance, Rednote's content production frequency and characteristics cause user information overload, fostering digital hoarding. Users then exacerbate this behavior through "hoard-first, view-later" practices. The convenience of "one-click" functions and copy-paste technology enables users to actively or passively hoard increasing amounts of digital content. At the social affordance level, the asymmetric mutual aid dynamics of the social media era incentivize hoarding. Through interactions like comments and group chats—primarily "weak ties"—users accumulate life experiences and creative inspiration on Rednote, while maintaining real-world social connections via cross-platform hoarding. Regarding mobile affordances, Rednote creates a "space-erases-time" media environment. Its lightweight content and technical design, combined with algorithmic recommendation systems, collectively facilitate users' hoarding pathways. At the level of imagined affordances, while the platform provides digital memory support, users transcend the platform's pre-set "technological scripts" to hoard their own emotional memories.

While this study offers innovative insights into young female users' digital hoarding behaviors and motivations, limitations remain. First, the research methodology primarily relies on semi-structured interviews and online field surveys. Although these methods can deeply explore user motivations, they still suffer from issues such as over-reliance on interviewers' subjective perceptions and insufficient observation duration. Future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data to develop a more suitable digital hoarding scale for social media contexts. This would allow broader exploration of hoarding behaviors across different groups. Increasing the frequency of follow-up interviews could also yield richer dynamic data for cross-validation. Second, the sample selection has limitations. Although 22 young female users were recruited through snowball sampling and online recruitment, these subjects were concentrated within specific gender, age, and occupational ranges, failing to represent all users. Future research should broaden the sample scope to enhance the generalizability of findings, thereby guiding whether platforms truly need to regulate users' digital hoarding behaviors and to what extent such regulation should be implemented. After all, "every small change made by the platform affects the lives and consumption experiences of hundreds

of millions of users" (Y3). Finally, this study primarily examined digital hoarding on Rednote through the lens of media affordance theory, failing to fully leverage other perspectives to consider digital hoarding phenomena on Rednote and other social media platforms. Future research could explore the similarities and differences in digital hoarding across various social media platforms using different theoretical frameworks. It could also investigate how different platforms influence digital hoarding behaviors among users of various age groups. By examining both commonalities and differences, such research could explore how to enhance users' digital literacy and establish healthy, efficient digital lifestyles.

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