

Experiential Narratives and Commercialization Boundaries in Xiaohongshu Recommendation Notes

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Abstract: Xiaohongshu recommendation notes often present products through personal stories, daily routines, use records, and emotional responses. This form of content appears close to ordinary consumer sharing and can create strong trust among readers. Yet many notes are also connected with paid cooperation, free products, commission links, brand campaigns, or future commercial opportunities. The commercial purpose may remain hidden behind a personal voice and an ordinary user image. This paper examines how experiential narratives shape the persuasive force of Xiaohongshu recommendation notes and how commercial interests enter these narratives. It discusses common problems such as hidden advertising, selective presentation, exaggerated emotional language, repeated scripts, false personal stories, and unclear commercial ties. The paper argues that the commercialization boundary should not be judged only by whether direct payment exists. Product sources, material benefits, disclosure methods, actual use, language, visual presentation, and purchase pressure should also be considered. Creators should disclose commercial links and limit claims to real experience. Brands should not require hidden promotion or fixed praise. The platform should provide clear labels, review coordinated commercial content, and protect ordinary user sharing. A clear boundary can preserve the value of personal experience while allowing readers to identify commercial influence and make more informed choices.

Keywords: Xiaohongshu; recommendation notes; experiential narratives; commercialization boundary; hidden advertising

1. Introduction

Xiaohongshu is a social media platform built around lifestyle sharing and consumer experience. Users post notes about beauty products, clothing, food, travel, home decoration, study methods, fitness, and

many other parts of daily life. Many of these notes include product recommendations. A writer may explain why a product was purchased, how it was used, what problems appeared during use, and whether it was worth the price. Photos, videos,

personal feelings, and small details are often added to make the experience easier to understand.

This type of content differs from traditional advertising. A traditional advertisement usually speaks in the name of a brand. Its commercial purpose is easy to identify. A Xiaohongshu recommendation note often speaks in the voice of an ordinary user. The writer may begin with a personal problem, such as dry skin, difficulty choosing clothes, limited travel funds, or poor sleep. The product appears later as part of the solution. The note may look like a record of daily life rather than a planned promotion. Readers may lower their guard because they feel that they are reading another consumer's honest experience.

Personal experience is the main source of persuasive power in these notes (Djafarova & Rushworth; Lou & Yuan). The writer does not need to present professional knowledge or formal product data. A detailed story can create trust. A statement such as "I used this cream for two weeks after my skin became dry" may feel more believable than a general claim made by a brand. The description links the product to a real situation, a clear period of use, and a visible result. Readers who have similar needs may see the writer as someone like themselves. They may also treat the recommendation as useful advice from a friend.

The visual form of Xiaohongshu strengthens this effect (Qin et al.). Product images are often placed beside selfies, travel scenes, bedrooms, desks, meals, or daily routines. These images connect the product with a certain way of life. A lipstick is not only shown as a cosmetic item. It may appear in a workday makeup routine or a record of a weekend trip. A household product may be placed in a clean and carefully arranged room. The product becomes part of a personal story and a desired lifestyle. Readers are not only told what to buy. They are also shown what kind of life the product may represent. The comment section can add another layer of trust. Readers ask about price, product quality, suitable users, purchase channels, and possible problems. The writer may answer these questions in a relaxed and personal tone. Other users may also share

similar experiences. Such interaction makes the note appear open and natural. Likes, saves, and comments can be read as signs that many people accept the recommendation. Yet high engagement does not always prove that the content is independent or reliable. Traffic may be shaped by platform distribution, creator popularity, brand activity, or planned interaction.

Commercial interests are now closely connected with many recommendation notes (Abidin; Audrezet et al.). Brands may pay creators to publish content, send free products, provide discount codes, offer commission links, or promise future cooperation. Some creators earn income when readers purchase through a link. Others may not receive direct payment, but free products and traffic support still create a material connection with the brand. A note can keep the form of personal sharing while serving a clear promotional purpose.

The commercial nature of such content is not always visible. Some writers use direct labels such as "brand cooperation" or "sponsored content." Others place vague signs at the end of the note or avoid clear disclosure. A creator may describe a gifted product as a personal discovery. A paid promotion may be written as a sudden and natural buying experience. Brand requirements may also be hidden inside the story. The creator may be asked to mention certain selling points, avoid negative comments, or use a fixed emotional tone. Readers may then mistake planned advertising for independent consumer experience.

The problem does not lie in commercial cooperation itself. Creators may reasonably earn income from their content, and brands may use social media to introduce products. Personal experience can also remain real when a product is gifted or a note is sponsored. The main issue is whether readers know about the commercial relationship and whether the experience has been presented honestly (Audrezet et al.; Evans et al.). When the source of the product, payment arrangement, or sales commission is hidden, readers cannot judge the recommendation with full information.

The boundary is also difficult to define because commercial influence takes many forms. A creator who buys a product with personal money may still write an exaggerated note to gain traffic. A creator who receives a free sample may give a balanced review. A paid note may contain real experience, while an unpaid note may repeat brand language for future cooperation. It is not enough to judge the content only by whether money was paid. Product sources, cooperation terms, commission income, narrative methods, claim accuracy, and disclosure practices all need to be considered.

Experiential narratives have value because they provide information that formal advertisements often cannot offer. They show how products are used in daily situations and how different users respond to them. This value depends on the trust between writers and readers. When personal stories become a cover for hidden promotion, that trust is weakened. The commercialization boundary of Xiaohongshu recommendation notes should protect honest sharing while making commercial influence clear. It should also allow readers to distinguish personal experience from advertising claims and make purchase decisions based on complete information.

2. Experiential Narratives in Xiaohongshu Recommendation Notes

2.1 Personal Experience as the Main Form of Expression

Many Xiaohongshu recommendation notes are written in the form of personal experience. The writer does not begin by listing product functions or repeating brand information. The note usually starts with a problem, a need, or a small event from daily life. A user may write about skin irritation, difficulty choosing clothes, pressure from study, a crowded bedroom, or a travel plan with a limited budget. The product enters the story because it is related to that situation.

This form of writing makes the recommendation look natural. The product does not appear as an item that must be sold. It appears as something the writer

found, tried, and included in daily life. A skincare product may be introduced through a period of poor skin condition. A suitcase may appear in a story about preparing for a short trip. A desk lamp may be discussed after the writer describes eye discomfort during late-night study. The personal problem gives the product a clear place in the note. The narrative often follows a simple order. The writer explains what happened, why a product was needed, how the product was selected, and what changed after use. This order is close to the way people tell friends about a recent purchase. It does not sound like a formal sales message. Readers can follow the story without needing much product knowledge.

Personal experience also gives the writer a reason to speak. The writer does not claim to know everything about the product. The note only reports what happened during use. Expressions such as “this worked for me,” “I used it for two weeks,” or “the result was not as good as I expected” limit the claim to an individual situation. Such language can make the content appear careful and honest.

The first-person voice is common in these notes. Words such as “I,” “my,” and “for me” appear many times. They keep the focus on the writer’s own life. The product is placed inside that life rather than presented as a separate object. This form gives the note a personal tone and makes the commercial message less direct.

Some notes also use a problem-and-solution structure. The writer describes a difficulty and then presents the product as a useful answer. For example, a user may say that ordinary shoes caused pain during long walks and that a certain pair reduced the discomfort. The reader is invited to understand the product through the problem. When the reader has the same difficulty, the recommendation becomes more convincing.

This structure can also hide promotional planning. A personal problem may be chosen because it matches the selling point of a product. The story may be written after the creator has already accepted brand cooperation. The problem, the product, and the positive result may all be arranged

before publication. The note still looks personal because it uses first-person language and daily situations. Readers cannot easily know whether the story came from real experience or from a planned advertising script.

2.2 Daily Details and the Sense of Reality

Daily details are an important part of experiential narratives. Writers often include the time of purchase, the price, the place of use, the length of use, and the steps followed during use. They may also describe small problems, changes in mood, or unexpected results. These details make the note look specific.

A note about a cosmetic product may mention the user's skin type, the weather, the amount applied, and the condition of the skin after several hours. A food recommendation may include waiting time, portion size, price, taste, and noise in the restaurant. A travel note may describe transport, ticket costs, queues, opening hours, and suitable clothing. The information is tied to a real situation rather than presented as a general product claim.

Photos and short videos support this sense of reality. A creator may show the package before opening it, the product after several days of use, or the object placed in a bedroom, office, or travel bag. These images suggest that the product has entered the writer's daily routine. Readers can see where and how it is used.

Before-and-after images are also common. They are used in notes about skincare, makeup, fitness, home cleaning, room decoration, and study organization. A visible change gives the impression of proof. Readers may feel that they do not need to rely only on the writer's words. The image seems to show the result directly.

Yet such images do not always present the full use process. Lighting, camera angle, filters, makeup, editing, and image selection can affect the result. A writer may choose the best photo from many attempts. A room may be cleaned and arranged only for the picture. A product may be placed carefully in the center of the scene. The visual detail looks ordinary, but it can still be planned.

Prices and purchase records can also make a note appear reliable. Some writers show order screenshots, receipts, or shopping bags. These materials suggest that the product was bought by the writer. They may support the image of an independent consumer. Still, a purchase record does not prove that no commercial connection exists. A brand may reimburse the cost later, or the creator may receive payment for publishing the note.

Minor negative comments often strengthen the sense of reality. A writer may say that the package is difficult to open, the colour is slightly different from the picture, or the product is not suitable for everyone. These small criticisms can make the positive parts seem more believable. The note appears balanced because it does not contain only praise.

Negative details may also be carefully controlled. A creator may mention a harmless weakness while avoiding a more serious problem. For example, the note may complain about packaging but say nothing about poor product quality. A small criticism can protect the image of honesty without reducing the main promotional effect.

The use of timelines gives the story a clear shape. A writer may describe the first day, the third day, and the second week of use. This creates the impression that the product has been tested over time. The note looks more serious than a simple first impression. Yet the length of use may still be too short to support a broad claim. A product used for several days cannot always prove long-term safety or effectiveness.

Daily details are persuasive because they reduce the distance between content and life. Readers can imagine following the same steps, paying the same price, or using the product in a similar situation. The note seems useful because it gives information that formal advertising often leaves out.

2.3 Emotional Expression and Reader Identification

Emotional language gives experiential narratives a personal voice. Writers often describe surprise, excitement, disappointment, worry, relief, or

satisfaction. These feelings make the note sound like a story told after a real event. They also help readers understand how the product affected the writer.

A creator may describe the anxiety caused by a skin problem, the embarrassment of choosing the wrong outfit, or the frustration of buying an expensive item that did not work. When the product produces a positive result, the emotional change becomes part of the recommendation. The story moves from discomfort to relief or from doubt to satisfaction. This emotional movement can be more persuasive than a list of product features.

Readers may identify with the writer when they have faced a similar problem. A student who often studies late may connect with a note about eye strain. A person with sensitive skin may pay attention to a writer who reports the same condition. A traveller with a limited budget may trust a note written by someone who also tried to reduce costs. Similar needs create a sense of closeness (Sokolova & Kefi).

This closeness is often expressed through informal words. Writers may use phrases such as “I did not expect this,” “I almost gave up,” “this was really useful,” or “I wish I had found it earlier.” The language sounds closer to conversation than to advertising. Readers may feel that the writer is speaking honestly instead of reading from a brand script.

Strong emotional words can also increase attention. Phrases such as “saved my skin,” “changed my life,” “must buy,” or “I cannot live without it” are easy to remember. They give the product a dramatic role in the story. A normal item may be presented as the answer to a serious personal problem.

Such expressions can go beyond the real value of the product. The emotional effect may be larger than the actual result. A common household item may be described as life-changing. A small improvement may be written as a complete solution. The writer’s excitement can lead readers to expect more than the product can provide.

Fear and regret are also used in some recommendation notes. A creator may warn readers that they will miss a discount, choose the wrong

version, waste money, or damage their skin if they do not follow the advice in the note. This language creates pressure. The reader may make a quick purchase because they want to avoid a negative result.

Emotional identification can weaken careful judgment. When readers feel close to the writer, they may pay less attention to missing evidence or commercial connections. They may accept a claim because the writer appears sincere. The emotional bond then becomes part of the product’s persuasive force (Lou & Yuan; Sokolova & Kefi).

The comment section can deepen this bond. Readers may share their own problems and ask for advice. The creator may reply with comforting words or personal suggestions. These exchanges make the relationship look friendly and equal. The recommendation no longer appears to come from a distant seller. It appears to come from someone who understands the reader’s needs.

2.4 The Role of the Ordinary User Image

Many Xiaohongshu creators present themselves as ordinary users. They may describe themselves as students, office workers, new parents, travellers, or people living on a limited budget. Their value does not come from professional qualifications. It comes from the claim that they have used the product in real life.

The ordinary user image gives the creator a different type of authority (Djafarova & Rushworth). An expert speaks through training and professional knowledge. An ordinary user speaks through experience. Readers may trust this voice because it seems closer to their own position. The creator has faced the same choice, paid a similar price, and dealt with the same practical problem.

Creators often strengthen this image by discussing mistakes. They may talk about buying the wrong product, following poor advice, wasting money, or changing their opinion after use. These stories make the creator appear imperfect. Imperfection can support trust because the writer does not look like a professional seller who always gives a positive answer.

The setting of the note also supports the ordinary user image. Products are shown in bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, offices, classrooms, or public transport. The background may include common objects and signs of daily activity. The scene suggests that the product is being used in normal life, not in a studio.

Some creators use low-cost or casual production styles. The camera may be handheld, the room may not be perfectly arranged, and the language may include pauses or small mistakes. This style can make the content feel less planned. Readers may see the note as a quick record instead of a formal promotion.

The ordinary user image can remain even when the creator has many followers and works with brands. A professional content creator may continue to speak as an average consumer. The note may not mention the team, equipment, editing process, or commercial agreement behind the content. What readers see is a personal account written in a familiar tone.

This creates a gap between visible identity and actual role. A creator may appear to be a normal buyer while acting as a commercial communicator. The creator's income may depend on brand cooperation, product links, or sales results. The recommendation then carries more commercial purpose than the ordinary user image suggests.

The ordinary user image is valuable to brands because it reduces the distance between advertising and daily communication. A message from a brand is clearly promotional. The same message spoken by a user can appear independent. Product claims become part of personal advice, and sales language becomes part of a life story.

This image does not always mean that the experience is false. A creator can receive payment and still use the product. A creator can also give an honest opinion after receiving a free sample. The problem appears when the ordinary user image is used to hide the creator's commercial role. Readers may believe that the recommendation comes only from personal preference when money, gifts, or future cooperation have shaped the content.

3. Why Experiential Narratives Are Persuasive

3.1 Trust Based on Personal Testimony

Personal testimony gives recommendation notes much of their persuasive force. A product claim made by a brand is easy to recognize as advertising. The same claim may feel different when it appears inside a personal story. Readers may believe that the writer has bought the product, used it in daily life, and formed an opinion from direct experience. The recommendation then appears to come from use rather than from a sales plan.

This form of trust does not depend mainly on professional knowledge. It comes from the belief that the writer has gone through the same decision as the reader. The writer may describe confusion before purchase, doubts about the price, problems during use, and changes noticed later. These details create the image of a consumer who has already tested the product. Readers may treat the note as a way to reduce the risk of making a poor choice.

The use of the first-person voice supports this effect. Statements such as "I used it for a month," "my skin felt dry at first," or "I would not buy it again" sound limited and personal. They do not appear to make a claim for every user. This limited form can seem more careful than direct advertising language. Readers may trust the statement because the writer does not appear to be making a broad promise.

Personal testimony also gives product information a human source. A brand may explain what a product is designed to do, but a user can describe what happened in a real setting. The writer can mention whether the package leaked, whether the colour changed under natural light, or whether the product was convenient to carry. These details are close to the questions that consumers face before purchase. They can make the note more useful than a formal product description.

Trust is often stronger when the writer includes uncertainty. A creator may say that the result could be related to personal habits or that the product may not suit every user. This kind of wording makes the note appear less like a fixed promotion. It gives the

impression that the writer understands the limits of personal experience.

Small negative comments can have a similar effect. A note that contains only praise may look planned. A note that mentions an unpleasant smell, slow delivery, weak packaging, or a higher price may appear more honest. Readers may believe that the writer has no reason to hide the problems. The positive opinion that follows can then carry more weight.

Yet the appearance of balance can be created on purpose. A commercial note may include one or two minor weaknesses to make the main praise more believable. The writer may mention that the package is not attractive while avoiding questions about quality, safety, or value. The note looks honest because it includes criticism, but the criticism does not affect the purchase decision in a serious way.

The identity of the writer also affects trust. Readers may follow a creator for a long time and become familiar with the creator's habits, preferences, and past choices. A recommendation from this creator may feel more reliable because it fits an existing personal image. Trust has already been built through earlier posts about work, study, family life, travel, or daily feelings. A commercial message can then enter a relationship that was not created only for selling products.

This long-term trust can reduce careful judgment. Readers may accept a recommendation because they like the creator or feel close to the creator. They may not check whether the product was gifted, whether the note was paid for, or whether the creator earns commission from sales. The truth of the product claim becomes tied to the reader's opinion of the person making it.

Personal testimony remains limited evidence. One person's experience cannot show how a product will work for all users. Skin type, body condition, income, living space, habits, and expectations may change the result. A writer may report the experience honestly, but readers can still give it more value than it should carry. The personal voice makes the information easy to trust, even when the experience is short, selective, or difficult to verify.

3.2 Information Presented Through a Clear Situation

Experiential narratives usually place a product inside a clear situation. The writer does not only say that the product is useful. The note explains when it was used, why it was needed, and what problem it was expected to solve. This gives the recommendation a practical form.

A skincare note may focus on dryness during cold weather. A clothing note may discuss what to wear during a long workday. A home product may be introduced through the problem of limited storage space. A travel item may be linked to a short trip with strict baggage limits. These situations help readers understand the product through a familiar need.

Clear situations reduce the work needed to interpret product information. A formal description may list materials, size, functions, and technical features. Readers still need to decide whether those features matter to them. An experiential note does part of this work. It connects the feature to a practical result. A small bottle is described as easy to carry. A quiet machine is shown in a shared room. A quick-drying fabric is discussed in relation to travel.

This form also helps readers compare their own situation with the writer's situation. A reader with a similar skin type, budget, room size, or travel plan may feel that the note is directly relevant. The product does not need to be useful for everyone. It only needs to appear suitable for people facing the same problem.

The situation can also define the limits of a recommendation. A product may work well for short trips but not for long-distance travel. A cosmetic item may look good under indoor lighting but perform poorly outdoors. A low-cost device may meet basic needs but not support professional work. When the note includes these conditions, readers can judge whether the recommendation fits their own use.

Many notes use a direct problem-and-solution structure. The beginning describes discomfort or inconvenience. The middle introduces the search for

an answer. The product appears near the point where the problem is expected to change. The end shows relief, improvement, or satisfaction. This simple structure is easy to follow and gives the product a clear role.

The product often becomes the turning point of the story. Before the purchase, the writer feels worried, tired, embarrassed, or disappointed. After using the product, the situation becomes easier. The product is not presented as one possible choice among many. It may appear as the item that solved the problem. This can make an ordinary effect look more important than it is.

A clear situation can make product claims appear more realistic. A statement such as “this bag has a large capacity” is general. A photograph showing a laptop, water bottle, umbrella, and notebook inside the bag seems more concrete. The reader can see what the claim means in daily use. The situation turns an abstract feature into visible information.

Yet situations can be carefully chosen to support a positive result. A creator may use the product only under conditions where it performs well. A cleaning product may be tested on a light stain. A camera may be shown only in bright daylight. A cosmetic product may be photographed under soft lighting. The situation is real, but it may not represent normal or difficult use.

Some situations are also designed around the target reader. A brand may ask a creator to present a product as suitable for students, office workers, new parents, or budget-conscious consumers. The personal story is then built around the needs of that group. The situation looks natural because it reflects common concerns, but its purpose is to guide a certain group toward purchase.

The clear situation can create a strong sense of relevance even when important information is missing. A reader may see a problem that closely matches personal experience and quickly accept the proposed solution. Questions about price, product limits, alternative choices, or long-term effects may receive less attention. Relevance makes the note easy to use, but it can also narrow the reader’s judgment.

3.3 Social Proof from Comments and Interactions

Recommendation notes are not read as isolated texts. Numbers and user reactions appear around the content. Likes, saves, comments, shares, and follower counts give readers extra signals. A note with high engagement may appear more reliable than a note that has received little attention (Seo et al.).

Readers often use these signals when they cannot judge product quality directly. A large number of likes may suggest that many users agree with the note. A high save count may suggest that the information is useful. Many comments may make the product seem popular or widely discussed. The reader may treat the response of the group as evidence.

This form of judgment is convenient. It reduces the need to examine every claim. When thousands of users have liked or saved a note, a reader may feel that the recommendation has already been tested by others. The number itself becomes part of the persuasive message, even though it does not show whether those users bought or used the product.

Comments can provide more detailed social proof. Some users write that they had a similar experience, bought the same product, or plan to place an order. Such comments make the recommendation appear to extend beyond the original writer. The note no longer presents only one person’s view. It seems to be supported by a wider group.

Questions in the comment section can also strengthen the note. Readers may ask about price, product size, suitable skin type, colour choice, purchase links, or use methods. When the creator gives detailed replies, the content appears open and helpful. The exchange may look like a normal conversation between users rather than a sales process.

Creator replies can build a feeling of personal care. A reader may receive advice based on a stated need. The creator may use friendly language, share extra details, or warn that the product may not suit everyone. This direct contact can make the recommendation feel more trustworthy. The reader

is not only viewing content but also taking part in a conversation.

Comments may also reveal problems that are missing from the main note. Users can report poor quality, different results, slow delivery, or difficulty getting a refund. These replies may correct an overly positive presentation. They can provide a wider range of experiences and help readers see that the product does not work in the same way for everyone.

Yet comment sections are not always neutral spaces. Creators can delete, hide, or avoid replying to negative comments. Brands may arrange positive interaction soon after publication. Some accounts may repeat similar praise or ask planned questions that allow the creator to mention selling points. The visible discussion can then create an impression of support that is stronger than the real response.

High engagement may also come from the creator's popularity rather than from the quality of the recommendation. Followers may like a note because they enjoy the creator's style, appearance, or daily content. They may support the person without knowing the product. The numbers still appear beside the recommendation and can be mistaken for approval of the product itself.

Platform distribution affects social proof as well. A note that receives early interaction may be shown to more users. More exposure can bring more likes and comments, which can lead to further exposure. Popularity then grows through repeated visibility. Readers may see the final number as a natural sign of public approval, even though platform ranking helped produce it.

Sales comments can create direct pressure. Statements such as "I bought it immediately," "the popular colour is almost sold out," or "the discount ends tonight" suggest that many people are acting quickly. A reader may fear missing the chance to buy. The comment section then moves from discussion to purchase encouragement.

Social proof is persuasive because people often look at the actions of others when information is uncertain. In recommendation notes, product quality cannot usually be checked before purchase.

Likes and comments offer an easy signal, but the meaning of that signal is unclear. Engagement may show interest, support for the creator, successful promotion, or real satisfaction. These different meanings are often mixed together on the same page.

3.4 Visual Evidence and Perceived Authenticity

Images and short videos give experiential narratives a visible form. Readers can see the product, the use process, and the claimed result. This visual material often feels more direct than written description. A photograph can make the experience appear to be recorded rather than simply stated.

Product packaging, order records, use scenes, and result images are common forms of visual evidence. A writer may show a parcel after delivery, a bottle that is partly empty, or a product placed among personal belongings. These signs suggest that the item has been used in real life. They support the claim that the writer is speaking from experience.

Videos can make the process look even more complete. A creator may open the package, test the texture, apply the product, or show how an object works. Movement and sound give the reader more information than a single image. The creator's facial expression and spoken reaction can also create a sense of immediacy.

Visual content can answer practical questions quickly. A clothing video can show how fabric moves. A makeup note can show colour under different lighting. A storage product can be shown inside a small room. Readers do not need to imagine the result only from words. They can compare the visible situation with their own needs.

Before-and-after images are especially persuasive because they present a clear difference. The product appears between the two stages and may be understood as the cause of the change. A dirty surface becomes clean, a disordered room becomes neat, or a skin condition appears to improve. The visual sequence gives the story a simple cause-and-effect form.

The image does not always show what caused the change. Other products, lighting, camera settings,

makeup, time, rest, diet, or editing may affect the result. The reader sees two selected moments but not everything that happened between them. The product receives credit because it is the main subject of the note.

Careful arrangement can make commercial content appear natural. A product may be placed beside books, coffee, flowers, or personal items. The scene looks like a normal part of daily life. Yet the position of each object, the light, and the background may have been planned to create a certain mood. The image sells both the product and the lifestyle connected to it.

Filters and editing can change colour, skin texture, room brightness, and product appearance. Some changes are easy to notice, while others are not. A small adjustment may make a cosmetic shade look better or make a room appear cleaner. Readers may treat the image as direct proof even when it has passed through many stages of selection and editing.

Creators also choose what not to show. A note may include the best result but leave out failed attempts. A product may be photographed from the most attractive angle. A video may cut out waiting time, difficult steps, or unwanted effects. The final material can be based on real use while still giving an incomplete view.

Casual visual style can strengthen perceived authenticity. Handheld shots, ordinary rooms, natural light, and simple clothing make the content look less like advertising. Small mistakes, background noise, and informal speech may suggest that the creator recorded the experience without much planning. This style can be produced deliberately because it fits the visual language of personal sharing.

Screenshots also carry persuasive value. A creator may show purchase records, chat messages, search history, or notes made during use. These materials give the story a timeline and suggest that the experience can be checked. Yet screenshots can be selected, changed, or separated from their full context. They should not be treated as complete proof only because they look like records.

Visual evidence works well because seeing often feels close to knowing. Readers may believe that an image is less open to manipulation than a written claim. On social platforms, images are also viewed quickly. A strong visual result can shape the reader's opinion before the text is read carefully. The appearance of authenticity may then become more influential than the actual amount of information shown.

4. The Entry of Commercial Interests into Experience Sharing

4.1 Brand Sponsorship and Paid Cooperation

Brand sponsorship is one of the clearest ways in which commercial interests enter Xiaohongshu recommendation notes. A brand may pay a creator to introduce a product, show how it is used, or include it in a daily-life story. Payment may take the form of a fixed fee, extra payment based on views, free services, event invitations, or platform traffic support. The creator receives a benefit, while the brand gains access to the creator's followers and personal image.

Paid cooperation does not always look like traditional advertising. The creator may not use formal product language. The note can begin with a personal problem, a shopping experience, or a change in daily routine. The product appears inside the story and is presented as something the creator found useful. The note keeps the tone of personal sharing even though its publication has been arranged in advance.

Brands often provide creators with basic content requirements. These may include product names, selling points, target users, use scenes, key phrases, or purchase information. Some brands also set rules for images, video length, posting time, and reply methods in the comment section. The creator may still write in a personal style, but the main direction of the note has already been shaped by the cooperation agreement.

The level of brand control differs between projects. Some creators are allowed to test the product and express their real opinion. Others must submit the

text or video before publication. The brand may ask for changes when the description is not positive enough or when an important selling point is missing. Negative comments may be reduced, softened, or removed. The final note can still contain personal details, but these details are placed inside a controlled promotional message.

This form of cooperation creates a conflict between personal expression and paid communication. The creator is expected to sound like an ordinary user, but also needs to meet the brand's needs. A note that is too direct may be rejected by readers as an advertisement. A note that is too critical may not satisfy the brand. The creator may use personal language to keep the message persuasive while avoiding any point that could weaken the promotion.

Paid notes often use natural scenes to reduce the sense of advertising. A skincare product may appear in a morning routine. A food brand may be included in a record of office life. A travel service may be introduced through a personal holiday plan. These scenes make the commercial message easier to accept because the product does not appear alone. It is connected with emotions, habits, and daily needs. Disclosure is important in this type of content. Readers need to know whether the creator has received payment or other benefits. Without clear disclosure, they may believe that the note was published only because the creator liked the product. The commercial relationship affects how the content should be read. Praise in a paid note may still be honest, but it is not fully independent.

Some creators use direct labels such as "paid cooperation," "brand partnership," or "sponsored content." These labels allow readers to understand the relationship before reading the recommendation. Other notes use unclear symbols, short forms, or words that are easy to miss. A label may also be placed at the end of a long text. In such cases, the note is technically marked, but the commercial connection is not clearly presented.

Payment can also affect the amount of praise. A creator may fear losing future work if the note contains strong criticism. Even without a direct

order from the brand, the creator may choose safer words, avoid discussing product limits, or focus only on positive use scenes. The pressure comes from the need to protect a business relationship.

The problem is not that every paid note is false. A creator can receive payment and still test the product carefully. The note may contain useful information and real experience. The main concern is whether the reader knows about the payment and whether the creator is free to describe the product honestly.

4.2 Product Seeding and Free Samples

Product seeding is common in lifestyle content. Brands send products to creators without always paying a fixed publication fee. Some products are sent with a request for a note. Others are sent in the hope that the creator will choose to publish. The creator may receive cosmetics, clothing, food, household items, travel services, or other goods.

Free samples can appear less commercial than paid cooperation. The creator may say that no money was received and present the note as a personal review. Yet the product itself has value. Receiving it reduces the cost of trying it and can create a sense of obligation. The creator may feel that a positive note is expected, even when no written agreement exists. The source of the product can affect the writer's judgment. A person who pays the full price may pay close attention to value for money. A creator who receives the product for free may focus more on appearance, functions, or ease of use. The same weakness may feel less serious when the user has not spent personal money. A high price, poor value, or short product life may receive less attention.

Free products also affect content selection. Creators cannot test every item available on the market. The products sent by brands become easier to access and more likely to appear in notes. This gives brands a way to shape what users see without buying direct advertising space. A product may receive repeated exposure because it has been sent to many creators at the same time.

Product seeding often creates similar notes across different accounts. Many creators may post about

the same item during a short period. The wording, use scenes, and positive points may look similar, even when each creator writes the note separately. Readers may treat repeated recommendations as proof that the product is popular. In fact, the repeated exposure may come from the same brand campaign.

The absence of direct payment can make disclosure less clear. Some creators mark the product as gifted. Others do not mention its source. They may believe that disclosure is unnecessary because the brand did not pay for the post. Readers still need this information because receiving the product creates a commercial connection and may affect the review.

Product seeding can be open or selective. Large creators may receive expensive products or full product sets. Small creators may receive low-cost samples in exchange for content. New creators may accept such offers because they want to build a profile, gain brand contacts, or appear more professional. The value of the product may be small, but the chance of future cooperation can influence the note.

Some brands use seeding as a test before offering paid work. Creators who publish positive notes and produce strong engagement may receive later contracts. This creates an indirect incentive. A creator may praise a free product not only because of the current item but also because of possible future income. The commercial effect extends beyond the value of the sample itself.

Free trials can still produce useful reviews. They allow creators to test products that may be too expensive to buy personally. They can also give readers access to detailed information before a product becomes widely available. The review is more credible when the creator clearly states how the product was obtained, how long it was used, and whether the brand had any control over the content. A gifted product should not be described as an ordinary personal purchase. Claims such as "I found this by chance" or "I decided to buy it after a long search" become misleading when the product was sent by a brand. The experience may be real, but the

story of discovery is false. This changes the meaning of the entire note.

4.3 Commission Links and Purchase Incentives

Commission links connect content directly with sales. A creator places a product link, discount code, or purchase page in the note. When a reader buys through that channel, the creator receives part of the sale. Income may depend on the number of orders, the value of each order, or the total sales produced by the content.

This model changes the creator's role. The creator is no longer only sharing an opinion. The creator also acts as part of the sales process. Stronger recommendations and more purchases can lead to higher income. The creator has a direct financial reason to make the product appear attractive.

Commission-based content often uses clear calls to action. The note may tell readers to click a link, use a code, place an order quickly, or buy before a discount ends. These messages are closer to sales language than ordinary experience sharing. Yet they may still be placed inside a personal story. The emotional connection built earlier in the note can lead the reader toward the purchase link.

Purchase incentives may shape the tone of the recommendation. A creator may use stronger words because a careful or uncertain review is less likely to produce sales. Phrases such as "worth buying," "must have," or "do not miss it" can move readers from interest to action. Product limits may be mentioned briefly or left out because they could reduce the number of orders.

Commission income can also encourage repeated promotion. A creator may post about the same product in several forms, such as an unboxing note, a use guide, a comparison, and a discount reminder. The content looks varied, but each note leads to the same purchase channel. Experience sharing becomes part of a continuing sales plan.

Discount codes create another form of pressure. They give readers a small benefit and allow brands to track which creator produced a sale. The creator may present the code as a special service for followers. This can strengthen the feeling of

closeness. Readers may believe that buying through the creator is a way to support someone they trust. Limited-time offers can weaken careful decision-making. A note may say that the price will rise soon, stock is running low, or a gift is available only for a short period. Readers may buy before checking other reviews or comparing prices. The sense of urgency becomes part of the commercial message. Purchase incentives are not limited to direct cash commission. Creators may receive extra products, higher future fees, platform ranking, or brand rewards when sales reach a certain level. These benefits can also affect how strongly a product is recommended. The reader may not know that the creator's reward depends on the purchase result.

A commission link does not make every claim false. A creator may use the product, like it, and choose to earn income from the recommendation. The main issue is whether the financial link is easy to identify. Readers should know that the creator may benefit from their purchase.

Clear disclosure should appear near the recommendation or purchase link. It should use direct language. A general statement such as "this note contains links" does not explain that the creator may earn money. A reader needs to understand the nature of the benefit, not only the existence of a link. Commission-based promotion can also affect comparison notes. A creator may compare several products but provide links only for the items that offer higher rewards. A product with better value may receive less attention because it does not produce commission. The comparison then appears independent while being shaped by sales terms.

The connection between recommendation strength and creator income is central to this model. When readers cannot see that connection, personal trust is used to support a hidden sales relationship.

4.4 Long-Term Cooperation with Brands

Commercial influence does not exist only inside a single note. A creator may work with the same brand over several months or years. The cooperation may include paid notes, product gifts, event attendance, live broadcasts, new product testing, or

offline activities. This long-term relationship can affect the creator's content even when a particular note is not formally sponsored.

Repeated cooperation creates familiarity between the creator and the brand. The creator learns what the brand expects and which forms of content are more likely to be accepted. Direct instructions may become less necessary. The creator may adjust the note in advance to match the brand's preferred tone and selling points.

Future opportunities can influence current judgment. A creator may avoid strong criticism because it could damage the relationship. A weak product may receive a soft review, or the creator may choose not to discuss it at all. The public sees only the notes that were published, not the problems that were left out.

Long-term cooperation can also shape the creator's public identity. A beauty creator may become closely linked to a skincare brand. A travel creator may often recommend the same hotel group or booking service. Followers may begin to see this connection as part of the creator's normal content. The commercial relationship becomes less visible because it is familiar.

Repeated use can support a more detailed review. A creator who has used a brand for a long time may know its products well. The creator can explain changes between versions, compare different items, and describe long-term use. This information may be useful to readers. Yet close contact with the brand may also reduce distance and critical judgment.

Some creators describe long-term brand relationships as personal loyalty. They may say that they have used the brand for years or trusted it before receiving cooperation. This may be true. It can also make the commercial message stronger because the creator presents the brand as part of personal history.

The order of the relationship matters. A creator may begin as a real consumer and later become a paid partner. The earlier experience does not remove the need to disclose the later cooperation. Once payment, gifts, or other benefits enter the

relationship, readers need to know that the creator's position has changed.

A creator may also publish unpaid content between paid campaigns. These notes can support the same brand without a direct fee for each post. They may keep the brand visible, prepare followers for a later campaign, or show loyalty to the company. It can be difficult to separate personal preference from relationship maintenance.

Long-term cooperation may include private benefits that readers cannot see. These can include early access to products, travel, event invitations, professional contacts, or support from the brand's media team. The creator may value these opportunities even when no money is paid for a specific note.

Brands gain more than product exposure from a long-term partnership. They also gain access to the creator's personality, audience relationship, and content style. The creator becomes a familiar voice for the brand. Readers may accept repeated recommendations because they trust the person and no longer see each note as a separate advertisement. Clear disclosure should not be limited to single paid posts. When a creator has an ongoing partnership, this relationship may be relevant to other notes about the same brand. A reader may judge a positive review differently when the writer has worked with the company many times.

4.5 Platform Traffic and Commercial Value

Commercial pressure can shape recommendation notes even when no brand is directly involved. Creators depend on platform traffic to gain followers, attention, and future income. A note that receives many views, likes, saves, and comments can improve the creator's visibility. This visibility has commercial value.

Creators may choose topics that are likely to gain traffic. Popular products, new releases, seasonal trends, low-price alternatives, and controversial items often receive more attention. A creator may write about these subjects because they fit audience needs, but also because they can improve account performance.

The platform rewards content that keeps users watching, reading, saving, or commenting. Creators learn which titles, images, words, and story forms produce stronger responses. (Cotter) They may use dramatic openings, clear emotional changes, strong product claims, or eye-catching before-and-after images. These choices are not always required by brands. They come from the need to compete for attention.

Traffic can turn ordinary experience into a planned content product. A creator may choose a personal problem because it is widely shared. The story may be shortened, intensified, or rearranged to make the product more attractive. Real experience remains present, but it is edited according to what performs well on the platform.

High traffic can lead to later business opportunities. Brands often choose creators based on follower numbers, engagement, audience type, and past content performance. A popular recommendation note can become proof of the creator's ability to influence purchases. The note may not be paid, but it can help the creator obtain future paid work.

This expectation can affect unpaid content. A creator may publish positive product notes to attract brands in a certain field. A new beauty creator may post many favourable cosmetic reviews to show possible partners that the account is suitable for cooperation. Commercial planning begins before any contract is signed.

Account growth also encourages regular posting. Creators need enough content to remain visible. This can lead to frequent recommendations, short testing periods, or repeated use of similar story structures. A product may be reviewed soon after arrival because waiting several weeks could reduce its value as a trending topic.

Traffic pressure can favour strong opinions. A moderate statement may receive less attention than a claim that a product is excellent or terrible. Positive excitement and sharp disappointment are both easier to turn into eye-catching content. Careful language may appear less attractive in a fast content feed.

The platform's search and recommendation systems can increase the value of certain words. Creators may include product names, common problems, popular labels, and purchase-related phrases to improve visibility. The note then serves both readers and the platform system. Its form is shaped by the need to be found and recommended.

Commercial content can also receive extra traffic through paid promotion. Brands or creators may pay to increase exposure. Readers may not always know whether a note became popular through ordinary interaction or paid support. High visibility can then appear to be natural public interest.

Traffic data can affect cooperation prices. A creator with strong numbers can charge more for sponsored notes. Likes, saves, comments, and purchase results become part of the creator's business value. Each note contributes to a public record of influence.

This system places commercial pressure on personal expression. Creators may still share real experiences, but they also need to consider whether a story will gain attention, support account growth, and attract future work. The line between ordinary sharing and commercial activity becomes unclear before any direct payment appears.

5. Main Problems Caused by Blurred Boundaries

5.1 Hidden Advertising under Personal Experience

Hidden advertising appears when a commercial note is written as if it were an independent personal recommendation. The creator may receive payment, free products, commission, or other benefits, but the note does not clearly state this relationship (Federal Trade Commission). Readers then approach the content as ordinary experience sharing, even though the note also serves a sales purpose.

The personal form makes hidden advertising difficult to notice. The creator may begin with a real or familiar problem, such as dry skin, limited storage space, work pressure, or difficulty choosing clothes. The product appears later as part of the solution. The story contains personal feelings, daily scenes, and use details. It does not look like a direct

advertisement, even when the brand has helped plan the content.

Some creators avoid common advertising words. They do not say that the product is officially recommended or that the note is sponsored. They use phrases such as "I recently found," "I have been using," or "a friend introduced this to me." Such phrases create the impression of a natural discovery. When the product was actually sent by a brand, this description gives readers a false idea about how the recommendation began.

Commercial information may also be hidden through weak disclosure. A creator may place a small mark at the end of the note, use an unclear abbreviation, or mention cooperation only after several paragraphs. Some readers may not understand the label. Others may complete most of the note before seeing it. A disclosure that is difficult to find cannot fully correct the impression created by the personal story (Evans et al.; Wojdyski & Evans).

The title and cover image often appear before any commercial label. A title may say that the creator finally found a useful product or solved a long-term problem. The cover may show a strong result or an emotional reaction. Readers form an early judgment from these elements. A later label may not remove the belief that the recommendation came from free personal choice.

Hidden advertising affects the reader's ability to judge the content. A reader may give more weight to an independent review than to paid promotion. The reader may also expect a personal note to include problems that a brand advertisement would leave out. When the commercial relationship is concealed, the reader cannot adjust this expectation. The problem is not limited to false factual claims. A note may describe real use and still mislead readers about its purpose. The creator may have tried the product and liked it, but payment has influenced the decision to publish, the choice of words, and the amount of praise. Hiding that influence changes how the note is understood.

Some creators argue that a note should not be treated as advertising when they already used the

product before accepting cooperation. Earlier use can support the truth of the experience, but it does not remove the later commercial relationship. Readers still need to know that the creator received a benefit for publishing or promoting the note. Hidden advertising also affects ordinary users who share products without payment. When commercial notes copy the language and appearance of personal sharing, readers become more suspicious of all positive recommendations. A genuine user may then be treated as a seller. The value of ordinary experience sharing is weakened because the platform no longer gives readers a clear way to separate personal choice from paid communication.

5.2 Selective Presentation of Product Experience

A recommendation note may be based on real experience but still present only part of that experience. The creator can choose which details to include, which images to show, and which results to describe. Positive points may receive several paragraphs, while limits and problems are reduced to one short sentence or left out.

Selection begins with the use situation. A creator may test a product under conditions where it is likely to work well. A cosmetic product can be shown under soft indoor lighting. A cleaning product can be used on a light stain. A bag can be filled with small and carefully arranged objects. The result is real, but the situation does not show how the product performs under more difficult or common conditions.

The period of use may also be too short. A creator can publish a review after one or two uses because the brand has set a posting date or because the product is receiving high traffic. Early experience may show texture, appearance, or ease of use. It may not show long-term quality, safety, durability, or value. Readers may still understand the note as a complete review.

Positive changes can be linked to the product without enough support. A creator may use several skincare products at the same time, change sleeping habits, or adjust diet. The note may give most of the credit to the sponsored item. The product becomes

the main cause in the story because it is the subject of the promotion, not because other causes have been ruled out.

Failed use is easy to remove from the final content. A creator may take many photos and publish only the best one. A video may cut out difficult steps, repeated attempts, or waiting time. If the product does not work in one setting, the creator can choose another setting where the result looks better. Readers see a smooth process that may not match normal use.

Product limits are often treated as minor details. A note may say that the item is "slightly expensive" or "not perfect for everyone," but give no clear explanation. The price may be much higher than similar products. The product may also be unsuitable for a large group of users. Soft wording makes the note appear balanced without giving readers enough information.

Risks can be reduced in the same way. Notes about skincare, health products, food, or fitness may focus on positive results and leave out possible discomfort or unsuitable conditions. A short statement such as "personal results may differ" does not replace a clear description of relevant risks. Readers need practical information, especially when a product may affect the body.

Selective presentation can also occur in comparison notes. A creator may compare a sponsored product with weaker or more expensive alternatives. The comparison points may be chosen to favour the promoted item. Important features where the product performs poorly may not be included. The note appears fair because several options are shown, but the method of comparison is already unequal.

Price information can be incomplete. A creator may show a discount price without explaining the normal price, membership conditions, delivery fee, or amount needed to receive the discount. Readers may believe that the offer is more attractive than it is. Product value is then judged through selected numbers rather than the full cost.

The comment section may contain experiences that differ from the main note. Some users may report poor results, damaged products, or difficult refunds.

When these comments are hidden or deleted, the visible content keeps a positive direction. The creator controls not only the original story but also part of the later discussion.

No personal account can include every detail. Selection is a normal part of writing. The problem appears when important information is removed because it may reduce sales or harm a brand relationship. The note still carries signs of real experience, but the experience has been narrowed until it mainly supports the desired commercial message.

5.3 Exaggerated Emotional Language

Emotional language is common in Xiaohongshu recommendation notes. It helps creators express personal reactions and makes the content easier to read. The problem appears when emotion replaces careful description or makes the product seem more useful than the actual experience supports.

Words such as “must buy,” “never fails,” “perfect,” and “the best I have ever used” leave little room for limits. They turn an individual preference into a broad claim. A creator may have had a good experience, but this does not mean that the product will work for every reader. Strong language hides the difference between personal satisfaction and general product quality.

Some notes present ordinary products as complete solutions to serious problems. A storage box may be described as having “saved” a small home. A cosmetic product may be said to have “changed” the creator’s life. A study tool may be presented as the reason for a major improvement in performance. Such claims give the product a central role that may not match its real effect.

Emotional language often follows a dramatic story. The creator may describe a long period of worry, repeated failure, or strong disappointment. The product then appears and quickly changes the situation. This clear emotional turn makes the note engaging. It also reduces attention to other reasons for the change.

Negative emotions can be used to create purchase pressure. A creator may warn that readers will

regret missing a discount or waste money by choosing another product. Some notes suggest that a person who does not own the product is falling behind, making poor choices, or failing to care for personal needs. The reader is encouraged to buy in order to avoid shame, anxiety, or regret.

Urgency gives this pressure a time limit. Phrases such as “buy before it is gone,” “the price ends tonight,” or “do not wait” make careful comparison seem risky. Readers may click the purchase link before checking other reviews. Emotional speed replaces calm judgment.

Exaggerated praise also affects expectations. A reader may expect a visible result after a short period because the creator described the product as immediate or certain. When the result is weaker, the reader may believe that the product was used incorrectly. The gap between the promise and actual experience can lead to repeated purchases or unnecessary changes in use.

Some emotional words are difficult to prove false because they describe personal feeling. A creator can say that a product is a personal favourite or that it caused great excitement. The wording is subjective, but it still guides readers toward a purchase. Commercial content can use personal feeling to make strong claims while avoiding direct responsibility for accuracy.

The creator’s performance in videos can add force to these words. Facial expressions, voice, music, and fast editing can make a small result look surprising. A quiet or careful reaction may not attract as much attention. Creators may feel pressure to appear more excited than they really are.

Repeated emotional language can change the normal standard of product discussion. Moderate satisfaction begins to look weak. Creators need stronger words to gain attention, and readers become used to dramatic claims. A product described in careful terms may seem less attractive even when the information is more reliable.

5.4 Repeated Scripts and False Personal Stories

Many commercial notes follow similar story patterns. The creator begins with a problem,

explains several failed attempts, introduces a product, and ends with a positive change. The details may differ, but the main order remains the same. This structure is easy to understand and places the product at the centre of the story.

A repeated structure does not prove that a story is false. Many users face similar problems and may describe them in similar ways. Concern arises when several creators publish nearly identical stories about the same product during the same period. The wording, emotional change, use scene, and final recommendation may all appear planned.

Brands or marketing agencies may provide scripts to creators. These scripts can include the problem that should appear at the beginning, the selling points that must be mentioned, and the result that should be shown at the end. Creators then add personal language, images, or small details to make the note fit their account.

A scripted note often uses a false sense of discovery. The creator may claim to have found the product by chance after trying many alternatives. The product may actually have been sent as part of a campaign. The story of discovery is used to hide the arranged nature of the promotion.

False personal stories can include invented problems. A creator may describe skin trouble, poor sleep, study pressure, or a difficult trip because these situations match the product. The story gives the recommendation a reason and helps readers identify with the creator. When the problem did not occur, the personal experience becomes a fictional advertising device.

Some stories use real problems but change the order of events. The creator may have received the product before the problem appeared or may have accepted the commercial project before deciding how to frame the experience. The final note makes it seem that the product was chosen as a natural answer to an earlier need.

Repeated scripts can create the appearance of wide public agreement. When many accounts tell similar positive stories, readers may believe that the product has solved the same problem for many ordinary users. The repeated content may actually

come from one campaign brief. What looks like many separate experiences is partly one commercial message copied across different voices.

This practice is harder to notice when creators use different visual styles. One account may present the product through study life, another through family life, and another through travel. The surface changes, but the main selling points and emotional path remain close. Personal identity gives each note a separate appearance.

False stories also affect the creator's later content. Readers may remember the claimed problem and expect it to remain part of the creator's life. When later notes show a different story, contradictions can appear. A creator may claim to have used several competing products for years, even though the publication dates and cooperation records do not support these claims.

Scripted storytelling does not always remove all real experience. A creator may test the product and then fit the experience into a required structure. The final story can contain true details mixed with planned claims. This mixture is difficult for readers to judge because the true parts support the false or exaggerated parts.

5.5 Difficulty in Judging Authenticity

Readers often lack the information needed to decide whether a recommendation is independent, sponsored, or connected to sales income. The note may look personal, but its production process remains invisible. Readers see the finished story rather than the agreement, product source, payment method, or editing requirements behind it.

It can be difficult to know whether the creator bought the product. A note may show an order record, yet the cost could have been returned by the brand. A product may appear partly used, but it may have been sent for promotion. The presence of the product proves access, not independence.

The absence of a commercial label does not prove that no commercial relationship exists. A creator may receive a free product, future cooperation, event access, or other benefits without calling the note sponsored. Some arrangements may take place

through private messages or agencies. Readers cannot check these links from the published content. Clear labels can also be incomplete. A note marked as “gifted” may not explain that the creator receives commission from sales. A “brand cooperation” label may not show how much control the brand had over the script. The reader knows that a connection exists but still does not know how strongly it shaped the content.

Personal experience is hard to verify. A creator can state that a product was used for several weeks, but the reader usually cannot confirm the period or method of use. Photos may have been taken on the same day. Empty packaging may belong to another person or may have been prepared for the note. Visual records give an impression of proof without allowing full checking.

The creator’s account history may provide some clues, but it can also create confusion. A long record of daily sharing can make a sponsored note look trustworthy. Frequent cooperation may make commercial content appear normal. Readers may not review older posts or notice repeated changes in product preference.

Comments do not always solve the problem. Positive comments may come from real users, loyal followers, brand accounts, or arranged interaction. Negative comments may be hidden. A large number of replies shows activity, but it does not clearly show product quality or creator independence.

Different product types create different levels of difficulty. The quality of clothing or household items may be partly visible in images. Claims about skincare, health, learning, or long-term use are harder to judge from a short note. Readers may rely more heavily on the creator’s personal account when direct proof is limited.

New users face greater difficulty because they may not know the common forms of commercial content. They may treat first-person language, casual images, and minor criticism as signs of independence. Experienced users may recognize some patterns, but commercial notes also change their style to avoid detection.

Authenticity cannot be judged only by whether every sentence is factually true. A note may use a real product, real images, and real feelings while hiding the commercial reason for publication. The content is not fully false, but the reader receives an incomplete picture of why it was created.

5.6 The Use of Trust as a Commercial Resource

Creators often build trust through long-term sharing. They post about daily routines, personal difficulties, family life, work, study, travel, or emotional experiences. Followers become familiar with the creator’s voice and preferences. This relationship gives later recommendations more power than a single advertisement from an unknown source.

Trust becomes commercially valuable when it can influence attention and purchase. Brands choose creators not only because they can produce attractive images. They also choose them because followers believe their personal opinions. The creator’s relationship with the audience becomes part of what the brand pays for.

A recommendation can feel like advice from a familiar person. The reader may have followed the creator for months or years. The creator may have replied to comments, shared failures, and expressed views that match the reader’s own values. When this person recommends a product, the reader may not apply the same caution used for ordinary advertising.

The commercial use of trust is not always harmful. A creator may recommend a product that fits earlier preferences and may clearly explain the cooperation. The audience can then decide whether to accept the advice. The problem appears when trust is used to hide the creator’s commercial role or reduce the reader’s awareness of sales intent.

Some creators use the language of friendship to support purchases. They may call followers friends, family members, or a close community. A discount link may be presented as a special benefit prepared for this group. Buying the product can then feel like participation in the relationship or support for the creator.

This emotional connection creates an unequal position. The reader may feel personal closeness, but the creator communicates with a large audience and may earn income from their actions. The relationship appears personal while operating through platform traffic and commercial contracts. Readers often have less information about the transaction than the creator, brand, and platform.

Trust can also make criticism harder. Followers who question a recommendation may be treated as disloyal or unfriendly. Other users may defend the creator instead of discussing the product claim. The focus moves from whether the information is accurate to whether the creator deserves support.

A creator may rely on earlier honest content to support later paid notes. Years of ordinary sharing form a record of credibility. A hidden promotion can draw on that record without giving readers new information about the change in purpose. Trust earned in a non-commercial setting is transferred into a commercial setting.

When readers later discover hidden cooperation or false stories, the damage may extend beyond one note. They may doubt earlier recommendations and become suspicious of other creators. The loss is not limited to a single purchase. It affects the wider practice of sharing experience on the platform.

Trust should not give creators freedom from disclosure. A close relationship with followers makes clear disclosure more important, not less important. Readers who rely on the creator's judgment need to know when that judgment is linked to payment, gifts, commission, or future cooperation.

6. How to Define the Commercialization Boundary

The commercialization boundary should be judged through several connected factors rather than a single standard. First, any material benefit between the creator and the brand indicates a commercial connection. This includes not only direct payment but also free products, commissions, traffic support, event invitations, travel arrangements, or future cooperation opportunities. Even small or indirect benefits can influence content. The key issue is

whether the benefit is linked to the recommendation and may affect the creator's position. Personal purchase alone does not guarantee independence, and relationships through agencies or personal connections should also be considered.

Second, commercial relationships should be clearly disclosed. Disclosure needs to be visible, direct, and easy to understand before readers rely on the content. Labels such as "paid cooperation," "gifted product," or "commission earned" are clearer than vague expressions. The disclosure should match the actual relationship and cover all major benefits. It should appear early in the note, remain visible in videos or live content, and stay attached when content is shared. Clear disclosure helps readers interpret the recommendation but does not excuse misleading claims.

Third, experiential narratives should be based on real and personally verified use. Creators should only describe what they have actually experienced and should match their claims to the length and conditions of use. First impressions should not be presented as long-term results, and personal outcomes should not be generalized to all users. Visual evidence should not be manipulated to exaggerate effects, and other influencing factors should not be hidden. Borrowed or copied experiences must be identified, and creators should avoid presenting second-hand information as personal testimony.

Fourth, a fair recommendation should include key limits that may affect purchase decisions. This includes suitable and unsuitable users, possible risks, full price conditions, product size and duration, performance limits, and required effort or skill. Important weaknesses should not be hidden behind minor complaints. When information changes or users report consistent problems, creators should update or correct their content. The level of detail should match the strength of the recommendation.

Fifth, the language of the note should remain within what the experience can support. Absolute claims, exaggerated emotional expressions, and unsupported scientific or medical statements should

be avoided. Personal opinions should be distinguished from factual claims, and temporary results should not be presented as lasting effects. Words that suggest authority or universal effectiveness require clear evidence. Careful and specific language helps readers understand the real value of the experience.

Finally, the note should allow readers to make an independent choice. It should not rely on pressure, fear, shame, or false urgency to drive purchase. Practical conditions such as pricing rules, subscriptions, and refund policies should be clear. Purchase links should be identifiable, and alternatives should not be hidden. The comment section should allow reasonable discussion, and creators should not use loyalty or emotional ties to influence buying decisions. A fair recommendation informs rather than forces a decision, leaving space for readers to judge based on their own needs.

7. Responsibilities of Creators, Brands, and the Platform

Creators are the direct speakers in Xiaohongshu recommendation notes. Readers receive product information through personal voice, images, use records, and emotional reactions. Because creators know whether a note involves payment, free products, commission, or brand instructions, they have a basic duty to make these relationships clear. Commercial links should be disclosed before readers rely on the recommendation. Paid cooperation should be stated as such, gifted products should be marked, and commission links should be identified. These relationships should not be hidden under vague labels or unclear expressions.

Disclosure should use simple and direct language. Terms like “special experience” or “friendly sharing” do not explain what the creator received. Symbols or abbreviations that ordinary readers cannot understand create the same problem. Creators should also explain the source of the product, since a product bought with personal money differs from one provided by a brand or used

during a sponsored experience. These differences affect how readers judge value and credibility.

Personal opinions should be separated from factual claims. Creators can describe personal feelings such as appearance, smell, or comfort, but claims about safety, effectiveness, or long-term results require stronger support. The strength of a recommendation should match the actual testing period and method. Short-term use cannot support claims about durability or lasting effects. The use process should be described honestly, without exaggerating duration or inventing long-term experience.

Creators should avoid false discovery stories or invented personal struggles. A product provided by a brand should not be presented as an accidental personal find. Visual materials should also reflect real experience. Editing should not create false product effects, and before-and-after comparisons should use similar conditions. When multiple factors may influence results, such as diet or other products, these should be mentioned instead of giving full credit to the promoted item.

Negative aspects should not be removed simply to protect cooperation. A balanced review can include both strengths and limitations. Reasonable negative feedback from users should not be hidden, and creators should update content when information becomes outdated or inaccurate. Keeping basic records of cooperation, product use, and communication can support accountability, especially when strong claims are made.

Creators should also avoid using emotional language to pressure purchases. Followers should not be told that buying a product shows loyalty or support. A creator can earn income while maintaining a personal voice, but commercial influence should remain visible and grounded in real experience.

Brands also carry responsibility because they often control cooperation terms, campaign goals, and content review. They should not ask creators to hide sponsorship or replace clear labels with vague language. Content requirements should focus on accurate information rather than fixed praise or unsupported claims. Creators should be allowed to

describe both positive and negative aspects based on real use.

Brands should provide sufficient testing time and avoid requiring long-term claims without proper evidence. Products related to health, safety, or personal care require stricter standards, and creators should not be asked to make medical or exaggerated claims. Brands should not provide scripted personal stories or require identical narratives across multiple accounts, as this creates a false impression of independent experience.

Accurate information about price, discounts, and commission should be provided and disclosed. Agencies working on behalf of brands should follow the same standards. Brands should respond to creator feedback honestly and address product issues rather than suppress criticism. Keeping cooperation records can help clarify the nature of content and the level of brand control. While clear disclosure may reduce short-term attention, it supports long-term trust.

The platform also plays a central role because it provides the space where personal sharing and commercial promotion coexist. It controls content labels, recommendation systems, and commercial tools, and it has access to data that can reveal hidden relationships. Clear and visible labels should be integrated into the publishing process, allowing creators to indicate paid cooperation, gifted products, commission income, or other benefits. Different types of relationships should be distinguished rather than combined under a single label.

Labels should appear in visible positions and remain noticeable in videos and live sessions. The platform can link disclosure to commercial tools so that labels are added automatically when product links or campaign features are used. Although some arrangements occur outside the platform, creators should still be required to declare relevant relationships.

Review systems should focus on the actual effect of content, not only on explicit advertising language. Hidden promotion often uses personal storytelling and casual presentation. Patterns such as repeated

scripts, coordinated posting, or similar content across accounts may indicate organised campaigns and should be reviewed carefully. However, similarity alone should not lead to automatic punishment, as popular products may naturally generate similar discussions.

The recommendation system should not hide commercial influence. Labels should remain visible in search results and feeds, and paid traffic support should be distinguishable from organic popularity. Users should have simple ways to report hidden advertising or misleading content, and creators should have opportunities to correct mistakes before facing stronger penalties. Repeated or serious violations may require stricter measures, including reduced visibility or restrictions on commercial functions.

Brands and agencies should also be subject to platform rules, as focusing only on creators does not address organised hidden promotion. Comment sections should be protected from artificial support, and genuine negative feedback should remain visible. The platform can also provide basic guidance to help users understand commercial content without limiting ordinary expression.

At the same time, ordinary experience sharing should be protected. Users often share genuine opinions without receiving any benefit, and positive language alone does not indicate commercial intent. The key factor is whether material influence exists, such as payment, free products, commission, or future cooperation. When no such influence is present, content should be treated as ordinary user sharing.

Rules should not require complex declarations for every product mention, as this would discourage normal participation. Small accounts should not be assumed to be independent, but they should also not be punished simply for producing high-quality content. Similarity between notes should be treated as a signal for review rather than proof of coordination.

Users should remain free to express both positive and negative experiences based on facts. Creators who engage in brand cooperation should still be

able to publish independent opinions, although ongoing relationships may require disclosure when they could influence perception. Responsibility should match influence: stronger claims, larger audiences, and direct sales links require clearer disclosure and stronger evidence.

Clear boundaries help protect trust. When commercial content is visibly marked, readers can better understand the nature of recommendations, and ordinary sharing can retain its value. The goal is to allow genuine personal expression while ensuring that hidden benefits, false experience, unsupported claims, and sales pressure do not mislead readers.

8. Possible Ways to Maintain a Clear Boundary

A clear boundary between personal sharing and commercial promotion can be maintained through several practical measures that involve creators, platforms, brands, and readers. Commercial labels should be direct and visible, placed near the title or at the beginning of the note so that readers can recognize a commercial relationship before engaging with the content. Simple wording such as “paid cooperation,” “gifted product,” or “commission earned from purchases” provides clear information, while vague expressions like “special experience” or “friendly sharing” do not explain the creator’s benefit. Different forms of cooperation should be distinguished, since paid promotion, free samples, and commission links involve different levels of influence. These labels should remain visible across search results, recommendation feeds, videos, and live sessions, without requiring readers to open additional pages. Creators should also disclose how they obtained the product, whether through personal purchase, brand provision, borrowing, testing, or free service experience. The source of the product affects how readers interpret the evaluation, as a self-funded purchase may lead to different judgments than a gifted item. Non-cash benefits such as free travel, accommodation, meals, or services should also be treated as material gains. The description of the source should match the actual situation, and a

gifted product should not be presented as a personal discovery. If a purchase cost is later reimbursed, the note should not continue to describe the item as self-funded. Commission income should be clearly stated near purchase links so that readers understand the potential financial incentive behind the recommendation.

Experience descriptions should remain balanced and grounded in actual use. Useful notes explain how long the product was used, under what conditions, and with what limitations. Short trials may support comments on basic features such as texture or appearance but cannot justify claims about long-term effects or safety. Creators should mention important weaknesses that may influence purchasing decisions, including cost, size, performance limits, or unsuitable user groups. Minor criticism should not be used to conceal more significant drawbacks. Visual comparisons should use consistent conditions, and any additional factors that may affect results should be acknowledged. The level of detail should correspond to the strength of the claim, with stronger recommendations requiring clearer support.

The platform should improve its review of hidden promotion by looking beyond explicit advertising language. Hidden commercial content often appears in personal stories, casual images, and ordinary user expressions. Patterns such as repeated wording, similar narrative structures, coordinated posting times, and identical product claims across multiple accounts may indicate organized promotion. Undisclosed links, commission codes, or sudden shifts in a creator’s content may also require attention. These signals should not lead to automatic penalties, as popular products may naturally generate similar content. Instead, the platform should combine multiple indicators before making a judgment and may request creators to add labels or correct unclear information. Stronger measures can be applied when there is repeated concealment of commercial ties, fabricated experiences, or false claims. Brands and agencies should also be included in the review system to prevent repeated campaigns through different accounts.

Clear rules should apply to both large and small creators. Commercial disclosure should not depend on follower numbers, as smaller accounts may also receive benefits such as free products or future cooperation opportunities. Their ordinary appearance can make commercial content seem more independent, which increases the need for transparency. The same basic principle should apply to all creators: any material connection should be disclosed. While review processes may consider account size and influence, the existence of a commercial relationship should remain the key factor. At the same time, rules should be simple and easy to follow, with clear label options and guidance provided during content publication. High-quality content from small accounts should not be treated as advertising without evidence of commercial ties. Readers also play an important role in maintaining this boundary by developing basic recognition

skills. They should pay attention to product sources, commission links, repeated selling points, time pressure, and strong emotional language. A personal tone does not guarantee independence, as planned advertising can also use casual images and first-person narratives. Readers should consider whether the note includes a clear usage period and acknowledges real limitations. Visual evidence should be interpreted carefully, as editing, lighting, and presentation can influence perceived results. Comparing multiple notes can help identify repeated patterns that suggest coordinated campaigns. The platform can support reader awareness by providing guidance near commercial labels and purchase links, while broader media literacy education can explain how emotional narratives and selective information shape consumer judgment.

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