

From Restaurant-Review Warnings to Collective Empowerment: How Discourse Strategies Function in an Online Community of Practice

Jiaqi Li¹

¹ School of Western Languages, Jilin International Studies University, China

Correspondence: Jiaqi Li, School of Western Languages, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, Jilin 130117, China. E-mail: ttshitt27@gmail.com

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Abstract

Restaurant-review warning has become a prominent user-generated content genre on *Xiaohongshu*. In this genre, consumers share negative dining experiences and warn others about potential consumption risks. Drawing on a cleaned dataset of 48,359 comments from 70 highly interactive posts, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach to examine discourse strategies in commercial complaint interactions. The findings identify two major categories of discourse strategies: solidarity building strategies and dispute oriented strategies. These strategies construct alignment, negotiate norms, and manage interaction within the community. Conversation analysis of highly interactive comment threads further reveals four recurrent interaction patterns: empathic cohesion, humorous boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. These patterns illustrate how individual complaints are transformed into shared knowledge, negotiated norms, and forms of discursive collective empowerment through interaction. From an applied linguistics perspective, this study demonstrates how discourse strategies contribute to community construction in digitally mediated environments. The findings also contribute to research on online discourse and complaint pragmatics.

Keywords: discourse strategies; online communities of practice; collective agency; complaint discourse; *Xiaohongshu*

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the deep integration of social media and e-commerce has given rise to social commerce, reshaping global consumers' decision-making pathways. Social commerce refers to the use of Web 2.0 social media technologies to support online interactions and user contributions in the process of acquiring products and services (Liang & Turban, 2011). Consumers are no longer passive purchasers but active participants who influence others through content production and community engagement (Hajli et al., 2017). Meanwhile, user-generated content (UGC) has become a core channel for building consumer trust, often exerting greater influence than marketer-generated content (Smith et al., 2012). Against this background, negatively valenced UGC, such as warning posts, has become an important discourse vehicle for consumers to express dissatisfaction and protect their rights. However, warning interactions involve more than individual complaint expression. They constitute collaborative spaces in which users negotiate credibility, construct shared knowledge, align with others, and collectively evaluate consumption practices.

Within this context, *Xiaohongshu* has emerged as one of China's most representative lifestyle and social commerce platforms. Since its launch in 2013, it has evolved from an overseas shopping guide into a comprehensive community where users share consumption experiences, product reviews, and lifestyle discussions. Recent research suggests that *Xiaohongshu* has developed distinctive platform affordances related to creator hierarchy, brand status, and content visibility (Gao et al., 2026). In this ecosystem, restaurant-review warning has emerged as a new discourse genre in which users post negative dining experiences to caution others against low-quality services or misleading advertising. In this study, restaurant-review warning refers to user-generated posts that publicly document negative dining experiences and explicitly or implicitly caution other consumers against potential consumption risks. Unlike conventional online reviews, such posts are primarily oriented toward warning, exposure, and collective evaluation rather than recommendation. The rise of this genre reflects broader social changes, including the rapid expansion of the takeaway economy, the emergence of shadow restaurants and AI-operated takeaway shops, and growing dissatisfaction with platform review mechanisms. As a result, consumers increasingly turn to social media to publicly share complaints, negotiate shared evaluations, and seek collective support.

Although restaurant-review warning has become a prominent phenomenon, existing research has predominantly approached it from marketing or consumer behavior perspectives, focusing on electronic word-of-mouth, consumer trust, online complaint behavior, and consumer empowerment in digital environments (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Ward & Ostrom, 2006; Hajli et al., 2017). Comparatively less attention has been paid to its linguistic and interactional features as discourse practice. In digital environments, complaint discourse extends beyond the expression of dissatisfaction. It also involves the negotiation of accountability, the construction of alignment, and the management of interpersonal relationships among multiple participants (Haugh, 2017; Vladimirou et al., 2021). Traditional complaint research has mainly focused on face-to-face complaint-response sequences, whereas social media complaint interactions are public, multi-participant, and interactionally extended, involving more complex participation structures and the negotiation of meaning over time (Vladimirou et al., 2021). Existing research has predominantly examined complaint discourse on platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* or within brand-managed social media environments (Arora et al., 2025). Comparatively little attention has been paid to how users on content-driven platforms collaboratively construct complaint discourse, negotiate community norms, and develop shared evaluative practices through sustained interaction.

The construction of online communities of practice can be examined through the discourse strategies employed in interaction. Previous studies have shown that online public criticism often serves functions beyond the expression of dissatisfaction, including solidarity building, identity construction, and group alignment (Badarneh & Damiri, 2024; Liu, 2023). However, relatively little is known about how different discourse strategies are combined and negotiated in commercial complaint interactions on content-driven social media platforms. In particular, the processes through which consumers construct shared knowledge, negotiate community norms, and develop forms of collective agency through comment interactions remain underexplored. Examining these interactional processes can provide valuable insights into the relationship between discourse practices and online community formation.

Against this background, this study investigates the discourse strategies employed in *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning comment sections and their functions in constructing an online community of practice. The study makes three contributions. First, it extends research on online complaint discourse by examining the emerging genre of restaurant-review warning discourse on *Xiaohongshu*, a platform that remains underexplored in existing pragmatic studies. Second, it develops a discourse-strategy typology that captures both solidarity-building and dispute-oriented interaction in commercial complaint contexts. Third, it illustrates how discourse strategies function as interactional mechanisms through which participants construct shared knowledge, negotiate community norms, and develop forms of collective agency and discursive empowerment within an online community of practice. To achieve these aims, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of discourse strategies are employed in *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning comment sections? (2) What functions do these discourse strategies serve in the dynamic construction of an online community of practice?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Complaint Speech Acts in Social Media

Complaint speech acts have long been an important topic in pragmatics and discourse studies. Early research mainly focused on face-to-face complaint-response sequences, examining strategy types, politeness levels, and interpersonal relationship management in spoken interaction (Olshtain & Weinbach, 1993). With the rise of digital communication, however, complaint practices have increasingly shifted to social media environments, where participation structures and interactional dynamics differ fundamentally from offline communication.

Compared with traditional face-to-face complaints, social media complaint interactions are more public, multi-participant, and temporally extended. Vladimirou et al. (2021) argue that online complaints are characterized by complex participation and diachronicity, as users can repeatedly respond to, reinterpret, and escalate earlier complaints through layered interaction. Similarly, Page (2012) notes that social media platforms transform personal experience into networked public discourse, enabling users to collaboratively construct shared evaluations and alignments. In digital complaint interactions, users also employ various discourse devices, including intensifiers, rhetorical questions, irony, emojis, and humorous expressions, to negotiate stance and interpersonal positioning (Dyner, 2016; Vladimirou et al., 2021). In Chinese social media contexts, Ren and Guo's (2022) study demonstrates that users skillfully employ strategies such as code-switching, emojis, and indirect expressions to balance self-presentation and interpersonal harmony in online interaction.

Recent studies further suggest that online complaint discourse often serves broader social and community-oriented functions. Badarneh and Damiri (2024) argue that online public criticism is frequently motivated by the desire to express solidarity and align with other users rather than merely condemning a target. Similarly, digital complaint interactions may gradually develop into collective discussions through repeated stance-taking and shared evaluations.

Existing research, however, has largely examined complaint interactions on platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, or complaints directed toward firms on brand-managed social media pages (Arora et al., 2025). Comparatively little attention has been paid to how users on content-driven platforms collaboratively construct complaint discourse, negotiate community norms, and develop shared identities through sustained interaction, particularly from a community of practice perspective.

This shift from individual complaint expression to collective interaction highlights the importance of examining online complaints not only as speech acts but also as community-building practices. To better understand how users develop shared norms, identities, and evaluative frameworks through repeated interaction, the concept of community of practice provides a useful theoretical perspective.

2.2 Online Community of Practice and Discourse Construction

The concept of community of practice was first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) to describe how people develop shared knowledge and practical competence through sustained participation in social activities. Rather than viewing learning as simple knowledge acquisition, the framework emphasizes participation, identity construction, and meaning negotiation within communities. Wenger (1998) further conceptualized communities of practice through three interconnected dimensions: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. These dimensions explain how members gradually develop shared norms, communicative routines, and collective understandings through repeated interaction.

Subsequent research has extended the community of practice framework to digitally mediated environments. Barton and Lee (2013) demonstrate that online participation enables users to construct identities and maintain communities through everyday discourse practices. Angouri (2016) further argues that online communities of practice differ from offline communities in several important ways, including fluid membership boundaries, technologically mediated participation, and dynamically negotiated norms. More recent studies have also highlighted the role of discourse in shaping online communities. For example, Androutsopoulos (2023) notes that digital discourse practices enable users to construct alignment, negotiate belonging, and reproduce community-specific norms across online interactions.

From a discourse construction perspective, online communities of practice are maintained through the discourse strategies that members jointly employ in interaction. These strategies serve not only informational purposes but also important social functions, including identity construction, boundary negotiation, and solidarity building. Mansour (2020), in a study of a sustainable Facebook community, found that members gradually developed shared norms, monitoring practices, and collective understandings through repeated interaction. Similarly, Hine (2015) argues that online communities are discursively brought into being through situated interaction rather than simply formed around pre-existing shared interests. These studies suggest that discourse strategies play a constitutive role in the formation and maintenance of online communities.

In the context of *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning, the characteristics of an online community of practice are clearly observable. Users gather around shared concerns regarding takeaway food safety and consumption experiences, interact through multilayered comment exchanges, and gradually construct a shared repertoire of evaluative knowledge and communicative norms. Importantly, these norms are not fixed but dynamically negotiated through interaction, including disagreement, humorous exchanges, and issue escalation. Therefore, examining discourse strategies in restaurant-review warning comment sections provides an important pathway for understanding how online communities construct shared identity, negotiate community norms, and develop collective agency and forms of discursive empowerment through discourse practices.

2.3 Collective Agency and Discursive Empowerment in Digital Consumer Communities

Recent studies have increasingly emphasized the capacity of online communities to transform dispersed individual experiences into forms of collective agency. Collective agency refers to the shared capacity of community members to interpret issues, coordinate actions, and pursue common goals through interaction (Bandura, 2000; Ahearn, 2001). In digital environments, such agency is often manifested through collaborative meaning-making, norm construction, information sharing, and mobilization-oriented discourse rather than through formal organizational structures (Papacharissi, 2015; Angouri, 2016).

Research on digital participation suggests that online interactions can facilitate the emergence of collective awareness and coordinated orientations toward social issues. Papacharissi (2015) argues that networked communication enables affective publics in which individual emotions become collectively articulated and circulated. Similarly, Jenkins et al. (2016) note that participatory cultures encourage users to move beyond passive consumption and engage in collaborative knowledge production and civic-oriented participation. Within consumer contexts, such processes may enable individuals to transform isolated consumption experiences into collectively shared evaluations and practical

knowledge.

Relatedly, scholars have drawn attention to the notion of discursive empowerment, which emphasizes how language and interaction create opportunities for participants to voice concerns, negotiate meanings, and construct shared interpretations of social reality (Barton & Lee, 2013; Androutsopoulos, 2023). Discursive empowerment does not necessarily imply direct institutional influence or measurable social change. Rather, it refers to the capacity of participants to make their experiences visible, legitimate their perspectives, and collaboratively shape community understandings through discourse practices. In this sense, empowerment is viewed as an interactional and discursive process rather than a guaranteed social outcome.

In the context of *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning discourse, users rarely engage in organized collective action. Instead, they participate in collaborative evaluations, warning practices, norm negotiation, and occasional mobilization-oriented discussions. Through repeated interaction, individual complaints are transformed into shared repertoires of knowledge, collectively negotiated standards of evaluation, and emerging forms of collective agency. Therefore, rather than treating empowerment as a fixed outcome, this study conceptualizes it as a process of discursive empowerment that emerges through the construction of shared knowledge, collective awareness, and community norms in online interaction.

3. Methods

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Data Source and Screening Criteria

The data were drawn from user-generated content on *Xiaohongshu*, focusing on restaurant-review warning posts and their associated comment threads. In this study, restaurant-review warning posts refer to user-generated posts that publicly document negative dining experiences and explicitly or implicitly warn other consumers against potential consumption risks.

Data were collected using a Python-based web scraping script. Posts were included if they met three criteria: the post content or hashtags explicitly indicated a negative dining experience or warning intention; the post was published between February 2025 and August 2025; and the post had accumulated more than 500 comments. This threshold ensured sufficient interaction density for both discourse-strategy analysis and conversation analysis.

3.1.2 Data Cleaning and Anonymization

Duplicate entries, advertisements, automatically generated content, and comments containing no substantive linguistic content (e.g., emojis only) were removed. Personally identifiable information, including usernames and profile details, was anonymized and replaced with letter codes. Restaurant names were replaced with generic labels to prevent identification. All data were collected from publicly accessible content and stored securely. Following standard ethical guidelines for internet research on public data, no informed consent was required.

3.1.3 Dataset Composition and Analytical Roles of Comments

The final dataset consists of 48,359 comments from 70 highly interactive posts. Each comment record contains the comment text, posting time, number of likes, and hierarchical position within the thread. Of these comments, 36,325 (75.12%) are primary comments and 12,034 (24.88%) are secondary replies. Primary comments function as the principal unit for identifying discourse-strategy types, while secondary replies are used to examine interactional development including agreement, disagreement, humorous elaboration, norm negotiation, and issue escalation.

3.1.4 Sampling for Discourse-Strategy Coding and Interaction-Pattern Analysis

For discourse-strategy coding, we selected primary comments that received more than 100 likes, yielding 272 highly endorsed comments (8,039 Chinese characters). This sampling captures discourse practices that resonate most strongly within the community, though a limitation is that it may overrepresent dominant norms and underrepresent dissenting voices. Future research could include lower-engagement comments to address this bias.

For interaction-pattern analysis, comment threads were screened according to three criteria: a minimum interaction depth of three levels; observable interactional development such as opinion alignment, disagreement, humorous co-construction, or issue escalation; and at least 50 total likes or 10 replies within the thread. These criteria ensured that selected threads reflected sustained interaction. Four recurrent interaction patterns emerged, and representative cases were chosen for detailed conversation analysis.

3.2 Analytical Methods

3.2.1 Mixed-Methods Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative frequency

analysis.

3.2.2 Coding Discourse Strategies (RQ1)

A combined top-down and bottom-up coding procedure was adopted. The initial framework was informed by previous studies (Bi & Ren, 2023; Liu, 2023; Vladimirou et al., 2021). Iterative reading of the *Xiaohongshu* dataset allowed us to inductively identify additional strategy categories. The final framework consists of two overarching categories, namely solidarity-building strategies and dispute-oriented strategies, and their subcategories.

The coding process proceeded in three stages. First, two coders independently conducted exploratory coding on a pilot sample and discussed emerging categories. Second, the framework was refined through multiple rounds of comparison between theoretical categories and empirical observations. Third, the finalized framework was applied to the full dataset of selected comments. Inter-coder agreement exceeded 95% during pilot coding, and Cohen's Kappa at the subcategory level reached 0.962.

To address potential category overlap, we distinguished adjacent strategies by explicit criteria. Norm codification required a prescriptive formulation generalizing to all community members (e.g., "don't order from..."), whereas solution-oriented remediation offered optional advice (e.g., "you can check..."). Mobilization was coded only when an utterance explicitly called for collective or institutional action (e.g., "should be reported"). Generalization and extrapolation extended criticism from a specific case to a broader category, while appeal to shared knowledge invoked existing social consensus without necessarily criticizing the practice.

3.2.3 Identifying Interaction Patterns (RQ2)

Conversation analysis was employed to investigate how discourse strategies were dynamically combined within interaction, focusing on sequential organization and how participants responded to, elaborated on, challenged, or reformulated prior contributions.

Pattern identification followed an iterative process of open coding and constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Two coders independently reviewed all eligible threads and generated preliminary pattern labels. Through repeated comparison and discussion, four recurring interaction patterns were identified according to their dominant discourse strategies, interactional trajectories, and community-building functions: empathic cohesion, humorous boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. Representative threads were then selected to illustrate each pattern in detail.

Particular attention was paid to secondary replies, as they reveal how participants negotiate meanings, ratify or challenge prior evaluations, and collaboratively construct community norms.

4. Results

This section presents the findings of the study in relation to the two research questions. Section 4.1 provides an overview of the major categories and distribution of discourse strategies identified in the dataset. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 further examine the linguistic realizations and interactional features of solidarity building strategies and dispute oriented strategies, addressing the first research question concerning the types of discourse strategies employed in *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning comment sections. Section 4.4 then explores how these strategies are dynamically combined in interaction and how they contribute to the construction of an online community of practice, thereby addressing the second research question.

4.1 Types of Discourse Strategies

This section addresses the first research question by presenting the discourse-strategy typology identified in the dataset and examining its distributional characteristics. Through systematic coding of highly endorsed comments, we identified two overarching categories of discourse strategies: solidarity-building strategies and dispute-oriented strategies. These categories encompass four major subcategories and fifteen specific strategy types. The classification was developed through an iterative combination of theory-driven and data-driven coding, allowing both established interactional functions and *Xiaohongshu*-specific discourse practices to be captured. Table 1 presents the resulting typology and frequency distribution.

Table 1. Typology of discourse strategies

Major Category	Subcategory	Strategy Type	Frequency	Percentage
Solidarity Building	Empathy & Alliance Building	Co-victimization Narrative	31	13.5%
		Generalization & Extrapolation	22	9.6%
		Norm Codification	28	12.2%
		Solution Oriented Remediation	12	5.2%
		Affective Expression	5	2.2%
	Humor & Irony	Oxymoronic Framing	18	7.8%
		Hyperbolic Sarcasm	15	6.5%
		Ironic Endorsement	10	4.3%
			141	61.3%
Dispute Oriented	Questioning & Refuting	Veridicality Contestation	19	8.3%
		Responsibility Attribution	11	4.8%
		Appeal to Shared Knowledge	12	5.2%
	Regulating & Managing	Discussion Direction Commentary	23	10.0%
		Conflict Mediation/Escalation	9	3.9%
		Mobilization	8	3.5%
		Identity Declaration	7	3.0%
Subtotal			89	38.7%
Total			230	100%

As shown in Table 1, a total of 230 strategy instances were identified. Solidarity-building strategies account for 61.3% of all coded instances, while dispute-oriented strategies account for 38.7%. This distribution suggests that participants primarily orient toward alignment, mutual support, and collective meaning-making. At the same time, disagreement and norm negotiation remain a substantial component of interaction rather than marginal exceptions. The coexistence of these two orientations indicates that restaurant-review warning comment sections function not merely as spaces for emotional support but also as arenas for the collaborative evaluation and negotiation of consumption-related knowledge.

Within solidarity-building strategies, empathy and alliance-building strategies constitute the largest subcategory. In particular, co-victimization narratives (13.5%) and norm codification (12.2%) are among the most frequent strategy types. This pattern suggests that users often transform individual negative dining experiences into collectively recognizable problems and subsequently convert personal experiences into practical evaluative knowledge. Through repeated sharing of warning signs, consumption heuristics, and risk-identification methods, participants contribute to the construction of a shared repertoire of community knowledge. From a community-of-practice perspective, these strategies facilitate mutual engagement and the development of shared understandings among members.

Humor and irony strategies account for a smaller but still substantial proportion of the dataset. Oxymoronic framing (7.8%) and hyperbolic sarcasm (6.5%) occur particularly frequently. Although these strategies appear less often than empathy-oriented strategies, their interactional significance extends beyond their numerical distribution. By creatively reinterpreting merchant claims and exposing perceived inconsistencies through humor, participants not only express criticism but also reinforce shared interpretive frameworks. Successful participation in such humorous exchanges presupposes familiarity with community knowledge and evaluative assumptions, thereby contributing to the construction and maintenance of in-group membership boundaries.

Dispute-oriented strategies account for more than one-third of all identified instances, demonstrating that disagreement constitutes an integral part of community interaction. Within this category, questioning and refuting strategies occur slightly more frequently than regulating and managing strategies. Veridicality contestation (8.3%) and discussion-direction commentary (10.0%) are especially prominent. Rather than simply challenging others' opinions, these strategies often function to test the credibility of claims, clarify the scope of evaluations, and negotiate the applicability of community norms. In this sense, disagreement serves as a mechanism through which community knowledge is scrutinized, refined, and legitimized.

The presence of regulating and managing strategies further indicates that participants actively shape the direction of interaction. Through discussion-direction commentary, conflict mediation, mobilization, and identity declaration, members not only express evaluations but also intervene in how conversations are organized and interpreted. These strategies contribute to maintaining interactional coherence, establishing legitimate participation frameworks, and coordinating collective responses to perceived problems. Although less frequent than solidarity-building strategies, they play a disproportionately important role in sustaining the community as a structured site of knowledge exchange and norm negotiation.

Overall, the distributional patterns reveal that solidarity-building and dispute-oriented strategies perform complementary rather than opposing functions. Solidarity-building strategies facilitate the emergence of shared identity and collective knowledge, while dispute-oriented strategies enable the critical examination and refinement of those

understandings. Together, they constitute the interactional mechanisms through which participants collaboratively construct and maintain an online community of practice. The following sections examine how these strategies are linguistically realized and interactionally deployed in greater detail.

4.2 Solidarity Building Strategies

Solidarity-building strategies constitute the dominant interactional orientation in the dataset, accounting for 61.3% of all coded instances (see Table 1). These strategies primarily function to establish affective alignment, reinforce collective identity, and construct shared evaluative frameworks among participants. Rather than merely expressing individual dissatisfaction, commenters frequently transform personal experiences into collectively recognizable evaluations. Linguistically, this is achieved through inclusive expressions, generalized categorizations, directive formulations, and affective markers, which reduce interpersonal distance and facilitate alignment. Interactionally, these strategies enable participants to validate one another's experiences and co-construct a sense of shared consumer awareness. From the perspective of an online community of practice, solidarity-building strategies contribute to mutual engagement and the development of a shared repertoire of evaluative knowledge and communicative practices. Through repeated participation, individual dining experiences are reinterpreted as collectively meaningful evidence, thereby fostering shared norms and strengthening community cohesion.

4.2.1 Empathy & Alliance Building

Empathy and alliance building strategies function to establish interpersonal alignment through the construction of shared experiences, generalized evaluations, and collective responses. These strategies not only reinforce emotional resonance but also facilitate the emergence of shared knowledge, evaluative norms, and mutual engagement among community members.

4.2.1.1 Co-victimization Narratives

- (1) 自从我学会看商家信息里的图片，我就发现没有多少可以点的外卖

Since I learned to check merchant images, I realized there are not many takeaways worth ordering.

In (1), the first-person narrative structure “自从...我就发现...” (“since...I realized...”) constructs a personal trajectory of realization that resonates with the warning function of the original post. Linguistically, the use of first-person narration positions the speaker within the same experiential category as other participants. Interactionally, this shared positioning transforms individual experience into collective validation and reinforces a sense of co-victimhood. At the community level, such narratives contribute to mutual engagement among participants and facilitate the emergence of a shared identity as vigilant consumers, a key characteristic of an online community of practice.

4.2.1.2 Generalization & Extrapolation

- (2) 这种是最恶心的，有的连商家图片都没有

This kind is the most disgusting, and some don't even have merchant pictures.

In (2), the generalized expression “这种” (“this kind”) shifts the evaluative focus from a specific restaurant to a broader category of businesses. Linguistically, such categorization depersonalizes the complaint and elevates it into a generalized evaluative judgment. Interactionally, this strategy enables participants to align not only emotionally but also cognitively, as the criticism becomes applicable to multiple similar cases. At the community level, repeated generalization contributes to the construction of shared evaluative frameworks through which individual experiences are interpreted as manifestations of broader systemic problems within the takeaway economy.

4.2.1.3 Norm Codification

- (3) 这种一看就是预制菜，真的不要点

This is obviously pre-made food, and really don't order it.

In (3), the utterance contains both an epistemic assessment (一看就是, “is obviously”) and a directive (不要点, “don't order”), combining evaluation with behavioral prescription. The certainty marker 就是 indexes a high degree of speaker commitment, while the imperative transforms individual judgment into community-relevant guidance. Through repeated circulation of such directives, participants collaboratively construct practical consumption norms regarding how potentially problematic restaurants should be identified and avoided. These recurring prescriptions gradually become part of the community's shared repertoire, providing members with commonly accepted criteria for evaluating consumption risks.

4.2.1.4 Solution Oriented Remediation

- (4) 学会看商家信息里的图片再点外卖

Learn to check merchant images **before** ordering takeaway.

In (4), the imperative structure “学会...再...” (“learn to...before...”) frames the utterance as practical advice grounded in personal experience. Linguistically, the directive structure constructs the speaker as a knowledgeable participant offering guidance to others. Interactionally, this shifts the discourse from complaint expression to collaborative problem solving, reinforcing the community’s role as a site of knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning. At the community level, remediation strategies contribute to the development of collective coping mechanisms in response to recurring consumption risks.

4.2.1.5 Affective Expression

(5) 我还经常点这家 🤔

I even order from this place often 🤔

In (5), the emoji “🤔” conveys emotional surprise and self-directed irony. Linguistically, the combination of declarative statement and paralinguistic marker intensifies the affective stance of the utterance. Interactionally, such expressions invite emotional resonance and strengthen interpersonal alignment among participants. At the community level, affective expressions function as markers of shared emotional stance and contribute to the cohesion of the online community of practice. Such emotional displays not only communicate individual reactions but also invite affiliative responses from other participants, thereby strengthening affective cohesion within the community.

4.2.2 Humor & Irony

Humor and irony strategies enable participants to express criticism indirectly while maintaining an engaging and socially acceptable interactional tone. By exploiting incongruity, exaggeration, and implicit evaluation, commenters transform negative experiences into humorous narratives that invite participation and shared interpretation. Beyond mitigating the face-threatening nature of criticism, these strategies function as important resources for boundary marking and in-group identity construction within the community.

4.2.2.1 Oxymoronic Framing

(6) “绝无”是店名，**预制菜**才是指卖的就是预制菜

“**Absolutely Not**” is just the shop name, and what they sell is actually **pre-made food**.

In (6), it derives its humorous effect from the contradiction between the restaurant’s name and the product it allegedly sells. The phrase “绝无” (“absolutely not”) evokes expectations of authenticity and quality, while the subsequent reference to “预制菜” (“pre-made food”) creates an incongruous juxtaposition that undermines these expectations. By highlighting this discrepancy, the commenter avoids direct accusation while still conveying a critical evaluation. Interactionally, such oxymoronic framing invites other participants to recognize and share the implied criticism. More broadly, it reflects a collective skepticism toward perceived discrepancies between commercial branding and actual consumer experiences. The humorous effect relies on participants’ shared understanding of the discourse context and therefore functions as an implicit marker of in-group membership.

4.2.2.2 Hyperbolic Sarcasm

(7) 只能说**你太年轻了**，这种店**必须留下**

All I can say is **you’re too young**, and this kind of shop **must be kept**.

In (7), sarcasm is achieved through deliberate exaggeration. The expression “必须留下” (“must be kept”) appears, on the surface, to advocate for the restaurant’s continued existence. However, within the context of a complaint-oriented discussion, this endorsement is clearly ironic. The preceding remark “你太年轻了” (“you’re too young”) further contributes to the sarcastic tone by positioning the addressee as inexperienced. Rather than explicitly condemning the restaurant, the commenter employs hyperbole to intensify criticism while simultaneously generating humor. Such sarcastic formulations encourage participant engagement and reinforce shared evaluative understandings within the community. The humorous interpretation depends on participants’ shared assumptions about restaurant-review warning discourse, thereby further reinforcing in-group cohesion.

4.2.2.3 Ironic Endorsement

(8) 那就**继续点吧**，反正都一样

Then **just keep ordering**; they’re all the same anyway.

In (8), it presents an apparent endorsement that is immediately undermined by its evaluative context. The directive “继续点吧” (“just keep ordering”) superficially encourages continued consumption, yet the following phrase “反正都一样” (“they’re all the same anyway”) signals resignation and dissatisfaction. The resulting contrast produces an ironic effect

in which the literal meaning diverges from the intended evaluation. Interactionally, ironic endorsement relies on shared interpretive competence among participants, who are expected to recognize the implicit criticism beneath the surface agreement. Through such indirect evaluations, commenters are able to express dissatisfaction while simultaneously fostering a sense of in-group understanding and solidarity. Successful interpretation of the irony presupposes familiarity with community-specific evaluative assumptions, thereby reinforcing boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

4.3 Dispute Oriented Strategies

While solidarity-building strategies promote alignment among participants, dispute-oriented strategies introduce alternative perspectives and challenge dominant evaluations. These strategies play an important role in preventing the uncritical acceptance of claims and contribute to the ongoing negotiation of community knowledge. Through questioning, reframing, and regulation, participants actively evaluate the validity of others' comments and shape the boundaries of acceptable interpretations within the discussion.

4.3.1 Questioning & Refuting

Questioning and refuting strategies challenge the validity, interpretation, or generalizability of previous evaluations. Rather than simply expressing disagreement, these strategies introduce competing perspectives and encourage participants to justify their positions.

4.3.1.1 Veridicality Contestation

(9) 你确定都是预制菜吗?

Are you sure they're all pre-made food?

In (9), the interrogative structure directly challenges the factual certainty of the preceding claim. The phrase “你确定” (“are you sure”) functions as an epistemic marker of doubt, signaling skepticism toward the generalized assertion that all dishes are pre-made. Instead of providing a counterargument, the commenter invites further justification from previous speakers. Interactionally, such questioning disrupts the emerging consensus and creates space for alternative interpretations and initiates a process of norm negotiation concerning what constitutes reliable evidence for identifying pre-made food. More broadly, it contributes to the verification and refinement of shared knowledge within the community.

4.3.1.2 Responsibility Attribution

(10) 也有可能你自己不会挑店吧

It **might** also **be** that you don't know how to choose restaurants.

In (10), the source of responsibility is shifted from the merchant to the consumer. The modal expression “有可能” (“might be”) softens the accusation while simultaneously introducing an alternative explanation for the negative experience. Rather than accepting the complaint at face value, the commenter reframes the issue as one of consumer judgment. Interactionally, this move challenges the dominant evaluative narrative and encourages reconsideration of the causal factors involved. Such responsibility attribution broadens the range of perspectives represented in the discussion and encourages participants to negotiate competing understandings of responsibility in consumption-related problems.

4.3.1.3 Appeal to Shared Knowledge

(11) 现在外卖很多都是这种模式，很正常

Nowadays **many** takeaways operate like this, and it's **normal**.

In (11), the expressions “很多” (“many”) and “很正常” (“normal”) present the practice as widespread and socially accepted. By invoking generalized knowledge, the commenter legitimizes their stance and positions it as consistent with broader consumer experience. Interactionally, appeals to shared knowledge function to stabilize interpretations by aligning individual evaluations with perceived collective understanding. More broadly, they contribute to the negotiation of what should be regarded as normal, acceptable, or problematic within the community.

4.3.2 Regulating & Managing

While questioning and refuting strategies introduce alternative viewpoints, regulating and managing strategies focus on organizing interaction and guiding the development of discussion. Through metacommentary, directives, and identity claims, participants actively shape how issues are interpreted, debated, and prioritized. These strategies therefore play an important role in maintaining interactional order and facilitating the ongoing negotiation of community norms.

4.3.2.1 Discussion Direction Commentary

(12) 重点不是预制菜，是商家不标明

The key issue is not pre-made food, **but** that merchants do not disclose it.

In (12), it explicitly redirects the focus of the discussion through the contrastive construction “重点不是……是……” (“the key issue is not...but...”). Rather than disputing previous evaluations, the commenter reframes the issue by shifting attention from the existence of pre-made food to the lack of transparency surrounding it. In doing so, the speaker proposes a preferred interpretive framework and encourages other participants to evaluate the situation according to this criterion. Interactionally, such commentary helps structure the discussion by identifying what should be treated as the central concern. More broadly, it contributes to the collective prioritization of issues and influences how community members evaluate consumption practices.

4.3.2.2 Conflict Mediation / Escalation

(13) 大家别吵了，其实都有道理

Everyone, **don't argue**, and actually **both sides have a point**.

In (13), it attempts to reduce tension by acknowledging the legitimacy of competing viewpoints. The directive “别吵了” (“don't argue”) directly addresses the ongoing disagreement, while the follow-up expression “都有道理” (“both sides have a point”) softens opposition by emphasizing common ground. Rather than supporting one side over the other, the commenter adopts a mediating position that seeks to restore interactional balance. Such interventions help prevent disagreement from escalating into interpersonal conflict and contribute to maintaining a cooperative environment for discussion. At the community level, conflict mediation facilitates continued participation by allowing divergent views to coexist without undermining group cohesion.

4.3.2.3 Mobilization

(14) 这种店真的应该举报一下

This kind of shop really **should** be reported.

In (14), it moves toward action-oriented engagement. The modal expression “应该” (“should”) introduces a normative judgment that extends beyond personal opinion and frames reporting as an appropriate response. In this way, the comment shifts the discussion from assessment to prescription, encouraging participants to consider concrete forms of action. Interactionally, mobilization strategies transform individual dissatisfaction into collective concern by inviting others to adopt a similar stance. Such mobilization discourse represents an early manifestation of collective agency, as participants move beyond individual evaluation and orient toward coordinated responses to perceived consumption risks.

4.3.2.4 Identity Declaration

(15) 我在餐饮行业，这种情况很常见

I work in the catering industry; this situation is very common.

In (15), the commenter establishes credibility by explicitly invoking professional experience. The identity marker “我在餐饮行业” (“I work in the catering industry”) positions the speaker as an insider with relevant knowledge, thereby strengthening the authority of the subsequent evaluation. Rather than relying solely on personal opinion, the comment draws on occupational expertise to support its claim that the practice is common. Interactionally, such identity declarations influence how other participants assess the reliability of information and allocate credibility within the discussion. Identity declarations function as epistemic resources through which participants claim interactional authority and influence the circulation and validation of knowledge within the community.

4.4 Interaction Patterns of Discourse Strategies

This section addresses the second research question by examining how discourse strategies are dynamically combined in interaction and how such interactions contribute to the construction of an online community of practice. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) framework, the analysis focuses on how participants develop mutual engagement, negotiate a joint enterprise, and construct a shared repertoire through repeated interaction.

Four recurring interaction patterns were identified: empathic cohesion, humorous boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. These patterns correspond to different dimensions of community construction within an online community of practice. Through repeated interaction, participants move beyond individual complaint expression and collaboratively construct shared knowledge, community norms, and forms of collective agency.

To ensure systematic identification, two coders independently reviewed all 70 threads that met the interaction depth and reply/like criteria (see Section 3.1). Each thread was examined for dominant discourse strategies, sequential organization, and interactional outcomes. Through constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), threads with similar interactional trajectories were grouped. Four patterns recurred across multiple threads: empathic cohesion, humorous

boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. The representative threads presented in Section 4.4 were selected because they exemplified the typical sequential structure and strategy combination of each pattern while maintaining readability for readers.

4.4.1 Empathic Cohesion Pattern

The first interaction pattern is dominated by empathy and alliance building strategies, whereby members rapidly coalesce into a collective identity centered on the savvy consumer through co-victimization narratives, norm codification, and related means. The interaction in (16) demonstrates how scattered individual complaints converge into structured collective knowledge.

- (16) 1: A 自从我学会看商家信息里的图片，我就发现没有多少可以点的外卖
(Ever since I learned to check the store information pictures, I've realized there aren't many places worth ordering from.)
- 2: B to A 我也发现了 📸
(I've noticed that too 📸 .)
- 3: C to A 店名中间有个 的，地址在什么巷子的，住改商的，都不点。
(Names with a dot in the middle, addresses in some alley, residential-to-commercial conversions, just don't order from them.)
- 4: D to A 我现在不点外卖了，盒马或者朴朴买点半成品回家锅里一拌。
(I've stopped ordering takeout. I just buy semi-finished products from Hema or Pupu and toss them in the pan at home.)
- 5: E to A 给大家一个最直观的分辨方法，首先是店名起的很花里胡哨的不要点.....如果评价全是外卖的图片，那么，你懂的
(Here's the most intuitive way to tell: first, don't order from places with overly fancy names... If all the reviews only show delivery photos, well, you get it.)
- 6: F to A 深受其害，而且举报没用，只能给个带图差评
(I've suffered deeply from this, and reporting does nothing. All you can do is leave a negative review with photos.)
- 7: G to A 我一般看评价里的实体评价
(I usually check for in-store reviews in the comment section.)
- 8: H to A 我也是去大众点评先搜一下有没有堂食，没有实体店的一律 pass
(I also search on *Dianping* first to see if they have dine-in. No physical store, instant pass.)
- 9: I to A 看地址，城中村的地址就直接不点，除非是附近去线下吃过的
(Check the address. If it's in an urban village, just don't order, unless you've actually eaten there in person nearby.)
- 10: J to A 原来连这种看起来很破小的店面图竟然也是伪造的
(I can't believe even these run-down looking storefront photos are actually fake.)

In (16), A initiates the discussion by describing a growing awareness of deceptive restaurant practices, framing the issue as a personal realization gained through experience. This opening creates an interactional space for other participants to align themselves with the speaker. B's response ("I've noticed that too") immediately establishes experiential solidarity, while F's statement ("I've suffered deeply from this") intensifies the affective dimension of the discussion by introducing a stronger co-victimization narrative. Through these affiliative responses, individual experiences are transformed into a shared perception of consumer vulnerability.

Notably, the interaction does not remain at the level of emotional resonance. Once common ground has been established, participants begin to collaboratively construct practical knowledge. Comments from C, E, G, H, and I contribute increasingly specific criteria for identifying potentially problematic restaurants, including restaurant names, address characteristics, storefront authenticity, review patterns, and dine-in availability. Rather than repeating the same point, each participant adds a new evaluative cue, producing a cumulative process of knowledge building. Through this sequential accumulation, personal experiences are converted into collectively accessible warning strategies.

J's comment ("I can't believe even these run-down looking storefront photos are actually fake") represents a further

development in the interaction. Earlier comments implicitly assume that storefront appearance can still function as an indicator of authenticity. By challenging this assumption, J expands the scope of perceived risk and prompts participants to reconsider previously trusted evaluation criteria. The interaction therefore does more than circulate existing knowledge; it actively revises the community's shared understanding of what constitutes a warning sign.

Taken together, this pattern demonstrates how empathic alignment facilitates the transition from individual complaint to collective knowledge production. Through emotional resonance, experience sharing, and collaborative rule formation, participants construct a shared identity as informed consumers capable of navigating an increasingly uncertain consumption environment. From a community-of-practice perspective, this interaction pattern strengthens mutual engagement by encouraging members to recognize common experiences and participate in collective knowledge construction. The accumulation of warning cues and evaluative criteria also contributes to the development of a shared repertoire that can be mobilized in future interactions.

4.4.2 Humorous Boundary Marking Pattern

The second interaction pattern is dominated by humor and irony strategies, whereby members collectively deconstruct merchant discourse in a lighthearted atmosphere through ironic endorsement, oxymoronic framing, and related means, while implicitly distinguishing in-the-know core members from peripheral observers.

- (17) 1: A 名字带**绝无预制菜**的，都是预制菜 🤖
(Anything with **“absolutely no pre-prepared meals”** in the name, all pre-prepared meals 🤖.)
- 2: B to A 哈哈哈哈哈真相了
(Hahaha truth.)
- 3: C to A 名字叫**无预制的预制菜馆**
(A pre-prepared meal restaurant named **“No Pre-prepared Meals”**.)
- 4: D to A “**绝无**”是店名，预制菜才是指卖的就是预制菜
(“Absolutely No” is the restaurant name, “pre-prepared meals” refers to what they actually sell.)
- 5: E to A 原来如此，文字游戏被他们玩明白了
(I see now, they’ve mastered the word game.)
- 6: F 审核的是 ai，所以给 ai 图片，没毛病 🤖
(The reviewer is AI, so giving AI images makes perfect sense 🤖.)
- 7: G **绝对无厨房·预制菜**
(**Absolutely No Kitchen · Pre-prepared Meals**.)
- 8: H to A 点一个**绝无预制菜**的，结果送到了，确实不是预制菜，但全是**僵尸肉**。
(Ordered from an “absolutely no pre-prepared meals” place, and indeed it wasn’t pre-prepared, but it was all **zombie meat**.)
- 9: I to A 🤖 凡是写**预制菜**的都三思吧
(🤖 Think twice before ordering from anywhere that mentions pre-prepared meals.)
- 10: J 此地无银三百两，**绝无预制菜**：全是预制菜
(A guilty person protests too much. “Absolutely no pre-prepared meals” = entirely pre-prepared meals.)

In (17), A initiates the interaction through ironic endorsement, humorously reversing the intended meaning of the merchant's claim that it offers “absolutely no pre-prepared meals.” Rather than directly accusing the merchant of deception, the comment invites participants to reinterpret the slogan as evidence of the very practice it seeks to deny. B's laughter (“Hahaha truth”) immediately ratifies the humorous frame and signals alignment with the implied criticism.

The subsequent interaction illustrates a process of collaborative humor production. Rather than merely repeating the original joke, participants progressively elaborate and transform it. C's “A pre-prepared meal restaurant named ‘No Pre-prepared Meals’” and D's semantic reinterpretation of the restaurant name extend the ironic frame by generating increasingly sophisticated forms of wordplay. G's “Absolutely No Kitchen · Pre-prepared Meals” and H's exaggerated account of receiving “zombie meat” further intensify the absurdity of the situation. Humor is therefore not produced by

a single participant but collectively co-constructed through successive contributions.

Importantly, these humorous exchanges also perform a boundary-marking function. Successfully interpreting comments such as “Absolutely No Kitchen” or understanding the irony embedded in “absolutely no pre-prepared meals” requires familiarity with the original discussion, prevailing concerns about pre-prepared food, and platform-specific humorous conventions such as the use of 🤔. Participation in the humorous exchange thus becomes a symbolic display of community membership. Those who recognize and extend the joke demonstrate their alignment with shared community knowledge and values.

This interaction pattern therefore serves not only as a vehicle for criticism but also as a mechanism for reinforcing group cohesion. Through shared laughter and collaborative irony, participants simultaneously challenge merchant discourse and affirm their belonging within the community. The successful interpretation and reproduction of humor depend on participants’ familiarity with community-specific assumptions and evaluative norms. In this sense, humor functions as a symbolic resource within the shared repertoire of the community and serves to reinforce membership boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

4.4.3 Dispute and Negotiation Pattern

The third interaction pattern is dominated by questioning and refuting strategies along with regulating and managing strategies, as members debate what constitutes reasonable consumption rules and gradually calibrate and confirm community norms through disagreement.

- (18) 1: A 我原价买的凭什么不能带走 🤔
(I paid full price, why can't I take it with me 🤔.)
- 2: B to A 玻璃瓶一般都不能带走吧, 我以为这是常识
(You generally can't take glass bottles away, **I thought this was common sense.**)
- 3: C to A 这个瓶子要回收的, 人家厂家要回收的, 你带走当然要给钱啊。
(These bottles need to be recycled. The manufacturer wants them back. Of course you have to pay if you take it.)
- 4: D to A 我们这边都可以带走啊, 第一次听说不能带走
(Where I'm from, you can take them away. First time I've heard you can't.)
- 5: E to A 带走和不带走价格不一样。这种两三元一瓶的, 默认就是不带走瓶子的。
(Taking it away vs. not taking it away are different prices. For these two or three yuan bottles, the default is not taking the bottle.)
- 6: F to A 那超市买的玻璃瓶饮料怎么就能带走? 价格也没贵啊?
(**Then how come you can take glass bottle drinks from the supermarket?** The price isn't any higher either?)
- 7: G to F 超市的渠道和餐馆不一样, 餐馆的这种玻璃瓶是专供的, 有押金。
(Supermarket channels and restaurant channels are different. These glass bottles in restaurants are specially supplied and **have a deposit.**)
- 8: H to A 我小时候喝这种, 带走是要加一块钱押金的, 喝完还回去再退。
(When I was little, taking these away required a one-yuan deposit, which you'd get back after returning the bottle.)
- 9: I 感觉还是不合理, 我付了钱商品就是我的, 瓶子也是商品的一部分。
(Still feels unreasonable. I paid for the product; it's mine, and the bottle is part of the product too.)
- 10: J to A 其实加一块钱就能带走了, 店家也说了的。这就是个约定俗成的规矩, 不算坑人。
(Actually, you can take it away if you add one yuan. The restaurant staff said so too. It's just an **established convention, not a rip-off.**)

In (18), A challenges an existing consumption practice by questioning why a glass bottle cannot be taken away after paying full price. This complaint immediately generates competing interpretations and initiates a process of norm negotiation. Rather than producing straightforward agreement, participants introduce alternative explanations, counterexamples, and evaluative frameworks.

B's appeal to common sense ("I thought this was common sense") frames the practice as widely accepted, while C and E provide explanations grounded in bottle recycling systems and pricing structures. These responses collectively support the legitimacy of the existing norm. However, disagreement remains present throughout the interaction. D challenges the presumed universality of the practice by citing local experience, while F questions the emerging consensus through comparison with supermarket purchases.

Particularly noteworthy is the exchange between F and G. F's comparison between restaurant beverages and supermarket drinks creates a challenge that requires further justification. Rather than dismissing the objection, G responds with a detailed explanation concerning supply channels and deposit systems. This reply sequence demonstrates how disagreement functions as a resource for knowledge construction. The challenge creates a demand for clarification, while the subsequent response provides information that helps participants better understand the rationale underlying the practice.

Importantly, the interaction does not culminate in complete consensus. Even after multiple explanations are provided, I continues to question the fairness of the arrangement, arguing that ownership of the bottle should transfer with the purchase. This persistence of disagreement indicates that alternative viewpoints remain available within the discussion. Nevertheless, J's concluding comment re-establishes the dominant interpretation by framing the practice as an established convention rather than merchant misconduct. From a community-of-practice perspective, such interactions contribute to the negotiation of a joint enterprise, as participants collectively debate what constitutes legitimate consumption practices and acceptable evaluative standards. Rather than undermining community cohesion, disagreement functions as a mechanism through which community norms are continuously refined and renegotiated.

4.4.4 Issue Escalation Pattern

The fourth interaction pattern is characterized by the progressive expansion of evaluative scope. Through mobilization, generalization, and action-oriented discourse, participants move beyond specific complaints and begin to frame individual incidents as manifestations of broader platform, industry, and societal problems.

- (19) 1: A 这不就是**虚假宣传**吗🤔
(Isn't this just **false advertising** 🤔.)
- 2: B 平台根本不管，投诉也没用
(**The platform doesn't care at all**; complaints are useless.)
- 3: C 平台不审核？有关部门不管？
(**The platform doesn't vet?** The relevant authorities don't care?)
- 4: D 美团和饿了么要是再不管，总有一天会**暴雷**的
(If *Meituan* and *Ele.me* don't start caring, **they'll blow up someday**.)
- 5: E 垃圾平台审核
(Garbage platform vetting.)
- 6: F 应该搞一个外卖员取餐的时候**举报有奖**活动
(They should create a **reward program** for delivery drivers to report violations when picking up orders.)
- 7: G 哎，谁能想到 2025 年了，中国人还要为吃的担心，我们早就不应该担心这些了啊🤔
(Sigh, who would have thought that in 2025, Chinese people still have to worry about what they eat? We shouldn't have to worry about this anymore 🤔.)
- 8: H 天天给我吃预制菜也没人管，就这还要让我**生孩子**？
(Feeding me pre-prepared meals every day and no one cares, **and they still want me to have kids?**)
- 9: I 这个时代的**真实性**正在**逐渐崩塌**
(**The authenticity of this era is gradually collapsing**.)
- 10: J 真的没人抵制 AI 么
(Is no one really going to boycott AI?)

In (19), A initially frames the issue as a case of false advertising by a specific merchant. However, subsequent comments progressively expand the scope of discussion beyond the individual incident. This interaction exhibits a clear

process of scale shifting, through which participants transform a localized complaint into a broader critique of platform governance, regulatory effectiveness, and social trust.

B, C, D, and E collectively redirect responsibility away from individual merchants and toward platforms and regulatory institutions. The focus of evaluation therefore shifts from a particular restaurant to the broader systems that enable such practices to persist. Through this process, the discussion becomes increasingly concerned with structural rather than individual causes.

The escalation continues in comments G, H, and I. G broadens the issue from restaurant quality to food security and public well-being, while H links dissatisfaction with consumption experiences to broader anxieties about future family life. I further expands the discussion by interpreting the problem as evidence of a wider decline in social authenticity. These contributions progressively elevate the scale of concern, transforming a specific complaint into a symbolic reflection on contemporary social conditions.

F's proposal of a reward mechanism for delivery drivers to report violations is particularly significant because it represents one of the few comments oriented toward practical intervention rather than evaluation. However, rather than demonstrating actual collective action, the proposal should be understood as expressing an action-oriented stance. What emerges from this interaction is therefore not evidence of collective empowerment in a material sense, but the discursive construction of shared concerns and possible avenues for collective response.

Overall, this pattern illustrates how participants move from discussing individual consumption experiences to collectively defining broader social problems. Through repeated processes of generalization, responsibility attribution, and action-oriented framing, the interaction transforms isolated grievances into shared public concerns. From a community-of-practice perspective, this pattern reflects the emergence of collective agency, as participants begin to orient toward common problems and imagine potential forms of coordinated response. Although such interactions do not constitute collective action in a material sense, they demonstrate how community members develop shared awareness and action-oriented dispositions through discourse.

5. Discussion

5.1 Solidarity, Identity Construction, and Shared Knowledge

Regarding the first research question, the analysis shows that members employ both solidarity-building and dispute-oriented discourse strategies, with the former constituting the dominant category in the dataset. This finding suggests that even in contexts centered on complaint and criticism, the construction of alignment and emotional affiliation remains a primary interactional orientation (Baym, 2015; Herring, 2013). However, unlike the consensual support typically observed in fan communities, alignment in restaurant-review warning discourse is structured around what may be termed an adversarial collective identity. Through co-victimization narratives, norm codification, and alliance-building practices, participants position themselves as knowledgeable consumers in opposition to perceived deceptive commercial actors.

From a community of practice perspective, this process can be understood as the collaborative construction of a shared repertoire through recurring interaction (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020; Nicolini et al., 2022). In the present study, this repertoire extends beyond practical knowledge concerning AI-generated storefront images or pre-prepared meal identification. It also encompasses recurrent discourse strategies such as ironic endorsement, norm codification, and co-victimization narratives. These strategies function as semiotic resources that both reflect and reproduce community membership. Similar findings have been reported in studies of online knowledge-sharing communities, where participation is sustained not only through information exchange but also through the circulation of recognizable communicative practices (Baym, 2015; Herring, 2013; Angouri, 2016). The collaboratively constructed warning methodologies observed in the data therefore constitute both informational resources and socially embedded practices that contribute to community continuity.

5.2 Complaint Discourse Beyond Individual Grievance

The findings also extend existing understandings of complaint discourse in digital environments. Previous research has increasingly emphasized that online complaints differ substantially from traditional dyadic complaint encounters because they are simultaneously directed toward multiple audiences and embedded within networked communication environments (Vázquez, 2014; Haugh, 2017; Culpeper & Hardaker, 2017). The restaurant-review warning discourse examined here exemplifies a form of public consumer complaint in which participants orient not only toward the criticized business but also toward an audience of potential consumers.

Moreover, the comment section transforms individual complaints into a site of collective knowledge production. Rather than merely expressing dissatisfaction, participants collaboratively evaluate experiences, compare cases, formulate warning criteria, and construct practical consumption guidelines. This observation resonates with research on electronic

word-of-mouth and online consumer communities, which has highlighted the importance of peer-generated evaluations in shaping consumer decision-making and risk perception (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Lee & Youn, 2009; Erkan & Evans, 2016). The findings therefore suggest that complaint discourse in digitally mediated environments performs functions that extend beyond grievance expression, including knowledge circulation, identity construction, and community maintenance.

5.3 Humor, Disagreement, and Norm Negotiation

The presence of humor and dispute-oriented strategies further indicates that restaurant-review warning communities cannot be characterized as homogeneous echo chambers. Participants actively challenge prior evaluations through veridicality contestation, responsibility attribution, and appeals to shared knowledge. Such practices introduce alternative perspectives and contribute to the ongoing negotiation of community norms (Baym, 2015; Angouri, 2016; Chandrasapth et al., 2021). Rather than being treated as disruptive, disagreement functions as an interactional resource through which norms become visible, discussable, and open to revision.

The discussion surrounding whether glass bottles can be taken away illustrates this process particularly clearly. While highly endorsed comments tend to reinforce dominant understandings, dissenting contributions prompt participants to articulate and justify the assumptions underlying those understandings. Similar observations have been reported in studies of online deliberation and participatory knowledge construction, where disagreement serves as a catalyst for clarification and collective reasoning rather than merely signaling conflict (Papacharissi, 2015; Baym, 2015). In this sense, community norms emerge not through consensus alone but through recurring cycles of challenge, explanation, and negotiation.

Humor and irony strategies play a complementary role in this process. Strategies such as oxymoronic framing, ironic endorsement, and hyperbolic sarcasm soften the confrontational force of criticism while simultaneously enhancing participation and engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies suggesting that humor can function as both a face-management resource and a mechanism of group solidarity in online environments (Dyrel, 2016; Culpeper, 2011; Liu, 2023). At the same time, successful participation in humorous exchanges presupposes familiarity with shared interpretive conventions, platform-specific cultural references, and community knowledge. Humor therefore functions not only as an interactional resource but also as a mechanism of membership negotiation, distinguishing more central participants from peripheral observers.

5.4 Interaction Patterns, Platform Affordances, and Discursive Agency

With respect to the second research question, the four interaction patterns identified in this study demonstrate how discourse strategies are systematically combined in interaction to perform distinct community-building functions, namely empathic cohesion, humorous boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. From a community of practice perspective, these interaction patterns illustrate how mutual engagement, the negotiation of joint enterprise, and the development of a shared repertoire are accomplished through recurrent interaction (Wenger, 1998). Community construction is therefore not a static outcome but an emergent process realized through ongoing participation and interactional practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020; Nicolini et al., 2022; Baym, 2015). The empathic cohesion pattern facilitates the formation of collective identity through affective alignment, the humorous boundary-marking pattern reinforces membership boundaries through shared interpretive practices, and the dispute-and-negotiation pattern contributes to the refinement of community norms.

The findings also underscore the importance of platform affordances in shaping these interactional processes. Consistent with previous studies of digitally mediated communication (boyd, 2014; Papacharissi, 2015; Angouri, 2016), the interaction patterns identified in this study are not solely the product of participants' communicative choices but are also facilitated by the technological architecture of *Xiaohongshu*. The threaded comment structure enables users to engage in extended multi-party exchanges, allowing interaction sequences to develop beyond isolated reactions into collaborative processes of knowledge construction, humor co-production, and norm negotiation. In particular, the emergence of dispute-and-negotiation patterns relies heavily on the visibility of reply chains, through which competing viewpoints can be challenged, justified, and refined over multiple turns.

The platform's liking mechanism further shapes community dynamics by selectively amplifying particular evaluations and interpretations. Highly endorsed comments become salient reference points within the discussion, functioning as temporary normative anchors that guide subsequent participation. Meanwhile, algorithmic recommendation extends the circulation of community discourse beyond immediate participants, allowing individual consumption experiences to become resources for broader collective interpretation (Papacharissi, 2015; Baym, 2015; boyd, 2014).

The issue-escalation pattern is particularly revealing in demonstrating how online complaint discourse can transform localized consumption experiences into broader public concerns. Through processes of generalization, responsibility

attribution, and mobilization, participants extend specific complaints about restaurants into discussions of platform governance, regulatory oversight, food safety, and social trust. Similar processes have been observed in studies of networked publics, where individual experiences become resources for collective meaning-making and public problem definition (Papacharissi, 2015; Ticona & Tsapatsaris, 2020).

Importantly, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence of collective empowerment in a direct political or institutional sense. While participants frequently express dissatisfaction, formulate shared evaluations, and occasionally propose action-oriented responses, the data do not demonstrate sustained collective mobilization or measurable social change. Rather, the findings point to the emergence of collective awareness and discursive agency. Through repeated interaction, participants collaboratively identify problems, negotiate interpretations, and construct shared understandings of consumer risk. The significance of these practices lies not in their capacity to produce immediate social transformation but in their role in enabling participants to articulate common concerns and imagine possible forms of collective response.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends community of practice research beyond educational and occupational settings to the context of consumer warning communities on social media. The findings demonstrate how mutual engagement and shared repertoires can emerge through the collaborative production of evaluative discourse rather than through formal learning activities alone.

Second, the study contributes to research on complaint discourse by shifting analytical attention from individual speech acts to interactional processes through which complaints become resources for knowledge construction, norm negotiation, and community formation.

Third, the study highlights the role of platform affordances in shaping discourse practices and community development. By integrating discourse analysis with perspectives from community of practice research and digitally mediated communication studies, the study provides a more comprehensive account of how language, interaction, and technological infrastructures jointly contribute to the construction and maintenance of online communities.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the discourse strategies employed in the comment sections of *Xiaohongshu* restaurant-review warning posts and examined how these strategies contribute to the construction of an online community of practice. The findings identified two major categories of discourse strategies: solidarity-building strategies and dispute-oriented strategies. While solidarity-building strategies dominated the dataset, both categories played important roles in shaping interaction, constructing shared knowledge, negotiating community norms, and reinforcing collective consumer identity.

The analysis further revealed four recurring interaction patterns: empathic cohesion, humorous boundary marking, dispute and negotiation, and issue escalation. These patterns demonstrate that community building is accomplished through ongoing interaction rather than existing prior to participation. Through repeated exchanges, participants collaboratively develop shared evaluative frameworks, practical consumption knowledge, and community-specific communicative practices.

The study contributes to research on online complaint discourse by showing how consumer complaints can evolve beyond individual grievance into collective meaning-making and norm negotiation. It also extends community of practice research to the context of social media consumer communities. Nevertheless, the study focuses on a single platform and primarily analyzes textual interactions. Future research could adopt cross-platform, longitudinal, and multimodal approaches to further explore the development of online consumer communities and their discourse practices.

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