

Housewife Blogger and The Paradoxical Influence in Gender Roles and Self-Perception

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Abstract. The rise of digital media platforms, notably TikTok, has seen the emergence of housewife bloggers sharing their daily chores. Initially driven by interest, these bloggers have transitioned into a profession marked by standardized content and commercialization. While offering career opportunities, their portrayal of household chores reinforces traditional gender roles. This article discusses the reason why housewife bloggers are popular from the aspects of emotional resonance and social comparison theory, summarizes the common features of these bloggers as “protagonist rather than dominant”, “limited space and repetitive labor” and “performing ‘reality’”, and thus explores the paradoxical impact of housewives integrating into society to create value and further imprisoning themselves in this identity or feeling anxious about not being able to create direct value, shedding light on its implications for gender roles and self-perception in the digital age, providing new thinking for the impact of digital media on social life from the perspective of gender division of labor.

Keywords: Housewife blogger; paradox; social media.

1. Introduction

With the development of digital technology, the influence of digital media platforms on people’s daily lives is increasing day by day. Individual digital life is involved in highly differentiated social production under the name of labor, and the integration of labor and life has become an important feature of digital labor forms. Compared with the traditional factory system, digital labor has undergone fundamental changes in labor methods, labor processes, and labor organizational relationships. One specific manifestation of this change is the emergence and rise of short video social platforms such as TikTok, which has led to the emergence of a new career as a video blogger. The profession of video bloggers has the characteristics of low entry barriers and flexible time requirements, making it a side job for many housewives outside of household chores.

At first, many housewives chose to share their lives in the form of short videos, driven by their interests. However, as this type of video became popular in the market, female family bloggers became a profession, and the methods of video production became increasingly standardized and commercialized. At the same time, due to the long-standing family division of labor structure that men work outside, and women do housework at home, for a large group of housewives, household chores are the most important form of labor in their lives and have become the most representative feature of this group. In the short video platform represented by TikTok, there are such a group of women who record the process of doing housework and daily life within the family in detail, and then share them in TikTok through editing. This process pushes housewives and household chores to the forefront, making family life more visible. Household chores have departed from the original labor mode in the private sector and instead formed a new form of value production. On the one hand, household chores move from the interior of the home to the screen, never being seen but becoming deliberately and comprehensively displayed [1]. On the other hand, many housewives receive “labor compensation” through technology platforms, audience rewards, and advertising sponsorship while publishing short videos.

This article argues that sharing household chores on short video platforms not only creates new career possibilities for housewives, but also deepens people’s stereotypes of housewives. Relying on this type of video to gain attention will imprison these bloggers in household chores. Therefore, for

housewives, this is not only a possible career development but also a limitation. In the following, this article will discuss the reasons for this paradoxical impact by specifically analyzing why housewife bloggers are popular on TikTok and what characteristics their videos have.

2. Current Situation and Analysis

2.1. Data and Blogger Portraits

Table 1 introduces the basic information of the study objects and it can be concluded from the table that the reason why such bloggers are named as housewife bloggers is that they use family as the source of scenes and materials. This article specifically analyzes two bloggers, “Wang Rong Sawama (Wang Rong)” and “Dahua Zai Beipiao (Dahua)”.

Table 1. Overview of study sample

Blogger ID	No. of Followers (k)	No. of Videos	Contents	Scenes
Dangao Mama	98.1	1220	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room
Liuliu Youyou de Ma	230.5	1269	Pregnancy record, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, outdoors
Tangtanga	46.6	1196	Pregnancy record, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, outdoors
Dengdeng Mama Aifenxiang	106.7	795	Cooking	Kitchen
Dahua Zai Beipiao	176.3	1352	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, Bedroom
Yanyan Rourou Mama	65.6	614	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, outdoors
Wang Rong Sawama	705.3	434	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, outdoors
Wannuo Bulaji	86.0	89	Child rearing, Beauty Recommendation	Kitchen, Bedroom, Outdoors
Ding Xiaoyan de Jia	39.6	126	Cooking, Housework	Kitchen, Living room
Shi Jingjingya	48.8	1215	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, Children's bedroom
Kelema Yaowenrou	131.6	583	Cooking, Family routine	Kitchen, Dining room, outdoors

Figure 1 shows the gender composition of the two bloggers' fans. From the data provided, it can be seen that Wang Rong's fans are mainly young women, most of whom are still in college or just entering the workforce. They have just separated from their native families and experienced the loneliness of entering society for the first time, so the image of a good mother that Wang Rong portrays, along with the family atmosphere she presents, always evoke a sense of homesickness among this user group. Therefore, Wang Rong focuses on showcasing the positive and harmonious aspects of family life and her selfless dedication to their children. She always stands in front of the camera with a gentle smile, speaking softly. When releasing videos, Wang Rong also attaches some tags related to her video content to accurately target her fans, such as “mommy”, “life recording”, “recipes”, “couple”, and so on. In addition, these people's attention to Wang Rong may also be due to curiosity about the living conditions of older women than themselves, but at the same time, they do not recognize Wang Rong's life choice of giving up her career and returning to her family.

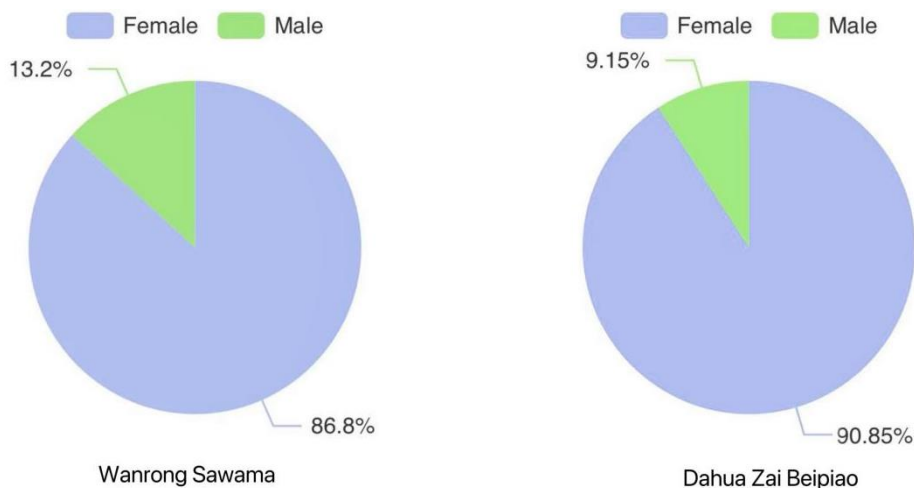


Fig. 1. Fans Composition of “Wang Rong Sawama” and “Dahua Zai Beipiao”

Based on the age of Dahua's fans, it can be seen that most of them have been mothers for many years and have some parenting experience. They prefer to watch videos about daily family life because it is relevant to their actual lives and resonates with them. Therefore, Dahua's video content mainly focuses on sharing daily trivialities of childcare, such as laundry, cooking, picking up and dropping off children, playing with children, conflicts with husbands, visiting relatives, and taking parents out for fun. These seemingly ordinary daily activities are true reflections of the lives of countless married women, making them key attractions for Dahua's fans. Each of Dahua's videos is labeled with tags like "full-time mom daily life," "documenting real life," "Vlog daily life," ensuring that the videos can reach the target audience smoothly.

2.2. Reasons for Popularity

The reason why these bloggers are popular can be explained from two aspects: emotional resonance and social comparison theory.

On the one hand, Internet users are engaged in shaping emotions and transmitting them, while also receiving transmissions of other emotions. Emotional transmission on the internet is extremely common, with research indicating that the subjects of emotional transmission activities adopt emotional logic frameworks and directional methods, using emotions as the path and pattern of communication to achieve communication goals and effects. The proliferation and development of internet technology also drive continuous innovation in the forms of emotional transmission. Particularly, against the backdrop of the rise of social media platforms, internet users are not merely transmitting emotions on platforms but are also gradually being shaped by them. In this context, online communities have become important channels for people to express emotions, serving as new spaces for emotional production and consumption in the internet age. The platform-mediated online community culture, algorithm technology, and emotional economy are all new factors driving emotional transmission [2]. From these full-time mom videos and their comment sections, it can be seen that evoking emotional resonance is an important strategy for full-time mom bloggers.

On the other hand, social comparison theory can also explain why these housewives who primarily share their daily lives are popular. In today's digital era, it has become increasingly common for individuals to compare themselves to what they see online. Research suggests that women, in particular, are more inclined to compare themselves to images and individuals they encounter on the internet. Women are also more likely to fantasize about their lives mirroring the idealized images they come across on social media platforms [3]. Moreover, captions accompanying social media posts have been found to influence women's perceptions of their bodies and self-worth. The primary audience of housewife bloggers is women aged from 18 to 42. They could be divided into two categories: married with children and unmarried without children, to analyze why housewife bloggers are popular among them. One category consists of mothers who are already married and have children.

They may compare their own life status with what the bloggers present. The research indicates that upward comparison has been shown to result in negative emotions in some mothers and downward comparison has been shown to result in more positive emotions in mothers [4]. The other category includes college students and young women who are just entering the workforce and are not yet married or have children. This group often enjoys watching videos from housewife bloggers with unique styles to satisfy their curiosity.

3. Performance and Expression

3.1. Protagonist vs. the Dominant

Women are often perceived as the protagonists in the private sphere, but not necessarily the leaders; whereas men are commonly seen as the protagonists and leaders in the public sphere. People view these two different connections as the "natural" result of gender roles, but the concept of social gender indicates that gender is not innate. The family is classified in the private sphere, and while women are considered the protagonists of the family, they are also placed within the private sphere. On the stage, performances are carried out by the protagonist, but the plot and outcome are not determined by the protagonist alone. Women are the protagonists while men are the directors; although the director's presence may not be visible on stage, their influence is reflected in both the protagonist and other characters. For example, the female protagonist is busy cooking in the kitchen, yet the dishes she prepares may very well cater to the taste of the male protagonist [5].

According to official backend data, "Wang Rong Sawama" from October 2022 to April 2023 had video descriptions predominantly featuring keywords such as assistant, breakfast, record, life, Shenzhen, husband, human, smell of cooking, Tang Ge (her husband's nickname), and children.

"Dahua Zai Beipiao" from October 2022 to April 2023 had video descriptions primarily including keywords such as life, mom, full-time, record, real, children, Beijing drifter, assistant, Liu Guolong, and husband. These keywords include nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Similarly, "mom," "children," "Liu Guolong," and "husband" depict the main characters and their relationships. "Life," "full-time," "record," and "real" indicate that the video theme revolves around documenting the blogger's daily life with children, emphasizing the mundane aspects. "Beijing drifter" specifies her and her family are migrants living in Beijing.

It can be seen from these tags that although these housewives share their work and life. Their daily life is almost entirely serving their families. Although they are the protagonists of their videos, the labor content presented in their videos is not determined by themselves, is a role arranged by their families and society.

3.2. Limited Space and Repetitive Labor

The videos of housewife bloggers have the characteristics of fixed content and fixed update frequency. As the protagonists in the family space, their behavior of sharing their family life on TikTok is like the heroine being arranged to perform the same play repeatedly on the same stage. Table 1 reflects that these tasks are usually done at home, especially in the kitchen. In his study of spatial justice and urban space theory, Lefebvre proposed that the distribution of space is full of implicit discrimination against women [6]. Space is never empty, it often contains a certain meaning, space is the basis of the existence of social relations, but whether in the social public space or in the family space, women are marginalized and neglected. In the presentation of housewife bloggers, the spacious living room and study room are the main activity areas of their husbands, while the narrow kitchen is their own workplace, and even the housewife's work is to take care of the family's diet and living for free labor.

These videos also capture many unnoticed details in life. The process of household chores itself has the characteristic of invisibility. In recent years, the concept of "invisible household chores" (also known as "unnamed household chores") in Japan has exposed the issue of "invisibility" of household chores, which has attracted widespread attention and discussion in East Asian society. Invisible

household chores refer to household chores that are usually not mentioned or named but must be done by someone. They include 163 items such as “brainstorming a menu before cooking”, “replenishing laundry detergent before washing clothes”, “putting garbage bags on empty trash cans”, and “managing daily necessities inventory” [7]. These trivial household chores continue to flow, and due to their invisible labor effects, those who do them rarely feel a sense of achievement and cannot receive praise from family members. Language reflects the breadth and depth of the public’s understanding of the world. Therefore, the more important fields contain more detailed and rich naming concepts. The concept of “unnamed household chores” that arise in daily life reflects the overall neglect of household chores in society.

For housewives, these tedious and laborless tasks are often rather inevitable and unavoidable responsibility than an inherent and voluntary need. Thus, the chores not only fail to bring freedom and enjoyment, but also further limit housewives to a state they feel that they lose themselves. The short video presents these invisible and personal household chores that restrict the freedom of housewives to the public. The emotions triggered by the audience are more avoidance than desire, and comments such as “suffocation” and “it’s another tiring day for newlyweds; so tired” frequently appear in the comment section.

3.3. Performing “Reality”

Erving Goffman posits that society is akin to a stage, where individuals construct the frontstage scene based on a script while preparing backstage [8]. In the short videos created by full-time mom bloggers, not only the bloggers themselves but also their family members play a significant role in disseminating the content, collectively forming a complete family scene. Furthermore, the family scene differs fundamentally from other social scenes; it serves as an “emotional refuge” within the social space, providing comfort and safety to those within it.

Presenting family space on a public platform gives housewives the identity of bloggers. The presence of the audience makes family space a stage and allows housewives bloggers to truly become the protagonists on the stage. Consequently, when the family background is brought to the forefront for viewers to see, the consequence of collective gaze is the intertwining and interaction between the private domain and public space.

With this transition, creators aim to pique the audience’s curiosity, entertaining them by meeting their emotional needs through a relaxing and enjoyable performance. They seek audience attention and recognition, maximizing the audience’s sense of presence. In this family scene, various traditional family relationships such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, spouses, generations, and parent-child relationships are continually reimagined through new media connections to attract viewers. When constructing these relationships, achieving a balance between authenticity, drama, and sociality is crucial for the video to resonate on a larger scale.

Therefore, for housewife bloggers, although their videos are named after presenting real life, the reality they present is based on whether the audience is willing to watch and whether they can generate a topic of discussion. With the rise of this type of video, housewife bloggers have become a fixed “track” on the TikTok platform. The popularity of sharing real household chores and daily life, which can resonate with the audience or compare oneself with the blogger, has transformed into a targeted and standardized production of content that can resonate with the audience or compare oneself with the blogger in order to attract traffic.

4. Paradox

4.1. Integrating into Society and Creating Value

Long term focus on taking care of family can bring many troubles and troubles to full-time mothers. For example, Caroline and other scholars have shown that for middle and low-income families, the quality of life for full-time mothers is lower than that of working women. Returning to the family for a long time can have a huge impact on their lives and psychology [9]. On this basis, housewives also

face social integration issues, and the attitude and behavior of full-time mothers themselves are also the main factors that promote their integration into society. Therefore, it is advocated that full-time mothers actively participate. When dealing with issues related to full-time mothers, there is a tendency to awaken their self-awareness, encourage and support them to gain more freedom and rights from society. Becoming a blogger provides these housewives with a flexible career choice that can help them integrate into society. Their status as bloggers also makes them not only the protagonists in the family space, but also the protagonists visible to the audience on public platforms. The feedback and love from the audience also gave them recognition and a sense of accomplishment. The re-creation of family life and the increase in female narrative perspectives also allow them to acquire the status of directors in addition to actors. Meanwhile, the content presented on the stage will have a subtle impact on the audience. The videos of housewife bloggers also showcase subtle and tedious household chores that have not been noticed on public social media platforms, highlighting the importance of these tasks and gaining recognition for the value of household chores.

4.2. Self-Restraint and Erroneous Social Guidance

The name of the housewife blogger itself is paradoxical. When the blogger becomes a profession and gains benefits through advertising placement, live broadcast, etc., the blogger himself or herself has been integrated into society and is no longer a housewife. However, the content conveyed by the video is still that women should perform housework and take care of the food and living of the whole family.

In addition, as posting videos has developed into a fixed commercial performance, housewife bloggers' video content has also transformed from the creator's pure self-expression into a commodity production that caters to market demand. With the commercialization of short video platforms and the influence of algorithmic push rules, full-time mom bloggers are intentionally or unintentionally catering to the user preferences generated by algorithms for content production. This has led to many videos becoming more formulaic and repetitive, and even beginning to showcase dilemmas around social issues in order to gain more traffic and attention. These bloggers showcase low profile, anxious, and confused images in short videos, which gain sympathy and understanding from the audience and also bring opportunities for commercial monetization. However, this dilemma display may also lead to the audience becoming numb to its predicament, making it difficult to truly understand and sympathize. In addition, relying on the identity of a housewife to gain attention also hinders these bloggers from exploring more career possibilities, and using a housewife as their public image can exacerbate the stereotype that women should engage in household chores.

The deeper impact is that shooting short videos has allowed some housewives who were forced to return to their families to once again see the possibility of balancing family and career. The successful cases of some stay-at-home mother bloggers have convinced them that as long as they overcome their lack of inner self-confidence and continue to learn, by improving the production level of short videos and striving to output content that is consistent with the new media environment, they can go hand in hand with the private and public fields and realize yourself. However, Ogaard's judgment that the ideal of the balanced woman represses and masks the institutional constraints that prevent women from achieving balance suggests the possible pitfalls of this cultural fantasy. It may lead to more that they look for solutions to institutional problems within themselves and individuals, instead of continuing to reflect and criticize the forces of social inequality that shape their life trajectories and real situations [10]. The result may be that, in addition to continuing to perform a demanding role of motherhood that is rarely truly acknowledged, stay-at-home mothers are burdened with the additional responsibility of earning a living and the guilt of failing to achieve the latter.

5. Conclusion

The emergence of housewife bloggers on platforms such as TikTok highlights the continuous evolution of digital labor and its intersection with daily life. Although these bloggers have found a

platform to share experiences and gain recognition, their description of housework raises questions about the strengthening of traditional gender roles. Although housewives' blogging provides employment opportunities, it also has the risk of continuing social constraints and limiting self-expression. When navigating the complexity of digital media and labor, it is necessary to critically examine the impact of these trends on contemporary social gender dynamics and self-perception. Cultivating a detailed understanding of the housewife blog adds a cognitive foundation for moving towards a more inclusive and equitable digital future. In addition, in order to provide full-time housewives more career possibilities while avoiding negative influence of housewife bloggers deepening the stereotypes of women, the platforms should provide them with help and conduct correct value guidance.

This article is limited in data analysis and the size of research samples. Future study can analyze the correlation between the content selection and popularity of housewives, which may have a more accurate understanding of the reasons for the popularity of housewives.

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