Research on the Survival of Chinese Beauty Anchors

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Abstract. The beauty anchor industry, often perceived as a gateway to fame and fortune, reveals a complex reality upon closer examination. This study employs intersectionality theory to delve into the challenges faced by both top and bottom-level beauty anchors through in-depth interviews with industry professionals. The findings unveil a landscape marked by existential angst due to age limitations, income inequality, and gender-biased harassment. Contrary to the popular notion that success in the anchor industry is easily attainable, the study paints a nuanced picture of uncertainties and hardships faced by individuals across different echelons, emphasizing the intersectionality of age, wealth, gender issues, and the identity of beauty anchors. Whether basking in the limelight or struggling for recognition, beauty anchors share a common thread of concern for their survival. The prevalent rumor that entering the anchor industry guarantees prosperity overlooks systemic issues and individual struggles, emphasizing the need for a more realistic understanding of this profession. Acknowledging these challenges is crucial for fostering industry-wide reforms and supportive policies to ensure the well-being and sustainability of beauty anchors. This study calls for a shift in societal perceptions and a more nuanced perspective to promote the genuine success and welfare of those pursuing careers in the beauty anchor industry, ultimately addressing the limitations of the law in safeguarding the rights and well-being of these professionals.

Keywords: Intersectionality Theory, Law, Beauty anchors, Anchor industry, Exhaustive working hours, Emotional engagement, Existential angst.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a profound transformation in societal behaviors, with labor, consumption, entertainment, and social interactions becoming deeply entrenched in the digital realm. Amid the constant convergence of public attention, information consumption, and social capital on network media platforms, a subtle yet impactful emergence of live-streaming e-commerce has transpired. This innovative e-commerce paradigm leverages influencers and anchors as dynamic marketing channels, offering distinct advantages, including low cost, heightened interactivity, and an elevated conversion rate compared to traditional methods. Within the cosmetic industry, beauty anchors, wielding their unique influence, have catalyzed revolutionary changes in beauty goods promotion. However, this evolution has fostered an illusion of a "low threshold" and "quick money maker," drawing a substantial social impact and enticing burgeoning participation, particularly among the youth, predominantly females or someone with feminine qualities. Nevertheless, beneath the veneer of prosperity, a less glamorous reality prevails, with many ordinary anchors enduring a laborious existence without equitable remuneration, teetering on the brink of becoming societal outcasts. Data substantiates these dynamics, revealing significant disparities in compensation within the live-streaming e-commerce sector, underscoring the urgency for a nuanced examination of its socioeconomic implications [1-3].

The author conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews with a cosmetic brand company in Guangdong Province, China. Interviews were conducted with Ten cosmetic anchors and unbiased exploration, covering "What do you think are the special characteristics of Internet celebrities as a profession?" "What is the biggest difficulty you have encountered in your career?" "What do you think about competition?" and "Talk about the daily work rhythm after being a cosmetic anchor". Open-ended questions, ranging from 30 to 60 minutes in length, were used to explore and

reveal the nuances of their professional journeys, and to explore the difficulties they experienced from various perspectives, including mental and physical. By delving into these unknown difficulties, we aim to fully understand the multifaceted nature of the Chinese beauty anchor profession and the lack of well-being.

The significance of this interview based on ten cosmetic anchors lies in its departure from previous studies in the field. While existing research has predominantly concentrated on different aspects of the cosmetic anchor industry, such as marketing strategies, audience engagement, and the economic implications of this profession [2-5], this study offers a fresh and unexplored perspective. It delves into the multifaceted challenges faced by beauty anchors, emphasizing the intersection of age, wealth, and gender identity in their professional journeys and relating them to the law.

1.2. Define Cosmetic Anchors in China

Chinese cosmetic anchors, or beauty anchors, represent a dynamic and influential category of individuals in the beauty and cosmetics industry. In essence, a cosmetic anchor is a beauty influencer or expert with a focus on marketing and selling cosmetic items via social media, e-commerce, live-streaming, and other digital platforms. These people, who are frequently female, have a special set of abilities, such as proficiency with makeup and beauty, efficient communication, and a captivating demeanor. [4-6].

Cosmetic anchors have emerged as key players in China, influencing beauty trends, offering product recommendations, and interacting with a wide audience. They use their expertise to produce interesting material that highlights the newest trends and methods, like product evaluations, live sessions, and cosmetic lessons. Social media platforms such as Douyin (TikTok), Xiaohongshu (RED), Weibo, and WeChat allow them to engage with their fans, create communities, and take part in the digital beauty scene. [7-9]. Wang utilized Lefebvre's spatial theory to analyze six beauty marketing bloggers on a "one live broadcast" platform. She investigated the construction of live broadcast space and interviewed ten viewers, applying Hall's theory of encoding and decoding. This research revealed that webcasting spaces have replaced physical malls, serving as both a personal space for self-imagination and a social space for diverse relationships [10].

What sets Chinese cosmetic anchors apart is their ability to not only influence beauty trends but also to monetize their influence by collaborating with cosmetic brands, endorsing products, and often running their businesses. Their entrepreneurial spirit, coupled with a keen understanding of digital platforms, allows them to navigate the ever-evolving beauty industry successfully.

In essence, Chinese cosmetic anchors are influential figures who play a significant role in shaping beauty culture, providing valuable insights into the latest cosmetic products, and fostering a sense of community within the digital beauty space.

1.3. Objective

China's cosmetic anchor industry, while displaying a booming image, has encountered unexpected challenges that go beyond its fine presentation. This research aims to shed light on the undisclosed difficulties faced by these influencers.

2. Intersectionality Theory and the Multiple Identities of Beauty Anchors

2.1. The Roots of Intersectionality

The origins of intersectionality can be attributed to the work of Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. She investigated the "intersectional disadvantages" that arise in legal cases addressing discrimination. In her 1989 paper she describes a specific case involving a black woman who applied for a job at an automobile manufacturer and was rejected. She claimed that the organization refused to hire her because she was a black woman, but the court's decision upheld the organization's claim that it did not discriminate against her because they hired blacks and hired women. However, as Crenshaw explains, existing laws against "sex discrimination" and "racial discrimination" are drawn

from the experiences of white women and black men and do not address the multiple and co-occurring oppressions that black women face. In the cases she provides, courts and laws fail to consider how these seemingly disparate issues of discrimination affect the plaintiffs in a case because they ignore the overlapping effects of race, sexuality, class and age [11].

2.2. The impact of multiple identities of beauty anchors

Based on the theory of intersectionality, by understanding the intersection of the identity of beauty hosts with their age, wealth, and gender identity, we can better understand the labor issues in the development of the current netroots economy, and further reveal the oppression and legal deficiencies that exist in the current netroots economy.

2.2.1. Occupational dilemmas due to age limitations:

Age-related career bottlenecks are a common phenomenon. Research confirms that, on average, mid-life is the most difficult period of a lifetime for careers. A 1996 article based on a survey of more than 5,000 British employees found that job satisfaction follows a gently curving U-shape, starting high in young adulthood, bottoming out near the age of 40, and then recovering with age[12]. The low point in the thirties may reflect the traditional notion of a "mid-life crisis" in which people become frustrated with their careers and begin to doubt their careers and decision-making. The low point in the 30s may reflect the traditional notion of a "midlife crisis," in which people become frustrated with their careers and begin to question their careers and decision-making.

The age limitations of beauty anchors make them suffer from a deep sense of "mid-life career anxiety". Based on the literature and in order to obtain more realistic and objective results, the author conducted in-depth interviews with beauty anchors in a cosmetic brand company in Guangdong Province, China. Interviewee E, a 23-year-old female beauty anchor, explained that the cosmetic company she works for has very strict age criteria for selecting beauty anchors, who must be between 20 and 27 years old or else they will not be able to provide perfect results for live broadcasts. Such strict criteria can lead anchors to believe that they will be systematically discarded once they surpass the company's perceived youth threshold, leading to deep uncertainty about the future of the industry (Interviewee B). Interviewee G also mentioned that since she is almost 30 years old, the effects of age discrimination in her career, such as lack of job opportunities as well as resources, are looming. She is considering a career change, but is unable to decide on her next career due to a lack of expertise in other careers.

Notably, the author found that because of the occupational age restriction, age-related occupational anxiety and stress for the occupation of beauty anchors was about 10 years earlier than for the general occupation. This reveals the "short life cycle" of the profession, suggesting that anchors are unable to enjoy the benefits of youthful age for a long time and are increasingly exposed to the negative effects of age discrimination over time.

2.2.2. Health problems arising from income inequality:

Income inequality means that wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few. There is a serious income inequality in the field of cosmetic anchors and this can lead them to increase competition thus leading to health problems. According to the "2018-2019 China Online Live Broadcasting Industry Research Report ", last year, a total of 8.77 million anchors on six major live broadcasting platforms, namely, Stranger, Yingke, Huajiao, Yishang, Meipai, and Laixian, earned a total income of about 6.4 billion yuan (about 8.8 billion U.S. dollars), and 0.02% of the anchors earned nearly 41% of the revenue[13]. Against a backdrop of inequality, anchors can gain more materially by doing better than their peers, as working harder brings greater monetary rewards when the product sold is of higher value, i.e. higher performers are rewarded more. Income comparisons with their coworkers add to the stress and anxiety of being left behind socially and materially[14]. As a result, anchors willingly work longer hours and more intensely in an attempt to sell higher-value products to generate financial rewards.

However, overworking has left anchors suffering from health problems. The beauty company I interviewed capitalized on the anchors' competitive mentality by setting work hours for them as early as 8:00 a.m. and as late as 4:00 p.m., and making them work seven hours straight (Interviewee F). It is not just the companies I visited that have a problem with anchors working excessive hours; it has become the state of the profession. O'Ratings monitoring found that the average live broadcasting time of Taobao shopping platform anchors reached the most 7.29 hours, 40.3% of Jieyin anchors, 34.4% of Shutterbugs anchors, and 28% of Taobao anchors chose to focus on broadcasting from 19:00-21:00 p.m. The anchors had to do review and other work after they went off the air, and ended their work close to the early hours of the morning[13]. This has led to anchors complaining about the relentless hours and frequent night shifts, which has led to chronic insomnia and a host of health problems caused by a weakened immune system(Interviewee B, D, E, H, I, J). Most of the anchors struggle with the profession: they are unable to balance their health, as refusing the industry's rules is tantamount to giving up the profession and wealth.

2.2.3. Gender bias and harassment faced by male anchors

The beauty world has long been associated with femininity, and men can feel a heavy burden of embarrassment and shame for talking about skincare and beauty, believing that it lacks masculinity. With more and more male beauty bloggers, anchors challenging the status quo of gender divisions in the beauty world, they are suffering extreme online harassment. Li Jiaqi, known as Austin Li in English, is a top beauty anchor with 40 million followers on China's Jieyin video platform, earning 1.8553 billion Yuan (about 254 million dollar) annually, and is known as the "Lipstick King"[15]. Despite his enormous success and influence, Li Jiaqi is no stranger to the harsh realities of cyberbullying and harassment. As a male beauty anchor who broke the stereotypes of the beauty industry, he was subjected to online attacks that questioned his masculinity and scrutinized his career choices, calling him "not a man," "disgusting," and more. Some even continued to attack him verbally while he was selling cosmetics live on air, challenging him time and time again. These attacks reflect a deeply ingrained social bias that sees male engagement with beauty as a threat to traditional masculinity. It also illustrates how a career as a beauty anchor brings exposure and visibility along with a lack of privacy, which on a consistent basis is likely to lead to psychological problems.

2.3. Impact and Inadequacy of the Law

The law is one of several ways of responding to common inequalities and an important engine for reproducing them. By describing the law's inability to fully protect the rights and interests of beauty anchors, it is shown that the law protecting Chinese beauty anchors deserves more attention from inequality scholars.

2.3.1. Introduction of five insurance policies:

The Social Insurance Law of the People's Republic of China (adopted at the 17th meeting of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People's Congress on October 28, 2010)[17], also known as the five insurance policies and one pension, are part of China's social insurance system, which includes pension insurance, medical insurance, work injury insurance, unemployment insurance and maternity insurance. The system is designed to provide comprehensive social security for workers and to ensure that they receive appropriate financial support in the event of retirement, illness, injury, unemployment or maternity. This is the legal protection that many companies give to their anchors[16].

2.3.2. Loopholes in the Five Insurance Policies

However, the five insurance laws do not always apply to the beauty anchor profession,Although this is the main legal protection for anchors from the companies The author interviewed(Interviewee I). When an anchor exceeds the age limit, the company will force the anchor to be placed in a different position than she was originally assigned (Interviewee I). At this point, China's unemployment insurance, which is an important part of the "five insurance and one pension", cannot provide the

necessary financial support. This is because this safety net is usually only available when a person faces involuntary dismissal due to business closure or employer decision[16]. Choosing to quit voluntarily in light of the age limit may make them ineligible for financial assistance, thus placing them in a precarious situation.

Second, workers' compensation insurance is like a safety net designed to provide financial assistance to those who have suffered physical or psychological injuries in the workplace. However, a stark reality emerges when it comes to the plight of Chinese beauty hosts who suffer such injuries. According to the policy, a prerequisite for receiving such support is the occurrence of a life-changing event - an accidental injury or occupational disease that renders an individual unable to work for the rest of his or her life[16]. In essence, this stringent requirement can create a significant coverage gap for those whose injuries may not permanently incapacitate them, but still create a significant financial and emotional burden. As a result, many anchors grappling with workplace injuries find themselves in the challenging position of dealing with a complex system that may not adequately address their specific needs.

3. Conclusion

In the realm of Chinese beauty anchors, a distinctive challenge emerges as age-related restrictions lead to premature "mid-life career anxiety." This unique "short life cycle" intensifies the pressure on their careers, thrusting them into uncertainty far earlier than typical professions. Additionally, income inequality compounds these difficulties, leaving only a fraction of anchors with substantial financial gains, as fierce competition drives many to overwork, resulting in health issues and chronic stress. Moreover, male beauty anchors, challenging conventional gender norms, confront severe online harassment, exemplified by the experiences of top beauty anchor Li Jiaqi, known as the "Lipstick King."

Despite these glaring issues, the existing legal framework, encompassing the five insurance policies, proves inadequate in safeguarding the rights and interests of beauty anchors. Age-related job transitions and stringent workers' compensation insurance criteria present formidable hurdles, leaving many anchors without sufficient financial support and protection. To address these challenges, it is imperative to foster a comprehensive understanding of the complexities within the beauty anchor profession. Acknowledging these concerns represents the initial stride toward fostering industry-wide reforms and implementing supportive policies. Effectively addressing age limitations, income disparities, and gender biases is paramount for ensuring the well-being and sustainability of beauty anchors. This research emphasizes the deficiencies in current legal safeguards and calls for a more equitable and just future for beauty anchors in China.

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