

In the Digital Media Era, the Construction of Online Female Live Streaming Identities and Professional Identity Research

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Abstract. In the current digital media era, women's work is frequently subjected to more convenient "gazes." This study employs participatory observation methods to observe and research female anchors on internet live streaming platforms, exploring the processes of constructing their professional, familial, and social identities. The research finds significant variations in their roles and self-identities across different domains, closely influenced by factors such as digital work environments and the use of social media. The impact of digital media development on women's professional lives is profound and cannot be underestimated. Additionally, female internet anchors may face issues such as work-family balance and conflicts between career development and social needs. Promoting gender equality, fostering women's career development, eliminating potential gender discrimination and occupational barriers, and advancing social progress and development are imperative.

Keywords: digital media era, female internet anchors, identity formation, occupational discrimination

1. Introduction

The advent of the digital era has transformed lifestyles and work patterns, particularly impacting professional women. The development of digital technologies has provided more job opportunities and flexibility for women in the workforce, yet it has also introduced new challenges and pressures. The prevalence of social media and the rise of digital work environments have intertwined people's social and professional lives, imposing new demands and challenges on the construction of multiple identities for professional women. Traditional gender roles and career expectations are being challenged, requiring professional women to navigate pressures from both career success and family and social lives, making the construction of multiple identities a critically important topic of discussion.

From a policy perspective, the expansion of digital infrastructure provides crucial support to the digital economy. Advances in new information infrastructure such as 5G networks, gigabit optical networks, and the rapid development of emerging businesses like data centers, cloud computing, and big data, along with the continuous expansion of IoT user bases, signify the ongoing deepening integration of the digital economy with the real economy. This integration continuously strengthens new advantages in the digital economy. According to estimates, in 2022, the network economy index reached 2739.0, a 39.6% increase from the previous year. The deepening application of digital transformation has facilitated the organic integration of online and offline consumption through new formats and models, expanding consumer scenarios. New forms of e-commerce, notably live streaming e-commerce, have rapidly developed, expanding new channels of consumption. [1]

2. Identity Construction of Female Internet Anchors

2.1. Emotional Anchors: Q&A and Emotional Value

This category of anchors addresses fans' questions to create an atmosphere akin to face-to-face chats. Their live content spans a wide range, from discussing emotional issues with fans to sharing successful experiences in various fields. One such anchor is TikTok blogger "Tian Zong (Zhu Shuyu version)". In her live broadcasts, she responds to fan comments, discussing her media journey and successes, engaging female fans emotionally, and guiding interactions through features like clicking on the top left corner of the lucky bag and interacting with fans to light up the stage. She portrays herself as an "Internet electronic bestie" to her fans, claiming to be their "spiritual food". Her approach involves setting herself up as an "electronic bestie," which bridges the

distance between her and her fans. On May 15, 2024, from 12:35 AM to 1:00 AM, she guided fans to light up the stage and connect through live streaming. During the interaction, a fan named "koi" mentioned she was currently not studying or working, feeling that education didn't benefit her much, so she chose to work in marketing. However, her true ambition is to open a clothing store while expanding into media business. "Tian Zong" advised the fan that to open a clothing store, she needs a stable source of goods and must first save money. To succeed in media, she needs to possess qualities that help solve specific problems for a certain group of people. The anchor mentioned that during her live broadcasts, connecting with fans and answering their questions helps fulfill her goal of providing emotional value to them.

2.2. Dance Anchors: Physical Performance and Audience Interaction

Some anchors write out different funny actions corresponding to various gifts on the public screen, guiding fans to give gifts for monetization. For instance, they may perform actions like "Great Wall Cannon" for heart gifts or "Hen Laying Eggs" for rose gifts. Some anchors operate a TikTok account collectively, forming a team-like account where live content is similar to the former category. These anchors often appear in the form of team-operated accounts, with the main page of one account being the personal accounts of various team members. In addition to this, there are dance anchors who, after receiving gifts from fans, dance according to fan comments. These anchors typically wear more revealing outfits, and their fan base consists predominantly of male fans. Anchors guide fans to give gifts and likes by changing clothes. A typical example is the anchor "Self-Responsible (Forward)", whose account's main videos showcase personal videos, with no detailed introduction in the personal information section, and live broadcasts mostly occur after midnight.

2.3. Gaming Anchors: Guiding the Battlefields and Energetic Texts

These female anchors predominantly livestream their gameplay, commentating on their attack strategies and engaging in conversations with fans about game developments. Fan interactions often revolve around discussing game strategies, with fans providing strategic advice in the comments. The anchors read these comments aloud and respond, creating a conversational atmosphere. For example, TikTok anchor "Kong Xincan (Jin Chan Chan)" attracts approximately five to six hundred viewers per livestream. On her personal page, she positions herself as "Northeastern Sweet Sister who loves playing this game" and regularly updates her livestream schedule. These anchors livestream themselves playing games, guiding fans to collect light codes in fan groups during the process to attract more followers. Additionally, some anchors accept orders to accompany fans during gameplay. For instance, TikTok anchor "Yang Qi Yi" is a Peace Elite game anchor. Her homepage displays nightly livestream schedules featuring highlights of her accompanying gameplay process. On average, each livestream attracts around 7,500 viewers. The main content of her livestreams revolves around her gameplay process of accompanying orders, where she also helps fans draw equipment and shares experiences in equipment drawing.

2.4. Music Anchors: Song Request Performances and Professional Confrontations

Take TikTok anchor "Zhen Nan Shou" for example. This anchor's profile introduces her as a vocal teacher with seven years of teaching experience graduated from Wuhan Conservatory of Music. During her livestreams, she guides fans to give gifts and request songs in the comments. Such anchors primarily showcase their talents, and music anchors also demonstrate their skills through PK competitions. For instance, TikTok piano blogger "Cool Hanzhi" plays various fast-paced piano pieces. Before starting the main piece, she uses her unique way of singing to tap the piano to read the score like smashing the drum with piano and encourages fans to follow, like, and add their votes.

2.5. Education-oriented Anchors: Versatile Skills and Skill Demonstrations

These broadcasters often possess certain talents. For instance, on Xiaohongshu, there's a painting anchor named "Blue Liyu in Painting." The primary content of this anchor's live streams involves their painting process, where they provide explanations and teachings on various steps. The anchor's profile indicates they were originally an artist, using live broadcasts to attract clientele. Education-focused anchors offer guidance to viewers during live sessions. For example, on Douyin, anchor "Guo Xiaoyu" encourages fans to send gifts, queue up for interactions, and invites them to sing in the live room. During fans' singing performances, the anchor provides feedback, corrects mistakes, and interacts with them.

Virtual gifts such as "lamp codes," hearts, lucky bags, hot air balloons, roses, and request lights are functionalities within Douyin. These features are essentially a series of virtual gifts linked to real economic transactions. On the surface, anchors engage in emotional exchanges with their audience, but in reality, economic transactions underlie these interactions. This reflects anchors guiding and encouraging fans to send gifts to earn income through the platform. Fans, on the other hand, spend money on virtual gifts to support their favorite anchors. The interaction modes between anchors and fans vary across platforms. Douyin anchors tend to encourage the gifting of lamp codes and similar virtual items to boost platform visibility through likes. On platforms like Xiaohongshu, besides virtual gifts, anchors also recommend their fan groups to viewers after they spend a certain amount of time browsing the live room.

3. Construction of Professional Identities for Female Online Anchors

Online video livestreaming platforms, as emerging forms of media, provide a platform for professional women to expand and deepen multiple identities. Embracing multiple professions reflects a work attitude where young people no longer settle for a single career model but choose to lead lives with multiple professions and identities. Through online livestreaming, they showcase themselves, promote personal brands, and engage in discussions on topics such as female values and advocating for diverse choices, thereby shaping rich and diverse identity affiliations. However, factors such as gender, capital, services, space, and time involved in online livestreaming also impact the labor processes and identity formation of professional women.

The digital economy has had a significant impact on the labor processes and daily lives of female online anchors. Leveraging "flexible accumulation" facilitated by the internet and driven by digital technologies, work patterns exhibit characteristics of temporal and spatial compression. Work is no longer constrained by traditional boundaries of time and space; this flexibility is a key feature. Capital and information integrate rapidly on a global scale, resulting in highly flexible work times and spaces for workers. Work extends from factories and offices to within homes, blurring the boundaries between workplaces, homes, and public spaces. The era of digital self-media is breaking the elitism of traditional media, opening media access to broader segments of society. In 2017, Tencent Research Institute, in collaboration with Longzhu Livestreaming Platform, surveyed over 4,500 anchors nationwide. The data shows that the cumulative scale of anchors participating in platforms like Huajiao, Yingke, and Yizhibo exceeds 3.5 million, comparable to the urban employed population in the information transmission, computer services, and software industries reported by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2015, and even surpassing twice the employed population in the cultural, sports, and entertainment sectors. Geographically, only 10% of anchors are based in first-tier cities, with over 80% concentrated in second-tier cities and rural areas. Among them, anchors from third- and fourth-tier cities and rural areas account for half of the total. In terms of education, nearly 80% of anchors have high school, college, or junior high school education backgrounds. Scholars point out that compared to traditional professions, the emerging profession of anchors to some extent reduces the rigid requirements for education and geographical location, demonstrating characteristics of grassroots origins and medium education levels.[2]

The flexibility of time and space and the low entry threshold into this profession are highly appealing to many. However, this emerging profession brings not only convenience but also new challenges and pressures different from traditional jobs, such as the unlimited expansion of labor time and space, squeezing the space for labor reproduction. Some scholars argue that this flexibility has dual aspects: on one hand, it provides more job opportunities for women facing employment difficulties; on the other hand, it blurs the boundaries between work and life, compressing their spaces of reproduction entirely into virtual realms.

For example, besides their livestreaming hours, some anchors need to chat and interact with fans after broadcasts to maintain relationships, making sacrifices. Additionally, the rise of platform economies subjects professional women to more complex norms and management, requiring them to autonomously schedule work times and content under loose supervision. They endure psychological fatigue and burdens due to the unlimited expansion of labor time and space, as well as identity discrepancies brought about by their public personas, amidst a fiercely competitive work environment. [3]

The construction of female identities on online livestreaming platforms is influenced by multiple factors. Scholars emphasize the symbolic direction of media images, highlighting rich, diverse, personal, and unique characteristics in female images. [4] However, female anchors not only showcase personal charm and talents but also navigate societal stereotypes and expectations about their images and behaviors. The personas they craft during broadcasts may differ significantly from their true personalities, necessitating them to interact post-broadcast using these personas to solidify relationships with highly contributing fans, a practice that may challenge and stress their identity construction due to prolonged role fragmentation. [5]

Therefore, a comprehensive exploration of the identity construction of women on online livestreaming platforms must consider the symbolic direction of media images, diverse social role perceptions, individual self-identity, and role-playing within this background. The roles women play and their self-images presented to audiences in online livestreaming reflect societal perceptions and acceptance of female values and roles. [2] In the era of digital self-media, women's entertainment and work are no longer independent domains but are interwoven. Online video livestreaming provides women with a new stage where they can showcase themselves, promote personal brands, engage in discussions on female issues, and monetize their presence on these platforms, achieving dual satisfaction both spiritually and materially. [7]

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the construction of multiple identities also entails challenges and conflicts from work, family, and social life. Today, digital transformation provides new avenues to enhance women's economic capabilities, contributing to gender equality. The internet, digital platforms, mobile phones, and digital financial services offer "leapfrog" opportunities for all, helping bridge the gender gap by enabling women to earn extra income, increasing employment opportunities, and gaining access to knowledge and general information. Therefore, studying the process of professional women constructing multiple identities in the digital age not only helps deepen our understanding of the impact of digitalization on women's professional lives but also provides insights and recommendations for addressing the challenges they face. This can promote gender equality by seizing the opportunity to foster gender equality in the labor market, drive economic growth, and build a more inclusive digital world.

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