

Study on the Online Representation of Chinese Rural Wanghong Based on Space Theory-Taking Kuaishou as an Example

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As the development of 5G technology and new media platform, UGC and the participation culture appears. Short video platform such as Kuaishou has the characterist of low production threshold, easy to use, attracting a great number of users. A great number of internet celebrities appears including rural wanghong. In the traditional media era, the communication mode is one way, farmers, especially rural women, are always on the margins of mainstream media discourse. However, the appearance of short video platform gives them right of speaking, in the space conducted by short video platform contains complex Ideology and social structure which also restrict the online space practice of users. Thus, rural female users' online practice is a kind of dynamic balance following the spatial discipline. This study will analyze the support and constraints of rural female wanghong's online representation, figure out the relationship of online representation and their traditional rural culture. It provides theoretical suggestions for harmonious coexistence among rural women, social media platforms, the state and society.

Keywords: short video platform, space theory, internet celebrity, feminism

Introduction

In traditional media era, Chinese rural women are often seen as “powerless” “low economic independence”, “low educational level and low income.” A lot of rural women regard becoming a ‘good wife and good mother’ as their highest goal in life” (Ye & Jia, 2010). However, as the emergence of UGC and short video platform, this situation is changing. Based on the <2022 Sinking Market Insight Report>, in April 2022, the monthly active user base of Chinese mobile internet reached 1.185 billion, with 58.4% of the sinking market being in the third-tier city and below. And most users of Kuaishou come from third and fourth tier cities including Chinese female group. In this period, lots of female grassroots Wanghong like Liziqi, Rural xiaoqiao appears, they gained a lot of followers by revealing rural daily life and interacting with fans on short video platform. They sell products through livestreaming and have gained huge economic income which brought great changes to their lives.

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Lefebvre's concept of space provides a study perspective for this study, he believed space is closely related to human practice, including the place of human living practice and the existence of production mode (Liu & Wang, 2023). The capital is expanding power and extract labor in the world though producing more and more spaces. In the digital age, capital expansion is transformed from offline physical space into online virtual space. In the online space, rural female actively engages in self-participation and identity construction according to the media logic, under the restrictions of capital, platform, and politics. While obtaining profit, rural female wanghong also become digital labor of capital, and alienation occurs in the process of spatial production. This study will base on the space production theory, study the rural female wanghong's online presentation from four aspects: power, culture, social interaction, and capita, give advice for the spatial alienation.

The Evolution of Wanghong

Wanghong is Chinese version of internet celebrity, hong means red, which means "connoting people who have become viral/popular often within a short period" (David, Jian & Stuart, 2021, p3). With the development of Chinese network technology, the form of social media platform has changed from Weibo to short video platform like Tiktok, the ways of netizens participation changed, the form and nature of Wanghong are also different. "In the late 1990s and 2000s, use of the term Wanghong still largely overlapped with 'internet celebrities'" (David, Jian & Stuart, 2021, p. 3). The function influence of Wanghong mainly reflected at the cultural and social level instead of economy. In this era, social media are mainly graphics and text, Wanghong usually become famous because of some photos or some event (Ren, 2022). However, with the rise of various video platform in the internet era, Wanghong has entered the wideband era, with rich types and differentiation. Wanghong not only include people who become popular in reality or on the Internet because of an event or behavior that attracts the attention of netizens also refer to those who become popular on the Internet by relying on long-term output of professional knowledge (Xu & Zhang). Until 2015, the concept of Wanghong changed, "became a officially economic phenomenon" (Chen, 2016; Han, 2020), became "A series of business models and monetization models for personalized internet traffic resources" (Pan, 2019), connecting closely with Chinese culture and politics.

Power in the Space

Power Discipline

Social space is filled with the ideology of power. Foucault examines the impact of power in micro-space, he believed power, surveillance and discipline exists in space. He regards "surveillance" as "a part of production institutions and a special mechanism for regulating power" (Foucault, 2003, pp. 198-199). "regulation is a type of power, a track for exercising power. It can be used by various institutions or systems" (Foucault, 2003, p. 242).

Just like Foucault described, on Kuaishou platform, the government and platform work together to build media logic in the online space, and the online space practice and image presentation of rural female wanghong on the Kuaishou platform can only be performed within the framework of media logic. The Chinese government sets guidelines and policies for content regulation, while platforms like Kuaishou are responsible

for implementing these regulations and monitoring content on their platform (Fang & Repnikova, 2018), developing content moderation strategies, which include designing and deploying content review systems, setting community guidelines (Nie & Wu, 2020). By limiting the availability and visibility of UGC, the regulatory systems can influence the types of content users produce and share on social media (Yang, 2019), which forms the spatial discipline. If the user violates the ideology of the government and the platform, the punishment is not to get traffic, serious accounts will be blocked, and more serious will involve the law.

In addition, the algorithms become a part of media logic and form user's action, algorithm can identify user's interests and recommend relevant information to users. Also, Content moderation algorithms can identify and filter out inappropriate content (Wu & Guo, 2021). which may control content discoverability, as algorithms may prioritize content that aligns with government policies and platform guidelines.

The Production of Power

While being restricted by power, rural female are also attracting fans, gaining economy and producing power through online practice. Wanghong's online space displays are acknowledged by an audience (Abidin, 2020). Wanghong belongs to key opinion leader. Compared with advertising, opinions of Wanghong are easier to convince consumer, consumer think wanghong can provide more valuable information (Flynn, 1996). Meng (2012) believed that, wanghong could influence others' consumption attitudes and purchasing behaviors by exchanging information through diversified network media. Thus, after having a certain number of fans, rural female wanghong have a certain amount of influence and discourse power online.

In addition, in the family scope, the e-commerce bring income for rural female, which is helpful to improve their position in family. Because in traditional rural China area, many rural women have no income and are dependent on their husbands. The increase in economic income has brought them a certain degree of economic autonomy, self-confidence, and respect.

The Cultural Production of Space

The online space production of rural female is a performance based on real rural cultural background and the personal understanding of media logic. The cultural production is a remained real rural traditional culture and influenced by urban culture.

Rural Female Wanghong.

The content production materials of rural female wanghong are mostly taken from the rural social environment around them. "The most common daily life in rural areas has become one of the main contents of rural wanghong's short video presentation" (Tan & Guo, 2023). Zhu (2020) divided the content production of Kuaishou rural female wanghong into four categories: food, song and dance, life experience, and daily life. They recorded food, clothing, housing, daily trifles, farming, washing, and cooking, etc. This simple life retains the characteristics of traditional rural appearance and attracts the attention of urban fans. For example, the wanghong named Liziqi, her video content mainly shows the "daily" life and food making of rural area and rural women, her video style is simple, which has won the love of many people in China and overseas.



Figure 1. Liziqi.

In addition, rural women's social roles are positioned as "housewives" (Ye & Chen, 2022). The ideology of "men are strong and women are weak" "Men should go out to work, wife should stay in the family taking care family members" is still deeply rooted (Ma, 2022). In the role shaping of short videos, to a large extent, they are in line with their traditional family roles, and they are more in front of the camera as "wives, mothers and daughters-in-law, with strong kinship attributes."

However, kuaishou is a mix platform gathers urban users and rural users. Kuaishou Wanghongs' online representation also influenced by urban users' culture. Wanghong will adjust the online presentation based on requests and comments from city fans. For example, wanghong zhangli, began to wear make-up because of some comments from urban users. Also, some wanghong may imitate urban wanghong's content, using their elements such as music, clothing, or joke. These all shows a mix of urban culture.

Social Interaction in Space

Short video platform has expanded rural female wanghong's online social internet, attracting lots of fans who are interested in her online content and may from different cities, this gives more social opportunities for rural female wanghong.

However, on the other hand, making short video platform occupy lots of time, it may be weakening the social relations related to blood within the family.

The Capital Cooperation of Platform and Wanghong

Wanghong wants to earn profit through the online practice while the platform provides technology and functional support, change media logic continuing to gain user stickiness so that they can make more profit.

Platform is Profit-driven

The platform provides technical support, traffic support, and incubation teaching for rural female net celebrities, which helps net celebrities win more profits while the platform obtains part of the profits. Firstly, the characteristic of Short-video platform content is usually short in duration. Kuaishou allowed two maximum lengths for videos: 11 seconds and 57 seconds (Lin & de Kloet, 2019). Secondly, short video platforms leverage

multimedia communication, combining visual, auditory, and textual elements to create engaging and immersive content experiences (Chen & Hao, 2020). Thirdly, short video platform is easy to use and require minimal technical expertise, making them accessible to many users, including those from rural areas (Wang, 2019). These characteristics of short video platform shape the strong dissemination power of short videos, making it easy for users to become addicted. Second, platforms can gain more data by engaging more users. Short video platform's core capability is to get its users to stay on the platform for as long as possible and to package and target these users for advertiser messages, then it will sell users' profile to advertisers (Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022).

The Business Model of Rural Female Wanghong

Short video platform itself has the function of driving interests, and farmers also participate in the shooting of short video platforms and get income from live broadcasting. Moreover, wanghong's income is much higher than that of engaging in agricultural production (Yin & Shi, 2021). Rural female Wanghong also get jobs and income through short video production on the Kuaishou platform. The economy model of rural female wanghong is attention economy, "a form of economic activity that directly or indirectly converts netizens' attention into actual benefits or economic effects, mainly manifested as flow monetization and content monetization" (Wang, 2021). Rural wanghong transfer the influencer economy to rural areas by "producing information products, selling values, achieving commercial realization, and building emotional economic relationships" (Wang, 2021). There are two main ways for rural internet celebrities to monetize: the first is through self-management, attracting fans through live streaming and short videos, and then earning income through virtual gifts or selling local specialty products on the platform; the second is by signing with professional short video companies, which provide them with advertising promotion and professional packaging, and they can earn advertising fees from the company.

Spatial Alienation

In the digital age, spatial alienation still exists. However, "Digital capital expropriates and gains value in space in a more covert way" (Liu & Wang, 2023). Just like Yan (2022) said "Compared to the traditional spatial discipline, social media has actually produced a larger, more complete prison-based surveillance network" (Yan, 2022). The original users and Wanghong are all become "digital labors". The real rural culture has changed under the control of capital. Spatial alienation is embodied in the formation of information cocoon, the production of vulgar and exaggerated content and the serious homogenization of content.

Information Cocoon

The surveillance of online space is everywhere and construct digital panopticon, they are the main producers of data; their personal information and interaction are all monitored by the platform and finally be used in commercial. Social media like TikTok's core capability is to get its users to stay on the platform (Zeng & Wikstrom, 2022) to gain profit. The platform distributes and pushes information according to the users' and preference, this may lead to "information cocoons". This may make rural female Wanghong "lose judgement and limit themselves" (Shi, 2022).

Vulgar, False Content Output

Because rural female are “low educated knowledge” and “lack of professional skills” (Zhang & Yuan, 2022), short video platform are easy to use and require minimal technical expertise. Under the purpose of chasing capital, there have been a number of vulgar contents produced in order to obtain traffic, which violates the original intention of “recording real life”. For example, the appearance of “Nong yuan”, Nong yuan refers to women represented by wearing vulgar and revealing clothes, they attract the heat of the Internet by posting some legal but with obvious traces of vulgar videos, so as to obtain more traffic and revenue. There are also some wanghong to get attention, deliberately ugly, belittle themselves, and even some wanghong publish false information, the online content is far from the real. The pursuit of profit causes the cultural alienation of space production.



Figure 2. Nongyuan.

Homogenization of Content

Under the influence of politics and capital ideology in space, the online space production of rural female wanghong is implied by mainstream values. For some UGC which do not conform to the spatial ideology will be restricted or punished. Therefore, in order to obtain more officially distributed traffic, rural female wanghong have to conform to the ideological value orientation, follow the current hot topics of the media, and shoot similar content, which limits the innovation of net celebrities to a certain extent, resulting in the homogenization of the content produced by them, and their capital labor has become a tool under the control of capital.

Conclusion

In terms of power in online space, rural female wanghong are limited by political capital. At the same time, media give them rights of speak. In terms of cultural output, rural female wanghong have integrated the elements of urban culture based on the original traditional rural culture, forming a unique mixed rural culture. From the social interaction, in online space, short video platform expanded the scope of rural female wanghong's social network, however, in the family space, it weakens the relationship connection between the family members. Wanghong and platform are all profit-driven. The expanded of capital causes alienation, shows at information cocoon, vulgar, false content output, and homogenization of content.

The government can provide more teaching activities on e-commerce and short videos on the platform and offline to encourage content innovation of rural women and improve their media literacy. The platform should also focus on rural women as much as possible, publish more interesting creative inspiration, and equally distribute traffic resources. Rural female wanghong they should not be complacent, should take a long-term view, more contact with information in different fields, learn from excellent creators, improve personal media literacy, and produce meaningful videos.

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