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WOMEN AS DANCING WANGHONG ON DOUYIN

Affective Affordances and Gender Performativity

Han Fu, Anthony Fung and Jindong Leo-Liu

Introduction

In recent years, the Chinese word 'wanghong' (网红) has been coined to refer to internet influencers, celebrities or key opinion leaders who feature themselves online or on social media platforms to attract large numbers of followers. This quite frequently implies that they have the capacity to monetise their digital fame and their fan base (Craig, Lin, and Cunningham 2021). The internet and other media technologies afford the opportunity for ordinary people to get their 15 minutes of fame and to brand themselves in a manner that would be unable to achieve in the offline world (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017). With their communicative and aesthetic skills, women frequently excel in building virtual intimacy with viewers and in selling products, thus leading to their prominence in the wanghong economy. This is a gendered and affect-driven relationship economy, which in recent years, has been on a steep rise in video-based communities (Dong and Ye 2021). Against this background, social video platforms provide women with an emotional outlet to speak out and an opportunity for those with essential digital skills and technical tools to improve their material well-being through traffic monetisation.

In 2020, the market size of the wanghong economy in China reached US$197.1 billion (China index academy 2021), and within this, the she power was significant.[1] On Douyin, a leading short video-sharing platform, equivalent to TikTok and owned by the same parent company, female streamers contributed 57.5% of the content in 2021 (Chen 2021). Douyin has been calling for stimulating women's economic potential by providing them with low-budget employment possibilities to support them in accumulating economic and social resources and enhancing their sense of being acknowledged.[2] In 2021, more than 13.2 million women, around 38% of Douyin's monthly active female users that year,[3] have earned income mainly from e-commerce, advertising and livestreaming on Douyin.[4] Enabled by platform functions typified as beauty filters, a video-editing tool embedded in apps and adopted to enhance the user's physical attractiveness, female performers can reshape themselves with the white, thin, young image that most male fans will find attractive. Unlike those anchors who prioritise their physical attractiveness on Douyin, rural women on Douyin often draw attention by narrations of personal suffering, thereby resonating with female audiences who have had similar experiences and using hashtags such as 'rural girls' and 'left-behind girls' to further increase social attention (Yi and Zhang 2021, 39). The techno-cultural

affordances of the platform, such as beauty filters and hashtags aforesaid, facilitate the women's affective competence in the construction of multiple gendered personas for specific purposes, such as impressing a male audience, promoting women's freedom and unity or monetising their visibility. Douyin affords women the possibility of transforming and presenting themselves in different spaces and against varying backgrounds. Among the various types of content, which range from intellectual knowledge to entertaining jokes, from formal teaching to leisure hobbies and from serious discussion to seemingly meaningless memes, dance is probably the most representative video content on Douyin. Created and circulated by female wanghong creators and enhanced by the platform-provided affordances, these dance performances foreground the women's rhythmic body displays.

From the perspective of the platform's affective affordances and their function in enabling and circulating affects, this study elaborates on how platform affordances are geared towards enabling female wanghong dancers to perform affectively and to present their bodies in a manner that can potentially increase their visibility, fame and income. Specifically, we look into which technological affordances are adopted by female dancers to construct their affective affinities and how this is done, and we consider the dancers' strategies for transferring affective capital into economic capital. In other words, this chapter investigates the use of affordances and the narrative strategies employed by female dancing wanghong creators on Douyin for attracting attention, managing relationships, self-branding and product promotion. With the focus on their capacity for constructing contagious affection, and for 'gluing' their audiences to themselves and to the products they recommend. We selected the study subjects by using three keywords: 'female', 'talent' and 'more than one million followers' on Xindou, a platform presenting and analysing the data on Douyin. We ultimately located 104 top female wanghong creators who profiled themselves as dancers, each of whom had more than 1,000,000 followers. Each video creator is permitted by Douyin to flag up to three videos on their webpage on Douyin. Of the 104 wanghong creators in our sample, in July 2022, a total of 208 videos were pinned by them. By investigating those 208 flagged videos, this study sheds light on the affective properties of Douyin and on digital gender performativity through the lens of affect, recognising that affective affinities have become an indispensable resource for accessing and accumulating symbolic capital on video-sharing platforms.

Thus, we begin this chapter by reviewing the 'affective turn' of symbolic capital developed through video-based social media by considering the case of Douyin. Next, we describe our methodology, which includes the app walkthrough method (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018) and textual analysis. Then, female Wanghong's use of affordances, the resulting affects and the monetisation of affective affinity are analysed.

The Affectivity of Symbolic Capital Built on Video-Based Social Media

Against the background of an increasingly platformised society, featuring connectivity, precarity and flexibility (Van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and De Waal 2018), scholars have recently come to see affect as a critical factor by which to understand the accumulation and dissemination of symbolic capital in the contemporary world, where emotion often trumps rationality (Threadgold 2020). Symbolic capital is a term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to a 'degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge and recognition' (Bourdieu, Bourdieu, and Kritzman 1993, 7), which can be embodied and recognised in competencies such as literacy (Bourdieu and Richardson 1986). In response to the emerging affective turn, Threadgold (2020) redefines Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital as 'a felt relationship through processes of

deference, celebrity, respect, admiration, etc'. Affective affinities are seen as competitive resources for garnering internet fame and self-monetisation (Raun 2018). As distinct from traditional celebrities who are equipped with demonstrable talent and professionalism, online influencers acquire celebrity status due to their ability to attract attention and manage their affective affinities on the internet (Zhao 2020, 670). In this environment, emotional stimulation plays a significant role in an effective and low-cost manner (Liang 2022; Tyng et al. 2017, 1454). As Yue Cao (2022, 160) indicates, the rise of China's wanghong industry stems from a shared desire for virtual intimacy and an indispensable symbolic value that monetises the work of the wanghong.

To date, research into online female celebrities has focused on their affective work in generating and managing intimate and trusted connections with their audience for monetary purposes, drawing attention to the performers' interpersonal communication skills and the discourse strategies associated with commercialised sexuality (Ruberg et al. 2019, 466; Zhang 2021, 236). Most frequently, these discussions have revolved around the use and reuse of words, rhetoric and scripted actions (such as the hand–heart gesture), which are known to evoke emotions and commercialise virtual relations (Wang 2020, 934) and have opened up a new means of labour exploitation (Zhang, Xiang, and Hao 2019, 340) in the form of affective labour. Enabled by information technologies and platformed affordances, wanghong creators work on (re)producing and transforming affects for producing economic relations with others, even though a level of human relations on the platform is dominated and coordinated by platform capitalists via techno-cultural systems such as a black-boxed algorithm. The productive circuit of affect and value comes into the dominant processes of capitalist valorisation in the contemporary informational economy (Hardt 1999, 89), where engagement on digital platforms has become a lucrative industry, inspiring individuals to develop their own brands as digital entrepreneurs (Cao 2022) . In such a 'social industry' featuring monetising platformed sociality, the capacity to exert impact by (re)configuring collective feelings and actions is essential if the performer is to acquire and accumulate symbolic capital on the digital platform. Online celebrities rely heavily on platform-enabled features to express and present themselves to impress their target audience. However, relative to the performative discourse regarding the power of words and body language wielded in acquiring, accumulating and sustaining their online fame (Wang 2020, 548), few studies have looked into the wanghong's use of affordances, which is also critical for dancers' appropriate gendered performances on Douyin as they move to the music without talking. Under the authority of user agreements and laws, the platform possesses the legitimate 'means of violence' to limit the online visibility of influencers whose acts may cross the line. In response, experienced content producers strategically coordinate their performance with the help of the platform's functions to be culturally adaptable to the platform and geo-culture. For example, tarot reading, originating in the West as divination, has been articulated by Chinese online diviners on Bilibili, a prominent video community in China, as sheer entertainment to avoid being recognised by the platform and the state as promoting superstition (Fu, Li, and Lee 2022).

Like other video-based social media, Douyin has unique design features, connected to sophisticated sentiments in practice. Starting in 2016, Douyin's short-video platform has been booming in China, and it has become a hotspot for dance trends and popular music. Equipped with a video-creation interface, Douyin affords dance lovers powerful editing capacities to popularise their physical performances by adding various types of music, sound and special effects to their bite-sized videos. The length of each uploaded video is restricted to 15 seconds, which requires the wanghong creators to catch the viewers' attention quickly and to present with instant emotional resonance and behaviours easy to imitate. As part of the process, the platform apparatus mediates the user behaviours and determines how connectivity will occur (Van Dijck and Poell 2013), while

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the same affordance may lead to different affective outcomes. For example, affordances such as hyperlinking and anonymity not only enable expressions of love and support but also have the potential to elicit hate and anger.

As individuals' affective involvement on social media platforms has increased over the last decade, scholars of cultural studies have introduced the concept of 'affective affordance' to analyse the emotional reactions elicited and circulated through platforms from two distinct, but interrelated, perspectives. One considers affective affordance to be 'the ability of media to transpire affects such as hope, but also of dread and despair' (Twigt 2018, 2). The other places greater emphasis on user agency and suggests that 'technologies also afford different tactics for navigating emotional experiences' (Vidolov 2022, 1). Existing studies enlighten us by explaining affective affordances from two intertwined aspects: (a) the properties of the technical architecture, and (b) the emotions and affective affinities (i.e. the capacities to build affective connections with others and capitalise on that influence) stimulated and circulated through the utilisation of the affordances. Through affective affordances, multiple and diverse affective atmospheres come to be produced, transformed and intensified. To understand the affect-imbued atmosphere that emanates and is created in the ongoing negotiation between environment, things and bodies (e.g. human bodies, discursive bodies and non-human bodies; Anderson 2009), the spatiality of the atmosphere matters. An atmosphere is understood not only as occupying a concrete space but also as 'a dyadic space of resonance—atmospheres "radiate" from one individual to another' (Anderson 2009, 80). In this study, the affective atmosphere is specific to the organised assemblage of video elements (e.g. music, colours and symbols) that are entangled with certain shared emotions. This has inspired us further to focus on the relationship between affect and space in the videos of Douyin female dance influencers and on the role of the platform functions within this.

In the case of Douyin, much scholarly attention has been paid to know how the interplay between users and the Douyin interface allows, encourages or discourages particular kinds of performance and affective affinities through the lens of interactive features such as virtual gifting (Dong and Ye 2021). However, Douyin is particularly designed to provide mobile internet users with short videos, which are essentially unidirectional self-presentations and lack reciprocal visibility. Wanghong creators, particularly the females, are 'objects of the gaze, desire, and consumption' (Zhang, Xiang, and Hao 2019), and it is hard for them to discover who is watching. Their online experiences and practices are generally based on how they imagine, perceive and experience the platform's visibility performance and how it becomes possible to concretise these imaginations using the available resources (Bucher 2017). To fill the research gap on women dancers' use of affordances in video communities, this chapter examines how the short videos of influential female dancers on Douyin harness the platform functions and services to embellish and justify their gendered performances in different spatial contexts and how they convert affect-imbued symbolic capital into economic value.

Methodology

The app walkthrough method and textual analysis were applied to understand how female wanghong creators adopt the platform's affordances to monetise their bodily performances on Douyin. We began the study by using the app walkthrough method to 'engage directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences' (Light, Burgess, and Duguay 2018, 882). This method can serve as an initial inquiry that would lay the foundations for further study, in a comprehensive research project, on the socio-cultural phenomena in the apps and platforms

(Fu, Li, and Lee 2022; Leo-Liu and Wu-Ouyang 2022). Leveraging Davis and Chouinard's analytic framework for affordances (Davis and Chouinard 2016), we conducted walkthroughs of Douyin in July 2022 to identify how Douyin's features are designed to request, demand, allow, encourage, discourage and/or refuse particular kinds of action. For example, regarding Bilibili, one of China's largest video-sharing websites, Han Fu, Yihan Li and Francis Lee (2022, 4) indicate that the platform requires users to pass a quiz before posting comments, and it encourages them to participate in real-time discussion via its commentary mechanism *danmu*, 'the real-time scrolling of user comments across the screen', while it retains the power to delete content.

We then conducted a textual analysis of the videos of our targeted female wanghong creators featured on the platform. In November 2021, with the help of Xindou, a platform that presents and analyses the data on Douyin, we constructed a sample of top-tier female wanghong creators in the talent category who had more than 1,000,000 followers. From this, we selected 104 bloggers who labelled themselves dancers and regularly produced video content. Most of them pinned some videos (the platform allows up to three pinned videos) on their personal page for self-disclosure and promotion. When their account names incorporate particular meanings (e.g. sexually suggestive) in Chinese, we will present their original Chinese characters and make further interpretations. To protect the research subject's privacy, we excluded their account ID, which is the unique and trackable personal identifying information on Douyin.

Their videos were watched iteratively for increasingly in-depth analyses, and close attention was paid to (a) wanghong's bodily performances, including their physical appearance and dress, their dance moves, use of special effects for videos, etc., (b) wanghong's 'scripts', especially their profiles, descriptions and recurrent themes in these featured videos, and the interactions between the wanghong creators and their audiences in the comments section and (c) wanghong's Douyin stores (if any), focusing on the merchandise, promotional rhetoric and sales figures.

Overall, through the app walkthrough method and the textual analysis, we aimed to provide a rich description of wanghong's use of affordances in self-promotion and monetisation. In the following section, we consider Douyin as an affective reservoir built upon various kinds of affective atmospheres. We also look into how the female wanghong creators construct an 'affective glue' with others through their physical performances to increase and monetise their visibility.

Douyin Affordances and Dance

Through the app walkthrough, we learned that Douyin provides the dancing wanghong creators with a series of technical features, which enable them to edit and show their bodies as they would like them to be, or as 'trendy'. Douyin's introduction in the Apple app store describes itself through a set of technological affordances, which include smart matching music, auto-generated sync videos to the music beat, user-generated special effects, filters and scene switching. It is claimed that these platform-based functions help users to record 'the good life' on Douyin. After accepting the User Terms of Service and setting certain permissions, the newcomer will be reminded to log in with a personal Chinese mainland phone number to access more services and functions. Registered users are then allowed and encouraged to upload work that can include videos, photos and texts. As Douyin promises in its download introduction, uploaded content can be furnished, distorted and edited to portray certain aesthetics and emotions. With the built-in affordances of the app, female dancers are imbued with the ability to 'choreograph' their own bodies while dancing in front of their mobile phones. For example, the morphing effect allows the dancer to elongate her legs to look sexually attractive when swinging her body in the dance; the headgear effect equips the dancer with an assortment of hairstyles and ornaments, such as sunglasses and veils,

individualising her with multiple personalities such as cool, cute and intellectual. Scenarios and atmospheric effects make the dance fit into a specific time and space in a playful way; for example, with the help of Douyin's scene-shifting special effect, dancers can travel virtually back to Hong Kong discos in the 1990s; while beauty effects allow the performers to create stylish looks with one click. Douyin is far more than a platform on which users simply record life anecdotes to please their audiences. For the users, Douyin functions as a powerful tool through which dancers can freely 'edit' or 'rebrand' their bodies and redefine the space within which they function. Before formally publishing the video, the uploader will be encouraged to add titles and hashtags and use @ to mention their friends and to further increase the likelihood of being seen. The uploaded videos will be published publicly only after they have been approved by the platform. Even if the content is visible only to the uploader, it must comply with the requirements of national laws and regulations, and Douyin retains the power to terminate user accounts and delete content. Once approved, the account owner can manage public postings, such as pinning their video.

Pinned videos provide a window through which we can understand the content creator's concerns over a period of time. Despite the content of the top videos being adjusted in an irregular manner, four types of content were commonly seen: personal dance shows, inspirational personal experiences, collaboration with celebrities and advertising endorsements. According to their different watcher groups, female dancers with a huge follower base will strategically choreograph their visual performances in terms of their body displays, scenes and atmospheres and dressing. Through the connection of objects, texts, scenes and bodies, dancing female wanghong creators on Douyin configure and construct multiple affect-imbued personas to accumulate and benefit from online visibility, representing a form of symbolic capital in cyberspace.

Bodies, Spaces and Dance

Dance, designed to capture the attention within video-based communities, is scripted, choreographed and interpreted through its spaces. The spaces between and around dancers set up the kinds of atmosphere that stimulate and manage specific affective resonances (Briginshaw 2016), which is achieved 'by means of the body, that space is perceived, lived, and produced' (Lefebvre 1991, 162). Inspired by this insight, this section considers body/space relations in female dance performances on Douyin and the role of such conjunctions in constructing and transmitting affects. Private locations, public areas and events and virtual scenes provide three noteworthy spatial possibilities.

Dance videos that are created in private locations or public spaces without bystanders seem to project pseudo individually-tailor-made desire for their audiences to consume. In these videos, the female characters are normally committed to packaging themselves as 'a lover' ready for the audience to 'take away'. Two common tactics of bodily performance are adopted for this purpose: Constructing a sexy body appeal is the first tactic. In such a video, the female performer attempts to create an implicit narrative with sexual undertones, as if her followers will hear 'I am yours' and 'I know you well', even though the performer has no idea who is watching the video. For example, in the bedroom, Houqiqi wore a short skirt and entitled the video 'I heard that boys like girls who dress like this', while Xinzirui dressed in a suspender skirt and moved her body like a languid cat in a dimly lit room, with the hashtag #cat-alike girlfriend# and under the title of 'Oh, caught by you'. A video of Baiwujinji (百無禁忌; uninhibited) in the living room made a similar point: 'I will always love you more than I showed'. There is another level of performance in which the female performer interacts with the camera on the phone. Rather than performing dance, the 'performer' features her body and gestures. For instance, in videos of Luyi, with over 11.03 mil-

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lion followers, she merely stares at the camera and smiles. For this, she has received more than two million likes. Similarly, another well-known girl with more than 9.16 million fans, Ounixiong, sits in a classroom twirling the pen, then leans towards the camera and smiles with a wink: this episode received more than 1.54 million likes. In another video, Badaozongcai (霸道总裁; a domineering CEO) wears a thin, tightly-fitting, knitted sweater in the office, and she implies that the person filming the video may hug her. As the name suggests, she often plays as a company president in videos, flirting with the audience in front of the camera as if he was her employee. Some of her male watchers commented with erotic emoji as if they were that photographer. Both these performance tactics play a role in creating an imaginative utopia that makes the male audience member feel he can establish a romantic relationship with the performer, who is sexualised, vulnerable and non-threatening; it is thus common to see dancers called 'my wife' and 'my girl' by male audiences in the comments section. As in other audio-visual products such as video games, these bodily performances purposely and unintentionally cater to the male gaze and occupy stereotypical gender roles, such as the objects of sexual desire (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2009, 808). Meanwhile, these performances stimulate a multilayer female gaze entangled with complicated emotions, from appreciation and praise to jealousy and sarcasm. Among the cheers of men in a video of Baiwujinji wearing crystal high heels and wielding a sword, a female commented, 'who said that only boys like beautiful women, and girls now also like beautiful sisters'; also, some females unconcealed female wanghong's 'fake' sexiness indicative of long legs and buttocks are only enabled by beauty effects on Douyin. Seen in this way, the enactment of these dancing wanghong, although at first glance consistent with conventional heteropatriarchal gendered relations, opens up a channel for users with different gender identities to collectively (re)articulate the meaning of female body in video-sharing communities.

It is worth noting, however, that not all women dance in sexy outfits to seduce men. Many of the female dancers are engaged in dance teaching and target other women, so their bodily presentations are designed specifically to attract a female audience. They present dance as a means of escape from the moral bondage of being a virtuous wife and good mother (*xianqi liangmu*), and to them, dancing is presented as an effective shortcut to self-determination, freedom and independence. Their followers often call these dancers *teachers* and even build fan groups to support them. For example, the fans of *Tonglaojianshenwu* named themselves '*Tongjiaban*' (Tong's group), and members made a thank-you video for her one-year anniversary of being their teacher. With these dance teaching videos, most comments come from female audiences that praise the instructor or give feedback on their learning experience. Distinct from the rhythmic movements featuring sexual attraction to draw the male gaze, these female-oriented videos draw attention to the dancer's personal stories, which are associated with their positive qualities, such as tenacity, diligence and strength. These resonate with and motivate empathy in viewers with similar individual experiences. In this way, the 'teacher' convinces the spectators that, under her guidance, they can be in the same good shape as her, the dancer. With this comes an increase in attention, fan base and influence.

Dancing in crowded public areas, such as parks and walkways, or at public events such as dance competitions and TV shows, opens up the possibility of reciprocal expressions of support between performers and spectators, confirming the dominant social value of glorifying the dancer as a role model. In women's public dance performances, dancers typically dress conservatively (i.e. fully clothed, instead of wearing skimpy clothes as in private settings). Interestingly, even women who dance outdoors in short skirts and with bare midriffs mostly conceal at least part of their faces with coverings, such as masks or helmets. Constructing an infectious carnival atmosphere is key in these public shows, rather than sexiness aligned with the conventional male gaze. In the top

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videos of this kind that we followed, the dancers usually prioritised episodes of co-shooting with pop stars or their presence on national TV station programmes, such as the ones aired on China Central Television (CCTV). To move from television screens to bite-sized videos, the programmes were cut and edited by the performers so they stood out among the dancing wanghong creators on Douyin. Their dance performance may have been an inconspicuous clip or a moment of an entire television show, but in their personal video clips, they are the center of attention. On the video screen, it is common to see captions in large font above and below the video, prominently introducing the programmes they attended and their performances. Personal performance clips and positive reactions from others (e.g., from stars, hosts, dance judges and ordinary onlookers) are integral parts of the clips captured. This is understandable. In particular, appreciation from celebrities and professionals on state-owned media is a strong endorsement of a dancer's self-branding and could further glorify her as a role model, worthy of attention and imitation. A couple in rural Wenzhou province can serve as an example: the wife, Ying Xiao, went viral on Douyin by videoing her husband learning and choreographing dances to help him recover from a car accident. When CCTV programmes publicised the story and praised their dance as 'contagious and joy-imbued', the couple edited it into short videos and pinned them on Douyin. The comments section is full of praise for them, with some viewers hailing them as 'the pride of Rui'an'[5] and 'the pride of rural China'. In response, they liked and responded to some of the supportive comments, sparking more compliments following their replies. Compared with entertainment-oriented TV shows, the excerpts portrayed in these short videos are more like self-promotion channels for performers to showcase their dancing skills and to attach positive qualities, such as bravery, fortitude and optimism.

Compared with physical spaces, dancing against a virtual background empowers dancers with additional possibilities for bodily expression and control over their bodies. The dancer's body is most often highlighted with the use of the clone effect, a built-in functionality on Douyin, by which a person can be replicated as multiples of themself and occupy most of the screen. The 'doppelgängers' dance with the same moves and clothes, often in a colour that contrasts strongly with the background colour (e.g. they dress in bright red against a dark green scene). This visual shock may grab viewers' attention (see Figure 19.1). This intriguing and eye-catching phenomenon is commonly seen in square dance (*guang-chang-wu*), where virtuality liberates the dancers from the physical limitations and the watchful eyes of the onlookers. In practice, the dancers have the autonomy to customise their performance scenes, control the number and movement of co-dancers and make others disappear.

Affective 'Glue' for Visibility and Monetisation

The platform-enabled affordance for accumulating visibility functions as an affective 'glue' that binds people, or people and other objects, together through shared expectations and a sense of purposefulness. Similar to other online celebrities, evoking and maintaining emotional resonance and bonds with viewers is crucial for the dancing wanghong creators on Douyin if they are to monetise their visibility in the form of viewing time, followers, likes, favourites, comments and retweets (Duffy, Erin, and Hund 2019, 60). In practice, the production, replication and promotion of memes are commonly used by female dancers to construct and maintain their affective affinities, and the affective affinities bond their personas to their target audiences in particular scenes, thereby enabling and facilitating the commercialisation of their bodily performances in the name of health, ease or sexiness. Memes are understood as contagious patterns of 'cultural information' passed from mind to mind, which generate resultant behaviours and actions in a social group
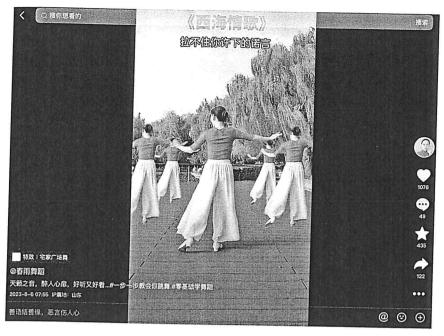
Figure 19.1 Screenshot of a square dance video using the clone effect on Douyin.

(Knobel and Lankshear 2007, 199). Their online spread is usually accompanied by an increase in visibility, popularity and influence. In the case of dancing wanghong creators on Douyin, we found that dance instructors and dancers, known for their attractive figures, are the main players in the memes, in which the @ facility and the Douyin store bond their audiences to them.

In videos about dance teaching, the performers implicitly attach their dance to health, elegance and ease, inspiring their audiences to follow them, to add their videos to their favourites, to attend live-streaming education or to buy a series of dance lessons. Even though most of them are dance amateurs, without professional training, these dance instructors advertise themselves as expert educators. As *Xiaohuangrenyebuwu* claims in her profile, '(I am) specialized in teaching those without dance skills, with uncoordinated limbs, and be low of comprehension', although she mentions in another video that she is an amateur without professional training. As the number of followers (also called students) grows, dancers acquire the power to standardise bodily presentation in terms of aesthetic standards, that is, what is considered right and attractive. In the process, average-ability audiences are inspired to believe that they could do better under the guidance of the performers, whom the followers admire as role models. As a result, the instructors' easy-to-follow dance memes will be widely imitated and reproduced, and the costumes they recommend will sell well. At the same time, a mutually motivating 'teacher–student group' will take shape. On the one hand, the influential dancers manage to promote the audience's confidence and passion in pursuing health and elegance; on the other hand, the fans' trust and support, in turn, stimulates the instructors to devote themselves to their course preparation. Apart from their regular video releases, the female wanghong creators who are primarily engaged in dance teaching, live-stream dance lessons almost every day.

In comparison, female dancers known for their pretty faces and attractive bodies are more committed to the imitation of memes through dance moves, music and special effects. Popular memes

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usually start out of nowhere but always quickly go viral among dancing wanghong creators who fear being left behind the current trend. Narratives in formats such as 'I heard this song/dance is trending recently, and I will try it' are used frequently by these dancers in video descriptions, and they create a clarion call to join in with the meme imitation and replication (Zulli and Zulli 2022, 1872). This trend has probably reinforced, to a large extent, the social stereotype that female wanghong creators look and act the same. They dance the same way, wear the same clothes and have similar facial expressions. However, as in the dance instruction videos, @ and the Douyin stores play a significant role in making the performer stand out from other 'cookie-cutter' performances, increasing their visibility and converting their dance shows into cash.

The @ is a feature used to address someone publicly, with the expectation of a response, even which is unguaranteed. In the case of female dancers on Douyin, the @ does more than spread messages widely as it provides a structure for cooperation and is a linguistic device that enhances resonance. This is different from literary devices such as alliteration, repetition and the generic 'you', which are used to make the text, such as fiction or corporate brand slogans, more memorable and attractive, and which will usually focus on the aesthetics of rhymes to stimulate the reader's empathy (Miller and Toman 2016). In the profiles and video descriptions on Douyin, the @ serves as an outward and directional text symbol that directly connects the sender with the receiver. This interaction, driven by self-promotion, is not only aimed at attention aggregation but also at visibility sharing in exchange for cooperation. The video uploader often uses @ to remind others that she has published a new video relevant to them as an invitation to ask the receivers to transfer it further, to join the onlookers, or to dance together. Sometimes content producers @ their sub-accounts to share visibility internally. In addition, @ can be a direct request for cooperation and assistance. It is often seen that uploaders @ Douyin's official accounts, especially '*Douyin xiaozhushou*' (Douyin assistant) and '*DOU+ xiaozhushou*' (DOU+ assistant), thereby seeking the platform's support to increase their own popularity. This is evident from the profile of *DOU+ xiaozhushou*: 'This is the only official account of Douyin to help you get popular. ⋯ Uploading videos @ DOU+ xiaozhushou, you will be distributed with more traffic and get popular!' As such, @ is not only a symbol of platform-based interaction and collaboration, but it is also a circulated symbolic capital that can be further converted into economic capital via the Douyin stores, which further bind artistic performance, commodities and viewers together.

The Douyin store is an e-commerce feature that allows video producers to sell their products and services. The items most often seen in the female dancers' shops are the costumes used in their videos and livestreaming, in which the female bodies act as billboards. By posting videos streaming themselves using or wearing a product, the wanghong creators motivate their followers to buy these products in the store and they articulate the use of these goods as a means for the fans to get closer to themselves. Narrations such as 'the same clothes as the dancer' and 'only for my fans' are used frequently in product descriptions in the Douyin stores. In this way, dancers justify the purchase and use of these products as upgrades in the relationship of the audience–dancer, moving from 'you and me' to 'us'. This kind of dancing performance portrayed on Douyin is not so much an art show as it is a product display for selling, particularly through the square dancing, where many performers emphasise the store promotion rather than the dance aesthetics. In these videos, the dancers carefully select their outfits and highlight their bodies with special effects, such as virtual backgrounds with a strong contrast to the colour of the clothes, thereby drawing the audience's attention to what they are wearing. In addition, store links are positioned in conspicuous places, such as the first line of text in the video (see Figure 19.2) and the comments at the top.

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Figure 19.2 Screenshot of a female dancer promoting the self-branded dress.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the use of technological affordances by a specific group of female users of Douyin, namely the dancing wanghong creators, who produce and monetise their affective affinities with co-producers, the platform and audiences. We observed that by harnessing the special effects built into the platform, the female dancers are able to choreograph their bodies and construct virtual backdrops to shape their multiple personas with the aim of targeting audience groups with diverse backgrounds and social norms. In other words, their bodily choreographies are often created to be situated within different spatial settings. Specifically, dances with sexual cues are often created in private spaces to cater to the male gaze, where the female dancer works on packaging herself as an available lover whom the audience can 'take away'. Dancing in public usually aligns with social norms and is often attached to positive qualities, such as strength and optimism. Compared to physical spaces, virtual scenarios give the female dancer more playful control over her bodily representation. In videos against virtual backgrounds, it is common to see female dancers digitally manipulating their bodies, such as zooming in and replicating themselves, thereby giving special prominence to the commodities they use and sell.

To accumulate cashable visibility, the symbolic capital of the wanghong creators in video-based communities, the female dancers adopt two significant affective glues (e.g. @ and the Douyin store) to socially connect with others and to commercialise their bodily performances. Specifically, @ is a linguistic device characterised by the outward and directional, and it typically works in two ways. The first is to invite other individuals or agencies to relate to the video in order to increase online exposure and fame for herself and for others she cares about. The second is to request possible support from the platform, such as @ Douyin's official account, thereby drawing the platform's attention for the purpose of gaining official recognition and receiving more traffic. The accumulated

visibility can be further monetised in the Douyin store, which links the dance performance and the product the dancer recommends. The weblink to the store is often inserted in a prominent place on the video screen to entice viewers to browse the product information. At the same time, narrations such as 'only for my fans' frequently appear in product introductions in the store to motivate followers' purchases as a way of getting closer to the performer. In a nutshell, Douyin acts as a body editing tool embedded with special digital effects, where @ circulates symbolic values that could enhance the visibility of the account owner and expand her influence. The Douyin store enables the female dancers to turn symbolic resources (e.g. visibility and fame) into cash, and their bodies often serve as billboards for showcasing and promoting products in their videos.

We hope this study will help to counter the gender stereotypes against female internet celebrities and especially the dancing wanghong creators, whose bodily performances have long been subjected to derogatory labels in contemporary China, such as 'titty streamer' and 'explosive body'. Much negative news pops up when searching the keywords '*douyin nü wanghong*' (抖音女网红; female wanghong on Douyin) online. However, apart from the sexiness, we found that many female dancer wanghong creators are committed to constructing and spreading positive affects, such as optimism and health. Video-based communities, typified by Douyin, equip ordinary women with a set of techniques for editing and branding their gendered bodies. Virtuality seems to empower users with more possibilities for displaying their bodies and choreographing dances. As such, future studies could further investigate the role of virtual technologies in women's liberation, at least, in terms of bodily transformation and self-presentation.

Notes

1 Please refer to: https://www.doit.com.cn/p/432525.html
2 Please refer to: http://pdsc.ruc.edu.cn/docs//2022-03/0f8ae3f3890746caadb1ee0bfdaafe13.pdf
3 Please refer to: https://www.sgpjbg.com/task/28607.html
4 Please refer to: https://lf3-static.bytednsdoc.com/obj/eden-cn/uj_shpjpmmv_ljuhklafi/ljhwZthlaukjlkulzlp/data_reports/douyin_female_data_report.pdf
5 Rui'an is a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Zhejiang Province, China.

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