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Father Influencers' Short Videos in China: Representations of Hybrid Fatherhood and Commercialisation on Xiaohongshu

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Abstract

This study investigates the emerging trend of "dad vlogs" and short videos on Xiaohongshu, a popular lifestyle platform in China that incorporates e-commerce. Specifically, it examines how dad vloggers represent fathers' parenting practices and responsibilities in their videos, and how they construct the commercial aspects of their content. Through a netnography approach and the analysis of 285 popular dad vlogs and short videos created by ten father influencers on Xiaohongshu, the study reveals how these dad vloggers showcase the various activities and efforts involved in raising children. They take on the roles of friend, playmate, and mentor, incorporating a type of humour and playfulness that end up characterising their approach. Notably, a hybrid model of fatherhood has emerged that combines new practices—such as encouragement and an "emotionally strategic" approach—with the traditional Chinese father's role as an educator, aiming to cultivate high-achieving children. Based on such representations, the commercialisation of father influencers' content involves different approaches to integrating product endorsements into well-crafted, informative videos with a well-received persona. The findings provide insights into contemporary parenting practices popularised in short videos, where representations of fatherhood attract large audiences, particularly female viewers, while enabling monetisation in the context of Chinese platform economies.

Keywords

Chinese short-video platforms; dad vlogs; father influencers; fatherhood; parenthood; representation; Xiaohongshu

1. Introduction

Vlogs that discuss various aspects of parenting, including family activities, parenting tips, and product reviews, have become increasingly popular on video platforms. While scholars have extensively studied "mommy blogs" and "mommy vlogs" (e.g., Abetz & Moore, 2018; G. He et al., 2022; Lehto, 2020; Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2011), there is a noticeable lack of research on dad vlogs and short videos in which fathers share their parenting experiences, insights, and advice. A comparative study of mommy blogs and dad blogs reveals gendered nuances in blog framings of parenting, and that intensive parenting culture affects both mothers and fathers in similar but also different ways (Scheibling & Milkie, 2023). Compared to blogs, newer social media platforms such as TikTok may challenge parental norms and gendered messages more radically (Scheibling & Milkie, 2023). It is therefore important to study dad vlogs and short videos on social media to understand how they challenge traditional parenting norms and to identify their characteristics in representing parenting practices.

Dad vlogs and short videos in the Chinese context present an interesting area for research, given the widespread popularity of short videos in China and their potential to challenge traditional stereotypes of fathers as distant or uninvolved. These videos feature fathers actively participating in childcare, documenting their parenting journeys, and sharing parenting advice. It is intriguing to explore how dad vloggers construct fatherhood and whether these representations reinforce patriarchal structures. Moreover, with both mother and father influencers showcasing goods and services in their content, there is growing concern about the ongoing monetisation of parenting media. The question arises as to whether these media primarily serve as informative resources for parents or as marketing tools aimed at parents as consumers (Scheibling & Milkie, 2023). In this context, dad vlogs and short videos in China can also provide valuable insights, as sponsored videos still have the potential to attract thousands of likes and generate lively interactions on Chinese social media platforms.

This study examines representations of fatherhood in dad vlogs and short videos as well as their commercialisation on Xiaohongshu, a platform in China, similar to Instagram and Pinterest, that has evolved into a lifestyle platform with e-commerce integration. Focusing on 285 popular dad vlogs and short videos by ten father influencers on Xiaohongshu, the study poses the following key question: How do dad vlogs and short videos on Xiaohongshu represent the responsibilities and parenting practices of fathers in China today, and how do they incorporate elements of commercialisation?

This study builds on the theory of hybrid fatherhood (Randles, 2018). Based on a netnography approach and thematic analysis, we propose that a hybrid model of fatherhood has emerged that combines new practices (such as encouragement and an "emotionally strategic" approach) with the traditional Chinese father's role as an educator, aiming to cultivate high-achieving children. Hybrid fatherhood thus serves both as the theoretical framework for this study and as a distinct finding in the Chinese context. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about parenting practices in short videos, where representations of fatherhood resonate with large audiences, particularly female viewers, while enabling monetisation in the context of Chinese platform economies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hybrid Fatherhood

The study of fatherhood has been a significant area of interest for scholars, with a growing amount of research in recent years focusing on fathering and hybrid masculinities (e.g., Carian & Abromaviciute, 2023; Randles, 2018; Wang & Keizer, 2024). Hybrid masculinity describes a phenomenon in which men selectively integrate aspects of marginalised masculinities and femininities into their identities and behaviours (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). It discursively distances men from hegemonic masculinity and signals shifts in styles of hegemonic masculinity. Some men construct a hybrid masculinity by strategically appropriating traits traditionally defined as feminine and describing themselves as caring (Eisen & Yamashita, 2019). Paradoxically, hybrid masculinity reinforces rather than challenges existing gender hierarchies. It reproduces systems of gendered and sexual inequalities while obscuring this process (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Building on the theory of hybrid masculinities, studies on fatherhood have explored how fathers incorporate elements stereotypically associated with femininity, such as caregiving and emotional expressiveness, alongside more traditional breadwinning aspects. In particular, Randles (2018) theorises hybrid fatherhood as a discourse of paternal engagement that promotes the idea that fathers, especially those from marginalised groups, should engage emotionally with their children, encouraging fathers to be masculine role models that mothers alone cannot provide. This discourse suggests that responsible fathering involves embracing a nurturing, care-focused hybrid paternal identity. However, as Randles (2018) points out, the discourse of hybrid fatherhood is based on patriarchal assumptions. Rather than highlighting the practical and emotional contributions that fathers can make to their children's lives, the discourse suggests that their value is inherent in their gender (Randles, 2018). This discourse sustains gender, race, and class inequalities, failing to address the impact of class and race inequalities on marginalised men's parental involvement and advocate for gender-egalitarian parenting.

Some studies have explored hybrid fatherhood in different cultural contexts (e.g., Cannito, 2019; Randles, 2018; Scheibling, 2019a). For example, a hybrid model of fatherhood has been identified among Italian fathers, challenging the distinction between traditional and new fatherhood (Cannito, 2019). However, as most existing studies have focused on Western societies, it is intriguing to consider how elements of hybrid fatherhood might differ in other contexts, which are shaped by different cultural and parenting traditions, as well as social trends.

2.2. Reconstructing Fatherhood in the Digital Age

The media, particularly digital platforms, play a crucial role in shaping and disseminating evolving fatherhood. Social media has provided a transformative space for fathers to redefine their roles and challenge traditional notions of masculinity and stereotypes about dads (e.g., Scheibling, 2019b, 2020). In a study by Scheibling (2019b), dad bloggers reject stereotypes of being "bad" fathers, while also pushing back against the stereotype of being a "good" or "super" dad, which often refers to stay-at-home dads or celebrity fathers publicly caring for their children. Although many dad bloggers live up to the "super dad" image, they resist being labelled as such. Instead, they seek to reshape prevailing beliefs about fatherhood, advocating for the normalisation of active and nurturing parenting by dads, which Scheibling (2019b, p. 15) describes as "a new ideology of

normalised involved fatherhood." They therefore form the basis of a group culture referred to as "the culture of fatherhood 2.0" (p. 15), which promotes the idea that caregiving fathers should be seen as capable, but not exceptional.

Although the studies have examined the meaningful practices of dad bloggers, further research in the following areas could deepen our understanding of fatherhood in the digital age. First, with the expansion of the platform economy, where commercialised content is ubiquitous, there is a growing need for research into the commercialisation of social media content created by fathers. Existing studies have examined the monetisation of mommy blogs and the commercialisation of parenting experiences through "sharenting" (sharing content about one's child on social media; see, e.g., Archer, 2019; Campana et al., 2020; Hunter, 2016; Jorge et al., 2022). In a study focusing on father influencers on Instagram, scholars suggest that they engage in "sharenting labour," which involves sharing parenting experiences for monetary gain (Campana et al., 2020). They perform relational, connective, and emotional labour while creating commercial imagery of fatherhood for sponsoring brands (Campana et al., 2020). How father influencers construct commercial representations of fatherhood on social media platforms remains an important area of research.

Second, it is crucial to pay more attention to the diversity of contemporary fatherhood on social media. Existing research suggests that the demographic profile of dad bloggers is predominantly made up of individuals who are "white, heterosexual, married, and relatively affluent men" (Scheibling, 2019b, p. 15). The experiences and practices shared by these bloggers may not fully represent the diversity of contemporary fatherhood, given the complexity of fatherhood in different cultural contexts and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as the variety of digital practices observed worldwide. Thus, it is recommended to consider variations in parenting content by race, class, sexuality, and marital status (Scheibling & Milkie, 2023).

Finally, on platforms that use algorithms, the role of visual media, such as dad vlogs and short videos, in articulating fatherhood remains underexplored. Dad vlogs, which capture snapshots of everyday fathering, use visual and auditory elements to communicate emotions and experiences in a more immediate and engaging way. This contrasts with dad bloggers, who offer a more retrospective account of their experiences. Moreover, scholars have noted the rise of traffic media in China, which prioritise maximising and controlling user attention through algorithmic technologies (Zhang et al., 2020). On traffic media such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu, independent content creators often use tactics to "play with" or "please" algorithms in the hope of increasing their traffic (Zhang et al., 2020). With the influences of algorithms and commercialised elements mentioned above, the resulting representation of fatherhood in dad vlogs and short videos can be more intricate. These aspects suggest that studying dad vlogs and short videos on social media platforms in a non-Western context could complicate or enrich current narratives of fatherhood.

2.3. Fatherhood in China and Media Representations

Fatherhood in China has changed dramatically in response to rapid social, economic, and cultural shifts. Traditionally, Confucianism has had a significant influence on Chinese family life, establishing a patriarchal structure that creates dual hierarchical relationships (Li, 2020; Xu, 2016). A key aspect is the hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship (Wu, 2012). Parental control, referred to as *guan* in Chinese, embodies not only the guidance and supervision of parents for the success of their children but also the understanding and obedience of children to their parents' instructions (Wu, 2012). In this style of Chinese parenting,

authority is a defining characteristic, and expressions of parental love are often subtle (Li & Lamb, 2015). Fathers were responsible for teaching children social etiquette, disciplining misbehaviour, and acting as role models rather than being directly involved in child rearing, which was not considered a masculine activity for fathers (Cao & Lin, 2019). The prevalent "strict father, kind mother" model of parenting reflects the norm that fathers and offspring need to have "a smooth yet distant father–child relationship" to ensure parental authority (Li & Lamb, 2015, p. 277).

Another aspect is the hierarchy between men and women. The old sayings reflect traditional Chinese gender roles, such as "men take care of things outside the family whereas women take care of things inside the family" (*nan zhu wai, nü zhu nei*; Shek, 2006). Consequently, Chinese fathers were expected to be the financial providers and to make important family and child-related decisions (Chuang & Su, 2009), while mothers were responsible for caring for the family and taking on daily childcare activities (Shen & Jiao, 2024). The powerful role of the father was defined as "master of the family" (*yi jia zhi zhu*; Chuang & Su, 2009), positioning men as the head of the household.

In the early 1900s, progressive elites embraced and promoted a modern version of fatherhood, characterised by child-centredness and affectionate displays between parents and children, in contrast to the traditional, power-assertive father role; however, authoritarian fatherhood remained the norm in society (Li, 2020). Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, traditional patriarchal fatherhood has undergone dramatic changes. In particular, the state has taken over the educational responsibilities traditionally held by fathers, while also undermining their patriarchal power (Li, 2020). The economic reforms of 1978 in China marked a further shift in fatherhood, emphasising the revival of the traditional male breadwinner role and rearticulating the importance of the paternal role of provider (Cao & Lin, 2019).

China's one-child policy has led to the majority of urban Chinese youth born after 1979 lacking siblings, prompting intense parental focus on their only child as the family's hope (Fong, 2004; Xu & Yeung, 2013). With the significant investment of their parents, many people who are an only child can enjoy high living standards and educational opportunities (Fong, 2004; Xu & Yeung, 2013). In contemporary Chinese families, fathers are increasingly involved in their children's daily lives and education, shifting from aloof disciplinarians to more involved and affectionate dads (Li & Jankowiak, 2016). In a study by Xu and O'Brien (2014), for example, fathers are described as close and supportive, in contrast to the stereotype of the strict father. Chinese fathers are changing their parenting style from the traditional strict, distant figure to a warmer, more affectionate role. An increasing number of fathers are proud to be called "nurturing fathers" (*nai ba*), a term that describes their active participation in the daily care and upbringing of their children (S. He, 2020). The term *nai ba* challenges traditional gender stereotypes by shifting the father's role from being primarily the family breadwinner to a more involved and nurturing father figure, in line with modern societal expectations of fatherhood and family responsibilities (S. He, 2020).

Scholars have examined different representations of fatherhood. For example, "dadvertising" portrays fathers with ideal masculinity, focusing on involved parenting and emotional vulnerability (Leader, 2019). On social media and at conferences, dad bloggers challenge traditional notions of masculinity and create "caring masculinities" through representations and interactions (Scheibling, 2020). In the Chinese context, existing research on media representations of fatherhood has largely focused on traditional media, particularly television programmes (e.g., Jiang, 2018; Song, 2019). The reality TV series *Where Are We Going,*

Dad? has been recognised as a representation of changing parenting practices and serves as a cultural site to encourage a re-examination of traditional parenting practices and the role of fathers in China (Jiang, 2018). While discussions about motherhood and parenting on social media platforms have increased in recent years (e.g., Han & Kuipers, 2021; Shen & Jiao, 2024), Chinese fatherhood in the digital realm remains understudied. Given the increasing popularity of short videos in China and their integration into everyday life, it is crucial to examine how fathering practices are represented in these videos.

3. Methods

Given the exploratory nature of the research, this study employs a qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of dad vlogs and short videos. It specifically focuses on the popular videos produced by dad vloggers on Xiaohongshu. The platform boasts three million active users. Of these, approximately 70% are female, 50% reside in first- and second-tier cities in China, and 77% are aged between 18 and 34 (Qian Gua, 2024). Notably, about 22.06% of these users are mothers. This makes Xiaohongshu a highly frequented platform for sharing motherhood and parenting content in China (Qian Gua, 2024). Xiaohongshu encourages users to share various aspects of their lives, from daily routines to product experiences, inspiring people to explore and connect with different lifestyles (Xiaohongshu, 2021). Its promotional culture is closely linked to the rise of user-generated product reviews. Compared to other platforms, Xiaohongshu combines "personal life experiences" and "genuine, friendly" content with commerce, making it a popular resource for lifestyle choices (Xiaohongshu, 2023). This aspect of Xiaohongshu's culture ensures that dad vlogs and short videos are filled with representations of everyday parenting practices, even when commercial elements are included.

To identify influential dad vloggers on Xiaohongshu, a search was conducted on the Xinhong data platform. The keywords "nurturing father" (*nai ba*) and "dad" (*ba ba*) were used, targeting either account names or user descriptions. This search revealed a group of dad vloggers who primarily produce parenting content. A total of ten father influencers were selected based on their popularity and the relevance and sufficiency of their content to our research, with followers ranging from 206,962 to 921,499 on Xiaohongshu (see Table 1). We also made sure to include dad vloggers with different personas, professional backgrounds, and content styles. More than half of the father influencers in this study are affiliated with multi-channel network agencies. This affiliation suggests that these vloggers receive training in persona development, style, photography, editing, and copywriting, leading to more organised and planned content production (Yu & Li, 2022). A certain level of popularity among dad vloggers not only provides a foundation for their commercialisation but also increases both the views of their content and the level of interaction with their audience.

We conducted a netnography of the accounts of the ten father influencers (Kozinets, 2019). In the first phase, we immersed ourselves in these accounts on Xiaohongshu, observing their self-introductions, posted videos, hashtags, comments, and interactions between the influencers and commenters. We also observed content from other dad vloggers and mommy vloggers to gain a broader understanding of typical content trends and to identify the unique characteristics that set these ten father influencers apart. Many mommy vloggers started earlier and have more followers than daddy vloggers. However, when comparing dad and mommy vloggers with similar numbers of followers who post similar parenting content, their metrics such as likes, saves, and comments show little difference. Dad vloggers tend to have more collaborations with sponsoring brands than

Table 1. Information about the selected dad vloggers and short videos on Xiaohongshu (data collected in April 2024).

Dad vlogger	Location	Followers	Wording in the introduction (in Chinese)	Children	The number of likes on his most popular short video	Number of sampled short videos with over 1,000 likes
@dad 1	Beijing, China	483912	*ba ba* (*nai ba* is used in some videos)	one daughter and one son	39156	30
@dad 2	Hebei, China	305708	*nai ba*	one daughter and one son	54507	30
@dad 3	Beijing, China	631259	*ba ba*	one daughter and one son	103037	30
@dad 4	Guangdong, China	334670	*nai ba*	one daughter	7707	30
@dad 5	Guangdong, China	274864	*nai ba*	two daughters	6126	21
@dad 6	Beijing, China	921499	*ba ba*	one daughter	41189	30
@dad 7	Guangdong, China	588162	*ba ba* (*nai ba* is used in some videos)	one son	92066	30
@dad 8	Zhejiang, China	415361	*ba ba* (*nai ba* is used in some videos)	one daughter and one son	12147	24
@dad 9	Shanxi, China	507091	*ba ba* (*nai ba* is used in some videos)	one daughter	49120	30
@dad 10	Hebei, China	206962	*ba ba*	one son	25588	30

mommy vloggers, although it is unclear whether this is due to their greater interest in commercialisation or the preferences of the brands.

Based on the general information about the followers of these accounts available on Xinhong, the audience for father influencers' videos is predominantly female. In addition, our observations suggest that the majority of commenters on dad vlogs and short videos are also female. The predominantly female audience aligns with the primary consumers of the Chinese maternal and infant market. Mothers tend to make most of the purchasing decisions for childcare products, which has led to the rise of social media influencers who use their expertise to offer specialised advice and recommendations (Zhao, 2023). With a large proportion of female followers, dad vlogs and short videos can spark discussions about children and parenting among female viewers, and sometimes discussions about fatherhood and gender.

In the second phase, we collected popular dad vlogs and short videos from the ten father influencers, which involved several steps. Initially, Xinhong was used to collect all vlogs and short videos with more than 1,000 likes created by the ten influencers from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. Subsequently, these videos were organised based on the number of "likes" they received. Videos with more than 1,000 likes from each vlogger were chosen to capture content with high engagement and strong audience interest. The top 30 most popular

videos for each vlogger were selected to ensure a comprehensive representation of their content. In cases where fewer than 30 videos received 1,000 likes for a particular dad vlogger, all available videos were included. In total, 285 dad vlogs and short videos were collected, none of which had durations longer than a few minutes.

A thematic analysis of these collected videos on Xiaohongshu was conducted, which provided insights into the recurring themes and narratives they presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We first familiarised ourselves with the data by repeatedly watching the short videos and reading the transcripts. Initial codes were generated and the relevant coded data extracts were then collated into potential themes. Particular attention was paid to representations of fathering practices and responsibilities, comparisons with traditional Chinese fathering, and aspects of commercialisation. Finally, the themes were reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the overall dataset. They were refined as follows: humour and playfulness in representations of fatherhood; an emotionally strategic approach to educating children; and commodification of parenting experiences and everyday family life.

4. Discussions

4.1. Humour and Playfulness in Representations of Fatherhood

Many dad vlogs and short videos are tagged with #DadWithKids (*baba daiwa*) or similar hashtags. For some dad vloggers, a frequently used hashtag related to fatherhood is #DadHasWaysToRaiseKids (*baba daiwa you banfa*), with the videos showcasing the resourceful role of young fathers. In these videos, fathers have their own unique and interesting ways of raising children. In some cases, the dad vloggers' narratives show a sense of humour, highlighting the joy of parenting and turning difficulties of parenting into special memories. For example, @dad 9 humorously shows his care for his daughter, as well as his personal thoughts and feelings about raising her. In one of his short videos, entitled *An Annual Performance Report of a Married Man*, he comments on his experiences of caring for his daughter over the past year:

> Our little friend still loves to cry and probably cried over 200 times during the year. With 365 days a year and three meals a day, 1095 meals in total, almost none of them were eaten with full attention. The most memorable moment was when she got sick and I took her to the hospital twice. I suddenly realised that the hundreds of times she cried and did not eat with full attention throughout the year were insignificant compared to her health. (12044 likes, 280 saves, 262 comments)

This father influencer starts by describing the video as an "annual family performance report" to assess whether he is a qualified husband and father, joking about his role in the family. He takes a humorous approach to the challenges of parenting, sharing clips of his daughter crying and eating inattentively. The video lightens the mood while highlighting the prevalence of parenting difficulties and the father's emotional investment in his child. It evokes emotion through sharenting (Campana et al., 2020), in this case combining humour with a father's sensitivity. It is worth noting that unlike the self-mocking humour of Chinese mothers on TikTok, who ironically portray themselves as "desperate" or "hopeless" (Han & Kuipers, 2021), this father influencer emphasises his progress and skills rather than mocking himself. He humorously addresses the challenges of caring for his daughter, including her crying and inattentive eating habits. Like other dad vlogs and short videos tagged with #DadHasWaysToRaiseKid, this short video portrays the father influencer as resourceful and demonstrates his ability to handle difficult parenting situations.

In dad vlogs and short videos, father influencers are portrayed as actively engaging in various daily activities with their children, taking on the roles of friends, playmates, and mentors, rather than adhering to the strict, authoritarian father figure commonly seen in traditional Chinese families (Chuang & Su, 2009; Wang & Keizer, 2024). In the past, Chinese fathers were often not very involved in their children's daily lives, focusing instead on providing financial support. However, the emergence of dad vloggers signals a shift, as these fathers are deeply committed to being actively present in their children's lives, participating in every stage and special moment of their growth. They promote and demonstrate a collaborative approach to parenting. Their vlogs and short videos show not only the quality time they spend with their children but also the everyday tasks involved in caring for them. These activities include playing with their children, preparing meals, teaching them new skills such as cycling and swimming, bathing them, reading to them at bedtime, picking them up from school, going on trips, and capturing special moments through photography, among others. The representations of various fathering practices are consistent with a recent study showing that fathers embrace the idea of *pei* (companionship) and spend time with their children (Wang & Keizer, 2024). Their representations challenge the public discourse on widow-style parenting, which criticises and mocks "the prevailing parenting norm in which fathers have minimal involvement in childcare and education, leaving the mother with the majority of the responsibility, similar to that of a widow" (Shen & Jiao, 2024, p. 1).

Like the short video discussed above, the progressive parenting styles shown in dad vlogs and short videos are often well-received by commenters. They frequently praise the children and sometimes wish there were more fathers like the influencers they see. In a rare instance, a male commentator mentions that work can make it challenging to spend quality time with kids. Other commentators point out that mothers also work, suggesting that hard work should not excuse men from sharing parenting responsibilities. This type of dialogue among commentators partly explains why representations of caring fatherhood appeal to viewers, especially women who desire more recognition for mothers' contributions and increased involvement of fathers in parenting.

In addition to the humour discussed above, another key feature of their representations of fatherhood is playfulness. In dad vlogs and short videos, father influencers try to bring creativity to their companionship. These representations often include playful interactions, such as fathers playing with their kids or children playing pranks on their fathers. For instance, @dad 1 shares several videos of his children playing pranks on him, such as splashing him in the swimming pool or playfully throwing wet paper at him as if in a snowball fight. While dad vloggers increasingly portray childcare in videos similar to mommy vloggers, their playful interactions stand out and are less commonly seen in representations of mommy vloggers. Through playful activities, these father influencers create environments where children can express themselves freely in their daily interactions. They redefine behaviours once considered rebellious into acceptable jokes. These representations illustrate moments of bonding and playfulness, challenging the traditional strict father figure and contrasting with audiences' stereotypes of fathers.

4.2. An Emotionally Strategic Approach to Educating Children

Scenes of encouragement and emotional support are common in the dad vlogs and short videos sampled, suggesting a shift from the traditional notion of "a father's love as silent as the mountain" (*fuai rushan*) to a more expressive and emotional approach to fatherhood. However, this shift subtly fulfils the traditional Chinese father's role as an educator and serves the purpose of cultivating children (*jiao*; Cao & Lin, 2019),

resulting in a hybrid model of fatherhood that combines new practices with traditional roles. Such hybrid fatherhood is reflected in dad vlogs and short videos in two main ways. First, dad vloggers incorporate practices of encouragement into their daily interactions with their children. The encouragement of father influencers is consistent with research showing that fathers consider encouraging words to be an important daily fathering practice, as well as showing positive emotions to their children (Wang & Keizer, 2024). The encouragement styles of some dad vloggers in this study appear to be more expressive, presumably because of their vlogging scenarios and as a way to enhance the entertaining elements of their short videos. The occasions for encouragement can be as big as the children's participation in competitions, or as small as the children finishing their meals. Other dad vloggers tend to be more thoughtful or deliberate in their encouragement practices, as exemplified by the suggestions by @dad 10:

> To encourage a sense of responsibility in children, tell them that the family really can't function without them; this empowers them and makes them feel like an indispensable member of the family. To build self-confidence in children, tell them that next month they'll be able to do it, and next year it won't be difficult at all. This instils a growth mindset in children, letting them know that all difficulties can be overcome with effort. (1439 likes, 1004 saves, 6 comments)

This dad vlogger uses positive affirmations to empower children, focusing on fostering a sense of responsibility and self-confidence. His parenting strategies illustrate how contemporary Chinese parents consciously use the opportunity of everyday interactions with their children to develop them into "high-achieving [*youxiu*], emotionally well-adjusted, and considerate individuals" (Li & Jankowiak, 2016, p. 189). In contemporary China, fathers are expected not only to provide sufficient financial resources for their offspring (raise/feed, or *yang* in Chinese), but also to raise confident, competitive, independent, and happy children with a promising future (educate/cultivate, or *jiao* in Chinese; Cao & Lin, 2019). The encouraging approach to cultivating children, while different from the distant fathering role, is closely aligned with the strong emphasis on *jiao* in traditional Chinese fathering practices (Cao & Lin, 2019).

Second, some dad vloggers not only provide positive affirmations to their children, but also respond skilfully to difficult interactions, fulfilling the purpose of *Jiao*. For instance, @dad 8 discusses parent-child communication extensively in his videos. In one video, he talks about empathetic ways to respond to disappointed children:

> One mistake parents make when expressing empathy is the tendency to follow empathic language with a "but," which is not really comforting to someone in need. To avoid this, I have two tips. The first tip is to replace the "but" with an expression of your own feelings....The second tip is to replace "but" with a question. Instead of closing the door on the child with a "but," asking a question invites the child to work together to find a solution. (4958 likes, 4021 saves, 293 comments)

This video draws attention to children's emotional wellbeing, pointing to an emotionally strategic approach advocated by some dad vloggers. To effectively engage in this emotional work and foster a deeper connection with their children, parents need to learn techniques such as acknowledging and validating their children's emotions and avoiding language that undermines their empathic intentions, such as the use of "but." Fathers are thus encouraged to adopt traditionally feminine traits such as caring and emotional expressiveness. Indeed, emotional involvement in Chinese fathering practices is increasingly recognised and is becoming an important aspect of contemporary Chinese masculinity (Wang & Keizer, 2024; Xu & O'Brien,

2014). Notably, this study suggests that efforts to support children's emotional well-being extend beyond simply offering positive affirmations, and also involve adeptly navigating challenging interactions with specific intentions. With the intention of "inviting the child to work together to find a solution," this video can be seen as a clear example of *jiao*, in line with traditional Chinese fathering practices. The aim is to promote the development of psychologically healthy children, reflecting the prevailing "psychologized" discourse on child development in contemporary Chinese society (Li & Jankowiak, 2016, p. 189).

In discussing hybrid fatherhood, which combines new practices such as positive affirmations and an emotionally strategic approach to father-child interactions with the traditional Chinese paternal role of educating children, it is worth noting that dad vlogs and short videos also demonstrate unconditional love and support for their children. A representative example is the fathers' support for their children's hobbies. For example, in the short video entitled *Why Are Her Eye Sockets So Dark? It's Because of Her Deep Love for Latin Dance!*, @dad 3 reflects on how his daughter persists in learning and practising dance, despite her clumsiness as a beginner:

> When it comes to the child's hobby, we as parents should not have ulterior motives, hoping that she will achieve this or that. Her hobby is her hobby and it's not a transaction where our time must necessarily produce a result. Her optimism and positivity can melt away all the negative emotions that any difficulties bring. Parents simply need to keep providing her with a nurturing environment of joy and happiness. (103037 likes, 6113 saves, 916 comments)

This quote shows that @dad 3 supports his daughter in pursuing her own passions, while respecting her individuality. More importantly, the father rejects the idea that a parent's time and effort should be seen as an investment that must produce a specific result, suggesting a philosophy of unconditional love with no expectation of return. Fathers' involvement in their children's education is often associated with high expectations for children's success (Xu & Yeung, 2013). However, this dad vlogger suggests a more nuanced perspective, indicating a growing complexity in Chinese parenting practices. While many parents aim to raise high-achieving individuals, as seen in the videos discussed earlier in this section, they also respect their children's individuality and adjust expectations as necessary.

4.3. Commodification of Parenting Experiences and Everyday Family Life

The realm of dad vlogs and short videos has seen a significant increase in commercialisation as vloggers integrate product endorsements into their content. Although dad vloggers may present fatherhood in similar ways, the commercial opportunities depend on several factors, including the classification of the vlogger. Influencers on Xiaohongshu are classified based on their follower counts, content statistics such as likes and interactions, and rates for product endorsements. While it is difficult to determine the social class of the ten father influencers in real life, identities such as former national athlete or PhD likely help them attract attention more quickly than average individuals on Xiaohongshu. Organised, high-quality content and a well-received persona also help these influencers attain higher statuses on Xiaohongshu, leading to greater visibility, more attention, and more endorsement opportunities. There are two main types of content creators on Xiaohongshu: spontaneous users who post out of personal interest, and strategic content providers who adhere to community rules and commercial goals (Yu & Li, 2022). Based on our observations, less popular dad vloggers on Xiaohongshu often have irregular posting schedules, inconsistent content

styles, and overly commercialised material. In contrast, the ten father influencers in this study produce well-crafted, informative, and subtly commercialised videos.

The father influencers draw inspiration from their lives and vlogging experiences, as well as from trending topics on the platform and interactions with their audience, such as questions from followers. They have a deep understanding of the platform's algorithmic recommendations and actively address their followers' parenting concerns. Among the ten father influencers in this study, there are three main types based on their positioning and content development. The first type has a clear focus from the start. For example, @dad 5 consistently shares parenting tips, while @dad 6 emphasises understanding from a child's perspective. The second type starts as a personal diary with a somewhat vague positioning, but gains popularity. Based on what attracts attention, these vloggers then focus on parenting practices and sharing their children's daily lives, such as @dad 1, @dad 3, and @dad 9. The third type consists of dad vloggers who initially focus on other topics, but later shift to parenting content after getting married and becoming fathers. For example, @dad 2 started vlogging about pregnancy nutrition, mother and baby care product recommendations, and parenting advice after his wife became pregnant.

Integrating product endorsements into discussions about parenting experiences and product recommendations, or incorporating them into storytelling about everyday family life, are the two main approaches these father influencers use in their sponsored videos. In the first approach, a key feature of these short videos is their informative nature, often with a dad vlogger speaking directly into the camera, sharing his ideas and recommendations, drawing on his knowledge and personal experience. These informative videos showcase two distinct styles of endorsement, aligning with the typical approach of dad vloggers. The first style is more personal, where the dad vlogger shares his child's experiences as a consumer while providing detailed information about a product. A typical example of this is infant formula. In the short video, entitled *From Tiny Baby to Chubby Cheeks, I'm So Proud as a* Nai Ba (7512 likes, 1610 saves, 282 comments), @dad 4 reflects on his child's healthy growth with the help of a particular brand of formula. The video features heartwarming clips of the dad cradling the baby, the baby eating, smiling, and enjoying various indoor and outdoor activities. Before highlighting the brand of formula, the dad vlogger acknowledges that the choice of formula is a personal one and may vary depending on the specific needs of each baby. He also emphasises that he is very selective about which brands he endorses, only recommending those that his own child has used and had positive experiences with.

The second style of endorsement, seen in these informative videos, takes a more educational approach, targeting new parents with specific advice and information on parenting. These videos typically serve as how-to guides, focusing on specific topics related to child-rearing, including practices that promote children's well-being and physical and intellectual development, as well as discussing behaviours and habits that may hinder their overall growth, and addressing nutrition and skin care concerns. The integration of sponsored products is often woven into the content, rather than being the central focus of the video. For example, in a series of short videos by @dad 2, he features a particular brand of infant formula in videos entitled *6 Foolish Behaviours That Harm a Child's Intelligence—Don't Do Them*, *6 Things That Seem Good for Children But Actually Damage Intelligence*, and *7 Foods That Smart Babies All Eat*. Throughout these videos, he provides nutritional science to support his product recommendations. This style of informative sponsored videos requires the expertise of the vlogger, positioning the vlogger as a trusted advisor and increasing the credibility of product recommendations. The PhD identity of this dad vlogger validates his persona with

scientific expertise. To enhance the visual appeal, he combines his own commentary with images of scientific reports and clips of his child, creating a visually engaging and informative experience for viewers. In addition, he frequently highlights children's intelligence while endorsing products to attract the attention of new parents, presumably targeting those hoping to raise high-achieving and competitive children.

The second approach to sponsored videos often involves creating a narrative, with dad vloggers chatting or participating in activities with their children, such as playing games, while integrating product recommendations into the storyline. By blending storytelling and product information, they not only showcase products but also ensure that they align with the rest of their everyday life videos. This approach also encompasses a range of styles, from light-hearted to heart-warming content. For example, a short video from @dad 1 titled *What? The Dad Lets Kids Do Homework in the Car!* (16140 likes, 4401 saves, 84 comments) is a portrayal of a family's morning routine in which the children are scrambling to finish their homework before heading off to school. The father influencer pleasantly surprises them with a new car that offers ample space and advanced technology, enabling the children to make the most of their commute by studying. The title of the short video plays on the stereotype that dads often do awkward things while spending time with their children. However, the video depicts his thoughtful solution to a problem faced by the children. While the video shows his caring nature, the car endorsement is in line with traditional masculine qualities and reflects the traditional Chinese fatherly role of provider. Hybrid fatherhood is therefore evident in commercialised videos like this. Incorporating product promotion into family interactions subtly minimises the commercial aspects of the videos, even though they are scripted.

5. Conclusion

By analysing popular dad vlogs and short videos on Xiaohongshu, this study reveals key characteristics of how dad vloggers represent fatherhood and engage in commercial activities within the Chinese platform economy. Firstly, dad vloggers show the various activities and efforts involved in raising children, taking on the role of friend, playmate, and mentor, in contrast to the strict, authoritarian father figure found in traditional Chinese families. Dad vloggers who showcase nurturing roles are more likely to attract female viewers' attention, as their content resonates with mothers' desire for greater recognition of their contributions and increased involvement from fathers in childcare. Second, a hybrid model of fatherhood has emerged that combines new practices such as encouragement and an emotionally strategic approach with the traditional Chinese father's role as an educator whose goal is to cultivate children. While this model of fatherhood reflects a transnational shift towards a more caring role (e.g., Cannito, 2019; Randles, 2018; Scheibling, 2019a, 2020), the representations in this study also promote the traditional Chinese father's responsibility to cultivate high-achieving children (Li & Jankowiak, 2016). Finally, the commercialisation of father influencers' content involves various approaches to integrating product endorsements into well-crafted, informative videos with a well-received persona. These videos not only showcase fathers' caring moments but also highlight their proven expertise and capabilities as providers in traditional Chinese fatherhood. However, the platform designates different classes of influencers, making it difficult for most dad vloggers to achieve the same level of popularity and financial benefits as the sampled father influencers. As a result, the platform to some extent reinforces class inequality among content creators.

The findings have two main implications for the current discussions on hybrid fatherhood. Firstly, in the study of Randles (2018), the discourse of hybrid fatherhood does not call for men to share household and

childcare responsibilities equally. Instead, it reinforces patriarchal power by framing men as "helpers" and emphasising how to maintain masculine identities. In contrast, the representations of fatherhood on Xiaohongshu emphasise the multiple responsibilities and considerable efforts of fatherhood. Fathers are actively involved in various daily activities with their children and present themselves as resourceful, caring, and encouraging. As a result, the differences in content between mommy vloggers and daddy vloggers are diminishing. However, certain representations of parenting practices, such as humour and playfulness, are presented by these fathers as unique to their approach. Secondly, while Randles (2018) suggests that the value of fathers in the discourse of hybrid fatherhood is inherent in their gender, the representations of hybrid fatherhood by father influencers in this study are less tied to gender and more connected to the traditional Chinese father's role. Although these representations include caring and emotionally expressive practices rarely seen in the distant fathering roles of the past, the underlying emphasis on the father as both provider and educator still, to some extent, reinforces patriarchal structures.

There are a few limitations to this research. First, while father influencers provide brief self-introductions on their Xiaohongshu pages, their personal information—such as their occupations (if they have jobs apart from being influencers) and social class—remains unknown. Gathering more information through interviews would be beneficial for determining whether social class influences their popularity and representation of fatherhood. Second, because our focus was on representations of fatherhood by popular father influencers, it is difficult to make claims about actual parenting practices. Future research could explore how wider audiences, particularly male viewers, interpret these representations to assess their authenticity and influence on male viewers.

Acknowledgments

Funding

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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