

The “She Economy” in the New Media Era: Spatial Practice, Women's Mobility Reconstruction and Its Impact on Urban Employment and Industrial Development

Xinyu Zhu

*Ulink College Shanghai, Shanghai, China
Ellazhu20091129@gmail.com*

Abstract. This paper employs mobility as its core analytical lens to investigate how the "She Economy" in China's digital era reshapes consumer discipline, reconfigures female representation, professions, and spatial mobility, and drives urban economic and industrial transformation. However, new media platforms have emerged as a critical tension field. On the one hand, algorithms, affective marketing, and notions of empowerment reproduce disciplinary logics, reinforcing aesthetic norms and constraining cognitive and affective mobility. On the other hand, platforms enable women to become online content creators, achieve economic independence through digital affective labor, and mobilize physically by leveraging digital imaginaries to overcome information gaps. Such gendered mobility practices extend beyond individual agency, significantly contributing to new economic models, the expansion of digital and cultural industries, and the "She Economy"-oriented urban renewal of China's emerging first-tier cities. Using Hangzhou as a case study, this paper analyzes the growth of the new media industry and the reconfiguration of its urban image, revealing the interconnections between women's employment, mobility, and urban transformation. This demonstrates that while new media reinforce disciplinary power, they also open novel spaces for female agency, production, and urban participation in the digital era.

Keywords: New Media, She Economy, Mobility

1. Introduction

The mobility paradigm, first initiated by Mimi Sheller and John Urry in the early 2000s [1], is a concept used to explore the movement of people, ideas, and capital, as well as the crucial factor of the constellation of power, the creation of ideas, and the micro geographies of everyday life. The New Mobilities Paradigm breaks with the foundational assumption of twentieth-century social science that 'the social' is constituted by a set of intense relations between individuals in close physical proximity to one another. Such distant and intermittent connections are crucial for maintaining social life. In the contemporary era, the mobility of female groups is significantly influenced by the development of the new media industry, both physically and virtually, and has stimulated the transformation of some new first-tier cities.

This study uses "mobility" as its core theoretical framework to explore how the "she economy" in the digital era deconstructs traditional consumption norms, reconstructs the fluidity of female identity, occupational mobility, and physical mobility, and drives the economic and cultural transformation of new first-tier cities. This research is based on the new mobility paradigm [1]. Through theoretical analysis and a case study of Hangzhou, this study reveals how new media platforms simultaneously serve as spaces for bodily discipline and identity mobility. This study offers a new theoretical perspective for understanding the interplay between gender, media, and urban development.

2. Formation and transformation of the mobility paradigm and gendered consumer subject

Although female consumption in the post-feminist context implicitly follows the logic of capitalist domestication, the individualism and materialistic evaluation standards it advocates have promoted the evolution of women's mobility. According to Marxist feminist theory, the combination of patriarchy and capitalism provides a foundation for women's oppression. However, the "career woman" and "economically independent" "successful image" shaped by post-feminism has also, on the other hand, facilitated the disengagement of contemporary women from patriarchal family structures [2].

Meanwhile, the collaborative development of digital new media has provided marginalized/non-centralized groups from different classes and labor sectors with opportunities to showcase themselves, increasing online communication and information exchange among women, thereby becoming an important factor in promoting women's solidarity and constructing a multidimensional mobility project.

The construction of this "mobility project" manifests as a complex, multidimensional practice: First, the mobility of the image and representation. In the social media environment, women's self-presentation is transformed into a dynamic and never-ending process, with various female creators from different classes showing diverse lifestyles and values. For example, Li Ziqi, a content creator related to traditional culture and farming life, has attracted many fans on the Internet with her aesthetics of idyllic life. The formation of such a fan base has, to some extent, constructed a new safe space detached from the power system, utilizing lifestyle choices to counter the mainstream aesthetic of consumerist culture.

Second, the mobility of capital is considered. Under the logic of the digital economy, women's bodies are not only vehicles for self-presentation but also productive nodes. Through digital emotional labor, female creators commodify their private experiences, emotions, and even bodily knowledge to build communities and accumulate social influence [3]. This labor process ultimately converts economic and social capital through channels such as advertising collaborations, brand endorsements, and live-streamed product promotions. The mobility of capital is closely coupled with the mobility of the image: only when the digital body aligns with the aesthetic logic of "commodified feminism" can it more effectively attract traffic and complete the capital cycle. Thus, the success of women's "mobility projects" is directly measured by their ability to convert capital.

Third, physical mobility (mobility in space). The construction of "ideal images" and "ideal lives" in digital narratives profoundly influences women's actions in physical spaces. To maintain consistency between online images and offline experiences, women often choose specific migration and consumption paths, whether it is migrating to first-tier cities for career development and cultural belonging or "checking in" at popular tourist spots, visiting unique shops, or participating in mind-body healing workshops. Spatial mobility and consumption practices not only serve personal experiences but also aim to produce content for digital sharing, thereby reinforcing the construction

of online images. Thus, the intertwining of physical and digital spaces constitutes the key practical arena of the "she economy."

3. New media and the reconstruction of cultural space

3.1. The expansion of new media platforms and the transformation of digital labor

In Manuel Castells' depiction of the "network society" [4], the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has made network logic the most decisive organizing principle of contemporary society. The network is no longer merely a technical infrastructure but a social form that reorganizes the economy, politics, culture, and daily life through nodes and connections. One of the core manifestations of this transformation is the rise of the new media industry, represented by self-media, livestreaming, and e-commerce. These models rely on the platform economy, breaking the spatial and temporal constraints of traditional employment and exhibiting high flexibility and mobility.

In this digital labor transformation, women have opened new employment possibilities. The large-scale rise of content production and emotional labor driven by the new media economy—such as beauty tutorials, fashion sharing, parenting, lifestyle aesthetics (vlogs), and other content types related to the "she economy"—heavily relies on creators' image management, emotional expression, and community relationship maintenance. These skills, traditionally viewed as "feminine traits," have been commodified. Female creators generate traffic for platforms, attract user attention, and build commercializable "personas" and communities through continuous self-disclosure, interaction, and emotional investment [3], thereby achieving economic success.

3.2. The mediatization of urban space and cultural renewal

The expansion of new media platforms has not only transformed labor forms but also, through its intertwining with urban space, triggered a process of change in the image and characteristics of urban space, thereby promoting urban economic growth. This process validates David Harvey's theory of spatial production [5]: space is not a static container but a dynamic process continuously produced and redefined by social relations (especially capital relations).

In the present context, this "production" process is heavily dominated by the media logic. Platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu shape the image of "trendy cities" through user check-ins, sharing, algorithmic recommendations, and topic-based marketing. The popularity of keywords such as Chongqing Hongyadong, Changsha Chayanyueshuai, and Shanghai Anfu Road does not stem solely from their inherent attributes but is instead co-constructed as symbolic "check-in destinations" through massive user-generated content (UGC) and platform-concentrated traffic distribution. This city image is fluid and visual, with its core value lying in its "shareability" and "spreadability." At this point, the city is no longer merely a geographical unit but a media product co-produced by platforms, users, capital, and algorithms—new media industry factors—bringing cultural vitality and economic opportunities.

4. The development of the "she economy" in new media and its optimization of urban environment and industrial structure

In traditional urbanization theory, economic factors and employment are the core drivers of population migrations. However, under the current trends in the development of the new media industry, the migration logic of female creators in the new media era has shifted from "survival" to

"lifestyle." The cultural atmosphere and value systems of a city, as well as promotional tags on social media, have become important driving factors in urban population migration. Furthermore, digital professions have enhanced women's occupational mobility. The development of digital industries within cities undoubtedly fosters more diverse and comprehensive occupational chains and choices, thereby attracting more female migrants to participate in the production of new media industries. Taking Hangzhou, China, as an example, according to the latest data from the "Hangzhou Digital Economy Industry Development Report" [6], the added value of Hangzhou's core digital economy industries now accounts for 27.1% of GDP, constituting the absolute dominant sector of the city's economy. In this grand digital landscape, women are no longer bystanders but important participants and driving forces in the digital landscape. According to the seventh national census conducted in May 2021 [7] and the sample surveys conducted at the end of 2021 and 2022, the results show that the male-to-female ratio of Hangzhou's permanent residents remains at approximately 52:48. However, in terms of the household registration population, the female population exceeds the male population. In 2021, Hangzhou's registered household population was 8.3454 million, with 4.1225 million males and 4.223 million females, a difference of 100,500 in favor of females. This indicates that females are more inclined to remain in Hangzhou than males.

Based on historical data, the trend of a higher female-to-male ratio among Hangzhou's registered population has persisted for almost a decade. Since the first turning point in 2013, the gap between the numbers of female and male registered residents in Hangzhou has widened by an average of 10,000 people annually. These data collectively indicate that an increasing number of women are choosing to stay in Hangzhou to pursue their careers there. This is closely linked to the development of Hangzhou's digital economy. According to the "2022 China Women's Digital Economy Platform Employment Development Report" [8] released by Yicai Think Tank, Hangzhou, with its robust digital economy and service sector, has entered the first tier of cities in terms of female digital flexible employment vitality index, ranking just behind Beijing, Shenzhen, and Shanghai. The Development Report mentions that Hangzhou's digital economy, centered on e-commerce, has driven growth across the industry chain, creating abundant employment opportunities in commerce and related services, particularly for online store owners, live streamers, and digital team leaders in the wholesale and retail sectors. The concentration of vast e-commerce supply chains (such as Taobao and Tmall) and content platforms (such as Xiaohongshu and Douyin) has created unprecedentedly abundant employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, enabling a structural shift in their career choices from traditional industries to the digital sector. Additionally, an increase in the female population can indirectly enhance urban environmental factors, such as social welfare and safety standards, thereby boosting the city's overall capabilities.

5. Conclusion

This study primarily explores the mobility changes experienced by women as consumers and creators in the context of new media industry development, as well as the indirect impact of new media platforms on urban employment, industrial structure, social welfare, and other areas. Based on current Internet content and official data, it is evident that the development of China's "she economy" has, to a certain extent, promoted mobility and urban development through the tension between the constraints and liberation experienced by women themselves, demonstrating the powerful force of the female economy.

However, this paper did not conduct field data collection or ethnographic research during its investigative phase, relying solely on online platforms and official data for analysis, which insufficiently demonstrates methodological rigor and accuracy. Future studies should incorporate

appropriate improvements in this regard. Furthermore, regarding research content, subsequent investigations may delve deeper into analyzing the impact of emotional value generated by female practitioners in the new media industry and female users on new media platforms on economic output through case-based examinations.

References

- [1] Urry, J., & Sheller, M. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, 38(2), 207–226.
- [2] Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10(2), 147–166.
- [3] Wei, Y. (2022). Digital Emotional Labor and Gendered Economy. *Journal of Communication and Society*, 45(3), 55–72.
- [4] Castells, M. (1996). *The Rise of the Network Society*. Blackwell Publishers.
- [5] Harvey, D. (1990). *The condition of postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Blackwell Publishing. pp. 201-203
- [6] Hangzhou Municipal Bureau of Economy and Information Technology. (2021). Hangzhou Digital Economy Industry Development Report. https://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/art/2022/4/13/art_1229063404_4030379.html
- [7] National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2021). The Seventh National Population Census Report. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/pcsj/rkpc/7rp/zk/indexch.htm>
- [8] Yicai Research Institute. (2022, July 29). 2022 China women's digital economy platform employment development report [Report]. Yicai Think Tank. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from <https://www.yicai.com/news/101481245.html>