

Hyperreal Construction by Lifestyle Content Creators from the Perspective of the Society of the Spectacle: A Case Study of Douyin

Xiaoti Cui

School of Television, Communication University of China, Beijing, China
3396502158@qq.com

Abstract. Short video platforms have become an integral part of everyday life. The way in which the "good life" is visually embellished with online content has become a tangible "cultural spectacle." Based on Guy Debord's work, this study examines lifestyle content creators on Douyin and explores how they construct "hyperreal" representations of everyday life through visual strategies. This study finds that the available "good life" images given to the user on the site are not what real life is about. However, they are only "hyperreal" dreams—especially retouched and optimized snapshots of events meant to be better than the real thing. The study categorizes three groups: rural slow-living content, urban aesthetic content, and daily healing content. It further shows that these images are shaped by examining technology, platform mechanisms, and the culture. These findings suggest that it is a combination of corporate objectives, computer algorithms, and the standards of beauty we have selected for ourselves that produces such images. Apart from giving comfort, though, this may also weaken viewers' awareness of the complexities of real life.

Keywords: society of the spectacle, hyperreal, lifestyle content creators, self-media, lifestyle

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the internet is flooded with short videos portraying the "good life". On short video platforms, content creators such as Li Ziqi, Taoxi Brothers, and others present highly aestheticized versions of everyday life. This often leads viewers to perceive these representations as real life, even though they are carefully constructed.

Guy Debord, in the course of his life, called attention to the fact that in the present time, the real life experience is oftentimes supplanted by various intentionally arranged shows or visuals [1]. On the other hand, one of the theorists Jean Baudrillard denotes that current pictures are not merely replicates of the real; rather, they are what Baudrillard describes as "simulacra," which possess the ability to look more veritable than reality. This line of thought is affording the iniquity of "life idealism" in audiovisuals. This paper will be using "society of the spectacle" as its theoretical framework to explore the Douyin influencers' creation of "hyperreal" life spectacles through the filming, editing, technology, and culture.

This study aims to explore how people perceive what they see in the media and whether that influences their actions or how they feel.

2. Literature review

French philosopher Guy Debord is credited with coining the phrase "society of the spectacle." According to *The Society of the Spectacle*, he said: "The whole life of those societies, in which modern conditions of production prevails, presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles." [1] In recent years, related research has mainly focused on exploring the nature of the society of the spectacle and critiquing its alienation. Zhang Yibing proposed that the society of the spectacle is another form of "alienation" under the premise of Marx's alienated society, manifesting as a representational distortion of the ontology of social existence [2]. He believes that in Debord's view, the fact is a re-inverted representation of the already inverted reification itself. In this inverted world, the spectacle becomes a decisive force. Liu Liyong re-examined Debord's theory from the perspective of media era critique, arguing that its analytical path is similar to Marx's critique of capitalist society, aiming to provide a possible direction for critical practice in contemporary society [3]. Meanwhile, Baudrillard proposed the theory of "simulacra and simulation," [4] pointing out that contemporary images are no longer representations of reality but transcend and even replace reality. In the digital media environment, images continuously construct seemingly real yet highly processed life forms, increasingly blurring the boundary between reality and fiction. Sun Quansheng accordingly pointed out that the trajectory from Marx to Debord, and then to Baudrillard, is a movement from a commodity society to a society of the spectacle, and then to a simulation society [5].

So the theory of the society of the spectacle and the simulacra has been extended from the context of traditional media to the short video period, providing an important theoretical foundation for understanding the "ideal life" in current self-media imagery. Rui Bifeng and Peng Zhixiang noted that, in relation to the "Qixi (Chinese Valentine's day) Spectacle" posted on WeChat Moments, it is also possible to see this kind of logic as a process: the three grand displays of selfie, leisure travel, and bragging about red envelopes, all filtered for beauty, offer up an uniformed idealization of living, causing audiences to feel anxious and want of the supposed spectacle by comparison [6].

Furthermore, existing research has also focused on the transformation of photography's function, mainly concentrating on image language and technological evolution. With the development of short video platforms, the production and dissemination methods of imagery have undergone significant changes. Some studies point out that "the birth and rapid development of short videos have led to the updating and iteration of original audiovisual art creation concepts and thinking...The imaging form of short video has also caused the corresponding changes in many aspects of the demand, attitude and habit of audiences, and even notions such as aesthetic quality of an image." [7] Related studies either analyze such contents as Li Ziqi's from the angle of images symbolization and stories, indicating "from a pragmatic point of view, the unique visual narrative in Li Ziqi's micro-video shows the superiority of grassroots communicators in transcultural communication," providing new directions for effectively telling China's stories externally" [8]; or aims to study the function of short video for city image communication and culture tourism economy, which puts emphasis on "the short videos uploaded by short video creators who have visited cities presenting city phenomenon in first-person perspective and enable users to utilize the interactivity features of short video, stimulating collective aesthetic consciousness; obtaining the most intuitive visual experience, and strengthening people's urban memory and group emotional identity." [9] However, overall, systematic research on how lifestyle content creators construct idealized life "spectacles" through

imagery remains relatively insufficient. Such "spectacles" not only influence audiences' perceptions of daily life but are also closely related to consumer culture and the platform economy.

3. Analysis and findings

3.1. Three types of lifestyle video spectacles

3.1.1. Rural slow living: the romantic reconstruction of rural China

Rural slow-living mini-stories usually take place in the backdrop of nature's beauty. Apart from that, there are the lives traditionally created by man. Considering its aesthetic and romanticism, daily rural life integrated with nature is presented as an idealized pastoral scene. This kind of content has a storytelling concept based on the character's perspective, which contributes to the realization of interpersonal collaboration not only between the character and environment but also between the audience and the organisation. That is, because of the easy categorization of the viewers into reliable and possible confused groups of followership, it is very easy for the audience to detect the comparatively simple emotional structure. "Li Ziqi", "Taoxi Brothers", "Pastoral Baby," "Countryside Xiaogang" are well-known examples of social media influencers in this genre.

Such works have few common features: high-saturation colors and time lapse. As the peak audiovisual works, we usually notice a phenomenon called "visual afterimage" [10]. For rural short videos that are made for nostalgia, the realness of life among the country that follows along with visual persistence goes far beyond imagination. Being a unique form of the cinematographic language, slow-motion is disrupting the standard actions and doing them in a different direction of framing with "short, flat, and fast" video, which represents the majority of internet videos [11]. As a result, it is easier for audiences to have a more engaging experience on manipulating the internet through slow-motion shots that are combined with tight shots of food processing, which limit the visual exploration. Likewise, these videos mark changes in scales of the shots and composition of the depicted relationship between the characters and the environment. For instance, in the video "Intangible Cultural Heritage: Velvet Flowers" released in November 2024, time-lapse could be seen where the alternation of day and night. A well-constructed example could be the sounds of birds chirping and water stream which have been the theme in a composition perceived to have an affinity to heaven or a place of peace (see Figure 1).

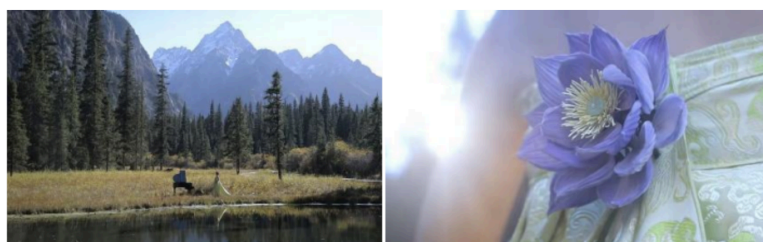


Figure 1. Still from the video Ronghua posted by blogger Li Ziqi in November 2024
(Source:Douyin)

In terms of spectacular connotation, pastoral slow-living videos successfully evoke urban audiences' imagination of and longing for an idyllic rural life through symbolic elements such as traditional farming tools and handicrafts. They have thus become a form of spiritual resistance to, and escape from, the fast-paced and high-intensity conditions of modern urban life, offering urban viewers an emotional outlet for coping with the anxieties of modernity through the narrative theme

of slow living. However, the presentation of this spectacular connotation in the contemporary era also carries an evident commercial character: pastoral elements such as agricultural products are transformed into symbols of consumption within the reconstructed spectacle, forming a concrete manifestation of the reality that "the spectacle is commodity."

3.1.2. Urban aesthetic content: standardized visual templates of "refined living"

Urban aesthetic short videos focus on curated moments of urban life, that are typically reinforced in the coffee shops, gyms, and art studios to erect "ideal templates" [12] for routines amid various standardized visual elements. In the influencer's case, for instance, when a scene (like fitness equipment) or an object (for instance, designer furniture) is a part of a persona he/she is creating, it adds more meaning of a so-called "tasteful life" as the influencer uses such symbols, thus evoking reflexive identification and emotional engagement among members of a particular class audience.

Related to aesthetics, the videos may have a "Facebook-like" low-saturation color, symmetry, and fast editing pace, providing a light, fashionable urban atmosphere. The cinematography usually incorporates both first- and third-person perspectives, as are recorded from the eye-level angle, that bear resemblance to what we observe in our daily life. Firstly, consider the example of the influencer "Fancy Fan Jia'en," whose main character in the story focuses on fashion events, beauty and skincare, as well as high-end leisure spaces such as hot spring resorts, restaurants, and nightlife places. The visuals are stunningly so as the subject closely relates to the interests of the target users. Also, the following examples of styles are highly distinctive. The influencer "Julie's Slow Life" posts daily excerpts of the life like morning light, hand-brewed coffee, and the family members, increasing daily quality the home life. On the other hand, the social network "Beijing Little Wind" spends its short videos on quick cuts between two activities, coffee making and book reading, thus, underlining the life rhythm and certain ritual of urban daily life.

These short videos feature a typical capitalistic aesthetic in their depiction of urban aesthetics, which serves to demonstrate the identity formation and class consciousness of the different urban social classes. They offer viewers a model of an "ideal lifestyle". It subsequently results in standardized yet branded templates of contemporary style being sold, formulizing the urban life into a homogeneous display of a few visually replicated patterns, thereby flattening the complexity of urban life in some way.

3.1.3. Daily healing content: a de-urbanized space of emotional compensation

Daily healing content often centers on a certain enclosed, "de-urbanized" spaces such as home life, studios conceptualizing studios, balconies, and kitchens, representing the beauty in everyday life. The content generally focuses pets, plants, and quotidian items which builds an emotional "niche" within the audience as a reflection of solitary or family life through such unimportant but warm moments. For example, "Homesickness" is written in which the protagonist Shen Dan describes his/her difficulties which he/she addresses by detailing how he/she establishes a warm and inviting atmosphere through such act as cooking home-style meals and taking care of the plants. "Diagou Cutie" from the movie is also a quite simple yet classic look of cave dwellings and smoke coming out from the stoves on the Loess Plateau. The life of "Fat Tiger Not Master" can be made even more delightful through keeping a record of the interactions between people and "Fat Tiger" with whom they live (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Stills from videos posted by the bloggers "Xiangchou," "Diaogou Xiaokeai," and "Panghu Bu Shi Ye" (Source: Douyin)

In terms of visual style, these videos often use high-saturation tones and warm color grading to create a stable and soothing atmosphere. The overview of virtual temporality is done through fixed camera positions, or timelapse film, which manipulated light and shade to compress the processes of temporal scale change and spatial layering. Symmetry is frequently present in the landscape productions, and the is placed well onto the subjects using the rule of thirds, giving more order and sense of stability.

In order to appreciate the art of life in their own feelings, viewers are drawn into these scenes and experience a sense of slowed-down, meaningful everyday life. In addition to that, it urges viewers to ponder over a deeper layer of meaning and harmony behind their everyday lives, which they may have overlooked, as the pace of work is often rapid and distracting, turning it into a selection of exciting, simplified, and fragmented real life.

3.2. Mechanisms of hyperreal construction

3.2.1. Technology: the democratization of production tools

The new technologies as well as the convenience and intelligence systems represent a basic pillar for the formulation of "hyperreal" lifestyles in short videos that focus on lifestyle. On a hardware level, movie-making technology except for high-end production is getting more and more democratized. Equipment used nowadays, mainly the high-end mirrorless cameras with full-frame and the DJI Pocket 3, keep improving their usability and pricing, enabling amateurs to go a step deeper and to produce footage of cinematic quality. While upgrades in mobile computational photography, such as Huawei's Hong feng Imaging technology and different built-in intelligences, help to enhance the picture quality as the AI frame interpolation and scene recognition, enabling creators to produce well-made visual content more easily.

Over the years, video editing profession has gone the way of appification and automation of its tasks. This is mainly because of the Ever-changing content delivery framework. Lightweight editing tools such as Jianying transform complex processes into one-click functions. This allows creators to transform heavy functions such as grading and calibration into one-click color grading and one-click effect, respectively, which increase your efficiency greatly. Through the internet and tutorials of well-known techniques (like golden ratio composition, keyframe movements of the camera, and three-point lighting), which used to require a lot of professionals' training, now can be harvested by everyone. Postproduction takes away the need for more complex software, and that happens as a consequence of development of auto color grading and beauty filters that are becoming more simple and intuitive. In conjunction with that, the digital technology is rather evolving from the computer side to the mobile side, taking on many forms in the process, and showing a clear trend toward less professional practice, making content creation much easier and simple.

3.2.2. Platform: algorithmic recommendation and traffic distribution

Platform recommendation algorithms and traffic allocation have had a major impact on how lifestyle short videos are presented. As one scholar points out, "through users' ongoing addictive engagement, the intelligent algorithms within short-video platforms claim to save users time, but in fact create technical traps for the public" [13]. In this process, users are often exposed to the same kinds of content over a long period of time and gradually begin to treat the algorithmically constructed "pseudo-environment" as reality itself.

At the same time, traffic allocation also shapes the direction of content production. The idea of the "golden first three seconds" has become a key rule in short-video creation, meaning that creators need to grab viewers' attention immediately at the beginning. As a result, many videos open with dramatic hooks such as "waking up early for 30 days," often combined with sound elements like ASMR to make them more appealing. In addition, trending topics and hashtags such as "#IdealLifeChallenge", "#TheLifeWeLongFor", and "#LifeNeverLetsDownThoseWhoWorkHard" also push content in certain directions. Once a particular type of video becomes popular, creators often imitate its settings, camera movement, and narrative structure, which leads to increasing homogenization.

In terms of traffic distribution, platforms usually give priority exposure to signed influencers and MCN agencies, while some independent creators try to gain more visibility through paid promotion tools such as DOU+. To some extent, this system strengthens the model effect of top-performing content while squeezing the space for non-mainstream expression and individual creativity.

3.2.3. Culture: emotional needs and aesthetic shifts

These videos provide a form of emotional compensation. In a rapid, anguished world even ordinary people are looking for affection and tranquility [14]. The "slow living" or "refuge" movement phenomenon is a parallel illustration of this nervousness.

Also, people's standards of beauty are not static but constantly changing, but rather dynamic, are changing. Hence, it is no longer that you only like "ideal" and "classical" images, normal daily things are now charming to many people. Influencers create unedited videos or including messy rooms on purpose to be more relatable. Notwithstanding if this "realness" is, so to speak, so thoughtfully staged a job.

Finally, there is a close relationship, if not connection between economy and culture. A vague post about a "warm morning routine" can easily incorporate the promotion of a coffee maker brand, for instance. The product itself becomes a commodity you can delve into. Beyond what we do with the spectacle, it activities are proven to serve as marketing sales stimulus.

4. Discussion

4.1. The filter of "reality": lifestyle short videos as a visual "spectacle"

When scrolling through the scenes of "the good life" on Douyin, people are always filled with a feeling of resonance or nostalgia. From the perspective of Debord's "society of the spectacle," everyday life is replaced and reshaped by spectacle. "Reality" in the videos does not record the original appearance of life as faithfully as this "reality" is closer to the "substitution of reality for the spectacle"—that is: "The spectacle is not a collection of spectacles; it is a social relation between persons which is mediated by images" [1]. From the scene selection and light control to the action

design, it's a rigorously selected, choreographed, and beautified "performance" and "perfect life sample" that is stripped of chaos, fatigue, and uncertainty, and reduced to peace, harmony, and symmetry.

4.2. From sharing to business: how the "spectacle" becomes sellable cultural capital

Once the aesthetic presentation of a certain lifestyle garners sufficient attention, it ceases to be purely personal sharing and quickly moves along the track of commercialization, alienating into a form of "cultural capital" that can be bought and sold. As Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, cultural taste itself is also an important resource for distinguishing social strata, capable of being imperceptibly transformed into economic and social capital [15]. As traffic and attention continuously accumulate, the blogger's personal characteristics, lifestyle, and even 'taste' itself gradually acquire market value.

This transformation is often driven by brand collaborations, in order to promote products (furniture or clothes about good life) converting the aesthetic signifiers of the videos into actual products; taking this one stage further, lifestyle itself is transformed into "ideal life template", which followers are willing to pay for learning how to live it. Meanwhile, when the built spectacle gets on the express train of commercialization, "assembly-line production" is hard to escape from; thus, some bloggers must give up a portion of the unique life experience in themselves that is slowly washed away with traffic and gives way to reproduceable scenes, fixed filming, and stereotyped narratives.

4.3. Maintaining clarity within the "spectacle": rethinking the aesthetics of the "ideal life"

Romanticised reconstruction, whilst giving an air of healing in so many short videos, also has the propensity to superficialise life, in some way hiding the actual hardships in life, or leading viewers into over-romanticizing life too much, producing a "de-realized" spectacle. In this ocean of ubiquitous dazzling lifestyle short videos, we may need to consciously pause and reflect: in our process of learning from and following such lifestyle short videos. As Foucault argues, power operates through everyday practices of discipline rather than overt coercion [16]. Are we in this process unknowingly giving away the power to determine what is valuable about ourselves, what makes us happy or not, to those people across the screen from whom we watch videos, as well as to the logic of algorithms that lie behind them? What we're chasing, is that really ourselves? Or is that a "standard" life which everyone admires?

5. Conclusion

It should also be noted that lifestyle short videos cater for the affective demands of modern people who live hectic, high-stakes existence. Yet such a reaction is frequently paid for by denying the richness and fatigue of actuality. To put it simply, it's "a soft mirage that comes as an outcome of consumerism-platform collusion." At the same time, if some way of life becomes popular, it is readily convertible to reproducible and marketable cultural capital. The initially individualised manifestation of life thus becomes a "product on the assembly line."

Thus, now that images are continually invading our everyday lives, we need once again ask: if life is being turned every minute into something to be displayed, are we getting closer to the real world, or moving further away from it? We may have to keep a conscious scrutiny: what we see and yearn for can only be a well-edited "sample". The aesthetics of life is not about copying other people's scenes but about honestly feeling and dealing with our lives.

Certainly, this paper has certain limitations: first, the case selection requires further expansion and deepening; second, it pays insufficient attention to audience reception and interpretation. Future research could proceed from the audience's perspective, exploring how they understand, negotiate, and even resist such spectacle expressions, as well as the new forms of authenticity in the context of "de-performance."

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