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Understanding LGBTQ+ Family Dynamics on Chinese Social Media: A Content Analysis and Sentiment Study on Douyin

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an in-depth analysis of LGBTQ+ family dynamics within Chinese social media, specifically focusing on Douyin. It critically examines the portrayal of LGBTQ+ parenting models, investigating both how these parents present themselves and how the general public perceives and interacts with these representations. The research method includes a comprehensive content analysis of selected videos from popular Douyin accounts, focusing on emotional expression, parent-child interaction, and parenting styles. This study goes further to analyze audience engagement with these videos, revealing not only the public's perception but also the underlying societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ families in China. By highlighting the interaction between digital representation and audience response, the study offers nuanced insights into the evolving landscape of LGBTQ+ issues in Chinese society, reflecting both progress and challenges in public acceptance and understanding.

KEYWORDS

LGBTQ+ family dynamics; Douyin; parenting models; public perception; societal attitudes

Introduction

In China, the interplay of traditional culture and societal systems has long shadowed the visibility of LGBTQ+ issues (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018; Wei, 2020). From a social reality perspective, China grapples with structural deficiencies in its policies and legal frameworks concerning LGBTQ+ issues. Concurrently, prevailing negative public attitudes and perceptions contribute to a climate of self-repression among LGBTQ+ individuals. This situation adversely affects the self-identity and expression of LGBTQ+ individuals (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018) and simultaneously relegates LGBTQ+ topics to a state of taboo and invisibility in society.

Regarding cultural factors, the emphasis on family and lineage within Chinese society (Bie & Tang, 2016) exerts substantial pressure against the open discussion of LGBTQ+ topics, thereby imposing significant barriers to such dialogue. Moreover, the distinctive social structure of traditional Chinese society, the “differentiated order” (Fei et al., 1992), regards the family as a sovereign entity, cultivating a cultural norm of noninterference in personal affairs, as epitomized by the proverb “清官难断家务事” (it is hard for an honest official to cut through household affairs). This normative approach positions family and upbringing topics as private matters, shielded from public scrutiny, as discussed by Wang (2013). The heightened emphasis on privacy, especially concerning LGBTQ+ family structures that deviate from traditional family models, may result in the absence of these topics in public discourse, leading to a lack of open discussion on LGBTQ+ issues and further marginalizing these communities. Despite the emergence

of LGBTQ+ individuals who defy these norms and choose to come out, such actions remain outside the mainstream, hindered by both societal and familial pressures (Bie & Tang, 2016). Furthermore, the prevailing mainstream media often casts homosexuality in a negative light, framing same-sex relationships as inherently unstable (Chang & Ren, 2017), which perpetuates stigmas and strengthens existing cultural and social barriers.

Attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues are evolving, mainly due to changing individual, social structure, and societal perceptions influenced by the internet (Lin & Wang, 2021; Wang, 2013). Despite these shifts, the LGBTQ+ community continues to encounter significant challenges. On the one hand, while some LGBTQ+ individuals may not wish to have children, the traditional Chinese emphasis on family and lineage (Bie & Tang, 2016) exerts considerable pressure on them. In response to these cultural and societal pressures, LGBTQ+ people in China have begun to form families and raise children through same-sex domestic partnerships and assisted reproductive technology (Choi & Luo, 2016; Liu, 2013; Suen et al., 2023). On the other hand, those who aspire to parenthood face hurdles due to societal non-acceptance and the invisibility of such groups, compounded by deficiencies in the social system (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018). Furthermore, societal oversight often neglects the challenges inherent in the available methods of becoming parents. Once they become parents, LGBTQ+ individuals, often perceived as “special” within society, face the additional challenge of managing various risks and ensuring the healthy upbringing of their children. In China, where family lineage and childbearing are highly emphasized, having children can serve as a strategy for coping with external stress among LGBTQ+ individuals to a certain extent (Wei & Gao, 2020; Wei & Wang, 2024). It underscores the need for more in-depth exploration into how LGBTQ+ individuals can effectively raise children, focusing primarily on the social integration of their children and the reciprocal impact on their social integration.

Compared to the real-life social environment, online spaces tend to be more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community and related issues (Cao & Lu, 2014; Craig & McInroy, 2014). Platforms like Weibo, Douban, Zhihu, and Douyin offer LGBTQ+ individuals a more direct avenue for self-expression. Specifically, LGBTQ+ parents use these platforms to share their family lives openly, fostering connections and mutual support and providing guidance and inspiration for others in similar situations. Douyin, in particular, stands out due to its visually appealing and interactive format and public sharing feature. It enables LGBTQ+ parents to share their parenting experiences, daily life, and parent-child interactions through engaging video content. Such content displays their relationships with their children and various facets of parent-child interactions and garners attention from the wider public, including those outside the LGBTQ+ community.

Given the inclusivity of online spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals, this research delves into the portrayal and impact of LGBTQ+ parenting on digital platforms. These platforms offer LGBTQ+ parents a vital avenue for expressing themselves and sharing their family lives and experiences. However, this openness prompts an investigation into the nature of these interactions and their broader societal implications. Among various platforms, Douyin is particularly notable due to its accessible content creation tools, unique visual appeal, and interactive format, which make it a favored choice in social media. Consequently, this study focuses on Douyin to investigate the subtleties of LGBTQ+ family dynamics and public perceptions in this context.

Background

LGBTQ+ groups in China

Since the Chinese Classification and Diagnostic Criteria of Mental Disorders ceased classifying homosexuality as a mental illness in 2001, there has been a degree of medical rationalization concerning homosexuality. Despite these developments, the homosexual community in China continues to face significant misunderstanding and discrimination, mainly due to the prevailing influence of traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism (Yu & Xiao, 2017).

For instance, Confucian principles such as “男大当婚” (men should marry at a suitable age, and women should marry when they are ready), “多子多福” (more children bring more blessings), and “不孝有三，无后为大” (the three unfilial acts, the greatest being to have no descendants), strongly link personal fulfillment to heterosexual marriage and procreation. These ethical norms have profoundly shaped societal attitudes in China, influencing perceptions of the childless homosexual community (Yu et al., 2011). In this cultural context, homosexuality is often still viewed as a “mental disorder” or a “personal quality issue” (Yu & Xiao, 2017), perceived as deviant behavior and a challenge to social order (Tang et al., 1997). Homosexuality remains a taboo topic in Chinese society, where conservative values prevail (Higgins et al., 2002; Yu & Xiao, 2017), and the emphasis on collectivism is seen as essential to maintaining social harmony (Burki, 2017; Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018; Wei & Yan, 2021).

Attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues are shifting, primarily due to evolving individual views, social structures, and societal perceptions shaped by the internet and economic growth (Lin & Wang, 2021; Wang, 2013; Wang et al., 2020). However, in China, the homosexual community still encounters significant challenges, primarily due to the persistent influence of traditional Chinese culture and the absence of official government support (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018).

These pressures are evident within the socio-cultural environment, where young LGBTQ+ individuals must navigate between traditional values like filial piety and their pursuit of personal identity and freedom in love, often facing profound moral dilemmas (Zhang, 2018). Traditional family expectations, particularly concerning marriage and lineage, place considerable pressure on gay children (Suen et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2020). Additionally, policies such as the one-child policy and pension reforms have introduced biases that favor heterosexual norms, further marginalizing the LGBTQ+ community (Hildebrandt, 2019). Research shows that both young and older Chinese homosexuals face heightened risks to their mental health, mainly due to the cultural pressures associated with marriage, childbearing, and filial duties within the LGBTQ+ context (Hua et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2020; Wei & Liu, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020).

To address these pressures and challenges, the integration of the homosexual community into Chinese society has taken on unique forms. Pressured by parental expectations to marry, some homosexuals opt for “Performative Marriage” or hide their homosexual orientation by marrying a heterosexual spouse (Cai, 2023; Choi & Luo, 2016; Ding & Dong, 2021; Fu & Zhang, 2013). Performative marriage involves two homosexuals of different biological sexes negotiating to form a family while maintaining economic, physical, and personal independence (Ding & Dong, 2021). This arrangement helps preserve the family’s reputation, alleviate moral distress, and manage social pressures (Ren et al., 2019). However, conflicts often arise between the parties impersonating husband and wife due to ambiguities in their relationship and the cognitive dissonance from long-term acting and emotional labor (Ding & Dong, 2021; Ren et al., 2021). The second type, deceptive marriage, involves homosexuals marrying unknowing heterosexual partners (Zhu, 2018). Such marriages not only pose physical and mental health risks to the Tongqi (the unwitting wives of gay men) (Tang & Zhan, 2016; Tsang, 2021) but also result in painful relationships for both parties (Fu, 2012, pp. 149–151). These approaches partially fulfill traditional marriage requirements through compromise and cater to social desires beyond physical ones (Wang, 2011).

LGBTQ+ parents in China

In China, some LGBTQ+ individuals have opted to become parents and form their own families. This decision fulfills their desires and provides “an explanation to their parents,” navigating societal expectations (Wei, 2016). The rise of same-sex childbearing in China has been primarily facilitated by advancements in assisted reproductive technologies and shaped by the country’s social norms. Historically, many LGBTQ+ individuals concealed their sexual orientation by entering into heterosexual marriages to have children (Li, 2002). However, growing public awareness and ethical concerns, especially regarding the plight of Tongqi, have led more LGBTQ+

individuals to seek assisted reproductive methods to have children, aligning with their true identities (Wei, 2016, 2023).

Despite the established history of LGBTQ+ parenting in China, academic research in this area remains limited. Wei Wei's series of studies represent some of the few scholarly endeavors that explore the genesis, upbringing, and societal integration of LGBTQ+ parents and their children, with a particular focus on intergenerational caregiving within these families (Wei, 2016, 2023; Wei & Gao, 2020; Wei & Wang, 2024). In China's family-centric culture, fulfilling familial duties, especially procreation, is highly valued (Wei, 2023). Wei's research highlights how parenthood can serve as a strategic response to external pressures faced by the LGBTQ+ community. It can facilitate the process of coming out to parents, enhancing acceptance within their families (Wei & Gao, 2020; Wei & Wang, 2024). Furthermore, Wei's findings suggest that after achieving "marriage," the focus often shifts toward "providing a child," which is crucial to achieving social legitimacy (Wei & Gao, 2020). The origin of the child is considered less important than fulfilling the role of a parent (Wei & Gao, 2020), indicating that, to some extent, the Chinese LGBTQ+ community might bypass traditional marital expectations to gain societal acceptance and integration through childbearing and parenting. However, while Wei's studies provide valuable insights into these dynamics within LGBTQ+ families, they do not extensively address the broader society's perceptions of this family model, highlighting a need for further research.

In Western contexts, a significant portion of the research on LGBTQ+ parenting is dedicated to affirming the legitimacy of LGBTQ+ families. These studies often focus on the parenting capabilities of LGBTQ+ parents within the broader framework of affirming LGBTQ+ identities. For example, Harris and Turner (1986) acknowledged the competencies of LGBTQ+ parents. Riggs (2020) found that LGBTQ+ parents generally achieve outcomes for their children that are comparable to those of heterosexual and cisgender-headed families despite facing discrimination and challenges in accessing reproductive services, managing family interactions, and confronting societal attitudes. Similarly, Farr et al. (2022) observed that LGBTQ+ parents often exhibit flexibility, creativity, and intentionality in their parenting, positively influencing their children's development and resilience. These studies also frequently highlight the experiences of children within LGBTQ+ families. However, the situation contrasts with the emergence of LGBTQ+ parents in China, where "same-sex marriage" remains illegal, presenting unique cultural and legal challenges.

LGBTQ+ parents and Social Media

Social media plays a crucial role in the LGBTQ+ community, leveraging its openness to facilitate identity expression and community support (Cao & Lu, 2014; Craig & McInroy, 2014). LGBTQ+ individuals utilize social media to share both explicit and subtle LGBTQ+ content across different spaces within their online ecosystems. This strategic use allows users to protect information about potentially stigmatized aspects of their identity in more risky settings while freely expressing their LGBTQ+ identity in safer environments (Devito et al., 2018). Online social platforms facilitate this process through various interaction designs such as "tagging" and "categorization," strategically curating content to align with user preferences (Carrasco & Kerne, 2018).

Social media is a vital supportive environment for the LGBTQ+ community, enabling connections, education, and mutual support that enhance identity management and social cohesion. Studies underscore its significant role in improving mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals (Berger et al., 2021; Han et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2016). Research on platforms like Weibo indicates they provide crucial channels for communication and expression, particularly benefiting those with poorer psychological well-being by fostering a sense of social support (Han et al., 2019). Long-term engagement with social media has been associated with better psychological outcomes. Additionally, these platforms facilitate romantic and sexual relationships within the community (Berger et al., 2021; Sousa et al., 2020). In China, online platforms also play a crucial role in pursuing performative marriages, contributing to establishing such relationships (Liu, 2013).

Social media has evolved into a pivotal platform for the LGBTQ+ community, enabling them to extend their reach to broader, non-LGBTQ+ audiences and consolidate minority perspectives for public presentation. This enhanced visibility fosters a greater understanding of LGBTQ+ issues among non-minority groups (Fu, 2022). Furthermore, social media can perpetuate “a spiral of silence” in specific contexts, amplifying minority voices (Fox & Warber, 2015). Content related to LGBTQ+ issues on these platforms acts as a form of everyday activism, as evidenced in Duguay’s (2016) analysis of platforms like Telegram and Vine, where routine selfies from queer communities provoke discussions that challenge conventional discourses on gender and sexuality within counter-publics. Additionally, Blackwell et al. (2016) discovered that routine posts by LGBTQ+ parents intended merely to document their daily lives inadvertently serve as advocacy, contributing to broader social movements concerning LGBTQ+ issues. This open sharing of content also empowers other LGBTQ+ communities to initiate discussions about their identities, potentially fostering greater societal acceptance (Mares et al., 2022; 2023). Despite ongoing dialogues about LGBTQ+ community engagement on social media, research focusing on LGBTQ+ parents within this realm remains scarce.

The literature review underscores the current status of LGBTQ+ individuals and parents in China, highlighting the profound impact of traditional culture. It also delineates the crucial role that social media plays for the LGBTQ+ community. Nonetheless, research into the social media presence of Chinese LGBTQ+ parents remains notably scarce. The review delves into the nuances of “parenting” and “children” as conceptualized within traditional Chinese thought and the family-centric social structure. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the posts of LGBTQ+ parents on the Douyin platform and addressing the following research questions:

1. What parenting models are presented by LGBTQ+ parents on social media like Douyin?
2. How does the general public perceive these parenting styles, and what attitudes are prevalent toward them?
3. What are the main parenting concerns of the audience? What role do “children” and “parenting” play in their views?

Methods

Data collection

LGBTQ+ parenting-related accounts on Douyin were searched, but they proved rare and relatively unnoticed due to platform scrutiny. Consequently, only 21 accounts could be identified. Their followers, likes, and post counts were compared to determine the most influential ones. Given the polarization of account influence, four highly influential Douyin accounts that are frequently updated and collectively feature 1463 videos were selected (Table 1). The remaining accounts have fewer than 1500 followers, fewer than 100 posts, and total likes under 50,000.

For a focused analysis, 50 videos were randomly selected from each account, prioritizing those showcasing parent-child interactions and receiving substantial comments and engagement, yielding an initial selection of 200 videos. Videos lacking parent-child content were excluded upon further review, refining the dataset to 187 videos. These videos were posted between August 5, 2020, and October 10, 2023.

Video scoring calculation

This study initially assigned a score to each video to assess the audience’s reception and support for LGBTQ+ parenting content on Douyin. The scoring process involved two primary components: a sentiment score derived from video comments and a score based on the number of likes each video received.

Table 1. Description of selected accounts.

Authors	Descriptions	Followers	Posts	Likes	Certification	Family Structure
Daddy Dashuang	A father with a Chinese-Russian mixed-race baby, Maxim	54 thousand	259	822 thousand	None	One father and one child
Liu Kaipeng	Rainbow family, two dads, and four kids	192 thousand	274	4.406 million	None	Two fathers and four children
Ye Haiyang	Here I am just Doris and Hatti's mother	8.478 million	545	120 million	None	One mother and two children
Xuanzhe dad	Rainbow daddy and mixed-race twin brother's daily life	22 thousand	385	954 thousand	None	Two fathers and two children

The sentiment analysis was conducted using the SnowNLP package in Python, which evaluates comments on a scale from 0 to 1. A score closer to 0 indicates a negative sentiment, while a score closer to 1 suggests a positive sentiment. This “comment score” reflects the audience’s approval of the video content. Additionally, the number of “likes” for each video directly indicates the audience’s appreciation. Due to the number of likes variations, a logarithmic function was applied to standardize these figures into a range between 0 and 1, forming the “likes score.”

The final score for each video, combining the “comment score” and the “likes score,” is an independent variable in this study. It evaluates audience engagement and support for the video content, helping to understand the public perception of LGBTQ+ parenting on Douyin.

Construction of the coding table

In conducting the content analysis, this study faced the challenge of limited existing literature on the subject matter and a lack of standardized scales or established reference measures. As a response, a bespoke coding scheme was developed, and constant comparative analysis was employed to identify themes and establish coding categories.

Recognizing the significance of emotional expression, communication, and collaborative practices in parent-child relationships, as highlighted in prior studies (Atkin, 1978; Köster & Kärtner, 2018; Stephenson, 2017; Zhang, 2018), these elements were chosen as preliminary standards to assess the quality of parent-child interactions in the videos intuitively. A high score in these categories suggests a superior quality of interaction depicted in the videos. This approach aids in understanding whether specific interactions resonate with the audience. Platforms like TikTok and YouTube have been acknowledged as conduits for educational knowledge (Syah et al., 2020), with some influencers openly sharing their parenting philosophies and methods. It led us to question the significance of influencers’ parenting styles in attracting viewers. Given the widespread misconceptions about LGBTQ+ parenting in many societies (Johnston, 2016; Miller et al., 2023; Özdemir & Erenoğlu, 2022) and the Chinese public’s unfamiliarity with this model due to socio-cultural factors, it was considered crucial to explore whether the “non-mainstream” aspect of LGBTQ+ parenting plays a key role in drawing audience interest.

Based on existing literature, the study developed a coding book featuring five major categories, each with two corresponding subcategories (Table 2): (1) Emotional expression. This category delved into two primary facets. Firstly, it assessed whether the videos overtly conveyed love, care, and concern for the child. Secondly, it explored the portrayal of diverse ways to express feelings, including affectionate terms of endearment, hugs, kisses, etc. (2) Parent-Child interaction. Within this category, two subcategories were established. The former assessed whether the video depicted parent-child participation in joint activities such as outdoor adventures, traveling, and playing games together. The latter examined whether the video included practical demonstrations of mutual support, help, and encouragement between parents and children. (3) Parenting style. This category evaluated whether video creators expressed their parenting styles and how they conveyed them. One subcategory scrutinized the direct articulation of parenting opinions, encompassing philosophy, values, and goals for children’s education. The other subcategory

Table 2. Coding book.

Categories		Elaboration
Emotion Expression (A)	Direct expression (A1)	Whether the video overtly conveys love, care, and concern for the child
	Diverse expression (A2)	Whether the video uses various ways to express feelings, such as affectionate terms of endearment, hugs, kisses, etc
Parent-Child Interaction (B)	Activity participation (B1)	Whether the video depicts parent-child participation in joint activities such as outdoor adventures, traveling, and playing games together
	Cooperation and mutual support (B2)	Whether the video includes practical demonstrations of mutual support, help, and encouragement between parents and children
Parenting Styles (C)	Expression of opinions (C1)	Whether the video directly articulates parents' philosophy, values, and goals for their children's education
	Demonstrating in activities (C2)	Whether the parents demonstrate educational and parenting methods in the activities presented in the video, such as guidance, rewards, and punishments
Parent-Child Communication (D)	Dialogue and exchanges (D1)	Whether the video presents dialogues, exchanges, and communication between parents and children
	Understanding and support (D2)	Whether the video contains expressions of understanding and support between parent-child communication, including emotional support and understanding, respect for opinions, etc
"Non-mainstream" Parenting (E)	Statement about distinction (E1)	Whether the parents express a clear distinction from traditional mainstream family parenting
	Response to questions (E2)	Whether the parents express and respond to the problems that may be encountered as a "special parenting group" in the video

focused on whether parents demonstrated their educational and parenting methods in the activities presented in the video, including guidance, rewards, and punishments. (4) Parent-child communication. This category centered on verbal communication between parents and children. The study assessed whether parent-child dialogues, exchanges, and communication were evident in the videos. Additionally, it examined whether these dialogues contained expressions of understanding and support, encompassing emotional support, understanding, and respect for opinions. (5) "Non-mainstream" parenting. This category gauges whether parents expressed a clear distinction from traditional mainstream family parenting and whether they addressed and responded to challenges encountered as a 'special parenting group' in their videos.

Content analysis

This study utilized a bespoke coding table and implemented manual encoding using Divominer. Before proceeding with the full-scale coding, a preliminary test was conducted on 10% of the sample, involving the collaborative efforts of two researchers. The Holsti reliability coefficient (HCR), calculated through Divominer, yielded a reliability score of 0.83, considered acceptable. A linear regression analysis was performed at a 95% confidence level after completing the formal manual coding process. The analysis aimed to explore how different factors influenced audience preferences for varying types of video content, using the coding categories as dependent variables and the video scores as independent variables.

Textual analysis

The study included a textual analysis component involving a manual review of user comments to gain deeper insights into audience attitudes toward this genre of videos and non-mainstream families. The Gooseeker software was used to collect comment data from the Douyin platform. To balance representativeness and efficiency, we limited the number of page scrolls to 100, ensuring a manageable collection of comments that still captured representative viewpoints. In total, 114,348 comments were collected.

In designing our data collection strategy, we prioritized capturing high-engagement comments to ensure a comprehensive representation. Rather than focusing solely on highly liked comments,

we aimed for a balanced approach that preserved relative diversity by homogenizing each comment. Following the methodology Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) recommended, our qualitative textual analysis proceeded through three stages: data preparation, exploration, and reduction. Given the enormous volume of comments, 10% (11,435) were randomly sampled in the data preparation phase, and irrelevant content like pure punctuation marks was removed. This process left us with 11,144 comments for analysis.

During data exploration, we first categorized the data based on the emotional tone (e.g., positive, neutral, negative) to capture the general sentiment of the comments. Then, we categorized comments within each emotional tone based on content type (e.g., parenting views, questions, appreciation). We then used the constant-comparison method to examine the data, identify recurring categories, and organize them into coding categories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006; Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Similar coding categories were consolidated into broader categories in the data reduction phase, and categories unrelated to parenting or specific video content were omitted to maintain the research focus. Ultimately, the comments were classified into six categories (see Table 3).

Finding

Content analysis

This study performed a content analysis on the selected video samples utilizing a customized encoding book. In these videos, a predominant theme is the depiction of emotional expressions between parents and children. A significant portion, 71.12% (133 videos), directly express emotions, and nearly half, 48.13% (90 videos), portray parent-child emotions in various forms. Additionally, numerous videos feature interactions and communication between parents and children. Parenting philosophies are often displayed through activities in the videos, with direct expression of these viewpoints being less common, accounting for only 8.56% of the total. Content related to “Non-mainstream” Parenting is relatively scarce; only six videos explicitly contrast with mainstream parenting models and seven address audience inquiries about such parenting styles (Table 4).

This research conducted linear regression analyses at a 95% confidence level, utilizing the video scoring outcomes. The analyses treated the encoding categories as dependent variables and

Table 3. Categories of textual analysis.

Categories	Description	Examples
Appreciation and Blessings	Comments showing appreciation, blessings, or offering kind suggestions toward the family model	1. The baby looks so cute eating blueberries (V. Wang) 2. The parenting is excellent, cultivating very positive values in her (Kelly Du)
Doubt and Response	Comments expressing skepticism or criticism of the family model and responses to these critiques	3. Feels very neglectful toward Kele! It is not suitable for the child (J.m.y) 4. Some people are meddlesome; even kids with moms aren't necessarily happier than those without (July)
Questions and Misunderstandings	Comments conveying questions or misunderstandings about the family model	5. I want to see the baby's mom; she must be beautiful too (Yuan Gang Shang Tong) 6. Will children raised in such families have different thoughts in their minds compared to other children? (Familiar Stranger)
Seeking Information	Comments seeking parenting information	About how much money is needed to go abroad? I also plan to have a child, but I can't give birth due to three significant hemorrhages (Blooming Flowers on the Horizon)
Touched and Inspired	Comments expressing emotions of being moved, resonating, or inspired	I'm also an unmarried mom. No matter how the world treats me when she calls me mom, I feel it's worth it (Tender Girl i)
Not parenting related	Comments related to specific video content but not to parenting topics	When I hear an airplane, I have a shadow in my heart! (Flower Fairy)

Table 4. Coding results.

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Emotion Expression	Direct expression	133	71.12%
	Diverse expression	90	48.13%
Parent-Child Interaction	Activity participation	118	63.10%
	Cooperation and mutual support	52	27.81%
Parenting Styles	Expression of opinions	16	8.56%
	Demonstrating in activities	39	20.86%
Parent-Child Communication	Dialogue and exchanges	99	52.94%
	Understanding and support	45	24.06%
"Non-mainstream" Parenting	Statement about distinction	6	3.21%
	Response to questions	7	3.74%

Table 5. Linear regression result.

	Categories	Coefficients	Sd	t Stat	p value
Emotion Expression	Direct expression	−0.046	0.031	−1.472	.143
	Diverse expression	0.102	0.030	3.421	.001
Parent-Child Interaction	Activity participation	0.054	0.032	1.677	.095
	Cooperation and mutual support	0.007	0.036	0.209	.835
Parenting Styles	Expression of opinions	0.170	0.047	3.631	.000
	Demonstrating in activities	−0.013	0.037	−0.344	.731
Parent-Child Communication	Dialogue and exchanges	−0.063	0.036	−1.752	.081
	Understanding and support	0.219	0.039	5.613	.000
"Non-mainstream" Parenting	Statement about distinction	0.121	0.196	0.617	.538
	Response to questions	−0.057	0.181	−0.317	.751

the video scores as independent variables (Table 5). Notably, categories such as “Diverse Expression,” “Expression of Opinions,” and “Understanding and Support” demonstrated a significant positive correlation with the video scores. The finding suggests that videos showcasing a variety of emotional expressions, clear articulation of parenting viewpoints, and evident mutual understanding and support in parent-child interactions are more likely to be positively received by audiences.

Textual analysis

The content analysis revealed that audiences generally positively evaluate videos featuring diverse emotional expressions, the direct expression of educational viewpoints, and mutual understanding and support in parent-child communication. However, each content analysis category also received diverse response comments (Table 6). The collected comments were analyzed and categorized into six main categories based on sentiment and content type to gain a deeper understanding of these attitudes. The classification results indicate the distribution of comments as follows: Appreciation and Blessings (4989, 44.8%), Doubt and Response (342, 3.1%), Questions and Misunderstandings (270, 2.4%), Seeking Information (48, 0.4%), Touched and Inspired (202, 1.8%), and Not Parenting Related (5293, 47.5%). The following section presents detailed observations and insights drawn from each parenting-related category, beginning with “Appreciation and Blessings.”

Appreciation and blessings

Audience appreciation and affection in the comments ($n=4989$) mainly center on the child, the parenting style, and the parent-child relationship. Many comments focus on the child’s adorable actions in the videos, with viewers frequently praising the child’s cute behaviors, such as in a comment stating, “*The baby looks so cute eating blueberries* (V. Wang).” The dialogues between content creators and their children in these videos also prompt some viewers to engage directly with the child, reflecting a high level of immersion and affection.

Table 6. Content categories and corresponding comments.

	Categories	Corresponding Comments
Emotion Expression (A)	Direct expression (A1)	211,901
	Diverse expression (A2)	206,581
Parent-Child Interaction (B)	Activity participation (B1)	148,459
	Cooperation and mutual support (B2)	80,587
Parenting Styles (C)	Expression of opinions (C1)	57,972
	Demonstrating in activities (C2)	38,267
Parent-Child Communication (D)	Dialogue and exchanges (D1)	119,825
	Understanding and support (D2)	86,008
"Non-mainstream" Parenting (E)	Statement about distinction (E1)	12,630
	Response to questions (E2)	12,859

In terms of parenting styles, viewers often express admiration for the parenting methods displayed. It is evident in comments like, *"This mom is good at educating, constantly guiding the child to think and express. Patiently listening* (Liu Xing, Nanning)." Additionally, the excellent behaviors of the children in the videos are frequently attributed to effective parenting, as seen in comments like, *"The parenting is excellent, cultivating very positive values in her* (Kelly Du)." Comparisons to "mainstream" families are also made, often highlighting the unique strengths of the parenting style depicted, for example, *"A child with a mom might not necessarily have such a gentle dad* (Lao You)." Beyond mere compliments, some viewers share their own parenting experiences, showcasing a tolerant and affectionate view toward this "non-mainstream" style, as in, *"Key period for baby early education, be sure to practice and accompany more, graphics, colors, language, gross motor skills, rules, logical thinking* (Yi Lan Jing He)."

Videos that depict positive parent-child relationships and harmonious family life also receive appreciation. For instance, comments like, *"Sim, the darling of the family, a harmonious and loving big family* (MTJJ Zi Qi), "reflect this sentiment. Such harmonious depictions often elicit blessings from viewers, such as *"A kind and excellent family, may you be happy for a long time* (Auspicious to have met you)."

Doubt and response

Some comments express skepticism or criticism of the family model and responses to these critiques ($n=342$). Some doubts center on the parents' caregiving approaches, with comments like, *"Feels very neglectful toward Kele! It is not suitable for the child* (J.m.y). "More pronounced are the comments questioning the family structure itself. For example, comments such as *"I feel sorry for the child, leaving the mom at such a young age, no mom to call from now on, selfish!* (Mei Xin)", *"Men can't handle raising kids* (Mei Mei)", and *"The child lacks a sense of security. It won't work without a dad* (Ma Wang Dui Ji Wei Xia Luo Xia Lu Yu Gui Yu)" convey the belief that the presence of both gender roles is crucial in parenting. These comments cast doubt on the effectiveness of single-gender parenting and suggest that children raised by same-sex couples may face developmental challenges.

Beyond outright questioning, some comments subtly convey skepticism through expressions of pity or regret for the children. While not directly disparaging the "non-mainstream" parenting model, these comments hint at an underlying belief that such parenting is inferior to mainstream models. Examples include *"It's heartbreaking to watch without mom's company* (Twin Brothers)" and *"What to do if the baby misses mom? Sigh.* (SL)".

Faced with such doubts and criticisms, many viewers actively engage in the comments, especially when they hold contrasting views. In these discussions, beyond a minority who label the skeptics as conservative or out-of-touch, like in the comment, *"Society is advancing, only those who stand still will find new things strange. Little do they know that they are the ones who have lost touch with modern times, how laughable!* (Forever Far)" most responses can be

categorized into two distinct types. The first type displays a “counter-attack” approach. Adhering to a “mind your own business” philosophy, these viewers express disapproval of unsolicited criticisms of others’ lives. For instance, *“Some people in the comments say it’s as if their children are so much happier with a mom. If you’re that happy, why can’t you stand others being happy? Is it difficult to acknowledge that others’ families are loving, happy, and fulfilling? (Round and Round) and “Some people are meddlesome; even kids with moms aren’t necessarily happier than those without (July).”*

The second type of response is characterized as “self-proving.” Contrary to the aggressive tone of the first type, these viewers aim to logically affirm the viability and sensibility of the “non-mainstream” family model depicted in the videos. An example is, *“Don’t mention that the child has no mom. A child only misses a mother when they lack love. The two are so good to the child; they are meticulous and caring. The child is cheerful, lively, and expressive. It is already better than 80% of Chinese families. How many children spend their childhood amidst their parents’ quarrels, emotional neglect, and neglect? They’re great, responsible, and supportive (Zhao Meiling).”*

Questions and misunderstandings

The content analysis revealed that only a few videos explicitly identify as “non-mainstream” families. As a result, some viewers might misconceive the parent-child interactions depicted as representative of conventional “heterosexual” families and raise related questions ($n=270$). For instance, in response to a video of a father caring for his child, one comment says, *“I want to see the baby’s mom; she must be beautiful too (Yuan Gang Shang Tong).”* Other viewers pose direct inquiries, like *“Where is his mom? (SpongeBob)”* or *“Are these two kids adopted? (User98462268).”* “When videos feature two fathers, distinguishing them from “mainstream family” content, it often leads to various speculations and misunderstandings, such as, *“Oh my, can men get pregnant and have children now???? (Woyang Taoyiku Women’s Wear Collection Store)”* or *“What’s going on? Is it one woman with two husbands? (Shen Qing Jiu Ban).”*

Beyond mere misconceptions and questions stemming from unfamiliarity with the family structure, many inquiries concern the impact of such family models on the children. Queries like, *“What if the child’s mom wants the child in the future? How will they handle it when the child grows up and wants to reconnect? (User4836914427060)”* and *“Will children raised in such families have different thoughts in their minds compared to other children? (Familiar Stranger)”* indicate a trend among viewers to seek a deeper understanding of the situation rather than outright rejection.

Seeking information

Videos have increasingly become a medium for bloggers to share aspects of their lives. In LGBTQ+ parenting videos, the depiction of “non-mainstream” lifestyles suggests that the bloggers possess knowledge in specific areas, potentially addressing questions that viewers have about LGBTQ+ couple fertility issues or the logistics involved in children returning to their home country. Consequently, viewers often use the comment section to seek information ($n=49$). For instance, one viewer asks, *“About how much money is needed to go abroad? I also plan to have a child, but I can’t give birth due to three major hemorrhages (Blooming Flowers on the Horizon).”* Another inquired, *“I also want to ask if the procedures are easy and how much money is needed (Yali).”* Additionally, questions about practical matters are posed, like *“Just asking, for such a small baby returning to the country, do they need to get a passport and such? (Taobao Fun Women’s Clothing in Chuzhou).”* These comments illustrate how viewers use the platform to engage with the content and seek relevant information based on what is shared in the videos.

Touched and inspired

Some audience expressed emotions of being moved, resonating, or inspired in the comment sections ($n=202$). Many videos feature parents demonstrating their love for their children in diverse ways, such as engaging in practical activities together or through dialogues that highlight a harmonious parent-child relationship. This emotionally rich content often moves viewers, prompting them to share their feelings in the comments. Examples include, “*Watched it twice, went from laughing to crying* (Yangxin Real Estate Liu Jianhua)” and “*By the end, I cried* (Rebecca L.)” Beyond these overt emotional responses, many viewers find an internal connection with the content. For instance, in response to a mother articulating her parenting philosophy, a viewer comments, “*Understood every word you said. Finally, someone has said everything I wanted to say* (Just call me Tingting).” When a mother expresses profound love for her daughter and her determination to support her single-handedly, viewers often relate to these sentiments, sharing their own experiences like, “*I’m also a single parent, taking care of four children* (Xiao Jing@)” and “*I’m also an unmarried mom. No matter how the world treats me when she calls me mom, I feel it’s worth it* (Tender Girl i).”

The portrayal of “selfless love for children” and resilience “fearless of societal norms” in the videos also inspires viewers, giving them courage in their own lives. Comments such as, “*After the divorce, raising a child felt lost. Douyin resonated with me, and I recommended Haiyang’s Douyin. It guides me with positive energy, refreshing my understanding. I love myself, my child, and my family. Keep going! I can do it!* (Autumn’s Story)” and “*My child’s father went abroad. Today, the landlord raised the rent for the small shop. Faced with a dilemma, I saw this segment of Haiyang. It gives me strength* (Shuangshuang)” illustrate this impact. Furthermore, some viewers idealize the parental figures and the parent-child lifestyle shown in the videos, leading to introspection, as seen in comments like: “*My husband and I have been arguing for four months. I’m a pregnant woman. I’m so afraid I won’t be able to give my baby happiness. If we divorce, seeing that you have the ability to give your baby a happy home makes me feel so inadequate. I’m not a good mom* (Happy Mama),” and “*I’m a single-parent family from Changchun. Whenever I hear you talk about educating your child, I feel inferior. My daughter is three and a half years old, and I hope she can be independent and face her future life well* (Hannah).”

Discussion

Continuity and transformation: from “invisible” to “partially visible”

In the context of Chinese society’s traditional cultural milieu, LGBTQ+ parenting families have historically been “invisible” (Miles-Johnson & Wang, 2018; Wei, 2020). However, as social and cultural norms evolve, societal attitudes and perceptions shift, signaling a move away from the “invisible” status (McKnight, 2016). This study observes LGBTQ+ parenting families as being in a state of “partial visibility,” indicative of a societal environment that represents both continuity and transformation from the traditional “invisible” status.

On one hand, the content analysis reveals that only a few videos explicitly identify as “non-mainstream” families. As a result, viewers in the comments often misinterpret these families as the conventional “husband and wife” model, evidenced by remarks such as, “*I want to see the baby’s mom; she must be beautiful too* (Yuan Gang Shang Tong).” It suggests the persistence of certain aspects of the “invisible” status in the parenting families depicted.

On the other hand, the parenting content often subtly indicates a “non-mainstream” family identity. In China, explicit expressions of homosexual or LGBTQ+ content, such as mentioning the word “tongxinglian” (which means homosexual) or showing two men or women kissing, are forbidden by platforms and the government. However, it is generally possible to avoid scrutiny if you only hint at your orientation or use words like “tongzhi” or “rainbow” to refer to your identity. This partial concealment by content creators can be seen as a compromise with

government and media platform regulations, allowing them to post their content successfully. In this study, rather than adopting a “marriage of convenience” role-playing model (Choi & Luo, 2016) to maintain “invisibility,” these videos allude to an LGBTQ+ family identity through subtle cues like the absence of a mother, children of mixed heritage with Chinese parents, or more overt indications like “two dads” or “daddy and papa.” Some viewers, recognizing these hints or being better informed, ask questions such as, “*Where is his mom?* (SpongeBob)” or “*Are these two kids adopted?* (User98462268).” Moreover, some knowledgeable viewers voluntarily clarify others’ doubts in the comments, reflecting these families’ “partially visible” nature.

Interestingly, even when videos explicitly feature cues like “two fathers,” it doesn’t always lead to a clear recognition of LGBTQ+ families. Instead, such representations might prompt conjectures adhering to traditional gender norms, such as “*What’s going on, one woman with two husbands?* (Shen Qing Jiu Ban).” It illustrates the complex interplay of social norms in transitioning from invisibility to partial visibility.

LGBTQ+ parenting: a possible approach to social integration for China’s LGBTQ+ community

LGBTQ+ individuals often encounter various doubts and biases, as highlighted in previous research (Johnston, 2016; Miller et al., 2023; Özdemir & Erenoğlu, 2022). Our textual analysis identified criticism centered around “inappropriate parenting behaviors” and the belief that “the absence of both genders is detrimental to a child’s growth.” These doubts largely stem from the deep-rooted traditional family values in Chinese society, which bring into question the reasonableness of LGBTQ+ parenting, particularly regarding their capacity to raise children effectively. Confucian culture emphasizes family and social harmony, viewing marriage and childbearing as duties everyone should fulfill (Yu et al., 2011; Yu & Xiao, 2017). Concepts such as “men should marry, women should marry” (男大当婚, 女大当嫁), “more children bring more blessings” (多子多福), and “having no descendants is the greatest unfilial act” (无后为大) reinforce the recognition of heterosexual marriage and the importance of continuing the family line. In this cultural context, the family is seen as the fundamental unit of society, while heterosexual marriage and parenting are considered the foundation of individual responsibility and social stability. Therefore, LGBTQ+ individuals, as they cannot continue the family line through traditional heterosexual marriage, are often seen as violating social ethics, and their lifestyle and family structure are not widely accepted, especially regarding establishing a family and raising children, which are more likely to be questioned. This study brings into focus the reasonableness of LGBTQ+ parenting, particularly questioning the capacity of LGBTQ+ families to raise children effectively. Since the public generally views the traditional family as the basis for stable child-rearing, doubts tend to focus on whether LGBTQ+ families are capable of effective parenting.

It is precisely because the public focuses on parenting abilities and values the effectiveness of raising children that some viewers can objectively recognize the positive aspects of LGBTQ+ families’ parenting practices. Content analysis revealed that videos displaying diverse emotional expressions, direct articulation of educational viewpoints, and mutual understanding in communication are positively received. Videos that depict solid parent-child relationships, parents’ educational philosophies, and children’s abilities to express and communicate tend to garner favorable reviews. When parenting skills are illustrated through love expressions, effective communication, and unique educational philosophies, some viewers acknowledge their effectiveness in the comments section.

Responses to criticisms typically manifest as assertive “counter-attack” or logical “self-proving” reactions. Central to both response types is the theme of parenting capabilities, addressing aspects like family atmosphere, child development, and parent-child relationships. “Counter-attack” responses refute doubts concerning these themes, whereas “self-verification” responses provide evidence of a positive family atmosphere, healthy child development, and harmonious parent-child

relationships to validate the legitimacy of “non-mainstream” families. Both types of responses use “parenting competence” as a measure, drawing upon the outstanding family dynamics depicted in the videos to advocate for this family model. Moreover, this study observes that, aside from questions arising due to the “partially visible” status of this parenting model and misunderstandings about the family dynamics, most inquiries concentrate on the potential impact of this parenting model on the child’s development.

The focus indicates that the public shows limited interest in the relationships of LGBTQ+ parents but cares deeply about their children. In other words, the ability to parent effectively is the crucial criterion for evaluating such family models. While some people are aware that the parents are homosexual—a concept that contradicts mainstream Chinese norms—they tend to avoid discussing this issue, viewing it instead as a personal choice. It aligns with the suppression of sexual topics in China (Higgins et al., 2002; Yu & Xiao, 2017) and traditional cultural attitudes of detachment and respect for others’ family affairs, as expressed in the saying “it is hard for an honest official to cut through household affairs” (Wang, 2013). However, it is noteworthy that respect and tolerance are strongly connected to fulfilling essential family duties—giving birth, parenting, and continuing the family line. This familialistic perspective explains why LGBTQ+ individuals without children face significant social pressure (Liu et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2020), while those with children primarily face concerns about whether their family structure disadvantages their children. This concern can be addressed by demonstrating practical parenting skills and the well-being of their children, as supported by the study’s findings. Additionally, that is why in Wei Wei’s research, the presence of intergenerational parenting in LGBTQ+ families helps them cope better with external pressures and makes it easier for them to “come out.” (Wei & Gao, 2020; Wei & Wang, 2024)

LGBTQ+ individuals are often perceived as unable to continue the family line, which is seen as a violation of traditional ethics. However, fulfilling familial duties can lead to greater tolerance of their personal choices. Therefore, the findings suggest that because children serve as a crucial evaluation criterion for the rationality of LGBTQ+ families, effective LGBTQ+ parenting can promote the social integration of the LGBTQ+ community in China.

Social media: platform algorithm, emotional function, and empowerment & constrain

Social media, given its expansive nature (Cao & Lu, 2014; Craig & McInroy, 2014), has become a crucial platform for many “non-mainstream” parenting families to share their lives. It plays a significant role in disseminating “non-mainstream” information and has amplified the influence of content creators who share their daily family lives. It contributes to everyday activism (Duguay, 2016) and makes LGBTQ+ parents incidental advocates (Blackwell et al., 2016), potentially driving cognitive transformation among the audience.

Due to Douyin’s recommendation algorithm, which primarily relies on a hierarchical interest label tree for user personas, and the partitioned data bucket strategy (Zhao, 2021), users are accurately provided with personalized content tailored to their preferences. Therefore, people with shared preferences are grouped, forming the primary audience, which creates a relatively less controversial and more tolerant environment. Tag selection is crucial in identifying and categorizing posts for recommendation algorithms. It is commonly used for selective self-representation on social media (Kataria & Agarwal, 2015). It is seen as a strategy to bypass platform moderation policies through “coded language” (using indirect or modified terms to convey messages that might otherwise be restricted or censored). For instance, LGBTQ+ parents might use tags like #babydaily or #rainbowparents (instead of #tongxinglian) to manage their self-representation and avoid restrictions. This approach helps gather a group of supportive followers and achieve effective dissemination, demonstrating an emotional function in this study.

Social media content can impact viewers’ emotions, leading to emotional contagion (Herrando & Constantinides, 2021; Nummenmaa et al., 2008; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). In this study, viewers are influenced by the emotional expressions and harmonious parent-child relationships

shown in the videos. They express affection for the children, like “*The baby looks so cute eating blueberries* (V. Wang),” or admiration for the parent-child relationships, as in “*Sim, the darling of the family, a harmonious and loving big family* (MTJJ Zi Qi).” Parents’ resilience in the face of societal challenges also moves viewers, prompting comments such as “*I watch all your videos from start to finish, and your love story moves me a lot!* (ColdRiverLoneGoose).” Blessings and encouragement are frequently expressed: “*A kind and outstanding family, happiness forever* (Veryluckytohavemetyou).” In addition to contagion, emotional resonance can be easily found in the comments, such as “*Understood every word you said. Finally, someone has said everything I wanted to say* (Just call me Tingting).”

It is revealed that emotions are vital in shifting cognitive perceptions (Dolan, 2002), whether through emotional contagion or resonance (Dolan, 2002; Giorgi, 2017). When viewers are emotionally touched or impressed, they are more open to persuasion and acceptance of previously unfamiliar concepts (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Additionally, people often feel similar to those they resonate with, aiding identification (Kouamé et al., 2022). Although selected tags and recommendation algorithms can gather audiences with overlapping interests in this study, they may attract viewers only interested in the specific elements labeled in the tags. For example, when an LGBTQ+ parenting video is tagged with #babydaily and #rainbowparents, it might attract people who simply enjoy baby videos without necessarily having any interest in LGBTQ+ parents or even being aware of their presence. In such cases, despite the accuracy of the recommendation algorithms, the Douyin platform can still amplify the voice of this “non-mainstream” group to a broader audience. Due to the emotional functions, viewers are touched, impressed, and more open to acceptance of this unfamiliar parenting model. Additionally, the “resonance” effect makes it easier for them to see themselves as “non-mainstream” LGBTQ+ parents, enhancing acceptance and recognition of such parenting models. Thus, as a conduit of these emotional contents, social media plays a pivotal role in eliciting emotions and fostering a shift in perceptions toward LGBTQ+ parenting models, which is introduced as everyday activism (Blackwell et al., 2016; Duguay, 2016). Discussions in the comment section also contribute to visibility by fostering engagement through questions and responses.

However, social media platforms also constrain the voices of marginalized groups while empowering them, primarily by limiting diversity. The literature has extensively discussed the digital divide, highlighting the increasing disparities (Dijk & Hacker, 2003). On these platforms, creators are evaluated based on various metrics, such as the number of followers, likes, and posts; more influential creators gain greater visibility and can further expand their reach, while less influential ones become increasingly marginalized (Duffy & Meisner, 2023). The significant differences in followers, views, and likes among creators in this study illustrate this phenomenon. Therefore, Douyin is likely to promote certain LGBTQ+ content that aligns more closely with mainstream expectations, overshadowing other LGBTQ+ parenting content that may be equally valid but suppressed. Specifically, the account of Ye Haiyang garnered the most attention in this study, portraying a mother with a successful career and excellent parenting skills. This illustrates the effectiveness of this “non-mainstream” model, as it meets public criteria for parenting ability and promotes acceptance of such parenting styles. However, what about ordinary LGBTQ+ parents who may not be as successful in their careers or who face challenges in their parenting? Should they be deemed “unreasonable” and rejected by mainstream society? In other words, the empowerment and constraints imposed by platform algorithms can increase visibility and acceptance for marginalized groups. Still, they may also result in a lack of humanism and empathy, which warrants further exploration in future research.

Additionally, the “partial visibility” of LGBTQ+ content on Douyin reflects how platform regulation, tag selection, and recommendation algorithms work together to determine which narratives are promoted and which are suppressed. While content that conforms to mainstream aesthetics and values may be tolerated or celebrated, other narratives may be suppressed due to their perceived non-conformity. For example, content that showcases harmonious family relationships and well-behaved children may receive greater visibility because it aligns with societal

expectations of what makes a family legitimate. This partial visibility, therefore, plays a dual role: it helps in normalizing LGBTQ+ families by emphasizing commonalities with mainstream families, yet it also constrains the diversity of LGBTQ+ narratives that reach the broader public. The dynamic highlights Foucault's concept of "power/knowledge," wherein power influences societal understanding and behavior by controlling the production and dissemination of knowledge. In Douyin's platform environment, recommendation algorithms and content moderation policies determine which narratives are amplified and which are suppressed, thereby shaping public perceptions of LGBTQ+ families.

Applications and limitations

Research on LGBTQ+ parenting in China is relatively scarce, particularly in terms of how these families present their parenting styles and parent-child relationships through social media. This study contributes to understanding LGBTQ+ parenting presentations on social media and explores the interaction between social media and LGBTQ+ parenting. It offers a foundational point for further exploration and understanding in this area.

However, this study also has its limitations. The analysis primarily focuses on several videos from popular social media platforms, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of all LGBTQ+ parents in China. The reliance on content and textual analysis might overlook nuances in the portrayal and reception of LGBTQ+ parenting. Furthermore, the comments analyzed may not fully represent public opinion due to self-selection bias. The users who choose to comment are likely more engaged or hold extreme views, which may lead to an overrepresentation of certain attitudes. At the same time, more moderate or indifferent perspectives are underrepresented. Additionally, platform moderation policies, including content filtering and algorithmic regulation, may influence which comments are visible and which perspectives are captured in our analysis. Chinese social media platforms, such as Douyin, often implement content moderation mechanisms that can result in the deletion or suppression of sensitive content, affecting the diversity of opinions available for analysis.

Future research could benefit from a more comprehensive approach, including surveys or interviews with LGBTQ+ parents, to better understand their experiences and perspectives. Expanding the scope of the study to include a broader range of social media platforms and content types could also provide a more holistic view of LGBTQ+ parenting in the digital age.

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