

# Discussing Women's Understanding and Attitudes Towards Gender Stereotypes on Social Media: A Case Study of the "Female Driver" Topic

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## Abstract:

The depiction of gender is the focus of a growing number of content analyses in the fields of both mass media and social media. This study focuses on the gender stereotypes reflected by the "female driver" label on social media and explores how women view and respond to these stereotypes and their impact on their career development. By using content analysis, this study examined and analyzed posts and comments on Xiaohongshu, a social media platform, to reveal different attitudes of social media users towards the "woman driver" label. The study found that most women hold a negative attitude towards this label, believing that it is a denial of women's ability. And this labeling phenomenon may cause women to encounter obstacles in career choice and development. Despite data showing that female drivers are less responsible for traffic accidents, negative stereotypes about "female drivers" remain prevalent in society. This study also applies social identity theory and Doing Gender theory to explore the psychological motivation and social impact behind these stereotypes, emphasizing the importance of eliminating stereotypes to promote gender equality.

**Keywords:** Social media; female driver; gender stereotype; social identity theory; Doing Gender theory.

## 1. Introduction

The hashtag "female driver" is often used on social media to refer to female drivers, and there are a range of gender stereotypes implicit in this labeling. This study aims to understand how women perceive and respond to stereotypes of "women drivers" on social media, to explore the impact of these stereotypes

on women, and to inform the promotion of gender equality. Explore the messages women receive on social software and their impact, and understand how women perceive them and work to overcome gender stereotypes [1]. This study focuses on analyzing the stereotype of "female driver" on social media and its impact on women and selects a post with the title "Feeling how much female drivers are maligned on

a regular basis...” as a sample for the study. A post titled “Feeling how much malice female drivers receive on a regular basis...” was selected as a sample for the study, and content analysis was used to categorize and summarize the posts on social media to explore women’s attitudes towards the label “female driver”. It seeks to analyze the psychological motivations and social impacts behind the stereotypes of “female drivers” from the current situation of the stereotypes on social media, explore how women perceive these stereotypes and their impacts on women’s lives and provide targeted insights in combination with a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature and data on social media.

## 2. Literature Review

Women’s rights in the workplace have been a relatively longstanding topic. In the course of social development, women have gradually joined the working class, rather than merely existing as subordinates to men, and stand on the same historical footing as male workers. However, for historical reasons, women have long faced a variety of obstacles in the workplace, including the pay gap, barriers to advancement, and work-family balance, as reflected in the women’s rights movement throughout history. Gender stereotypes are prevalent in society and are one of the highly discussed gender issues today. Social identity theory suggests that people not only define themselves based on their personal traits but also construct identities based on the social groups to which they belong. When individuals view themselves as part of a group, their behavior, and attitudes may be influenced by group norms and social expectations. These two theories help to understand why certain labels, such as women’s inability to take on high-intensity work, unsuitability for science and engineering majors, frailty, and many other negative perceptions can limit women’s abilities and choices and have a substantial negative impact on women’s career advancement.

While there is a great deal of research on social media and gender stereotypes today, there is relatively little research on how hashtags on social media specifically impact women’s career development.

Nowadays, social media is an important source of information, “tutorials” and “guides” are endless, but a considerable part of these contents have poor information and misperceptions due to stereotypes, and there are also a lot of discussion posts and help posts that receive a lot of opinions and suggestions based on negative stereotypes. At the same time, there are also a lot of discussion posts and help threads that receive a lot of opinions and suggestions based on negative stereotypes, so we will further fo-

cus on how women understand these labeling phenomena, and through these theoretical frameworks and a review of existing research, we will seek to better understand how labeling phenomena on social media affect women’s career development, and explore a foundation for further research.

### 2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

Regarding media usage, the higher the frequency of exposure to news reports about female athletes in both traditional and new media, the weaker the gender stereotypes held by university students [2]. Doing Gender theory emphasizes that gender is not a static attribute, but a process that is constantly being constructed and reproduced through everyday social interactions. Using this theoretical framework, this study will explore how women construct and express their gender identities through their interactions on social media, especially when confronted with the label “female driver.”

Social identity theory emphasizes how individuals define themselves through the groups to which they belong and how this sense of belonging influences behavior and attitudes. This study will analyze how women identify themselves socially on social media through the hashtag “female driver” and explore how this identification affects their behavior and attitudes.

According to Van Dijk, discourse plays an indispensable role in the reproduction of ideologies and daily expressions. Expression of our sayings expresses our ideologically based views, especially as a member of a group. The discourse is both fed from ideologies and is shaped according to the ideology; as well as our ideologies [3].

### 2.2 Current Status of the Study

Social media is both a powerful tool and a force to be managed carefully in modern society. It has not only profoundly changed people’s lifestyles and socialization habits, but has also had a wide-ranging impact on a number of levels, including political, economic, and cultural. Social identity theory states that people’s self-concepts are based not only on personal traits, but also on the groups they belong to. The theory explains how individuals define their identities through group affiliation and how this affiliation influences individual behavior and attitudes. Labeling theory and the labeling effect, on the other hand, are important concepts in sociology that explore how members of society define and understand the behaviors of others through labeling and how these labels affect the identity and social behaviors of the labeled individuals. This theory focuses specifically on how labels are created, disseminated, and ultimately accepted as perceptions of a group,

and it also explores the effects of labels on self-perception. This theory helps to understand why certain hashtags become popular on social media and negatively impact women's careers.

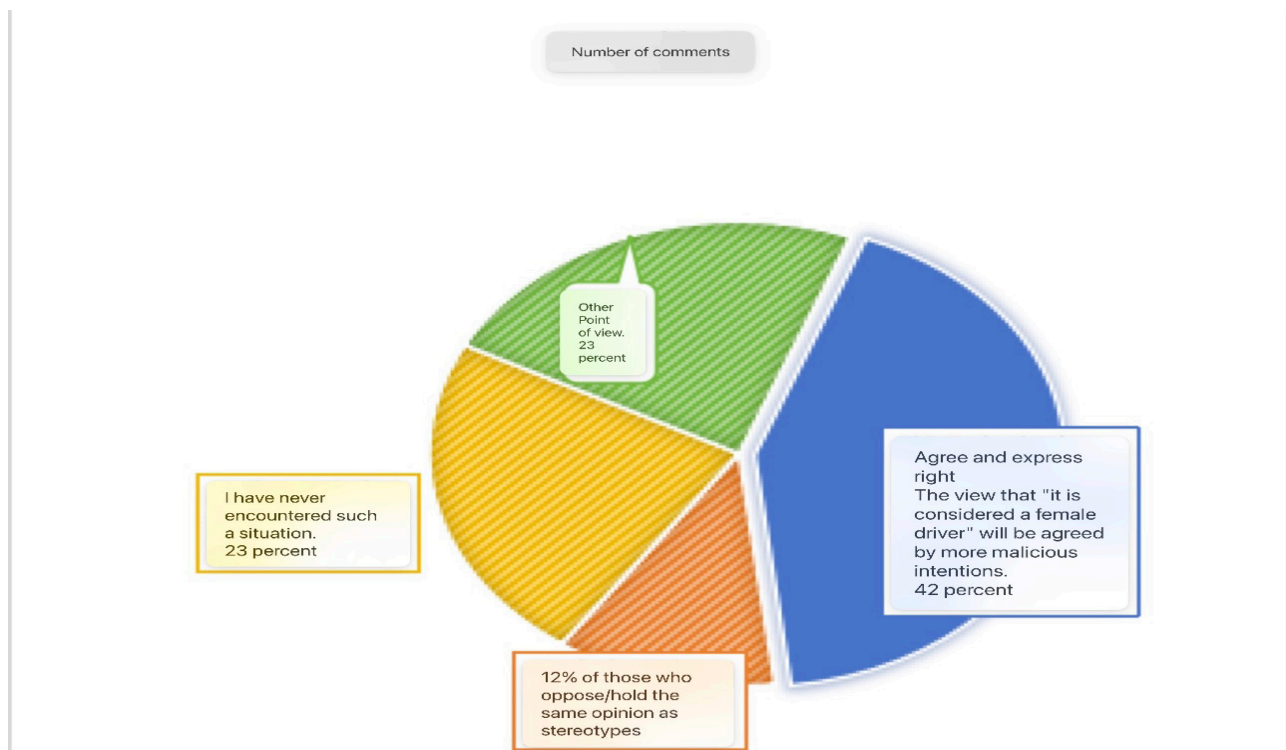
### 3. Research Methodology

To delve deeper into the topic of "female drivers" on social media, the study employed content analysis methods. Data were collected from posts and comments on the social media platform Xiaohongshu, focusing on the topic of "female drivers." A post titled "Feeling the extent of malice female drivers face daily..." was selected as a case study. This study analyzed at least 50 valid comments to ensure the diversity and representativeness of the sample. Data collection was conducted through screenshots and

manual recording, and the data were organized and managed using spreadsheets.

#### 3.1 Research Findings

By analyzing the sentiment orientation of these comments, as shown in Figure 1, out of 50 comments, 22 expressed agreement with the viewpoint that being perceived as a "female driver" leads to experiencing more malice, and they indicated displeasure with this situation; 6 comments opposed or held opinions similar to such stereotypes; 12 comments stated that they had not experienced similar malicious treatment; and another 12 comments involved different perspectives. This analysis reveals the complex sentiments and views surrounding the "female driver" label on social media.



**Fig. 1 Analysis of comment quantities**

Through the analysis of comment samples on social media, this study observed several main themes and patterns. Some comments directly criticized the "female driver" label, viewing it as a manifestation of gender discrimination; other comments supported this label, believing it to be a reasonable classification based on certain experiences or statistical facts; still, other comments took a more neutral stance, advocating that society should treat every driver fairly and should not simply apply labels. It can be seen that women generally hold a negative attitude toward the "female driver" label, considering it a denial of their

individual capabilities and an unfair treatment of the female population. Many women use social media platforms to voice their dissatisfaction with this phenomenon and counter these labels by showcasing their driving skills and achievements, thereby proving their worth.

### 4. Discussion

In today's society, social media has become an important platform for people to communicate and interact. However, on this platform, there also exist various forms of stereotypes. Among these, the label "female driver"

stands out particularly because it is often associated with negative connotations such as lack of driving skills and a tendency to cause accidents. Research has found that this kind of label frequently appears in social media comments and is usually accompanied by teasing or derogatory tones. However, do these stereotypes have factual basis, and how do women view this label? With these questions in mind, this study conducted a simple analysis of comment samples. In addition to observing several main themes and patterns in the comments on image-text posts, it also collected some official statistics related to the number, ratio, and frequency of traffic accidents. In the analysis of the Xiaohongshu image-text post titled “Feeling the extent of malice female drivers face daily...”, some comments directly criticized the “female driver” label, viewing it as a manifestation of gender discrimination; other comments supported this label, believing it to be a reasonable classification based on certain experiences or statistical facts; while still others took a more neutral stance, advocating that society should treat each driver fairly and should not simply categorize them by labels. In the collection of statistics related to traffic accidents, it can be observed that the data provided by various traffic police detachments are not as extreme as those selectively reported by the media. For example, according to data from the Xiangtan Traffic Police Detachment, the ratio of male to female drivers is approximately 4:1, and in the proportion of major traffic accidents, male drivers account for as high as 92.94%, while female drivers account for only 7.06% (Xiangtan Traffic Police Detachment, 2024). This data aligns with the statistics from the Ministry of Public Security, which show that nationwide, the ratio of male to female drivers is 7:3, and in traffic accidents in 2019, male drivers accounted for 85%, while female drivers accounted for only 15% (Ministry of Public Security, 2019). In a dataset classified by gender, male defendants accounted for 94.6%, while females accounted for 5.4%. The average incidence rate per ten thousand female drivers between 2016 and 2019 was 0.25, whereas for male drivers, it was 2.2, which is 8.8 times higher than that of female drivers. Therefore, from the perspective of statistical data, female drivers are not the primary responsible parties in traffic accidents. However, despite these facts, the focus on and discrimination against “female drivers” remains widespread. Theoretically, based on the “Doing Gender” theory and Social Identity Theory, labels like “female driver” not only reflect societal views on women engaging in driving activities but may also have profound impacts on women’s career choices and development.

The “Doing Gender” theory posits that gender is not a static identity but rather a process that is continually constructed and reconstructed through everyday interactions.

During this process, individuals perform and confirm their gender identities through behavior, speech, and actions. When there is a prevalent negative perception of “female drivers,” women engaged in driving-related professions might face additional pressure, as they must not only fulfill their job responsibilities but also continuously prove their competence. If women perceive societal biases or negative stereotypes, these feelings could translate into professional uncertainty and self-doubt, thereby affecting their career planning and personal growth.

Social Identity Theory further indicates that an individual’s social identity influences their behavior and psychological state. This theory emphasizes the importance of group affiliation, suggesting that people tend to view their own group in a positive light and strive to maintain and enhance the status of their group. Consequently, if groups like “female drivers” are saddled with negative labels, women might opt to avoid related activities or professional fields to evade negative feedback. This situation is not limited to driving and related careers; women often encounter similar circumstances in fields such as STEM disciplines, physical labor, and technical jobs.

In summary, the stereotype of “female drivers” is not only a matter of gender equality but also a significant factor influencing women’s career choices and development. To eliminate these effects, society needs to work towards changing the stereotypes associated with female drivers and provide a fair and unbiased environment where everyone has the opportunity to pursue career development based on their abilities and interests.

In “Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership”, Eagly and Carli summarize that women face complex challenges in the development of leadership capabilities [1]. In modern society, professional roles represent another crucial social role for women beyond traditional family roles. Working women confront multiple challenges, including gender stereotypes, limitations on career advancement, and unfair treatment on the path to promotion. The root of these challenges lies in the social structures and cultural biases of gender inequality, where certain ingrained beliefs are often imposed upon women. The phenomenon of labeling can impact women’s career development through several mechanisms: firstly, negative labels create more obstacles for women in the workplace, including issues related to securing job opportunities, promotions, and pay equity; secondly, persistent stereotypes may also lead women to avoid industries or careers that are stigmatized; finally, long-term exposure to negative labels can undermine women’s confidence and affect their sense of professional accomplishment.

Research findings indicate that the stereotype of “female drivers” on social media has been recognized by many

women, and they are actively resisting this label and opposing any form of gender discrimination. Faced with negative labels, many women express dissatisfaction and take proactive measures to uphold their dignity, such as publicly refuting these labels to defend their personal identity or proving their capabilities through action to break down these unfair stereotypes. Such behaviors are not only acts of resistance at the individual level but also a pursuit of gender equity and justice in society [4]. Today, this selective reporting and intentional steering are gradually being recognized and resisted.

The governance level should focus on improving the media environment, constructing gender equality concepts, and enhancing laws and regulations, using social media management as a key measure to promote the realization of gender equality in practice [5].

In her book “Feminism and Media Studies,” Zhang Li mentions that in traditional media studies, women’s issues are often neglected or marginalized. Feminist media studies incorporate postmodern theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and other theories to explore the representation of women in media, women’s discourse, bodies, and their everyday life experiences, providing new value orientations for media research and offering insights applicable to the study of other marginalized groups. She also criticizes the essentialist tendencies within feminist media studies, emphasizing that gender is a social construction process filled with conflicts, contradictions, and discontinuities, while also revealing how media discourse negotiates the process of gendering. This study reveals an important fact: the phenomenon of labeling on social media is not just a personal experience of social issues but also a gender equality issue that should be taken seriously. This indicates that eliminating stereotypes is not only about individual emotional experiences and mental health but is also closely linked to building a more inclusive and equitable social environment. Therefore, the findings of this study have far-reaching implications for raising individual awareness, guiding organizational policy-making, and promoting overall social progress.

For individuals, recognizing the existence of stereotypes and their potential harm can help them speak up more confidently for themselves when encountering such issues, safeguarding their rights. For organizations, understanding and actively eliminating stereotypes in the workplace can not only help build a more diverse and inclusive work culture but can also enhance the overall satisfaction and loyalty of employees, thereby strengthening team cohesion and creativity. And for society as a whole, eradicating gender bias will promote gender equality, reduce unnecessary social friction, and lay a solid foundation for creating a more harmonious and just social environment.

## 5. Conclusion

This study not only deepens our understanding of gender stereotypes in the context of social media but also provides strong evidence and support for advancing gender equality and promoting social justice. This research offers preliminary insights and reveals some real phenomena, yet it also comes with unavoidable limitations. Firstly, due to the relatively small sample size and limited number of selected cases, the generalizability of the research findings is constrained. Occasional anomalies or biases within the sample mean that the conclusions drawn may not fully apply to all contexts or populations. Therefore, any conclusions derived from this study need to be interpreted cautiously and require further validation before being extended to broader populations. To overcome these limitations, future research could adopt a more diverse range of perspectives to continue exploring this issue. For instance, designing cross-cultural comparative studies could better understand how different cultural contexts influence perceptions of labels such as “female driver” and associated social phenomena. Such an approach could reveal how cultural differences impact perceptions of gender roles and social behavior. Secondly, technical limitations during the research process and sample selection posed numerous challenges, and with advancements in technology, future research should leverage more advanced data collection and analysis methods. For example, employing natural language processing techniques to automatically analyze text data on social media or using big data analytics tools to uncover broader social patterns and trends. The application of these technologies promises to provide researchers with more comprehensive and precise information, thus supporting more reliable research findings. Although the current study has certain limitations, future research can overcome these by adopting more integrated and innovative approaches, thereby providing a stronger foundation for addressing the social issues stemming from the “female driver” label.

### Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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