MEMEFICATION OF MOTHERHOOD ON TIKTOK: #TYPESOFMOMS DECONSTRUCTION OF PARENTING IDEALISATION

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Introduction

Social media has transformed the digital expression of motherhood. Whether historical representations crafted by early mommy bloggers (Friedman, 2013) or the more recent phenomenon of YouTube families (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2022), these narratives have conveyed a highly curated and calibrated vision of parental perfection (Abidin, 2017). Scholars have argued that such portrayals introduce a narrow blueprint for motherhood, imposing rigid expectations and limiting the diversity of maternal experiences (Kirkpatrick & Lee, 2024; Wegener et al., 2023). In contrast, emerging digital practices on TikTok reveal a more disruptive and hopeful pattern, as the demotic norms and affordances of the platform accord mothers with highly visible opportunities to propose alternative narratives that embrace the complexities of real-life parenting (García-Rapp & León, 2024; Zaccone, 2024).

Drawing on theoretical perspectives from digital ethnography and cultural studies, this study situates memefication within the broader context of community imitation construction (Zulli & Zulli, 2022). *Memefication* is defined as the process through which social and cultural content is rendered into visually encoded, easily replicable formats, enabling users to iterate, reinterpret, and collectively reframe meaning within a participatory media environment (Dynel, 2022). This implies *poiesis*—i.e. not merely imitation as repetition, but imitation as performative rearticulation (Dahl, 2019).

In this sense, scholars have highlighted that early digital platforms foster an environment in which maternal identity is idealised (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Aguaded, 2020). The current TikTok phenomenon challenges this tradition by foregrounding fragmented, candid snapshots of everyday life. In brief, witty videos about parenting in the

#TypesOfMoms stream offer multifaceted representations of motherhood that challenge conventional perceptions and expectations of mothering, and highlight how creators negotiate between authentic self-representation and the performative demands of TikTok's audience.

Methodology

We examine how mothers on TikTok employ memefication to challenge and deconstruct traditional idealisations of motherhood, focusing on #TypesOfMoms as the core example. A qualitative approach grounded in thematic content analysis provides a framework (Neuendorf, 2019) to explore the symbolic strategies and storytelling techniques embedded in these digital expressions. Our RQs are: (1) What meme templates are prevalent within #TypesOfMoms content on TikTok? (2) How do these meme formats structure the content representation of motherhood? (3) What discursive narratives emerge from these memefied portrayals? For this purpose, we conducted qualitative data processing on a preliminary sample outlined in Figure 1.
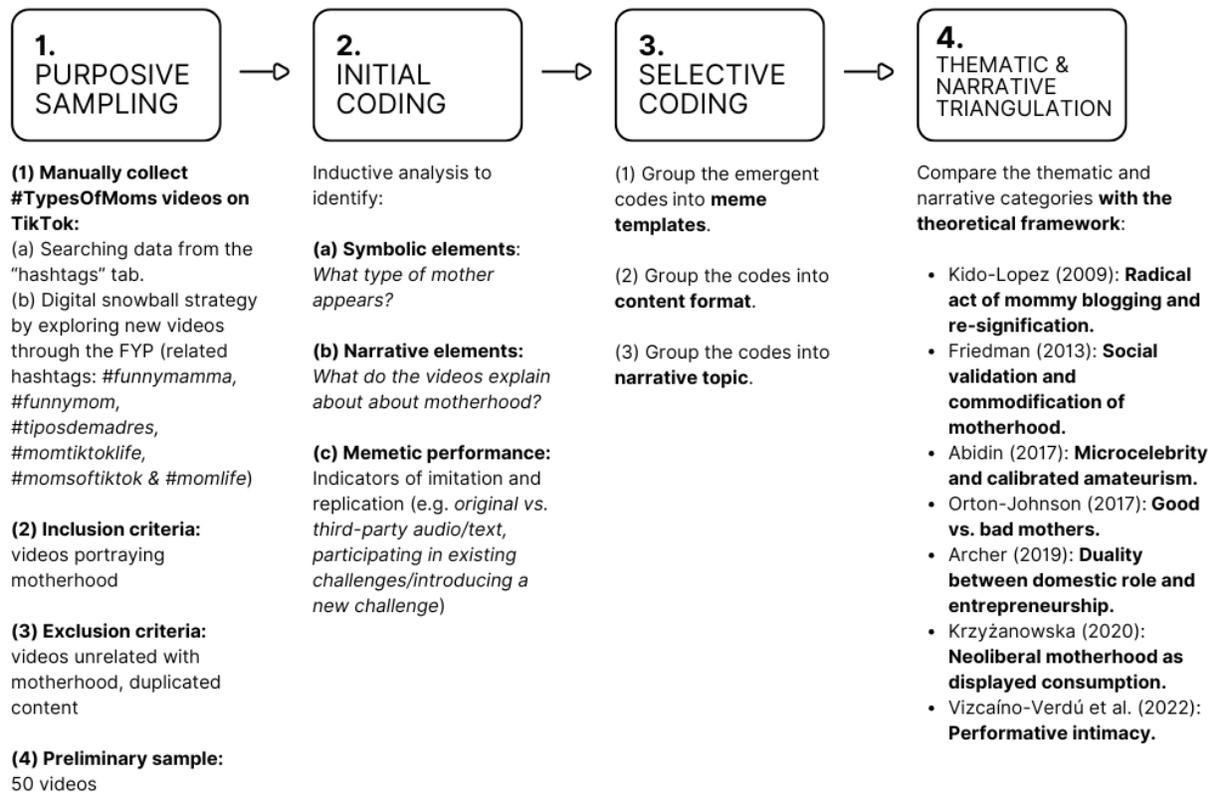

1. PURPOSIVE SAMPLING → **2. INITIAL CODING** → **3. SELECTIVE CODING** → **4. THEMATIC & NARRATIVE TRIANGULATION**

(1) Manually collect #TypesOfMoms videos on TikTok:
(a) Searching data from the "hashtags" tab.
(b) Digital snowball strategy by exploring new videos through the FYP (related hashtags: *#funnymamma*, *#funnymom*, *#tiposdemadres*, *#momtiktoklife*, *#momsoftiktok* & *#momlife*)

(2) Inclusion criteria: videos portraying motherhood

(3) Exclusion criteria: videos unrelated with motherhood, duplicated content

(4) Preliminary sample: 50 videos

Inductive analysis to identify:

(a) Symbolic elements: *What type of mother appears?*

(b) Narrative elements: *What do the videos explain about about motherhood?*

(c) Memetic performance: Indicators of imitation and replication (e.g. *original vs. third-party audio/text, participating in existing challenges/introducing a new challenge*)

(1) Group the emergent codes into **meme templates**.

(2) Group the codes into **content format**.

(3) Group the codes into **narrative topic**.

Compare the thematic and narrative categories **with the theoretical framework**:

- Kido-Lopez (2009): **Radical act of mommy blogging and re-signification.**
- Friedman (2013): **Social validation and commodification of motherhood.**
- Abidin (2017): **Microcelebrity and calibrated amateurism.**
- Orton-Johnson (2017): **Good vs. bad mothers.**
- Archer (2019): **Duality between domestic role and entrepreneurship.**
- Krzyżanowska (2020): **Neoliberal motherhood as displayed consumption.**
- Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. (2022): **Performative intimacy.**

Figure 1. *Qualitative content analysis.* Created by the authors based on Palys (2008), Kido (2009), Friedman (2013), Abidin (2017), Orton-Johnson (2017), Archer (2019), Krzyżanowska (2020), and Vizcaíno-Verdú et al. (2022).

Preliminary findings

Our analysis identified three overarching discursive categories shaping maternal portrayals on TikTok: (1) meme templates prevalent within #TypesOfMoms content, (2)

meme formats structuring the content representation of motherhood, and (3) discursive narratives emerging from memefied portrayals (Table 1).

MEME TEMPLATE	CONTENT FORMAT	TOPIC	DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLES
Choose your character (Mom Edition)	Challenge	Motherhood as optional gamer identity	*Mothers presented as characters in a video game, each representing a selectable 'avatar' on the home screen (e.g. pregnant mom, mom who wants more kids, mom who is done).*
Type A/B mom	POV	Good vs. bad mom	*Comparison of type A and B mothers (e.g. Type A is organised, structured, task-oriented, and Type B is relaxed, flexible, creative).*
Mums who...	Skit	Everyday life as mothers	*Everyday household routines of mothers (e.g. mums who pick up their children at school—Busy mom; Knows everyone mom; Late mom; Doesn't leave car mom; Prepared mom).*
The mom I want/ wanted to be	Remix	Aspirational motherhood	*Aspirational vs. Actual realities of mothering (e.g. video of a mother singing sweetly to her children before bedtime vs. video of a mother shouting 'shut up now').*
Mom vs. Caregiver	Skit	Demarcating care from motherhood (gender roles)	*Negotiation of the 'care' elements of motherhood (e.g. mother cleaning the house while taking care of her baby in fast motion with the message 'this is not mothering, this is caregiving').*
Gentle vs. Mainstream parenting	Skit	Parenting expectations and realism	*Similarities and differences of mainstream and gentle parenting (e.g. exaggerated imitation of a mother gently dealing with her child's tantrum in a supermarket).*
Experienced and unexperienced mums	POV	Parenting experience contrast	*Similarities and differences of mainstream and gentle parenting (e.g. first time mum vs. multi-child mum avoiding an argument among their children).*
Paging Dr. Beat (mom roles)	Challenge	Mom self-representation through fashion	*Mothers dancing to the song 'Paging Dr. Beat' while changing into outfits that represent a stereotypical mum (e.g. Gym mom; Laundry mom; Cleaning mom; Cooking mom; Office mom).*
Mom stereotypes at social media	Skit	Digital archetypes of moms	*Stereotypes of mothers according to social media platforms (e.g. Crunchy mom; PTA mom; Fit mom; Wine mom; Corporate mom; Hot mess mom; Fit mom; Perfect mom—implied absence).*
Moms before vs. Moms now	POV	Intergenerational motherhood	*Similarities and differences between mothers from different time periods/decades (e.g. mothers from the 80s, 90s, 2000s, and nowadays).*
Western zodiac sign moms	Challenge	Zodiac-based personality of moms	*Stereotypes of mothers depending on their Zodiac sign (e.g. open-minded Sagittarius mother, close and affectionate Taurus mother, imaginative, and fun-loving Aries mother).*
Self-deprecating mood	Lip-sync	Navigating maternal moods with humour	*Mother's monologues or dialogues (e.g. talking about how exhausted she is; reflecting on child growth).*

Table 1. *Motherhood meme templates, content formats, topics, and examples on TikTok.* Created by the authors.

RQ1: Prevalent templates in #TypesOfMoms content

A key feature of #TypesOfMoms content was the use of recurring meme templates that framed motherhood in a humorous and satirical manner. These templates provided a participatory structure for TikTok users to iterate upon existing maternal tropes.

For instance, the "Choose your character" challenge transformed motherhood into a gamified selection of archetypes, including "pregnant mom", "mom who wants more kids", and "mom who is done" (Figure 2). Similarly, the "Paging Dr. Beat" music

challenge assigned maternal identities such as "gym mom", "laundry mom", and "corporate mom", emphasising its fashionable customisation following the song's beat.

Figure 2. *Representation of "Choose your character (Mom Edition)". From L-R: 2.1. Pregnant mom; 2.2. Mom who wants more kids; 2.3. Mom who is done; based on the TikTok videos analysed. Created by the authors using ChatGPT's GPT-4o model and refined with Adobe Illustrator.*

Some memes relied on direct comparisons, such as the "The mom I want/wanted to be" remix, which contrasted idealised and realistic maternal portrayals. Other examples, such as the "Type A/B mom" trend, allowed users to categorise themselves along a structured versus relaxed parenting spectrum (Figure 3). Additionally, the "Gentle vs. Mainstream parenting" skit showcased variations in disciplinary styles, offering a memetic structure to critique shifting parenting norms.

Intergenerational comparisons also emerged as frequent memes. The "Moms before vs. Moms now" POV humorously compared past authoritarian parenting approaches with contemporary, emotionally engaged, and eco-conscious methods, reflecting the evolving cultural and generational discourse on motherhood.

The "Self-deprecating mood" videos presented maternal exhaustion and frustration using satirical dialogues (Figure 4). Skits such as "Moms who..." highlighted chaotic school pick-ups, WhatsApp parenting group dilemmas, and rushed meal preparation, turning the invisible labor of motherhood into a widely shared comedic experience.

Figure 3. *Representation of Type A (left) and Type B (right) mothers based on the TikTok videos analysed.* Created by the authors using ChatGPT's GPT-4o model and refined with Adobe Illustrator.

Finally, another significant meme was related with the critique of performative motherhood through the "Mom stereotypes on social media" videos, which playfully sorted mothers into archetypes such as the "crunchy mom", "wine mom", and "hot mess mom".

Video script

Voice kid:
Why you look so tired, mom?

Performer lip-sync:
Because you suck the life out of me, you sweet little blessing.

Figure 4. *Representation of "Self-deprecating mood" lip-sync memes based on the TikTok videos analysed.* Created by the authors using ChatGPT's GPT-4o model and refined with Adobe Illustrator.

RQ2: Content formats structuring the TikTok representation of motherhood

#TypesOfMoms' content formats structured the audio-visual representation of motherhood, shaping maternal portrayals through dynamic, participatory, and performative engagements. Challenges, POVs, skits, remixes, and lip-sync trends enabled creators to explore their maternal identity.

For example, (a) *challenges*—trend-based prompts that encourage users to replicate or creatively modify a specific action, audio, or format—facilitated co-creation, framing motherhood as a fluid and interactive rather than static experience. This format encouraged users to expand predefined maternal roles through iterative playful performance. (b) *POV*—short-form videos in which creators simulated first-person perspectives—allowed for direct audience engagement by presenting contrasting and immersive parenting styles or generational shifts, showing the multiplicity of maternal everyday scenarios. In addition, (c) *skits*—scripted short comedic scenes, often structured around exaggerated character portrayals and punchlines—amplified satire and categorisation, turning mundane maternal routines into recognisable and exaggerated tropes.

Finally, (d) *remixed contents*—reinterpreting or altering existing material by combining original footage with pre-existing audio, text, or visual effects—, and (d) *lip-syncs*—synchronising users' mouth movements to pre-existing audios, dialogues, or songs—further contributed to the resignification of motherhood by juxtaposing idealised maternal portrayals with chaotic realities. Through humor and irony, these formats destabilised conventional maternal archetypes, encouraging reinterpretation through participatory engagement. Rather than documenting notebook everyday maternal life as fixed and intimate, TikTok's content formats integrated these role-playing and platform-native aesthetics to produce a collectively negotiated, performative representation of motherhood that foregrounded imperfections, relatability, and shared experiences.

RQ3: Discursive narratives emerging from memefied portrayals

Maternal portrayals introduced discursive narratives that challenged, negotiated, and satirised the conventional digital representations of motherhood. These narratives emerged from memefied content formats, deploying humor, irony, and participatory engagement to reframe maternal representations beyond other digital models (Figure 5).

We observed that (1) motherhood was a flexible choice that reframed maternal identity as non-compulsory, portraying it as an adaptable rather than an inevitable living journey. (1) Motherhood as a reflection of idealisation and reality emphasised the gap between aspirational maternal representations or assumptions and everyday struggles, juxtaposing curated portrayals with exaggerated chaotic experiences.
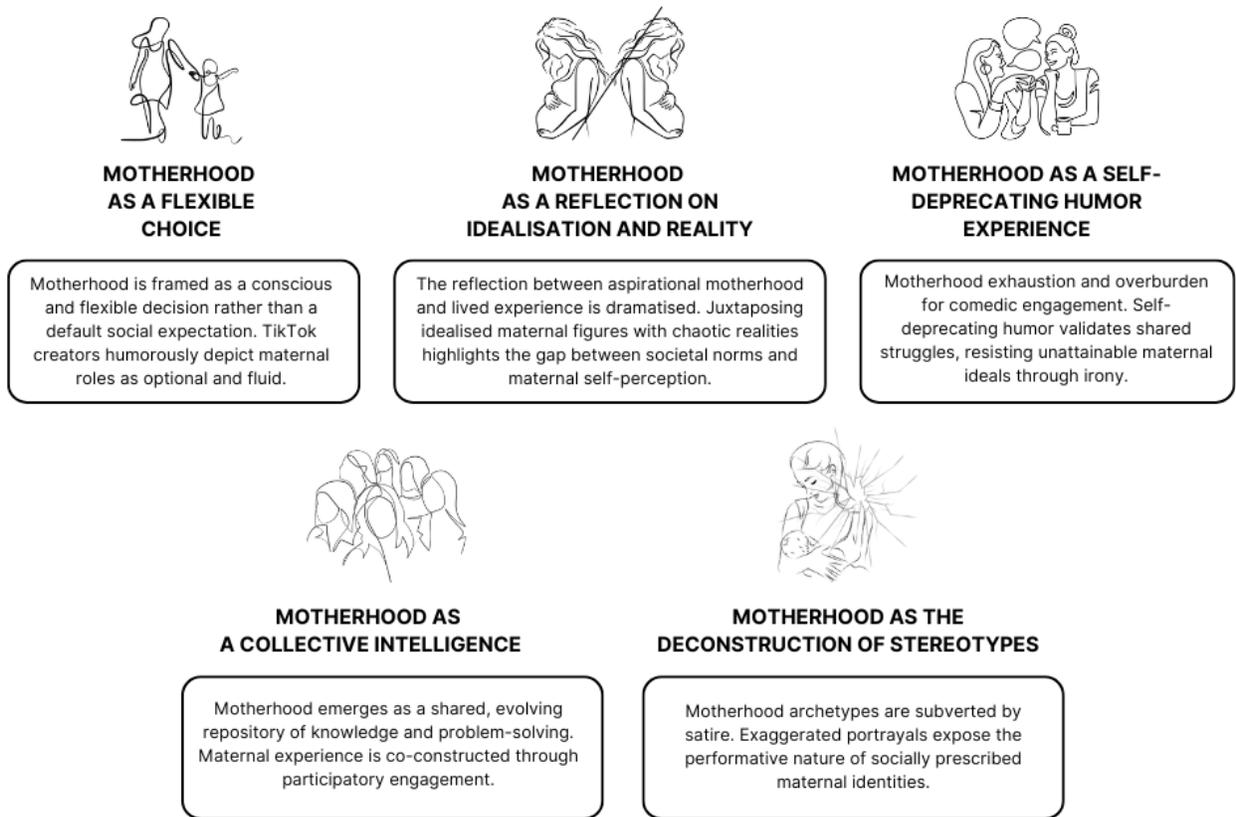
Figure 5. *Discursive narratives of motherhood on TikTok.* Created by the authors.

Motherhood as (3) a self-deprecating humor experience amplified exhaustion and cognitive overload through irony, normalising parental fatigue. Similarly, (4) mothering as a collective engagement positioned mothers' experiences within a shared cultural framework, fostering participation and identification through intergenerational and communal discourse. Finally, (5) motherhood as the deconstruction of stereotypes relied on satire to expose the performative nature of rigid maternal archetypes, highlighting their constructedness rather than their authenticity.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis advances the research on digital motherhood by examining how TikTok's memefication dismantles maternal identity through participatory engagement, irony, and iterative performance. Earlier platforms fostered performative intimacy (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2022) and maternal self-branding (Abidin, 2017), thus reinforcing aspirational and commodified portrayals (Friedman, 2013; Krzyżanowska, 2020). In contrast, TikTok's meme culture emphasises collective meaning-making, reconfiguring motherhood as fluid, and co-constructed narratives. This form of mimesis is not merely reproductive but also generative, a mode of *poiesis* or world-making, wherein imitation becomes a vehicle for creative redefinition.

Whereas mommy blogs framed maternal struggles as personal confessions (Orton-Johnson, 2017), TikTok encourages mimesis (Zulli & Zulli, 2022), amplifying exhaustion, cognitive overload, and stereotype deconstruction through playful, humorous, and

satirical performances. Moving beyond individualised storytelling, this shift resists neoliberal maternal optimisation (Archer, 2019) and fosters engagement through narrative resignifications. By embedding motherhood within platform-native aesthetics, TikTok unsettles historical maternal representations, reframing it as a multidirectional, collective exchange rather than an isolated, idealised experience.

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