

YOU WOULD NOT BELIEVE WHAT WE SAW!: A  
SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PERFORMATIVITY  
AND EVERYDAYNESS IN FAMILY-VLOGS IN INDIA

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Using the lenses of performativity and everydayness, this paper analyzes Indian family-vlogs on YouTube. It asks questions regarding the performativity of "sharenting" and the realness and the popularity of everyday life in family-vlogs. To answer these questions, the paper thematically analyzes videos of four popular Indian family-vloggers. It concludes that the performativity of parenting in family-vlogs reinforces heteronormative gender roles instead of challenging them. But it gives the video creators some agency to shape the portrayal of their family lives online, even though the performativity is often driven by the demands of the audience and the market. Moreover, the popularity of family-vlogs is based on the portrayal of everyday occurrences as significant, and gives mom-vloggers the scope to challenge perceptions about household work. The neoliberal context is important when one considers the interaction of the social media ecosystem with the economy and society.

**Table 13.0.1:** YouTube Channel Description

Channel Name	Subscriber Count	Total Views
Mom Com India	2.93 million	388,603,152
Indian Mom On Duty	691K	206,181,346
Flying Beast	7.86 million	3,381,453,747
Mumbiker Nikhil	3.96 million	1,524,646,588
All figures as on March 30, 2023		

## Introduction

In the recent past, owing to the Indian State's favorable policies of digitalisation, as well as high investments from the private players in the technology-driven market, there appears to be a rise in internet users in the country. In 2015, while a mere 19 per cent of the Indian population had access to the internet, in 2022, however, it reached almost 60 per cent [1]. Reliance's Jio has been widely credited for the initial surge in the number of internet users in the country by offering fast 4G internet at cheaper rates [2]. Owing to these developments as well as the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, content creation and therefore content creators have exploded on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. A study by Mindshare India revealed that during the COVID-19 lockdown, YouTube witnessed a 20.5 per cent increase in its subscriber base in India [3]. The content creators produce lifestyle content, movie reviews, and recipe videos, and document their daily lives. The documentation includes family-vlogs as well. Despite a growing concern regarding the content, production and ethical considerations of family-vlogs, they seem to be generally well-received by the audience. In this essay, however, we shall be studying the family vloggers in India by thematically analyzing their content through the lens of 'performativity' and 'everydayness'. These concepts are discussed below. We approach this essay by asking two questions, firstly, what is the performativity of sharenting in family-vlogs on YouTube? Secondly, how does the 'everydayness' of family-vlogs on YouTube contribute to their popularity? In order to answer these questions, we analyzed the vlogs of four YouTubers from India who are popular for their family-centred content.

## Methods

Using purposive sampling, we selected four family-vloggers from India with high subscriber counts, namely Mom Com India (2.91M subscribers), Indian Mom on Duty (691K subscribers), Flying Beast (7.87M subscribers) and Mumbiker Nikhil

(3.94M subscribers) and reviewed the five most-viewed family-vlogs on their respective channels. We watched the videos to identify certain patterns which were then arranged and analyzed as per the selected themes. Instead of being a linear process, the selection of themes and the identification of patterns were continuous in nature and developed as we researched and composed this paper. Under the theme of everydayness, we identified patterns related to the portrayal of family values, lifestyle, and religiosity. Both events and routines constituted the ‘everydayness’ of the vlogs. The ‘performativity of sharenting’ was evaluated by understanding the patterns related to the portrayals of the family’s authority figure, primary caregiver, and ‘involved’ father and their activities. All twenty videos were analyzed as per the above-mentioned parameters. The data on themes and their constituting patterns have been arranged in the form of channel-wise tables in the Appendix to this paper.

## The Performativity of ‘Sharenting’

Campana, Van den Bossche and Miller (2020) believe that the act of ‘sharenting labour’ appears to have resulted in a change in the division of caregiving practices, with the adult male figure contributing more towards household chores which stands in contradiction to the heteronormative gender roles [4]. Their work discusses the gender-based prejudice of ‘intensive mothering’, but ‘involved father’ which seem to have lost their relevance in the recent past. A similar thought is echoed in Tambunan’s (2020) work as well [5]. However, our examination of two popular father-operated family channels namely, Flying Beast and Mumbiker Nikhil revealed that instead of challenging the gender roles, the gendered division of labour in the household continues to persist. Both channels feature the mother indulging in caregiving roles, with the father being ‘involved’ in household chores. However, his participation is restricted to traditionally masculine jobs such as repairs or disciplining the child. On the other hand, the examination of two mom-operated channels, namely Mom Com India and Indian Mom on Duty unveiled how YouTube is utilised to share their daily routines and caregiving strategies. They share their children’s meals, hair-care routines, and clothing among other things. Both creators present parts of their household routines in an organised and detailed manner, thus bringing out the effort that is put into accomplishing household tasks that would otherwise be considered the default duty of the female.

The immense popularity and consumption of family-vlogs have led them to become a commercially viable opportunity in the attention-driven economy [4]. Nichols and Selim (2022) while citing Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2016) explain

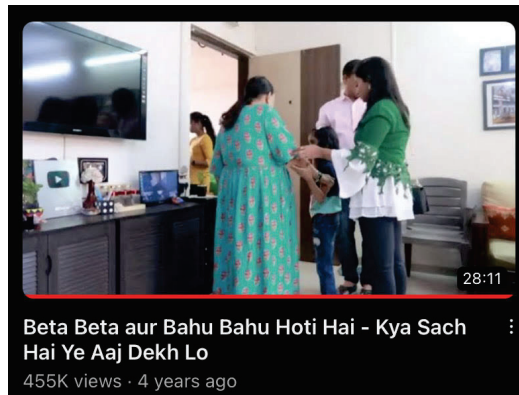
the attempt by social media influencers to develop their identity and to project it as a ‘personal brand’ that would attract sponsorship, therefore, generating income [6]. While vlogging could be considered as a form of documenting the ‘reality’, filmmaker Satyajit Ray (2011) would problematise the ‘authenticity’ and the ‘realness’ that these vlogs seem to portray [7]. While interrogating the nature of documentaries as a depiction of reality, Ray argues that because of the scrutiny of the camera, ‘reality’ is compromised and influenced, and instead would consider them as its ‘creative expressions.’ Similarly, a study revealed how social media influencers include their children in their projects to portray and present positive imagery of parenting and family life [6]. Herein, we cite Goffman (1956) whose theory of ‘performativity’, a reflection on the role theory and impression management- wherein the ‘actors’ on the ‘front stage’ that is in front of others, behave how they wish to be perceived, this is different from the ‘backstage’ which operates in the private spaces [8]. Likewise, Cooley (1902) used the term ‘looking glass self’ to explain and describe how socialisation shapes our self-image and influences how we view ourselves [9]. Therefore, it could be reasoned how the discourse of parenthood in vlogs is shaped in response to the need and demands of the audience and the market.

## The Popularity of Everyday Life

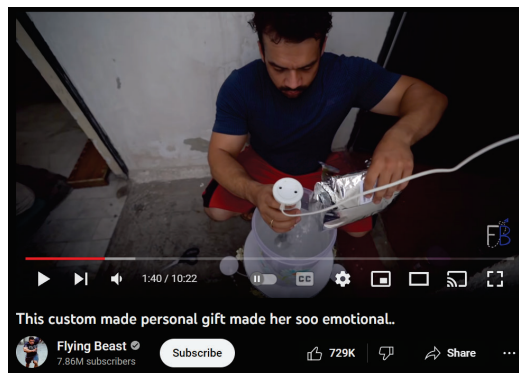
Our analysis of the four YouTube channels has led us to identify the following factors that contribute to the popularity of family-vlogs. Firstly, ‘attractive’ and ‘controversial’ thumbnails are commonly used. Known as clickbait, the creator relies on eye-catching or deceitful video thumbnails and titles like ‘Had to rush her to the hospital’ (Flying Beast), ‘Skyu got stuck under the bed’ (Mumbiker Nikhil), ‘Beta Beta Hota Hai Aur Bahu Bahu’ (Indian Mom on Duty). Secondly, by portraying a sanitized and carefully curated image these vlogs seem to provide their viewers with an ‘ideal’ and ‘functional’ family practising aspirational lifestyles. For instance, the frequent presence of Mom Com India’s parents in her vlogs illustrates their importance in her family life. Thirdly, instructional videos ranging from meal preparations for children, home repairs and even product recommendations (often sponsored) occupy considerable space in their content, thereby increasing the chances of attracting a wider range of viewers.

Thus, the popularity of family-vlogs emanates from the fact that they can portray the most ordinary events in a significant way where everyday tasks become recognisably important for the upbringing of children and the strengthening of familial relationships. However, it is a combination of the mundane and the

Chapter 13. You Would Not Believe What We Saw!: A Sociological Analysis of Performativity and Everydayness in Family-Vlogs in India



**Figure 13.0.1:** Example of Clickbait Title (Source: *Indian Mom on Duty, YouTube*)



**Figure 13.0.2:** Example of home improvement (Source: *Flying Beast, YouTube*)

eventful that comprises the content of family-vlogs. As Veena Das (2020) conceptualizes the ‘everyday’ arguing that it constitutes both the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, moreover, the lives of individuals are shaped by not just ‘events’ or catastrophic happenings, but also through the ordinary happenings of everyday domestic and marital lives [10]. As discussed previously, Indian family-vlogs seem to reinforce heteronormative parenting roles. However, according to Strangelove (2010) despite the reinforcement of dominant structures, family-vlogs do offer the scope to challenge them, owing to their amateur production [11]. Both mom-influencers exercise their agency in how they portray their daily lives online.

Indian Mom on Duty in her vlogs shares her early-morning routine to prepare meals for her family and manages to highlight the effort she puts into her household chores. However, she edits the parts where her daughter refuses to eat the prepared meal, and later, expresses her disappointment. Similarly, Mom Com India’s detailed descriptions of her children’s routines highlight her efforts at household management. Tasks which would otherwise be taken for granted by us are captured through vlogs highlighting their significance in family life. In social theory, the ‘everyday’ is often a subject matter of research. As cited in Strangelove (2010), a scholar like Lefebvre (1947) who has studied modernity, has discussed the rise of capitalism and its effect on ordinary life [11]. Strangelove’s (2010) work on YouTube further utilizes this concept of ‘everydayness’ to study social interactions in virtual spaces [11]. It is the quality of ordinariness of these vlogs—both in terms of production quality as well as their content, that underlies their popularity. Moreover, it is when vloggers combine this ordinariness with other influencer strategies that they can reach a wide audience.

## Conclusion

Lefebvre (1987) discusses the impact of modernity and rationality on the nature of the ‘everyday’ and emphasizes how daily life is as much influenced by capitalism as are formal institutions such as the State and the economy [7]. As a result, mundane life begins to be characterized by an ‘organized passivity’ where individuals have little control over the various aspects of their lives. One can argue that much of what constitutes the daily family life and leisure time of individuals is heavily influenced by prevailing dominant ideologies. Like elsewhere, India has experienced a shift in its economy, culture, and society due to the onset of neoliberalism. In the case of family-vlogs, the lifestyles of social media influencers are also centred around consumption. Large parts of their vlogs discuss their fashion, travel, and other such practices including hauls and reviewing home products

in their vlogs. Interestingly, all four influencers identify with the middle-class in their videos but promote lifestyles that are highly aspirational for their viewers. The high viewership count of these vlogs leaves little doubt about their ability to influence many people.

Our discussion analysing the ‘performativity’ and ‘everydayness’ of YouTube family-vlogs has brought to light a few issues that warrant further research. First, is the idea of aspirational lifestyles and their promotion by social media influencers which can be examined in the light of the consumption culture in the neoliberal economy. Second, is the rising importance of advertising in the social media ecosystem which has managed to challenge existing social norms while establishing new ones. In family-vlogs, both these issues emerge, and future research can give better insights into the relationship of social media with the economy and society.

## Refereces

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