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by Rony Agustinus Siahaan

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Mumpreneur, Identified!: Digital Social Practices and the Networking Capacity of Stay-at-Home Mothers

Rony Agustino Siahaan

Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, Tangerang, Indonesia
rony@umn.ac.id

Abstract. This article aims to explore the experiences of stay-at-home mothers (SAHMs), which are shaped by their engagement with social media and intensive parenting practices that support women's career through the performance of the "mumpreneur" identity. This performance is grounded in theoretical assumptions about the plural and dynamic construction of motherhood identity, as well as empowerment-oriented digital literacy. Using data from informal interviews with millennial first-time mothers, this study describes SAHMs' digital social practices, particularly their strategic use of Instagram to build home-based entrepreneurial ventures and craft their maternal personas on social media. The findings reveal that millennial mothers undergo a transitional phase marked by identity dilemmas as they navigate new domestic routines and the desire to engage in economically productive work. During this transition, their digital proficiency—especially their engagement with Instagram—gradually transforms the traditional maternal role into a digital social practice aligned with professional standards and achievement goals comparable to having a career. In conclusion, Instagram serves as a strategic tool for SAHMs to seek information, generate knowledge, and enhance their networking capacity, which in turn reshapes intensive parenting practices and constructs a new narrative that reconfigures the image of the "good mother" into that of the "productive mother" through entrepreneurial activity. Finally this article suggests new insights into digital motherhood, platformed entrepreneurship, and identity performance in a non-Western post-colonial context.

Keywords: motherhood identity, neoliberal SAHM, mumpreneur, networking capacity, digital entrepreneurship, Instagram.

1 Introduction

The ideological tension between motherhood and economic autonomy continues to shape gender discourse in Indonesia (Hyunanda et al, 2021, Suryakusuma, 1996). Traditionally, motherhood has been idealized as a moral and domestic vocation, bound to the household and supported by the state through ideologies like "State Ibuism." However, in contemporary urban life, especially among Indonesia's millennial middle class, these ideals are being reconfigured through digital technology and neoliberal influ-

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ences. Millenial mothers representing neoliberal stay-at- home mothers (SAHM) (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015) increasingly pursue home-based entrepreneurial ventures while engaging in what Hays (1998) terms "intensive mothering"—a labor-intensive model of care that demands complete emotional and cognitive dedication to child-rearing.

This intersection between caregiving and entrepreneurial aspirations forms the basis of the "mumpreneur" identity (Ekinsmyth, 2013). This hybrid persona represents mothers who simultaneously perform caregiving and business work from home, using digital platforms— particularly Instagram—as spaces of identity construction, income generation, and social validation (Abidin, 2014a). Such identity work reflects broader neoliberal trends that valorize self-regulation, personal responsibility, and market participation (Lewis et al., 2022).

This research argues that identity performance shaped by ambivalence reflects personal processes of building relationships while making self-beneficial choices. Through social negotiation in specific discursive contexts, mothers forge unique configurations of maternal identity (Miller, 2007; Allen & Osgood, 2009). Neoliberal mothers exhibit distinctive traits: autonomy, discipline, strategic behavior, and self-organization informed by subjective female experience (Gill, 2008; Scharff, 2016). The neoliberal ethos encourages entrepreneurial individualism—rationally calculated, competitive self-governance outside state regulation—enabling women to claim autonomy through platform-driven businesses (Burchell, 2013).

Neoliberal principles open opportunities for women—including mothers—to compete in labor markets alongside men (Braedley & Luxton, 2010; Fodor & Horn, 2015). Judy Foster Davis (2021) contends that the competitive and dynamic world of entrepreneurship compels mothers to manage their lives through strategic actions that sometimes defy dominant norms, producing liberated and permissive self-identities based on responsibility and self-discipline. These identities emerge through rational freedom—evaluating risks and returns in pursuit of materially profitable self-actualization (Burchell, 2013; Foucault et al., 2008; Chen, 2013).

In Indonesia, where traditional expectations of femininity persist alongside rapid digitalization, these practices do not simply reflect Western models of entrepreneurial motherhood but emerge from specific socio- cultural negotiations. The "budaya ikut suami" (wife-follows-husband norm), for instance, continues to shape gendered expectations about women's mobility and labor roles. Yet, millennial mothers, often well-educated and digitally literate, increasingly use their platforms to carve out hybrid roles—anchored in home life but visible in the public sphere.

This study explores how Indonesian millennial SAHMs navigate the contradictions between traditional femininity and entrepreneurial self-realization. It examines how they use digital tools, particularly Instagram, to perform, legitimize, and commodify their maternal roles. Central research questions include: How do they transition from professionals to SAHMs in a digital domestic context? How do they use digital marketing and networking to construct a "mumpreneur" identity? And how do these practices reflect both resistance to and reinforcement of prevailing gender norms?

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2 Literature Review

Parenting is not merely a private activity but a deeply social practice embedded in ideological frameworks. Hays (1998) argues that the dominant cultural model of "intensive mothering" imposes high demands on mothers, who are expected to provide expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, and financially costly care. This model often equates good motherhood with sacrificial devotion to children's development, leaving little room for competing identities. Arendell (2000) emphasizes that while not universally practiced, this ideology sets a normative benchmark against which maternal behavior is judged. Hays (1996) similarly notes that even mothers who do not fully adhere to the model still internalize its moral authority. These maternal norms shape everyday decision-making and emotional labor, often inducing guilt when mothers deviate from the "ideal."

The term "mumpreneur" captures the fusion of motherhood and entrepreneurship—typically from the home—which reflects broader postfeminist sensibilities (Ekinsmyth, 2013). This identity encapsulates neoliberal ideals of self-responsibility, economic independence, and self-branding, while preserving caregiving obligations (Lewis et al., 2022). Women perform dual roles without explicitly challenging traditional femininity, but rather adapt it to market demands. Entrepreneurial motherhood thus involves both empowerment and constraint. While it offers flexibility and control, it often reinforces gendered labor divisions and commodifies maternal identity (Krzyzanowska, 2020).

The digital age has ushered in a new subset of millennial mumpreneurs who cultivate public personas on social media, identified as bloggers or influencer-mumpreneurs. As early and influential social media users, they have shaped broader usage patterns (Archer, 2019, Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017). Their mumpreneur identity is constructed through relational storytelling featuring family, especially children, often involving children in monetization efforts such as sponsorships. This raises internal struggles over motivation, doubt, and justification in sharing content involving their children (Archer, 2019).

Jenkins (2006) describes "convergence culture" as the flow of content across multiple platforms and the merging of production and consumption roles. In this context, digitally literate SAHMs act as both content creators and consumers, engaging in relational labor and strategic self-representation. Their practices exemplify "networked individualism" (Papacharissi, 2011)—a shift from group-based to individualized social formations, mediated through digital connectivity. SAHMs harness digital tools not only to document parenting but also to build networks, exchange knowledge, and create economic value. Ameen et al. (2024) identify how algorithmic affordances on platforms like Instagram generate cognitive, emotional, and economic value for mumpreneurs. These mothers strategically position themselves within digital parenting subcultures to access both support and entrepreneurial opportunities.

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distinctive traits: autonomy, discipline, strategic behavior, and self-organization informed by subjective female experience (Gill, 2008; Scharff, 2016). The neoliberal ethos encourages entrepreneurial individualism—rationally calculated, competitive self-governance outside state regulation—enabling women to claim autonomy through platform-driven businesses (Burchell, 2013).

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3 Methodology

This qualitative study adopts digital ethnography to explore the digital practices of Indonesian mumpreneurs. Three millennial SAHMs, based in Bandung and South Tangerang, were purposively selected based on the following criteria: middle- class background, active Instagram usage (1,000+ followers), visible sharenting practices, and entrepreneurial activities (e.g., product sales or endorsements). These three participants whom are explicitly middle class and digitally savvy marked the delimitation of the research in term of classed cases due to their success is not solely individual grit but also a function of resource endowments.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

Informant	Background	Enterprise	Digital Strategy
La (32)	Ex-TV presenter; Bandung	Maternity apparel brand	Dual Instagram: branded & personal, hashtag #modyarhood
De (31)	Communications grad; Bandung	Toy/play accessories brand	Branded/unbranded accounts, YouTube content
Ni (32)	Architecture & Business M.S.; South Tangerang	Jastip reselling	WhatsApp groups & business Instagram

As the researcher, my positionality is intertwined with the analytic contours of this study. I identify as a middle-class academic with professional familiarity with digital culture, which informed my access to participants - who were likewise - and facilitated rapport during interviews.

Data sources included Instagram posts, stories, and highlights, supplemented by informal interviews conducted in participants' homes. The interviews explored themes of identity transition, parenting values, digital engagement, and business motivations. A thematic analysis identified patterns related to maternal performance, emotional negotiation, and strategic digital networking.

4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Reframing Motherhood Through Digital Entrepreneurship

Participants expressed ambivalence about traditional motherhood. While they internalized caregiving ideals, they also sought self- realization through home-based businesses. Ni, for instance, described guilt over not spending enough time with her child despite being at home, but simultaneously viewed her business as a way to assert her professional identity Ni also expressed her subjectivity as a neoliberal woman who values independence and self-realization (McRobbie, 2004). She negotiated her mother's expectations for academic and career success by continuing her business from home, affirming her professional capabilities:

"I did my Master's in business. I can prove I can succeed in this field too. My mom knew I liked selling since I was little. Even when I worked in an office, I kept doing reselling services. I'm passionate about this, and now she's accepted it." (Ni)

La found in Instagram a new space for identity expression and productivity after childbirth. She created babywearing products and built a community through content sharing. Such subjectivity is enacted through social practices aimed at providing the best care for their children, akin to building a maternal career (Kerrane, 2022). Hence, "sharenting"—sharing parenting experiences online—functions as a performative strategy to establish an individualized maternal identity, crafted not to meet dominant societal standards of a "good mother," but rather one grounded in intensive mothering values (Lazard, 2019):

"When my child was born, I was so excited—I wanted to share with people. Not parenting tips, just how cute my baby was. It just flowed naturally. Then I noticed a lot of responses about parenting, so I kept sharing." (La)

These narratives illustrate how SAHMs redefine domestic motherhood through neoliberal logics—blending caregiving with productivity, self-discipline, and income generation. The "good mother" is reimagined not through sacrifice alone, but through strategic multitasking, emotional labor, and digital engagement.

4.2 Identity Work and Emotional Labor

While SAHM practices can fulfill women's desire for autonomy, these roles still fall short of delivering the subjective satisfaction derived from traditional professional careers with measurable economic returns. Thus, participants transitioned again—this time into entrepreneurial roles, utilizing their access to information and engagement with digital parenting culture to craft businesses aligned with SAHM identities. In doing so, they managed to meet both moral obligations as "good mothers" and neoliberal

productivity demands via the "Mumpreneur" identity. Ni shared her resolution to the earlier conflict between familial expectations and professional identity by launching an online business:

"I felt pressure—just staying at home, seeing everyone else moving forward. Sure, I loved being with my child all the time, but I still wanted to create something. I used to think I had to become a boss, a 'lady boss'… but now, building my online business, that's my achievement." (Ni)

La, on the other hand, acknowledged the complexities of being a SAHM—not just the joys of parenting, but also the exhaustive demands:

"We all know the theory of parenting, but we get tired. Sometimes, we don't know what the baby wants. That's why I created the hashtag #modyarhood—to show real motherhood, not just the curated Instagram version." (La)

In one of her posts, La appears smiling while babywearing, surrounded by the wraps she designed and now sells. This image represents the "Mumpreneur" identity in action—a mother who simultaneously nurtures and manages a business from home. Still, La was conscious of screen time interfering with child care. To resolve this, she hired a social media admin to manage customer interactions, pretending to be her—thus maintaining the authenticity of her SAHM identity:

"I resigned to spend more time with my child. But if I stay home and just stare at my phone, it's meaningless. That's why I needed admin help." (La)

De, another participant, highlighted the importance of authenticity in content creation: even fashion-oriented posts had to reflect her motherhood values to maintain audience trust. All participants acknowledged the time-consuming nature of content production and algorithmic pressures to stay visible and engaging.

4.3 "The Productive Mother" and Networking Capacity

Social media such as Instagram engagement served multiple purposes: economic (sales), cognitive (learning), social (validation/support), and personal (identity affirmation) value—consistent with Ameen et al. (2024)'s findings. In the age of social media, being a "productive mother" entails the ability to network strategically with fellow mothers based on shared interests. This is especially important when entrepreneurial ventures cater to maternal needs and identities. La highlighted how digital networks provided both emotional validation and business support:

"Theory and real life are so different… When I opened up to other moms, many said, 'I feel guilty sometimes too.' Over time, we became real friends."

Digital networking was central to participants' entrepreneurial success. Instagram allowed them to connect with other mothers, share business tips, and promote products through soft-selling strategies. La's initiative "Moms Empower Moms" supported fellow SAHMs by reposting their products—blending solidarity with strategic branding against societal bias toward commercial SAHMs:

"We repost other moms' businesses, but they must share their story. The goal is to show that becoming a mom doesn't end your dreams—you can start something. That's what 'her brand'-ed wants to support." (La).

De similarly expressed support for fellow mothers through YouTube content and personal branding:

"I really support moms who run businesses— because I've experienced it myself." (De)

Ni used messaging apps to run a reselling business, while De attended workshops on personal branding to optimize her Instagram presence. Their strategies—content planning, hashtag use, story highlights—reflected growing algorithmic awareness. This aligns with the findings of Ameen et al. (2024), who argue that digital entrepreneurship requires high levels of cognitive and emotional investment.

Outside neoliberal ideals, De used the "housewife" label to reflect her hybrid role. Through content creation, she commodified intensive mothering experiences, cultivating a persona of a successful professional mother. In one caption, she linked her mothering role to financial literacy and household investment. Spousal support further enhanced SAHM digital practices. La's husband was actively involved in both parenting and the early development of her business:

"He helped a lot—especially when I wanted to give up breastfeeding. And when we started the business, we'd stay up late working on our product manuals." (La)

These findings suggest that while mumpreneurs act as autonomous agents, their success is often mediated by familial support and prior professional skills. In this case, they are not generic Indonesian mothers but classed subjects whose digital and social capital lower the threshold of market entry. Their capacity to maintain algorithmic visibility—regular posting, rapid replies, high-quality visuals—rests on access to devices, time, and kin-based care infrastructures. These background conditions convert domestic spaces into production sites, revealing mumpreneurship as a classed affordance rather than a universal pathway.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows how Indonesian millennial SAHMs reconfigure traditional motherhood pertaining to double moral economy through digital entrepreneurship, constructing the hybrid identity of the mumpreneur. Their practices reflect both agency and constraint— challenging the boundaries of domesticity while reproducing norms of intensive mothering and neoliberal productivity.

Social media, particularly Instagram, serves as a key site for identity performance, allowing SAHMs to legitimize their maternal roles, build networks, and monetize their caregiving experiences. These women act as microcelebrities, navigating audience expectations, emotional labor, and algorithmic demands to sustain both personal and economic value. Instead of displacing traditional norms, platformed entrepreneurship allows mothers to rework moral legitimacy into commercial legitimacy, transforming maternal devotion into a public performance of responsibility, expertise, and trustworthiness.

Unlike Western influencer motherhood—which often plays with aspirational glamour—Indonesian mumpreneurship is governed by a culturally specific regime of respectable visibility. Mothers curate feeds that emphasize modesty, domestic care, and

family cohesion. These visual and discursive practices operate as trust technologies, enabling transactions and credibility within a community-based market. This underscores that visibility on Instagram is not simply algorithmic but also morally mediated.

While mumpreneurship appears empowering, it often reinforces structural inequalities—commodifying motherhood, intensifying unpaid labor, and exposing women to precarious forms of digital work. The aspirational identity of the "productive mother" depends heavily on digital literacy, emotional resilience, and social support—resources not equally available to all women. These insights offer a model in which Indonesian mumpreneurship is understood as a situated, relational, and algorithmically mediated identity. It is produced not only through individual agency but through systemic cultural scripts, class-based inequalities, platform infrastructures, and kinship support networks. This expands prevailing global accounts of mumpreneurship and demonstrates that platform-based identity performance must be analyzed within local moral worlds and socio-technical conditions, not as a universalized form of postfeminist entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Limitations include the small qualitative sample, limiting generalizability. Future research could employ longitudinal or comparative methods, explore class-based differences, or investigate the psychological and economic implications of algorithmic labor on mothers' well-being.

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