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Women's Representation on Kazakhstani YouTube: A Qualitative Content Analysis

Kazakistan YouTube'unda Kadın Temsili: Nitel Bir İçerik Analizi

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Abstract

This study examines how female identities are constructed and received on Kazakhstan's YouTube media platforms. It compares representations of women in state-affiliated and independent video channels and analyses audience reactions to these portrayals. Particular attention is paid to emotionally charged topics and how conflicting gender perspectives are expressed in viewer comments. The analysis is based on eight videos selected through purposive sampling, comprising state-produced content and independent self-presentations. Qualitative content analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software. Findings indicate that official videos tend to portray a visually neutral, modernised image of women, while subtly maintaining patriarchal patterns. Independent sources, by contrast, offer a broader spectrum of representations – from traditional and religious to modernist and self-sacrificial. A paradoxical image of the woman as both mother and professional appears across both types of discourse. Furthermore, the comment analysis reveals a high degree of emotional engagement, particularly around issues such as victim-blaming, religiously framed gender roles, and female morality. Overall, the study highlights the significance of self-presentation as a form of female subjectivity and contributes to a deeper understanding of gender attitudes in contemporary Kazakhstani society.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Kazakistan'ın YouTube medya platformlarında kadın kimliklerinin nasıl inşa edildiğini ve nasıl karşılandığını incelemektedir. Çalışmada, kadın temsillerinin devlet bağlantılı ve bağımsız video kanallarındaki sunumları karşılaştırılmakta ve izleyici yorumları üzerinden bu temsillere verilen tepkiler analiz edilmektedir. Özellikle duygusal açıdan yüklü konulara ve çelişkili toplumsal cinsiyet bakış açılarının izleyici yorumlarında nasıl ifade edildiğine odaklanılmıştır. Analiz, amaçlı örnekleme yöntemiyle seçilen sekiz video temelinde gerçekleştirilmiştir; bu videolar hem devlet yapımı içerikleri hem de bağımsız öz-sunumları kapsamaktadır. Nitel içerik analizi MAXQDA yazılımı kullanılarak yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, resmi videoların kadınları görsel olarak nötr ve modernleşmiş bir şekilde sunma eğiliminde olduğunu, ancak bununla birlikte ataerkil kalıpların örtük biçimde sürdürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Buna karşılık, bağımsız kaynaklar geleneksel ve dini temsillerden modernist ve özverili kadın imajlarına kadar daha geniş bir yelpaze sunmaktadır. Kadının hem anne hem de profesyonel figürü olarak sunulması ise her iki söylem türünde de paradoksal bir biçimde yer almaktadır. Ayrıca yorum analizleri, özellikle mağdur suçlama, dini çerçeveli toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve kadın ahlakı gibi konularda yüksek düzeyde duygusal katılım olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Genel olarak, bu çalışma öz-sunumun kadın öznellik biçimi olarak önemini vurgulamakta ve çağdaş Kazakistan toplumundaki toplumsal cinsiyet algılarını daha derinlemesine anlamaya katkı sunmaktadır.

Keywords

Gender representation · media discourse · audience reception · qualitative content analysis · MAXQDA

Anahtar Kelimeler


Toplumsal cinsiyet temsili · medya söylemi · izleyici tepkisi · nitel içerik analizi · MAXQDA



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Introduction

In contemporary Kazakhstan, social media has become a key space for communication, self-expression, and public debate. According to recent research, about 92.3% of the population now prefers social media to traditional media such as television and radio (Kassymbekova et al., 2025). Among these platforms, Instagram remains the most popular, followed by YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok, while others such as Facebook are gradually losing audiences (InBusiness.kz, 2024). Besides, social media exerts a notable influence on political behaviour: the majority of Kazakhstani citizens aged 18 to 50 make political decisions based on information obtained through online networks (Dmitriyeva et al., 2023).

In this context, Kazakhstan's media space has also become an arena for the active rethinking of gender roles, national identity, and cultural norms. Female representations in the public sphere exist at the intersection of multiple discourses – state, religious, traditional, and global-modernist. These images not only reflect existing social attitudes but also actively contribute to their reproduction or transformation by shaping norms around what is considered acceptable, desirable, and appropriate behaviour for women (Kovaleva & Danilyan, 2012).

Women's social status in present-day Kazakhstan combines elements of formal equality with persistent patriarchal views. Although the country has a well-developed legal framework and is implementing international initiatives to ensure gender equality, traditional cultural attitudes continue to shape perceptions of women's roles. Women actively participate in education, healthcare, and public administration, but their participation in politics and business remains limited (UN Women, 2022). Furthermore, problems such as the wage gap, the predominance of women in low-paid professions, and unequal access to leadership positions persist (Khairullayeva et al., 2022).

Besides, women in Kazakhstan navigate conflicting expectations. On one hand, they are anticipated to follow traditional patriarchal norms; on the other, they inherit the Soviet legacy of total female employment – a state-imposed modernity that has redefined, but not eliminated, gender hierarchies (Kandiyoti, 2007). At the same time, today's market demands often encourage women to produce provocative online content (Naizabekova, 2021, pp. 81–83). These opposing forces create a complex landscape in which media representations of women both reflect and influence public perceptions.

Recent studies on the portrayal of women in Kazakhstani media reveal a contradictory picture as well. Despite a growing trend towards more multifaceted representations of women's roles, patriarchal views continue to dominate advertising and traditional media formats (Baskynbayeva et al., 2024). Print media, for instance, still display a gender imbalance in favour of men (Akhmetova et al., 2024). Domestic films and articles often reproduce patriarchal gender norms through visual imagery, textual framing, and cultural codes (Maratova et al., 2024). On the contrary, feminist themes are gradually emerging in Kazakhstani cinema, as contemporary filmmakers attempt to revise conventional female images and challenge the established norms of national film production (Gabdrashitova & Mukusheva, 2023).

This diversity provides a significant field for analysis, allowing researchers to trace dominant representations, their interactions, and how they are interpreted by audiences. There is a need for systemic efforts to deconstruct gender stereotypes and promote equality within Kazakhstan's media landscape. Visual and media formats play a crucial role in this process as they can facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of specific values (Kaldybek et al., 2021).

YouTube, as one of the most popular media platforms in Kazakhstan, provides a unique space for examining these dynamics. Unlike traditional media, which are often constrained by official agendas, YouTube

integrates institutional content with self-presentation and user-generated material, making it a productive site for exploring diverse forms of representation (Döring & Mohseni, 2018, pp. 512–515). Particularly valuable is the opportunity to analyse the content itself and trace audience responses in the comments section – observing how female images are received, contested, or endorsed in public debate.

In this context, this research focuses on the ways how female identities are portrayed in Kazakhstan's media space and how these images are perceived by viewers. To explore this question, the following research objectives were set:

(1) to identify which types of female representations dominate or remain absent on state-affiliated and independent YouTube channels, with particular attention to how these portrayals construct and shape women's social roles;

(2) to explore how the diversity and internal contradictions of these images manifest across different types of discourse;

(3) to analyse which aspects of women's representation generate the most intense audience reactions, and how these responses vary by context.

The aim of this study is thus to examine the complex dynamics between the discursive construction of female images and their reception by the public in Kazakhstan's media environment. The analysis focuses not only on the content of the videos, but also on how this content is interpreted and discussed by users. This approach enables a deeper exploration of the cultural and ideological processes shaping female subjectivity in contemporary Kazakhstan, moving beyond surface-level representation towards the underlying structures that sustain or challenge dominant gender norms.

Methodology

This study included eight videos published on the YouTube platform, reflecting various forms of representation of women in the Kazakhstani media space. The sample was formed using a purposive sampling approach and included videos that met the following criteria:

- Thematic focus: gender, cultural, or religious content related to women's identity in the Kazakhstani context.
- Representation of different types of sources: state and independent channels, as well as videos containing elements of self-presentation.

Videos address topics such as national identity, religion, morality, feminism, and personal experience, allowing for an exploration of the diversity of approaches to female representation in Kazakhstan's YouTube space. Besides, the selection of video materials is not aimed at quantitative representativeness, but rather at capturing discursive diversity. The corpus includes sources reflecting diverse ideological positions, which ensures analytical balance and thematic representativeness.

In qualitative research, the use of a small sample is considered justified as it allows for detailed and contextualized data analysis (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Boddy, 2016). Increasing the sample size in this case would have reduced the depth of analysis without adding new interpretative value.

The videos were categorised according to the type of discourse they projected (see Appendix for detailed video descriptions). First, two key source categories were identified: state-affiliated media and independent channels. Videos classified as state-affiliated reflect official discourse and depict women through the prism of state-promoted values. In contrast, content from independent platforms predominantly features women's voices, personal stories, and perspectives, often presented in a self-narrative format where women speak in the first person about their experiences and self-perception.

The independent channels video group was divided into three subcategories, with two videos in each. The self-representation group included a TEDx talk by a Kazakhstani Muslim woman and a video interview of the chairperson of an NGO. Another group consisted of discussion- and interview-style videos: one featured a conversation between men representing the religious community, discussing women's roles and behavioural norms; the other was an interview with an activist from Kazakhstan's feminist movement. The final group comprised two videos in a documentary-style format, presenting stories of women from diverse backgrounds, including accounts of domestic violence and other personal narratives.

The analysis was conducted in three stages: (1) collection and selection of video materials according to specified criteria; (2) transcription and thematic coding of content and comments; (3) interpretation and comparison of the obtained results. This staged structure provided the consistency and comparability of the data during further interpretation.

To analyse the videos and user comments, a qualitative content analysis method was employed using the MAXQDA software. The analysis covered both the verbal and visual content of the videos and the audience's comments. All video materials were transcribed by the programme, and comments were exported where possible. The data were coded using a pre-developed hierarchical coding scheme, which included three main semantic blocks: types of female images, ideological and cultural frameworks of representation, and user reactions. Shortened labels were used in MAXQDA for clarity in visualisation tools (see [Table 1](#)).

Qualitative content analysis has been chosen as the core research method since it helps to identify both explicit and implicit meanings in texts and comments (Galliker & Weimer, 2000; Kempf, 2002). This approach is particularly suited for studying how gender norms are articulated in media discourse and how audiences reinterpret these meanings during their reception.

For the analysis of comments, three of the most controversial cases were selected from the eight videos – those which generated the highest number of responses and appeared to provoke the most active public debate. The sample included three cases reflecting different content types and discussion dynamics:

- Video Case 1 – a discussion video featuring a group of men debating women's appearance and behaviour (4442 comments);
- Video Case 2 – a video categorised as self-presentation – a TEDx talk by a Muslim woman discussing her religious identity (2962 comments);
- Video Case 3 – an interview with a feminist, activist, and human rights defender (37 comments), included to offer a contrasting perspective and explore audience reactions to it (see Appendix for detailed video descriptions).

The study does not aim to obtain statistical data. The primary focus is on a qualitative interpretation of symbolic meanings, modes of representation, and public reactions. This approach ensures depth of analysis and makes it methodologically consistent with the objectives of this study.

Given the large volume of comments under individual videos, purposive sampling was used to select comments for analysis. A total of 505 codes were applied. The selection focused on substantive relevance: priority was given to comments that expressed a clear position on key themes such as perceptions of religious women, attitudes towards feminism, victim-blaming, gender roles, and expectations regarding appearance and behaviour. The sample also included emotionally charged and polemical comments that reflected public reactions to the portrayed images. This approach allowed the analysis to focus on the most representative and meaningful elements of the discussion, while avoiding excessive time spent on repetitive or marginal remarks.

Coding was conducted with attention to the possibility of applying multiple codes to a single segment of text. In addition, visualisation tools and quantitative features within MAXQDA were used, including code frequency tables, ratio matrices, and code co-occurrence maps. This made it possible not only to identify the most frequently occurring topics but also to explore their intersections and distribution across different types of sources. Additionally, language editing support was provided using ChatGPT (OpenAI), without involvement in research design or data analysis.

Table 1*Code Scheme*

Code	Subcodes	
Video Content	Female Images	Traditional image
		Aestheticization of femininity
		Modernised image
		Woman as a mother
		Woman as a professional
		Woman as an activist
		Woman as a symbol of the nation
		Woman as a victim
	Ideological Context	Independent woman
		National ideology
		Religious discourse
		Gender equality discourse
		Family values
Audience Reactions	Reaction tone	Support
		Criticism
		Aggression / Hate
		Neutral response
	Reaction content	Support for modernist gender roles
		Support for traditional gender roles
		Support for religious gender roles
		Victim-blaming
		Against victim-blaming
		Against feminism
		Against religion / covering
		Questioning self-representation

Findings

Portrayals of Women

The analysis identified three frequently appearing types of female images across the selected videos. The image of a woman as a victim and the modernised image appeared with equal frequency (see [Table 2](#)). The former was most prevalent in videos where women shared personal experiences related to violence, discrimination, and economic vulnerability. The latter was associated with portrayals of women as professionals, activists, or independent individuals, highlighting an expanded scope of female agency.

The traditional image of a woman was the most frequently recorded, encompassing both explicitly patriarchal views and subtler forms associated with the aestheticization of femininity. In such instances, women were framed through aesthetics and symbolic value, for example, as “the beautiful half of humanity” or “the weaker sex”. A similar paternalistic tone was observed both in male speech and in women's self-presentation. For instance, the TEDx speaker described women as “a fragile creature that a man must protect”, while an NGO representative noted that “if a man supports her, it is easier for a woman to advance

in her career or start a business.” In religious context, a Muslim woman is described as “not forbidden by her husband to work”, illustrating the primacy of male authority and the conditional nature of female autonomy.

Table 2

Code Frequency for Female Images

Code	Segments
Traditional image	48
Aestheticization of femininity	15
Modernised image	46
Woman as a mother	21
Woman as a professional	29
Woman as an activist	12
Woman as a symbol of the nation	1
Woman as a victim	46
Independent woman	28
<i>Total</i>	246

The images of a woman as a professional, an activist, and an independent person were also relatively common. The image of an independent woman appeared in both religious and secular contexts, suggesting that female subjectivity can emerge irrespective of affiliation with a specific discourse. The figure of a woman as a mother was another significant category, often intersecting with both traditional and modernised narratives. Additionally, the image of a woman as a symbol of the nation was rarely recorded, which may suggest a declining emphasis on this category in current media rhetoric.

The analysis of ideological codes revealed that the religious context was the most frequently referenced theme in the video materials, followed by themes of gender equality, family and moral values, and national ideology (see [Table 3](#)). Notably, religion and equality appeared with comparable frequency; however, while religion was almost absent in the official discourse, it featured prominently in independent narratives. Themes of family and nation, despite their ideological weight in state rhetoric, were relatively underrepresented in practice.

Table 3

Code Frequency for Ideological Context

Code	Segments
National ideology	5
Religious discourse	18
Gender equality discourse	15
Family values	8
<i>Total</i>	46

An analysis of code intersections further demonstrated that the image of a woman as a victim often overlapped with the traditional image, portraying women in passive roles and assigning agency to external actors, such as husbands, society, or institutional systems. The code “traditional image” co-occurred with “victim” seven times, with “mother” four times, and only once each with “professional” and “independent woman”. This pattern suggests that traditional portrayals are more frequently associated with vulnerability than with active social agency.

Audience Reactions

As the analysis of comments under the three selected video cases illustrates, audience responses were predominantly critical: 95 instances of criticism, 24 expressions of aggression or hate, and 53 instances of support were recorded. However, due to the differing thematic focus of each case, these figures should not be interpreted in a generalised manner.

According to the data, Video Case 1 (a discussion among religious men) received the highest number of critical responses (see [Figure 1](#)). The main target of criticism was the victim-blaming, especially following a participant's statement that "85% of rape cases occur because women were in the wrong place, in the wrong clothes, at the wrong time." The video also included critical remarks about religion as a possible source of gender inequality, although this theme was less prominent compared to other audience concerns. More noticeably, some viewers questioned the absence of women in a discussion about women's issues – reflected in the "questioning of self-presentation" code. Although this code was not frequent overall, it appeared more often in this case than in others.

Figure 1
Code Frequency for Audience Reactions

Code system	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
▼ Audience Reactions			
▼ Reaction tone			
Support	33	7	13
Criticism	75	11	9
Aggression / Hate	13	4	7
Neutral response	4	2	1
▼ Reaction content			
For modernist roles	42	19	5
For traditional roles	24	14	5
For religious roles	51	24	
Victim-blaming	4	1	
Against victim-blaming	72		
Against feminism		2	3
Against religion / covering	27	24	1
Questioning self-representation	6	1	1

At the same time, the video drew considerable support for traditional and religious gender roles. Interestingly, the simultaneous support for modernist roles suggests a nuanced and somewhat divided audience perspective.

Despite the predominance of negative reactions, sufficient supportive responses were recorded, mainly directed towards participants perceived as embodying religious morality. Conversely, support for victim-blaming narratives was relatively low and was typically linked to stereotypical gender expectations. In these cases, women whose behaviour was seen as exceeding "acceptable" boundaries, for example, by drinking alcohol or engaging in overt displays of sexuality, were often excluded from the category of "real victims" and thereby deemed undeserving of protection.

In Video Case 2, which featured the self-presentation of a Kazakh Muslim woman, audience reactions were more balanced: support and criticism appeared in roughly equal measure (see Figure 1). Although a few instances of aggression were recorded, this level of hostility was notably lower than in Video Case 1. Support for religious roles and criticism of religion were recorded in equal numbers, reflecting a polarised response. Similarly, support for traditional roles and modernist roles was rather evenly distributed.

Video Case 3, an interview with a feminist and civic rights activist, also generated a mixed response. Support, criticism, and aggressive comments were all present, echoing the reaction pattern observed in Video Case 2 (see Figure 1). Support for modernist and traditional roles was equal. Comments expressed both agreement with the feminist perspective and rejection of it, including hate speech.

Figure 2

Code Co-occurrence for Reaction Content

Code system	For modernist roles	For traditional roles	For religious roles
▼ Audience Reactions			
▼ Reaction content			
● For modernist roles			1
● For traditional roles			13
● For religious roles	1	13	
● Victim-blaming		2	5
● Against victim-blaming	17	1	7
● Against feminism		2	
● Against religion / covering	14	6	

Additionally, an analysis of code intersections across all three cases clearly indicates that the audience is not ideologically homogeneous. Support for both traditional and modernist conceptions of womanhood often coexist with criticism of religion, feminism, or victim-blaming (see Figure 2). For example, criticism of victim-blaming most frequently co-occurred with support for modernised roles. Among those supporting religious roles, the relationship with victim-blaming was ambivalent: some expressed criticism, while others supported it. Support for traditional roles was less frequently associated with support for victim-blaming.

Several comments contrasted religious and traditional images of women, echoing distinctions present in official rhetoric. Several statements drew a line between the national headscarf and the *hijab*, with the latter seen as foreign or culturally alien:

“I am against women wearing headscarves, that is, completely covered.”

“Let her wear a headscarf, but not a *hijab* – a headscarf and a *hijab* are two different things.”

However, code intersections revealed minimal overlap between criticism of religion and support for traditional roles. In contrast, traditional and religious roles intersected in 13 cases, which may suggest a perceived alignment between these two discourses in the context of female representation.

Discussion

The study revealed that state-produced video materials promote a superficially modernised image of women. Traditional representations are rarely articulated, suggesting a deliberate attempt by state media to present a visually neutral portrayal of women – an approach common to many nationalist discourses (Kandiyoti, 1996, p. 9). Although the overarching themes continue to focus on morality and social contribution, women are more frequently depicted as professionals or as politically and socially active citizens. This

reflects a conscious effort to avoid overtly traditionalist rhetoric or portrayals of women as victims – images that may be associated with religiosity or seen as outdated.

Instead, the state narrative emphasises modernisation, loyalty, and civic engagement. However, despite the apparent commitment to gender equality, the language and tonal nuances in state-produced content continue to reproduce underlying patriarchal patterns. Women are often given a condescending role, portrayed as weaker, more vulnerable, or as decorative figures when femininity is aestheticized (Bartky, 2020). Their presence is most framed in terms of functional value to the state, as workers or contributors to national development.

In contrast, independent media present a broader spectrum of representations, encompassing traditional, modernised, and religious images. Nevertheless, even in self-presentational videos, a periodic emphasis on the need for male support points to the continuation of deeply embedded patriarchal norms.

Religion, as an element of female identity, is absent from state discourse but rather features in independent narratives, particularly in the self-presentation of Muslim women. A similar trend applies to the victim image, which is absent in state sources but widely represented in independent content.

Thus, as both previous studies and the present analysis suggest, despite the overall diversity of female portrayals in the Kazakhstani media landscape, traditional and self-sacrificing images remain dominant in quantitative terms (Baskynbayeva et al., 2024; Gabdrashitova and Mukusheva, 2023). At the same time, modernised representations of women are becoming increasingly visible, particularly within independent media formats (Gabdrashitova and Mukusheva, 2023).

As this study demonstrates, traces of the Soviet discourse on the “liberation” of women in Central Asia remain present in Kazakhstani media. This discourse conveys a paradoxical image: although women were granted the right to work and equal citizenship, their role as mothers continued to be central framed as both natural and essential (Kandiyoti, 2007, p. 616). The analysis revealed a similarly contradictory representation in contemporary media, combining traditional and modernised ideals: a dual image of a woman as both mother and professional. Notably, this hybrid portrayal appears in both state-affiliated and independent media discourses.

The findings from the comment analysis align with broader research on audience engagement and emotional responsiveness. Topics such as domestic violence, victim-blaming, women's appearance, behaviour, and moral judgments – particularly when expressed by men from a religious perspective – tend to provoke especially strong emotional reactions. In contrast, a video presenting official state rhetoric, where women are shown in active social and political roles, as well as a self-presentation by a businesswoman (chair of an NGO), generated little to no audience interest, with no comments recorded under these videos. These dynamic echoes earlier findings that “male” topics tend to attract greater attention, particularly when addressed by women (Wang et al., 2013), and that emotional responses to media content are more likely to be triggered by portrayals of suffering, with notable gender differences in these reactions (Höijer, 2004).

The theme of victim-blaming, illustrated in Video Case 1, emerged as a particularly powerful catalyst for diverse audience responses. Among many commentators, victim-blaming was closely tied to traditional and religious worldviews, confirming the findings of previous studies (Arystanbek, 2022). A frequent logic in the comments reflects a framework of moral conditionality: victims are perceived as deserving of protection only if they conform to certain gender norms. This discourse implies that a woman's right to safety is contingent upon her adherence to the ideal of a modest, passive, and “decent” woman. A woman who deviates from this image is not only blamed for the violence inflicted upon her but is also denied empathy or support. These reactions may reflect an underlying tendency to view women's autonomy as a trigger or partial justification for violence.

Such narratives also underscore the fact that, in the context of Kazakhstan, victim-blaming does not merely involve assigning blame, but also functions to classify women into those deemed “deserving” and “undeserving” of protection, based on their alignment with prevailing cultural norms.

Despite the presence of such views, the analysis also revealed that victim-blaming often provoked strong criticism from other users. This division points to the existence of competing gender attitudes in online debates concerning the religious and social roles of women.

Firstly, commentators aligned with modernised perspectives on gender – emphasising equality, human rights, and gender justice – consistently rejected the notion that women provoke violence. Secondly, within the religious audience itself, positions varied: while some advocated compassion and protection for victims, others endorsed moral condemnation and justified violence through appeals to norms of female decency. This heterogeneity underscores the diversity of interpretations within religious discourse itself.

Traditionalist views, by contrast, appeared less aggressive in this context. They were, however, often associated with a more neutral or ambivalent perspective on issues of violence and victim-blaming. This issue remains open to debate and may be associated with the fact that the videos examined were primarily centred on religious themes.

Besides, the boundaries between religious and traditional gender roles often appear blurred in public perception. While official discourse frequently contrasts these categories – framing tradition and moderate religiosity as national, and strict religious expressions (such as the *hijab*) as foreign or radical – user discussions reveal more nuanced and overlapping interpretations. In several comments, for instance, criticism of the *hijab* as “foreign” was accompanied by support for modesty and femininity grounded in national cultural values.

This intersection of traditional and religious images is especially evident in discussions of behaviour, morality, and the social role of women. Such discourse points to the existence of multiple and at times contradictory frameworks, in which religion and tradition function both as complementary and competing reference systems. Similar studies, such as Yadgar’s (2006), suggest that some women construct complex identities that go beyond the simple dichotomy of “secular-modern-feminist” versus “religious-traditional-subordinate.”

Finally, the analysis suggests that female self-presentation evokes greater trust and empathy than videos in which men speak about women (Wang et al., 2013). This may indicate a growing public demand for female agency and the right of women to “speak for themselves”. However, it is also worth noting that videos featuring both religious self-presentation and feminist perspectives elicited similarly mixed reactions, ranging from support to overt hate, further underscoring the polarised nature of public discourse on gender in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study demonstrates that representations of women on Kazakhstani YouTube platforms are diverse and ideologically layered. State channels portray a visually neutral and modernised image of women, emphasising their professional and social activity. However, underlying patriarchal attitudes remain embedded in these representations. In contrast, independent platforms present a broader spectrum of female images, including traditional, religious, modernist, and sacrificial portrayals. Notably, within this category, ideas of female dependence on male support continue to exert influence. A hybrid image – combining the roles of mother and professional – can be traced in both state and independent discourses.

The analysis of user comments revealed an ambivalent audience response to these representations. Themes related to violence, victim-blaming, religious morality, and women’s behaviour provoked particu-

larly strong emotional reactions. The comments reflected a range of positions, from open support for women's rights to accusations of failing to adhere to moral norms.


At the same time, the study faced several limitations. The sample included only eight videos, with limited representation of state media content. In addition, the comment analysis was conducted for only three cases and does not aim to fully capture broader public opinion. Future research could expand the sample to include other platforms and content formats. Interviews with content creators and viewers could also enrich the analysis and offer a deeper understanding of the interaction between media narratives and audience responses on gender-related issues.



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Appendix

Appendix 1

List of Analysed YouTube Videos

Nº	Full Title	Short Description	Type of Discourse	Link	Access Date
1	Empowering Women's Role in Society	News video on a state channel about the role of women in society, emphasising patriotism, morality, and family values.	State-affiliated	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3lBuqVkdKDA	13.05.2025
2	Women's Role in National Development	Informational video on an official channel presenting women as the driving force of the nation and the family.	State-affiliated	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Wqks4sJeHY	13.05.2025
3	Women in Kazakhstani Society: What State Media Don't Say	Video on an independent channel exposing issues silenced in official discourse. Women as agents of public dialogue.	Independent – Documentary	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkGnOqtAD7A	25.05.2025
4	How Do Men Become Like Bishimbayev? Divorce Saves Women from Domestic Violence	Analytical video on domestic violence, divorce, and women's social vulnerability. A critical view of patriarchal norms.	Independent – [Documentary]	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j82ypyvmy5g	25.05.2025
5	Myths about Oppressed Women in Islam – TEDx Talks	TEDx talk by Kazakhstani Muslim woman Gulmira Nussipbekova on debunking myths about Islam and female autonomy. Personal story and self-representation.	Independent – Self-representation	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kulti2mpuiw	01.04.2025
6	On Today's Agenda: Modern Women of Kazakhstan	Interview with Zhanar Ilyasova, Chair of the Alliance of Women's Forces in Atyrau Region. Discussion on various social roles, views, personal experiences, and challenges.	Independent – Self-representation	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DQcDDSRlFQ	01.04.2025
7	Feminism in Kazakhstan: Stereotypes, Gender Equality, and the List of Banned Jobs for Women	Discussion featuring human rights advocate, LGBTQ+ activist and co-founder of feminist initiative "Feminita," Zhanar Sekerbayeva, on feminism, rights, and stereotypes in Kazakhstan.	Independent – Discussion	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKrIB5lwF4g	05.04.2025
8	Year of the Child. Core Values in Upbringing. Women's Status in Islam	Podcast featuring a group of well-known self-identified Muslim men discussing morality, Islam, and the role of women as mothers and guardians of values.	Independent – Discussion	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vltCnW9KhU	05.04.2025