

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

# **“I don’t know about y’all, but I’m a lot happier as a housewife”:**

An Appraisal and Corpus-based Analysis of Tradwife Discourse on  
TikTok

MA Programme in English Studies  
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## Abstract

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**Abstract:**

This thesis studies the traditional wife (hereafter tradwife) discourse on TikTok. Since the rise of the tradwife phenomenon on TikTok and its significance on women’s identity and gender equality, different discussions on this topic have emerged. In order to investigate the influencers’ attitudes and interactions with the audience, the focus of this study is to explore the specific content, attitudes, and engagement strategies within the tradwife discourse.

This study uses quantitative and qualitative approaches, combining Martin and White’s appraisal theory (2005) and corpus-based analysis. Keywords, collocation and concordance analysis were conducted to identify attitudinal and engagement markers. The textual data were compiled by collecting 75 TikTok videos posted by influencers between 2020 and 2024. All the videos were transcribed and saved as a target corpus.

The results show that the tradwife influencers mainly focus on lifestyle, aesthetic, gender role, popular culture and housework. They present a positive attitude toward the traditional lifestyle, while showing rejection or even hatred of modern feminism. The applications of the first-person pronoun convey subjective opinions and reject external voices or other viewpoints. Furthermore, the influencers use mild verbs to express women’s feelings or choices. Conversely, they apply strong emotional verbs to intensify their husbands’ feelings and needs. The application of modal auxiliaries indicates the influencers willing to describe

their abilities and obligations. Meanwhile, they seldom use modals expressing multiple possibilities of views. Based on this, contractive engagement strategies are used frequently to establish a sense of solidarity and alienation with different audiences.

This study contributes to the investigation of influencers' language use on the TikTok platform. Particularly, the analysis of tradwife discourse reveals how these influencers express themselves and propagate ideology on social media. The findings verify the earlier research on attitudes toward the tradwife phenomenon. It also concurs with the suggestion that tradwife influencers impact the public perceptions of traditional gender roles by promoting an attitude of voluntary submission to others' authority.

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## 1 Introduction

Tradwives, short for traditional wives, refers to a modern phenomenon in which women choose to embrace traditional gender roles as homemakers rather than pursuing careers. This trend, which began gaining prominence in mid-2018, peaked in the early 2020s. The tradwife phenomenon is a nostalgic revival of the 1950s white suburban aesthetic (Kaur 2022), characterised by clearly defined gender roles: men as “breadwinners” and women as “breadmakers” of the home. The trendy social platform, TikTok, allows users to find meaningful ways to engage with and participate in various activist efforts aimed at raising global awareness, promoting social change, and influencing politics (Lee and Abidin 2023). TikTok has already become a powerful social platform for cultural diffusion, in which influencers can advocate for expressing their values and lifestyles.

Previous studies of TikTok content and influencers’ language mainly focus on user engagement, sentiment and language style from NLP techniques. Some studies examined how content features on TikTok affect user engagement, with particular attention on how sentiment and language style contribute to this impact (Cheng and Li 2024; Jung 2024). Additionally, to investigate how language choice influences audience engagement, prior research has explored the interplay between language style, consumer engagement and emotional attraction on TikTok (Munaro et al. 2024; Aleti et al. 2019; Labrecque et al. 2020). Nevertheless, in light of the spreading phenomenon of tradwife on TikTok, in earlier studies, the topic was mainly explored from sociological perspectives, with an emphasis on sociopolitical discourse and sexual politics research (Sykes 2023; Tebaldi 2023; Sykes and Hopner 2024; Kolpashnikova 2018). Consequently, it is notable that limited attention has been given to the linguistic features that are employed in tradwife discourse. In particular, how the tradwife influencers use language to express their stance and build a connection with audiences remains underexplored.

In response to the research gap, this study aims to explore how language is used to express values, attitudes and engage audiences on TikTok. To achieve this, Martin and White’s appraisal theory (2005) has been employed as an analytical framework to investigate the influencers’ subjective attitudes and their engagement strategies. The appraisal theory is an important approach in systematic functional linguistics to reveal the speakers’ or writers’ positive or negative assessment within text. It includes three main systems, attitudes, engagement and graduation, which together are used to analyse how speakers or writers

convey subjective evaluations and interact with others' viewpoints, and in doing so construct interpersonal meaning (Martin and White 2005). Based on appraisal theory (2005), this study has been complemented with corpus-based analysis. It is an empirical approach to language study that focuses on collecting data from actual language use and combining both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques to investigate linguistic features and patterns of language use (Biber, Conrad, and Reppen 1998; Conrad 1999).

Drawing on appraisal theory, this study mainly focuses on the attitude and engagement system. Additionally, guided by appraisal theory, a corpus-based analysis of tradwife influencers' language is also conducted. Complementing this, keyword, collocation and concordance analysis are employed to identify highly salient evaluative lexical terms and patterns. In order to accomplish the appraisal and corpus-based analysis of tradwife discourse, I compiled a small-sized corpus, in which 75 related videos were selected and downloaded from TikTok and transcribed into text. The time of the data ranges from 2020 to 2024. To investigate how the influencers interacted with their audiences and expressed their values toward the tradwife phenomenon, this study will answer the following research questions:

Q<sub>1</sub>: What specific topics do tradwife influencers emphasise in their video?

Q<sub>2</sub>: What attitudes do tradwife influencers express toward this phenomenon?

Q<sub>3</sub>: What strategies do tradwife influencers employ to engage their audiences and express their values?

## 2 Background

In this background section, first, I introduce the societal background of this topic from section 2.1 to section 2.4. This societal background provides the research topic's background information and related previous studies. In section 2.1, the linguistic features and interaction functions of various social media platforms are summarised. To narrow down the research scope, detailed information and previous research on the TikTok platform are also introduced in the following section 2.2. Additionally, the influencers' role on social media is investigated in section 2.3 since the influencers play a crucial role in creating content and cultural transmission. In section 2.4, the tradwife phenomenon and various studies toward this social phenomenon are illustrated.

The theoretical background of this study is introduced in sections 2.5 and 2.6. Within these two sections, I first examine Martin and White's appraisal theory (2005). The focus is mainly on the attitude and engagement system of the theory. Thus, subsystems and other resources towards these two systems are presented. Secondly, the corpus-based analysis of evaluative language is illustrated in the last section 2.6. This section concentrates on the point of concordance, keyword and collocational analysis.

### 2.1 Linguistic Features of Social Media Platforms

Social media refers to internet-based sites and services promoting participant interaction (Page et al. 2022, 5). Until now, different types of social media platforms, including text-based social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook and Reddit), image-based social media platforms (e.g., Instagram and Pinterest) and video-based social media platforms (e.g., TikTok and YouTube). Compared with traditional mass media, social media allows participants to create and share content with many viewers or audiences (Page et al. 2022). This enables more and more real-time and direct interaction between content creators and audiences. Additionally, social media interactions are focused on the exchange of information and emphasise interpersonal communication (Page et al. 2022, 14). However, the language features of digital communication on social media have already changed. According to Di Marco et al. (2024), the language use on various social media platforms exhibited a trend of decreasing text length and lexical richness. This indicates that the social media language becomes more direct and concise in communication. Under the above situation, it is necessary to investigate the detailed language use and digital interactions on social media platforms.

Considering the different types of social media platforms, previous studies of language use also focused on various platforms. Most of the studies of language use mainly focused on the text-based social media platforms, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and Reddit. It is also known as Web 2.0, referring to the above-mentioned text-based platforms (Herring 2013). The emergence of blogs can be traced back to the 1990s, and it has evolved to a stage for various self-expressions (Baron 2008). In blogs, the language exhibits the features of using hedging, constructing identities and expressing personal opinions (Myers 2010). Zappavigna (2012, 13) proposed that Twitter introduced a new form of “searchable talk”, where users can express personal opinions and seek affiliation in a public context.

Besides, in terms of image and video-based social media platforms, researchers mainly focus on the semiotic and multimodal analysis. The textual elements, such as hashtags and comments, work together with images to construct the transmission of information and meaning (Zhao and Zappavigna 2017). Similarly, Wang and Feng (2020) conducted multimodal critical discourse analysis of videos from TikTok, which reveals how the city identity constructed through linguistic and visual resources. The investigations into linguistic features of TikTok also focused on sentimental or thematic analyses (Cheng and Li 2024; Jung 2024) within the fields of natural language processing and computational linguistics. In all, the study of linguistic features of social media language has become diverse. The rise of video-based social media platforms, such as TikTok, also offers new opportunities to investigate the language use of future studies.

## **2.2 TikTok as a New Social Media Platform**

TikTok, as a newly emerging social media platform, has promoted different trends or topics over the years. It provides a digital platform for different internet celebrities (influencers) to publicise their personal content and gain popularity. Since its launch in 2017, this platform has rapidly grown in popularity. Until 2020, TikTok reached 2 billion downloads worldwide (Carman 2020). The popularity of TikTok is not only evident in its number of downloads, but also in its viral trends of different cultures (Tashjian 2024). Compared to other social media platforms, TikTok has demonstrated a more widespread transmission of various content, which has significantly enhanced its influence worldwide.

The function of TikTok goes beyond the video-spreading platform where a culture pulse resonates in the pockets of millions. TikTok is influencing trends, shaping identities, and connecting communities in ways that defy traditional boundaries (Casas 2023). Besides,

TikTok's scrolling culture has also contributed to the reimagining and shaping of traditional gender roles. This platform reflects gender, racial and other inequalities by supporting various creators and providing space for all gender expressions to innovate and create (Boffone 2022, 93). As a result, TikTok's blend of creativity and inclusivity both challenges and reinforces traditional gender roles, family values and the propagation of various cultures.

Previous studies also focus on researching different social issues on TikTok. Since TikTok has widespread societal information and high interaction between influencers and followers. Taking the 2020 U.S. presidential election as an example, Sánchez-Querubín et al. (2023) examined TikTok's role during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. It highlights how it served as an active platform for event commentary, with users engaging in political discussions through hashtags. This study demonstrates the platforms' capacity to promote political discourse by enabling users to create and share content, thereby reflecting the platform's influence in shaping political narratives. In addition, TikTok's creative and flexible nature facilitates discourse analysis. Mordecai (2023) highlighted how hashtags promote mental health discussion and increase accessibility to anxiety-reducing techniques via various media forms. Similarly, Tillewein et al. (2024) examined the discursive strategies employed by survivors of sexual violence in their online disclosures on TikTok. These studies emphasise TikTok's role in amplifying user voices and fostering public discourse on critical social issues. However, despite the growing body of research on TikTok's social impact, few studies have examined the language used by influencers and how they engage and interact with their followers in specific contexts. Therefore, it is worthwhile to be aware of the function of language in culture transmission and engaging the audience.

### **2.3 The Influencers' Role on Social Media**

In today's digital media era, influencers play an important role in content creation, audience engagement and promoting culture and popular trends, especially in this video-based platform. Different from celebrities or idols, TikTok influencers build and maintain their digital identity by producing and uploading content regularly and interacting with their followers, which helps create an image of authenticity and accessibility (Bastrygina and Lim 2023).

TikTok influencers play the role of "opinion leaders". Their speech and behaviours are often followed by their followers or audiences and enabling them to shape public discourse and influence cultural trends. According to Barta et al. (2023), perceived originality led the

followers to enjoy a hedonic experience and develop perceptions that influencers are opinion leaders. In recent years, with the commercialisation of the TikTok platform, the influencers have corporate with brands as brand promoters through their image and interaction with their audiences or followers. Moreover, influencers create identities that make a sense of closeness with their audience by sharing personal experiences through photos and videos (Sokolova and Kefi 2020). This connection strengthens followers to believe that they have a deep understanding of the influencers (Barta et al. 2023).

Under the linguistic approach of analysing the influencers, Page (2024) investigates the representation strategies of the influencers. It focuses on authenticity, emulatability and intimacy to explore the influencers who use language to maintain engagement and promote their commercial interests. This study provides insight into how language constructs influencers' identity and affects the relationship with their audiences. By considering the intimacy between influencers and audiences, it becomes clear that influencers can foster a strong emotional connection with audiences. They may also play a crucial role in spreading popular culture and trends. In addition, the influencers present their lifestyles and show their values and behaviours that followers can emulate. This encourages followers to follow and interact with them. In other words, the influencers can also gain popularity and propagate specific cultures effectively.

Other previous research also supported that the influencers' diverse linguistic styles attracted their audiences. The study by Munaro et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between influencers' linguistic style and digital consumer engagement, and they found that emotional tone, subjectivity, pronoun usage, and other linguistic variables affect engagement significantly. Aleti et al. (2019) examined how different linguistic styles used by celebrities on Twitter affect engagement by drawing on speech act theory. Their findings indicated that the external narrative style was the most effective in encouraging retweets, which highlighted the persuasive power of performative and emotionally engaging language on social media. This finding is relevant to the influencers' communication on TikTok, where engagement and emotional attraction are central to audience interaction. Labrecque et al. (2020) investigated how pronoun choices in online communication affect consumer engagement on social media, in which they found that using first-person plural pronouns (e.g., *we*) increased the shares and comments, instead using the first-person singular pronoun *I* tended to reduce engagement.

## **2.4 The Tradwife Phenomenon**

The “tradwife” phenomenon has gained significant attention on social media platforms. On TikTok, the tradwife influencers capture the audience’s attention by sharing their daily lives, housework, opinions and lifestyles. Leidig (2023) proposed that the tradwife influencers use social media platforms to show their traditional lifestyles, such as cooking, parenting and cleaning. Their ways of presenting create an authentic image and attract followers by sharing personal experiences and stories. Besides, their contents are embedded with far-right ideologies, such as anti-feminism, white supremacy and the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory. The tradwife influencers’ strategies enable the extremist ideas to be propagated in a relatable way and accepted by mainstream audiences.

The tradwife phenomenon has become a research interest across various academic disciplines. Previous studies on “tradwives” have primarily explored themes such as gender roles, subcultures, and household division from sociological perspectives. For instance, some research has examined the sociopolitical and sexual politics associated with traditional wives (Sykes 2023; Tebaldi 2023). Sykes and Hopner (2024) further suggest that the “tradwife” subculture, with its emphasis on family values and traditional gender roles, raises critical questions about gender relations, women’s autonomy, social justice, and political-economic structures. Additionally, Tebaldi and Baran (2023) describe the “tradwives” subculture as an example of anti-genderism. It defends notions of national and sexual purity while incorporating new discursive elements associated with far-right nationalism. Regarding the gendered division of household labour, Kolpashnikova (2018) adopts an analytical framework combining gender and resource theories to examine the relationship between gender performance and household labour allocation. All in all, these previous studies collectively emphasise the cultural, political and economic implications of the tradwife phenomenon within sociological contexts.

## **2.5 Appraisal Theory**

Martin and White’s appraisal theory, developed within the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics proposed by M.A.K. Halliday in the 1960s, focuses on the interpersonal function of language (Hood 2019) and how speakers or writers use language to express attitudes, construct identities, and engage with their audiences (White et al. 2015). The appraisal

framework was displayed in Figure 1, which includes three main categories: attitudes, engagement, and graduation.

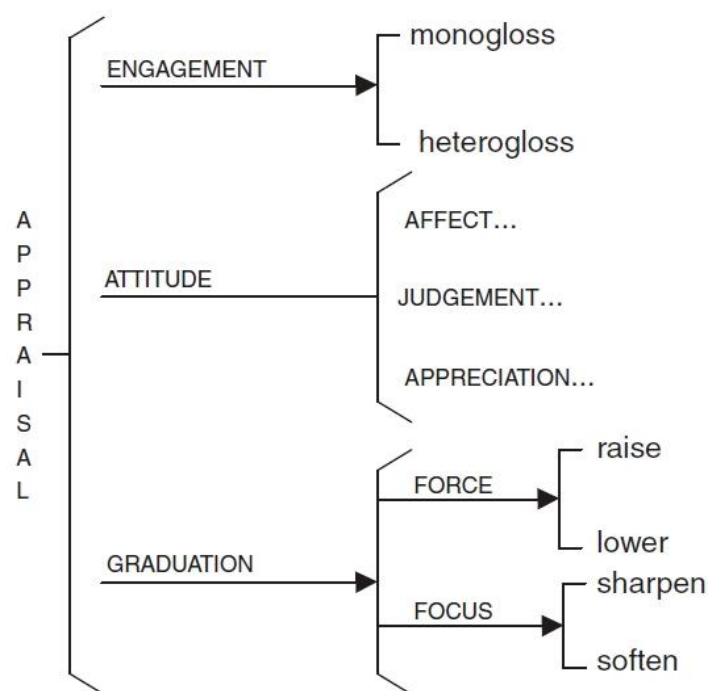


Figure 1. An Outline of Appraisal Theory System (Martin and White 2005, 38)

Attitude, the first category of appraisal framework, is mainly concerned with the way of feeling, including emotional reaction, judgment of behaviour and evaluation of things. The second category is engagement, which examines how attitudes are expressed and how different voices interact within discourse. The last category is graduation, which addresses how speakers or writers intensify their evaluations and blur categorical distinctions in discourse (Martin and White 2005, 35). In this study, I mainly applied the attitude and engagement categories to the analysis. I discussed the two related categories in the following paragraphs.

The application of appraisal Theory has been widely used in discourse analysis, academic writing, and social media studies. Zappavigna (2012) explored how language patterns like emoticons serve social purposes in microblogging, while Bednarek (2009) applied the framework to analyse identity construction in media. Hood (2010) examined evaluative language in academic writing, focusing on how attitudes and assessments are conveyed. In addition, this framework is particularly applied in analysing how language shapes and reflects the emotional and evaluative stance of speakers or writers. It provides insights into how

people communicate their feelings, values, judgments and opinions in the context. More than that, it is also notable for its empirical and flexible nature. This theory allows for adjustments to the classification based on the actual language used in texts. It also adopts a bottom-up approach to appraisal analysis, beginning with individual texts and generalising from specific instances to build a broader taxonomy of attitudinal meaning (Hunston 2011, 22). However, Thompson (2008) evaluated the appraisal theory critically and emphasised the importance of context while conducting appraisal analysis. His research mentioned that the analysis must consider the context and the shared cultural norms to avoid decontextualised and impressionistic interpretations (Thompson 2008, 16-19). Inspired by the above-mentioned, I have examined each concordance line to identify the interpersonal meaning of lexical items within their context. This approach ensures that the analysis remains grounded in systematic grammatical and lexical criteria and avoids impressionistic interpretations.

### 2.5.1 Attitude

Attitude system consists of three subsystems: affect, judgement and appreciation. Affect focuses on emotional and psychological reactions and involves positive and negative feelings. The judgement subsystem evaluates a person's character and behaviour based on social ethics, with the division of social esteem and social sanction. Within the judgement system, social esteem assesses normality (how unusual someone is), capacity (how competent they are) and tenacity (how determined they are). Social sanction leans towards legal judgments concerning veracity (truthfulness) and propriety (ethical behaviour). The subsystem of appreciation evaluates processes and phenomena, including reaction (how emotionally engaging something is), composition (how well-organised it is) and value (how the things significant or worthwhile it is) (Martin and White 2005, 38-56).

The attitudinal meaning in discourse is expressed through three types: first, the expression of personal emotions (e.g., *happy*, *sad*, *like* and *afraid*). Second, the assessment of behaviour and social phenomena (e.g., *honest* and *brutal*). Lastly, the evaluation of the nature or function of things or aesthetic appreciation (e.g., *beautiful*, *elegant* and *useful*) (Martin and White 2005, 42-43). As noted by Zappavigna (2012), the attitude system consists of three more delicate subsystems:

- AFFECT: expressing emotion
- JUDGEMENT: assessing behaviour
- APPRECIATION: estimating value

Alongside above mentioned, it can be indicated that the three subsystems correspond to the domains of psychological reaction, moral judgments and aesthetic evaluation, respectively.

Additionally, Martin and White (2005, 46-52) suggested that different types of attitudinal meanings can be analysed from six dimensions:

- i. Are the feelings positive (*she is happy*) or negative (*she is sad*)?
- ii. Are the expressions of feelings involved in paralinguistic or extralinguistic manifestations, such as gestures or internal psychological state? In a grammatical way, the former is realised through behavioural processes and the latter is expressed through mental or relational processes, for instance, *she laughed*, and *she likes laughing*.
- iii. Are the feelings or emotions triggered by a specific stimulus or represent a general psychological state? For example, *she likes candy*, or *she's unhappy*.
- iv. The intensity of the feelings or emotions can be categorised as high, medium and low:
  - High     I love to do housework
  - Median   I enjoy doing housework
  - Low      I like to do housework
- v. Do the feelings emerge from a subjective intention (rather than reaction)? For instance, *I'd like to* vs. *I like it*.
- vi. The content of the feelings can be classified into different categories, such as un/happiness (*I felt happy/sad*), in/security (*I am confident/nervous*) and dis/satisfaction (*I am fed up/absorbed*).

This categorisation of the attitudes supports analysing the different attitudinal meanings and checks whether the attitudes are positive or negative. It also helps to identify the speakers' or writers' emotional stance more precisely.

### 2.5.2 Engagement

The engagement system, as another component within the appraisal framework, can be used to analyse whether the source of attitudinal expressions is dialogic, as well as the specific ways in which dialogic space is expanded or contracted. Precisely, the speakers or writers convey their thoughts directly or use explicit or implicit strategies when expressing their

attitudes. For example, citing authoritative opinions, rejecting alternative propositions, highlighting their own viewpoints or presenting contrasting arguments from various perspectives (Martin and White 2005).

Within the engagement system, the expression of attitudes is analysed through two subsystems: monogloss and heterogloss (Martin and White 2005, 92). Heterogloss involves dialogic expansion and contraction, which was defined as a notion of multiple voices (Bakhtin 1981). Dialogic expansion includes two strategies by which writers or speakers entertain alternative propositions or attribute the viewpoints to external sources. Common strategies of heterogloss include projection (*she said it was wrong*), modality (*it might be true*), and concession (*I would like to go, but I need to leave now*). In this case, projection is a way of including the voices of others and bringing in external viewpoints. Although these views belong to others, they are used to support the writers' or speakers' stance. Modality, according to Martin and White (2005, 104-106), implies that the stance taken in the discourse is one of several possible stances. The writer or speaker not only asserts a viewpoint but also acknowledges the other potential voices. In this sense, to some extent, modality serves to expand the dialogic space. Concession serves as a link between two semantically related propositions with a shift in emphasis (Martin and White 2005, 118). In such a case, the speaker places two propositions, one is first acknowledged, and then attention is shifted to the main point. This creates a dialogic structure, suggesting that the speaker is engaging and responding to alternative viewpoints.

Under the dialogic contraction, there are two subsystems, the disclaim and the proclaim. Their function is to limit the scope of alternative propositions and strengthen the speaker's or writer's authority. Disclaim refers to the voice positions opposed to an alternative viewpoint, which actively rejects or negates a contrasting stance by using deny or counter. Deny is a common way to negate a viewpoint while referring to a viewpoint (Martin and White 2005, 118). Negative words, such as *no*, *did not*, *have not* and *never*, are the common expressions representing denial. Counter, as another subtype of disclaim, construes the current proposition as a replacement or substitution for an expected proposition. In this way, it functions to challenge or reject the expected proposition. The counter is usually conveyed via conjunctions and connectives (e.g., *but*, *although*, *however*, *surprisingly*, *yet*, etc.) and adjuncts (e.g., *as even*, *only*, *just*, *still*, etc.) (Martin and White 2005, 120).

Proclaim as a resource to suppress or exclude competing voices by emphasising the present propositions' validity, credibility and warranty, which includes three resources: concur, pronoun and endorse (Martin and White 2005, 97-98). Within proclaim, there are three subtypes: concur, pronounce and endorse. Concur involves the proposition construed as an indisputable assertion, which is realised through lexis and grammatical structures (e.g., *of course, naturally, certainly*, etc.). Pronounce is to indicate the speaker's attitude emphatically so as to exclude or close down the space for opposing propositions. The way of realising pronouncement includes *indeed, really, I contend..., there can be no..., etc.* Endorsement refers to those formulations that present propositions from external voices as correct and undeniable. The realisation of endorsement involves "it is show/prove/demonstrate that..., X has demonstrated that..., etc" (Martin and White 2005, 126). The difference between the above three resources is that the endorsement uses the external authoritative voice to support the truth of the proposition. Building on the above background of appraisal theory, the modality and concession in the tradwife influencers' speech are analysed. For instance, analysing the modal auxiliaries (e.g., *would* and *might*), conjunctions (e.g., *but*), and pronoun resources (e.g., *I think...*).

To sum up, this study employed the appraisal theory to analyse the interpersonal function of language with a particular focus on the expression of attitudes and engagement. The corpus-based analysis will also be employed since it provides a substantial amount of data to help reveal specific lexical items, collocations and contextual usage. These approaches strengthen the reliability of theoretical analysis and interpretation. Therefore, this study will combine the theoretical framework of appraisal Theory with corpus-based analysis to offer a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the language use of the tradwife influencers. In the following part, the corpus-based approach to evaluative language is discussed.

## **2.6 Corpus-based Approach to Evaluative Language**

A corpus-based approach provides intensive sources of textual data, which help researchers retrieve and analyse relevant linguistic features effectively. The corpus-based approach is widely applied in language feature analysis, language teaching, and sociolinguistic studies. For example, Biber et al. (1998) explored differences between spoken and written language, while Granger (2003) investigated second language learners' language use. Brezina et al. (2018) analysed contemporary spoken British English with sociolinguistic factors.

Evaluative language refers to expressions that reflect the speakers' or writers' acts of evaluation or stance-taking. It also expresses a subjective attitude towards a person and situation (Hunston 2011, 1). Accordingly, evaluative language is subjective and highly context-dependent. It only relies on frequency or co-occurrence data may not capture the full semantic nuances of evaluative language. Thus, it is necessary to be cautious when applying this approach to analysis. It is also essential to apply corpus analysis with qualitative interpretation to ensure understanding of the meaning and accuracy of the results.

In a previous study, Hunston (2011) studied how context-dependent evaluative language can be systematically examined through corpus-based techniques and the feasibility of using corpus approaches to study evaluative language. She argued that it is crucial to apply co-occurrence and frequency analysis. However, some challenges still existed in these analyses. As previously discussed, evaluative language is context-dependent, and the same word may convey different meanings in different contexts. In this case, one should be cautious when checking the co-occurrence and frequency. Hunston (2011, 3) also proposed that while adjectives and adverbs frequently express evaluative meaning and some patterns of use are associated with such meaning. But this does not mean that every adjective and adverb marks evaluation or that all evaluation can be identified in this way.

Other than that, the cumulative nature of evaluative language is another challenge. Evaluative meaning may be distributed across multiple sentences or be repeated within a paragraph before being fully expressed (Hunston 2011, 14-16). Furthermore, it should be noted that the source of evaluation and attribution is implicit, in which judgment and attitude may not be presented by the writer or speaker directly but conveyed through external utterances. The intensity of evaluation may also be affected by the choice of different verbs or resources (Hunston 2011, 18-19).

Taken together, Hunston concluded that corpus techniques can quantify evaluative language and provide evidence for discourse. However, it still depends on qualitative analysis to interpret the contextual meanings and layers of evaluations (Hunston 2011, 24). Motivated by the nature of evaluative language, concordance analysis is needed for analysis.

### 2.6.1 Concordance Analysis

Many previous studies introduce and guide how to do concordance analysis. Hunston (2012), Weisser (2016), and Wulff and Baker (2016) all introduced how to generate and explain

concordance in a specific context. According to Biber (2023), concordance analysis is the most effective technique that helps to determine the use of specific terms within context and distinguish between different contextual information. Moreover, concordance analysis is the most important aspect of corpus-based discourse analysis, where human interpretation takes over from computer software (Biber 2023, 107). In other words, the analysis does not rely on the generated data but rather engages in the interpretive subjective position. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that while the concordance analysis can eliminate the subjectivity of interpretation, it cannot guarantee that the same interpretation will be acknowledged by others. Therefore, it is essential to consider the broader background or historical context of the subject (Biber 2023, 132).

Mautner (2022) also proposed some similar views. Concordance shows the search words surrounded by their co-text. It is a key technique in corpus-based analysis that brings the researchers closer to the original texts to reveal the potential features. As a result, concordance analysis provides a way to combine qualitative and quantitative analysis in corpus linguistics and offers a flexible method for analysing evaluative language.

## 2.6.2 Keyword and Collocation Analysis

Within the corpus linguistics context, keyword analysis is defined as a process of calculating the frequency of each word in the target dataset. It also requires calculating the frequency of the same words in a reference or comparative dataset. These frequencies are then compared. The purpose of keyword analysis is to identify words that occur significantly more often or less frequently in the target corpus. The result of keywords, which will be ranked according to the significance of the difference (Culpeper and Demmen 2015, 93). The concept of collocation was first proposed by J.R. Firth in 1957. It has a significant impact on linguistic studies. He proposed that “you shall know a word by the company it keeps” (Firth 1957, 11). Many linguists have followed Firth’s view, defining collocation as the characteristic co-occurrence patterns of words (Xiao and McEnery 2006).

Previous studies of keyword and collocation analysis focus on discourse analysis. Baker (2023) applied keyword, keyness and collocational analysis to reveal significant lexical differences among texts. He argued that conducting keyword analysis supported by collocational and concordance analysis provided a more accurate understanding of how keywords function within context. Baker also emphasised the necessity of examining individual keywords in detail by carrying out concordances and analysing their collocates

(Baker 2023, 169). Besides, keywords can reveal the most significant lexical differences or features in the text. And examine what producers of a text have chosen to focus on. This supports investigating the most important embedded discourse traces or assumptions within a text (Baker 2004, 90-91). Keywords and collocation analysis are useful, since they help identify words and associations between words. The lists of keywords and collocates act as signposts to point to the corpus (Brookes and Baker 2022). At those points, the analyst needs to look at the text in detail.

Therefore, high saliency words and their semantic function in the tradwife discourse can be identified through keyword and collocation analysis. Based on this, the context of the keywords can also be explored by conducting collocation and concordance analysis. It also supports a feasible way to reveal the influencers' specific topic, emotional tendencies and evaluations.

### **3 Data and Methods**

This section outlines the data collection, processing, corpus compilation, and theoretical methods used in this study. It begins with an introduction to the selected data resources and their criteria. Additionally, data processing and corpus compilation are described in section 3.1. The ethical issue of data collection from TikTok is also mentioned. Furthermore, section 3.2 introduces the application of appraisal theory (2005) and corpus-based analysis. The appraisal theory is used to reveal the language aspects of interpersonal function, while corpus-based analysis provides valuable and authentic quantitative evidence for unveiling the linguistic features of tradwife influencers' speech.

#### **3.1 Data Collection and Corpus Design**

##### **3.1.1 Keyword and Collocation Analysis**

Before deciding which influencers' accounts were chosen for this study, I set eight selection criteria to support data collection. In the following, eight selection criteria of the influencers and their video content are introduced:

1. All influencers explicitly state that they are tradwives (in their biographical information or used tradwife-related hashtags before).
2. The videos are in English.
3. The video content is entirely original.
4. Video types include lifestyle sharing, value discussions, fashion or makeup.
5. Timeline: from 2020 to 2024.
6. The followers count must be more than 40k.
7. Their contents have received high engagement in terms of "Likes" and "Video Views".
8. The video can be downloaded.

The rationale for this selection criterion was established to ensure the originality of the video and alignment with the research question. Some videos that consist of non-original background music, humorous imitations, or voiceovers were excluded. In addition, I set the timeline of the data since the tradwife phenomenon first began trending online in 2020

(Sherman 2024). The follower count was set to ensure the influencers have a stable and active audience base so that the interaction with their audience is meaningful.

Besides, I ranked the videos by using TikTok's "Popular" tab and chose the first 15 videos from each influencer's account. This approach is to ensure the selected videos are popular and have high-level engagement. Figure 2 shows the "Popular Tab" in the user's profile.



Figure 2. Popular Tab

Based on the above outlined selection criteria and ranking approach, a total of five influencers and 75 videos were identified and selected for analysis. They are *Esteecwilliams*<sup>1</sup>, *Homewithmadison*<sup>2</sup>, *Ivyoutwest*<sup>3</sup>, *Mrsarialewis*<sup>4</sup>, and *Tradwifetori*<sup>5</sup>, whose account information is shown in Table 1 below.

*Esteecwilliams*, whose real name is Estee Williams, is a popular Gen Z tradwife who gave up her career as a meteorologist and pursued a homemaker life after getting married. With over three hundred thousand followers across all the social platforms, Estee shared her daily life about keeping her house organised and prioritising her husband and family chores. *The New Yorker* described her as “a quasi-Marilyn Monroe with white-blond waves and a cinched waist, advocate of marital subservience” (Elmhirst 2024). Another TikToker, *homewithmadison*, whose video content emphasised mostly motherhood, home and lifestyle as its key attractive points. As a young mother, she gained attention through her daily schedule and parenting experiences while actively responding to the audience's criticisms.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@esteecwilliams>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@homewithmadison>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@ivyoutwest>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@mrsarialewis>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tiktok.com/@tradwifetori>

Although the number of followers isn't high, her content has captured a large audience due to the sharp response to the criticism.

*Ivyoutwest*, a young stay-at-home mother with two children who likes to discuss the traditional lifestyle in her accounts and supports women in choosing different lifestyles, rather than solely pursuing the “boss babe” lifestyle. *Mrsarialewis*, whose video content shows her expertise and experience in home management that attracts the audience through her rustic pastoral clothing and biblical-inspired lifestyle. *Tradwifetori*, whose account is famous for sharing her opinions about gender roles and family structures, daily life and her own experience. Unlike other TikTokers, her videos are consistently filmed with the passenger seat of a car as the backdrop. She is known for not hesitating to challenge those who criticise traditional wife concepts and gender roles.

Table 1. Account information about the Selected Influencer<sup>6</sup>

<b>Accounts</b>	<b>Followers</b>	<b>Likes</b>	<b>Views</b>	<b>Biography</b>
Esteecwilliams	199.3k	1.4M	20K-2.1M	“Traditional Wife & Mama-to-be”
Homewithmadison	88.2k	1.8M	10k-1.1M	“From scratch baking homemaker, homesteader, mother”
Ivyoutwest	123.6k	3.7M	52k-5.8M	“News   homemaking   culture Mrs. Arizona '23”
Mrsarialewis	43.8k	574.1K	15K-4M	“'23   tradwife & entrepreneur saved by grace through faith”
Tradwifetori	72.9k	1.8M	40K-2.8M	“Adorably irritating is my persona Victoria Lit Texas”

It is evident that there is an imbalance between the number of followers and “Likes” in Table 1. The selected user accounts have varying followers (from 43k to 199k) to ensure that their popularity is attributed to the content itself rather than the size of their follower base. This approach aims to minimise the potential impact of TikTok’s recommendations algorithm on the interaction metrics, thereby maintaining the representativeness of the selected data. Moreover, all the videos have been checked manually to ensure that the content is original and represents the influencers’ personal views and daily life experiences.

<sup>6</sup> Data sourced as of December 31st, 2024

### 3.1.2 Data Processing and Corpus Design

In terms of data processing and corpus compiling, I transcribed all the videos into audio format and then used transcription tools to transcribe the audio into plain text. The selected videos were transcribed, and the resulting corpus consisted of 18,191 tokens in total. This transcribed corpus served as the primary data source for the analysis.

Python 3.12 were applied to transcription, along with the MoviePy and Whisper packages. After initial transcription, the texts were manually checked by comparing the transcribed text with the original videos. The entire data processing procedure is illustrated in Figure 3, and the Python code is shown in Appendix 2.

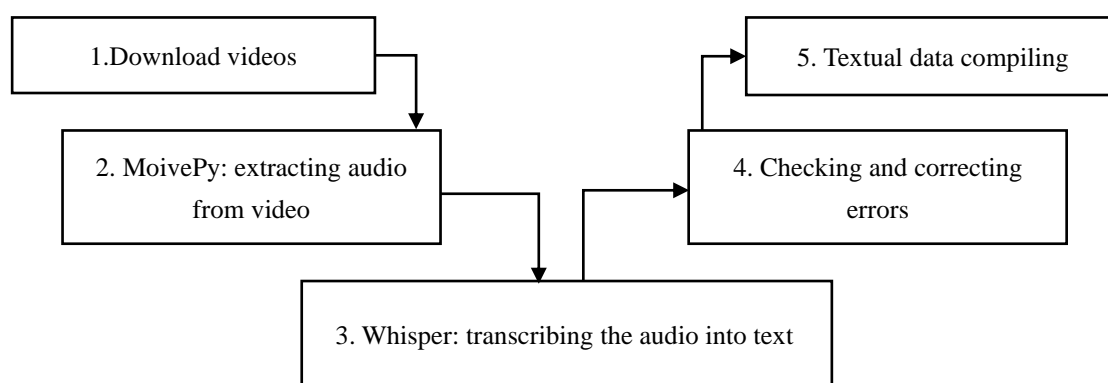


Figure 3. The Process of Data Collection and Compilation

Furthermore, to retrieve the specific patterns and word expressions for analysing, all the textual data were Part-of-Speech Tagged (POS Tagged) by employing the Free CLAWS Web Tagger<sup>7</sup>. It is the most common grammatical tagging tool for corpus annotations, with an error rate of only 1.5%. After the POS tagging, all the files were named and stored separately as a POS tagged version.

The main corpus tools for analysis are AntConc 3.5.9 and Sketch Engine. AntConc was used to retrieve collocations and perform concordance analysis. Sketch Engine is primarily used for keyword analysis as it provides access to the reference corpus and offers statistical evidence for keywords. The information about the reference corpus and methods of analysis will be presented in section 3.2.

<sup>7</sup> <https://ucrel-api.lancaster.ac.uk/claws/free.html>

Considering the ethical issues of the data collection and processing, all the selected videos were publicly available on TikTok. The five influencers' accounts are not limited to other users downloading their videos. This indicates consent for analysis. The collection was following TikTok's Terms of Service and community guidelines, which are presented on the website<sup>8</sup>. I will never use private messages or personal information for my analysis. Once selected, all videos were downloaded and safely stored for data processing and analysis.

### 3.2 Method of Analysis

This study combines corpus-based analysis with Martin and White's appraisal theory (2005) to investigate influencers' attitudes, how they evaluate the "tradwife" lifestyle, and how they engage in conversations with their audience. To solve the aforementioned questions, this study involves several key steps, including keyword and collocation analysis, and the application of appraisal Theory to reveal the interaction dynamics in influencers' language use. In the following section 3.2.1, I introduce the method of appraisal theory. After that, the corpus-based analysis is presented in section 3.2.2.

#### 3.2.1 Application of Appraisal Theory

Martin and White's appraisal theory is concerned with the interpersonal aspect of language that focuses on how writers or speakers express their stances, emotions, and values and interact with their readers/listeners (Martin and White 2005, 1). Relating to the investigation of influencers' language, appraisal theory provides a framework for revealing the interpersonal function of the language. Three subsystems of this framework, attitude, engagement and graduation, offer a valuable perspective for analysis. Attitudes can be used in analysing the influencers' attitudes toward the trends or their identity, such as how they evaluate the morality of their behaviours and their aesthetic evaluation of traditional lifestyles or values. Engagement applied to the influencers' language, by which used to uncover the stance and engagement strategies of speakers through specific lexical terms such as modal auxiliaries (e.g., *would* and *might*), negative words (e.g., *not* and *no*), conjunctions (e.g., *but*) or through linguistic patterns (e.g., *I think...*). This indicates the heteroglossia of the tradwife discourse and how the influencers open up or narrow down the dialogic space while interacting with their audience. Graduation can be utilised for analysing the intensity of the

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<sup>8</sup> Privacy and Security: <https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/en/privacy-security>

influencers' feelings and affect. It can explore how they strengthen or weaken their attitude through words, which in turn shape or affect the audience's attitudes.

Given the appraisal theory, this analysis mainly examines the attitudes and engagement aspects of the discourse. Specifically, it involves retrieving adjectives, modal verbs, conjunctions, and adverbs to identify and analyse the evaluative language frequently used in this discourse. Adjectives express evaluative judgments about traditional gender roles. Modal verbs help uncover the tone and stance of influencers when interacting or expressing their attitudes, such as expressing possibility, necessity, or obligation. Additionally, influencers either challenge or affirm the views of their followers. The first-person pronouns are also necessary to be investigated since they build authority or solidarity with their audience.

Using the appraisal framework, this study explores how influencers establish resonance or divergence to shape audiences' attitudes. It also aims to examine how the tradwife influencers constructed and propagated their values and lifestyles on this social media platform. Additionally, this analysis considers the engagement strategies that the influencers used to interact with their audiences.

### 3.2.2 Corpus-based Analysis

For this study, corpus-based analysis provides a quantitative approach to examine the linguistic features, enabling the identification of co-occurring lexical terms across the datasets. This method allows for systematic exploration of word co-occurrences, frequency and context. Most importantly, this approach can provide insights into the attitudinal and engagement markers of tradwife discourse.

Collocation analysis is an approach to identifying the co-occurrence of two or more words in a context and their frequency. According to Brezina. et al. (2015), collocates of words do not occur in isolation. Rather, they exist within a complex network of semantic relationships that reveal their meaning and the semantic structures of a text or corpus. This suggests that the collocation and context of the term *tradwives* reveal the influencers' values towards this concept or gender roles and how language shapes the ideological foundations of this social phenomenon.

In order to investigate the collocates of the node word, AntConc's default settings were adjusted to fit my corpora. The setting helped to find the most representative co-occurrence rather than categorise them as statistically significant or not significant. First, the default

threshold of the collocate setting was changed from  $P < 0.05$  (3.84 with Bonferroni) to  $P < 0.05(3.84)$ . Ranks of collocations were also changed to T-score  $> 1.5$ . According to Evert (2009), the T-score is a more robust way since it avoids inflating the significance of low-frequency co-occurrence. It also reduces the low-frequency bias. Moreover, given the small size of my corpus, adjusting the default setting supported identifying the meaningful collocations.

Additionally, keywords help reveal the specific content of the tradwife discourse. As Scott (1999) states, keyword lists tend to show three types of words: proper nouns, 'aboutness' keywords (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and interesting words to be analysed) and function words. Based on the above-mentioned, keyword analysis can be applied to find the specific interesting content of the tradwife discourse. The Open American National Corpus (spoken) (OANC) was selected as the reference corpus. It is a large electronic collection of American spoken English, including the personal face-to-face spoken language, narratives, and interview transcripts data produced from 1990 onward. Thus, the reference corpus is similar to the target corpus in terms of time, genre and contents. Based on the aforementioned, I also combined keyword analysis and collocational analysis to find the influencers' evaluation of the tradwife phenomenon. Conducting a retrieval of the high saliency keywords and their collocations. The results provided insight into analysing the evaluative language and the influencers' detailed attitude toward this trend.

Concordance analysis is the most important way to support identifying the evaluative meaning within a context. Given the subjectivity of appraisal theory and the contextual dependence nature of evaluative language (Hunston 2011), it is crucial to check the concordance line and determine the context that co-occurred with the node word. Consequently, the analysis combines keyword, collocation, and concordance analysis. This method provides a systematic way to investigate the evaluative language and its interpersonal functions in the tradwife discourse.

## 4 Analysis

In this section, the results of the appraisal and corpus-based analysis of tradwife influencers' language features will be presented to answer the following research questions:

Q<sub>1</sub>: What specific topics do tradwife influencers emphasise in their video?

Q<sub>2</sub>: What attitudes do tradwife influencers express toward this phenomenon?

Q<sub>3</sub>: What strategies do tradwife influencers employ to engage their audiences and express their values?

There are three main parts of the whole analysis section. First, in section 4.1, keyword analysis is employed to investigate the first question of the specific content of videos. Second, sections 4.2 and 4.3 investigate individual keywords through checking concordance and collocates. It aims to explore how influencers express attitudes toward the tradwife phenomenon. In addition, the collocation of high-salient keywords is also examined and interpreted under the appraisal theory. Finally, in section 4.4, engagement strategies of the tradwife influencers are revealed by analysing specific lexical words: modal auxiliaries, mental process verbs, negative words and conjunctions. Taken together, these sections examine emotional preference, the specific topic and interaction strategies of tradwife influencers.

### 4.1 Keywords Analysis

In order to determine the specific topic of the tradwives' short videos and their attitudes toward this phenomenon, keywords were examined to reveal the detailed content of their video. Furthermore, the collocation of high-salient keywords was also examined to investigate their basic attitudes toward the tradwife phenomenon. The Open American National Corpus (spoken) (OANC) was selected as a reference corpus in section 3.2.2. After comparing the reference corpus with the target tradwife corpus, the keywords of tradwife discourse and their saliency are listed in Table 2. The Top 30 keywords indicating a significant difference in frequency were selected for display.

Table 2. Keywords List

	<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Frequency (focus)</b>	<b>Keyness Score</b>		<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Frequency (focus)</b>	<b>Keyness Score</b>
1.	tradwife	20	989.39	16.	unconventional	4	153.21
2.	stay-at-home	10	495.19	17.	sass	3	149.26
3.	sundress	12	458.09	18.	homemaking	3	149.26
4.	feminist	13	403.79	19.	femininity	3	149.26
5.	feminism	10	381.87	20.	hi	3	149.26
6.	tiktok	6	297.52	21.	gender	10	146.76
7.	tradwives	6	297.52	22.	mop	8	142.54
8.	milkmaid	5	248.1	23.	cleaning	8	128.8
9.	millennial	5	248.1	24.	housewife	20	126.43
10.	feminine	14	205.35	25.	traditional	38	123.25
11.	flowy	4	198.68	26.	unborn	3	115.1
12.	masculine	6	186.7	27.	breadwinner	3	115.1
13.	homemaker	17	163.17	28.	ellie	3	115.1
14.	implant	6	157.39	29.	sometimes	7	112.74
15.	syrup	4	153.21	30.	always	22	103.67

The above keywords list is sufficient to reflect the content preferences and tendencies in tradwife speech. After manual semantic categorising and checking their contexts, it is clear to assume that these influencers focused mainly on the tradwife lifestyle (*tradwife, tradwives, homemaker, homemaking, housewife, traditional, breadwinner*), aesthetic (*sundress, milkmaid, feminine, flowy, implant*), gender role (*gender, unconventional, feminist, feminism, masculine*), popular culture (*TikTok, millennial, sass*) and housework (*mop, cleaning, sometimes/always*). These results indicate that the contents of their videos mainly focused on the personal lifestyle, division of household labour, and gender roles. It also solidifies the influencers' alignment with their tradwife persona.

To examine the attitude of tradwife influencers, it is necessary to study the individual high-frequency keywords and their collocates in detail. I retrieved the collocates of selected keywords with a frequency exceeding 10. Additionally, nouns that are semantically related to

the tradwife phenomenon are particularly focused. They are *tradwife* (plural form *tradwives* also included), *feminist*, *feminism*, *homemaker*, *gender* and *housewife*. Based on the collocates, the realisations of attitudes were analysed through their context. The result of each keyword's collocates that convey the attitude of the influencers is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Collocates of Keywords and Evaluation (T-Score>1.5)

Node word	Collocate	Evaluation	Context
tradwife	traditional	Judgement (social esteem)	1 And women should also be able to use the term <u>tradwife</u> , which means <b>traditional</b> wife
homemaker	dream	Judgement (social esteem)	2 ... if your <b>dream</b> is to be a <u>homemaker</u> , do not continue wasting your time with this type of man.
gender	traditional	Judgement (social esteem)	3 ... a woman who chooses to live a more <b>traditional</b> life with ultra-traditional <u>gender</u> roles.
	empowering	Judgment (social sanction)	4 There's nothing <b>empowering</b> about letting somebody's <u>gender</u> override their personal character.
housewife	happier	Affect (happiness)	5 ...but I'm a lot <b>happier</b> as a <u>housewife</u> ...

I checked every context of the above analysis, since the evaluative meaning highly relies on the context. The above results suggest that the influencers perceive the tradwife phenomenon as aligned with social normality and given a positive evaluation. It reflects adherence to traditional gender roles. It also indicates that the influencers believe the tradwife's values or customs should be normal and appropriate to other people. However, in context 4, it also evaluates the challenging actions and criticises the way of focusing on gender rather than individual values. In addition, since the results of some collocates did not present meaningful outcomes when the T-score was set above 1.5, the results of *feminism* and *feminist* were excluded from Table 3. However, some results are still interesting even though they are lower than the threshold. For instance:

Table 4 Collocates of *feminist* and *feminism*

<b>Node word</b>	<b>Collocates</b>
feminist	<i>modern, dismantle, escaping and hatred</i>
feminism	<i>modern, classic, rejecting, anti, and hashtagged</i>

The results in Table 4 show the influencers' attitudes toward *feminist* or *feminism*. The word *modern* is a co-occurrence of these two node words. It can be assumed that the tradwife influencers know the modernity of feminism. However, other collocates can also indicate that they have feelings of rejection, opposition or even hatred. This polarised attitude reflects that the influencers have a complex view on feminism. But, according to the above analysis, it cannot be denied that these influencers still believe their lifestyle and values are reasonable and should be accepted in society.

In order to explore the deeper attitudinal illustration of the influencers themselves, I will investigate the tradwife influencers' personal feelings and the affect in the next part.

## 4.2 Collocation of Pronouns

Table 5 presents the word frequency in the tradwife corpus. The frequent use of personal pronouns is revealed.

Table 5. Word Frequency in the TikTok Tradwife Corpus (Top 30)

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1.	and	686	16.	for	160
2.	I	657	17.	they	159
3.	to	606	18.	t	140
4.	a	475	19.	this	138
5.	the	457	20.	like	137
6.	that	391	21.	just	134
7.	you	380	22.	have	129
8.	it	311	23.	not	125
9.	of	293	24.	do	122
10.	is	243	25.	me	122
11.	s	221	26.	be	121
12.	my	208	27.	are	120
13.	so	192	28.	he	111
14.	in	191	29.	with	102
15.	we	163	30.	your	99

Based on the high frequency of first-person pronouns, I hypothesised that the influencers are more likely to express their personal opinions and emotional attitudes. To verify the assumption and answer the second research question, the following analysis examines the first-person pronoun *I*. The results show the influencers' feelings and emotional intensity.

The collocates of *I* were retrieved to summarise the attitudes. The collocates were analysed and categorised into positive and negative categories in the next step. The results show that only a few attitudinal items can be identified, namely: *loved*, *love*, *enjoy*, *happy*, and *like*. The results of positive and negative use of the above collocates are displayed in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Affective Collocation of First-Person Pronouns

Items	Positive Affect Frequency	Negative Affect Frequency	Raw Frequency
love	22	0	23
enjoy	3	0	4
happy	3	0	3
like	22	3	58

The results show that the influencers express their satisfaction with their values and lifestyles. The influencers tend to use mild expressions of emotion (e.g., *like*, *happy* and *enjoy*) more often and extreme emotional expressions (e.g., *love*). The results present that the most frequent affective lexis that co-occur with the first-person pronoun is positive affect. This supports the idea that tradwife influencers express satisfaction with their traditional lifestyles and beliefs. Additionally, the data suggest that lower-intensity emotion words (e.g., *like*) appear as frequently as the higher-intensity ones (e.g., *love*), indicating an attitudinal nuance of the influencers who adjust the way of expressing their feelings. For example,

- (1) ... about how amazing my husband is and how much **I love** him, everyone says, what's your backup plan?

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-11-06]

- (2) Sometimes I'll use other things. Like **I love** this method, Squirt and Mop. I also **love** this product.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-02-27]

(3) I'm not Amish. **I just love** historically inspired fashion and that's why I look like...

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-11-02]

(4) I **like** to wear the things that he likes.

[Esteecewilliams, 2023-01-29]

(5) And now that I have him, **I just like** staying in that kind of mode. And obviously...

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-06-04]

The above examples revealed that both *love* and *like* co-occurred frequently with *I*. However, their semantic preferences are diverse, with *love* mainly used for interpersonal relationships (i.e., family and value) and directed toward people (e.g., *husband, him*). While *like* is used more closely with their individual experiences.

However, three negative affect items *like* also appear in the influencers' speech, which are employed in the context of "my husband/ my man doesn't like..." and another of "I don't like finance". In this case, the switch of subject (from *I* to *my husband/my man*) suggests that the influencers link the affect to an external individual (i.e., her husband), trying to involve the response and evaluation of others' behaviour. In addition, the influencer does not explicitly express her own feelings. Rather, she expresses her attitudes through others' evaluations (i.e., her husband's preference). The actions embody that the influencers construct self-worth or identity by pleasing others or conforming to their male partners. In the tradwife discourse, the aforementioned feelings may align with their submissive and family-oriented values.

Meanwhile, verbs such as *enjoy* are primarily used to express pleasure or gratitude toward their idealised lifestyle, with an intensity level falling between *like* and *love*. The use of *enjoy* in examples (6) and (7) indicates the influencers' feelings through the emotive mental processes. *Simplistic way of living* and *slow-paced life* are the entities that prompt the speakers' mental processes.

(6) I quite **enjoy** this **more simplistic way of living and learning**.

[Esteecewilliams, 2023-03-23]

(7) I **enjoy** living a **slow-paced life**.

[Homewithmadison, 2020-12-31]

Overall, influencers tend to use mild emotional expressions, such as *I like...* and *I enjoy...* when conveying their satisfaction with their values and lifestyles. The affective lexis co-occurring with the first-person pronoun *I* is mainly positive, which suggests that they prefer to express positive emotions to their audiences. These expressions not only reflect their affection for their individual choices but also reveal their satisfaction and identification with their way of life. Moreover, interesting results show that they use lower-intensity words to describe personal experiences while employing higher-intensity words for their family and traditional values. It can be assumed that the tradwife influencers minimise the significance of their personal feelings. Rather, they highlight that their self-value should be rooted in their family or gender relationships. Additionally, using affective lexical items and first-person pronouns may reduce the sense of didacticism and make it easier for their audiences to accept their views unconsciously without any resistance.

To examine other attitudinal markers, the specific grammatical patterns and collocations were also analysed. In the next section, I summarise how the influencers intensify their attitudes through different modes of intensification.

### **4.3 Intensification of Attitudes**

The expression of attitude is not fixed. It can also be adjusted according to varying intensity. Gradability is a key characteristic of all attitudinal meanings (Martin and White 2005, 135). The operations over qualities are employed whereby adjectives, adverbs, and other modifiers are scaled. In this section, the attitudinal intensity of the influencers is analysed from the perspectives of isolating modes, comparatives and superlatives, maximisation and lexicalisation.

#### **4.3.1 Adverb + Adjective Patterns**

I retrieved the pattern of *adverb + adjective* (Regex: `\w+_AV0 \w+_AJ0`) to verify the qualities of subjective attitudes. In total, 79 hits were obtained. The results are extracted and compiled in Table 7.

Table 7. Different modes of intensification

Isolating				
Up-scaling of qualities	Down-scaling of qualities	Comparatives and superlatives	Maximisation	Lexicalisation
37	4	26	6	6

The results reveal that isolating intensification in the influencers' speech is common. It shows the intensity of the adjectives by using the pre-modification *very* and *really*. It also emphasises the speakers' positive attitudes explicitly and directly. Moreover, this strategy also reflects the influencers' attempt to enhance persuasiveness. The application of *very* and *really* also suggests their strong desire to express a personal stance. For example:

(8) They're traditional housewives. They're **very** modern and **very** attractive.

[Tradwifetori, 2024-02-16]

(9) I think it's **really interesting** to see how shocked people are by the term tradwife.

[Ivyourwest, 2024-05-13]

The above example of up-scaling of qualities illustrates how the influencers apply the isolating mode of intensification to strengthen their attitudes. In example (8), the influencers use the adverb *very* to make the tradwife's values more commendable and evoke emotional resonance. Similarly, in example (9), the influencer also intensifies the positive evaluation of the things. At the same time, it combines hedging that allows the influencer to express her subjective opinions. Thus, the frequent use of up-scaling resources suggests that the influencers tend to express their positive attitude in a persuasive and performative way of communication.

#### 4.3.2 Comparatives and Superlatives

According to Table 7, comparatives and superlatives are also highly used in the influencers' speech. The expressions present intensity by making comparisons within a specific range to achieve a higher semantic effect. Examples are exemplified below:

(10) ...women who are **more humble**, **more feminine** and willing to treat their men better...

[Tradwifetori, 2024.03.05]

(11) A lot of wives I see they like getting these relationships and they try and change their man's diets and stuff like that. Like sure, if you want to eat your salads and your green smoothies, go for it, but do not make your husband eat that way. They are grown men. They usually want something **more hearty** and **filling**, and that's what I make him. And if I want to eat less of it ... but I'm not going to change what he eats.

[Esteecwilliams, 2023.01.26]

(12) ...men are interested in finding these women they think they will be **more submissive**.

[Tradwifetori, 2024.03.05]

(13) ...there will always be women who naturally want a **more traditional lifestyle**...

[Ivyoutwest, 2024.05.13]

(14) I think one of the **most sexist, misogynistic** mentalities you can have about women is that they are all the same and they all need to think the same.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024.07.21]

The above examples localise the scale intensity within the different contexts of feminine traits. The influencers do not directly express the intensity of the aforementioned feminine traits. Instead, they convey them through comparison between different states. Expressions such as *more humble*, *more feminine*, and *more submissive* highlighted the influencers' attitudes that conformed to male-defined femininity. Meanwhile, terms like *more traditional lifestyle* convey the influencers' preferences and implicit attitudes towards admiration of the traditional lifestyle. Moreover, the influencers also highlight the subconscious prioritisation of male needs. In example (11), *more hearty and filling* implies the stance that the male-centred or the husband needs. Furthermore, the context of this example, "and if I want to eat less of it ... but I'm not going to change what he eats," reflects an attitude of self-sacrifice or accommodation. It also indicates an attitude of taking her man as the reference point. Her husband's needs are positioned as the priority, even though her (the influencer's) own needs differ.

#### 4.3.3 Maximisation and Lexicalisation

In Table 7, it is clear that maximisation and lexicalisation are also employed in their speeches. Referring to maximisation, the influencers use these words such as *completely*, *extremely* and

*totally* to enhance the scale of intensification and intensify a certain emotion to the highest degree. For instance:

(15) I was going to be **completely confident** in submitting to him as the leader of...

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-10-18]

(16) I also have an **extremely supportive** family who told my husband that if he died...

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-11-16]

(17) She seemed **totally cool**.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-01-18]

The influencers strengthen the tone and demonstrate a strong commitment to their attitudes towards the chosen lifestyle. When combined with positive adjectives such as *confident*, *supportive* and *cool*, which further conveys the influencers' attitudes in a positive stance. The patterns of "maximiser + positive adjective" not only intensify their statements but also emphasise their strong emotional contribution to their lifestyle.

According to Martin and White (2005, 143), lexical items also carry the intensification and convey an attitudinal overtone. For example,

(18) ...and love all eight of her babies, and the fact that she is **wildly** successful and prioritizes her family, it just drives these people insane.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-01-18]

*Wildly successful* conveys stronger emotions and attitudinal nuances by using descriptive adverbs. In this expression, *wildly* functions as an intensifier that highlights the meaning of successful. It also indicates great success. Meanwhile, *wildly* serves to intensify the degree of success rather than its literal meaning. This co-occurrence enhances the semantic effect and highlights the influencers' strong attitudes towards their chosen tradwife lifestyle.

To sum up, the above analysis reveals how the influencers intensify their attitude toward the tradwife lifestyle. The frequent use of up-scaling resources, comparatives and superlatives shows that the influencers tend to emphasise the emotional intensity and male-centred lifestyle. This suggests that the influencers prefer to reinforce their commitment to traditional gender roles. In addition, lexicalisation enhances emotional and attitudinal meaning by

strengthening the intensity of co-occurring lexical items. Consequently, the application of different modes of intensification demonstrates the influencers' conformist attitudes toward patriarchy that conform to traditional family values. It also provides clear evidence of their subjective attitudes and self-marginalised stances.

#### **4.4 Influencers' Engagement Strategies**

In this section, to answer the third question of how the influencers engage their audiences and express their values, I have employed the subcategory of engagement to investigate the dialogic expansion and contraction.

In section 4.4.1, I present the results of expansive engagement through analysing modal auxiliaries and *I think* structure. According to the results, most of them serve to express a singular viewpoint or ability. It also shows that the influencers have a limited application of expansive engagement strategies. In other words, the influencers tend to narrow down or reject other opinions toward traditional lifestyle and gender roles.

In section 4.4.2, I will reveal the influencers' strong tendency to employ contractive resources to reinforce their own stance. They still reject and limit the space for alternative propositions by using the resources of denying, countering and pronouncing. The results show that the contractive engagement strategies are used more frequently, in which the influencers try to reject, neglect or ignore external voices or opinions.

##### **4.4.1 Expansive Engagement**

Dialogic expansion refers to a strategy in which the speaker opens up space for alternative voices or viewpoints. This also allows the audience of listeners to respond, engage and agree or disagree with some viewpoints. In this case, the dialogic space can be seen as an opening-up space. Rather than asserting a single opinion as an absolute truth while speaking (Martin and White 2005).

In this part of the study, the lexical items were retrieved to investigate the expansive engagement between influencers and their audiences. Firstly, the modal auxiliaries were examined by using regular expressions ( $\backslash w+_VM0$ ). 231 hits of modal auxiliaries were retrieved. Secondly, after checking every concordance and excluding affirmative instances, 152 hits of modal auxiliaries were obtained. The results included *will*, *would*, *can*, *could*, and

*might*, followed by 54, 45, 48, 17 and 8 frequencies, respectively. Finally, some example sentences were selected randomly for analysis and elaboration.

Within the results, 54 hits of *will* and 48 hits of *can*, unsurprisingly, did not function as a dialogic expansion due to the meaning of these two words. This only expresses ability, intention or certainty of commitment. Similarly, only 1 concordance of the 45 occurrences of *would* was found to function as dialogic expansion. In the context of, *if you **would** like to, get a part-time job*. This example illustrates how the utterances are framed to accommodate and entertain alternative perspectives. It gives the audience a feeling of a possible stance, rather than an asserted position.

Two hits of *could* also function as a dialogic expansion. It indicates a non-definitive and indirect statement. In the example sentence, *I once was a successful wedding photographer. I **could** go back to doing that or I **could** grow my social media here...*, which provides the uncertain future. It allows the audience to predict the influencers' behaviours and future choices or options. The results and examples of *might* show that all hits function as expanding the dialogue, as in Example (19).

(19) However, if your dream is to be a homemaker, do not continue wasting your time with this type of man. There are plenty of men out there that make this lifestyle realistic and they do what needs to be done. They **might** work more than one job. They **might** put you in a smaller home. They **might** change states to a state that is more realistic to live off of one income. You **might** not even be able to be fully on one income. You **might** need to supplement that husband's income. That's okay.....If you think that when you become a mother and he's a father, that he will suddenly want his wife to stay home with his kids, that **might** be true for some, but for a lot, that is not.

[Esteecwilliams, 2024-04-22]

The above examples express the possibility of one's behaviour. The influencer does not offer a single or definitive stance. Instead, she uses *might* to provide the audience with multiple hypothetical situations. To some extent, this also encourages the audience to consider different viewpoints based on their own experience and allows diverse thinking that engages with influencers' perspectives. For the influencers, this makes their stance appear more open and uncertain. This may inspire the audience to reflect and respond with different choices. It also avoids the absoluteness of the influencers' attitudes.

The results of the modal auxiliaries indicate that the influencers try to provide multiple possibilities and are highly engaging with their audiences. The influencers apply *could*, *might* and *would*, which aim for avoiding assertiveness and encouraging diverse opinions to interact with. However, compared with the total number of 152 modal auxiliaries, the proportion of modals that function as dialogic expansion is still very low. There are only 9 hits in total, making up about 6% of all results of modal auxiliaries. On the contrary, most of the modal auxiliaries still function to express the singular viewpoint, ability, suggestion and obligation. For instance,

(20) ...a masculine provider man **will** always do what he needs to do to protect...

[Esteecewilliams, 2024-04-22]

(21) ... people who have said they **would** beat up my husband if he ever abused me...

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-11-16]

(22) ...I **can** assure you that my daughter is just fine.

[Homewithmadison, 2020-08-16]

These sentences indicate that the influencers express their intention, make assumptions about the future or describe their abilities. More than that, they do not introduce any external voices or provide any space for the audience's response. This excludes the possibility of any doubts from others and reinforces the speakers' authoritative position.

Besides modal verbs, due to the high frequency of the first-person pronoun *I* (mentioned in Table 5, section 4.2), I have investigated *I + verb* structure (Regex: \w+\_PNP \w+\_VVB). It makes it easier to find the terms that functioned as dialogic expansion. A mental process verb was chosen for analysis, such as *think*, *assume*, *believe*, etc (Martin and White 2005).

However, only *think* was selected since the low frequency or no results of other verbs. *I think* encompasses meanings by which the speaker makes assessments of likelihood (2005, 104-105). Seventeen hits of *I think* were retrieved (results see in Appendix 2). Surprisingly, there were no hits that function as dialogic expansion when checking the context. Instead, all the hits function as a dialogic contraction, which acts to challenge or reject alternative positions and external voices. Consequently, the results of *I think* once again suggest that the influencers exhibit a strong sense of subjectivity. It also conveys the influencers' strong

personal beliefs by rejecting other viewpoints or external voices. The results of *I think* that function as a dialogic contraction, are analysed and interpreted in section 4.4.2.

#### 4.4.2 Contractive Engagement

In this section, I focus on the disclaim resource. It includes two ways of rejecting or replacing other viewpoints: deny and counter. Both of them regard alternative views as invalid or not applicable in the context (Martin and White 2005, 117-118). Based on the above resources and functions of disclaim, I retrieve and analyse the denial expression and conjunction to investigate how the influencers disalign and limit their engagement with their audiences.

In addition, proclaim is another resource of contractive engagement. It is used to limit the scope of dialogistic alternatives in the ongoing conversation (Martin and White 2005, 121). Under this condition, the speaker can argue against or exclude other alternative positions. Moreover, pronouncement, as one of the resources of proclaim, involved authorial emphases. It indicates that the speaker could emphasise their own opinions (Martin and White 2005, 127). Given the above resources of proclaim, I will analyse the formulation *I think* in this section and reveal the contractive strategies of influencers.

##### a) Deny

Denying or rejecting a position is to adopt a contractive stance. Although the speaker acknowledges alternative viewpoints, these viewpoints are still considered unacceptable in the given context and are excluded by the speaker (Martin and White 2005, 118). In other words, the speaker recognises the possibility of other external voices or opinions, but they still explicitly reject it. As a result, the propositions are assertive and leave no room for further discussion.

Based on the aforementioned definition, the denial expressions, including *not* or *n't*, *no*, *never*, *none* and *nothing*, were included in this analysis. Regular expressions (`\w+_XX0`, `no+_ITJ`, `never+_AV0`, `\w+_PNI`) were used to retrieve the instances. The results reveal the explicit denial in the influencers' speeches, which are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Frequency of Deny Terms

Terms	<i>not or n't</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>nothing</i>	Total
Raw Frequency	254	18	15	12	299
Average Frequency (per 1000 words)	14.3	1	0.8	0.67	16.9

I have excluded some hits that do not have a denial function, such as “not only”, “last but not least”, “not...enough” and “why not”. Under the manual verification, it was confirmed that a total of 299 hits constituted clear examples of denial. In the results, the influencers explicitly oppose certain viewpoints. Moreover, they acknowledge the stance of a certain viewpoint at first but still reject it. These two ways of rejection indicate that the influencers narrow and compress the alternative views and show a rigid stance. This approach neglects the applicability of opposing views while leaving no room for further discussion. Consider the following extract by way of example:

(23) It is a blessing to be my husband's helpmate and the Bible has the man of the household, **not** the woman.

[Esteecwilliams, 2023-01-29]

(24) **No**, a Kamala Harris presidency **would not** be a victory for all women. For so long, women have been coerced into thinking that if there is a woman in power, we need to support her... So for millions of women across the country, we **do not** share the same values as Kamala Harris. We **do not** believe that she represents us.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-07-21]

In the above examples, the influencers use *no* and *not* to indicate a disalignment with the views of “woman of the household” and “the presidency being a victory for all women”. In example (23), the influencer expresses her viewpoints on the leadership of men in the household and the subordinate role of women. In this speech, she uses the phrase “not the woman” to deny the possibility of female leadership. Moreover, given the context of this example, “the Bible has the...”, she expresses an authoritative reference to strengthen her viewpoints. In this case, the opposing viewpoints turn to “the opinions that are against the will of God”. Additionally, the context of “to be my husband’s helpmate” reaffirms the male-centred views of the household. In all, the context of example (24) is used to support the

denial marker *not*. It addresses the exclusivity of other possible viewpoints and makes other voices or opinions not worth considering. Based on the above interpretation, I assume that this may increase the solidarity between the influencers and the like-minded audiences.

Considering the example (24), the influencer still applies an explicit denial (e.g., *no, would not, do not*) to express their unsupportive stance to the politician. At the beginning of the sentence, the influencers use “No” to deny the viewpoints of *Kamala's presidency would be a victory for all women* directly. Moreover, the use of *not* in the following sentences also emphasises they reject Kamala as a representative of all women. In addition, by using “we do not share” and “we do not believe”, the influencer excludes Kamala’s representation of womanhood from “we tradwives”. It suggests that the influencers hold the view that women’s political success is not equal to the triumph of all women.

This indicates the influencers’ rejection or denial of feminism. Furthermore, it presents that the influencers treat their stance as unquestionable and there is no need for further discussion. This reinforces the influencer’s rejection of any other viewpoints. In this case, the influencers narrow down the space for further discussion of this issue and reject others’ opinions on women’s political success.

#### b) Counter

Counter is another subtype of disclaim that represents the current propositions as introducing a new stance that contrasts with the assumed proposition (Martin and White 2005, 120). In other words, the function of a counter is to present a new view that opposes an expected one.

*But* is the most common conjunction in this discourse. It conveys the countering and adversative in the influencers’ speech. *But* appears 92 times in the corpus and highlights the crucial role in contrasting ideas and challenging expectations in the influencer’s speech. For example,

(25) I don’t know about y’all, **but** I’m a lot happier as a housewife obeying her husband than I ever was as a career-driven woman obeying her boss...

[Tradwifetori, 2024-02-24]

(26) Stay-at-home moms know that they'll be looked down on. We know that what we do isn't making money. **But** we also know that some of the most valuable, impactful work in this world isn't paid.

[Tradwifetori, 2024-02-24]

These examples employ dialogic contraction by introducing and rejecting presupposed viewpoints to establish the influencer's stance. In example (25), the influencer implicitly assumes the audience holds the value that "career women may be superior housewives". It presents a contradictory experience, "I'm a lot happier", to challenge the previous assumption. Similarly, example (26) begins by presupposing that "stay-at-home moms do not make money and are looked down on". In response, the influencer asserts that "valuable work in this world isn't always compensated." This example suggests that the influencer challenges the prevailing assumption and reargues the value of unpaid housework. In the above examples, the influencer first introduces the presupposed or potential viewpoints. These viewpoints are contrasted through the adversative conjunction *but*. After that, the influencer proposes her viewpoints to contrast with or challenge the previous ones.

Within this strategy, the influencer first objectively presents the existing claims without judgment (i.e., *career women may be superior housewives* and *stay-at-home moms do not make money and are looked down on*). Nevertheless, the influencers immediately follow with a new view (i.e., *I'm a lot happier* and *valuable work in this world isn't always compensated*) to replace the previous one. It is not aimed at engaging the audience in discussing other possibilities, rather, it is to highlight the validity of the influencer's viewpoint. This approach turns the conversation into an expression of a stance, not a discussion of other possibilities. In this case, the dialogic space is narrowed down, which limits the possibility of other viewpoints.

Apart from the aforementioned, the application of the conjunction *but* also affects solidarity between the influencers and their audiences. It can be assumed that this may create the polarisation of the tradwife discussion. A stronger sense of solidarity may be established when the audience aligns with the influencer's perspective. Conversely, if the audience disagrees with the influencer's views, it may be perceived as an imposition of specific values, causing a sense of alienation.

## c) pronounce

The category of pronouncement includes expressions that demonstrate the author's emphasis, interventions or interpolations (Martin and White 2005, 127). That is to say, the speaker expresses what they think or believe explicitly by emphasising a view or inserting the opinion into the speech directly. Given this definition of pronouncement and the low frequency of other mental process verbs (which I mentioned in section 4.4.1), the phrase "I think" was selected to investigate in this part.

Within the results, 17 hits of *I think* were retrieved, which functioned as a contractive resource in asserting stance. The results of *I think* (I listed in Appendix 2), show that the influencers present the proposition as a personal belief. It is not negotiable or challengeable. In example (27), the influencers emphasise personal stance by using *I think* structure.

(27) **I think** it is important that the woman has the house clean, a hot meal on the table for her husband and her kids... (Result 6 from Appendix 2)

[Esteecwilliams, 2023-01-26]

Although this structure seems to express personal viewpoints, it is used to strengthen the legitimacy of the viewpoints. In other words, *I think* is used to validate the "women's role should be service to others" and to make this view more persuasive to the audience. In addition, the influencer does not discuss other divisions of housework. She emphasises the inherent importance of women's responsibility instead. That is to say, the influencer leaves no space or possibilities for other options or alternative viewpoints. In all, the result of *I think* embody the gendered subordination. Consequently, even though this example is introduced with *I think*, it does not provide any other options for labour division. Rather, the influencer excludes other options by presenting her own opinion as a rational one. In this case, it contracts the dialogic space through subjective expression and strengthens the traditional gender roles.

## 5 Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study related to the research questions. It also discusses the results in light of the relevant literature on social media language and influencers' language features. Additionally, considering the implications for appraisal theory and corpus-based analysis, this section highlights the significance of using the combined approach to investigate the evaluative language through lexical items and linguistic patterns. The implications of the tradwife phenomenon are also discussed. Finally, the limitations and suggested direction for future research will also be discussed.

The topic preference and attitudes of the tradwife influencers toward the tradwife phenomenon were investigated through keyword and collocational analysis. The keyword analysis shows that the influencers focus mainly on the tradwife lifestyle, aesthetic, gender role, popular culture and housework (shown in section 4.1). This is aligned with Sykes and Hopner's (2024) studies that suggest "tradwife" subculture emphasises family values, traditional gender roles and women's autonomy. In addition, section 4.2 examines the subjective attitudes of the influencers. The collocates that co-occurred with the first-person pronoun *I* were investigated. The results show that the influencers hold a positive attitude toward their lifestyle, in which they use mild emotional expressions more frequently (via *like* and *enjoy*) to express their satisfaction with their lifestyle. Moreover, the switching of subject that co-occurred with *like* indicates that influencers construct self-worth or identity by conforming to their male partners. The application of the first-person pronoun *I* is not found to decrease audience engagement since *I* is the most frequently used pronoun in this study. This does not concur with the finding of Labrecque et al.'s (2020) study that the application of the first-person pronoun tends to reduce engagement.

More than that, the popularity of tradwife content on TikTok is linked to the way influencers express their attitudes. As demonstrated in section 4.3, the intensity of the attitudes is interpreted through different modes of intensification. The strategy involves, first, the influencers frequently enhancing their positive attitude by using pre-modification (*very* and *really*) with adjectives. Second, the influencers prefer using comparatives and superlatives to express their attitudes and highlight their self-sacrifice and submission to their husband. Finally, the application of lexicalisation and maximisation enhances the semantic effect and highlights the influencers' strong attitudes towards the tradwife lifestyle. These results align

with Aleti et al.'s (2019) study, which confirms that emotional attraction can enhance audience interaction.

The tradwife influencers' engagement strategies were concluded in section 4.4. The results present expansive engagement in section 4.4.1 and contractive engagement in section 4.4.2. Firstly, by investigating the modal auxiliaries and *I think* structure, the expansive strategies are rarely used in the influencers' speech. The results show that the influencers tend to hold their singular opinions and seldom use modals to express possibilities. They tend to provide multiple options only when they consider their futures. Moreover, the application of *I think* does not serve as an expansive resource. Conversely, it conveys the absolute subjective attitudes as a contract resource. Secondly, in section 4.4.2, the influencers have strong tendencies to use contractive resources (e.g., *no*, *not*, *but* and *I think*). In this case, the influencers employ these words to reinforce their stance. They reject external voices or other viewpoints by using the resources of denying, countering and pronouncing. The high frequency use of the above contract resources also enhances solidarity and strengthens the sense of identification between influencers and their audiences. This also leads to the polarisation of the tradwife discussion.

Beyond the results of this study, the common use of functional words such as modal auxiliaries, comparatives and conjunctions can also illustrate the main features of tradwife discourse. It avoids using lexical terms to evaluate their own choices or behaviours directly. Secondly, the influencers have a clear stance and always show explicit denial or rejection. Thirdly, the influencers expand or contract dialogic space when they seek to build identification or assert their viewpoint. These features are aligned with the soft-spoken, thoughtful, rational, and not blindly obedient self-image of influencers. The above language features, to some extent, also reduce the assertive stance and reinforce the self-image that they aim to construct. These findings align with Bastrygina et al. (2023) and Page (2024) findings. They argued that influencers prefer to create an image of authenticity and accessibility and use a language strategy to maintain engagement with their audience.

Based on the linguistic features of the tradwife influencers, the ideology of the tradwife phenomenon is also revealed. On the one hand, the influencers do not completely negate self-existence. On the other hand, they reconstruct their self-awareness through the identity of a traditional wife. This is often expressed through their choice of obeying their husband and believing the rightness of what they did (results are presented in Appendix 2, with examples

illustrated in sections 4.2, 4.3.2, and 4.3.3). This also suggests that the influencers' subjectivity is grounded in a morality of "living for others". Considering self-objectification, the tradwife influencers' behaviours fit the voluntary self-objectification. Although these influencers have their own thoughts, they still choose to prioritise their husbands' needs. Not because they are oppressed, but due to their sense of moral superiority. Since they believe the submission to their husband is a virtue or responsibility. They turn self-sacrifice or gender oppression into an expression of moral virtues. The results in section 4.4 regarding engagement strategies also support the above results. The influencers do not wish to engage in further discussion about their viewpoints. That is to say, they strive to maintain their viewpoints or morality and do not accept others' advice or criticism.

These implications of ideology concur with Leidig (2023) and Tebaldi & Baran's (2023) study that the tradwife phenomenon embeds with far-right ideologies, anti-feminism, anti-nationalism and white supremacy. Nevertheless, the influencers are also becoming more aligned with postfeminist sensibility. That is, they use the language of personal choice to conceal the structural gender oppression. For instance, the results of the pronoun *I* and some statements about personal choice in section 4.2. This appears to be a personal choice, but it legitimises the traditional gender roles through their choices.

Within the tradwife discourse, voluntary submission, structural gender oppression and the relationship with postfeminist sensibility can be interpreted as a problematic ideology. It is derived from the following points: firstly, male dominance and female submission are assigned as social morality. Secondly, the traditional role of women has been constrained by moral or religious norms. Lastly, these thoughts limit the progress of gender equality. Moreover, combining with the high engagement of the tradwife phenomenon, the propagation of ideology concurs with previous studies of TikTok functions as a powerful cultural communication platform (Casas 2023; Boffone 2022).

These findings answer all the research questions and corroborate the tradwife phenomenon. It helps to understand how influencers employ language to enhance connections with their audience. Additionally, analysing the tradwife influencers' language use also implicates the specific linguistic features of social media communication, particularly on TikTok. The influencers speaking on this newly emerging short video platform can strategically construct their persona. They tend to choose concise and highly subjective expressions to promote their

values. Furthermore, combined with its visual features, the language may become more attractive and persuasive on this platform.

Several limitations to this study also need to be acknowledged. First, in applying appraisal theory, analytical subjectivity is unavoidable as the interpretation of evaluations depends on personal understanding and context. Especially analysing each concordance and checking the context of each evaluative word. Second, this study has only focused on the high-frequency lexical terms while neglecting some meaningful lexicogrammatical terms. This shortcoming may lead to overlooking some linguistic features that carry additional functions and valuable meanings. Finally, the exploration of tradwife influencers' language features only focuses on five influencers. Due to the limitations in data accessibility, some "big" influencers could not be included in the analysis. As a result, the most influential linguistic features may have been overlooked.

Future research on appraisal and corpus-based analysis could be explored in different digital contexts. It can be used to compare attitude and interaction constructions through text-based, image-based and video-based social media platforms. In this way, multimodality analysis can also be considered in future analysis. Also, the size of the corpus could be expanded to explore more specific lexis and lexicogrammatical features. More valuable evaluative meanings will be investigated, and a more comprehensive understanding of digital language will be obtained. Regarding data annotation, future studies could conduct qualitative annotation. This approach will enhance the subjectivity of the analysis process and lead to more systematic results.

In addition to digital engagement and discourse analysis, the language in the comments can also be explored in the future. This will strengthen the analysis of the interaction between influencers and the audience. In terms of the influencers, more work will be needed to analyse how the language is used to maintain their identity or brand. Moreover, beyond the tradwife phenomenon, it is crucial to explore ideological communication or cultural transmission strategies on social media.

## 6 Conclusion

This study has explored the linguistic features of the tradwife influencers on the TikTok social media platform. It has focused on investigating specific topics, attitudes and engagement strategies of the tradwife influencers and the phenomenon. To explore this topic, the TikTok tradwife corpus was compiled from 75 video transcriptions. This study also combined quantitative and qualitative approaches in examining this discourse. An appraisal and corpus-based approach was applied to this topic. In particular, keyword, collocation and concordance analysis were employed to examine the attitudinal and engagement markers within the discourse. Python and two packages, MoviePy and Whisper, were used to process data transcription. AntConc 3.5.9 and Sketch Engine were used to retrieve specific linguistic features in the analysis.

The findings in section 4 show that the influencer mainly focuses on the tradwife lifestyle, aesthetic, gender role, popular culture and housework. Regarding the attitudes of the influencers, they show a positive attitude toward the tradwife phenomenon and a rejection of feminism. These polarised attitudes also reflect on the intensity of their attitude. The influencers prefer to use mild expressions to indicate their own feelings or choices, while using strong emotional verbs to demonstrate their husbands' preferences. In addition, the influencers employ contractive engagement strategies more frequently than expansive engagement. In other words, the influencers tend to hold their singular viewpoints and reject others' possible viewpoints directly. They prefer to use a subjective expression and a concession to express their values. This leads to no room for future discussions about the tradwife phenomenon. The above findings reveal that the tradwife influencers have voluntarily placed themselves into a subordinate and submissive position. They use subjective language to conceal the structural gender oppression and legitimise the traditional gender roles.

The combination of appraisal theory and corpus-based analysis supports the investigation of attitude and engagement. The contribution of employing appraisal theory has helped examine the evaluative stance within the tradwife discourse. This approach has revealed the expression of affect and judgment from the influencers. Additionally, the structure of intensified attitudes and engaging strategies has been investigated through this framework. The contribution of corpus-based approaches provides quantitative evidence for evaluation. This approach helps to identify specific topics of tradwife discourse, high-frequency lexis or patterns and how the

context affects the evaluative language. In general, combining appraisal and corpus-based analysis can reveal the evaluation objectively and avoid the intuitive analysis of the discourse.

To avoid some limitations in this study, future studies might be possible to use a different method or expand the corpus to enhance the scope of this topic. The different methods can be applied to investigate the influencers' language on social media, such as the pragmatic strategies and multimodality analysis. Regarding the topic, digital communication strategies, influencer identity constructions or gender ideology on social media platforms are suggested in the future direction. While this study did not focus on identity and problematic ideology construction, future studies could explore this dimension in depth. Furthermore, the size of the corpus can be expanded and include more influencers. The larger dataset could help capture more nuanced linguistics than a small one. While this study did not focus much on lexicogrammatical patterns due to the limited data, future studies could continue to investigate patterns or specific grammatical use within the discourse.

Although this study has investigated the attitudes and engagement strategies of tradwife influencers, further research is needed to gain a better understanding of this discourse. Since the new digital conservatism and TikTok self-branding tendency are emerging, the public opinions of gender identity, female autonomy and family roles are developing. Meanwhile, the tension between anti-modernism (such as tradwife) and feminist discourse deserves closer academic attention. Furthermore, the linguistic strategies used to construct and negotiate this tension also need further investigation. Finally, the tradwife phenomenon, as a digital phenomenon on social media, declares women's morality, choice, gender roles and ideologies. This also inspires future thinking about gender roles, ideologies, linguistic strategies and cultural tension embedded in social media language.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Python Code for Transcription

MoviePy:

```
>>> from moviepy.editor import VideoFileClip
>>> video_paths = [
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20220917top13.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230315top7.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230323top9.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230503top15.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230508top11.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230608top8.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230704top12.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20231122top10.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20240220top6.mp4",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20240422top14.mp4"
]

>>> for video_path in video_paths:
...     video = VideoFileClip(video_path)
...     audio = video.audio
...     audio_output_path = f"{video_path.split('.')[0]}_audio.wav"
...     audio.write_audiofile(audio_output_path)
...     video.close()
...     audio.close()
...     print(f"Audio extracted and saved as: {audio_output_path}")
...
```

MoviePy - Writing audio in E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20220917top13\_audio.wav

MoviePy - Done.

Whisper:

```
>>> import whisper
>>> model=whisper.load_model("turbo")
>>> audio_files = [
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20220917top13_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230315top7_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230323top9_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230503top15_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230508top11_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230608top8_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20230704top12_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20231122top10_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20240220top6_audio.wav",
    "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee selected\\estee20240422top14_audio.wav"
]
>>> output_file = "E:\\MA thesis\\TikTok data collection\\estee
selected\\transcription_results.txt"
>>> with open(output_file, "w", encoding="utf-8") as out_file:
...     for audio_path in audio_files:
...         filename = audio_path.split("\\")[-1]
...         print(f"Transcribing {filename}...")
...
...         result = model.transcribe(audio_path)
...
...         out_file.write(f"File: {filename}\n")
...         out_file.write(f"Transcription: {result['text']}\n\n")
...
...         print(f"Finished transcribing {filename}")
...         print(f"All files transcribed and saved to {output_file}")
...
```

## Appendix 2 Results of *I think*

1. *I think* a lot of people who leave these types of comments would love to see me fail...  
[Ivyoutwest, 2024-05-16]
2. *I think* it's really interesting to see how shocked people are by the term tradwife and how they seem to think it's some new way of living.  
[Ivyoutwest, 2024-05-13]
3. *I think* you have a little bit of misogyny you need to work on.  
[Homewithmadison, 2021-11-03]
4. But *I think* you saying that women need to act like men or to tap in more to their masculinity in order to be strong and heard and confident is a little misogynistic.  
[Homewithmadison, 2021-11-03]
5. Community college also gives you the chance to stay home with your family. Which *I think* is so important.  
[Esteecwilliams, 2024-02-20]
6. *I think* it is important that the woman has the house clean, a hot meal on the table for her husband and her kids if she has any and a really welcoming environment.  
[Esteecwilliams, 2023-01-26]
7. *I think* it makes me appreciate it more.  
[Esteecwilliams, 2023-03-23]
8. And *I think* the longer I worked at that store, the better I became at communicating with people.  
[Esteecwilliams, 2024-02-20]
9. *I think* they expect me to look at my life, my husband, I have been married almost 10 years, we got a great thing going, I trust him, I love him, I have every reason to do so.  
[Ivyoutwest, 2024-05-16]

10. And *I think* getting into that supplement store and learning customer service skills and learning how to speak to people and help people really helped me

[Esteecwilliams, 2024-02-20]

11. *I think* I left them in for like an hour and a half, two hours.

[Esteecwilliams, 2023-11-22]

12. Even though it was a fun experiment to try something new, *I think* I'll stick to what makes me feel most comfortable, and I hope that you'll do the same.

[Marsarialewis 2024-01-17]

13. And truth be told, *I think* one of the most sexist, misogynistic mentalities you can have about women is that they are all the same and they all need to think the same.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-07-21]

14. It's worth that risk for us *I think* some people spend their entire lives just waiting for bad things to happen and just being suspicious of every single person around them and that's fine if...

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-05-16]

15. *I think* these younger generations have really, really good BS detectors.

[Ivyoutwest, 2024-06-21]

16. Number one, proper budgeting. *I think* this is so important living on one income because most of us traditional wives are not living like the housewives of Beverly Hills or anything...

[Esteecwilliams, 2023-03-23]

17. *I think* you'll find plenty of things to stay busy.

[Mrsarialewis, 2023-11-07]