

Research on the Role of Social Media in the Modern Feminist Movement

Yinuo Zhao

The London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London, WC2A 2AE, England

Abstract: *With the popularization and development of social media, feminists have been able to express their views and disseminate their ideas on a more open and equal platform, and create and use their own symbolic language, thus gaining more voice. While social media has become the main battleground for feminism, it has also emerged problems such as over-expression and stigmatization of feminism, which have a negative impact on the dissemination of feminism. This paper analyzes the dissemination of feminism in social media to provide reference for the dissemination of feminist ideas through social media.*

Keywords: *feminism; social media; communication patterns*

1. Introduction

Social media has dramatically changed the way feminism is communicated and how effective it is. It has provided feminists with a more open and equal platform, enabling them to express their views, spread their ideas, and create and use their own symbolic language more freely. However, there are also many problems with social media, such as over-expression and stigmatization of feminism, which have negatively affected the spread of feminism." The importance of "share of voice" or discourse in the spread of feminism is mainly reflected in the ability to enable women to change from the state of being written about to the state of self-expression^[1]. Whereas in the past, the power of voice was primarily in the hands of men, the advent of social media has allowed women to become more involved in the discourse^[2]. The emergence of the word "straight" has had a significant impact on the spread of feminism. Firstly, it is a way of self-expression and protest for women; secondly, it is also a satire and criticism of the patriarchal society; finally, it provides women with a way of self-definition and identification, and strengthens their voice^[3]. The responsibilities that the media should take in spreading feminism mainly include promoting equality between men and women in society, eliminating stereotypes of women, correcting misconceptions about feminism, and providing a fair and equitable public opinion environment. Feminists should adjust their strategies in social media communication, avoiding overly aggressive and irrational expressions that may cause public resentment and misunderstanding. They should approach feminist issues in a rational and mature manner, correctly understand the core of feminism, and at the same time adopt an appropriate way of expression^[4].

2. Overview of feminism and its development in the country

The term "feminism" originated in France to end sexism, sexual exploitation, discrimination and oppression and to promote sexual class equality. It is a social theory and political movement that explores themes such as discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, especially of sexuality, the body, oppression and patriarchy^[5]. Feminist ideas were first introduced to China in 1919 during the May Fourth Movement. The pioneers of the May Fourth Movement used the issue of women's rights as an entry point to advocate for individual rights and rebel against traditional culture. At the time, feminism was seen as the yardstick of modern civilization and a prerequisite for human liberation^[6]. However, despite the fact that women's legal equality was explicitly guaranteed after the founding of the new China in 1949, the traditional model of gender relations remained firmly in place in real life^[7].

3. The shape of feminist communication in social media

3.1 Access to the public agenda through public opinion events

In the social media environment, the agenda-setting function of the media is weakened because of the massive influx of information and the distraction of the audience's attention. Public attention to a social issue or a certain type of topic is often due to the occurrence of a public opinion event, which brings the issue related to or behind it into the public eye. Because feminist issues are often ignored by traditional media, the spread of feminism has largely relied on public opinion events, which then enter the public agenda through social media platforms.

For example, a social news story attracted widespread attention: a 31-year-old mother in Hunan jumped off a building with her two toddlers in her arms, leaving behind a dozen pages of suicide notes accusing her husband of cheating and domestic violence, the indifference of her in-laws, and the difficulties and suffering of being a full-time mother. This incident has aroused the concern and discussion of many women. In marital relationships, the rate of male cheating is significantly higher than that of female cheating, and is easily tolerated by society^[8]. Issues such as domestic violence and the double pressure on women's career and family have touched many women's pain points, so people's thinking about women's social status and value has led to the widespread dissemination of feminist ideas.

3.2 Social Media Platforms as a Position

Women's rights advocates have actively created platforms on social media with the aim of bringing together female audiences and spreading feminist ideas. Many WeChat public numbers targeting female users have had a significant impact on promoting women's self-orientation in society and the awakening of their awareness of gender equality. For example, the WeChat public number "She Magazine", which has many articles with a click-through rate of more than 100,000, publishes content that criticizes the mainstream white and skinny aesthetics, takes a firm stance against male cheating, and supports "leftover women". These tweets have had a profound impact on shaping modern women's self-confidence and enhancing their perception of self-worth. At the same time, the public number also provides a platform for women's groups to gather, which helps to promote the exchange and interaction of feminist ideas.

3.3 Unsolicited, unconscious dissemination

Under the influence of social media, the rise of women's discourse and the influence of women in the socio-economic and cultural contexts have gradually emerged, but this influence is very often not conscious or explicit, which is clearly manifested in the era of male consumption. With the rapid development of entertainment and cultural productivity, the power of the fan economy cannot be underestimated. On the microblogging hot search list, what tops the list are mostly gossips about popular stars or variety shows, and star chasers and variety show chasers are predominantly female. Therefore, the production of TV, movies or variety shows will cater to the preferences of female audience to get better market response. For example, in recent years, most of the hot male celebrities are fresh meat and warm men, which is in line with contemporary women's aesthetic preferences. At the same time, due to the anonymity and openness of social media, women are able to directly and openly express their preferences and favorites for men's looks or bodies, and vote with clicks and attention. This shows that women have also begun to "consume" male sex in the position of viewers, and are no longer in the position of "being consumed" as in the past.

4. The Effectiveness of Social Media in Communicating Feminist Ideas

4.1 The prominence of female discourse and the use of symbols

Writer HAN Shaogong used the term "share of speech" to denote language rights, that is, the right to speak. He said, "Those who hold a share of words are followed by the masses in the topics they manipulate, and their words, sentence patterns, tone of voice, etc., are practiced by the masses; it is in this propagation of language that rights are formed. In the past, women were in a state of being written about, both in history and literature, whether they were virtuous and chaste or extravagant and lustful, and the authors of the books were all men, so the portrayal and evaluation of the characters were inevitably colored by a patriarchal society, and the right to speak was entirely in the hands of men. However, the openness and equality of social media communication has made this situation change in a

subversive way^[9]. The 37th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development shows that the ratio of men to women Internet users in China is 53.6:46.4, and the gender structure of Internet users tends to be balanced. This shows that men and women have equal voice on social media platforms, and women have the opportunity to become opinion leaders. Of course, it should not be overlooked that, according to the China Microblog Opinion Leaders Research Report, men account for 91% of the top 100 opinion leaders, while women account for only 9%^[10]. In terms of scope, male users are also more broadly focused on topics such as finance, current affairs, society, institutions, and environmental protection, while women's sharing of information is relatively centralized. Since there is no limit to the amount of information that can be disseminated through social media (e.g., newspapers are limited by the length of newspaper articles and TV programs are limited by the length of programs), people have entered the era of information explosion, and people rely on symbolic language to memorize a certain type of information, which not only enables the information represented by the symbols to be distilled from the human brain, but also serves as the audience's psychological expression to a certain extent. One point that deserves attention is the emergence of the term "straight male cancer"^[11]. The term "straight male cancer" appeared on Douban and Weibo in late June 2014, originating from netizens' sarcastic comments on people who live by their own worldviews, values, and aesthetics, and who often show their displeasure and dissatisfaction with other people with a slight hint of chauvinism.

4.2 Feminist distortions and over-expression

Because of the high degree of openness of social media, the varying quality of its users, and the slow development of feminist thinking in China, feminism in China has recently experienced a kind of barbaric growth, giving it a "New Year's temperament". Some women have a biased understanding of feminism, and some use feminism as a means of evading their responsibilities. As a result, feminism in China has given rise to a kind of "Chinese idyllic feminism" that emphasizes only rights but not obligations. As a result of the spread of this erroneous feminist ideology, many people have become disgusted with feminism and feminists before they really understand feminism. This made the spread of feminism even more difficult^[12]. For various reasons, discussion of feminist issues rarely enters the public discourse, and many feminists are unwilling to let go of the opportunity to express their views, which often leads to overreaching or out-of-control situations. For example, the theme song of Han Han's movie *Riding the Wind and the Waves* was attacked by netizens because of its lyrics asking the woman to get up earlier and go to bed later than she does, "I'm a man with no skills," and "My whole family depends on you," among other things. Many feminists have denounced Han Han as a straight male cancer, and have been even more vocal about the movie, which has yet to be released. But in fact, the content of the movie has nothing to do with straight cancer^[13]. While it is undeniable that Han Han has used event marketing, the radical expression of feminists is actually not beneficial to the dissemination of feminism, and it has also left a negative impression of feminists as irrational and radical to the onlookers.

4.3 Negative impact of media coverage

The impact of negative media coverage of feminism on public opinion cannot be ignored. This impact is mainly reflected in the stereotyping of women and the stigmatization of feminism. On the one hand, the prejudice against women has been transferred from traditional media to new media, and many news use terms such as "female doctor", "female driver", "female college student", etc., and these news are often dominated by negative content. These news are often dominated by negative content. For example, news or pictures of poor driving skills of female drivers often appear on Weibo, and the number of retweets of these messages is extremely high, accompanied by a large number of mocking comments from male users. These phenomena subconsciously deepen the social prejudice against women. At the same time, the number of media reports on feminism is low, and some of them are negative^[14]. For example, when the media refers to the statements of feminists, it seldom uses words such as "think" and "point out", which are common in the news, but uses "refute". Instead, words such as "rebuttal" and "protest" are used, labeling feminists as radicals. In addition, feminism is often used as a term of opposition to men. For example, the headline of an article, "Feminist Huang Sheng Yi and straight man Song Xiaobao in an unseen battle," itself misunderstands the meaning of feminism, which seeks equality rather than confrontation. These reports can mislead the audience and affect the public's understanding and acceptance of feminism.

5. Countermeasures

5.1 Increased media responsibility and gender awareness

"Equality between men and women" is one of China's basic national policies, and the media plays an irreplaceable role in promoting equality between men and women in society. However, according to the current situation, the media has not paid enough attention to women's rights, which has led to the slow advancement of women's rights in China, and has also forced some feminists to take more radical actions to attract the attention of the media. With regard to the stereotyping of women and the stigmatization of feminism in the media, on the one hand, it is due to the fact that men are still the majority of media practitioners, and a higher proportion of men are found in the top management, so men control the power of speech to a large extent. Influenced by social masculinity, men may not be sensitive to sexist content, leading to many discriminatory contents against women in the media. On the other hand, some media, in pursuit of commercial interests, sometimes intentionally stigmatize feminism to please and pander to some audiences and attract eyeballs^[15]. In order to promote gender equality in society, the media, as the controllers of public opinion, must have a strong sense of social responsibility and gender equality awareness, and create a favorable public opinion environment. Only in this way can the stereotypes of women and the misunderstanding of feminism be gradually eliminated.

5.2 Correct expression of feminism

Being a feminist is often labeled as radical, forceful and irrational, and many women consciously draw a clear line between themselves and "feminists". Undeniably, there are objective reasons for the radicalism of feminists, such as the mainstream media's lack of attention to women's rights issues and the stigmatization and stereotyping of women in some media. But feminists themselves also need to improve^[16].

Social media communication is characterized by fast information updating, wide dissemination and uncertainty. If a public opinion event involving women's rights occurs, and feminists express immature and irrational views without being fully informed of the truth and without comprehensive and calm thinking, they may be able to gain public attention and recognition at first. However, once the news is reversed or the rhetoric is too radical, and homogenized information is flooded, the public will be left with a negative impression and even attack feminist ideology, which is undoubtedly detrimental to the development of feminism. Therefore, feminists should correctly understand the kernel of feminism and also adopt appropriate ways of expression. In this way, they can better promote the development of feminism and make greater contributions to social progress^[17].

6. Conclusion

Feminist communication in the new media environment provides a more open and equal platform for feminists, giving them the opportunity to express their views, disseminate feminist ideas, and create and use their own symbolic language. This is a major step forward compared to feminist communication in the traditional media environment. However, some problems have arisen in the process, such as over-expression and misunderstanding, which have negatively affected the dissemination of feminism. Therefore, feminists need to utilize new media sensibly and steadily for communication in order to increase the public acceptance of feminism and promote its development. In addition, feminists should also make full use of the advantages of the new media environment, such as its openness and equality, in order to strive for more discourse rights and improve the status and influence of feminism in society.

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