An overview of the effects of feminist stigmatization on Chinese online platforms

-- From the media and women's perspectives

Qishan Shi *

Student, Communication University of China, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: shiqishan319@163.com

Abstract. Feminism's emergence has a lengthy history. Feminism has steadily been addressed and valued as a result of global human interaction and communication, spreading from the West to the East. Additionally, the media has increased women's access to media resources and encouraged the growth of feminism. But concurrently, the advent of blogs and other public opinion platforms has accelerated the stigmatization of feminism. Starting with the media and women's perspectives, this article. This essay examines how feminism has been structuralized throughout the communication process using the theory of communication. This article examines the effects of feminism's stigmatization on feminism and female groups in Chinese online platforms, using Weibo as an example. According to the findings, feminists are advised to take the necessary steps to eradicate the stigma and advance gender equality.

Keywords: Feminism; Stigmatization; New media platform.

1. Introduction

1.1 The concept of feminism

Reviewing the history of feminism reveals how rich and varied its connotations are, and how they are continually changing. The earliest and most reliable definition of feminism is found in The Encyclopedia of Chinese Women, which states that it is "based on the ideas of bourgeois freedom and equality, it calls for the end of women's subordinate status and advocates gender equality, which is the main theoretical basis of bourgeois women's movement."[1] Feminism, according to Professor Qiu Renzong, is the philosophy and practice of promoting gender equality. [2] Feminism can be categorized as a practice, a political belief, and a theory and value. It has a diverse meaning depending on the era and field of study. However, the goal of feminism is to promote gender equality as well as women's freedom and autonomy.

1.2 The origin and development of feminism

Feminism gradually grew in the 1960s as a means of exploring the path to women's emancipation. Europe is where the first forms of feminism emerged. [3] The majority of middle-class women who were swept up in the bourgeois revolution gave birth to the female ideology of this era, which criticized social status inequality and emphasized the similarities between men and women. They looked at the countless years of women's suffrage in history and tried to concentrate on and compile the causes of women's suffrage from the social, economic, political, and other angles. [4] Olumbi Guges, a French feminist activist, noted the following in the Declaration of Feminism: "Women share the same rights as men and are born free. Only shared interests can serve as the foundation for establishing social distinctions." Demand that groups of women who have been oppressed, abused, and ignored for too long receive more attention.

The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, coinciding with a global upsurge in liberation movements following World War II. [5] During this time, feminist theory evolved and was increasingly broadened. They talked about the nature and underlying causes of women's oppression and women's emancipation from the depths of philosophy, in addition to improving the social issues that women faced. They focus on how pre-existing social institutions affect how both

sexes are viewed in society. As an illustration, Simone de Beauvoir noted in The Second Sex: Women are not born, but shaped. From the perspective of social psychology, it is the patriarchal society that casts the social gender of women, so that women are molded as "the second sex " and "the other ". Another example is the concept of "social gender", which is put forward and distinguished from "gender", and becomes the core concept of this wave. In addition, feminists also strengthened the basis of social gender analysis by u sing sociological concepts such as "gender roles" and "gender role stereotypes". [6] In this period, feminism had its own independent research object and research perspective, no longer dependent on other disciplines, and began to establish its own independent theoretical system and analytical methods. It can be said that feminism began to become an independent discipline. However, the concept of this period still has its limitations, such as the distinction between "gender" and "social gender" still has a lot of room for discussion.

The third wave of feminism emerged at the start of the twenty-first century. The ideology of Western feminism engaged in a contentious debate over citizenship during this time. This served as the foundation for the feminist citizenship theory, which focused on the status and demands of women in six areas: freedom, rights, social equality, political autonomy, political expression, and political judgment. It also evolved into a significant effort for feminist theory to transition from internal plurality to internal unity. It's also important to note that not all feminists agree that feminists must be women. All ideologies and movements that aim to liberate women or significantly advance their status should be considered feminist. [7] Runi Philippe pointed out: "It is necessary to emphasize the importance of gender differences, but only in a transitional way, because I do not want to see a woman speaking only as a woman, or a man speaking only as a man."

1.3 The spread of feminism in China

Feminism has expanded from the West to the East as a result of global connection and communication, where it has steadily gained attention and worth. With the May 4th Movement, feminism was brought to China during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China. The Chinese Constitution was amended to include gender equality in 1954. A written report on gender equality as a fundamental governmental policy was published in 2012. The popularization of feminist thinking has accelerated in the twenty-first century. Feminists now have additional platforms to express their views thanks to advancements in Internet information technology, and online discussion forums have opened up new opportunities for women's empowerment and gender equality. On the Internet, the concept of "female p ow er" is very popular. In addition, it is apparent that more individuals are scrutinizing and challenging feminism due to the frequent use of terms like "Chinese rural feminism," "female boxing," and "boxer" that stigmatize the movement.

2. The idea of stigmatization and the phenomenon of feminism's stigmatization on the internet

2.1 The concept and process of stigmatization

"Stigma" -- originated in ancient Greece, and initially referred to a kind of mark on the body. The stigma indicated that the carriers had poor status or had a criminal history, and because of the stigma they would be avoided and even stigmatized in public. Owen Goffman originally put up the idea of stigma in modern culture in 1963. It is largely acknowledged that his book "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Damaged Identity" was the first sociological study of stigma. He makes the point that stigma is an insulting societal designation. On the other side, stigmatization is a process in which the victim has an exclamatory social reaction and loses his or her social credibility or value in the eyes of others due to a "damaged identity". [8] It includes the stages of labeling, stereotype construction, cognitive segregation, loss of social standing, and discrimination. Stigma is a dynamic process. [9] People will first assign labels to groups based on those qualities. As people grow to know the labeled group, rather than developing a thorough grasp of it, they can gradually make basic

judgments about the group based solely on the label. However, cognitive compartments and social isolation will develop when the designated person is unique from the general population. The stigmatized group will experience social status loss, identity cognitive anxiety, and other consequences as a result. Thus, stigma is created.

2.2 New media platforms promote the stigmatization of feminism

The organization of gender discourse has changed as a result of the growth of social media and the popularity of online communities like Weibo. On the one hand, the Internet now has a tremendous quantity of vertical information thanks to improvements in the speed of information diffusion, which helps people comprehend the demands of feminist organizations and women's groups while undermining some of the old stereotypes and labels. The capacity and efficacy of women to protect their own rights and interests through the media have also significantly increased, which has essentially boosted their autonomy and ability to pursue gender equality. However, in the course of feminism's propagation, public stigma and media stigma combine to demonize feminists. Additionally, there is a pattern of constant growth under the influence of the Internet, and the stigma's effects are more pervasive than they were previously. More over half of feminists—58.65%—expressed their opinions on feminism online, according to Wan Jun's Survey on the Image of Feminism on Weibo. It is clear that one of the most vibrant feminism spaces today is the Internet. Search for the term "women's rights," and you can see more than 70% of the information from Weibo. Sina Weibo's official website public opinion monitoring platform — micro hot spot — can record the 24 hours of a word or a specific event network spread heat index and the entire network keyword cloud.

However, numerous ideas and societal discourses that are detrimental to the advancement of women continue to circulate and reappear in a variety of contexts. The development of microblogs and other media in the "everything is media" era has aided in the stigmatization of feminism. Surrogacy, antagonism, and resolute are the words that are most frequently used while discussing "feminist," according to the scholar's survey data. The remaining phrases also addressed concerns that women face on a daily basis, including marriage, family life, and sexual orientation. The speech's overall tone tended to be unfavorable. [10] Another illustration is the sample of a scholar's questionnaire survey, which found that 38.85% of respondents had used the terms "rural feminism" and "female boxing" and that 53.24 % had seen them on social media platforms. Men made up 86.35% of the sample population who had used these phrases. In the opinion of more than 79.64 percent, the words stigmatized feminism. [11] It is clear that feminism generally has a bad reputation on the Internet.

2.3 The impact of stigmatization on the dissemination of feminism

Feminism criticizes patriarchal thinking and the patriarchal social system, not to promote conflict between the sexes or fight for political and social rights that belong to men, but rather to fight for the liberation of women everywhere, to assist them in escaping the confines of traditional consciousness, and to encourage them to recognize their own worth. so that more women can lead autonomous, liberated, and respectable lives. However, stigmatization frequently undermines the real goals of feminism and isolates feminists from society, which is not good for the development of real feminism. Social isolation is the process of stigmatizing a link; it is the mass concentration of the negative image of someone or something to generalize, label, and alienate; further, it rises to the height of certain people and certain things, ignoring the other features of the group and image, consciously on the isolation, rejection, and attacks, resulting in a discrimination and prejudice; and finally, it damages the image and status of the target object. The stigmatization of feminists as an objective and irrational group causes stigmatized labels and stereotypes to proliferate more quickly than the fundamental core of feminism, distorting and biasing feminism and making it more difficult for others to embrace the authentic viewpoints of feminists. [12]Some of the female interviewees in the scholar interview claimed that they would experience reverse psychology after receiving criticism for their sensible

online voice. The stigmatization of feminism will worsen if rational feminists also engage in activism, which will make their voice more emotive. [13]

3. The causes of stigmatization of feminism

Feminists fight all over the place, in excessive and unreasonable ways, according to the reality we see on the Internet. Women's voices, however, are actually lacking, and many of them are hard to hear. In accordance with Michel Fouque's "discourse theory," the right to express oneself is merely a discourse right; the social context and discourse mechanism are more crucial for ensuring successful expression. But on online social media, "opinion leaders" and the mainstream media dominate the conversation. Although there are roughly as many female users on the Weibo platform as there are male users, according to the Research Report on China's Weibo Opinion Leaders, 91% of the top 100 Weibo opinion leaders are male and only 9% are female. Additionally, the circle of thought leaders does not include any regular individuals. As can be observed, men have the unalienable right to speak in the group of opinion leaders who control public opinion on Weibo, despite the fact that women have the fundamental right to speak on stages. Furthermore, due to the Weibo platform's algorithm system, which favors male voices, it is challenging for women to take the lead in establishing the media image of women. The Internet has consequently evolved into a mimicking environment.

The phrase "mimicry environment" refers to the idea that the degree to which the general public perceives objective reality is accurate primarily depends on how accurate "symbolic" reality is. And the few persons who are visible are identified and put through the symbolization process. For instance, "Chinese pastoral feminism" initially referred to an organization that promoted women's rights in the name of gender equality. The opposition to "Chinese pastoral feminism" is, nevertheless, to some extent grafted onto "feminism," generating one radical feminist name after another, when emotive and harsh declarations are made. Similar expressions include "female fist" and "boxer." They will be referred to as "boxers" even if they post comments on Weibo supporting gender equality. However, a survey on Weibo feminism's image revealed that more than half of respondents couldn't distinguish the difference between "feminist" and "rural feminism." It is evident that the majority of people do not fully comprehend feminists. The female group is still in a vulnerable position, however. Women have the freedom to comment on the topic of gender equality in the public sphere, where the term "gender inequality issue" typically refers to the unfair treatment of women. On the Internet, feminist organizations frequently express themselves strongly and in a prominent manner. Feminist movements and feminists are frequently emphasized in the communication of their irrational, enraged impulse traits or imagery due to the peculiarities of the feminist fight. If the public and media just understand the outward manifestation of their battle, they will construct an unfavorable stereotype of feminists.

In the 1850s, social psychologist GORDON W. ALL PORT used the theory of cognition to explain bias. He held the opinion that stereotypes are an inevitable byproduct of human thought, which is the psychology of self-defense brought on by human ignorance. To save cognitive resources, it may appear that group members in a group of foreign groups are using their prior experiences to define and define the situation of the group members in a one-sided or in-group members outside the views and opinions, which is likely to result in stereotypes and stigmatization. [13]

In a nutshell, the stigmatization of feminism is a product of the media's estrangement and the creation of the patriarchal society during its propagation. The end result is that the general public misunderstands and knows nothing about true feminism. Because of this, whenever a feminist stands up, she will be referred to as "female fist" or "pastoral feminism".

4. The impact on the female community

Individual women react negatively to stigma by feeling angry, afraid, or depressed. Women are more likely than men to experience pain, worry, embarrassment, and other unpleasant feelings. Some

women are frightened to hear others discuss the stigmatization they face. Some academics refer to this irrational mental notion as "internalized stigma/self-stigma." Additionally, stigma is one of the main barriers to social support for women's groups. [14] These feelings will inspire various people to have active or passive coping techniques, depending on their social identity, social standing, and self-efficacy.

First of all, the female group will select silence as a coping mechanism when they erroneously believe that their social position is low. Because of this, individuals might not have as many social supports, therefore aggressively combating and denouncing stigmatization could put them in more danger. These elements contribute to women's propensity to react to stigmatization with dread rather than fury and ultimately opt out of sexual reaction. [15]. Due to this, individuals are unable to contribute to the advancement of social processes, and they renounce their ability to advocate for their rights and freedom of thought and expression.

Additionally, the stigmatization of feminism in popular culture will make the gender divide worse in the actual world. The self-efficacy of individual women is higher when the position of women is relatively high and the female group has more resources and discourse rights. At this point, individuals are more likely to express their rage and actively engage in acts of resistance, including speaking out on Weibo or taking part in "Metoo"-style events, among other things. Such rage display carries some risks from a social perspective. Some women may invalidate history and contribute to historical nihilism if they attempt to examine, track, and assign history.

In addition, feminism might be used for selfish purposes, offering the media a chance to drive attention. For instance, it promotes women to c onsume their own gender identity. A well-known relationship expert named "Anywawa" dresses up her theory of women's love and marriage in the guise of teaching women how to better pursue their spouses and improve their quality of life, but in truth, she is only doing this to market her training programs and skin care products. She is essentially exploiting women for business under the premise of supporting their wellbeing, which forces her to use a lot of misleading and exaggerated, illogical, and even offensive rhetoric to get people's attention.

In short, the stigmatization of feminism will deepen the inter-group prejudice between men and women, promote gender antagonism, have a real impact on women in real life, and also give opportunities to capital.

5. Possible directions to improve stigma

There aren't many studies on the evolution of feminist theories in the sphere of domestic academic research, which makes it challenging to localize. These studies also involve few theories and don't take into account the actual national circumstances of China. The majority of research on the stigmatization of feminism is still in the cause-and-effect stage. This essay makes an effort to offer suggestions for reducing stigma from both the perspectives of women themselves and wider society.

First, as a group of women, we should insist on approaching the mass media from our own perspective and interpreting the communication material with female thinking, based on a certain awareness of the history of male hegemony.Women should be freed from the condition of definition and otherization and empowered to use the media to create authentic, three-dimensional, and unique representations of themselves. This is how women are utilizing and appreciating their own human rights, which is helpful for raising women's social position.

On a societal level, the entire society should promote the popularization of feminism and enhance the measures on the basis of enhancing mass media literacy. Goffman emphasized that stigma is a deviant label created by society, not a problem with stigmatizers, and that stigma is an issue with social rules and public order. Additionally, Allport contends that stereotypes serve to legitimize social structures that openly display bias by giving them a veneer of validity.Although there is a history of feminism expanding in China, the concepts have not yet been adopted locally. It is also clear from the scholars' data analysis that the general population still has little knowledge of feminism and its

implications. Even when only somewhat educated, many Weibo users have established unfavorable prejudices about feminism. The root of feminism, however, is not being addressed.

Media, as a result, strengthens the system of "gatekeeper" gender consciousness education, modifies the traditional male discourse standard "rituals," and turns around the traditional gender discourse agenda setting. At the same time, media monitoring mechanisms are set up across the entire network, creating a strong and extensive surveillance network that is more important than equal participation in the public opinion field. This may encourage women's subjectivity, support their self-shaping, self-promotion, and self-expression, and encourage them to actively contribute to the development of public discourse with a more existential and upbeat perspective. The entire society must collectively participate in this.

6. Summary

"Media discourse should not be a space for sexist stereotypes, but rather a platform for advocacy of the social consensus for gender equality." [16] Investigating stigma's root origins can help us develop more effective anti-stigma strategies. In "Justifying Feminism," Mr. Li Yinhe noted that "the word 'right' has always been very sensitive and easily connected with disturbances, whether it is human rights, women's rights, or civil rights" in China's popular discourse. For the advancement of feminism and gender equality, the Internet era presents both an opportunity and a hindrance. Feminists need to consider how to effectively use the new communication platform provided by new media. However, there is still much to be done to increase public awareness of gender equality. Promoting gender equality will, however, have more positive long-term effects and values for the entire society.

References

[1] Editorial Board of Encyclopedia of Chinese Women: Encyclopedia of Chinese Women, Northern Women's Publishing House, 1995, p. 153.

[2] Qiu Renzong, Chinese Women and Feminist Thought, China Social Sciences Press, 1998, p. 11.

[3] anonymous, Selected Works on Foreign Feminist Movements, Beijing: China Women's Publishing House Li Xiaoguang.

[4] From Feminism to Post-feminism: The Theoretical Transformation of Western Feminism/Feminism [J]. Ideological Front,2005(02):9-12.

[5] Li Yinhe, The Rise of Women's Power, China Social Sciences Press.

[6] Liu Ni. Gender -- the central concept of Western Feminist Theory [J]. Social Sciences Abroad,2001(06):52-57.

[7] Rian Voet, Feminism and Cityzenship.

[8] Irving Goffman, translated by Lihong Song: "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Damaged Identity", The Commercial Press, 2009, p. 23.

[9] BRUCEGL, JOCP. Conceptualizing stigma [J]. Annual Review of Sociology, 2001, 27 (1) :363.

[10] Wan Jun. Research on the Stigmatization of "Feminism" in the context of Weibo.2020. Hainan Normal University,MA thesis.

[11] Zhang Jintao." Research on the Development of Feminism in China in the New Media Era -- A Case Study of the Stigmatization of Feminism in Social media Platforms." Science and Technology Communication 12.21(2020):75-79. doi: 10.16607/j.cnki.1674-6708.2020.21.025.

[12] Wei Zi. Discourse Research on Feminist We-Media [D]. Guilin: Guangxi Normal University, 2018.

[13] Sun Yingjuan. Analysis on the problem of stigmatization of female group image -- Taking the stigmatization phenomenon as an example [J]. Western journal, 2022 (02): 80-83. The DOI: 10.16721 / j.carol carrollnki cn61-1487 / c. 2022.02.018.

[14] Zhang Jintao. Research on the Development of Feminism i n China in the New Media Era: A Case study of the stigmatization of feminism in social media platforms [J]. Science and Technology Communication,2020(2 1).

[15] Xue Ting, Chen Hao, Le Guoan, etal. The role of social identity in collective action: Group emotion and Efficacy path [J]. Acta Psychologica Sinica ,2013(08).

[16] Cao Jin. Media and Gender Research: Theories and Examples [M]. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2015:46.