

Analysing the Construction of Women's Image in Network News Reports

Yirui Wang^{1,a,*}

¹*School of Foreign Languages, Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Nanjing, 210003, China*

a. lx42wangyirui@126.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: The mass media have transformed the way of news reporting with the help of Internet technology, which has promoted the diversity and inclusiveness of news reporting content, and more and more female figures have appeared in the mass media, reflecting the important role of the mass media in shaping and reflecting social reality. In this paper, the news coverage content of some microblog accounts in the past year and some women's information on microblog platforms. Using the constructive weekly sampling method and visualisation analysis, the samples were selected to study the construction of women's image by news reports. Meanwhile, the reasons for this phenomenon are analysed and summarized, and the future of the media presentation of women's image is explored and summarized. It is found that the online media play an important role in shaping women's media image and is also affected by stereotypical influences, gender bias, and is not conducive to the new era of women's media image. At the same time, it is also deeply affected by stereotypical influence and gender bias. Of course, it's also found that modern netizens are paying more attention to women's topics, and the role of women in modern society is also changing.

Keywords: Online media, identity construction, gender construction, feminism

1. Introduction

With the progress of information technology and the rapid renewal of communication media, online media has attracted widespread attention due to its rich and colourful information, convenient and fast interaction, etc. It has become the 'fourth media' in addition to the traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, and has influenced people's lives in all aspects. The decentralisation of the Internet era has allowed women to participate more in public discourse, and women's issues have gradually become the focus of attention in the mass media. At the same time, today's international community generally attaches importance to the respect and protection of women's rights, and even takes a country's respect for women as a yardstick for judging the degree of civilisation in that country[1], therefore, the study of women's image has certain theoretical and practical significance.

This paper will focus on the shaping of women's identity by media reports on social networks (taking Weibo as an example) and study the scope of netizens' attention to women's topics. This study will collect some Weibo data and use AntConc to generate a word cloud for research and analysis, exploring the current situation and dilemma of modern women in constructing their online identities.

The study of women's image has important academic value and social significance. It not only helps to reveal social problems such as gender inequality and stereotypes, but also promotes women's self-knowledge and growth, facilitates the development of social and cultural pluralism, and provides references for policy making. With the continuous development of society and the advancement of technology, the mass media will play a more important role in shaping and reflecting the image of women. In the future, it should keep promoting the diversity and inclusiveness of news reports, strengthen the attention to and coverage of female groups, and meanwhile focus on enhancing the quality and depth of the reports, so as to better display the elegance and charm of women.

The concept of 'image' is rich in connotations. Scholars in different fields have different interpretations of it. In the field of communication science, human beings are the subject of image cognition, and 'image' is regarded as a kind of cognitive information. Fan Yuming pointed out in 'The Study of Media Imagery Based on the Perspective of Construction' that 'media image is the mediated image, which is the symbolic cognitive information presented by the objective existence of people or things through the construction of mass communication media. Media image is a product of construction, which is derived from social reality, but not a mere projection of reality.' [2] 'Female media image' is the image of female group constructed and presented through the mass media, which is not only carries part of the real female group characteristics, but also contains the subjective perception of the mass media, reflecting the attitude of the public towards the image of women.

2. Research Methods

In the Internet era, online news media play a crucial role in shaping women's media images. However, some online news fails to report women's images in a comprehensive and objective manner.. Based on this, this paper uses the text analysis method to analyse the content of news reports of some microblog accounts during the year 2023, and due to the large sample size, it adopts the constructive weekly sampling method to extract some samples for the study, to summarise the overview of women's media image shaped in online news reports, the influencing factors, and to explore the future path of women's image media presentation.

In addition, this paper searches the Weibo platform with the keywords 'female' or 'women', collects 5,000 pieces of data, and conducts visual analysis based on Antconc to summarize the profile of women's media image portrayed on the mass network.

3. Results

3.1. Media Data

By analysing the valid samples, this paper finds that in these accounts. The image of women constructed is predominantly positive, and most of the reports show women's personal achievements, contributions and good behaviour in different fields. For example, 'Female blogger who was racially discriminated against abroad fought back with dominance' 'The female flight attendant who choked up and shouted at passengers was promoted' 'Zhang Guimei once brought back out-of-school girls to school in tears' '17-year-old Huang Yuting on Forbes! Seventeen-year-old Huang Yuting became the youngest person on this year's Forbes list', etc. Such reports show the image of women's hard work, selfless dedication and courage to struggle. The positive images of women portrayed by online media are more diverse than those portrayed by traditional media. Generally speaking, positive reports on women cover a wider range of areas, but the positive images of women portrayed in the online media are also relatively one-sided. Negative reports are relatively few in number and tend to portray women in a weak light, without a complete and objective portrayal of women. For example, female drivers are portrayed as 'more likely to have accidents' and 'less able to cope with emergencies', which gives people the wrong impression that women are road killers; and in reports

on women's injuries, women are portrayed as being 'more likely to have accidents' and 'less able to cope with emergencies', which gives people the wrong impression that women are road killers. In the reports on women's injuries, women are portrayed as 'weak', highlighting the identity of women as victims without criticising the perpetrators; in the reports on women's crimes, women are portrayed as 'impulsive and ignorant', and the reasons for the crimes are attributed to their irrationality without digging deeper into the real reasons. In the reports on women's offences, women are portrayed as 'impulsive and ignorant' and the causes of the offences are attributed to their irrationality, without digging deeper into the real reasons. The image of women constructed in these reports is subjective and one-sided, resulting in the stigmatisation of women. This point also confirms Guy Tuckman's point in the foreword of his book, *Fireplace and Home: Images of Women in the Media*, that 'women are doomed to suffer distorted communication in the mass media, that is, to be blamed, trivialised, and not even reproduced by the media.' [3]

At present, some online news media report more on women's murder and uncivilised behaviour, which makes the negative events of a few female groups appear in large numbers and increase in proportion before the eyes of the audience, which, although catering to the psychology of some audiences, leads to the stigmatisation and labelling of female groups.

3.2. Microblogs

This paper adopts the research method of corpus search and uses the corpus software AntConc 4.1.2 for data analysis. A small self-built corpus was constructed from 5,000 pieces of data collected under the search of the word 'women' in microblogs, and the frequency of occurrence of 'women' and other related words was found, and a word cloud diagram was generated, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Word cloud of frequency of occurrence of 'female' and other related words

Analysis of the data revealed that 'female' was most highly associated with 'childbirth'. This combination emphasises the role and experience of women in the process of childbirth. It may reflect society's concern for women's childbirth and their identity as mothers. 'Female' and "health" indicate society's concern for women's health issues, including physical and mental health. 'Feminine' and "strength", "growth" and "independence" emphasise the strength and resilience of women and may It covers women's performance in the face of challenges and adversity, reflecting how women seek opportunities for growth in different environments and how society provides support and resources for women to promote their all-round development, and emphasises women's autonomy and independence, such as financial independence, emotional independence and decision-making ability.

They give women ideas on how to seek self-fulfilment and autonomy in the context of social structures and gender norms, revealing society's concern and expectation for women's multi-dimensional identities, and also reflecting the challenges and opportunities faced by women in their pursuit of equality, dignity and happiness. By analysing these data and the socio-cultural factors

behind them in depth, it is possible to better understand the status and role of women in modern society.

4. Discussion

4.1. Entrenched Patriarchal Society

The term gender was first coined by Gail Rubin, who defined gender as ‘a socially reinforced’ distinction between the sexes, ‘a product of the social relations of gender’, a view that has made gender a central concept in feminist scholarship and theory.[4] Scholar David Popenoe distinguishes between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, arguing that ‘sex’ refers to biological differences between men and women, while ‘gender’ is used to distinguish between men and women in terms of psychological characteristics[5]. In traditional societies, gender stereotypes have had a profound impact on the shaping of women's identities, especially in feudal societies, where the notion that men are superior to women was deeply rooted in people's minds, and women's behaviour was subject to many restrictions. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, even though women's social status has gradually improved and they have more say, social stereotypes of women remain deeply entrenched. For example, women are often seen as the carers and supporters of the family, while men are seen more as the breadwinners and decision-makers of the family. Such stereotypes are also reflected in social media, which adversely affects the presentation and dissemination of women's images.

In addition, the gender awareness of online news media and audiences needs to be improved. Some media and audiences still uphold the traditional concepts of ‘men on the outside and women on the inside’ and ‘men are superior to women’. When reporting news related to women, the online news media are often influenced by traditional patriarchal culture and take a male perspective. The audience, on the other hand, often praises women's sacrifice and patience to the family, and limits the image of women to the family, which is a typical deviation of the audience's gender consciousness. The image of women is not limited to the role of a good wife and mother, but should be reflected in all areas of social life. Nowadays, many outstanding women have made significant contributions to the development of society, such as female pilots, female scientists, etc., but unfortunately, some online news media have not been able to objectively and comprehensively show their image.

4.2. Attention Economy Fuelling

Michael Goldhaber put forward the concept of ‘attention economy’ in the article ‘Attention Buyer’ -- ‘people pay attention to a topic, a thing, a behaviour and a variety of information on an enduring scale.’[6] It can be understood that attention has become a scarce resource, and the acquisition of attention has become an important asset. Since most of the network news media in China do not have the right to interview, only reproduce the news, so in the process of commercialisation, in order to seek profits, they have launched a fierce competition in the click rate, browsing volume, download volume, which has led to the emergence of the title party, hype, dabbing traffic and other phenomena; part of the network news media are also keen to report the content to satisfy the curiosity of the audience and the needs of the senses. For example, the use of words with exaggeration and curiosity effects to stimulate the interest of the audience, so as to obtain the number of readers and clicks. The opportunity for women's image to be presented in the media does not only come from the media's sense of responsibility, but also from the media's own objective need to satisfy the demand for profit and cater to the audience. Therefore, under the influence of consumerism and attention economy, some online news media pay much attention to women's groups in order to be favoured by the public, and even add contents related to ‘sex’ and ‘harm’ in news reports, which ignores the responsibility that should be borne by news communicators. This practice ignores the responsibility of a news

disseminator and leads to the labelling of women's image, which is not conducive to the creation of a true image of women.

4.3. Media Function Bias

Lewin pointed out in his article 'Group Life Channels' that in the process of group communication, there are some 'Gate' channels in which the flow of information takes place. These channels have some 'gatekeepers', i.e., 'gatekeepers', and only information that conforms to the norms of the group and the values of the gatekeepers can enter the communication channels[7]. From a psychological perspective, there are two aspects that influence gatekeepers: first, an individual's cognitive structure; second, motivation, which includes the choice of value judgments, needs, and distractions and obstacles to be overcome. The traditional gatekeeping process has also changed with the development of online journalism[8].

Traditional media have strict and standardised procedures for interviewing, writing, editing, reviewing and disseminating information, while the amount of information in the network is too large and rich in content, making it difficult for gatekeepers to screen out authentic and reliable information within a limited period. At present, most online news media use the 'intelligent + manual review' review mechanism process, that is, the intelligent system to remove the content containing illegal and illicit content, and then further screening by manual review. Compared with the traditional gatekeeping process, such an audit mechanism can easily lead to the proliferation of false information in the network. In addition, most of the content of online news reports comes from the screening and reprinting of traditional media reports, and in order to obtain clicks, they often attract the audience's attention through the title or narrative sensationalism, resulting in the portrayal of a mixed image of women, and even the phenomenon of distortion.

When disseminating information, social media sometimes stereotypically present images of women to attract attention or meet the expectations of specific audiences. Some media platforms may deliberately amplify or create gender oppositions for the sake of traffic and attention, exacerbating stereotypes of female identity. This phenomenon reflects the work attitude of some news media practitioners who do not think sufficiently, report directly on the authenticity of the news without corroboration, or even follow the trend, and there are also cases of unreasonable labeling in the content of the report, which is over-consumption of the person concerned, and moreover, the news media do not pay attention to their own credibility.

5. Cracking the Dilemma of Female Image Building

5.1. Breaking the Shackles of Male Power

In today's society, many problems not only limit the diversified presentation of women's image, but also aggravate the stereotype of women in society. Gender relationship is one of the most important and common social relationships, and the equal development of men and women is an important feature of social harmony and an inevitable requirement for the development of social civilisation[9].

In order to break the bonds of a male-dominated society, it is necessary to start with education and strengthen the cultivation of the concept of gender equality. Schools should offer gender equality education programmes to guide students to understand that gender should not be a criterion for evaluating individual abilities and values. At the same time, all sectors of society should actively participate in the promotion of gender equality, spreading the concept of gender equality through the media, public service announcements and other channels, and gradually eliminating the traditional concept of 'men are superior to women'. In addition, the Government should introduce relevant policies to protect the equal rights and interests of women in the workplace and in politics. For example, it should strengthen the monitoring and enforcement of anti-gender discrimination laws and

crack down on gender discrimination in the workplace; it should encourage women to participate in politics and increase their participation in political decision-making.

5.2. Respect for Women's Perspective

In the era of attention economy, online news media often neglect their social responsibility in order to seek profits. In order to change this situation, it is necessary to strengthen the self-regulation and supervision of the media industry. On the one hand, the government should strengthen the supervision of online news media and impose severe penalties on illegal reporting and title party; on the other hand, the media industry should also establish a self-regulatory mechanism, strengthen internal auditing and training, and improve the professionalism and sense of responsibility of practitioners.

At the same time, it is also necessary to advocate the media to report women-related news from the perspective of women and pay attention to women's real needs and feelings. The media should present an objective and comprehensive image of women and avoid confining women to the family or over-consuming their image. By strengthening the responsibility of the media, the negative impact of the attention economy on the image of women can be gradually eliminated.

5.3. Enhance Media Literacy

The mass media, as agenda-setters and guides of public opinion, should play their role well and make due contribution to eliminating stereotypical images of women and presenting a new image of women[10]. The bias in the functioning of the media is one of the major reasons for the distorted image of women. To enhance the authenticity of information, it is necessary to improve the gate-keeping mechanism of the media. On the one hand, the government should strengthen the audit and supervision of online news media to ensure the authenticity and accuracy of the information; on the other hand, the media industry should also strengthen the optimisation and upgrading of its internal auditing process, and improve the accuracy and efficiency of the intelligent auditing system. In addition, it is also necessary to advocate the media to maintain an objective and impartial attitude in the reporting process, and avoid following the trend of reporting and over-consumption of the parties. The media should strengthen the corroboration and verification of news authenticity to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the reported content. By improving the media's gate-keeping mechanism, the negative impact of false information and distorted reports on women's image building can be gradually eliminated.

In conclusion, to solve the dilemma of women's image building, women need to put forward practical solutions from the perspective of breaking the constraints of patriarchal society, addressing the challenges of the attention economy and improving the media gate-keeping mechanism. Through the implementation of these measures, the stereotypical image of women can be gradually eliminated, creating favourable conditions for the diversified presentation of women's image. At the same time, it is also necessary to strengthen the self-regulation and supervision of the media industry, improve the professionalism and sense of responsibility of practitioners, and jointly promote the healthy development of the media industry.

6. Conclusion

Network media has become one of the main indispensable channels for people to obtain news information. In recent years, with the rapid development of network technology and the diversification of information dissemination methods, the number of reports on the positive image of women in network news has shown a significant growth trend, which undoubtedly provides a broader stage for the display of women's style and the promotion of women's spirit. However, while this positive change is taking place, people also have to face a problem that cannot be ignored: there is

still a certain amount of sexist - colored information in network news. This information is implicitly or explicitly mixed with the media's subjective views and prejudices, resulting in women's images being 'labeled' or even 'stigmatized' to a certain extent. 'This has not only damaged the social image of women, but also hindered the spread of the concept of gender equality.

In order to effectively reshape the image of women and eliminate sexism in online news, online news media should assume their due social responsibility and actively take strong measures to correct this alienation phenomenon. Specifically, online news media should be committed to creating a favorable public - opinion atmosphere. Through positive publicity and guidance, they should establish a correct gender awareness, so that all sectors of society are fully aware of the importance of gender equality. In the process of news production, network news media should emphasise objective narration, respect the truth, and resolutely eliminate any form of sexist remarks and behaviours, so as to ensure the impartiality and objectivity of news reporting.

At the same time, online news media should also continuously improve and optimise the content quality of women-related news reports, and enhance the depth and breadth of the reports, so as to show the diversity and complexity of women in a more comprehensive and three-dimensional way. In addition, online news media should also actively increase women-related issues, give women more space for discourse, and let more people hear the voices of women from different fields and backgrounds, so as to better understand women's needs and demands, and fight for more rights and opportunities for women.

In conclusion, online news media play a crucial role in reshaping the image of women and eliminating gender discrimination. Only when work together to create a fair, equal and inclusive public opinion environment can people truly realise gender equality and harmony and promote sustainable social progress and development.

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