

Analysis of Female Narrative in In-depth Reporting from the Perspective of New Media—A Case Study of Extreme Women Series by New Weekly

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Abstract. Now is an era of booming new media. In-depth reporting has changed a lot. For example, with the rise of women's power, we can start from more female perspectives. More and more rich female images can be seen. This paper focuses on the Extreme Women series created by New Weekly magazine. The core theme of this series is breaking through limits. It shows female images in different fields through short video interviews with people and in-depth reporting. It tries to get rid of the previous abstract written concepts. It aims to explore and understand specific people and listen to real stories.

Keywords: in-depth reporting, female narrative, characters

1. Introduction

Digital technology is now rebuilding the traditional media environment step by step. In-depth reporting is facing two big challenges: fragmented information and people's lack of attention. According to the 55th survey report from China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of short video users reached 1.012 billion in 2025. It accounts for 94.8% of all internet users [1]. This shows that video-based, instant communication has become the mainstream gradually. This big change in communication forces traditional media to actively explore new ways to combine in-depth content with new media forms. At the same time, social movements like #MeToo and women's economic empowerment are happening all over the world. They make gender issues become the core topic of the public again.

Since its founding, New Weekly has stood out for observing and recording China's social changes with a sharp perspective. Its slogan is "China's Sharpest Lifestyle Weekly". It has reformed traditional media ideas and created a unique media method. It has launched a series of popular original topics and in-depth reports. The Extreme Women series was launched in 2024. It is an in-depth report column focusing on feminist issues. The column focuses on women who break through their limits. It listens to how they cross obstacles in daily life and gather strength from small inner changes. The interviewees of this series include women from different professions, such as writers, actors, scholars and entrepreneurs. For example, Qi Jinian, Yu Xiuhua and Ye Tong. They share their thoughts and choices when facing life, career and intimate relationships. It brings more diverse perspectives to the column. Besides, the column not only pays attention to personal growth. It also

mentions broader social issues, such as gender equality, generational differences and social prejudice. It tries to reflect social phenomena through personal stories. By sharing real stories and experiences, it arouse the audience's emotional resonance. It lets people find new ways to see the world. It encourages more women to break through their own "limits" when facing life challenges [2].

"The first element of news is people. The basic task of news reporting is to express facts through people." Walter Lippmann emphasized the importance of people in news reporting in *Public Opinion*. He also pointed out that the basic task of news reporting is to express facts through people. In character reporting, we shape people's personalities and three-dimensional images by describing their behaviors and telling their life experiences. Following the development of news reporting, whether we start from the subject of "people" or the event itself, the final focus is always "people" [3]. So the importance of character reporting in professional news practice cannot be ignored.

Extreme Women just seizes the lack of key elements in in-depth reporting and launches a series of dialogues. The innovative practice of New Weekly's Extreme Women series (2024) has double research values. First, as a transformation sample of in-depth reporting in the media convergence era, its narrative strategy has enlightenment significance for solving the "depth paradox". Second, as a typical case of feminist media practice, it shows unique value in breaking gender stereotypes and building a new gender discourse. This study tries to fill two gaps in existing research: the systematic analysis of the narrative system of in-depth reporting in the new media context, and the concrete presentation of feminist theory in news practice.

2. Image shaping: real and diverse women's stories

It is different from the traditional way of analyzing people from a news perspective. It focuses on women with different backgrounds and jobs. It describes solid and rich characters through deep "moments of breaking limits". It shows women's challenges and growth in life, career and emotions through real personal stories. For example, the writer Qi Jinian shared her process from becoming famous at a young age to rebuilding herself. She showed the struggle of East Asian women between family and self. Such diverse perspectives not only enrich the connotation of feminism. They also explore the inner qualities, growth experiences and mental journeys of typical characters. These women are not the traditional images of selfless dedication, kindness and virtue. They are characters with great personal charm, independent personality, and rich and three-dimensional images.

2.1. The return of subjectivity of female images

With the rise of feminist thoughts and social attention to gender equality, gender issues have become more and more prominent in news reports. Traditional news reports are often led by the male perspective. Female images are often marginalized or stereotyped in reports. However, with the rise of women's power, more and more media begin to pay attention to the female perspective. They explore women's stories and present diverse female images. Feminist Media Studies points out that the media plays an important role in shaping social gender concepts. Presenting women's stories through in-depth reports can not only break traditional gender stereotypes. It can also promote social attention and discussion on gender equality [4].

The selection of typical characters covers a wide range. There are not only well-known "successful women", but also ordinary women who live and work on the vast land. The character selection has both breadth and depth. The writing method is flexible. Excellent character reports combine rich detailed descriptions, sincere emotional expressions and fascinating story-telling. They

can touch readers' hearts and arouse deep thinking. The topics of Extreme Women are attractive and unique, and also professional. The first chapter is about Zhang Yingming, a talented woman admitted to Tsinghua University with reduced scores. It deeply portrays her image of being unyielding, cheerful, lively and full of joie de vivre. She sets an example for young women to be motivated, confident and outstanding. She hopes she has the ability to start from scratch no matter where she is. She believes women's success should be based on freedom and self-sufficiency. She has the confidence and courage to start from scratch anywhere. She has a firm sense of self, keeps improving and self-cultivating, and has the spirit of pursuing excellence and a strong desire for self-growth.

Vivid and lively stories are used to portray characters. In the fifth chapter, Yu Xiaodan switched from literature creation to designing "atypical bras" for breast cancer patients. She explores the complex emotions of people behind her works, as well as the hidden and unclassifiable physical and psychological predicaments of women. She makes little-known observations of her own body, others' bodies and women's bodies in general. The most common tensions and conflicts in East Asian mother-daughter relationships almost focus on the body. She discusses the issue of aging and tries to break the silent window about women's bodies. This is a common and effective method.

2.2. Capturing the mutual achievement of exterior and interior

In the Extreme Women series, the mutual construction of characters' exterior images and interior selves is also worth attention. The reports create rich and three-dimensional characters through accurate descriptions of exterior images and hidden expressions of inner emotions. People involved in or who know about the stories in character reports have their own subjective views. So when describing a character's exterior features in a character report, we must make accurate summaries and use implicit expressions. When news producers first tell a story or an event, the people related to the leading character in it also respond and talk about the event. This can draw the first outline of the character in an in-depth character report. Semiotics points out that the mutual construction of exterior images and interior selves is an important way to shape characters. By describing exterior images and exploring inner emotions, the reports not only make characters more three-dimensional, but also arouse readers' emotional resonance [5].

For example, the seventh article Ye Tong, the "Versatile Actress", Hates Being Asked Why She Never Ages skillfully connects the description of the character's exterior image with her interior self. It does not show all details when building the character. Instead, it writes: "She had a neat silver-gray short hair. That was my deepest first impression of Ye Tong. During the interview with Ye Tong, I often felt her playfulness and casual humor. When she focused, her eyes would fix on the person or thing in front of her, watching quietly and simply. When she relaxed, her words and expressions were lively, she made witty remarks from time to time, and she would laugh like a child when she talked about something exciting." "It was Ye Tong, with scattered white hair, wearing a white short-sleeve T-shirt, sitting by the window and playing an electric guitar. Some netizens commented that the actress was already old and not as good as people remembered. Others left messages: 'She just looks like a young person with grandma gray hair, and she is in great spirits.'" Then the report naturally turns to Ye Tong talking about the mutual achievement between her and her roles, how women can live true to themselves, break labels and packaging, accept herself at different ages, and her own thoughts on the popular aesthetic of the moment. A vivid image of an "ageless woman who always looks forward, loves new things, and thinks critically about internet fame" is presented in a three-dimensional way. It shows both the excellent traits in traditional value judgment and a high degree of uniqueness.

2.3. Symbolic construction: multi-dimensional decoding of female images

In the special topic Yu Xiaodan: The Body Politics in Bra Design, the report deconstructs the female body through three symbolic systems: Visual symbols: Close-up shots of scars after breast cancer surgery, challenging the myth of the perfect body. Verbal symbols: "This is not underwear, it is survival gear", reconstructing the functional meaning of the object. Behavioral symbols: Scenes of the designer trying on clothes with patients together, building an equal dialogue relationship. This symbolic practice echoes Butler's theory of gender performativity. It raises the body from the biological category to the dimension of political expression. The series also carefully designs intergenerational dialogues. Represented by Ye Tong, the post-60s generation discusses the core topics of age anxiety and self-reinvention, with a nostalgic montage narrative style. The post-80s generation is represented by Qi Jinian. They discuss native family and individual independence, with a stream-of-consciousness monologue narrative style. The Z generation is represented by Zhang Yingming. They discuss educational background prejudice and cross-border innovation, mainly with a gamified narrative style.

3. Narrative features: vivid perspectives and styles

The "pyramid structure" of traditional in-depth reporting is being replaced by a "honeycomb narrative". Each issue of Extreme Women includes three parts: the core layer – a 3000-word in-depth feature story (the core of the story), the extended layer – short video interviews (emotional touch points), and the interactive layer – UGC content under the hashtag #HerLetter# (activating connection chains). This multi-layered narrative structure confirms Jenkins' theory of "transmedia storytelling". That is, using the complementary characteristics of different media platforms to build a three-dimensional meaning network. Data shows that the complete viewing rate of short videos in this series reaches 78%. It is 210% higher than pure text reports. This proves the advantage of multimodal narrative in competing for people's attention [6].

Roland Barthes once said: "The nature of narrative originates at the same time as human history; there is no people in any corner of the world that has no narrative, and there never will be." This paper analyzes the text of the character reports in this column. It studies and summarizes from three aspects: the narrator, the narrative perspective and the narrative strategy. It shows a clear stand and makes readers think. Different from news-style character reports, these reports have a distinct self-awareness and a very unique style. They do not only report an event or a person. Instead, they express original values and communicate with readers. The Extreme Women series shows women's challenges and growth in different life stages through diverse narrative perspectives. Unlike traditional news reports, this series pays attention not only to women's external achievements, but also to their inner world and emotional experiences. Through the combination of multiple narrative perspectives such as first-person narrative and third-person narrative, the reports present rich female images. Narratology points out that the choice of narrative perspective directly affects readers' understanding of the story and emotional resonance with it. The Extreme Women series breaks the limitation of a single perspective in traditional news reports through diverse narrative perspectives. It enables readers to understand and feel women's stories from multiple angles [7].

3.1. In-depth discussion on feminism and life practice

The series of interviews deeply explores the embodiment and application of feminist theory in real life. The interviews not only focus on personal growth, but also cover topics such as gender equality,

generational differences, social prejudice, "erotic capital", "mother-daughter relationship", "marriage and independence"—all of which are important issues in feminist theory. For example, He Wapi, an anthropologist, discusses the stigmatization of female victims through analyzing case reasoning. She shows the application of feminism in specific social problems. She talks about her observations on justice, rumors, human nature and public opinion after seeing the depth of human nature, the depth of entanglement and the depth of darkness. He Wapi pays attention to the answers behind cold cases and pursues simple justice. She can block fear and anger when facing creepy cases, and record the process and evidence calmly. She has sensitivity and insight into women's predicaments.

The series focuses on women's collective predicaments and problems, including personal growth, self-reconstruction, career, family, dreams and popular aesthetics. It pays attention to various special industries, sets an example for thousands of women, gives them confidence, and makes rich female images more "visible". Whether it is women who became famous at a young age or women who write about desires at the bottom of society, they are all "extreme women". Whether they are in their 20s or 60s, like A Bao—a thorny grass that was abducted, cheated, hit by wind and rain, and even pulled out, but still re-rooted. Although she is an illiterate woman, she has a strong desire to write. In her humble life, she has the courage to rebuild her home and simple beliefs, taking root and sprouting like a seed. "Extreme women" are not limited; each of them is a vivid individual. "Extreme women" is a path leading to specific people. At the end of the path, there are straight and wide avenues, as well as gardens with forked paths. Putting aside class and titles, they polish themselves with the stones in their hearts, bleeding and scabbing without caring—in the daily life of this world, trying to settle themselves with pain is the limit of women.

3.2. Combination of emotional resonance and social issues

In the new media environment, emotional narrative has become one of the important strategies of in-depth reporting. The Extreme Women series arouses the audience's emotional resonance through real stories and emotional experiences. The reports not only show women's successes and achievements, but also deeply explore their confusion and struggles when facing life challenges. Emotional Communication Theory points out that emotion plays a very important role in information dissemination. Through emotional narrative, reports can enhance the audience's sense of participation and identity [8].

The Extreme Women in-depth series triggers the audience's emotional resonance through real dialogues and stories, and at the same time discusses profound issues such as gender equality and social prejudice. For example, readers share their confusion and insights through the #HerLetter# activity, and the guests provide support and suggestions through replies. This interactive form not only enhances the appeal of the reports, but also provides a new platform for the discussion of social issues. This series shows the diverse expressions of feminism—from academic research to personal narrative, from social action to emotional experience. This diverse expression not only enriches the connotation of feminism, but also provides a more comprehensive perspective for understanding feminism. At the same time, the program also covers women of different age groups from the post-60s to the post-80s, showing the differences and commonalities of women of different generations when facing gender issues. This intergenerational dialogue not only reveals the development of feminism in different historical stages, but also provides a historical context for understanding contemporary feminism.

4. The dual use of zero-degree perspective and emotional narrative

With the background of new media technology rebuilding the communication pattern, in-depth reporting not only needs to complete the basic function of information transmission. It also must respond to the public's deep expectations at the emotional and value levels. The rise of social media has promoted the communication mode from one-way indoctrination to two-way interaction. Emotional connection has become a key factor to enhance user stickiness and content influence. At the same time, in the post-truth and emotional online public opinion environment, the tension between reason and emotion, objectivity and empathy has become increasingly prominent. This also puts forward higher requirements for news narrative strategies. It is in this context that the Extreme Women series explores the balance between humanistic care and professional standards in in-depth reporting through the combination of zero-degree perspective and emotional narrative.

4.1. Emotional narrative: empathy construction of in-depth reporting in the new media environment

The Extreme Women column takes women's stories as the core of narrative. It deeply explores the humanistic values that can arouse resonance. It focuses on hierarchical progression in character construction: starting from external characteristics such as appearance, language and actions, and gradually going deep into the inner world and spiritual traits. It shapes real and three-dimensional characters with delicate narrative techniques, and finally achieves emotional resonance with the audience. For example, in the report on Jiang Yilei (Papi Jiang), the column avoids her public image as a short video creator. Instead, it focuses on her "extreme traits" of continuous content output, as well as her self-positioning and rational choices in cross-border attempts. It presents a sober, restrained and insightful contemporary female image, which greatly enhances the appeal and communication power of the report.

4.2. Zero-degree narration: a balanced strategy between objective discourse and implied value

"Zero-degree Narration" is another important narrative strategy in the Extreme Women series. This concept comes from the neutral writing theory proposed by Roland Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*. It emphasizes that the author should restrain subjective emotions and value judgments, and give the right of understanding to readers with objective and calm narration. In news practice, zero-degree narration requires journalists to avoid directly expressing their positions. They should realize implied value guidance through fact selection and detail presentation, so as to enhance the objectivity and credibility of the report [9].

In the use of zero-degree narration, this column does not completely exclude emotions. Instead, it outlines the characters' fates with restrained and implicit writing, leaving sufficient space for readers to interpret. For example, in the report on Qi Jinian, the journalist calmly records her process of self-exploration and spiritual reconstruction. When narrating Yu Xiuhua, it presents her living attitude of "living openly with mud all over her body" in an almost plain description. Dignity emerges without any judgment. This narrative strategy not only maintains the professionalism of news, but also provides a broader platform for showing the power of the characters themselves.

Through the organic combination of emotional narrative and zero-degree narration, Extreme Women not only achieves positive guidance of values, but also ensures the objectivity and authenticity of the reports. It provides an important model for the narrative innovation of in-depth reporting in the new media era. The practice of this column shows that in-depth reporting is

gradually moving from "information transmission" to "meaning production". Its innovation is reflected in three aspects: deconstructing gender stereotypes with symbolic strategies, activating public discussion with emotional narrative, and expanding the discourse space with technological empowerment. Future research can further focus on the impact of algorithm recommendation on the visibility of female narrative, and the negotiation mechanism of gender discourse in cross-cultural contexts. This will promote the continuous development of in-depth reporting in terms of publicity and professionalism.

5. Conclusion

Under the dual background of new media reconstructing traditional media and the evolution of gender awareness, the Extreme Women series by New Weekly is a successful attempt at the integration and transformation of in-depth reporting. It is also a socially significant breakthrough in female narrative. It constructs real and three-dimensional characters. It also embeds sharp public issues in the program. It provides a tense sample for us to understand in-depth reporting and female discourse practice in the new media era. It is worth mentioning that the reports maintain restraint in narrative while achieving emotional resonance. They still leave room for readers to interpret while guiding values. This reflects the rare content determination in the post-truth era. It proves to us that the communication of female issues does not need preaching or catering to internet fame. The real influence comes from the sincere respect and presentation of others' life experiences. In the future, such narrative practices also need to guard against the risk of being weakened by technical rationality. The real value of in-depth reporting should still focus on continuously promoting dialogue and understanding. It should also protect the concreteness of people and the complexity of stories in the noisy public opinion field.

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