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Research on the Communication Characteristics of Self-Media in the Era of Integrated Media: A Case Study of the #MeToo Movement on Weibo

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Abstract. With the rapid development of integrated media and digital communication technologies, self-media platforms have gradually become important spaces for public expression and social interaction. Compared with traditional media, self-media communication is more decentralized, fragmented, emotional, and interactive. Taking the #MeToo movement on Weibo as a case study, this paper analyzes the communication characteristics and influence mechanisms of self-media in contemporary Chinese society. The study focuses on how hashtags, reposting mechanisms, emotional narratives, and user participation shape public discussion on Weibo. At the same time, the paper also discusses how fragmented communication and emotional resonance accelerate the spread of information in the self-media environment. By combining literature review and case analysis, the research argues that self-media communication not only changes the mode of information dissemination but also influences public opinion, social governance, and digital participation. The #MeToo movement demonstrates that self-media platforms can amplify marginalized voices and push social issues into the public sphere, yet they are also subject to platform regulation and communication constraints.

Keywords: self-media, integrated media, Weibo, #MeToo movement, communication characteristics

1. Introduction

In recent years, the media environment has experienced significant transformation under the development of integrated media technologies. Traditional media institutions are no longer the only channels for information production and dissemination. Instead, digital platforms and self-media applications allow ordinary users to participate directly in content creation and communication. According to Jenkins, convergence culture has reshaped the relationship between producers and audiences, making communication more participatory and decentralized [1].

Against this background, self-media platforms have become important tools for public discussion. Unlike traditional media's linear one-to-many communication model, self-media communication often develops through networked interaction among users. Information spreads rapidly through reposting, comments, hashtags, and algorithmic recommendations. Castells argues

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that communication power in the digital era increasingly relies on network structures and online participation rather than centralized institutional control [2].

Another important characteristic of self-media communication is fragmentation. Most content on platforms such as Weibo appears in short texts, images, videos, and topic tags. This fragmented structure allows users to receive information quickly, but it also reduces systematic understanding. Nevertheless, fragmented communication accelerates information circulation and facilitates the cross-community diffusionof hot topics.

Emotional expression also plays an important role in attracting attention. Posts containing personal experiences, anger, sympathy, or emotional storytelling are more likely to trigger interaction and reposting. Papacharissi points out that emotional publics formed on social media platforms can accelerate collective participation and increase audience engagement [3]. In the case of the #MeToo movement, emotional resonance encouraged users with similar experiences to share their own stories, creating a cycle of support and public attention.

Among Chinese social media platforms, Weibo occupies a particularly influential position. Its open communication structure supports real-time public discussions, making it a core platform for online public opinion in China. Therefore, this paper takes the #MeToo movement on Weibo as an example to explore how self-media communication operates in practice and how it influences broader social dynamics.

2. Communication characteristics of self-media

Compared with traditional media, self-media communication does not rely on a highly centralized organizational framework. Instead of information flowing from professional institutions to passive audiences, communication in self-media environments is characterized by user interaction and participatory production. All users can act as both information receivers and content producers. This participatory characteristic greatly increases the diversity of public discourse.

Information fragmentation is another important feature of self-media communication. Information on Weibo is usually distributed in short forms, such as short texts, hashtags, memes, pictures, and videos. Although fragmented communication may weaken the depth of discussion, it significantly improves the efficiency and speed of information dissemination. Short and emotionally engaging content is more likely to gain public attention and spread rapidly through reposting mechanisms.

At the same time, emotional expression has become a key driving force behind communication. Unlike rational, formal news coverage, emotional narratives can generatestronger audience emotional resonance. Many users engage with social topics out of curiosity, empathy or shared life experiences. Emotional storytelling not only increases interaction but also strengthens users' willingness to participate in discussions. In the #MeToo movement, survivors' personal stories became important communication resources that encouraged public empathy and collective discussion.

Furthermore, self-media communication is highly interactive. Users can comment, repost, like, and participate in topic discussions instantly. This continuous interaction creates a dynamic communication environment in which information no longer spreads in a single direction. Instead, communication becomes fluid, decentralized, and constantly reconstructed through user participation.

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3. Communication mechanism and influence of Weibo

Sina Weibo was launched by Sina Corporation in 2009 and quickly developed into one of the largest social media platforms in China. As one of the earliest self-media platforms in China, Weibo integrates features similar to Twitter and Facebook, enabling users to post texts, images, videos, livestreams, and join topic discussions. According to Sina Weibo's annual reports, the platform has maintained hundreds of millions of monthly active users in recent years, making it one of the most influential digital communication platforms in China.

Weibo plays an important role in today's self-media ecosystem. Celebrities, media organizations, government departments, companies, influencers, and ordinary users all actively use Weibo to spread information and shape public opinion. One major reason for Weibo's influence is its "hot search" mechanism, which can rapidly draw public attention to specific events. Trending topics often become national discussions within a short period of time.

Another reason for Weibo's strong communication power is the participation of celebrities and mainstream media accounts. This phenomenon reflects the "two-step flow" theory, in which influential individuals help spread information and shape public opinion among audiences [4]. Many entertainment stars and official media organizations use Weibo as their primary platform for public communication. Their massive fan bases and high public visibility help accelerate information diffusion. In many cases, a single repost from a celebrity account can dramatically boost a topic;s public exposure.

Hashtags are another important communication mechanism on Weibo. By adding topic tags to posts, users can connect individual content to broader public discussions. This mechanism helps fragmented content form larger communication networks. Recommendation algorithms and trending lists further influence which topics receive attention, shaping the direction of public opinion.

Weibo's communication style also encourages emotional participation. Because users can directly share personal opinions and experiences, many discussions become emotionally charged. This emotional atmosphere often increases public engagement and makes social issues more visible. Major public events, international news, celebrity scandals, and social justice movements have all demonstrated Weibo's powerful influence in shaping online public discourse.

4. Case study: The #MeToo movement on Weibo

4.1. Case background

The #MeToo movement first gained global attention in 2017 after numerous women shared experiences of sexual harassment and assault on social media platforms. It encouraged survivors to voice experiences that had previously been hidden because of shame, fear, or social pressure. One important transformation brought by the movement was the shift from "victim shame" to "perpetrator shame," which challenged traditional gender power structures and increased public awareness of sexual violence.

The movement also produced practical social influence in some countries. For example, growing public pressure promoted several American states to revise or revoke legal restrictions governing sexual assault cases. These developments demonstrated how online communication could influence real-world social and legal change.

In China, discussions related to #MeToo gradually appeared on Weibo. Users shared personal stories, expressed support for victims, and discussed gender inequality issues. Because some related content faced censorship or restriction, users creatively adopted alternative expressions such as

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"Rice Bunny"—a homophone for # MeToo in Chinese—to sustain online exchanges. This phenomenon reflects how online discussions adapt under platform regulation.

4.2. Case analysis

Looking at the communication process of the #MeToo movement on Weibo and other social media platforms, several important characteristics of self-media communication become visible. First, personal storytelling became the core driving force behind information dissemination. Compared with abstract discussions about gender inequality, real experiences shared by individuals evoke much stronger emotional resonance and draw public attention. Emotional narratives allowed audiences to connect social issues with real human experiences, significantly increasing interaction and participation.

The global spread of the movement also demonstrated the powerful influence of self-media platforms. In October 2017, American actress Alyssa Milano posted a tweet encouraging victims of sexual harassment to reply with "#MeToo." Within only 24 hours, the hashtag was used more than 500,000 times on Twitter, and within several days, millions of related posts appeared across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. According to Twitter statistics reported by international media, the hashtag #MeToo generated more than 19 million mentions within the first year of the movement. These numbers reflect how emotional and participatory communication can rapidly transform individual experiences into global public discussions.

On Weibo, similar communication patterns appeared after Chinese users began discussing sexual harassment cases involving university professors, media figures, and public personalities. Many posts received tens of thousands of comments and reposts within a short period of time. Some related hashtags ranked Weibo's trending lists, greatly increasing public visibility. For example, discussions surrounding accusations in universities and the entertainment industry often spark widespread debate among young users, especially female audiences. Emotional expressions such as anger, sympathy, disappointment, and support became major driving forces behind reposting behavior.

Second, user interaction significantly expanded the influence of the movement. Comments, reposts, likes, and hashtag participation created a continuous circulation of information. Unlike traditional media communication, information on self-media platforms no longer flows in a single direction. Instead, users actively participate in reconstructing discussions through their own opinions and experiences. Zeng argues that the #MeToo movement in China developed as a form of "connective action," in which online users formed loose but highly interactive communication networks through hashtags and emotional participation [5].

Another important phenomenon is emotional identification and collective user participation. Many users stated in comment sections that reading others' stories encouraged them to share their own experiences for the first time. Supportive comments and reposts created a sense of solidarity among participants, producing a positive communication cycle. This demonstrates that emotional communication on self-media platforms is not only about attracting attention, but also about strengthening collective identity and social awareness.

At the same time, the movement also reflected the influence of platform regulation and online censorship. Some #MeToo-related content on Chinese social media platforms was restricted or removed. Accordingly, users creatively adopted alternative expressions such as "Rice Bunny" to keep re;evant discusssions ongoing. Abbott points out that Chinese internet users frequently use symbolic language, homophones, and coded expressions to navigate online regulation [6]. This

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phenomenon shows that communication on self-media platforms does not completely stop under restrictions; instead, it adapts and evolves through user creativity.

From a broader perspective, the #MeToo movement demonstrates how self-media influences public opinion and raises social awareness in the digital era. Certain issues that previously received limited attention in traditional media became highly visible through emotional storytelling, user participation, and networked communication. However, the case also reveals limitations of self-media communication, including unequal visibility, short attention cycles, emotional polarization, and dependence on platform mechanisms.

5. Conclusion

This paper combines relevant literature and case analysis to explore the communication characteristics of self-media in the era of integrated media, using the #MeToo movement on Weibo as the main research case. From the perspective of media development, the study discusses how integrated media technologies have transformed traditional communication structures into decentralized and networked communication environments. Compared with traditional media, self-media platforms like Weibo enable ordinary users to directly engage in information production, dissemination, and interaction, greatly increasing the openness and diversity of public discourse.Through the analysis of Weibo's communication mechanisms, this paper finds that fragmentation, emotional expression, hashtag participation, reposting mechanisms, and user interaction are major characteristics of self-media communication. Fragmented content formats speed up information dissemination, while emotional narratives strengthen audience resonance and public participation. At the same time, the study also analyzes Weibo's influential position in China's self-media industry, including its hot-search mechanism, celebrity participation, and strong ability to shape online public opinion.

Based on the #MeToo case study, this paper further discusses how self-media platforms amplify social issues through emotional storytelling and collective participation. The movement demonstrates that online communication can help marginalized groups gain visibility and encourage public discussion on sensitive social topics. In particular, the transition from "victim shame" to "perpetrator shame" reflects changing public attitudes toward gender issues and social justice. However, the study also shows that self-media communication still faces limitations such as platform regulation, uneven visibility, emotional polarization, and unstable public attention.

At the same time, this research still has certain limitations. First, this study mainly adopts literature review and case analysis without empirical methods such as questionnaires, in-depth interviews and quantitative analysis. Therefore, the conclusions are primarily based on existing literature and public communication cases, which may limit the depth of data support. Second, the number of references and case materials used in this paper is relatively limited, and the discussion mainly focuses on Weibo, without comparing communication differences across multiple social media platforms.

Future research can further enrich this research field through empirical studies and interdisciplinary analysis. For example, researchers may combine surveys, platform data analysis, or audience interviews to examine users' communication behaviors and emotional participation more systematically. Future studies may also compare different self-media platforms such as WeChat, TikTok, Xiaohongshu, and Twitter to explore differences in communication mechanisms and public opinion formation. In addition, with the continuous development of artificial intelligence and algorithmic recommendation systems, future research can further discuss how platform technologies influence emotional communication and online public discourse in the integrated media era.

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Overall, this study helps explain how self-media communication reshapes public participation, social discussion, and online governance in contemporary society. Understanding these communication characteristics has important significance for analyzing the future development of digital media and public opinion in the networked era.

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