

# Research on the Feminist Movement in the Internet Age from the Perspective of "Cultivation Theory"

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## ABSTRACT

Women's status in the new era is rising rapidly, followed by the further development of feminism and the rise of female movements. After continuous reflection on the patriarchal society, women's requirements for physical and spiritual liberation and equality with men's rights in social life have been continuously strengthened. Based on the "Cultivation Theory", combined with the upgrading and transformation of the media model in the Internet age, this article adopts a text analysis method to explore and reflect on the contemporary feminist movement.

**Keywords:** Internet age, "Cultivation Theory", Feminist movement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

"Cultivation Theory" originated in the late 1960s and was proposed by American scholar Gerbner. It was originally put forward to study the influence of watching TV on people's ideas, attitudes and values. It became the "mainstreaming" thought of society in the 1980s. After gradual development, its research scope has been continuously expanded, paying more attention to the conceptual and realistic relationship between media and social culture at various levels.

## 2. FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The feminism movement is also translated as the Women's Liberation Movement or the Female Movement, that is, a social goal or social movement of feminist revolutionaries who oppose discrimination against women, enable women to obtain their due social status and rights, and achieve complete equality of rights between the sexes. [1] In the 200,000 years of human history, during the period from 5,500 to 10,000 years ago, women occupied the status of the subject of social ruling, however, after this period, to this day, men have been running the society as the social ruling subject, namely, the birth of the patrilineal. In this context, with the development of society and the progress of the times, the concept of human rights was proposed. However, for a long period of time, women were not included among the protection

objects of human rights. As an important member of the family and society, women's existence and contributions are not negligible and replaceable. However, while women are working hard to contribute to society and family, their rights cannot be guaranteed or even ignored, which is unreasonable. Therefore, the first feminist, Condorcet, appeared in 1789, fighting for women's citizenship. Feminism also officially stepped onto the stage of history and began its long and bumpy development course.

According to the time division, Western feminism can be roughly divided into three stages: The first-generation feminism (the second half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century), the second-generation feminism (from the early 20th century to the 1960s), and the third-generation feminism. Since the birth of feminism, women's political, economic and other rights have finally been gradually implemented, but in society, women are still in a weak position for a long time. Therefore, three unique feminist theories — socialist feminism, liberal feminism, and radical feminism came into being, beginning to think deeply about women's progress and gender equality. So far, the feminist movement has not only been confined to fighting for the equality of rights between men and women, it has also emphasized the liberation of women from long-term spiritual oppression.

### **3. CULTIVATION THEORY**

#### **3.1 Traditional "Cultivation Theory"**

Cultivation Theory has two initial points of view: analyzing the relationship between the content of murder and violence on TV screens and real social crimes and investigating the impact of the content on people's understanding of social reality. [2] The "symbolic reality" suggested by the mass media helps society as a whole agree to exist and develop as a whole, and cultivate and educate the members of society in a "consensus". The specific value and ideological tendency of the media will subtly form people's sense of reality and society. Especially before the emergence of new media such as the Internet, television, as the major medium, played an important role in the "mainstream" of contemporary reality and social consciousness.

#### **3.2 The Reform and Development of "Cultivation Theory" in the Internet Age**

In the era when the "Cultivation Theory" was born, Chinese media had fewer channels than modern ones, and the form was simpler, and galaxy communication belonged to linear communication. This has also led to the public being more passive as information receivers, not occupying a dominant position in information transmission and selection. In the era of traditional media, television was more entertaining than other media such as newspapers. It had audio-visual sensory stimuli to the viewers, and had low requirements for the viewer's educational level. Therefore, it had the deepest degree of "cultivation" for the public. With the advent of the Internet age, various new media methods have sprung up, posing huge challenges to the traditional media environment. The Internet has replaced television in one fell swoop and has become the medium with the highest contact rate and the greatest influence on people. This change also breaks the chain of unidirectional communication of traditional media environmental information. The optimization and increase of communication channels, audience participation and interactivity have led to the emergence of the following new features in the contemporary "Cultivation Theory": On one hand, the audience's subject status is more prominent, so that it can play the dual role of information receiver and disseminator, resulting in the decentralization of the transmission power. On the other hand, it has

changed the originally passive status of passive acceptance and being "enlightened" of the audience, inspired the audience to speak for themselves with different voices that are different from the traditional system and authority, and posed a challenge to contemporary mainstream values. Under the contemporary network model, the reconstruction of "Cultivation Theory" has further promoted the integration of media interaction and audience personality.

### **4. THE DEVELOPMENT AND OBSTACLES OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE INTERNET AGE**

The Internet and other new media have changed the way of information dissemination as well as the cultivation of the public. The era of Internet big data has both promoted and hindered the development of the female movement.

#### **4.1 The Internet Information Spreads and Cultivates Faster**

Compared with traditional media, the high efficiency of the Internet helps information spread to more places in a shorter time. Saving the time of information dissemination is more conducive to the public's access to information, and at the same time, it can better form a "stimulus-feedback" loop, allowing the public to have a more timely response to the current social problems, which is more conducive to the discovery and resolution of problems and the further development of the feminist movement. This has undoubtedly expanded the influence of the contemporary feminist movement.

#### **4.2 The Internet Dissemination Breaks Space Restriction and Cultivates More Extensively**

In the context of contemporary society informatization, traditional media such as paper media have gradually lost power and influence. Instead, Internet big data has become the most important information interaction medium due to its advantages across time and space. This also virtually expands the scope of the audience. The feminist movement can be taken as an example. Women's justification has always been a real problem for women themselves. Therefore, men who have no justification problems think that there is no need to participate in this justification, and

they reject this responsibility. [3] However, in the contemporary Internet age, all-round and multi-dimensional upbringing has made men begin to face up to this problem, and this has promoted women's attention in various fields. In the 1960s, feminist-oriented social work was burgeoning. [4] The development of feminist-oriented social work has opened a new door for all walks of life, especially contemporary women. [5] The report of "CS Gender 3000 in 2019: Changes in the Image of the Company" pointed out that in the past ten years, the proportion of female directors in the total number of board members doubled globally. [7] Currently, there is an ever-growing awareness regarding the significance of women's economic and political participation. Women play a key role in the development of national economy and improving the living standards of individual households. [6] "The Map of Women's Participation in Politics in 2019" shows that the proportion of women ministers worldwide reached 20.7%, an increase of 2.4% compared with 2017.

Thanks to the universality of Internet information dissemination, the public has received a wider range and a deeper degree of feminist cultivation, which is also one of the important reasons for the advancement of contemporary feminism.

#### ***4.3 The Cultivation Imbalance Caused by Fragmentation of Information Under the Internet Model***

The information presentation model in the Internet age is more fragmented, that is, the volume of information that the media content itself can carry is smaller, and the expression will be vaguer, which will bring more room for readers to understand, however, it will also be easier to cause a decrease in the accuracy of encoding and decoding. This is why many people have misunderstood and prejudiced feminism and the feminist movement in recent years. Especially, the cultivation process is easy to cause mainstream resonance. Once the audience base becomes huge, the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of feminism will not be easily reversed. Under the big data environment, the subjectivity of Internet audience has increased, and the authority of the creators of traditional mimicry environments such as authority and elites has been challenged, and a new information interaction model of "performance-appreciation" has evolved. The public has a tendency to oppose and subvert the

mainstream consciousness, and this tendency is blind and spontaneous, conforming to others. The advent of social media and social network sites (SNS) in the Web 2.0 era, however, has reopened the debate on whether the Internet can become an uncoerced public sphere [7]. Based on this, in the contemporary era where the trend of anti-mainstream and anti-authority is relatively severe, the development of feminism is more likely to stagnate, and it is more difficult to dig into its theoretical core. "Cultivation" is not a one-way effect. Especially in the Internet era, with the enhancement of audience subjectivity, the public can also restructure the network content in the process of being "cultivated". This shows that the whole process of cultivation in the era of big data is the process in which the audience is self-centered and continuously cultivated and self-cultivated by the media.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In the Internet age, emerging media is like a double-edged sword to feminism, which not only vigorously promotes people's reflection and reform of the patriarchal society, but at the same time also causes excessive "cultivation" of the audience that may intensify the contradictions between men and women. But the author believes that the emergence of contradictions is a manifestation of reflection and progress. It cannot be denied that the advantages of the Internet across time and space and multiple dimensions have contributed to the advancement of women's liberation and equality between men and women. However, with the continuous emergence of many problems, people should also make more targeted restrictions on Internet media, trying to avoid the negative effects that "cultivation" may bring to them.

## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Yichang Chen.

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