How Social Media Impacts the Feminism Movement

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ABSTRACT

The vast uncertainty has permeated contemporary social life and has brought in a dynamic society where individuals are bestowed different identities and different ways of being in society. This paper analyses 12 books and papers from digital libraries to investigate social media's impacts on contemporary feminism movement. The meaning of this paper is to deepen our understanding of social media, which, as a form of socialisation, contribute to reshaping contemporary feminism agenda and social media producers and consumers and further adjusting social reality; although research also shows that it also brings a distortion of the truth and harmony, and implies an encroachment on the public sphere; social media provide space for women to speak up, to express their desire, to communicate and interrogate contemporary sexuality and gender issues. On the other hand, social media act as a platform for women's psychological projection to manipulate women's psychology.

Keywords: *Feminism movement, Social media, Socialisation agency, Digital space, Women's psychological projection.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The vast transformations to economic and social systems that have occurred as a result of the development of the digital economy have restructured societies into a cosmopolitanism form. Contemporary society is inextricably intertwined with the global digital economy. Different business models increasingly rely on information technology, data, and the internet, which serve as pervasive infrastructure for the contemporary economy. This paradigmatic shift to a global digital economy has affected social processes and norms. The ability to keep one's identity and location unknown on social platforms has an influence on contemporary social media authenticity. Marshall McLuhan famously argues that media forms (not only their content) have distinct effects on society [1]. Different media shape different messages and different audiences. These globe-spanning interactions afforded by digital technology have shaped cosmopolitanism and the universal community of world citizens. In a certain respect, the digital revolution has occurred in an egalitarian manner because, theoretically, everyone can participate in public debates from every corner of the world.

With such a premise, in today's society, there is recent research showing that the majority of teenagers spend a significant amount of time on social media each day [2], which indicates the use of mass media could be more widespread than education. Not only young women, but also young men who have not yet formed a fixed idea of gender, could be misled at a very young age about the real needs of social advancement. Such a consequence would have a negative impact on protracted challenges feminist movement, which needs to be carried forward for generations. Social media today is a double-edged sword, accelerating the feminist movement while at the same time limiting its development. This is why it is significant to discover the mechanisms by which social media influences the feminist movement.

Promoted by online movement, such as #Metoo and #NiUnaMenos, feminism has become a concept accepted by a larger group of people. Some social media agents and brands uses the concept of feminism as part of their image to gain the trust and interests of female group. Concurrently, the feminism activities and the influence they bring not only challenge the social norms, but also lead to more discussion and research from the public, media, and academia. This paper analyses 12 papers

from digital libraries to explore social media's impacts on contemporary feminism movement.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA'S IMPACTS ON FEMINISM MOVEMENT

The paper examines the influence that social media brings to feminism by looking at its role of socialisation agency, digital space and women's psychological projection. The classification of the articles can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of 12 papers of social media's impact on feminism movement

No. of papers	Social Media's impacts on feminism movement	References
4	Social media act as a form of socialization agency in feminism	[1] [3] [4] [5]
4	Social media act as digital space for feminist movement	[6] [7] [8] [9]
4	Social media act as a platform for women's psychological projection	[2] [10] [11] [12]

2.1. Social Media Act as A Form of Socialization Agency in Feminism

Different from the old movements, the new social movements address new social issues and generate new agendas on social media, which highlight the collective attempt to further common interests or secure common goals through action outside the sphere of the established institutions, as Giddens defines the characteristic of social movements [3]. Thus understood, the social movements enable massive transformation and social progression to dynamically change the status quo. As a salient example within the movements, feminism on social media attracts more and more attention.

Social media contributes to reshaping the desires of the passive consumers, which invites further discussion to the power hegemony in sexual relationships on social media platforms. Social media, as a form of socialisation agency, serves as a vital actor in the digital economy, bringing together social and political ideas into public discussion. Feminism debate is a vital aspect in the social media agenda. Social media conversations organise gender issues instead of simply representing it. The ongoing progression of the consensus on women's appropriate behaviour in different situations is continuing to restructure the social rules and norms. In Foucault's account, sexuality is the effect of the social conditions as well as a means of regulate the activities of human being. On social media conversations, the discussion about sexuality and power continue to play a role and still need to be addressed.

As a response to the pervasiveness of power, social media acts as a socialisation agency to reveal the concealed complexity between power and sexuality. When it comes to the social meaning of sexuality, Foucault famously gave sexuality a new meaning related to not only individuals' nature but also power. As a social and historical construction, sexuality is actually tied to human being's deepest identities and desires.

Conversations on social media ultimately have a communicative purpose, instead of reinforcement of the traditional gender hierarchy and the patriarchal patterns, which represent a felicitously egalitarian narrative of men-women desire and demand.

Thus understood, social media acts as a vital socialisation agency in imparting information and calling into detailed questions in terms of sexuality and gender issues. Social media debates on feminism are essential in reorganising social behaviour. The language repetition within these debates emphasises certain modes of human behaviour, which provides an example of how people should behave and how to deal with the radical indeterminacy of social norms and the consequent social internalisation that is produced by a range of social practices. Social media helps to bring into being the up-to-date notion of gender, and the inner reality previously unknown to the mass public. Jonathan Culler argues that the phenomenon of conscious life might be produced by unconscious forces, or that what we call "the self or subject is produced in and through the systems of language and culture, or that wheat we call 'presence', 'origin', or the 'original' is created by copies, an effect of repetition" [4]. Sexual relationships are actually cultural constructions and it was produced by massive and obligatory copies and repetitions in the sustained and prioritised social norms. The internalisation and prioritisation of social norms, through conscious repetition of "established discursive practices" on social media, is an essential means of adjusting social reality, to entertain, provoke and shape its audiences [4].

The prevalence of social media has resulted in openness to unprecedented differences and differentiation, which is a consequence of the prevalence of social unrest, the dissimilation of information; and the playfulness in our social life, which further bring a distortion of the truth and harmony. In a certain respect, the digital revolution has occurred in an egalitarian manner because, theoretically, everyone can participate in public debates. However, the differentiation and

divisions also brought about by social media have nevertheless caused profound social crises. The distortion of self-consciousness in observing and the reinforcement of individual agency has weakened the traditional hallmarks of the public sphere. Influencers on social media platforms, as the major game players, public opinion leaders, occupy a much larger space than ordinary netizens to further shape their response to the news. However, the majority of social media influencers aim to translate their influence into commercial deals. For the sake of commercial interests, some influencers will produce or distribute controversial gender-related content to earn advertising revenues rather than promote a healthy society. Several influential social media accounts, even some mainstream media accounts, seek to make profits rather than promote social benefits. Finally, qualified gatekeepers have disappeared while the emancipated but less powerful voices from ordinary netizens are often excluded.

Apart from the chaotic environment, the global media system is already increasingly commercialised, which implies an encroachment on the public sphere [3]. As Giddens introduces post-truth politics, which is characterised by the erosion of trust in experts, expertise, and establishments of various kinds (medical, political, media) and the increase in popular alternatives whose status rests mainly on not being part of the established order [3]. In Giddens' terms, seductive advertising revenue compels media to favour content that guarantees high-rating and sales at the expense of authenticity and reality. Dominant amateur producers on social media threaten the tight control of the information provided to the public. Traditional media, those who constructed the news and acted as the gatekeepers to set up agendas [5] are no longer capable of controlling what the public hears about at all. Ultimately, the mass public is manipulated by playfulness and algorithms, propelling deep suspicion and weakening citizen participation in public affairs, and shrivelling the public sphere.

2.2. Social Media Act as Digital Space for Feminism Movement

Social media provides a digital space for women to speak up. Initially proposed by sexual activist Tarana Burke in 2006, "Me Too" has transformed into a feminist movement and global phenomenon in 2017 which spread in the form of hashtag (#Metoo) on social media [6]. Women who have been sexually abused or harassed use #Metoo as a sign in their post indicating the universality and the extent of the problem of sexual abuse. With changing media technologies, the digital platforms provide more opportunities to common people to share their certain experience. As media posts have more exposure on social media, it is easier to form empathy and interactions with others who may share the same experience. Through empathy and solidarity, #Metoo has

pushed people to reconsider gender relations and brought renewed attention to women's rights [7]. It also reinvigorated complaints about harassment happened in the workplace and other occasions [8]. Aiming to stop sexual abuse and harassment, the MeToo movement not only contribute to an increasing number in feminist movements among the world, it also let people looking back and knowing the movements happened in the past. Since Metoo went viral on the internet, it has spread globally from the US across different parts of the world. Moreover, it facilitates new modes of expression and the practices of digital feminist activism, which help to a increasing number of successful campaigns against sexual abuse [9]. However, the freedom of women is still being restricted. There are remaining issues that have not been addressed, such as sexism in everyday life and sexist legal system in certain countries.

Some female celebrities who are feminists, what they say in public always lead to a huge online discussion. Beyoncé, as a public figure, she is a outspoken feminist and tells the public her understanding of feminism. There are also some male celebrities who have spoken out to support gender equality and the importance of giving a voice to women.

Social media plays the role of communicating and socializing, though it provides the opportunities to women to tell their experience in terms of sexual harassment, the lack of report or those false news with gender bias on media platforms deliberately lead to sexual misconducts among the society. The culture of misogyny is put in the spotlight, whereas the issue is hard to solve in the male-dominated society. To some extent, the social media reinforce gender opposition as men won't consider these normal "physical contact" as sexual abuse or harassment. Even though social media as a digital space provides opportunities for women to speak up and bring further impact to both the society and individuals' minds, we still have a long way to go to eliminate structural gender inequality.

2.3. Social Media Act as A Platform for Women's Psychological Projection

As a phenomenal new way of socialising, social media has become a part of contemporary social life. More than traditional media dominated by politicians and celebrities, social media has redistributed this access to citizens. This has led to an increasing discussion of women's rights in recent years, which has changed from the days when the mainstream media was silent about women's power. This progress is positive, yet there is still room for criticism of social media as an emerging product of a new era: some social media trends are influencing women's independence and thus feminist development by manipulating their psychology.

In contemporary society, the discourse of a group tends to be linked to the purchasing ability of that group. As the income level of the female population rises, the main target group for social media trends is beginning to target women. Firstly, social media is dominated by male power and, more than traditional media, its main function has changed from spreading information to stimulating the economy. In recent decades, women's career progression has improved. As in Holmes's research, he indicates that "the percentage of women in these parliaments rising from a world average of 3 per cent in 1945 to around 23 per cent by 2015" [10]. Accordingly, women's economic capability has also advanced considerably. In a social system dependent on the economy, this progress threatened to some extent the dominant position of men in society, while entitled men do not want this social system, which is beneficial to them, to change [11]. Therefore, masculine social media creates different fashion trends that reinforce women's subordination while making money back from them.

Using the indoor tanning that has become popular in the last few years as an example. According to Willoughby and Myrick's research, women who use Instagram and Twitter are more likely to go tanning [12]. This is the result of the 'opinion leaders' effect: celebrities who do tanning post pictures of their lives that look expensive and relaxed that people inevitably aspire to them. What is more, in white western society, bronzed skin somehow indicates beauty, health and wealth. This is because it takes enough available money and free time to be able to afford a routine in-house tanning service. Moreover, bronzed skin usually means sexiness and is a means of increasing one's attractiveness to men. Thus, the tanning trend is a way for social media to exploit the imitation mentality of its users by slowly transforming women's appearance into similarities with Western male aesthetics, depriving them of their independent aesthetic abilities.

The above-mentioned trends deserve to be criticised. It is true that this promotes the economic development of society as a whole, but at the same time women are involuntarily making sacrifices for society as a whole. On the one hand, materially, the money earned by women is directed to be spent in ways that are not related to core competencies. On the other hand, women who are constantly exposed to these fashion trends are more likely to be physically and mentally unhealthy. In Casares and Binkley's study, they suggested teenage girls who use social media heavily are more likely to have mental illness, be less physically fit and have sleep disorders [2]. What's more, the values of these girls are also influenced by the fact that they value their attractiveness as women more than their core competencies [2]. This is in line with the stereotype of women in the traditional media that women are to focus on appearance and take on household chores. As mentioned above, economic capacity determines

discourse, while core competencies determine economic capacity. In conclusion, for the sake of feminist development, social media should reduce the trend of women-specific fashion for the sake of profit and allow women to focus their lives on self-improvement.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, due to the universality and immediacy of social media, it plays an indispensable role to facilitate the development of feminism. Acting as a vital socialisation agency and digital space, it not only gives women opportunities to speak up, but also imparts information leading to a huge discussion in terms of sexuality and gender issues. Concurrently, acting as a platform for women's psychological projection, it reveals the gender inequalities and stereotypes among social media in the male-dominated society. Future research could be conducted on how social media platforms situate themselves amid the globalised free market and the resurgence of national populism around the world.

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