

# Feminism Discourse in Different Gender-Temperament Social Media: A Case Study of the Social Figure of Yang Li in Weibo, RED, Bilibili

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## ABSTRACT

With the development of social media platforms, digital feminism has grown up in cyberspace. Many research pays attention to one case or one platform in the digital feminism study, while few studies focus on the comparison of feminism in the social media of the different features. This study can fill this gap and compare feminism on Weibo, Bilibili, and RED through the social figure of Yang Li. Through the literature review and text analysis, the program analyzed the discourse of each platform. The study argues that the main topic of feminism discourse varies from platform to platform, which is largely influenced by the gender temperament of social media: Weibo, Bilibili, and RED, three social media platforms which focus on masculinity, professional code, and model building respectively.

**Keywords:** Digital Feminism, Social Figure, Gender-temperament, Yang Li.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When talking about feminism history in western countries, scholars consider it has at least three waves, for the existence of the fourth one is still controversial nowadays. The first wave from the middle of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century is mainly about political equality [1]. It called on people to pay more attention to the unjustified treatment of then women on "property ownership and suffrage" [2]. When it comes to the second wave originated in the 1960s, the whole campaign attached great importance to economic equality [1]. In this wave, the scope of feminism was greatly expanded to every corner of women's daily life. The representative sign of this spirit is the well-known slogan — "the personal is political". It was critiqued for treating women as completely identical individuals. Meanwhile, the problem of racism and classism was overlooked and deteriorated in the wave, which was first pointed out by Bell Hook. In her essay, the phenomenon of ignoring black and marginalized women was revealed [3]. Her essay appealed more attention to the multiple feminism, the core of which was intersectionality. It is worth mentioning that intersectionality is an unsolved problem and the main focus of today's feminism. The third wave started at the beginning of the 1990s [1]. In contrast to the second wave, it stresses the individual

development but not the advancement of women as a whole group, which gets the comment it makes the audience much smaller [2]. In China, there are mainly four stages of feminism development: the New Cultural Movement and May Fourth Movement at the beginning of the 20th century, the revolutionary era, Mao's socialist era, and the post-Mao era. The first three stages are attributed to state-led feminism, which means it has a close relationship with national liberation and national building. When there is a disagreement between the country and the women, the latter is considered to be subject to the former. During this period, feminism is not thorough and dependent on national modernization progress [4].

Few scholars pay attention to the gender temperament of social media mainly formed by its development history and its influence on the gender discourse. The expression and the presentation of feminist discourse are affected by it. The comparison of different gender-temperament social media as a tool of exploration of the topic is also a point ignored in the existing literature. The study of exploring the feminism discourse in different gender-temperament social media by comparing them is a theme that is worth studying.

The following essay will talk about the feminism development nowadays in western countries and China to illustrate the background, talks about the digital

feminism present situation, and then comes to the particular social media of different gender-temperament, taking Weibo, Bilibili, and RED as an example. The method used is content analysis, which means that the feminism discourse in these three social media platforms will be collected, analyzed, and categorized into ... parts. The results are divided into masculinity, patriarchy, household duties, work, and .... Finally, it comes to the conclusion that ...

## **2. DIGITAL FEMINISM IN WEIBO, BILIBILI, AND RED**

### ***2.1. Feminism Nowadays in Western Countries and China***

As for the fourth wave, the controversy comes into existence. The noun "the fourth wave" was first carried out by E. Ann Kaplan in 2003. He says, "the fourth wave will be distinguished by bringing second and third wave feminists together to confront a new and devastating reality that involves us all, if not equally, then at least at once. This new reality ideally cuts across racial, ethnic and national divides" [5]. The "new and devastating reality" refers to "the era of 'terror'" in the background of the Post-9/11 World. It seems that Kaplan regards the fourth wave as a powerful weapon to fight against the pessimistic future which is much stronger than the previous two waves. In the meantime, he deemed that it can also solve the long-term problem of intersectionality. This concept was later developed by Jennifer Baumgardner in 2011. She agreed with the presentation of the "fourth wave" of feminism and traced it back to 2008 [6]. When there are more and more supporters appeared later, like Nicola Rivers, some voices are arguing that the so-called "fourth wave" is the new form of the third wave [7]. For example, Debbie Stoller, whose standard of a new wave is a new idea, insists that the "fourth wave" "is merely using new technologies to discuss old ideas" [6].

Today, China is in the post-Mao era, with Deng's Reform and Opening-up, the post-feminism transmitted from the western countries to China [8]. During this period, the Fourth United Nations Reference on Women (UN) in 1995 was a significant turning point in Chinese feminism, since Chinese women began to accept the global concept and innovatively localized it [9]. When seemingly making progress, feminism in China meets trouble, such as Internet censorship and misogyny. Feminists are fighting against the obstacles by founding NGOs and establishing the counter-public online space.

### ***2.2. Digital Feminism under the Nowadays Feminism: Development, Opportunities, and Challenges***

No matter how serious scholars are arguing about the appearance of the fourth wave in western countries, there is no doubt that one of the features of feminism nowadays is that the movement is online, that is, digital feminism [10]. "Digital feminism" was initially carried out by Donna Jeanne Haraway [2]. In her article *A Cyborg Feminism*, she argues that humans are all Cyborgs, which blurs the boundaries between human and machine. She promotes women to make use of cyborgs to break the boundaries and develop a new feminist era [11]. With the development of the concept, Munro explained the formation of digital feminism is the "call-out" culture on the Internet and the inheritance of the focus on the "micropolitics" [2].

The definition of "digital feminism" in this study is based on the previous study, that is, "feminist protest and activism enabled by digital media in the form of networked and/or collective actions towards transformative changes of the unequal power structure" [12]. Due to the "call-out" culture, digital feminism can challenge sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny, making the predicament of women more visible to implement the huge transformation from being dominated by the patriarchy to being equal to men both on the virtual and the real world [2].

Digital platforms provide both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it offers the space for women to express their opinions and experience. For example, the #MeToo hashtag movement on Weibo gathered the power of women. They shared their personal experience with sexual harassment, communicated with peers, and aroused people's awareness of promoting gender equality. Finally, the movement led to the modification of the law about sexual harassment [13]. Prohibition of sexual harassment was written into the law for the first time, added to the Women's Rights Protection Law. What's more, the "low cost, easy use, flexibility and accessibility" is the advantage of digital feminism [14]. By calling the feminism 'digital', it suggests that online information dissemination behaviors such as posting pictures, words and videos abide by the rule of digital media communication. They nearly cost nothing and people can easily post their content almost anytime anywhere with the mobile devices.

On the other hand, digital media is also struggling with some negative elements, like the long-existing patriarchy and misogyny. Here are three points about negative aspects. First, the structure of gender unequal offline moves from the offline space to cyberspace, instead of the online voices of equality. In the western context, racism is hidden in feminism. Scholars pointed out that feminism is "white feminism". That is, white

women are the dominant architects and defenders of the framework [15]. In the Chinese context, it shares a similarity with the western one in that the offline male-dominance social structure is duplicated the social media platforms [12]. Meanwhile, with the unique Confucianism from ancient times, Chinese people attach great importance to harmony. In Confucianism, there are lots of sayings about suppressing women. For example, "Three Obedience and Four Virtues". The "Three Obedience" refers to women's obedience to her father before her marriage, to her husband during the marriage and to her son after her husband's death [16]. To maintain the harmonious relationship between men and women, which means that the women are subordinated to the men, some people unconsciously have a trend of insisting on remaining the old tradition. The fake harmony is "based on the absolute dominance" of males. "There cannot be real harmony until men and women can live with dignity and respect as equals" [17]. Second, feminism stigmatization is a serious obstacle to the feminist movement. There is a phrase called "Feminist Paradox", which refers to the people that hesitant to identify themselves as a feminist. The previous research shows that the identification may be due to the understanding of the meaning of "feminist". When talking about the objectives of feminism movements, non-feminists consider it only refers to women while the feminists think it is included more marginalized groups [18]. "The biological differences between women in general and the women activist who formulate the feminist agenda" can provide another perspective as answers [19]. The "Feminist Paradox" also resulted from the feminism stigmatization on the Internet. The small number of feminists partly due to the paradox result in the little strength of women's voices in cyberspace, which constrains the gender equality progress. Third, censorship has been a threat to digital feminism. "women's rights" is labeled as one of the words to be one of the most strictly examined on Chinese social platforms [20]. The "transparent wall" requires the feminists to "self-censor" before publishing the messages [21]. Besides this kind of tactical way to escape the censorship, there is another way to achieve the "digital masquerading". The way is to modify the digital alteration of images to successfully publish relevant pictures or videos [22].

It is pointed out that the online movement is increasingly separating from real-world conflicts. Additionally, the generation gap phenomenon roots in digital feminism is a big threat. Since the old feminists universally cannot completely participate in cyberspace, which is dominated by young feminists, the study on digital media can also reinforce the gap between real and cyberspace.

### ***2.3. Digital Feminism on Different Gender-temperament Social Media & Methodology***

The social media platforms the study focuses on are Sina Weibo, Bilibili, and RED. That is because they are representative applications of different kinds of gender-temperament social media. The "gender-temperament" here refers to the gender constitution structure of social media. When males are the majority of users, it means that the social media is "male-temperament"; When females account for the majority, the application is "female-temperament". The following are their brief introductions and the feminist discourse on them.

Sina Weibo(Weibo) is a Chinese microblogging website, which is one of the biggest social media platforms in China [23]. According to the 2020 User Development Report, the Daily Active Users (DAU) was 224,000,000 in September 2020. Generation Y users and Generation Z users accounted for nearly 90%, among both which females and males take account for 54.6% and 45.4% respectively [24]. Weibo turned from masculinism to feminism. At the beginning of its founding, to attract more users, Weibo invited many celebrities to be its users. Since the user structure was similar to the social structure in the real world, the app became the platform whose tendency was "mainstream is mainstream". At that time, feminism and women groups were marginalized like the situation in traditional media. In 2013, with the development of the Network Purification Action, "Big V"(another name for the celebrities on Weibo) became the main target to be managed. The strategy of Weibo was "downplaying the voices of the public intellectuals and developing the vertical content". After the adjustment, the main consumers and content producers have shown to be women, which led to the transformation of the "mainstream" to the "female stream". The topics of women have grown to be more visible. More and more users participate in the related discussions and feminist movement like the #MeToo hashtag movement has started to grow [25].

Different from the transformation from the male temperament to the female temperament of Weibo, Bilibili and RED seems to be born and grow consistently with vested gender temperaments. Bilibili is a barrage video platform that started as an ACG(Animes, Comics, Games) website [26], which caused its user structure to be man-oriented. In 2021, male users and female users account for 57% and 43% respectively [27]. There are about 1,000 search results of "feminism" on Bilibili, which can be mainly divided into the four types: popular science of feminism, such as its history; montages of women's power and living situations; personal sharing about women's experience, readings, filmography, speeches, interviews, and the news about feminism. RED is an online shopping and social platform in China. The target user of RED is female. The active users of RED

tended to be younger, with ages of users mainly concentrated between 18-34 years old, accounting for 83.31%. Female users and male users take account for 90.41% and 9.59% respectively [28]. The research results of "feminism" are similar to Bilibili when the proportion is different.

The common point about the feminism of these three digital platforms is the tendency to growing woman-oriented and feminist content while there is a divergence between them: on Weibo, there is pseudo-feminism and stigmatization; on Bilibili and RED, there is more deep content on feminism.

The approach applied here is the semiotics approach of the text analysis, since it can study the relationship between the mass media symbol and the subject of the symbol used to focus on the social recognition and ideology behind the symbols [29]. The texts analyzed here are the hot posts and comments about Yang Li. Through the analysis of her social figure on different platforms, the relationship between the platform gender-temperament and feminist figure judgment will be clearer. The following is a brief introduction to Yang Li.

Yang Li, a female stand-up comedian, is the main character of our case study of Yang Li Incident. After her graduation, she became a graphic designer. In 2017, because of unsatisfying with her present profession, she began to turn to get in touch with talk shows by joining the Beijing Talk Show Club. Then in 2018, she joined the Shanghai Xiaoguo Culture Media Company and formally embarked on her stand-up comedian career. In the next two years, she took part in the ROCK & ROAST 2 and ROCK & ROAST 3 respectively. Both of them are talk show competitions. In ROCK & ROAST 3, her gag "how can men be so confident when they seem to be so ordinary" triggered the hot discussion of gender dichotomy with the hashtag #Yang Li said that men were ordinary but confident# and made her a celebrity. Some males considered it a kind of offense while some females were in favor of her sayings. Later, Yang successively commenced as the spokesperson of four brands, that is, HEILAN APPAREL, Intel, Mercedes-Benz, and Shede Spirits Company, and failed to be formally committed the title of spokesperson every time because of the resistance of male customers, which resulted in her being titled of "brand killer". She was even accused of "creating gender antagonism, which is not conducive to the harmonious development of socialist society with Chinese characteristics" by the National Administration of Radio and Television. Her natural figure is a feminist while her social figures vary from platform to platform.

### **3. GENDER-TEMPERAMENT SOCIAL MEDIA**

On Weibo, whose gender temperament has been changing from male to female, the gender conflict is

more obvious than on the other two platforms. That is, the male discourse and female discourse are conflicting. The dominant opinion of male discourses is feeling offended by Yang's words. Almost all the feminist discourse is excluded from those discourses due to the transformation of the gender structure on this platform. The "transformation" makes male users feel deserted and that their words would be of no use. It is mainly the fear of losing discourse dominance that leads to severe conflict between males and females. On Weibo, Yang was considered a kind of "entertainment feminist" or "business feminist", which means that her sayings about feminism were just for entertaining the audience and therefore earning more attention and money.

On Bilibili, Yang's main identity is a female talk-up show comedian. The focus on her is the discussion on the extent of talk-up show comedian discourse. That is, are Yang's words offensive. The most common perspective of this discussion was to change Yang's gender and express the same thing, and whether a female would feel like being offended. Like Weibo, masculinity is Yang's main enemy on Bilibili, but not so severe. It may have something to do with its gender temperament, which is born with male temperament and keeps it until now. What's more, the gender structure is relatively balanced, since the proportion of males and females is 57% and 43% respectively [27]. The discussion about the gender of Bilibili is more peaceful than that of Weibo and pays attention to the professional standard.

On RED, the platform of the absolute female temperament, Yang was thought to be a feminist who actually spoke for women. Most users considered Yang as a female model and learned from her. The dangerous tendency about the figure of Yang on this platform is an idealization, which tended to build Yang as an ideal person and thought all her words were right without thinking and logic. This trend may lead to the critique of Yang because of the high standard built by female users. On RED, both Yang's companions and enemy are females to some extent.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

By the collection and the comparison of Weibo, Bilibili, and RED, the feminism discourse of those social media platforms, which are of diverse gender-temperament is figured out. Weibo is found to focus on masculinity and patriarchy due to its transformation history from male-temperament to female-temperament. Bilibili pays more attention to the deep discussion on feminism, the phenomenon which has something to do with the male perspective. As for RED, the female model is Yang's main social figure, since its gender structure is female temperament. The focus of feminism discourse in different gender-temperament platforms is clearer. Scholars can learn more about the effect of gender-temperament. Feminists can know the present situation

of digital feminism more clearly and adjust their strategies depending on this study. The essay only analyzed the discourse from ten accounts on each platform. The later study can enrich the database, increase the collection and draw more accurate conclusions.

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