



Gender Equality in Chinese New Media

Xiyue Liang^(✉)

School of Journalism and Communication, Shanghai University, Shanghai 200444, China
xiyueliang@shu.edu.cn

Abstract. With the rapid development of new media, the world has been concerned about the significant influence of media communication on the image and status of women, which has led to an increasing number of studies on media and gender. In addition, using new media to promote gender equality has become a new focus. However, due to the enormous amount of information in the new media era, the way of people received information has been greatly influenced. Meanwhile, the way people receive media information has changed from passive and limited choices to active and diverse options. As new media has convenient and efficient communication characteristics, it also brings opportunities and challenges to disseminating gender equality awareness and developing gender equality education. Therefore, this paper uses Lasswell's 5W communication theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the current new media coverage of gender equality in China from five aspects: communicator, message, media, receiver, and communication effect in the communication process, with reviewing existing literature. In addition, the paper focuses on the problems and positive and negative impacts of news reporting. This paper also proposes that the influence of media on gender role attitudes should be viewed dialectically. Finally, after reviewing previous research and the implication of the reports on Chinese new media, this paper proposes recommendations for journalists to promote gender equality, which should be helpful for future researchers and journalists.

Keywords: Gender equality · New media · Mass communication · 5W theory

1 Introduction

With the development of Chinese society, the status of women has improved, and gender equality has been reflected in some aspects. However, there are still many inequalities between men and women in society, affecting social harmony.

Ni found that in the feudal society of China for thousands of years, women were excluded from social work and were primarily deprived of the opportunity to contribute to society [1]. Women are supposed to live at home all the time, taking care of household chores and playing the role of a good wife and mother [1]. This patriarchal ideology has been deeply rooted in the bones of the Chinese nation for thousands of years, and has been passed down implicitly from generation to generation with extreme stability [1]. Even under the impact of the market economy and the significant development of productivity, the evolution of this idea has been prolonged.

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In addition, gender inequality has also manifested in the gender imbalance in birth rate, the gender difference in health levels, and gender discrimination in mass media [2]. In short, social injustices, gender injustice, and inequality affect most people in the world. The below sections will review the phenomenon and reasons for gender inequality in Chinese new media.

2 Analyzing Chinese New Media's Report on Gender Equality Using the 5W Theory

2.1 Theoretical Framework: The 5W Theory

The 5W model refers to the communication process model proposed by American scholar Harold Lasswell in 1948 in his paper of "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society." In the paper, Lasswell first proposed five basic elements of the communication process and arranged them in a certain structural order, forming a process model that people later called the "5W model" or "Lasswell's formula." The 5W's are the first letters of the five questionable pronouns in English: Who Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, With What Effect [3].

In 5W, five essential elements are named communicator, content, medium, receiver, and effect in the communication process. The communicator refers to the beginning of the whole activity, who is most likely an individual or a media organization. The main job of the communicator is to collect, organize, process, and handle the communication information. Information is also the content of communication, including comprehensive, public, open, and widespread. The dissemination of information should be analyzed accordingly so that the content of communication can be more valuable. The medium can be understood as the communication channel, which is usually called the intermediary. Only through the medium, the action of communication can be realized. The receiver is the person to receive the communication message, who occupies a significant position in the communication activity. The effect of communication refers to the impact of communication content in society.

2.2 The Reason to Use the 5W Theory

The 5W model is of great importance to the development of journalism and communication. The 5W model has profoundly impacted communication science and is still widely used in communication research in many fields more than 70 years after its introduction [4]. In *Modern Mass Communication*, Zhang summarized 5W model as "two first": The first scientific and detailed decomposition of the communication process, and is the first model used to define five major research areas in communication science, which opened up a wide path for further research [5]. It can be seen in the existing academic literature that many scholars, when encountering the analysis of current problems in the media, would firstly think of using the 5W model to conduct a complete analysis of the media environment and thus get relevant research results.

The author of this paper was deeply influenced by the 5W theory during his study of journalism and communication and recognized Lasswell's 5W model. Therefore, the

goal of this paper is to help clarify the communication objectives of the communicator, accurately grasp the preferences and needs of the audience, disseminate the appropriate content through the proper medium, analyze the communication effects, and promote the development of gender equality news reporting in China's new media with the 5W model.

2.3 The Characteristics of Chinese New Media Reports on Gender Equality

2.3.1 The Communicators

During the rapid development of media integration for more than ten years, the communication channels, interaction methods and public opinion ecology have all undergone fundamental changes. When WeChat group (i.e. a Chinese social software) is surprisingly the most trusted media, surpassing traditional mainstream media such as paper and TV, how to make new mainstream media bigger and stronger has become an essential and urgent task in the field of news communication in China [6].

According to Chen, the new mainstream media are the mainstay of promoting gender equality values and have irreplaceable guiding power, influence, and credibility in disseminating gender equality culture. Central media such as People's Daily and CCTV News, which have been ranked among the top influential new media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Tiktok, are responsible for internalizing the value of gender equality in their daily news reports [7]. In addition, they are responsible for telling the Chinese story of gender equality and promoting gender mainstreaming. This is not only the need for the cause of gender equality in China but also the need for the development of the new mainstream media itself.

2.3.2 The Content

The advent of the new media era has led to fundamental changes in the way media are communicated. The Internet seems to provide equal opportunities for both genders to voice their opinions. Still, it is worth considering and studying whether it can dissolve gender discrimination and bring new communication channels and platforms for gender equality.

Compared with the news reports about men, there are fewer reports about the positive image of women in the online news, and the women's group presents a biased value orientation in the online information, which harms the overall understanding of society and the positive construction of women's image [8]. Therefore, paying attention to women's issues, participating in research and calling on the news media to present a diverse picture of women from the perspective of the changing times, reflecting women's real needs and concerns, and genuinely providing media support from the standpoint of protecting women and gender equality are essential tasks of the media as a social watchtower.

2.3.2.1 The Marginalized News Reports Towards Women

Mass media is an independent communication field in which women are often easily marginalized as a vulnerable group. Their possession and use of media resources are far less than those of male groups. On the one hand, more men are working for the media,

male consciousness and masculinity inevitably represent the attitude of media coverage. On the other hand, most women have been influenced by the “mimetic environment” for a long time. They have already formed an ideological recognition and acceptance of male viewpoints, thus further weakening the power of women.

However, Shi found that as society pays more attention to women, news media coverage of this group has gradually increased, with China Women’s Daily ranking among the most important in terms of attention to women [8]. At the same time, the national mainstream media has also focused more on positive coverage of women to continuously correct social prejudices and hegemonic male consciousness, guide social opinion, and accelerate the democratic process. In an ideal society, all groups should have an equal voice, and the mass media should contribute to the realization of this voice. It will help to build women’s image and self-confidence and promotes gender equality. Therefore, the content of such coverage needs to be further enriched.

2.3.2.2 The Stereotyped Image of Women in News Reports

Researchers in media and gender research have found that most mass media have some gender stereotypes in disseminating content. These stereotypes are formed under the combined effect of various factors such as traditional concepts and gender differences. In this way, gender stereotype research is bound to become a cornerstone in constructing and pursuing gender equality.

Through the sample analysis, Shi found that some stereotypes also inevitably exist in online news reports. Currently, women are “devalued” in most news reports in China, and the content of women’s messages tends to focus on presenting women’s emotional and passive personality traits. The topics reported imply the traditional idea of women returning to the family [8].

Women’s news reports like to emphasize women’s selfless dedication to their families in positive content and women’s image as victims in adverse news reports, while women’s sacrifices around men as wives and girlfriends are overly reported in family-related reports. In addition, women’s selfless dedication to their work is reported in social-related reports, and their touching stories are rarely written. There is little coverage of women’s professional achievements and contributions to society. Whether there is a fundamental difference between women and men in terms of their ability to work may also reflect, to some extent, the media’s perception of gender relations and gender traditions. These phenomena have always existed in traditional media and have not been significantly improved in online media. Women should no longer be subordinated to men as the “second sex” but should be expressed equally and objectively in the communication discourse.

2.3.3 The Communication Channels

The development of new media has provided more convenient channels for the dissemination of gender equality.

Firstly, the new media has become the most convenient channel for expressing gender interests. The new media era has enabled the establishment and development of various women’s public and gender monitoring websites, which have also become a wall to stop gender violence and gender discrimination [9]. In addition, the new media have added

anti-domestic violence and gender equality to family education and organized gender equality-related knowledge popularization activities. They significantly increased the number of cases using microblogs and Weibo (i.e. a Chinese social software) to help and implement assistance on behalf of the two sexes. The Internet has become the most convenient and efficient channel for both sexes to express their respective interests and win public support.

In addition, Xu recognized that with the widely used of the new media, the new media became the first source of information for gender-related event searches [9]. After the “Anti-Domestic Violence Law” came into effect on March 1, 2016, all major national news media and websites and related charity websites and microblogs, Bing and Google search engines published 2732 anti-domestic violence related messages in total. There are two peaks separately in March and November. March is due to the first month of implementation of the “Anti-Domestic Violence Law”, the news media and relevant departments have made a lot of reports. In addition, November 25 is the International Day Against Domestic Violence and the subsequent 16 days of action against the violence, so the gender-related topics were more frequently reported. In conclusion, the importance of new media for access to information on gender issues is well-reflected.

2.3.4 The Audiences and the Effects of Communication

For news reports about gender equality, the impact of communication is around the audience, and the audience and the impact are inextricably linked. Therefore, the authors combine audience and influence for this research.

2.3.4.1 The Impact of Media Coverage on Gender Equality in China Needs to Be Viewed Dialectically

Some scholars believe that the influence of media on gender role attitudes needs to be viewed dialectically. Pan argues that the widespread use of the Internet and its various features have eliminated biological gender differences and provided a platform for women to communicate, which to a certain extent promotes gender equality. Still, on the other hand, the massive amount of mixed information on the Internet and the harmful content of reports on women may also pose potential threats to gender equality [10]. Guo argues that television has constructive and deconstructive effects on gender role attitudes. The constructive impact is that television places women outside the public sphere of affairs, mainly in the family role and in a traditional position, and the deconstructive effect is that television broadens women’s horizons, updates their perceptions, and influences changes in gender relations [11].

2.3.4.2 The Positive Impact of the New Media

With the development of new media, mass media has enabled individuals to have more modern attitudes towards gender roles, which promote gender equality.

Some scholars have argued that mass media has enabled individuals to have more modern gender role attitudes. Zhang, through a questionnaire survey of college students in the capital, found that the media platforms promoted and popularized the concept of gender equality, making college students more sensitive to gender issues and thus more skeptical and resistant to traditional gender concepts and stereotypes [12].

Sun and Zhang, through a questionnaire survey of middle school, high school, and university students in Shenyang, concluded that mass media is one of the essential factors influencing adolescents' values. In addition, they considered that women are more likely to be affected by mass media than men and more likely to agree with the ideas disseminated by mass media [13]. Specific to the influence of different media, Zhang believes that the new media has caused some impact on the established environment constituted by traditional media, breaking the status quo of the information monopoly of conventional media [14]. In addition, coupled with feminism's questioning and rebellion against the unequal social status of the sexes, the image of women in the media is more diverse. The diversified media environment also provides more opportunities for adjusting traditional concepts.

Gao found that the viewing frequency of television had no significant effect on gender role attitudes but using the frequency of the Internet had a significant positive impact on gender role attitudes [15]. However, Yang found that the media, such as the use of television, had a significant positive effect on gender role attitudes. The longer the time spent watching television, the more people's gender role attitudes tended to be modernized and have equal gender perceptions [16].

2.3.4.3 The Negative Impact of the New Media

Unfortunately, gender inequality still exists in news coverage, which caused some negative impact. The vast amount of information in cyberspace does not bring peace of mind to women.

Some scholars believe that the influence of mass media on equal gender role attitudes is harmful. Bu believed that mass media do not treat gender equality [17]. Jiang and Liu disagree with this view of equality on the Internet. In their opinion, it is just a "mirror escape" and there is still gender inequality in the seeming equality on the Internet. The massive information in cyberspace and the platform of political participation do not bring peace of mind to women, and the producers of knowledge are mainly men. Even women are only a minority of knowledgeable and economically powerful women. Therefore, the development of the Internet does not bring gender equality [18].

The "mirror escape" means everyone can observe the world through a mirror, then make judgments about the events in the world according to their values and form their impressions of the world in their minds. The mimetic environment is a mirror-like reproduction of the world. Still, it is not reality but a subjective reflection of the typical events that occur in society by the medium, which is readjusted to show people the environment by selecting and processing symbolic information. But when forming self-judgments, people tend to view the mimetic environment as the objective environment itself. Suppose the media does not objectively and correctly reflect reality. In that case, our minds will create stereotypes and one-sided understandings of similar events, misleading our proper knowledge of actions in the external world. To promote gender equality, we should focus on authentic culture and combine the Internet with reality to promote gender equality.

In addition, many scholars believe that stereotypes of women in new media still exist. Ye analysed the self-presentation of both genders in blogs. He concluded that women's self-presentation in blogs still has stereotypes [19]. In addition, women are also mainly ornamental objects in men's eyes. The development of the Internet does not effectively promote gender equality either. The mass media's reproduction and dissemination of

gender role stereotypes can implicitly influence and control the audience, and the mass media encourages gender role stereotyping. In terms of gender role patterns show that men are dominant, women are prevalent, men are strong, and women are weak. Xu believed that these will subconsciously influence the audience and promote the return of traditional gender culture. It is more important to promote gender equality that women awaken and strengthen their gender consciousness [20].

3 Conclusion

Gender equality is another political topic after class equality, ethnic equality and racial equality. Social harmony includes gender equality and harmonious development. Therefore, journalists should make good use of the new media platform and have a strong awareness of gender equality so that their news reports can genuinely meet the requirements of the scientific concept of development.

Therefore, after reviewing previous research and the implication of the reports on Chinese new media, some useful strategies and suggestions are as follow, which should be helpful for future researchers and journalists.

Firstly, journalists should pay attention to gender differences. Journalists must pay attention to cultivating their gender awareness in journalistic practice and should not confuse biological gender with social gender.

Secondly, journalist should eliminate stereotypes. Stereotypes of gender are mainly manifested in stereotypes of both sexes' character, image, intelligence, the social division of labor, and family roles. The role of mass media may reflect the stereotypes in society and construct such stereotypes. Journalists must clearly understand their stereotypes, especially gender stereotypes, and improve their knowledge through media literacy education.

In conclusion, journalists should have a high awareness of gender equality in journalism practice, which is necessary for journalists to build a harmonious society and implement the scientific development concept.

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