



The Impact of New Media Platforms on the Prevention of Deviance Like Kidnapping of Women from Feminist Perspective. MicroBlog as an Example

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Abstract. A video of a Chinese mother of eight locked in a slum hut in Feng county with chains around her neck has sparked outrage and shock in China. This deviance not only reveals the need to improve China's current women's protection laws, but also the cultural value of some rural areas in China. To better understand the significance of the Internet for women's safety protection in China, the paper analyzed the positive role of Internet platforms in changing both the attitudes of Internet users and legislation in promoting feminism on the exposure and dissemination of the MicroBlog platform for the Feng County Incident. Based on the data analysis, there were promising findings that at the legal level, the deputies to the National People's Congress and members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference were able to fill the gaps in the law by proposing proposals aimed at breaking the law and combating trafficking in women. In the meanwhile, netizens were reflecting on the need for women's safety protection in China, which set the stage for future feminism development in China. While more research was conducted to point out the adverse effects of online platforms, this study, on the other hand, creatively adopts an interdisciplinary approach and places more emphasis on the positive role that these flourishing 21st-century information platforms have played in the development of women's safety protection and feminism in China.

Keywords: Feminism · Mass Media · Personal Safety Protection · Deviance

1 Introduction

A video of a Chinese mother of eight locked in a slum hut with chains around her neck has sparked outrage and shock in China. The video was shot by a man who visited the woman and was visibly shocked. The video went viral among Chinese netizens, demanding that authorities intervene to help her. Many also discussed the abuse of women in rural China and their limited rights and questioned the circumstances under which the woman in Xuzhou, in eastern Jiangsu province, gave birth to her eight children. On February 17, the Jiangsu provincial government decided to set up an investigation team to investigate

the “woman with eight children in Feng County” incident to launch a comprehensive investigation and Dong Zhimin suspected of trafficking in women has been confirmed by the public security authorities on February 10.

Since the event occurred in early 2022, there are no current essays on the event. However, Professor Dongyan Lao of Tsinghua University Law School, President Weihua Guo of the People’s Court, and Professor Meijin Li of People’s the Public Security University of China have all interpreted the event from a legislative dimension.

But the Feng County Incident not only reveals the need to improve China’s current women’s protection laws, but also the cultural value of some rural areas in China. And more importantly, the Internet needs to be recognized for its ability to help China improve women’s rights protection in both legal and ideological dimensions. At the same time, because the Feng County Incident reflects the persecution of women by the patriarchal system, the discussion of feminism on various social media platforms has become more heated than ever. As the story spread, the term “feminism” came into the limelight. Although there have been studies by Chinese scholars on the impact of the Internet on feminism, more emphasis has been placed on the negative effects, such as feminist stigmatization [20, 21]. Therefore, the paper analyzed the positive role of Internet platforms in changing both the attitudes of Internet users and legislation in promoting feminism on women’s personal safety protection.

2 Literature Review

Dong Zhimin’s suspicion of trafficking in women has been confirmed by the public security authorities. Feng County incident reveals that there may be some connection with the ideological culture within a certain area, and Internet platforms show some potential in protecting women like Yang. To understand the cause and the impact of the incident, the following passage reviews three topics.

2.1 Policy Improvement

Fangfang and Guangjie suggested that sex discrimination in China is a product of private ownership and patriarchy, and is a typical backward culture of feudal society [1]. Although the status of women rebounded during the Tang and Han dynasties [2, 3], on the whole, women have always been dependent on men in traditional society.

Since the founding of the people’s Republic of China in 1949, the belief inequality between men and women has gradually prevailed, and the state has adopted a series of laws and regulations to protect women’s rights and interests [4], for example, the adoption of the Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in 1949, which enabled women to enjoy equal rights with men in political, economic and cultural fields.

After the 1980s, Jiang Zemin proposed that “equality between men and women should be a basic state policy to promote China’s social development.” Since then, equality between men and women has been established in politics and law, which has facilitated the development of gender equality [7].

Yet, as Xiang Luo, a professor at the School of Criminal Justice and director of the Institute of Criminal Law at China University of Political Science and Law, said after the incident came to light, for the crime of trafficking women, the buyer and seller are punished with three years and the death penalty, respectively. Such penalties are mismatched—the criminal law is significantly weaker against the former. Therefore the sale and purchase of the same crime, effectively curb the development of the criminal industry chain. Thus, we can also see that the laws in China today still have a long way to go in defending women's rights.

2.2 Culture Value

Though, generally speaking, the status of women in China has indeed improved over years through policy, rural areas are still deeply influenced by the patriarchal system and the traditional marriage system, so gender equality has not really been achieved. As Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech at the Global Summit of Women, the various forms of discrimination against women still exist [8].

According to Wenkang [10], there is still a widespread belief (especially in rural areas) that only men can be the symbol of heirlooms and the continuation of the family. Demographic economists have analyzed gender preferences from a cost-utility perspective, arguing that the relative utility of boys is higher than that of girls, and that utility is not limited to economic utility such as male labor and childbearing, but also includes psychological utilities, such as the ability to raise a family and maintain the family's socioeconomic status. And as Jingwen says: the social division of labor in rural areas, where “men dominate the outside world and women dominate the home”, has greatly diminished their values [9].

As a result, some stop their pregnancy after receiving an ultrasound or abandon, give away or just kill the baby girl, which caused a significant decrease in the number of baby girls born from the 1980s onward, laying the groundwork for an imbalance in the sex ratio between men and women [13].

Yet, at the same time, due to the local influence of the ideology of “more children, more blessings” and “No offspring is the greatest disrespect to the ancestors”, there is a strong need to be married. As Xiujuan among the many illegal marriages, there is an even worse illegal marriage, namely the trafficking of women into forced marriage [14]. Some women are abducted by traffickers and sold to local young and old bachelors as “wives” at a price, forcing them to form tragic marriages and deformed families. And the trafficking of women has still not disappeared; on the contrary, the women trafficking industry has spread to other countries, such as Vietnam. Families who buy “Vietnamese brides” are the main targets of life for male family members who have lost competitiveness in the local marriage market [15].

2.3 Chinese Feminism and Network Influence

With the growth of the Internet, the development of feminism has been somewhat affected as well. Intersectionality now enjoys remarkable contemporary popularity and prevalence in the feminist blogosphere [18]. As Kingston suggests that new media are increasingly the focus of control and surveillance [17], and as Scarborough and Helmuth

mention: social media indeed gives people the opportunity to connect with others from geographically distant areas, and online discourse is strongly shaped by the local space that users inhabit [16].

Apart from China, in Southeast Asia, India, for example, which has more similarities with China and its history of development than the West, is also forging new paths in feminist development particular on women's personal safety protection.

As Adrija Dey says: with the power of information, communication, connection, and collaboration, activists around the globe have begun to use digital spaces to mobilize and generate collective action and solidarity [19]. In India, this was evident in the protests following the Nirbhaya case that social media can create a space that enables women to share their experiences and to manipulate laws and state restrictions on their protests.

The development of feminism in the Chinese region may still be in its infancy. Yet, through the example of the Feng County incident, the Internet indeed shows us its potential to promote feminism in the Chinese region.

While the internet offers a free platform for expression, more research was conducted to analyze some non-feminist and feminist-smearing rhetoric that has led to feminist stigmatization on internet platforms in China [20, 21]. But it is safe to argue that the positive role of the Internet in promoting feminism should not be easily disregarded. Therefore, this thesis examines the positive role of mass media, as exemplified by MicroBlog, for the protection of women's rights in folkways, mores, and law.

3 Methodology

The study adopts both quantitative and qualitative research. A questionnaire study was conducted to better understand the significance of the Internet for feminism in China. By analyzing the exposure and dissemination of the MicroBlog platform for the Feng County Incident on feminist and non-feminist concerns about gender equality, this study aims to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the public's concern about the current state of women's existence in China. The study also examines the official statement of the Ministry of Public Security of the People's Republic of China in 2022, as well as the proposals of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People's Congress (NPC) to analyze the impact of the Feng County Incident in terms of legislation.

3.1 Questionnaire

For questionnaires, a non-probability convenience sample will be recruited. The purpose was to invite users and non-users of MicroBlog to participate who have known about the Feng County incident in the study, to examine whether micro-bloggers continued concern, retweets, and discussions about the Feng County event had any capacity to keep more non-micro-bloggers informed of the event's development by expanding their influence.

The 10-item questions use a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). A sample item is "I believe it is necessary to promote equal rights for women in marriage and childbirth after learning about

the Feng County incident.” The study conducted a Y/N and 5-point Likert scale survey to analyze the impact of the publication of the Feng County event on Weibo and the official platform on netizens’ knowledge and approval of feminism, especially female fertility.

At the same time, subjects who participated in the questionnaire were assessed for their change in mood after being confronted with negative news which specifically showed the encroachment on women’s rights in relation to being a potential feminist supporter. An interview was conducted with the consent of the participants, who had completed the questionnaire and they were free to comment on their perceptions of the events in Fountain County in the area at the end of the questionnaire if there were anything they wanted to add to explain their choices. The scale ranged from 1 (very anti-feminist) to 5 (neutral/objective) to 9 (very pro-feminist).

The questionnaires were distributed by forwarding QR codes with the help of MicroBlog, WeChat moment, and Wechat public account operators who have published reports and comments on the Feng County incident.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS. To investigate the relationship between knowledge of events and attitudes toward feminism in Fountain County, mean scores will first be calculated for participants’ variables.

Since all participants in the study will be anonymous, the names of the participants will not appear in the study. And before the study is conducted, the purpose of the study will be given in advance and all participants will fill out the questionnaire with the consent to participate in this study.

3.2 Content Analysis of Policy Documents

In addition to examining the impact of the Feng County incident on the public’s perception of feminism, this study examines the official statement of the Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China in 2022, as well as the proposals of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the National People’s Congress (NPC) to see if there is any potential for the online users to arouse the awareness from the representative of National People’s Congress.

By comparing the political system in 2022 with the political system in 2022 before the events in Feng County came to light, the study investigated whether the voice of the internet population may have some chance to participate in politics through a system of people’s representation, particularly in the case of women’s abduction and trafficking, which demonstrate the patriarchal oppression of the female body; and have a more substantial impact on feminist development.

4 Results

A total of 244 questionnaires were collected in the survey, of which 29.51% were from males and 70.08% from females (one transgender person appeared in 244 questionnaires) and 75% of the 244 questionnaires were from young people between the ages of 17 and 28. Due to the low data in some sample sizes at the time of data collection, it was too vague or broad to be included and generalizability may not be promised. To make the

Table 1. The distribution of the knowledge of the incident

Styles	Number	Percentage within the group (%)
Users of MicroBlog	155	90.12
Non-users of MicroBlog	40	55.56

study more targeted and scientific, the study will analyze the impact of the Feng County Incident overall.

4.1 Questionnaire

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4.1.1 Dissemination

The data shows that 172 out of 244 people use MicroBlog, accounting for 70.49% of the total number. The details of the survey are shown in Table 1.

This table reflects the number and percentage of MicroBlog users and non-users who are aware of the events in Feng County. The data shows that 90.12% of people who use MicroBlog have learned about the Fengxian incident, compared to 55.56% of non-blog users.

The data shows that knowledge of the Feng County incident led to a 21.77% increase in the percentage of people who knew the definition of feminism and a 6.55% increase in the percentage of people who approved of feminism for social gender equality.

4.1.2 Influence on Psychological and Cognitive Levels

To study the impact of exposure and dissemination of the Incident on the psychological and cognitive levels of people, the essay researched the agreement of people in A, B, and C directions.

A: You agree that the exposure and dissemination of this story have made you more aware of the current situation of women in some contemporary rural areas of China.

B1/B2: You agree: the incident reflects the negative effect of the patriarchal system and unhealthy thinking about marriage and childbirth on women/men.

C: After learning about the incident, you have become more convinced of the need to develop feminism for gender equality.

A scale of 1 to 5 respectively indicates: strongly disagree, relatively disagree, unsure/neutral, relatively agree, and strongly agree.

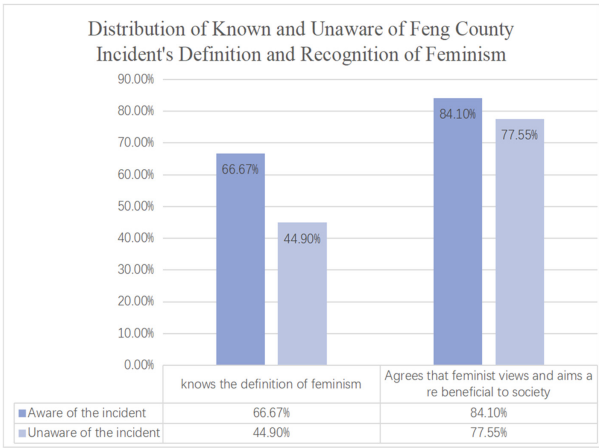


Fig. 1. Distribution of the knowing of definition and recognition of feminism among those aware and unaware of Feng County Incident

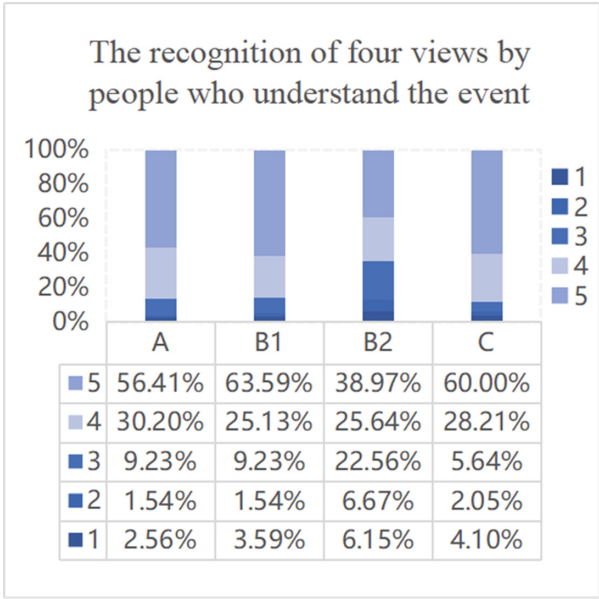


Fig. 2. The impact of exposure and dissemination of the Incident on the psychological and cognitive levels of people

The mean scores for each group were 4.36 for A, 4.44 for B1, 3.85 for B2, and 4.38 for C.

This study confirms the previous figure (Fig. 1) about understanding that the Feng Country event has increased the recognition of feminist development among internet users to some extent (Fig. 2).

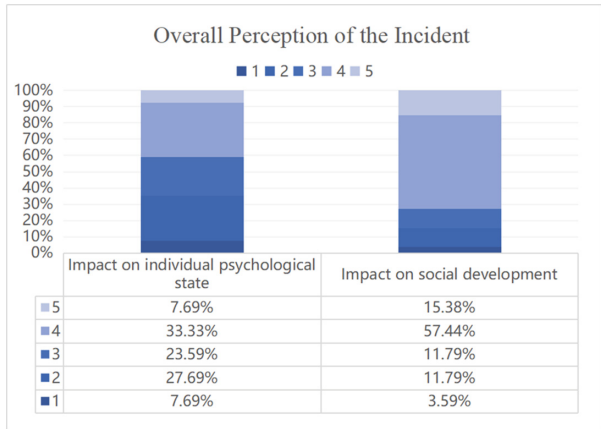


Fig. 3. The Overall Impact of Feng County Incident

4.1.3 Overall Perception

Next, the survey considered the impact of the way the event was handled on people. It also investigated the combined effect of the triple factors of exposure, dissemination, and handling of the event.

The scales from 1 to 5 indicate: very negative, relatively negative, uncertain/no effect, relatively positive, and very positive, respectively (Fig. 3).

The mean scores for impact on individual psychological state and social development were 3.06 and 3.69. The event is essentially neutral in terms of subjective psychological feelings of the person and marginally positive in terms of its contribution to society.

4.2 Content Analysis of Policy

First, the Ministry of Public Security decided that from March 1 to December 31 to carry out special operations to combat trafficking in women and children, and effectively safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of women and children. The Ministry of Public Security requires a deep understanding of the current new situation and new features of the crime of trafficking, the special action to combat trafficking in women and children is a key task this year.

Besides, in the Motion and Proposal presented by China in Two sessions in 2022, we found that some of them are specifically aimed at a crackdown on the trafficking of women and children.

For example, Wenmin Xie, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, suggested that to effectively combat the crime of abduction and trafficking of women and children, it is recommended that schools and public security bureaus, women's federations and hospitals establish genetic databases, and called for the phased implementation of the collection of genes from 0 to 18 years of age to establish genetic databases throughout the country. So when abducted people are found, they can be timely confirmed and rescued through DNA comparison.

On March 5, Xiaoxuan Li, a deputy to the National People's Congress, said that the current sentences and penalties for the buyers are light and that he advised amending the law to achieve equal punishment for buyers and sellers of trafficked women and children.

The feedback from these proposals addresses the prevention of trafficking in women in multiple dimensions, including medical and legal. Thus our results demonstrated that: though the online platform itself can only play a role in reporting and monitoring, by drawing the attention of public security departments and NPC and CPPCC representatives, it can protect women's rights and interests at the legislative and enforcement levels, thus promoting feminism.

5 Discussion

The results indicate that the MicroBlog platform has considerably increased awareness of the Feng County Incident among the platform's users. The trending topic and trending hashtag of MicroBlog seem to have largely helped more people to know about Feng County Incident. But it is also important to consider that with Information Cocoons, people may not pay attention to the topics they are not interested in. So, while hashtags can increase attention, people still have great power to control what they see or hear.

Although the data shows that people who use MicroBlog are more aware of the Feng County incident, it also raises another question: the effect of the digital divide cannot be ignored as well. In terms of perception: it allows people in urban areas (e.g. Beijing) to understand the real situation of rural women's survival in some parts of China and gives people the opportunity to reflect on the damage of the patriarchal social system to the rights of both sexes to marry and raise children. Also by reading the comments in the comments section, one learns more about feminism and the different perspectives on the event. Thus, on a psychological level: it increases to a certain extent the recognition necessary for the development of feminism. But based on the digital divide, we can learn that: worldwide, the subordinate groups like low-income people and rural residents have less access to the latest technologies. While Chinese company Huawei is committed to developing 5G technology, and China has fully lifted all of its poor out of poverty by 2020, the purpose is to realize that the poor do not have to worry about food and clothing, and to guarantee their compulsory education, basic medical care, and housing. Therefore, their further access to technology is still on our way to achieving. So at this stage, we can argue that the MicroBlog can only further raise the importance of women's rights in urban areas, such as Beijing, while it does have dysfunction like exacerbating the differences in folkways between urban and rural populations.

In line with the hypothesis: through the network platform, people can more effectively realize the civic responsibility of prosecution and supervision. Besides, during the survey, a follow-up data study was conducted and found that 68.72% of users had seen questions about the official notification on online platforms. Of these people, 90.30% agreed that these challenges advanced the progress of the survey. Undeniably, if there is no netizen to spread the video to the network. Considering the local traffic and limited communication, it would be difficult to uncover the woman's abduction.

And all in all, this research confirms the role of Internet platforms in promoting feminism. At the legal level, the NPC deputies and CPPCC members were able to fill

the gaps in the law by proposing proposals aimed at breaking the law and combating trafficking in women. However, the law only serves as a moral floor, and there is a time lag in filling legal gaps, so the law alone is not enough if we want to better protect women's rights. More importantly, the online platform can draw more people's attention to women's rights. On the MicroBlog platform, there are not only professors of law to interpret and call for netizens' attention to the Feng County Incident, but Professor Ning Yan of College of life science, Tsinghua University, Ning Yan, a professor at the College of Life Science, Tsinghua University, Fei Deng, editorial board member and director of journalism at PHOENIX WEEKLY, and Jingfang Hao, winner of the 74th Hugo Award, all also spoke out about the incident. There are also literary artists who have created paintings, sculptures, and other artworks based on the event. As a result, Feng County Incident has been very influential and widespread. More importantly, based on the data analysis, there are some promising findings that netizens are also reflecting on the need for feminism in China. That is to say, the event demonstrates the ability of the Internet to increase the number of potential feminist supporters, setting the stage for future feminist development in China.

Yet, contrary to the hypothesized association, the overall perception of events is not entirely optimistic.

Though 84.43% of the respondents are willing to reasonably and legally protect women's rights and interests than 70% said there is no channel to achieve it. The rest said they could appeal through the internet, or get help from the government. Both of these pathways, although their positive effects are reflected in the above, they are not totally promising.

59.49% of the respondents said they had found that reasonable questions and comments on the Internet were deleted by the platform and their accounts were blocked. This has led more than 90% of people who have found this to say: It has reduced their confidence that the matter can be resolved properly.

And how the incident was handled by government agencies is a factor that cannot be ignored as well. For example, on 28 January 2022, the propaganda department of the county party committee of Jiangsu Feng County claimed: that the woman was married to Dong by license in August 1998 and there was no abduction, which was indeed against the truth. On February 23, 2022, the Jiangsu provincial government investigation group acclaimed that Dong was suspected of abuse. According to the definition of the crime of abuse in Chinese criminal law: it refers to the physical and mental destruction and persecution of family members living together. In a way, it somehow recognizes that this kind of marriage of abducted women is legal.

It should be emphasized, however, that the fact that the incident came to light through microblogging platforms rather than the mainstream media does not mean that officials do not care about the rights of Chinese women. Rather, it is because following the reporting procedures from official channels takes longer in the context of this incident, yet the fermentation of online opinion is very rapid. Meanwhile, the propaganda department of Jiangsu Fengxian county party committee quickly denied the information about "women kidnapping" for the first time, more because the online media environment is mixed, just by virtue of a video can not be judged that there are bloggers or netizens fabricated stories, or deliberately distort the facts in order to gain attention.

However, the generalizability of the results is limited by the following factors: the sample size was quite small. Thus the data collection was mainly focused on people aged 18–27 in the Beijing area, and the sample of males was relatively limited. Therefore due to the lack of available data, the results cannot confirm how the younger generation aged under 18 think of the incident, or whether or not the sample is from a different region makes a significant difference to the results. For example, how does the exposure to the Feng County Incident affect people in rural China with similar conditions? For example, how does this incident affect the people who have a preference for boys and discrimination against women? Further research is needed to establish data to be able to study age and regional differences.

6 Conclusion

First, the study creatively adopts an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the Feng County Incident, based on sociology and integrating knowledge of law and media to interpret it in a multidimensional manner. In a sense, it also recognizes the positive effect that the Internet platform has had in the 21st century in different areas.

In the meanwhile, the study aims to determine the impact of the exposure and dissemination capacity of Internet platforms on the population and government departments, respectively. Based on the quantitative analysis of respondents' psychology and perceptions and the qualitative analysis of the government department's statements, it can be concluded that online platforms can lay the foundation for the future development of feminism by promoting people's understanding and recognition of feminism. At the same time, online platforms show their potential to increase the impact of events, leading to expanded protections for women at the legislative and enforcement levels. By reinforcing the three aspects of folkways, mores, and law for people to take the act of kidnapping women as deviance, the notion that one must marry and procreate would not be a reasonable defense for kidnapping.

Research on Cyberfeminism and the impact of Online Platforms on Feminism could continue in several directions. First, this research clearly illustrates the positive impact on MicroBlog, but it also raises the question of side effects. Since the focus of this study is more on the impact of the exposure and dissemination of the event, the comprehensive effect caused by MicroBlog's comments is beyond the scope of this study. Although in the above article I mentioned that MicroBlog's comments can contribute to official investigations. However, when considered in combination with its negative aspects, it is not certain whether the role of comments on feminist development is positive. Therefore, further research is needed to establish the impact of MicroBlog's comments on feminist development. Second, according to the data comparison between B1 and B2, it can also be found that people are more likely to be aware of the patriarchal power against women when they are confronted with incidents of women's rights being violated. But the adverse effects of patriarchy on men seem to be more difficult to be perceived. So more attention could also be paid to the influence of gender in the development of online feminism.

Though more studies have examined the stigmatization of feminism on Chinese Internet platforms, pointing out the adverse effects of online platforms or self-media, this

study, on the other hand, places more emphasis on the positive role that these flourishing 21st-century information platforms have played for feminism in China, which has a relatively short history compares with the West. As I mentioned in the literature review, the development of feminism cannot only depend on the law, but more importantly, it can generate public awareness and make more people understand that the essence of feminism is the pursuit of gender equality. Therefore it cannot be assumed that feminism is only fighting for the interests of female groups just because the root of the word feminism is female. Feng County Incident shows that the Internet offers a brand-new and effective way for women to pursue equal rights. Although this is only the first debut of an internet platform in promoting the cause of feminism, I believe that the internet can help China make up for the lack of feminist development time course and then prosper.

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