

A Brief Study of Women's Image in the New Media Environment

Rongchuan Zhou^{1,a,*}

¹Foreign Languages Department, Tianjin University Renai College, Tianjin, 301600, China

a. zrc021206@126.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: With the development of new media technology and the iteration of social media and short video platforms, women are able to grasp more voices through various ways and opportunities, and at the same time create more values with women themselves as the main body, breaking the stereotypes of women in society. This paper analyzes the transformation of the “stereotypical” female image in traditional media dramas by citing some female characters in dramas, while using social news and certain social phenomena as the starting point to discuss the impact of new media on the promotion of women’s image on screen and women’s discourse. Finally, we reflect on the dilemma faced by women in the current new media environment. The platform of new mediaplays a role in providing a more comprehensive understanding of this change for many participants in the self-media environment, and correctly views the impact of the construction of women’s image on new media platforms, and draws attention to the other dilemmas brought by new media platforms to women.

Keywords: new media, discourse, women’s image, stereotypes

1. Introduction

Before the emergence of new media platforms, women’s image was mainly presented through traditional communication methods such as TV dramas and movies, and the portrayal of women’s roles was relatively homogeneous, which often led people to form stereotypes, such that women should be gentle and considerate, they should know how to read and write, and women should take care of their families and children to realize their value. However, with the rise of new media, women can record and present their own “female image” and have more say, instead of limiting the presentation of women to the stereotypes of some people. More diverse, comprehensive, and objective images of women have been widely disseminated through the Internet via short videos and various social media, and more attention has been paid to the social dilemmas faced by women as subjects. This essay analyzes women’s on-screen image and various social phenomena, focusing on the transformation of women’s image in TV dramas and the explosion of many dramas focusing on urban women in the workplace, recognizing that new media has a positive impact on the shaping of women’s image on screen, and that in the current new media environment, more and more people are discussing various difficulties faced by women on the Internet, such as domestic violence, workplace harassment, etc. In addition, with the new media environment, more and more people are discussing various difficulties faced by women, such as domestic violence, workplace harassment,

etc. At the same time, with the advent of the “her economy”, women’s needs for various products are also being emphasized and met. However, in the new media environment, women are gaining more voice and receiving some negative influences that affect their normal life. By summarizing the above problems, this paper contributes to the creation of a good new media environment and helps to improve women’s voice, and also helps the society to reflect on the problem of online violence and prejudice brought by new media to women and draw more people’s attention.

2. The Portrayal of Women in Early Traditional Media

When new media did not emerge or were widely used, people were relatively passive in receiving information through television, and the range of choices was relatively limited. The image of women shown in TV dramas in the past was also relatively flat, and the image of women was often presented by film teams with a male perspective. For example, in *Beijing Women’s Illustrated Book*, one of the criteria for the success of the female lead is to be able to buy luxury bags. For example, in *Beijing Women’s Illustrated Book*, one of the criteria of success for the female lead is to be able to buy luxury bags, and material consumption becomes the first step for women to become independent; for example, in a large number of Mary Sue dramas, the female characters are often silly and sweet, while the male lead is a successful person with power and ability; although more screen images of women in the workplace have emerged in recent years, some of them do not break the boundaries of “male gaze” in terms of essential expression. For example, Andy in a TV series called *Ode to Joy* is always able to overcome problems in her life with the help of male leaders. Instead of focusing on women’s self-growth and self-efficacy, they are held hostage by the power of men. In addition, despite the growing number of big female dramas focusing on women’s growth, some court dramas are based on the main conflict of various fights between women for the emperor’s preference, and fundamentally do not get rid of the male-oriented thinking.

3. The Impact of New Media on Traditional Media in Shaping the Role of Women

Social media has conscripted more voices for women, and the portrayal of women is changing on screen. In the past, women’s roles were often portrayed in movies and TV dramas in the image expected by the public, but the use of new media platforms by women has broken the stereotypes of people and at the same time promoted the creation of movies and TV dramas, from the explosion of big female dramas focusing on women’s growth to the broadcast of dramas such as *Nothing But Thirty* and *Remembrance of Things Past* with several urban working women as the main line. Many of these dramas resonate with viewers through their lifelike narratives and by revealing the difficulties women encounter in the real world. In *Delicious Romance*, real-life problems such as “unfairness in the workplace” and “elders pushing for marriage” are well integrated into the plot, as well as the traditional belief of parents that a relationship should be “stronger for men than women in terms of work and economy”. The traditional parental belief that a relationship should be normal and acceptable only if the man is more capable than the woman. These problems revealed in the TV series have similarities with real-life workplace injustices, such as the “company waiver of liability in case of pregnancy” that has attracted attention on social media.

3.1. The Promotion of New Media on the Image of Women

The interactivity and immediacy of new media have broken the collective silence of women in traditional media, giving women an unprecedented voice and a platform to speak out on their own, making them the main subject of gender communication in new media [1].

As McGuire has said, “Almost all public media have the potential to be radical in terms of their ability to undermine the dominant system of social control. They can provide access to new ideas

and concepts against the existing order.” [2]. On the new media platform, women can be the creators of their own videos, and all the content is led by women themselves, including the creation of scripts, filming techniques, and the choice of perspectives. Women of different ages, different life backgrounds and professional backgrounds can use a cell phone to record their daily lives, and in the videos they share, people can more truly feel the different images of women - “wisdom”, “courage” and “independence”, “brave” and “independent”. “Anchor Pan Xiaorong” shows her excellent working ability in dealing with various unexpected situations by recording her daily work in the TV station; “papi jiang” starts from the small things in life, and her funny and humorous image is deeply popular.

3.2. New Media’s Promotion of Women’s Voice

In addition, when women face difficulties in society, there are more efficient and direct channels to defend their rights. A female employee of Ernst & Young reported her sexual harassment by an executive on a social media platform, which quickly drew widespread attention from the media, netizens and the corresponding company; beauty blogger Yu Ya posted her video of domestic violence in the media, which not only made society pay attention to the harm brought by domestic violence to women, but also inspired many women in the same predicament to bravely defend their own interests. Thanks to the development of the short video industry and the expansion of its user base, the influence and power of the content posted by women in it is also expanding rapidly, so presenting their image in short videos is not only a way of self-expression, but also a means of self-empowerment. The concept of empowerment was introduced by Solomon in 1976 [3]. The addition of a gender perspective to empowerment theory has led to the emergence of two terms that are used more frequently, namely “women’s empowerment” and “empowering women” [4].

3.3. New Media Boosts “Her Economy”

The development of new media technology has provided women with a broader space for self-expression and image building, while also subtly changing people’s consumption habits, in the new media platform, many bloggers with a high fan base and a certain degree of influence through live streaming or “goodies recommendation”, “unboxing video”, etc. to recommend goods for sale, “unboxing video” and other ways to recommend the sale of goods. According to questmobile data, as of 2021, the scale of female mobile Internet users in China has reached 547 million [5]. And with the development of the economy, women’s consumption ability and willingness to consume are gradually increasing, and a new economic form has emerged - “her economy”. “Her economy” means that as women’s economic and social status improves, they have stronger spending power and drive economic activity, forming a unique economic circle and economic phenomenon around women’s financial management and consumption [6]. In order to occupy a larger female market, the number of products built around women’s needs and ideas has also gradually increased. Jiang Xiaobai’s Meimei fruit wine, Rui’ao’s micro-brewed low alcohol sweet wine for women, Miyu software that records women’s physiological cycles, and brands such as ubras that create comfortable underwear for women all show that women are increasingly becoming a target group for businesses, and that women’s needs for more products are being actively listened to or developed. Women’s position in the economic market is also progressing

3.4. New Media Brings New Distress to Women

At the same time, we should also be aware that while the new Internet media are constantly penetrating into our daily life, people’s cognition and perceptions are also being influenced by them. Contextualization theory, proposed by Gerbner, suggests that the mimetic environment suggested

by mass media has an important influence on people's perception and understanding of the real society, and this influence is a long-term, subtle, "nurturing" process [7]. The "aesthetic persuasion" conveyed by new media platforms such as Tiktok, XiaohongShu and Weibo will silently influence users' value judgments, thus causing the widespread spread of "appearance anxiety" [8]. As the traffic attention attracted by the new media platform gradually increases, it brings more influence. Modern society is a consumer society surrounded by materialistic desires. Through the guidance of media and extensive advertising, mass consumption under consumerism is constantly created [9].

Many Netlix, through the media, often appear in the viewer's field of vision with a pretty face, a good figure, and a "white, young, and thin" image, and most of them have become successful figures in the public perception through the marketing of self-media. Netizens maintain their "white, young and thin" body and appearance in order to attract traffic, and advertisers use netizens as intermediaries to promote beauty products for product sales, creating the illusion of "face value supremacy". This environment subconsciously connotes the audience's values and creates a mimetic world of "face value first", "face era" and "white and young and thin". Under the connotation of the media environment, people's aesthetics are gradually homogeneous and homogeneous [8].

Under the influence of this concept, people will always compare themselves with the image of online celebrities on new media platforms, which leads to self-image disapproval and the so-called "appearance anxiety". At the same time, as people tend to show their outstanding aspects of themselves, and under the influence of new media, these characteristics are magnified. While the audience accepts the excellent image of netizens, the information they get is not equal and comprehensive to a certain extent, which causes other "anxieties".

In addition, according to the China Internet Network Information Center, as of December 2022, the size of China's Internet users reached 1.067 billion, with a penetration rate of 75.6% [10]. Many of these people still have prejudices against women, and the interactive and instantaneous nature of new media platforms makes it possible for people to generalize and speculate on the content posted by creators on social media, thus making malicious comments that are damaging to others' reputation or personally hurtful. Despite the fact that in November 2022, the Central Internet Information Office issued the Notice on Effectively Strengthening the Governance of Online Violence, which requires website platforms to establish governance mechanisms for early warning, protection, and non-proliferation of online violence. Various platforms are also improving their mechanisms, but net violence against women still happens from time to time. The "pink-haired girl" Zheng Linghua, who was pictured with her grandfather, was insulted by random comments about her misconduct because of her hair color, and despite her repeated requests to delete the comments and actively seek solutions, she eventually died of depression due to the pressure of the Internet.

4. Conclusion

Through the study of social news and other examples, this paper concludes that in the new media environment, women can use the new media platform to actively express themselves, show their demands, and expose unfair dilemmas, thus having a positive impact on promoting the image of women on screen, promoting women's voice, and meeting women's product needs in the consumer field. New media platforms have indeed built a more reasonable and efficient platform for building a diverse image of women, guiding and helping women to speak out, and exposing the difficulties and injustices faced by women. In addition, women have become the main players in short-form video platforms, gaining more voice and the rapid development of the economy, women's opinions and needs have been increasingly valued in the consumer market. However, at the end of the article, we only propose new challenges faced by women in the new media environment, such as online violence and various "anxieties", and do not propose practical solutions. A truly harmonious and

orderly new media environment. With the continuous improvement of the rules of the new media platform, the quality of the society and the efforts of all parties to clean up the online environment and dispel the prejudices and stereotypes of women, the future new media platform will give more equal voices and rights to women.

References

- [1] Xia Yang, *Presentation of Women's Image and Discourse Construction in the New Media Perspective*. [J] Sep15,2017.
- [2] Dennis McGuire: *McGuire's Theory of Mass Communication (4th edition)*, [M] translated by Baoguo Cui and Kun Lin, Tsinghua University Press, 2006, p. 34.
- [3] Chen Shuqiang. *Empowerment: A new vision of social work theory and practice* [J]. *Sociological Research*, 2003, (5).
- [4] Yang Liu, *New Media and Women's Empowerment: Mechanisms, Effectiveness and Reflection in the Perspective of Gender Communication*[J] Mar 15,2021.
- [5] QuestMobile2021 "her economy" report [EB/OL]. PengPai News,2021-03-11. https://m.thepaper.cn/baijiahao_11626
- [6] Cong Huang, "The construction of women's self-awareness by new media in the context of "her economy. [J] Mar 5,2002.
- [7] Qingguang Guo. *Tutorial of Communication* [M]. Beijing: People's University of China Press, 2011: 205.
- [8] Hehui Zhu, *A Perspective on Women's "Appearance Anxiety" on New Media Platforms Based on Connotation Theory* [J] Aug 25,2022.
- [9] Kui Yang, *The Symbolic Characteristics of Consumerist Culture and Mass Communication*. [J] Jan28,2003.
- [10] China Internet Network Information Center. *The 47th Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China* [EB/OL].