The Impact of Online Media Development, and Information Dissemination on LGBTQ Marginalised People

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Abstract: The purpose of this topic is to study the positive and negative impacts of the internet and media on LGBTQ people. This is because, with China's rapid development, the speed and breadth of information dissemination in social platforms and media is increasing. More and more sexual minority young people are participating in discussions on social media, sharing their lives, gender identity, and sexual orientation, and expressing their views and opinions. However, the fact that the phenomenon of verbal violence continues to affect the LGBTQ community while providing vulnerable groups with access to information, knowledge, resources and empowerment cannot be ignored. This study conducted interviews with a random sample of LGBTQ people in different regions of China in order to analyse the positive and negative messages about LGBTQ people on the internet from a more humane perspective. The results of the interviews also illustrate the harm caused by verbal harassment and violence to the LGBTQ community. Some LGBTQ people, when faced with such unequal treatment, will rise and fight back, expressing their dissatisfaction and fighting for their rights through self-empowerment in the form of words or behaviours. The dominant mindset is to avoid such harm and discuss and entertain it in their social communities.

Keywords: LGBTQ, China, media, internet, inequality

1.   Introduction

The affirmative action movement for the LGBTQ community has caused greater social change in Western societies. Equal rights have been gained, and gay marriage has been legalised in parts of Europe and North America, but they are still subjected to negative attitudes from the heterosexual majority in their daily lives [1]. LGBTQ are often victims of verbal harassment, ostracism, and crime. George Weinberg coined the term homophobia in the late 1960s to describe the phenomenon of homophobic prejudice and stigma [2]. Moreover, in countries where social acceptance of this minority group is low, the risk of LGBTQ people being targeted because of their sexual or gender identity is even higher.

At China's current stage of development, LGBTQ people, as a marginalised population, will encounter a variety of discrimination and prejudice in their daily lives as they develop themselves. The lack of relevant literature and resources leads to a lack of guidance for developing LGBTQ people in China. The anonymity of the internet protects their privacy and gives them a sense of security, and they rely on online resources to learn more about their community and find people like

themselves. Moreover, in recent years COVID-19 has led to the transfer of many real-life socialisations to social platforms connected with the internet, and networks and people have become more connected. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how media and information dissemination can help LGBTQ in the Chinese cultural and social environment, and how verbal harassment and prejudice on the internet can negatively affect them.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The explanation of LQBTQ

LQBTQ represents a group of sub-populations who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other. They are a group with different sexual orientations and gender identities than the heterosexual population [3] Records related to homosexual activity and same-sex love can be found in almost every documented culture, some of them accepted some rejected.

2.2. The Violence and Inequality Treatment of LGBTQ People

Currently, there are different views on LGBTQ people. Some adhere to the conservative ideology that LGBTQ people are not normal, especially children unless they hide or change their nature and take on roles that are acceptable to them as 'just like everyone else'[3]. In Allport's The Nature of Prejudice, it is suggested that part of the rejection of LGBTQ people comes from cultural conformity. People unconsciously or consciously conform to traditions, such as the idea that one should fall in love and have sex with the opposite sex or that men should be "masculine" in the sense that they are men. When people who break traditional beliefs are present, isolation and bullying can occur.

In China, the different environment and humanities of other countries may bring about different forms of discrimination, for example, heterosexuals may show indifference, deliberate avoidance, and indifference to LGBTQ people. Therefore, there is less literature on LGBTQ people in China. LGBTQ Identity Through Stories and Media Representation: A Cross-cultural Perspective is one of the few studies on the relationship between the media and LGBTQ people that can be found on Chinese journal websites. In this study, Leonardo Tobías Tárraga Arias(2018) uses a multi-method, intersectional inquiry design to demonstrate the connection and interplay between storytelling and LGBTQ identity on the internet[4]. He first administered a generalised questionnaire to 263 participants (comprising both LGBTQ members and non-LGBT members)[4]. In-depth interviews were then conducted with 10 LGBTQ members from around the world. The research methodology is worthwhile, as it is very effective in achieving a multidimensional assessment and getting to know the different ideas of different groups of people. However, it is not analysed from a Chinese perspective, and the development of the internet and the COVID-19 incident in recent years have led to more and more people using and even relying on the internet. It is worthwhile to study the influence of Chinese media, as well as the Chinese internet community, on LGBTQ people and the phenomenon of discrimination.

2.3. Implications of Media Empowerment

In the current state of Chinese society, large-scale mass protests and marches are almost non-existent, and it is more common to express one's views through online discussions, i.e. media empowerment. Traditionally, "empowerment" discussions have focused on "empowering the vulnerable". However, in fact, the discussion on media empowerment involves all people involved in the use of new media. The development of the internet and the popularity of electronic devices have made it possible for both powerful and vulnerable groups in the traditional social sense to

enjoy the same power on online platforms [5]. Some scholars in China have now studied the mutual influence of internet media and LBGTQ people, such as Rouyi Zhang's 2022 journal *New Media Empowerment under Homonormativity - A Study of Young Female LGBTQ's Self-Presentation in Social Media in China*[6]. However, her study focuses on females, and a male homosexual perspective is equally relevant, which is one of the conceptions of this research topic.

3.   Methodology

In order to draw a relationship between the development of online media information and LGBTQ, the research methodology focuses on semi-structured interviews to collect survey data. To analyse the impact of online media development and the dissemination of information and public opinion on LGBTQ people through the interviewers' point of view. In order to ensure the validity of the data, LGBTQ people between the ages of 18 and 30 will be screened out through major social media platforms, and 50 people from various careers will be randomly selected to complete a simple questionnaire about internet social networking. Then 15 people will be selected for more in-depth interviews based on the content and completeness of the answers.

The interview questions focused on four main areas. The first was about the impact of media development on LGBTQ people's perception of themselves. It involves questions about when and under what circumstances the interviewees became aware of being LGBTQ, and whether the internet and the media have helped them to improve their self-perception to some extent. There is a lot of literature to support the idea that homosexuality is genetically linked, with estimates of heritability that men would be attracted to the same sex ranging, from 0.28 to 0.65 having been found in 2000 in a large-scale study of sexual orientation in American twins [7]Kinsey and his team of researchers published a scale of homosexuality in 1939, based on differences in the homosexuality genes carried by each individual, sexual orientation scale. This scale classified homosexuals and heterosexuals into six grades by sexual orientation. On this scale, if the rank is between 1 and 5, under the influence of some social forces, such as growing up in the environment, it will show different sexual orientations[8]. While the online platform is like a society linked by the internet, COVID-19 in recent years has also led to the concentration of people's social activities on the online platform. The impact of the media on LGBTQ people is worth exploring.

The second aspect is about online discussions and media empowerment. It involves analysing the views on the empowering events in question and their perspectives. This will involve whether or not the respondents have been involved in empowerment campaigns, or if this is the main way in which LGBTQ people are empowered. Starting from the idea that "offline marches and affirmative action are extremely rare in China, LGBTQ people's main way of defending their rights and expressing their grievances is online", we will argue whether this idea is consistent with the facts. The third one is about norms and restrictions in online platforms. Interviewees will be asked whether they feel restricted in their discussions due to political sensitivity or personal factors. This is because, judging from the phenomenon that gay marriage is not yet legal in China, the development of LGBTQ people can be hindered by political factors to a certain extent. The fourth is about how the interviewees face the stereotypes of sexual minorities in the general public and the current reality of my situation. Also, during the interviews, recent social media posts about the content and the motivation for sharing them are collected.

In The Rules of Sociological Method, Durkheim suggests that social facts are universal and binding and that coercion and compulsion are repeatedly manifested in individuals because they are imposed on them, especially through education [9]. Similar to education, online media also has the process of information dissemination. In such a mode of existence that is maintained through education, people value and defend the current mode of existence and accordingly devalue or even actively attack those things that seem to threaten our values [10]. It is also for this reason that

LGBTQ people need to accept that they are different from others while accepting the hostility of others towards them in a heteronormative-dominated society. This is the reason for including questions about self-perception and stereotypes of others in the interviews. In contrast, media empowerment and the regulated and restricted online discussions faced is the desire to analyse the acceptance of LGBTQ people in society as a whole in the context of previous homophobic news and homophobic activism.

4.　Results

38 out of 50 participants were self-conscious of their LGBTQ status through their own upbringing, through their relationships with people around them, and through information on the internet, while a small number of them indicated that they were surrounded by LGBTQ people and were gradually led to become homosexuals in the process of getting along with them. There was also one respondent who said that he or she was disgusted by the relationship between his or her parents in his or her childhood. Everyone answered yes to the question of whether or not they had searched for LGBTQ knowledge on the internet. One interviewee said, "I originally thought I was treating her as a good friend, but later I realised that I had developed a different sentiment. Because I grew up in the countryside, the information I can get is very limited. So at that moment, I considered this kind of sentiment is wrong. I then used the weekend when I was home to look up on the internet. I have been secretly keeping the secret, only daring to share it with very close people around me." Another interviewee: "I have deliberately searched for related groups and the fact that I think I would have a strong sense of belonging in LGBTQ social group. And also I would go and research specifically why I became this kind of group, and then have my own ideas and so on."

They also all mentioned how the development of online platforms has made it easier for them to stay in their comfortable social groups. Forty-one of them said that they had not come out publicly, or actively gone out of their way to come clean about their sexual orientation. They generally shared their daily lives discreetly through their circle of friends. At the same time, because of the inner expectation of being recognised by people, they would participate in gay online discussions in order to find people who could understand them.

In the course of the interviews, the interviewees also admitted that they were subjected to various kinds of discrimination and prejudice on the internet. One female interviewee complained, "I made a comment that sex and love have no gender, and then people attacked me. They said that homosexuality is harmful to society and that homosexuality affects normal sex and social development. Then I got scared and deleted that comment." Statistically, there are two main approaches for LGBTQ people when facing online violence, and part of them will reply in a tough way. Seven of the interviewees mentioned that when they were treated unequally in reality or online, they would record and expose the behaviours to get attention and understanding. However, most of them will choose to remain silent and move on to discuss it in LGBTQ communication groups. One interviewee explained, "Most people are apathetic, and I'm scared of speaking out and not being recognised, which hurts me twice. A lot of people know very little about LGBTQ people as a population, and they don't want to; they think it's unnecessary."

Also, one of the interviewees mentioned that in online communication, blogs and videos, people use acronyms or homophones to refer to homosexuality, as if the word "gay" is a sensitive word.

In gathering data, it was also found that the data was basically homosexual-dominated. Bisexuality, pansexuality, and Queers are still in the minority among LGBTQ people in China.

5.   Discussion

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois(2014) defines double consciousness as a personal feeling that one's identity is divided into different parts[11]. From the perspective of LGBTQ people in China, they have been living with the same discrimination and prejudice that heterosexuals have been subjected to, labelled as "psychopaths", "AIDS carriers", and so on. In places where the law is negligent, such as online platforms, they are more vulnerable to different degrees of cyber-violence. At the same time, because of the specificity of the gay community and the difficulty of establishing a relationship, heterosexuals may have overly rosy fantasies about LGBTQ people. For example, several of those interviewed mentioned that there are always people on the internet who think that gay love is beautiful and faithful. But the reality is that the gay population is the same as the general population, and the difference is only in sexual orientation.

During the interviews, we found that although the online environment is much milder than before, most homosexuals still prefer to stay in their own social circles. There are increasingly more social software designed for gays and lesbians, and society's acceptance of and concern for the LGBTQ community is gradually rising. However, it should not be overlooked that this has also led to the segregation and division of LGBTQ social communities from heterosexual ones.

At the same time, based on Kinsey's definition of the Heterosexual–Homosexual Rating Scale(1948) in his survey of human male sexuality, people will be affected by a series of influences in society to manifest different sexual orientations. In China's social environment, most of the information transmitted by families, schools and the media is heterosexual. In the education and social process, people are mostly judged by their physical features, such as appearance. Therefore, a large number of LGBTQ people have gradually developed different perceptions of sexuality and sexual identities after their eyes have been opened and their minds have matured. The media and the internet play a big role in this process, especially in the dissemination of information.

Another finding worth exploring is that people are now gaining more knowledge and acceptance of the homosexual population, but the rest of the LGBTQ community is still on the marginalised side of society. Famous dancer Jin Xing is a transgender person who completed her gender reassignment surgery at the age of 28. Until now, no matter how much she has achieved in the field of business or dance, her identity still brings her a lot of bad comments [12].

6.   Conclusion

In conclusion, this study analyses how the development of the internet and the dissemination of information in the media have had a different impact on LGBTQ from a social influence perspective. Overall, public opinion is becoming more LGBTQ-friendly. The lack of understanding of LGBTQ people can lead to misunderstandings of good or bad intentions. At the same time, the pressures of verbal violence and prejudice have alienated LGBTQ people from heterosexuals, and LGBTQ people are more likely to choose to communicate in their own communities.

The purpose of this study is because, in the current Chinese social environment, many people are neglectful of LGBTQ people. However, the development of the LGBTQ community requires the support of research in various fields. So, it is necessary to stand on the basis of past scholars and theories to study the mutual influence between society and LGBTQ people.

However, there were still some limitations in the research process. The short time frame of the study resulted in incomplete data collection. Homosexuality is a more valued group in the LGBTQ community, and the difficulty in collecting data from pansexual, asexual, transgender, and queer respondents may have affected the results to some extent. In subsequent studies, the avenues for collecting respondents need to be expanded and could be more finely divided on the basis of region and age, among other things.

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