The Characteristics and Causes of the Phenomenon of "Misogyny" in Contemporary Chinese Online Social Platforms: Taking "Weibo" and "Red" as Examples

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Abstract: This research paper delves into the causes and consequences of online misogyny in China's social media space, focusing on the popular platforms Weibo and Red. The study investigated the manifestations and effects of online misogyny and focused explicitly on the "Pick Me Girl" phenomenon, reflecting trends in female competition. In it, this research session explores the consequences of online misogyny, with a focus on the impact on feminism and digital culture in general. While adverse effects include division and hostility, the positive aspects are manifested in the increased awareness and mobilization of the feminist movement. The study highlights the importance of tackling online misogyny and suggests measures to mitigate its prevalence, make social media platforms safer, and provide users with more inclusive spaces.

Keywords: Misogyny, Chinese Society, Feminism, Gender Stereotypes, Online Social Platform

1. Introduction

The proliferation of internet technology in China has given rise to numerous social platforms, enabling individuals to express their opinions, craft online personas, and share perspectives. This technological advancement has occurred concurrently with increased societal focus on gender equality, prompting a revaluation of misogyny [1]. In contemporary Chinese society, women actively present themselves in the process of adapting to new changes in media and continue to empower themselves. However, with an increasing number of users using social platforms, the phenomenon of "Misogyny" has been widely present.

Misogyny is defined as a feeling of hating women or the belief that men are much better than women [2]. The term "misogyny" is a widely recognized and accepted concept in academic, cultural, and social discourse, and it is typically interplay with the Feminist Theories, Communication Theories, and Sociological Perspectives.

Chinese social platforms' popularity stems from their ability to offer a diverse digital experience, integrating social networking, e-commerce, entertainment, and information sharing seamlessly in a single platform, appealing to a broad user base with varied preferences. Mainstream social platforms like Weibo and Red (also known as Xiaohongshu) have become integral components of China's

vibrant digital landscape, shaping people's behaviours and influencing discussions on various issues, including those related to gender and misogyny. These platforms contribute to the dynamism and diversity of China's digital sphere by providing spaces for both communication and the expression of societal values and concerns.

While existing research on global online misogyny lacks comprehensive studies specific to the Chinese digital context, this paper aims to fill this gap by offering insights into the distinct dynamics of online misogyny in China, contributing to a broader understanding of gender-related digital communication issues.

This research paper will examine the phenomenon of "Misogyny" within the context of two prominent Chinese online social platforms, namely "Weibo" and "Red." It will delve into the appearance and manifestations of this phenomenon, with a particular focus on the roles played by major Chinese mainstream social media platforms in perpetuating "Misogyny." Furthermore, the study will centre its attention on the concept of "Pick Me Girl" (denoting female competition). Lastly, the research will explore the consequences of "Misogyny" and propose potential solutions aimed at mitigating its prevalence.

2. Manifestation of Misogyny in Social Media

2.1. Various Forms of Misogynistic Discourse

In order to fully present the characteristics and causes of misogyny that exist in Chinese social media, the summarization of the main types of online misogyny is the foundation. The following session will present the various forms of misogynistic discourse that manifest in diverse content representation across Weibo and Red.

In the diverse online environment, individuals, typically women, are often subjected to abusive and threatening messages, comments, or posts. This can include explicit or implicit threats, derogatory language, and personal attacks. For example, the Beijing Court released the case of an online infringement liability dispute. The plaintiff, Liu, and the defendant, Zhao, are college classmates. Zhao continually copied the "moment" that was published in Liu's Wechat into his Weibo account for two years. The defendant "Zhao" used the fake Weibo account to send private messages to other users with unrecognizable and blurred facial revealing photos of women so that other users mistakenly thought that the protagonist of the pornographic pictures was the plaintiff or that the plaintiff used the microblog account to engage in illegal transactions. After the plaintiff "Liu", found out, he filed a lawsuit with the Beijing Internet Court, claiming that his right to reputation had been infringed, and asked the defendant to apologize and compensate for the loss.

Moreover, misogynistic discourse also relies on gender-based slurs and stereotypes to demean and belittle women. Generally, netizens use derogatory terms, sexist jokes, and the reinforcement of harmful gender stereotypes. Consequently, women are frequently objectified in misogynistic discourse, reducing them to their physical appearance or sexual attributes. [3] People not only use objectifying language to disparage women when they choose to become a housewife but also oppugn the ability of the female group as a whole by sharing explicit or non-consensual images and derogatory comments about a person's appearance [4].

Similarly, in professional settings and institutions, misogyny can manifest as gender-based discrimination, unequal opportunities, and the reinforcement of gender hierarchies. This can result in pay gaps, limited career advancement for women, and hostile work environments. This discrimination is intensified by the advertising that perpetuates gender stereotypes and objectification of women, reinforcing traditional gender roles and promoting products through sexualized imagery. For instance, the famous stand-up comedian "Li Dan" posted an advertising video promoting Ubras brand women's underwear on his personal Weibo, with the text #My workplace life jacket#, a piece of equipment

that allows women to lie down and win the workplace easily, I say there are no goods I cannot bring, you say believe it or not." Among them, the expression "let women easily lie down and win the workplace" caused netizens to question, saying that it discriminated against women. In response to this matter, the Beijing Haidian District Market Supervision Bureau imposed an administrative penalty of confiscating 400,000 yuan of advertising expenses and fining 400,000 yuan to the West Coast (Beijing) Culture Media Group Co., Ltd.

2.2. Roles and Characteristics of Social Media

With the development of internet technology, various social platforms keep emerging, allowing people to express their opinions and build their online identities while sharing their views. The internet's open ecosystem and its ability to connect everything have created an open environment for discussions, continually reshaping new public discourse spaces.

Both Weibo and Red are relatively anonymous, and social media can embolden individuals to express misogynistic views they might not share openly in other contexts. However, this characteristic can lead to a greater prevalence of hostile and discriminatory language, as people are not concerned about legal issues when they express their opinions.

The rapid development of the Chinese internet has fuelled the transmissibility of the social platform. *Transmissibility* is the fundamental characteristic that underpins the rapid dissemination of information, ideas, and content among users and across digital networks. It is driven by features such as sharing options, viral content mechanisms, engagement amplification, trending topics, and network effects, allowing content to reach a broad audience swiftly. This quality empowers users to share content that resonates with them, making it go viral while also enabling content to be discovered, discussed, and shared extensively [5].

More importantly, both Weibo and Red fosters two-way communication, enabling users to interact with content by liking, sharing, commenting, and engaging in discussions on a global scale. This interactivity facilitates not only real-time conversations and engagement but also increases the online opposition between the netzine.

Furthermore, social media collects data on user demographics and behaviour and holds vital insights into the prevalence and trends of misogynistic language and ideas. Researchers and organizations can leverage this data to inform strategies aimed at combating online Misogyny while simultaneously allowing platforms to collect valuable user information for targeted advertising and content recommendations.

Although social media contains lots of engaging features and characteristics, it can act as a double-blade sword. These platforms can inadvertently amplify misogynistic views by providing a broad and accessible space for individuals to express and share such ideas, regardless of their harmful nature. This accessibility can lead to the formation of echo chambers where like-minded individuals reinforce each other's misogynistic beliefs. As misogynistic views are frequently and openly expressed on social media, there is a risk of normalization, potentially desensitizing users and making them more tolerant or indifferent to misogynistic language and behaviour over time.

2.3. Perpetrations and Victims of Misogyny

The following session divided the perpetrators and victims of Misogyny into several specific groups. The perpetrations are mainly group by internet trolls, anti-feminist groups, and the cyberbullying of female gamers.

Firstly, there are individuals on Chinese social media platforms who engage in trolling and use derogatory language towards women. They might mock or insult women for their opinions, appearance, or lifestyle choices [6]. The typical misogyny comments are expressed by those trolling

on the social platform Red. Those trolling belittle women's values and objectify them as men's appendages. Some typical comments that this research finds are "If men can move away from women, they will become happier" or "Men should live with men, and women should live with women." Those sorts of comments raise the conflict between two gender groups and perpetuate the appearance of Misogyny in Chinese society.

Moreover, some online communities in China are dedicated to opposing feminist ideologies and activities. They may harass and threaten feminist activists or engage in cyberbullying campaigns against them. The backlash against gender equality initiatives or campaigns promoting gender equality or addressing issues like domestic violence can face resistance from users who espouse misogynistic views. Such individuals may use social media to criticize and undermine these efforts.

In the gaming community on platforms like Weibo, female gamers have reported facing cyberbullying and harassment. They may receive threats, derogatory comments, and even doxing attempts for their involvement in the gaming scene. Alternatively, even online games are stereotyped or lunched unequal treatment to female users. For example, in King of Glory, users complain that this video game does not offer supreme skin for male heroes, but they offer better qualities of supreme skin for the female skin. They then get mad and say: "How dare to give the female skin out of the supreme, King of Glory are extremely misogynistic."

Dismayingly, perpetrators of online Misogyny can indeed include women themselves. It is crucial to acknowledge that Misogyny is not confined to any specific gender, and individuals of any gender can hold and express misogynistic views. In some instances, women may internalize and perpetuate these harmful beliefs, participating in online harassment or discrimination against other women or feminist activists. This underscores the complex nature of online Misogyny, where those perpetrating it can come from diverse backgrounds and genders. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach aimed at promoting respectful online behaviour and challenging harmful stereotypes and biases, regardless of the gender of the individuals involved.

Consequently, the victims of Misogyny in social media are grouped by feminist activists, women in the entertainment industry and women in STEM fields. For instance, Chinese feminist activists advocating for gender equality have faced online harassment and even censorship on platforms like Weibo. Their feminist campaigns and discussions on topics such as sexual harassment or gender-based violence have led to backlash and threats. When the activist "Shouer Fu" brings the theory of equal rights to battle with Misogyny in her latest "U Can U Bibi" (Chinese TV show known as Qipa Shuo) has been met with a lot of doubts and counterattacks, some viewers comment that it is overly optimistic, and the theory is too ideal. Hence, those doubts bring challenges for women to empower themselves and battle Misogyny.

Moreover, female celebrities in China are often targets of Misogyny on social media. They may receive derogatory comments about their appearance, personal lives, or opinions. For example, netzines Netizens When actress Gulnazar posted a picture of her new pants with a unique design on Weibo, netizens deliberately insulted her. They portrayed her as someone who engages in clubs or even in sex work.

Furthermore, women pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) may encounter gender-based discrimination on social media. They might receive negative comments or messages challenging their competence in male-dominated fields. For instance, a female medical scientist like Youyou Tu, who is a Nobel Prize winner, when sharing her research findings online, may still receive disparaging remarks questioning her qualifications solely based on her gender. This highlights the persistent gender bias and sexism that women in STEM fields often face, even when they have achieved remarkable success in their careers.

3.   Factors of Misogyny - The Phenomenon of Pick Me Girls

3.1.   Background Information of Pick Me Girl Phenomenon

Women actively show themselves in the process of adapting to new changes in the media and constantly improve their online discourse power through powerful counterattacks against stereotypes and stigmatization of women.

Through analyzing manifestations of Misogyny on social platforms, as a researcher, I have come to realize that the "Pick Me Girls" phenomenon is a noteworthy factor contributing to Misogyny; however, in recent years, with the continuous improvement of users' use of internet social platforms, we can easily find a prominent phenomenon of "demeaning the same sex to attract the attention of the opposite sex" in female groups. Female users try to convey the signal "I am better than other women, so pick me" in various forms of dynamic videos, pictures, questions and so on. This phenomenon of women belittling each other to cater to men's preferences is called "female competition".

Misogyny, with its roots in Darwin's theory of sexual selection from 1871, is fundamentally tied to the concept of female competition. Darwin argued that males and females displayed different reproductive social behaviours, with males seeking to fertilize as many females as possible with cost-effective sperm, while females, limited by their finite number of large eggs, selected males with the highest genetic quality to ensure superior offspring. As human societies evolved with the development of group survival strategies, they extended into family and social divisions of labour, often rooted in innate physical differences between the sexes. These divisions contributed to the creation of the societal gender concept of "male superiority and female inferiority."

In modern society, men usually gain more abundant social resources with higher status, while women have to rely on men to expand their living space through "female competition". In the following discussion, we will explain the relationship between female competition and Misogyny by analyzing people's behaviour on the Internet. It is worth mentioning that Chizuko Ueno once mentioned "women's misogyny" in his book Misogyny. It believes that women's Misogyny is manifested as "self-loathing", so women often try to use the "exception" strategy to separate themselves from the female group by seeing other women as "other" to pass on this Misogyny. Hence, the phenomenon of the "Pick Me Girl" can be described as a situation where women vie for the favour of men in positions of power and social status, often viewing and treating other women from the perspective of male authority and approval.

3.2.   Feature Analysis of Pick Me Girl Phenomenon in Social Media

In the case of the development of science and technology, the Internet provides the soil for the spread of "female competition". In 2018, a topic named "#tweetlikeapickme" appeared on Twitter, which heated up and quickly became popular on various social platforms, and "Pick me" then became an Internet meme, gaining a more comprehensive range of spread and even imitation. In China, the term "female competition" was first popularized by emotional bloggers such as "@Yangbingyang Ayawawa" on Weibo platforms. Until April 2021, Weibo users' heated discussion on the topic of "Is female makeup a female competition?" further presented this phenomenon in front of the public. After in-depth observation of the "Pick me girl" phenomenon on the Weibo and Red platforms, we can summarize the following common characteristics of such behaviour.

Firstly, the Pick Me Girl phenomenon fixates on heterosexual relationships, adhering to traditional "virtuous wife and good mother" stereotypes, even imposing them on other women. It excessively highlights the importance of romantic relationships, sometimes making it the sole life goal. For example, on platforms like Weibo and Red, you can find comments like: "Some women nowadays

don't want anything from men – not money, not material possessions. They only seek trust, love, and earth-shattering passion. I am her, and she is me." The expressions of "Pick me girl", such as "With a girlfriend, men no longer have to do the dishes, cook, or do laundry," reinforce traditional values of marrying virtuous wives, solidifying gender roles for women and regressing gender consciousness.

Simultaneously distancing themselves from other women, those in "Pick me girl" often lean toward anti-feminism, apologizing as women "along with feminists" on social media and expressing viewpoints that may disregard women's real-world struggles, aiming to gain male attention. This behaviour ignores women's diverse roles and is counterproductive to healthy gender awareness and women's rights advocacy.

Moreover, In the discourse of "female competition", the expression usually appears: "I don't like to play with girls, they play too much." Alternatively, "I have more male friends around me because I think the girls around me are too contrived." These words confirm the characteristics of the "woman's misogyny" mentioned in his book Misogyny. It believes that women's Misogyny is manifested as "self-loathing", so women often try to use the "exception" strategy to separate themselves from the female group by seeing other women as "other" to pass on this Misogyny. Hence, the phenomenon of the "Pick Me Girl" can be described as a situation where women vie for the favour of men in positions of power and social status, often viewing and treating other women from the perspective of male authority and approval.

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The above proves that even as women, women's self-awareness and acceptance are not naturally consistent, and the dislike of their gender will make them achieve self-separation through different

discourse expressions. Drawing a boundary between oneself and "other women" and breaking oneself from the definition of "female" may be a means of self-protection that is difficult to integrate into other women. However, if you take the opportunity to devalue other women while arguing your own "uniqueness", this is "female competition" behaviour.

3.4. The Intensifying Effect of Social Media

While the "Pick Me Girl" phenomenon has been present in human society for some time, the rise of internet social platforms has given it a more visible platform. This kind of behaviour, where women within these groups "degrade each other to please men," is not limited to the online world but reflects real-life dynamics.

The internet's characteristics have both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, the anonymity of users and the lack of internet censorship can lead to more freedom in expressing opinions but can also result in more unrestrained behaviour. On the other hand, the internet's speed and global reach can lead to the viral spread of personal viewpoints.

Therefore, when "Pick Me Girl" behaviour on social platforms transcends its original confines and becomes an internet meme, it is challenging to say that the internet only has a positive impact in this context.

4. The Consequences of Misogyny in Social Media

4.1. Individual Mental Health and Gender Equality Issue

On a global scale, women are at a significantly higher risk of depression than men. The gender distribution of depression in our country is basically the same, with the number of women roughly 1.8 times that of men. Additionally, the psychiatric epidemiological investigation team found 1161 patients with various mental diseases in the province's sample group, including 462 men and 699 women. The prevalence of mental illness was 7.73% in males and 11.7% in females. It can be seen that the incidence of mental illness in women is significantly higher than that in men. Among them, online bad reviews are a factor with a higher weight of women's disease. In the survey, some women said that they had been bullied and criticized to varying degrees, which led to their depression and deepened their psychological problems. Consequently, those mental health problems may further raise gender equality issues, where there is building tension and conflict between gender groups and communities.

The rising sexism and sexist violence are other consequences that have profound effects. People often stemming from Misogyny inflict severe emotional and psychological tolls on women and girls, resulting in a range of detrimental consequences such as diminished self-esteem, feelings of shame, powerlessness, and even depression. In some cases, these negative experiences may drive individuals towards self-destructive behaviours as maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Moreover, Misogyny leads to internalized sexist assumptions about gender roles and relationships, impacting both girls and boys. These deeply ingrained beliefs, often encountered on platforms like Weibo and Red, contribute to a hostile online environment where women face psychological health issues stemming from the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, derogatory comments, and abusive behaviours.

4.2. Social Impact

First, Misogyny exacerbates conflict between the sexes. Men and women are further engendered on the Internet, prejudice and discrimination. The reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes in sexist content perpetuates unequal gender relations. Men and women can be rivals, and social media

often becomes a battleground for gender-related conflicts. The resulting mistrust and hostility between gender groups undermines the potential for healthy communication and cooperation [5].

Second, Misogyny often leads to conflict between women. For example, in the "pulling girls" phenomenon, women fight for men's approval by belittling other women, creating a hostile environment within the female community. This internalized sexism can lead to relationship tensions, as women may feel the need to devalue their peers in order to gain favours. This erodes the sense of unity among women and fosters competition where supportive and empowering relationships should flourish [7].

Finally, online communities may gradually disintegrate. The study shows that whether on Weibo, Red or other social media platforms, they have endured the conflict of online sexism. Such communities can become toxic environments where abusive and demeaning comments are expected. As a result, people may retire from these communities or avoid discussing gender-related issues altogether, and communities may be boycotted and disgusted by humans, exacerbating contradictions [8].

4.3. Feminism Movement

Misogyny can have a somewhat negative impact on the feminist movement, leading to divisions and controversy within the movement, as it leads to opposing views and approaches, thus hindering the unity and consistency of the movement. In addition, feminists can be targeted by online sexism and subjected to malicious attacks, threats and disparagement, which may reduce the motivation of some people in the movement.

Nevertheless, Misogyny also makes feminist activism a catalyst for more significant mobilization of women [9]. People can unite through social media and online platforms to express their grievances about gender inequality and fight for equal rights. In addition, Misogyny will strengthen education and awareness of gender equality, remind people that gender inequality and discrimination still exist, and promote more attention and participation in the feminist movement. While online sexism can lead to controversy and vicious attacks, it has also inspired more women to participate in the movement, spread important information, and strengthen efforts to combat sexism [10].

5. The Solutions to Eliminate Misogyny Through Media Platforms

5.1. Pay attention to gender equity education in school education

One of the fundamental solutions is to prioritize gender equity education within school curricula. This means implementing mentor sessions where students receive guidance on gender equality, respect in relationships, and the detrimental impacts of Misogyny. Additionally, educational films, workshops, and interactive materials can be integrated into the educational system to promote awareness, empathy, and understanding regarding these issues. This early education can help shape more egalitarian attitudes and behaviours in future generations. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in fostering digital literacy and ethical online behaviour. By integrating these components into the curriculum, students can be better equipped to recognize and respond to Misogyny, contributing to a safer and more respectful online environment. The emphasis on education and network security awareness helps create a culture where individuals are prepared to deal with online challenges while promoting the values of gender equity.

5.2. Improve social media regulations

To curtail misogynistic content on media platforms, stricter regulations and enforcement are necessary. This includes monitoring and removing hate speech, harassment, and harmful stereotypes

against women. In the Chinese context, linking phone numbers and ID cards to user profiles can be a practical step to promote accountability and deter online abuse. A robust re-naming system, in which users must provide accurate identification details, can help reduce anonymity and the associated risks of irresponsible behaviour. Such measures can also facilitate the tracing and reporting of individuals responsible for misogynistic content. Ensuring that platforms swiftly respond to reports of abuse and harassment is equally essential. Implementing transparent and effective reporting mechanisms allows users to feel safer while using these platforms.

5.3. Improve women's social status

The solution to the problem of Misogyny is to improve women's status in society. This work is a coordinated effort of the entire society. Increasing the representation of women in the media, leadership roles, and decision-making positions is an integral step. In addition, official guidance is needed to ensure that women's voices are heard in public discourse, politics and the workplace. Programs that provide support and opportunities for women through skills development can effectively empower women and improve their social status. However, it is worth noting that this is a collective effort, as it involves the cooperation of governments, media organizations, educational institutions and civil society. Thus, collaboration between each function of society will create an environment where women are respected and have equal opportunities. Further, by cultivating a culture that respects and empowers women, society can gradually reduce the prevalence of Misogyny on media platforms and promote more inclusive and equitable digital spaces.

6.   Conclusion

During the evolution of Chinese online social media, the problem of "Misogyny" has become a significant concern. By introducing the background and factors of Misogyny, this research paper has unfolded the causes of Misogyny. After analyzing the roles of the internet and social media like Weibo and Red, such as the anonymity feature of the internet, this research paper shows various forms and consequences of this phenomenon. Then this research paper has also provided a range of solutions that different functions of society can apply and collaboratively reduce the presence of Misogyny in contemporary and future Chinese society.

The key takeaway from this research is the "Pick Me Girl" phenomenon; it is one of the main presentations of Misogyny, where women vie for men's approval by demeaning other women. This behaviour is deeply rooted in traditional gender stereotypes and can intensify online Misogyny, making digital spaces hostile for women.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to a broader understanding of gender-related digital communication issues in the contemporary Chinese context. While social media platforms have empowered people to express their opinions, they have also exposed women to misogynistic discourse. Highlighting this issue is crucial to fostering a more inclusive and respectful online environment.

To extend this research in a longer term, the research can focus on the intersection between online Misogyny and mental health, sexual relationships, and society. Additionally, research on effective interventions and campaigns to combat Misogyny in digital spaces can provide valuable insights into creating a safer online world.

Despite its contributions, this research has limitations. As it mainly focuses on Weibo and Red, it may overlook other social media platforms and does not present the whole social atmosphere in contemporary Chinese society. Additionally, the fast-paced nature of online discourse makes it challenging to capture the full scope of online Misogyny. Hence the updating of the information may

required. Finally, the research primarily addresses the issue within the Chinese context, and further studies should examine this phenomenon on a global scale or at least focus on Asia or other continents.

In summary, the existence of online Misogyny on Chinese social media platforms is a complex issue with significant consequences. By acknowledging the phenomenon of "Pick Me Girl" and taking steps to combat Misogyny through education, regulations, and the empowerment of women, we can work towards a more equitable and respectful digital environment. This research aims to serve as a starting point in this effort, underlining the need for continued investigation, awareness, and action to combat online Misogyny in China and beyond.

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