A Study of the Phenomenon of "Extreme Feminist" Groups on Sina Weibo

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Abstract. Feminism is a social theory and political movement created and initiated to promote equality between the sexes, with the original intention of affirming rights rather than privileges. In the context of the Chinese social media platform, Sina Weibo, feminism should not be synonymous with bigotry, irrationality and brutality. This study uses both documentary and descriptive statistical analysis to investigate the "extreme feminist" group and finds that the social reasons for the emergence of the "extreme feminist" group include the development of Weibo strategies and the prevalence of consumerism. The basic manifestations of the 'extreme feminist' group include the creation of gender anxiety and fear and the emphasis on gender-oppositional topics. The social characteristics of these groups are predominantly female, with a high percentage of followers from the southeast coast of China, predominantly teenagers, and a lower level of education than college. As a result, feminism on weibo tends to become disorganized and to create barriers to true equality between men and women, leading to a vicious circle of criticism-hate and criticism.

Keywords: Extreme feminist groups · Feminism · Sina Weibo

1 Introduction

In the traditional media era, women were often portrayed and labelled, and the image of women was mostly in the form of dependence on men, such as the virtuous wife and mother, etc. Traditional media has traditionally placed women on the margin. Feminism has spread quickly on the internet thanks to the rapid development of the internet and technical empowerment [1]. Women are no longer passively shaped in the traditional media era, instead, they can express their views and communicate feminist ideas through social media, demonstrating the power of woman in society. The rise of female 'online vloggers,' has played a significant role in encouraging women to utilize the internet to express their concerns and fight for their rights [2]. It can be said that the Internet has provided a fertile ground for the development and growth of feminism, but it has also given rise to feminists with radical attitudes.

The subject of feminism has evolved from the 19th century to the later years of the feminist wave movement, which has gone through three waves. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of capitalism and the destruction of patriarchal family structures

by socialized mass production, women were not valued and given equal rights with men in terms of political suffrage, education, economics, etc., as black people were. During the development of feminism, a radical feminist movement gradually emerged with a central viewpoint of resistance to patriarchy and male domination, advocating independence from a submissive position to men [3]. The main representatives of radical feminism include Germaine Greer, Kate Miller and others. They rejected the liberal feminist and Marxist feminist views on the causes of women's oppression. They argued that the root cause of female oppression was the existence of a patriarchal system characterized by power, domination and hierarchy. For women to be truly emancipated, the legal and political structures of this system needed to be destroyed [4, 5]. They were critical of heterosexuality and argued for the elimination of the gender system, the creation of an intersex culture and the adoption of sexual separatist strategies to reject heterosexuality and promote homosexuality.

The "Sina extremist feminist" group studied in this paper is based on this development, and the arguments of this group have evolved from radical feminism. The term "Sina extremist feminism" was born out of a highly networked social environment [6]. The term refers to the extreme, blind feminist and feminist groups that originated on the Sina Weibo platform. "Extreme feminism" combines the rights and obligations of both Eastern and Western values and seeks only the rights of both sets of values without any obligations, which is fundamentally different from feminism in the true sense.

The academic significance of this study is to define the real meaning of "feminism", to demonstrate the fact that "extreme feminist" groups have established gender antagonism in social media spaces such as Sina Weibo, and to explore the causes and manifestations of "extreme feminist" groups on Sina Weibo. The feminist movement is not a war between men and women. We need to disseminate knowledge about feminism, eliminate misunderstandings and distortions from all sides of public debate, and provide better solutions for feminist communication, even for gender communication [7, 8].

2   Materials and Methods

This paper analyses the social characteristics of the "extreme feminist" group through the study of "super-topic" on Sina Weibo platform. The sample was selected from the "feminist" super-topic and the "running together in the office building" super-topic on Weibo. These two super-topics were chosen for the study because they are among the more heated and discussed feminist topics. The "running together in the office building" super-topic is part of a dense circle of extreme feminist groups exploring the topic.in which the "feminist" super-topic studied the mainstream feminist views and the "extreme feminist" discourse on Weibo. As of 26 March 2021, it had 16,000 followers, 8,451,000 readers and 4,229 posts on Weibo. The "Running together in the office building" super-topic is dominated by "Office building aunt," a Weibo "extreme feminist" blogger which has 2.225 million followers, 60.406 million readers and 1317 posts. In this article, we take 564 tweets related to "extreme feminism" from 1,000 random users in the period from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020, from the "Running together in office buildings" and "feminism" super-talk. The quantitative analysis was conducted on 564 tweets related to "extreme feminism". The analysis will be carried out after SPSS with

Table 1. "Running together in the office building" gender ratio of super-topic.

Gender	Number of people	Proportion
male	28	2.80%
female	972	97.2%
Total	1000	100%

crawler software and Weibo public opinion analysis system and excel software to collate and analyze the data on the social characteristics of the "extreme feminist" group on Weibo.

3   Results

3.1   The Focus Is Mainly on Female Users

The Table 1 shows that the 1,000 users of the "Running together in the office building" super-topic were mostly women, with 97.2% of the users being women and only 2.8% of the users being men. This shows that the audience of this "ultra-feminist" super-topic is predominantly female, while men seem to have little presence in the "ultra-feminist" group and are even the target of attacks.

3.2   High Percentage of Users in the Southeast Coast of China

In the survey on the regional distribution of the "Running together in the office building" super-topic, the top ten cities in terms of regional distribution of users were Zhejiang Province, Jiangsu Province, Guangdong Province, Liaoning Province, Shanghai Municipality, Fujian Province, Beijing Municipality, Jilin Province, Heilongjiang Province and Chongqing Municipality. The regional distribution of Zhejiang Province accounted for 12.6% of the total number of users, while Jiangsu Province and Guangdong Province also accounted for 8.4%, Liaoning Province for 7.8%, Shanghai for 7.6%, Fujian Province for 7.1%, Beijing for 5.7%, Jilin Province for 5.6%, and Heilongjiang Province and Chongqing City for 5.4% (see Table 2).

Table 2. "Running together in an office building" regional distribution of super-talk users.

Region	Number	Scale (%)
Zhejiang	126	12.60%
Jiangsu	84	8.40%
Guangdong	84	8.40%
Liaoning	78	7.80%
Shanghai	76	7.60%
Fujian	71	7.10%
Beijing	57	5.70%
Jilin	56	5.60%
Heilongjiang	54	5.40%
Chongqing	54	5.40%
Taiwan	33	3.30%
Shandong	28	2.80%
Anhui	25	2.50%
Tianjin	16	1.60%
Yunnan	14	1.40%
Hebei	13	1.30%
Hong Kong	12	1.20%
Sichuan	12	1.20%
Shaanxi	11	1.10%
Jiangxi	10	1.00%
Hunan	10	1.00%
Guizhou	10	1.00%
Gansu	10	1.00%
Shanxi	9	0.90%
Henan	8	0.80%
Hubei	8	0.80%
Macao	7	0.70%
Guangxi	5	0.50%
Xinjiang	5	0.50%
Inner Mongolia	3	0.30%
Hainan	3	0.30%

Table 2. (*continued*)

Region	Number	Scale (%)
Xizang	3	0.30%
Qinghai	3	0.30%
Ningxia	2	0.20%

Table 3. Age distribution of the users of the "running together in the office building" super-topic.

Age	14–18	19–24	25–35	35–50
Number	287	589	75	49
Scale	28.7%	58.9%	7.5%	4.9%

Table 4. "Running together in the office building" education level for super-topic users.

Educational status	Number	Scale
High school and below	104	39.54%
Junior college education	78	29.66%
Undergraduate	46	17.11%
Master	25	9.15%
PhD. And above	11	4.18%
Total	264	100%

3.3   Followers Are Mainly Teenagers

In the age distribution of the "Running together in the office building" super-topic, more than 50% are in the age range of 19–24, while 28.7% are aged 14–18, 7.5% are aged 23–25 and 4.9% are aged 35–50 (see Table 3 for details). The percentage of people aged 19 to 24 is the largest.

3.4   Education Level Is Predominantly Below Specialist Level

Only 264 samples were collected because many users of the "Running together in the office building" super-topic did not indicate their educational level, with 39.54% having a high school diploma or less, 29.66% having a specialist degree, 17.11% having a bachelor's degree, 9.15% having a master's degree, and finally 4.18% having a PhD or higher (see Table 4 for details). The proportion of specialists and high school and below is over 50%.

3.5   Summary of Super-Topic Characteristics

Under the super-topic of "running together in the office buildings", female users make up most users, with only a small number of male users. The percentage of users is higher in southeastern China than in the northeastern region, followed by the southwestern, central and northwestern regions. Of the 1,000 users who participated in the survey, the majority of those who posted their education level were in high school or below, followed by college students, undergraduates and master's students, with the lowest percentage of users holding a PhD degree.

In terms of regional distribution, the coastal and economically developed regions of China and the provinces and municipalities directly under the central government in the northeast rank high in terms of the proportion of users, followed by the central and western regions. This distribution pattern correlates with the economic development and cultural openness of the region. The northeast also ranks high, this result may be explained by the fact that the northeast is the first region in China to call for gender equality and has a gender ratio close to 1:1. Therefore, the proportion of topics related to women's rights will be higher in the northeast.

In terms of age and education, most of the followers of the super-topic belong to the teenage group. There are several possible explanations for this result that young people's values and worldview are in a period of confusion and are susceptible to radical and extreme content. The educational level of the followers is at a low to medium level and these relationships may partly be explained by their age, so that the followers are more susceptible to the non-logical and theoretical discourse of "extreme feminism".

4   Discussion

4.1   Sina Weibo Platform Operation Strategy Development

The prevalence of "extreme feminism" is inextricably linked to Weibo's development strategy. The number of users on Weibo has been steadily decreasing in recent years. Weibo, which has lost its focus on celebrity and entertainment traffic, has gradually turned to "extreme feminism" to gain more attention and traffic by drawing attention to itself and stirring up emotions [9]. The platform's algorithm will recommend more inflammatory and hateful speech to users, who will tend to pay more attention and be more emotionally mobilized by the platform's recommended content, leading to increased user stickiness.

4.2   Feminism Tends to Be Disorganized

The feminist movement is a social movement of women fighting against discrimination and for their rights. In recent years, with the development of Internet technology, feminist movements are no longer confined to the rigid social movements of the past. Instead, the Internet has been used as a forum for a "soft social movement" that focuses on the dissemination of feminist ideas [10, 11]. Unlike previous forms of communication, the Internet is complex in terms of how it is communicated and by whom, leading to a growing disorganization of feminism on the Internet.

Radical feminism, in contrast to true feminism, takes an extreme perspective of men and women's differences and stresses women's superiority, which poses a barrier to attaining a truly equal, free, and harmonious society. But liberal feminists do not see 'extreme feminist' symbols and demands as opposed to the need to draw a line between them. Because liberal feminism is supposed to occupy a position of public opinion, the more polarized the nature, the more coercive the group. Thereby small groups slowly become self-identified and closed off, unable to interface with the outside world at all let alone form a consensus.

The essence of feminism is equality and human rights, not power. But nowadays the "extreme feminist" group on Weibo has completely misinterpreted the true meaning of "feminism" and added a female-oriented theme to it, moving further and further away from the path of equality and human rights. This makes it more difficult to promote gender equality and exacerbates the conflict between men and women.

5   Conclusion

The Weibo "extreme feminist" community has no clear interests. In contrast to the history of the feminist movement, "extreme feminism" on Weibo lacks opinion leaders, is omnichannel, and has vague interests. The current body of feminist accounts serves as a catharsis platform rather than a knowledge dissemination tool. If a group does not have clear interests, it can easily fall into unlimited worship of one system and unlimited hatred of another. The "ultra-feminist" group seeks gender equality in all areas, is deeply hateful of the status quo, and has a group motive for launching criticism on the internet without making reasonable and concrete demands, and for the purpose of venting their emotions. This has led to a loop of criticism-hate-criticism within the "ultra-feminist" community, a phenomenon that has not solved the problem but has led to a deepening of the conflict.

We need to establish a reasonable mechanism for guiding public opinion and help active female opinion leaders transcend their old ways of thinking and perspectives on issues by providing them with rational and correct guidance. At the same time, we should control and moderate the irrational and extreme statements made by some "extreme feminist" opinion leaders and the public in front of social hotspots involving women's issues, to reduce the phenomenon of feminist extremism and stigmatization.

Authors' Contributions.   There is only one author for this work.

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