

# *A Study on Awakening Feminist under Social Media*

**Minxuan Zhang**

*Kunshan High School, Suzhou, China*

*zmxavery071217@126.com*

**Abstract.** Into the 21st century, with the widespread and application of the internet, women in the new era have different characteristics from the traditional ones in the past, and they fully express themselves in the media environment. Thus the image of women in the media is diversified and personalized. New media platforms also pay more attention to the use and satisfaction of female users. Simultaneously, more individuals get opportunities to be exposed to feminism. This has led to better protection of women's rights and images in various areas, and contributed to social stability and harmony, reducing conflicts between men and women in order to maximize equality between men and women. However, contemporary women still face countless difficulties, and some stereotypes and prejudices still exist. Based on gender theory, this article examines the current status of women's media survival context from the perspectives of the transformation of traditional female images, changes in feminist communication channels, the maximization of women's rights, the real dilemma of women under social media and its causes, and presents the trend of feminist awakening through content analysis, comparative analysis and other methods. In a word, social media comprehensively and substantively, but with limitations, promotes feminism.

**Keywords:** Internet, Feminist, Women's right, Social media

## **1. Introduction**

In the rapidly evolving digital world, social media has already become a powerful and convenient tool for social change, amplifying different voices that were once ignored in different places. As platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook emerge for decades, more women are offered larger stages for their real dialogues. Social media is not just a medium for feminist expression, but a catalyst for rethinking and reinvigorating feminist studies in the 21st century. By analyzing key movements and campaigns that have gained traction online, this paper seeks to explore the implications of this digital dialogue on traditional feminist theories and practices. Furthermore, this paper will investigate the challenges and opportunities posed by social media, considering its role in empowering feminist discourses. This paper, combined with the actual situation, will summarize the problems in existence. By continuously improving its theoretical content, so that when people encounter similar dilemmas in the future, they can find solutions. It has a facilitating role in solving women's dilemmas in real life; it promotes feminism and social media to move forward.

## 2. Awakening feminist under social media

### 2.1. Changes in the traditional image of women

The advent of social media has dramatically changed the traditional image of women and reshaped societal expectations and perceptions. Historically, women have often been portrayed in narrow, stereotypical roles that emphasize beauty, obedience, and domesticity. A good case in point is that in the tenth century A.D., small feet were considered a standard of beauty. "Three-inch golden lotus" was the term used for Chinese women's foot-binding, in which young girls' feet were forcibly bandaged at a very young age, and they had to be re-bandaged every day so that they could keep their feet small [1]. Moreover, In the past, the social media aesthetic standard of "white, young, and thin" has led women to frantically pursue fat loss and thinness to intentionally or unintentionally portray a thin, pathetic, innocent yet witty image, resulting in physical appearance anxiety, even anorexia, depression, and unhealthy consequences such as plastic surgery. 2019 Shake Report data shows that "about half of all women who consider themselves unattractive have a feeling that they feel anxious when looking in the mirror or taking pictures of themselves. And women who are concerned about medical aesthetics have lower self-esteem than the general population" [2]. However, platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter allow women to express themselves more authentically. Shake them up by presenting a multifaceted identity that challenges traditional norms, showing not only appearances but also talents, accomplishments, and diverse life experiences. Nowadays, the aesthetic of "white, young and thin" is no longer the mainstream aesthetic. On the contrary, female celebrities or big bloggers, such as TikTok blogger ChenKeke, who travels around the world by herself in a plane and a sailboat, sharing her own travel experiences and breaking through, advocating the beauty of women's strengths, have subverted the normalcy of women's objectification on the Internet. Female users are looking at themselves through a clearer lens and expressing themselves in a more confident way -- "The kind of person I am". Female users are no longer a monolithic, stereotypical image, displaying a diverse range of image styles, from being seen to seeing, from belittling the self to appreciating the self, displaying diverse and differentiated aesthetics.

### 2.2. Changes in commentary on women in popular events

The conversation around women's rights and representation has undergone a significant shift in recent years. Recently, several sanitary napkin brands have collapsed, with multiple problems such as a lack of length, quality, and insults to women in their advertising slogans. That's why most women are boycotting these brands and even creating their own sanitary napkin brands to protect women's health and safety. Not only that, but many male bloggers are also speaking out on behalf of women by posting articles about boycotting these brands. Public commentary has shifted from a dismissive attitude to a more supportive one, recognizing women's contributions and experiences. The media now emphasizes women's achievements and voices, ensuring that their stories are heard. This change in commentary reflects a growing awareness of gender equality and encourages a more inclusive dialogue that provides women a place to talk.

### 2.3. Changes in feminist communication channels

In recent years, the rise of the Internet has significantly changed and expanded the ways in which feminism is disseminated. Previously, the barren means of disseminating information was only

through television or computers. Today, social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become powerful tools for social activists and advocates, allowing them to immediately reach a global audience. According to a report by McKinsey, conversations around gender equality and women's rights surged on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, especially during significant events such as International Women's Day and global protests [3]. Through hashtags, viral campaigns, and engaging content, feminist ideas and movements have gained momentum, inspiring diverse voices and communities. Hashtags like #MeToo and #TimesUp have reached millions of users, highlighting the power of social media in spreading feminist messages and mobilizing support [4]. Online spaces have fostered discussions on gender equality, intersectionality and women's rights, making these topics more accessible and relevant. In addition, digital content such as podcasts, blogs and videos provides multiple perspectives and enables individuals to share their stories and experiences. The Internet has become an integral part of the contemporary feminist movement, amplifying once-marginalized voices and fostering a sense of global solidarity.

### **2.3.1. Dissemination of new variety shows and new movies with women's themes**

In recent years, the phenomenon of feminist films and variety shows has been emerging. The content of feminist films has changed from the "disappearance of the subject" to the "awakening of self-consciousness", showing the diversity and complexity of women's growth process [5].

The image of women in the movie has especially changed, from a dependent role in the past to an independent and autonomous individual. For example, in the movie *Barbie*, which was released in 2023, new perspectives on women's personal development and social roles are explored through the characters and plots. *Barbie* challenges gender-based stereotypes that exist in society and in *Barbie*, women and women's cinema. Furthermore, she serves as a role model and beacon of excellence in women's cinema. The director completed women's self-exploration and broke society's stereotypes about women in different ways. Female characters in *Barbie* movies tend to cover a variety of careers and interests, including doctors, scientists, explorers, entrepreneurs, and more. These diverse career options help break down the boundaries of traditional gender roles and show viewers that women can succeed in a variety of fields [6]. On the other hand, Chinese variety shows such as "Sisters Who Ride the Waves" have become rapidly popular, portraying many successful and independent women. This program not only showcases the charms of mature women, but also conveys a positive attitude towards life, encouraging viewers to conceptualize and appreciate the value of women of different ages.

### **2.3.2. The rise of feminist bloggers**

In recent years, the rise of feminist bloggers on social media platforms has become an important phenomenon in the gender equality movement in the digital age. Existing research suggests that such creators contribute to social change through three main mechanisms [7]. First, at the level of knowledge dissemination, they successfully transform abstract gender theories into popularized content. As Keller points out, by employing visual narratives and everyday language strategies, bloggers significantly lower the threshold of understanding feminist theory [8]. Second, in the dimension of community construction, Chen and Yang's empirical study found that Chinese online women's communities not only provide emotional support, but also develop into an organizational platform for collective action, as exemplified by the spreading trajectory of the #MeToo movement in China [9-10]. Finally, in the dimension of action transformation, the "Sanitary Napkin Box" campaign launched in 2020 proved that online initiatives can be effectively transformed into offline

social practices, and the cross-cultural comparative study by Pew Research Center further confirms the cross-cultural applicability of this model of online mobilization and offline action [11].

### **3. The realistic dilemmas of feminist communication on the internet**

#### **3.1. Social gazing and emotional communication in social media**

Social media has unwittingly intensified the culture of the female gaze, where women's symbolic value as commodities thrives under consumerism. Through films, television shows, and advertisements, women's images become solidified and objectified, while rigid beauty standards exert an overwhelming influence on young women. This combination of media representation, consumer culture, and personal insecurities has transformed social media from a communication platform into an anxiety amplifier. In her groundbreaking study on how "she-variety" shows influence gender anxiety, scholar Song Li reveals how the program's camera work, with its lingering gazes and selective framing, perpetuates harmful stereotypes about women's bodies and appearances [12]. Rather than empowering women as claimed, these production techniques ironically reinforce the very gender anxieties the show purports to address, creating a vicious cycle of self-consciousness and performance among female viewers.

#### **3.2. Stigmatization communication in social media platforms**

The democratization of new media, while expanding feminist discourse, has paradoxically contributed to its distortion. Lacking systematic exposure to feminist theory, many women encounter radicalized versions online that dangerously conflate affirmative action with female privilege. This misinterpretation, amplified by social media's echo chambers, has led to what scholar Wang Chenyang describes as the "barbarization" of digital feminism [13]. Wang's research points out how this stigmatization cycle operates: as misconceptions about affirmative action proliferate online, they reinforce negative stereotypes among audiences unfamiliar with authentic feminist principles. Consequently, the very movement fighting for women's rights finds itself undermined by the distorted perceptions it seeks to correct, creating a paradoxical backlash against gender equality efforts.

### **4. The reasons for the difficulty on the internet**

#### **4.1. Sociocultural factor**

Invisible shackles in society and culture still bind feminism. Despite the advancement of time, the shadow of patriarchy still hangs over the law, the workplace, and everyday life [14-15]. Society expects different things from men and women, leading to the solidification of gender stereotypes [16]. These stereotypes not only limit women's career choices and development but also affect their status in the family and society. What is even more frustrating is that feminism in pursuit of equality is often labeled as "extreme" and "man-hating", and this stigmatization makes many women afraid to speak out publicly even if they agree with the concept of equality just like dancing in shackles, wanting to break free from the constraints, but also afraid of attracting different eyes [17-18].

## 4.2. Economic factor

In the wave of capital, feminism is easily commercialized and individualized due to neoliberalism's emphasis on individualism and marketization-businesses are eager to sell the concept of "women's empowerment" while avoiding structural reforms [19-20]. Ironically, economic growth does not necessarily lead to gender equality, but even exacerbates gender inequality, with women facing higher unemployment and lower wages in the labor market [21-22]. More fundamentally, the current economic system continues to systematically devalue women: mainstream economics tends to undervalue women's contributions to the economy by ignoring unpaid labor, such as domestic work and care work, that is performed by women [23].

## 4.3. Theoretical and practical factor

Feminism faces deep tensions at the level of theory and practice. As a pluralistic system of thought, there are significant divisions within feminism between liberal, socialist, and radical schools of thought [24-25]; and this theoretical heterogeneity makes it difficult to harmonize collective action [26-27]. This dialectical contradiction between theory and practice constitutes the central dilemma in the development of contemporary feminism.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper mainly discusses the awakening of feminism under social media. Social media has helped the development of feminism in a non-negligible way, but there are still many problems. There is room for class improvement in this thesis, such as not delving into the solutions to these arising problems. Future research could focus on how to better utilize social media to spread feminism and actually change the plight of women.

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