

Analysis of the Communication of Women's Rights Issues on New Media Platforms from the Perspective of Media Frames

-- Take microblogging as an example

Chunyan Yang^{1, a}, Meixi Qu^{2, b}

¹Jiangnan University, Wuhan, Hubei, 430000, China

²China Foreign Affairs University, Changchun, Jilin, 130117, China

^ayemiliy-rose@outlook.com, ^b1327372090@qq.com

Abstract

The protection of women's rights and interests is a crucial national policy and a prominent societal issue. In the context of the new media environment, the communication characteristics of media platforms and the interactions between public opinion and policy provide significant support for formulating and implementing policies that promote women's rights and interests protection. This article is based on the discussions surrounding "women's rights and interests protection" and related topics on media platforms, and it employs framing theory to analyze the reports on women's rights and interests protection on Weibo. The objective of the study is to investigate the framing of women's rights and interests protection on Weibo, focusing primarily on the frames of law and policy and the frames of factual statement. Additionally, the research aims to explore the influence of media frames on women's rights and interests protection. The study employs framing theory as the primary research approach to analyze media frames used in reporting women's rights issues on Weibo. It focuses on two main frames: the legal policy frame, covering interpretations of laws and policies related to women's rights, and the factual statement frame, encompassing reports on incidents of women's rights infringements and legal analyses. The analysis reveals that the media frames about women's rights protection on Weibo predominantly revolve around the legal policy frame and the factual statement frame. These media frames play a critical role in shaping policy agendas and influencing public discussions on gender equality. However, the existing media frames are found to have issues such as emotional group confrontation, insufficient sustained attention, and reduced credibility of commercialized media. Based on the comprehensive analysis, it is suggested to optimize the media frames in the current environment. To achieve this, the article proposes strategies to optimize the communication of women's rights protection issues in the present media landscape. These strategies can serve as valuable references for improving communication practices concerning women's rights issues and promoting effective dissemination and protection of women's rights.

Keywords

Women's rights protection; Media framework; New media platforms; Microblogs.

1. Introductory

In the context of the new media era, public network platforms have become the common space of society, and the "rapidity" of information released on media platforms, the "comprehensiveness" of information received, and the "no-threshold nature" of participation have made new media a norm in media communication. "The new media has become a norm of

media communication, further changing the mechanism of public communication and the form of public discussion. Microblog, as one of the media in the new media era, has become the main position for many official media to disclose information and show social hotspots, based on its sufficient mass base and high number of users; at the same time, due to its timeliness and interactivity, the public opinion has more space to express itself, and microblog has become one of the platforms with the highest degree of public participation. As China's society is in transition, women's awareness of equality is awakening, demanding the protection of women's rights and interests and the promotion of gender equality. At the same time, the CPC Central Committee, with Xi Jinping at its core, has incorporated the protection of women's rights and interests into the legal system, and has done a good job of safeguarding women's rights and interests in the context of the overall development of the country and society.

With the gradual development of new media platforms, the microblogging-based medium has played an important role in promoting gender equality and the protection of women's rights and interests. Women's rights and interests issues have become public issues with high attention on microblogging and other online platforms, promoting the dissemination of women's rights and interests issues on the Internet, and providing important support for the empowerment and development of women. However, in the complicated online environment, problems such as gender discrimination and gender antagonism still exist and even group polarisation occurs. How to promote the optimal dissemination of women's rights and interests issues on the new media platform, and how to use the media to promote gender equality and implement women's rights and interests is an unavoidable issue in the field of "media and women". Therefore, it is necessary to study the discussion status and reporting framework of women's rights and interests issues on Weibo, so as to provide strategies and suggestions for the optimal dissemination of women's rights and interests issues, which is of great significance to the protection of women's rights and interests in China.

2. Main Text (As Opposed Footnotes)

2.1. Media Framing Theory

The new media platform based on Internet technology provides a public space for the presentation of women's rights and interests, and there are numerous gender-related topics on Weibo, such as the "stand-up comedian Yang Kasa incident", the female-oriented variety show "Sister Riding the Waves", discrimination in the workplace, and the three-child policy, which have attracted widespread attention and caused heated discussions and even group confrontation. "Workplace discrimination," and the two- and three-child policy have received widespread attention, causing heated discussions and even group confrontations. Due to the complexity of gender issues, issues related to women's rights and interests on microblogging platforms often lead to group confrontation, which is not conducive to the dissemination of awareness of women's rights and interests and the formulation of relevant policies. At the same time, with the development of society and economy, new issues in the field of women's rights and interests continue to emerge, and the relationship between the media and women's rights and interests is gradually becoming more complicated.

Framing theory originates from Goffman's book *Framing Analysis* published in 1974, in which he argues that people use frames to reflect and understand reality in everyday life. In a sociological sense, people use frames to understand the language and behaviour of others so that they can interact and socialise in a common space. Nowadays, framing theory is widely used in the field of communication, where the media influences people's perception and understanding of events through news frames. Entman (1993) argues that the core elements of framing are selection and prominence, and summarises the four main functions of media frames: defining the problem, causal explanation, ethical evaluation, and solution. Framing

theory has thus become a paradigm in media research. When reporting on an event or issue, the media uses appropriate language techniques and logic of presentation to give the news a particular interpretation, so that certain aspects of the event can be selected or highlighted to create a particular understanding of the event for the audience to fit into a pre-determined news frame. News framing involves the selection and processing of news texts, which can influence the audience's understanding of the news event to a certain extent and trigger public discussion on the new media platform. Li Xiguang (2002) argues that news frames are to some extent a replica of conceptual, ideological and intellectual frames. ¹This suggests that the frames used by the media are necessarily in line with the environment of the time and society in which they are located, highlighting social issues and reflecting social public interests.

Under the perspective of framing theory, reports on women's rights issues on the microblogging platform are analysed, and two main media frames are selected and summarised: the legal policy frame and the factual statement frame. ²It explores the characteristics of the media frames of the issue and their impact on the policy agenda and policy formulation.

2.1.1. Legal policy framework

The legal policy framework refers to reports on the legal system and policy documents related to women's rights and interests, including interpretations of newly introduced laws and policies related to women's rights and interests, as well as legal analyses in the context of specific cases and situations. ³When searching for the topic "women's rights and interests" on Weibo, from the point of view of the subject of publication, the media under the legal policy framework are mainly government agencies, such as courts and procuratorates, as well as accounts of lawyers' groups. In terms of horizontal comparison, "women's rights and interests" is not always a popular topic on Weibo, but only when women-related events occur, the topic will rise rapidly, such as Women's Day, before and after the amendment of the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, and when major social women's rights and interests infringements occur, the topic of women's rights and interests will have the highest degree of attention and discussion. The topics related to women's rights and interests have the highest degree of attention and discussion. In terms of content, it mainly involves the interpretation and analysis of laws and policies related to women's protection, which are explained to the public in the form of "case statements + legal analyses"

The protection of women's rights and interests has long been a social problem in Chinese society. 2022 marks the 30th year of the implementation of the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, which has strongly promoted the protection of women's rights and interests and the dissemination of the concept of equality between men and women. 2022 is the year that the State announced that the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women will be revised, and once the news was reported, members of the public asked questions and discussed the issue on the comment section of the relevant official microblog accounts. Some media accounts even collected public opinions in the form of questionnaires or forms, which not only realised the exchange of opinions with the public and obtained feedback from public opinion, but also raised the awareness of the society about the protection of women's rights and interests. After the amendment of the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests was issued, there was a large number of posts on Weibo analysing the content of the amendment, and the official media used the Weibo platform to interpret the amended legal provisions and policy documents, supplemented by more colloquial language. Individual accounts, such as lawyers and microbloggers, often output content under the framework of "personal experience/cases + legal interpretation", providing case references on how women can use the law to defend their rights.

By using the legal framework of the new media to publicise and guide public opinion on legal policies for the protection of women's rights and interests, the Government can facilitate the

setting of its policy agenda. On the one hand, the government has taken advantage of its public platform by registering official accounts on the microblogging platform, such as those of the Women's Federation, the People's Court and other governmental organisations, to serve as a publicity tool in the policy agenda of "safeguarding women's rights and interests". Generally speaking, official microblogs have wide attention and credibility, and the official media publish news on relevant issues on microblogs in the form of text or video, which can guide the public to correctly understand the Party's policies and strategies and build social consensus on gender equality through a specific media framework. On the other hand, the public participates in the public policy agenda through the media platform, "The public policy agenda is essentially a public choice process in which multiple interest subjects coordinate, compete, play and compromise with each other to maximise their own interests around a specific policy issue."⁵ In the news about "women's rights" in Weibo, the public can discuss policies related to women's rights and interests, express their views, put forward their rights and interests, and while participating in the policy agenda, they also participate in the construction of women's rights and interests issues, and give feedback to the government's policy making. In short, the government's rational use of new media platforms such as Weibo not only enables it to effectively obtain public opinion in the early stages of policy formulation, but also promotes the understanding and support of the society for the policies that have already been put in place for the protection of women's rights and interests. The use of the legal framework also reflects the great importance that the state and government attach to the protection of women's rights and interests.

2.1.2. Framework for the presentation of facts

The factual framework refers to reports on women's rights and interests, including factual reports and legal analyses of incidents of women's rights and interests being infringed upon, cases of women's rights and women's self-experience of women's rights and interests being infringed upon, and so on.⁶ When the official media report on women's rights and interests, they need to have a unified publicity framework to select and highlight the content, focusing on transmitting the concept of gender equality and safeguarding women's rights and interests. For example, the incident of the woman with eight children in Fengxian County, once exposed, quickly hit the microblogging hot search, becoming a hot topic of women's rights protection. Within a month of the incident, the mainstream media published 319 reports on the "eight children in Fengxian County".⁷ Among them, lawyers and government agencies usually interpreted the content of legal analyses in the form of "case statements + legal analyses"; when reporting on the facts of women's rights and interests, the official media reported on the time, place, cause and effect, moral judgement and other elements, following the principle of "incident statement" and the principle of "legal analysis". When reporting facts about incidents of women's rights violations, official media report the time, place, causality, moral judgement and other elements of the incident, following the narrative structure of "statement of the incident" or "statement of the incident + handling results".⁸ Unofficial accounts often publish content in the form of "story + opinion" when reporting. In the case of the eight-child woman in Fengxian County, many members of the public discussed the legal issues of abduction of women and human trafficking, and the majority of the content was mixed with personal subjective emotions, with "anger", "shock", "sympathy", and so on, in the public's comments. In the public's comments, "anger", "shock", "sympathy" and other emotions accounted for a relatively high proportion. At the same time, there were also rational analyses of the reasons for the victimisation of women's rights and interests involved in the incident, as well as policy suggestions for protecting women's rights and interests. However, there were a large number of conflicting comments in the comments section, and the public's sentiment towards the incident itself shifted to the inequality of social status between men and women. Because of the complexity and sensitivity of gender issues, the media must construct an appropriate

framework when reporting on related events, and be careful to avoid statements with strong emotional tendencies and those involving sexism in their choice of text and discourse.

2.2. Issues and recommendations

2.2.1. Grasp the public mood and promote rational discussion.

Research by scholars such as Lu Jia and Liu Xinchuan confirms that social media is emotional and irrational, however, emotions and public interest claims show a positive correlation, and interest claims are the purpose of people's communication.⁹In the discussion of women's rights and interests, the female public expresses their opinions in order to achieve the common interests of the female group. In this process, emotion-led speech dominates, and people quickly express their opinions through their personal judgement and value choices, lacking a truly rational discussion. It is not difficult to find that, due to the precise push of big data algorithms, individuals are gradually closed into groups of similar views, and it is difficult to break down the barriers of communication between camps divided by emotions, forming the "information cocoon" effect. Based on the fact that women's freedom of speech is maximised in the media, every single comment may affect the public's view of women's rights and interests. Therefore, under the emotion-driven speech, coupled with the differences in media literacy among different groups, the public discussion is obviously characterised by the lack of awareness of reaching a consensus and the differences in the impact on different groups, and the discussion tends to become "quarrelsome". In order to address this problem, women's groups should firstly establish the awareness of rational thinking and calm analysis, maximize the rationalization of their own speech and enhance the rationalization of their demands, in order to realize the common interests of women; furthermore, relevant professional public officials should combine their own advantages and gender differences to construct relevant issues, guide the public to speak out rationally, popularize the women's ideology of today's era, and convey the social concept of equality for all. Social Concepts.

2.2.2. Normalisation of women's rights and interests issues to increase social attention.

Social media news coverage and dissemination affects people's attention, and media agenda setting can influence the public's agenda. When more and more media devote themselves to reporting on the topic of "women's rights", the public will pay more attention to and discuss this topic. However, it is not difficult to find that the content of "women's rights" on Weibo is intermittent, hot and avoided.

Even most of the official media of "Women's Newspaper" avoided the important issues and chose to ignore or falsely report the issues related to women's rights and interests; "seeking women's rights and interests" has become a slogan, and the continuous output of content related to women's rights and interests cannot be guaranteed. In view of this, microblogging platforms and related media should fully recognise the necessity of disclosing women's issues in society, and increase the frequency of issues related to women's rights and interests. They should take the initiative to report women's rights and interests issues that really exist in the society, pay attention to the difficulties faced by women in their life, work and family, and endeavour to build a gender-equal society.

2.2.3. Increasing media authority and avoiding traffic domination

Many media outlets, in order to obtain public traffic, for competition, hotspot capture and other factors, make use of the subject matter by means of rhetorical modification, fabricated headlines and other means to exaggerate or mislead the facts in their reports on public events concerning women's rights and interests, leading to difficulty in discerning the truth of the content of the information and the proliferation of undesirable content, thus guiding the public opinion of the masses, and the antagonistic sentiments in the online environment are easily infected with each other and accelerated to spread within the group, promoting the

Oppositional sentiments in the online environment can easily infect each other and spread faster within the group, pushing members of the group to form homogenised sentiments and perceptions, thus solidifying the group's opposition. In this regard, the media should stand on the angle of public interest, shift the reporting framework to the topics of responsibility and interests that netizens are most concerned about, and shift the public's focus on the relevant events to the path of their resolution. The media should play the role of "gatekeeper"¹¹ and increase the public's trust in the media. When publishing hot but sensitive topics, they should report the facts in accordance with an objective and rational media framework, establish an objective awareness or rational concept of hot events, and guide the public discussion in a rational and positive direction.

3. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the presentation of women's rights and interests issues on microblogs within China's public discourse environment exhibits several distinctive characteristics. Firstly, microblogging media follow the framework theory, utilizing policy agenda setting to disseminate and report on women's rights and interests issues. By providing authoritative interpretations of newly introduced laws and policies, official microblogs establish a sense of state concern and trust, empowering women to express their views and interests confidently. Secondly, microblog media reports adhere to the principle of factual reporting, presenting events and details to the public, regardless of the varying reporting frameworks used by official and personal accounts. This approach facilitates wide dissemination and encourages active public engagement in discussions on women's issues. Thirdly, the nature of the microblogging platform encourages users to express emotions and opinions, fostering a growing awareness among women of their rights and interests, leading to increased attention and advocacy for their cause.

However, challenges persist in the media's coverage of women's rights and interests. Emotional-oriented reporting by some media outlets still prevails, hindering the dominance of rational and well-considered opinions, and potentially exacerbating gender confrontations. To address this, media organizations must adopt appropriate frameworks to foster constructive public discussions. Additionally, irregular reporting and declining public attention on women's rights issues are observed on microblogging platforms, where concerns tend to shift towards entertainment and fragmented content. To counteract this trend, the government should continue to reform mechanisms and institutions to safeguard women's rights from commercialization and ensure their strong protection through relevant policies. Moreover, media entities themselves must exercise discretion in handling controversial comments, avoiding the sacrifice of moral integrity for the sake of sensationalism and clickbait.

This research sheds light on the communication of women's rights and interests issues on microblogging platforms, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of public discourse and media framing. By understanding these characteristics and challenges, it becomes essential to explore further avenues for improvement and development. Moving forward, policymakers, society, industries, and individuals should collaborate to foster a more balanced and responsible media landscape regarding women's rights issues. Future research could delve into assessing the effectiveness of various media framing strategies, exploring the impact of policy implementation on women's rights, and investigating the role of microblogging platforms in shaping gender equality awareness. Based on the issues identified in this study, various stakeholders, including policymakers, society, industry, and the public themselves, can take specific actions to address them.

Policymakers play a vital role in shaping the media landscape and public discourse. They can promote media literacy and awareness among the public, investing in initiatives to enable

individuals to critically evaluate and discern information, particularly on women's rights issues. Furthermore, policymakers should enforce responsible reporting by implementing regulations and guidelines that ensure media outlets report on women's rights issues responsibly, avoiding sensationalism and emotional bias in their coverage. Additionally, they can support gender equality policies, developing and implementing measures that address women's rights violations and create an inclusive environment for women's empowerment.

Society as a whole has a significant influence on shaping attitudes and perceptions. To address the identified issues, society can raise awareness and foster empathy by engaging in campaigns and educational programs that highlight women's rights issues, encouraging empathy and understanding among the public. Promoting inclusive and respectful discussions is also essential, creating spaces where open and respectful conversations on gender equality can take place, allowing diverse perspectives to be heard and understood. Furthermore, supporting women's empowerment through advocacy for equal opportunities in various sectors, including education, employment, and leadership positions, is crucial for achieving lasting change.

The media industry plays a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and perceptions. To address the identified issues, media organizations should uphold ethical reporting standards, ensuring accuracy and fairness in their coverage of women's rights issues. They can also promote inclusivity in media content by featuring diverse voices and perspectives on women's rights and gender equality, breaking away from traditional stereotypes. Additionally, collaboration with women's rights organizations and experts can help develop accurate and informative content on gender-related topics, furthering public understanding and engagement.

Lastly, individual members of the public have the power to effect change through their actions and choices. By engaging in constructive discussions on women's rights issues on social media platforms and other forums, the public can contribute to empathy and understanding. Sharing accurate and reliable information on women's rights can help counter misinformation and raise awareness among peers. Moreover, actively participating in and supporting campaigns and initiatives that advocate for women's rights and gender equality can amplify collective efforts toward a more inclusive and empowering society.

However, this study is not without limitations. Firstly, the analysis focused on Weibo as the primary platform for media framing, neglecting the potential influence of other social media platforms. Secondly, the research solely examined the Chinese context, and cross-cultural comparisons could enrich the understanding of media framing in different societies. Additionally, due to the ever-evolving nature of the digital media landscape, the findings might be subject to changes in media practices over time. The findings offer a foundation for future studies to advance the protection and promotion of women's rights in China's ever-evolving media landscape. For future research, it is essential to explore media framing in a broader and more diverse digital media environment, encompassing various social media platforms and different cultural contexts. Comparative studies across countries could provide valuable insights into the role of media in shaping women's rights issues globally. Additionally, investigating the impact of media framing on public perceptions and policy outcomes could further enhance our understanding of effective communication strategies for promoting gender equality.

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