

# Research on the Impacts of Social Media Public Opinion on Women and Related Countermeasures

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## Abstract:

The development of social media platforms allowed people to express their perspectives on hotspot events freely. These different perspectives belong to public opinion, and they can affect people in several ways. Women are usually associated with many hotspot events, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and so on, and social media can make these events highly exposed and discussed. Some women use public opinion to speak up for themselves successfully, while others endure the injuries brought by public opinion because of some stereotypes and the dissemination of rumors. So, understanding the formation and propagation of public opinion, the specific pros and cons produced by public opinion, and the appropriate solution to reduce injuries can help to create a harmonious online environment and promote gender equality all over the world. Therefore, this essay reviews and analyzes the previous research to explore the procedure of how positive and negative effects were created by public opinion. Ultimately, it offers disparate strategies that different stakeholders can adopt to minimize the negative impacts.

**Keywords:** Woman's rights; network public opinion; social media.

## 1. Introduction

In the big data era, because of the development of the internet, more than 5.07 billion people actively participate in different social media platforms, and the most famous social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok, which have over 1500 million monthly active users [1, 2]. People on these social media applications can express their opinions freely about some hotspot events. These different perspectives belong to public opinion studies, which consider the formation, communication, and measurement of citizens' attitudes toward public affairs [3]. Researchers need to understand social context since it is correlated with various societal forces and institutions, reflecting the inner problems of cities, demographic profile, state of family life, and so on [3]. Moreover, public opinion is demonstrated to affect human life in fields such as policymaking and journalism. Hence, understanding the influences produced by public opinion can help to make citizens' lives happier.

Indeed, social media platforms provide opportunities for people to share their ideas or grab the attention of the government more conveniently through the internet, but problems such as cyberbullies and stereotypes, triggered by negative public opinion, especially on women, are somewhat inevitable as they are not many restrictions at

the same time. With the development of feminism, women desperately want to figure out the methods to alleviate the injury created by public opinion while using it efficiently to speak up for themselves. Therefore, this research review and analysis combine the previous studies with recent real-life events, which can provide a comprehensive view of how network public opinion influences women. It is going to explore the formation and transformation of public opinion, its specific impacts on women, and finding the appropriate solutions to solve the troubles. As a result, one can create a harmonious network environment for netizens to enjoy.

## 2. Formation and Propagation of Public Opinion through the Internet

Based on the network public opinion dissemination model, there are four stages in the process of the dissemination of public opinion through the Internet: the incubation period, initiative period, diffusion period, and regression period [4].

During the incubation period, social media accounts will put some tags while they post videos, texts, or pictures on the internet. Social media users can search and track for different tags that they are interested in. In the initiative period, people will respond to the topics by commenting, forwarding, and so on to express their attitudes, perspec-

tives, or emotions. With the surge of page views and comments, the events enter the diffusion period. More and more people participate in these hotspot events; so, at the rudimentary phase of the diffusion period, problems such as rumors, conflicts, and cyberbullying are easily formed since there are no official reports and blinded conformity as the pressure of public opinion. Subsequently, the departments involved will report the truth of the hotspot events after careful investigations. At last, since the truths are exposed, public opinion starts to dissipate because fewer people keep noticing the events in the regression period.

### 3. Effect of Public Opinion on Social Media on Women

#### 3.1 Encourage Gender Equality

Thanks to the characteristics of the process of the transformation of public opinion, social media can encourage people to focus on gender issues since everyone has the authority to speak up online. Based on the research conducted by Yingxue Wu, who studied at King's College London, it accords with the story of "Eight-Child Mother," which happened in 2022, to reveal how social media and public opinion helped to protect women's rights and stimulated the approval of amendments to the *Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests* [5]. Recently, a doctoral student of the School of Liberal Arts, Renmin University of China real-name reported that her tutor sexually harassed and forcibly molested her on social media. With the increase in exposure on social media, more and more people notice this event and speak up for her. The fermentation of public opinion forced the school to inquire about this event and take action to solve the problem, to keep its reputation. Ultimately, the professorship of her tutor was revoked. These two events both illustrated that public opinion is an efficient strategy for women to solve gender issues and protect their rights since many people engage in these gender-based events and support them, so the strength becomes more powerful to overturn the unreasonable affairs, finally elevating the status of women in society.

#### 3.2 Anti-Feminist Coverage of Violence Events

According to the essay written by Eastal et al., for problems such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, the media usually use an anti-feminist perspective to describe, providing overly simple or biased views for the issues. Therefore, the severity of the problems will be misunderstood, and the requirements of solutions will be ignored by society [6]. These types of

reports created profound effects on women since selective word choice makes victim-blaming resonate possible. For instance, some public opinion argued that women should be responsible for sexual harassment or sexual assault by blaming them for dressing so gorgeous and going out at night. These vitriolic languages not only make these events entertaining and less credible, but they also make women reluctant to speak up for themselves as they need to tolerate the injuries brought by vicious events and public opinion attacks.

#### 3.3 Creating Negative Images of Women

Some social media creates negative images of women in hotspot events of network public images by using biased and denigrated words, or separating women apart by adding "female" before the properties. These negative images lead to more and more negative perspectives and stereotypes under the reports of the events, destroying the reputation of all women. The essay written by Tianzi Zhang discussed three categories of women: female drivers, little fan sisters, and female doctors. The negative images of women created significant negative impacts, especially on "female drivers" and "female doctors." Because of social media guidance, females are usually thought of as bad drivers. Therefore, in many traffic accidents, netizens blamed the mistake on the female drivers and even attacked their dress [7]. For female doctors, because of some stereotypes of their identity and social media negative guidance, the conflicts between females and males are magnified, especially in marriage problems. Thus, female doctors are always attacked in most events by claiming they are vain, and the objective facts are ignored by the netizens [7].

### 4. Cyberbullying

#### 4.1 Relationship between Cyberbullying and Public Opinion

Based on the experiment conducted by Song et al., it explored the relationship between network public opinion, aggressive traits, and cyberbullying by controlling gender, grade, internet age, and internet time. The consequences show that network public opinion plays a moderation role in the relationship between cyberbullying and aggressive traits [8]. In other words, irrational public opinion will magnify the predicted effect of aggressive traits on cyberbullying. Since commenting on social media platforms is anonymous, people do not need to worry about bearing legal punishments. Thus, people can express their ideas freewheeling. Some irrational expressions will prompt people with aggressive traits to participate in cyberbullying since it is an effective way to release their pressure

and vent emotions. Hence, without any restriction, the cyberbullying is difficult to prevent.

### 4.2 The Effect of Cyberbullying

Between 2022 and 2023, an event about a Chinese female student showed the terror of cyberbullying. On July 13th, 2022, this woman posted a picture on Little Red Book and Bilibili, two popular social media platforms in China. In the picture, with the pink hair, she shared with her grandfather the joy of being admitted to graduate school. However, this sweet scene drew malicious rumors, Because of this pink hair, many people said she looked like a hostess. Holding hands with her grandfather, she was accused of having an illicit relationship with him. She was submerged by large amounts of negative public opinion, and her photos were disseminated on different social media platforms. Furthermore, some irrational people try to get her address and contact information, even threatening her and her family. The cyberbullying affected her daily life: her studying efficiency declined, and she got severe depression, a mental health problem that might have several symptoms such as thoughts about dying or suicide, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite or weight, and feeling very tired or low in energy [9]. At first, she was actively using the law to prosecute cybercriminals, but many people continuously verbally attacked her in different ways. Unfortunately, she chose suicide on January 23rd, 2023.

Understanding and analyzing these reasons can help to find effective solutions for cyberbullying. Combining this case and the research conducted by Gurishati Ashar, it is possible to figure out some reasons for the tragedy of cyberbullying. Firstly, the research claimed that media deliberately guides and spreads unsubstantiated information, causing the attack of social media users [10]. Secondly, since social media is virtual and anonymous, it makes stopping cyberbullying even more complex, because the lawyers need to obtain enough evidence to turn private prosecution into public prosecution, which has more power. Last but not least, as there are no severe punishments, cybercriminals are unable to realize their mistakes, making the extent of cyberbullying increase dramatically.

## 5. Methods to Mitigate the Negative Impacts

Although there are some positive impacts created by public opinion, based on this analysis, the negative impacts outweigh the positive ones. Therefore, to protect women's rights and create a harmonious online environment, different stakeholders need to take some actions together to mitigate the negative effects. Different stakeholders can alleviate the negative impacts created by public opinion in three main disparate ways: supervising the contents of the

original reports (during the incubation period), restricting the dissemination pathways of negative public opinion (during the diffusion period), and mitigating the injuries on women.

Further improvement in laws and regulations seems indispensable. Cybercriminals and rumormongers are unable to realize their mistakes as they do not think they will be punished, making them rampant. In the new laws, policymakers should list down the punishments specifically depending on the severity of the injuries. Moreover, they need to take action immediately after the fermentation of the hotspot events. They need to show the truth of the events to the public after doing investigations to prevent the further spread of the rumors.

The requirement of a real-name registration system plays an important role. The virtual and anonymous characteristics of social media make collecting effective evidence and tracking cybercriminals more difficult. Therefore, a real-name registration system can restrict the behavior of social media users. In addition, to avoid some negative public opinion and verbal attacks from irrational and aggressive people, which can induce massive cyberbullying, social media platforms should censor comments and block unfriendly words.

Media plays an important role in transmitting hotspot events to the citizens. Therefore, reporting the events objectively and without gender bias becomes very important. Improper word selections will lead to negative impressions of women of the people, harming specific groups of the population indirectly. Furthermore, the media should not oversimplify the whole event to undermine the severity of some bad events, such as domestic violence. In other words, the media should report the events comprehensively and in detail, avoiding any misunderstands.

Some social media accounts deliberately hire people or use some technologies to disseminate rumors and expand the influence of the events. They utilize the conformity of people, believing some people will engage in cyberbullying since many people already do so. Hence, people must have their judgments on the hotspot events, and they should not attack people without any evidence instead of believing victims must have their own mistakes.

Women, sometimes, can use public opinion to speak up for themselves successfully, but because of some stereotypes, their problems can also seem like jokes to other netizens. Thus, when their rights were encroached upon by others, they should find legal help actively and bravely, and if they have some symptoms of mental health problems, they should discover therapists for the first time, which can help them feel comfortable.

In the big data era, social media is indispensable in daily life. So, educators must teach children how to use social

media properly. Children need to understand social media is a way for them to extend their horizons, make friends, and obtain information, instead of venting their emotions or releasing pressure by assaulting other people. Also, it is important to teach them gender equality and try to eliminate some gender bias in the past.

### 6. Conclusion

Overall, it first explains the process of the formation and dissemination of public opinion. Next, it analyzes the previous research and recent case studies. There are several positive and negative impacts created by public opinion through social media. It can promote gender equality by helping women grab more attention, speak up for themselves successfully, and solve their problems. Otherwise, when the media used anti-feminist perspectives or negative images of women to report some bad events, women were usually blamed by other netizens because of some stereotypes or victim-blaming resonance. In addition, the proliferation of unreliable information and irrational expression contributed to massive cyberbullying, leading to serious mental health symptoms. Finally, it provides several actions to resolve these issues that different stakeholders should take in different periods of the formation and propagation of public opinion: policymakers and governments should approve new policies. Social media platforms and the media should guarantee real-name registrations, objective reports, and friendly comments. Women should positively find legal aid and psychological counseling when they feel overwhelmed by their situations. Educators are responsible for the future online environment by educating children to use social media appropriately. The limitation of this study is that the case studies are all from China; therefore, to have a more integrated view of these problems, future studies should obtain more case studies from different countries to analyze, discovering

more interrelated factors. As a result, people can figure out more effective countermeasures to solve the problems specifically, finally create a peaceful online environment, and elevate the status of women in society.

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