Research on the Influences of Social Media to Gender Equality

Yige Fu*

Lingnan University, Cultural Studies, Hong Kong, China

ABSTRACT: As social media emerged, it generally make an influence on our society, and especially the social relationship among us. Social relationships include many aspects, such as the expansion of the social sphere, and then comes to the subject of the research: the Influences of Social Media to Gender Equality. First, the research is conducted through collecting data: a questionnaire was designed and finally, 81 questionnaires were collected. The data comes from the friend circle around the researcher online, especially the group who do not have difficulty having access to the traditional media and social media at the same time. In short conclusion, the research finally showed that social media platforms gathered more voices from the minorities, especially from the LGBTQ group; and it provides the public with the opportunities to interact with each other, which is completely different from the traditional media; then if the topic related to gender equality is heated, it will be more possible to be seen by the public. Then the research in the following will provide more details.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Rolleri came up with an operationalized definition of "Gender equality": Gender equality is a social condition whereby women and men share equal rights and a balance of power, status, opportunities, and rewards. Gender equality can be broadly operationalized by men and women having equitable access and use of resources, equitable participation in relationships, the household, the community, and political arenas, and they have their safety or freedom from violence[1]. Gender inequality could have influences on people of different ages and backgrounds. Nowadays, social media has quite strong interaction, which lowers the barrier between publishers and their readers. In other words, unlike traditional media, ordinary people are gradually getting the chance to share their views on the same things with others and discuss them, instead of just receiving information as before. In addition, the information provided by traditional media is often official, formal and not easy. This represents a high demand for the information provider. But today, individuals can easily become providers of information if they want to. Therefore, after the emergence of social media, this research wants to explore why and how the strong interactivity of social media can affect gender equality, especially through activities like the online feminist movement. Then, research questions are designed from two aspects: information resources of gender equality and characteristics of social media, which is also the center of the following research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the study, *The Role of Social Media in Promoting Gender Equality in Indonesia*, The number of Social Media users continues to grow. Not only that, other reports on the development of the Internet and many other information and communication technologies around the world show that digital media has entered every part of people's lives [2]. The report also introduces "Aliansi Laki-Laki Baru" (ALLB) digital activism organized by men. It states that digital activism can be referred to as the use of digital technology in all forms of activism movements, or "the expanded use of digital technology in movements for social and political change -- for example, mobile phones and Internet devices [2]." This kind of male-dominated organization is very rare. ALLB not only uses their own website to present basic information about the organization, but also designs a frequently asked questions and answers area on the site based on this. In addition, the organization's three main social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) also performed well. So in the age of social media, the power of men in promoting gender equality is a force to be reckoned with.

Researchers in another paper named *A Reviewed Based Study of Gender Equality in Media* noted the potential of new media to break down gender biases. It is the media's responsibility to take gender issues out of the private sphere and put them on the political agenda, and to depict the current situation of discrimination between genders in the real world [3]. But for all the theories in the report, the fly in the ointment is the lack of convincing data across the board. It provides a comprehensive description of the possibilities and problems that women and the LGBTQ community may face in advocating their rights in the

---

*Corresponding author. Email: fuyige0928@gmail.com

media, but none of these are supported by data or other convincing examples.

Then the paper *Can Social Media Effectively include Women's Voices in Decision-making Progress* analyzes whether social media can effectively give women a voice in the decision-making process from a political perspective. Social media has proven to be a powerful tool for bringing more attention to women's rights, inspiring cities around the world to act, and encouraging policy makers to make a commitment to gender equality [4]. The article discusses the social media revolution and combines social media with women's empowerment. To show how social media can promote gender equality, researchers offer the example of hashtags: the hashtag movement has brought women's issues to the forefront of politics. Similar to UN Women's successful and high-profile #HeForShe online campaign, there are many other hashtag campaigns. The #MeToo movement, for example, has brought public attention to sexual harassment of women. However, the author believes that such campaigns also have their limitations, because the promoters are very well known, which means they can attract huge attention on their own. If ordinary people want to achieve such results, they have to spare more efforts.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In order to collect required data, the research was designed in three ways: online observations, interviews and questionnaires.

3.1.1 Online Observation

The first criteria of target social media is based on whether it is commonly and popularly used among people every day or not, and hashtag movement is indeed founded. On Weibo, the social media platform, which is mostly used and popular among people in Mainland China, hashtag is named as 'Topic'. Maybe hashtags have different names on different platforms, like Facebook and Instagram, but it actually works the same way. Each hashtag shows the hot topics of the moment, and each user can comment and share their thoughts, which greatly reduces the barrier to sharing. In addition, hashtags actually collect different or identical sounds within a particular topic. You can click on the tabs to see what other people think differently. The more opinions people share, the easier the hashtag will be seen.

3.1.2 Interviews

Ives and his female friend Jocelyn are invited to the interview.

(1) Do you know about gender equality? Where do you remember first encountering the concept?

(2) How do you think social media platforms affect gender equality?

(a) What do you think is the most obvious feature of social media?

(b) What are its positive and negative effects on gender equality?

(3) Does social media provide another opportunity for both men and women to pursue gender equality?

Because the first research task was to determine whether social media expanded people's knowledge of gender equality, the first interview question was to help identify the source of the information. If most people learn about gender equality through social media, it follows that these platforms do attract more attention to gender equality. The second question is for them to talk about their experiences with social media and share their insights. They can talk about how they know what social media shows about gender equality and how it affects it. It's worth noting that they were not asked to give any academic answers and were allowed to share their feelings on the topic of gender equality. The third question is not obligatory. If respondents have heard of the feminist movement, they can share their views on it.

3.1.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaire QR Code was designed and posted in the friend circle on WeChat and then the person who wanted to do the questionnaire can scan the QR Code and answer the questions. Until now, 81 people have finished. The questions are as follows:

(1) Have you heard of gender equality?

a) Yes. (Question 2) / No. (Question 5)

(2) Are you familiar with gender equity-related activities (e.g., feminism)?

a) Yes/no. (Answer question 3)

(3) How did you learn about gender equality? (Answer question 4)

a) Offline activities (e.g. classes, lectures, parades, etc)

b) Online activity (e.g. TV, websites, newspapers, social media, etc)

(4) Please check the way you know about gender equality:

a) TV

b) Newspapers

c) Learning in a course

d) Parade

e) Film

f) Social media (including interactive social platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, TikTok and BiliBili)

(5) If you need information about gender equality, which of the following channels would you choose:

a) TV

b) newspapers

c) Learning in a course

d) Parade

e) Film

f) Social media (including interactive social platforms such as Weibo, wechat, TikTok and BiliBili)

(6) Why did you choose this/these channels to learn about gender equality?

a) More authority

b) More convenient

c) Easy-to-understand

d) Unconsciously, it was easier to grab my attention and keep reading

e) Other answers.

3.2 Profile of Respondents

The first criterion for screening interviewees is that they have no difficulty in accessing the Internet and information resources such as TELEVISION and newspapers. Secondly, because each interviewee grew up in a different environment and gender, they may have different views on the same thing. In fact, gender equality may be familiar to the public, because it has always existed in our daily life, such as at work, in interviews, and so on.

Interview Respondents:

* Please note that names in the following form have been changed to protect their privacy.

Table 1: Information of Interview Respondents

Name	Gender	Age	Country of Study	Major
Ives	Male	21	Mainland China	Finance
Jocelyn	Female	22	America	Master of Communication Management

4. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

4.1 Social media platforms expand people's channels from which they learn about gender equality

The first significant finding was that 96.3% of those who filled out the survey had heard of the concept of gender equality. Among them, 89.74% are familiar with related activities such as women's rights movement. 96.15% learn about related information on gender equality through social media platforms. Thus, it proves the power of social media. Stephanie Lopez also agreed with this. In his paper, he was positive about the influences of social media: because different kinds of people are using social media to raise awareness for different issues, social media then increases consciousness of issues that are often left behind. Therefore, making social media is a powerful tool to promote gender equality in the modern world[5].

4.2 Differences between Mainland China and the United States

Secondly, the study compares the Hashtag campaigns in mainland China and the United States. In mainland China, as mentioned above, the pioneers of the hashtag movement need to be well-known and influential. For example, people like famous stars and idols, if they become leaders because of their fame, it will be easier to attract more attention, which is almost impossible for ordinary people. But Americans believe that everyone has the freedom to express himself, regardless of whether the initiator is famous or not. So they face a more level playing field. Clearly, in the United States, the Hashtag movement is becoming a powerful weapon to bring women's issues to the public, and it does provide an opportunity for people in the United States to fight for gender equality. Moreover, different from the US, parades are forbidden in Mainland China, and the Chinese government does not support feminism and feminism movements, which causes the result that people can seldom see hashtag movements online.

4.3 Gender stereotypes do not only exist for women

Then there are male stereotypes. Ives, the interviewee, told me that in particular fields, like nursing, kindergarten teachers and counselors, women were more trusted than men. This is because girls are always thought to be careful and gentle, which leads to people tend to think that girls are better qualified for these jobs. It also proves that gender equality is not a task for women alone. It requires the joint efforts of men and women.

5. CONCLUSION

The research first talked about if social media indeed expand the influences of gender equality. The data from questionnaires shows that social media platform indeed becomes a common tool for people to learn about the gender equality. In other words, social media brings the topic related to gender equality into the public eye. Moreover, because it provides opportunities for the public to exchange their ideas, it gathered more same or similar voices to support for a certain topic.

Although today's social media platform provides more opportunities, the research compared the situation in Mainland China and the United States and then found that the power of social media would be affected. If we take the minority group LGBTQ as an example, it is not difficult to know that in America, the government will not intervene in the discussion of the LGBTQ topic, while the Chinese government will do so. The research does not mean that only Mainland China is facing such a dilemma. In 2019 alone, 474 women were killed by men due to suffering abuse or attacks by men in Turkey. But the government's authoritarian and repressive tactics in silencing critical voices on social media and in the streets, the potential to build an organized social movement to curtail these violent crimes is minimal[6].

Even though social media is still evolving, the effects it has cannot be ignored. We indeed see how it changes gender equality, especially through online movements.

But it does not mean that the research has done

everything well. In the future, research can explore more real cases of gender equality in more countries and regions. It currently only lists social media in mainland China and the United States. In addition, the study did not have specific effects on each sample. For example, the popular hashtag movement may only happen in the United States. Mainstream social media, such as those in Indonesia, can hardly play a similar role. Again, take Twitter in Indonesia. Twitter is a platform for political discussion, not for people to share their thoughts, which means it may not be an opportunity for people to pursue gender equality like Hashtags in the US. Therefore, further studies should include comparisons between different fields, so as to carry out more rigorous discussions on the impact of social media on gender equality.

REFERENCES

1. Rolleri, L. (2012). Gender-related definitions. New York: EngenderHealth

2. Maryani, E., Janitra, P. A., & Rahmawan, D. (2018). "Aliansi Laki-Laki Baru": The Role of Social Media in Promoting Gender Equality in Indonesia. Salasika, 1(2), 107-122. https://doi.org/10.36625/sj.v1i2.19

3. Nande, Sushmita and Chitnis, Rucha and Bose, Simran, A Review Based Study of Gender Equality in Media (May 29, 2019). International Conference on Media Ethics 2019, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3396114 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3396114

4. OECD (2015). Can social media effectively include women's voices in decision-making processes?https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/DEV_socialmedia-issuespaper-March2015.pdf

5. Stephanie Lopez. Tools for Progress: How the Media Impacts Gender Equality? https://philpapers.org/rec/LOPTFP

6. Christine L. Ogan, Özen Baş (2020) Use of Social Media in the Struggle Surrounding Violence Against Turkish Women, Vol 14, Ogan.