Attitudes Toward Women in Media Discourse

-- Discourse Construction with "Leftover Women" as an Example

Liu Yinuo[1,a,*,†], Yang Wenqi[1,†]

[1]*School of Journalism and Communication, Zhongyuan University of Technology, Zhengzhou, Henan, 451191, China*

[2]*College of Communication, Guangxi University for Nationalities, Nanning, Guangxi, 530007, China*

a. *202017014118@zut.edu.cn*

*corresponding author

†These authors contributed equally.

Abstract: The media first proposed the term "leftover women" and then spread it on the Internet. Existing studies on "leftover women" mainly focus on traditional media, such as newspapers and TV, and rarely involve "we media". Through text analysis and comparative research method, this paper conducts a comparative study on the discourse attitudes of official media and private media towards women and the media images they construct. According to the data citation and case analysis, the following results are concluded: the official media's construction of the image of "leftover women" is relatively rigid and simple, and the reporting plate mainly focuses on the entertainment part. Due to the relative freedom of speech, private media create a more diversified image, and the mode is mainly personal Posting, relying on traffic to spread. To a certain extent, this paper fills in the research of "leftover women" in the field of "we media" and puts forward suggestions on how to create the media image of "leftover women" more objectively.

Keywords: media, leftover women, discourse construction

1.   Introduction

In 2006, the term referred to a group of older unmarried women called "leftover women" was originally derived from an unofficial fashion magazine cover, a type of private media [1]. Its counterpart is the official media, such as the People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency. The two have different attitudes towards "leftover women" and different content in their reports. Since 2007, the term "leftover women" has been included in the report on the State of China's Language and Life. The Ministry of Education defines leftover women as those above the age generally considered marriageable in society but not married. It is broadly defined as women above the age of 27. With the rapid development of "we media", "leftover women" have more and more say on public platforms.

Feminism has always been a hot topic of Chinese media and gender studies, but there are few related pieces of research on "leftover women". At present, the world as a whole influences the spread of feminism in the media, mostly by a relatively broad medium -- mass media. However,

with the development of The Times, we media gradually rises, and it has the characteristics of a large number of users, large span and more. This paper is roughly divided into two categories: official media and private media for comparative research. Taking the discourse attitude of official media and private media towards "leftover women" and the construction of media image as the theme, this paper uses text analysis, comparative analysis and other research methods.

"Leftover women" is involved in both the fields of feminism and media communication. This paper reviews and critically summarises the relevant literature and materials in the past. This study uses the comparative research method, according to the different circumstances of the comparative analysis, to find the differences and similarities. The purpose is to explore their media attitudes towards "leftover women" and what kind of media image they construct. Based on Walter Lippmann's theory of Public Opinion and Habermas's theory of "Public space", this paper tries to explain what kind of "leftover women" image is constructed by official media and private media and what kind of characteristics they present in the process of image communication.

There are four research questions in this paper. First of all, the question is, what female identities and characteristics are included in the "leftover women" group? Secondly, this study discusses the attitude of official media and private media towards the word "leftover women" and how to construct the media image. What is the relationship between society and the official and private media's evaluation of "leftover women"? Moreover, what factors influence the evaluation of leftover women? In this study, the author innovates in the topic selection. Most subjects of "leftover women" focus on traditional media and rarely involve new media. In this paper, we media (official media and private media), the representative of new media, is selected for comparative analysis, trying to study the environment of we media and trying to explain the role of official media and private media on the platform of we media in the process of discourse transmission of "leftover women".

2.   Group Definition of "Leftover Women" and Media Image Construction

In 2007, the Ministry of Education issued "China's Language and Life Situation Report 2006", officially defined the meaning of "leftover women", meaning "modern urban women, most of whom have high education, high income, high IQ, and impeccable looks, due to high requirements for a mate, resulting in the marriage of the ideal destination of older women " [2].

On the one hand, the majority of the identification traits that the media has created for "leftover women" display qualities like high education, high income, and attractive beauty. People rarely see the image of low education, mediocre appearance and ordinary work reported by the media. On the other hand, the media usually report negative news about women, such as marriage fraud, forced matchmaking and forced marriage, to attract people's attention and give a negative label to the "leftover women" group. The centre of the reports often focuses on the anxiety of the "leftover women" group. It is clear that the identification traits of "leftover women" propagated by media discourse attitude neglect the group's variety, concentrate mostly on extreme situations, and categorise people into a small number of categories for distribution.

In the field of "we media", more and more private media speak for "leftover women" in a light-hearted and humorous way, try their best to show the lifestyle and inner world of modern women, and also win a certain degree of discourse status for "leftover women". At the same time, female groups can use the Internet to create new semantic spaces with more text forms and symbols. Relying on this space, female groups' creativity and subject consciousness can be manifested. It can be seen that the role of this space is bidirectional. It can not only stimulate the self-identity of female groups through the construction of female discourse space but also actively dissolve the semantic space of "leftover women" discourse and promote a wider social identity [3].

3. Attitudes of Official and Private Media Towards "Leftover Women" Discourse: Constructing Media Image

3.1. The Discourse Attitude and Image Construction of the Word "Leftover Women" by the Official Media in China

Walter Lippmann, an American scholar, proposed the concept of a "mimicry environment". People's understanding of the world is mostly through the mass media, but under the construction of the media in the mimicry environment, people's cognition will change. Under such conditions, people's behavior, judgment, and stereotypes will affect people's judgment of real life through the change of mimicry environment. On this basis, media reports through mass media will again enhance the audience's stereotype. Walter Lippmann, an American scholar, proposed the stereotype theory in his book Public Opinion. He believes that the public has a one-sided understanding of things and, in most cases, defines them first and then understands them. Under the influence of social culture, people unconsciously define a thing and understand the world through the mode of self-identification [4].

The emergence of the term "leftover women", to some extent, will lead to the public's stereotype of unmarried women, which is further deepened through the mimicry environment. In 2007, after the term was officially recognised, major media outlets began to report on "leftover women", and "leftover women" became a hot topic of public opinion.

As the most authoritative official media, People's Daily constructs mostly positive female images such as model pioneers, professional women and strong women. The construction of female images always depends on the needs of national construction in different periods. It establishes individual value pursuit through the female images required by the country and advocates different ideal female images in different periods. Although the rationality of the report cannot cover up the tendency of discourse hegemony behind it, because women have been in a discourse environment where social responsibilities and obligations are constantly emphasised for a long time, they have always been unable to achieve the state of self-liberation. People's Daily, as the Party newspaper and official mainstream media, should mainly express the national position. Thus, in order to communicate national ideas, perspectives, and attitudes to the public, it is important to set an example while presenting female pictures. However, affected by its own media positioning, the female images reported by the newspaper are relatively simple and need more depth and breadth.

Local official media, such as Guangzhou Daily, Xinmin Evening News and Huashang Daily, mostly focus on life supplement pages and entertainment pages, while news pages are relatively small, showing an imbalance in distribution. Among them, in the media reports of Beijing Evening News, Xinmin Evening News and Yangcheng Evening News, "leftover women" are portrayed as a group of women who are overconfident and demand more from men [5].

3.2. Domestic Private Media's Discourse Attitude Towards the Term "Leftover Women"

The concept of "public space" was put forward by Habermas. It is summarised as the free dialogue between the public and public opinions through the media [6]. Hashtags are used in multiple social media, with strong cohesion of social media information. Through the use of hashtags, users may engage in and express their thoughts on a variety of issues on microblogs, a type of we-media. These random and adaptable microblogs allow private media to spread topics while encouraging fair and free discourse. Microblogs are a new medium for people to participate in conversations and share their thoughts. Microblogs' emphasis on user engagement makes them a desirable alternative for private media seeking to provide a more varied and inclusive environment for discourse. In the

end, microblogs are a potentially useful instrument for promoting more vibrant and democratic forms of communication in the digital era.

Topics related to "leftover women" on microblogs can be roughly divided into two types one is self-narration, and the other comments on others. Self-narrative accounts for 45%, which reflects that the publishers put themselves into the role of "leftover women" and conduct narration from the first-person perspective, usually with fewer words and fewer expression skills [7]. Most microblogs commenting on others are narrated from a third-person perspective, using a variety of techniques to express themselves, such as quoting quotations and metaphorical hints. On July 25, 2015, a Weibo user named "Daily Wenplay" said that in ancient times, women who did not marry when they reached the legal age had to be fined, but in modern times, there is still a "Grey Wolf" who does not get married. He satirised the contemporary phenomenon of "leftover women" in a joking way and gained nearly 10,000 likes [8].

In a blog post, user "Loveym" explained that over the years, she has been able to build a good relationship with her "leftover woman" status. She is not afraid of her age, even though others in her situation feel that a leftover woman is scary. In her mind, she likes to be free and unconstrained and is reluctant to follow a man casually for the rest of her life. Although she still sometimes yearns to have a married life and have a child, she will not choose the wrong man. At the end of her blog post, she writes, " Although I become those people's conversation for a typical, stubborn woman, I am living this life of aloofness and freedom. It doesn't matter if later on I meet the right person or if I am single for the rest of my life, I will face all these situations calmly [9]."

The media image of "leftover women" is diversified in the construction of Weibo and other new media platforms. Network social platforms provide voice space for this group of "leftover women". They spontaneously gather together and freely express their attribution, expectations and reality about love and marriage, which expands the expression space of the female image. To a certain extent, it can change the public's stereotype of women and their affiliated images.

4. The Evaluation of "Leftover Women" by Official Media and Private Media

Some local official media, such as Yangcheng Evening News, Beijing Evening News and Xinmin Evening News, reported "leftover women" from 2009 to 2010.

Table 1: The image positioning of "leftover women" in news reports [10].

Newspaper tendency	Frequency	Relative frequency
Positive (support, approval)	36	22.36%
Neutral (objective)	55	34.16%
Negative (ridicule, negation)	70	43.48%

According to Table 1, people can find that a tendency in a negative and joking tone of 43.48%, a neutral and objective tone of 34.16%, and a positive and supportive tone of 22.36% [10].

Table 2: Distribution of report types of "leftover Women"[10].

Type	Frequency	Relative frequency
News	38	23.60%
Supplement	115	71.43%

According to Table 2, 71.43% of the reported pages appeared in the supplement in the form of essays and miscellaneous remarks, and only 23.60% appeared in the news section [10]. As can be seen from this, the media discourse attitude is mainly negative attitude, and positive reports appear

less when discussing the realistic problems of women; there is no in-depth study of the formation of a phenomenon and historical background, to a certain extent, will affect the domestic audience's correct understanding of women.

In his book Weibo: Changing Everything, Kai-fu Lee wrote: In the era of Weibo, having 100 followers is equivalent to running a fashion tabloid. With 1,000 followers, it is equivalent to a poster; 10,000 followers is equivalent to starting a magazine; If a person has 100,000 followers, he can start a local newspaper. One million followers are equivalent to a national newspaper. If a person has 10 million followers, he can make his voice heard like a TV announcer [11]. It is the presence of many voices, big and small, on Weibo that makes possible what was once impossible. Unlike traditional newspapers and magazines, the media image construction subject of "leftover women" in Weibo is presented to the public after media editors are "checked" by newspapers and magazines. Instead, Weibo users directly produce and disseminate the content.

5.   Factors Affecting the Phenomenon of "Leftover Women"

The evaluation of "leftover women" by state and private media will be influenced by various aspects. The first is the influence of social structure on the problem of "leftover women". The complicated employment environment in modern society makes people's living pressure increase rapidly, and in order to live a better life, most young men and women are often in a state of mobility. According to the "China Migrant Population Development Report 2018", the new generation (born after 1980) has become the main part of the floating population, accounting for 65.1% of the total. The post-80s generation accounts for 35.5%, followed by the post-90s generation, accounting for 24.3%, accounting for about 60% of the new generation [12].

Moreover, in this case, the older unmarried young people have little contact with marriage and love time and opportunities. In addition, the influence of traditional concepts is also an important factor, such as the concept of marriage in line with the family and the preference for sons, which both make educated women more cautious in the face of marriage problems. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2020, the number of unmarried people reached 210 million, including 127 million men and 83 million women [13]. Therefore, even though there is a huge number of unmarried men, it is still difficult to get married to educated women in the upper class due to the obstacles of many traditional Chinese concepts, such as the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the marriage of families and more. There is no doubt that this "structural surplus" situation has subtly increased the difficulty for Kochi women to succeed in marriage". The subjective factors of "leftover women" are also one of the reasons for this phenomenon. The excessive requirements for marriage, the pursuit of high quality of life, and the picky feelings make it difficult for women to get married.

In a word, the phenomenon of leftover women is a complicated social phenomenon. The media should adhere to the principles of objectivity, fairness and comprehensiveness in shaping the image of such a special group so that society can have a full and sober understanding of this group and promote the alleviation of the problem through understanding and tolerance.

6.   Objective "Leftover Women" Media's Image

Through the analysis and research of the media image of "leftover women" by the civil media and the private media, it can be found that there are still obvious differences in the reporting content and attitudes of the two media towards "leftover women".

Through text analysis, this paper finds that some biased image building of "leftover women" by official media lacks objectivity and will lose its credibility to a certain extent. With the development of The Times, people will form more and more opinions on the image of "leftover women", and

their understanding of the phenomenon of "leftover women" will become more in-depth and thorough. Official media, as a media with a strong right to speak, should report more comprehensively and create a more balanced and fair media environment. People's Daily and other local official media should pay attention to the diversity of topic selection and try their best to be comprehensive and objective. Media workers should constantly improve their professional qualifications in the process of the development of The Times, keep pace with The Times in thought and vision, and look at the new groups produced by social development objectively.

For private media, Internet celebrities and public accounts are an important part of the presentation of the media image of "leftover women". In the information age with the developed network, Internet celebrities and public accounts have more rights to speak than the general public. Although the speech of private media is relatively free, they should refrain from following the trend at will and use their traffic advantages to deliberately publish some controversial words to attract the attention of netizens. People should focus on the formation of a civilised fashion of respecting, caring and paying attention to the development of main women, and actively spread the concept of gender equality to form a benign guidance for the awakening of female consciousness.

The public they are not only a single receiver of information but also a transmitter and creator. Therefore, in the relatively free and open we-media platform, the public should strengthen their own media literacy, improve their ability to identify information, avoid emotional expression, follow the trend at will, and view the "leftover women" group rationally. In addition, we media platforms can release some positive content to rebuild the image so that the public can have a more direct understanding of the life of older single women, so as to change the social stereotype of the "leftover women" group.

7. Conclusions

Generally speaking, the emergence of "leftover women" reflects the rise of Chinese women's power and the progress of their ideas to some extent. Although some official media attitudes towards "leftover women" are still relatively rigid and unitary, overall, they are still changing. At the same time, private media are also speaking up for "leftover women" through the advantage of the freedom of speech, trying to change the public's stereotype of the "leftover women" group. In recent years, with the improvement of science and technology and the awakening of female consciousness, the freedom of speech on we-media platforms has also been further improved. Even though a few people still have a prejudice against the term "leftover women", more and more people have expressed their recognition of the value orientation of female self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance and self-improvement. They believe that "leftover women" is also a reflection of breaking the established role of women in the traditional feudal culture, showing the collision of feminism and traditional ideas in the new era.

The phenomenon of "leftover women" is more a result of how society as a whole has developed than it is of the women themselves. Because of the collision and integration of traditional views on marriage and love and feminist ideas in the new era, the term "leftover women" appears in the public eye. From the perspective of women's own development stage, a series of distinctive "leftover women" are not character defects but challenges to the existing gender concepts. It is also the process of female personality perfection in the new era. The development of new media has given women more free and open space for discourse. However, since the term "leftover women" has been somewhat discriminatory since its appearance, there is still a long way to go for women to realise the real freedom of discourse and freedom of marriage and love. When reporting on women, official media should not only guide women to choose the right value orientation but also guide women to enhance their own subjective consciousness and strengthen their independence and subjectivity in social activities. Private media, a relatively free media platform, should increase

platform management, improve network guidelines, establish a civilised culture of honouring, valuing, and paying attention to women's growth, and establish a positive feedback loop for advancing women's awareness.

Based on the theory of Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann, this paper uses text analysis and comparative research methods to cite data and analyse the discourse attitudes of official media and private media towards "leftover women". This study contributes to the development of a new female cultural environment and the awakening of female awareness under the influence of social media. This paper only makes a brief comparative analysis of discourse attitude and media image construction, but there are still many things that could be improved. For example, the relevant data included in this paper is small and has not been quantitatively analysed, so some quantitative content, such as a questionnaire survey and random interview, can be added to future academic sharing. Other scholars can also make a more detailed classification of "leftover women" on the topic of "we media" and make in-depth discussions with the help of data. It is hoped that in the future, the term "leftover women" can be used less frequently or even banned. Older unmarried women can be treated in normal light, and people can be more inclusive of all groups.

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