

Research on the Image of Chinese Rural Women Presented on Short Video Platform

—Take Douyin as an Example

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Abstract: As one of the leading platforms in China, Douyin has allowed the underprivileged group of rural women to showcase themselves. While empowering them, it has also led to the imposition of various labels on them. This paper conducts an in-depth study of the representation of rural women through content analysis and other research methods. It analyzes the representation of rural women from the perspectives of the communicators and the audience, and explores how the Chinese government and the platform can improve this situation. Research has found that the transmitters, the rural women themselves, have diverse images. Some are diligent and hardworking, while others are passionate about traditional culture, breaking the stereotype of poverty and lack of education. The audience has shifted from having prejudices to getting closer and gaining a deeper understanding of the rural women's image through the Douyin platform. The writer suggests that rural women should learn more about new media knowledge and improve their new media skills. The Douyin platform should encourage high-quality content production and strengthen the supervision of inappropriate and low-quality content. The government should provide relevant support policies and strengthen education for rural women.

Keywords: Chinese rural women, Douyin, new media.

1. Introduction

According to the 53rd China Internet Development Status Report released by the China Internet Information Center (CNNIC), as of March 2023, there were 1.092 billion Internet users in China, a new increase of 24.8 million compared with December 2022. Among them, the number of short video users reached 1.067 billion, accounting for 97.7% of the total number of Internet users[1].

The rapid development of the Internet, especially short video platforms, has provided Chinese rural women with a platform to display themselves and make their voices heard. However, people's stereotypical impressions of rural women remain. While some rural women bloggers break the inherent labels, others continue to present hardships on Douyin, thus accommodating people's psychological acceptance. This paper analyses the images of different rural women through the accounts and posts of different rural women bloggers on the Douyin platform.

There has been sociology education, yet few have focused on new media platforms. This paper aims to fill the gap in contemporary female studies and enrich the theoretical vacuum of rural women in new media. Research on this topic is conducive to enhancing rural women's self-awareness, strengthening female discourse, and changing the public's stereotypical impressions of them.

Television has broken the situation where poor people were excluded from the gates of information and entertainment[2]. With the development of the internet and the popularity of new media, the barriers to using media have been lowered, allowing everyone to become a communicator. The emergence of short video platforms has made communication even more convenient and quick. Rural women in China, who may not have job opportunities or access to society, have found a chance to be seen on public platforms like Douyin. As more and more rural women start sharing their lives on social media platforms, the general public gains a better understanding of this group, leading to a clearer image of them. However, this increased visibility also comes with negative stereotypes, such as being labeled as uneducated, poor, or stay-at-home mommy.

The research object is a marginalized and vulnerable group, and the depth of research on rural women is rare. The research perspective starts from the short video platform, which is closer to the life of contemporary people. At the same time, it is easier and faster to obtain information and data, making it more convenient to analyze and implement practical solutions. The main method of collecting information is from Douyin, and the collection of existing literature is supplementary.

The study of the image of rural women on the Douyin platform adds practical cases to the theory of empowering marginalized groups. At the same time, there are female influencers who speak for women and advocate for the equal rights of rural women. By conducting in-depth research on the social and cultural implications and influencing factors behind their images, this study can predict future hotspots on new media platforms and promote the voice of women, pay attention to women's rights, and care for marginalized groups. In China and abroad, there are many studies on women, covering various aspects, but the focus on the media aspect is mostly on the image of women in newspapers and television. This paper aims to supplement the theoretical insufficiency of contemporary women's studies and enrich the theoretical framework of women's studies.

2. Literature Review

Rural areas are places where agricultural workers gather, usually located away from cities. In this paper, rural women are defined as women who live in rural areas, have a rural household registration, and are engaged in agricultural or non-agricultural production activities without working outside the countryside.

Different from traditional media, new media platforms are built on the internet and rely on data technology. They provide functions for emotional communication, information dissemination, knowledge sharing, and idea expression. They allow everyone to become a communicator, making information more open and faster to spread. The short video platform mentioned in the paper is one of them. They use short videos to tell stories or express emotions.

In Western countries, the feminist movement has experienced three significant waves. During the first wave, a large number of women fought for equal rights with men, such as the right to vote, the right to participate in politics, and the right to education, while also addressing employment issues. These measures quickly raised the status of women in society. During the second wave, feminist scholars, taking advantage of the social background and technological development, included mass media in their research scope. Feminist studies are no longer limited to a specific field but have begun to cross-integrate across disciplines and theories, leading to the birth of feminist media studies[3]. The research results of feminism in various countries are increasingly abundant, and the focus of attention is gradually shifting to rural women. However, overall, women's voices are still weak, and gender bias has already penetrated the media, appearing in subtle ways[4].

Female influencers from rural areas on Douyin have changed the traditional image of women to some extent. The principle of the superiority of the weak in the public opinion world is that the weak in reality are stronger and more likely to attract attention in the public opinion world. The platform brings them traffic and attracts more attention to rural women, a marginalized and vulnerable group. However, this also has certain drawbacks. The image of rural women presented through short videos is one-sided, and people can only see their appearance and family environment. The deeper spiritual world is difficult to access.

Through the short video platform, some rural women influencers have gained traffic, started live streaming, and engaged in product promotion or hometown promotion. This has promoted the development of the tourism industry and increased the family's income. At the same time, it has promoted communication and interaction between urban and rural areas, promoting the integration of urban and rural development. The economic value of rural women has also changed in a different way.

Foreign research is more focused on women's relationships with medicine, education, and science, and is less related to mass media. The research on the images of rural women and the media is also mostly focused on traditional media or research based on a specific location, and rarely analyzes the images of this group in new media platforms.

The study of news communication in China is relatively backward, and the research on rural women and the media is not comprehensive. In the initial stage, the way women express themselves was not well resolved. The emergence of new media has brought more speaking power to women, giving them more opportunities for expression and self-expression, and the image of women is more diverse and extensive. The construction of the image of women in new media is very beneficial, and at the same time, it promotes the awakening of women's self-awareness. The short video platform of new media has built a stage for rural women to connect with society, but they are both directors and actors, but the plot of the video is not entirely determined by them, and it is not only determined by the audience's perception. They are also trained by the platform and controlled by capital[5].

In general, the research on the image of women and the media in China is relatively extensive. The research objects include the images of rural women in films and literary works. However, these studies are mostly focused on some specific phenomena, such as analyzing around certain people or specific works. Compared with this, these studies lack in-depth exploration of the construction of women's images in the media and the influence of social culture, and the theoretical support is relatively weak[6].

3. Methodology

This paper selects one of the most popular short video platforms in China, the Douyin app, and conducts research on the images of rural women in short videos based on relevant content.

Content analysis is a research method that conducts objective and quantitative analysis of research content. This paper takes rural female hosts on Douyin as the research object, searches for the keyword "rural women" to find users and topics, and conducts a network survey, including the user's gender, region, and profile, and the content of the published videos, to determine the identity of rural women, and selects the required samples for in-depth research on the presentation of the images of rural women in short videos[7].

The research questions of this paper are:

1. What are the images of rural women presented on the short video platform? Are they real?
2. What are the reasons for the non-realistic performance of some parts?
3. What is the impact of the short video platform on rural women?

Table 1: Douyin Account Selection and Preliminary Analysis

Num	Video blogger	Time	Account style	Main content of the account	Likes
1	Shimei Han	20s	Frequent updates, rural life with beautiful sentences, positive, determined and powerful	Sharing of verses and literature with a focus on positive content and encouraging women's growth	2,000
2	Dongbei Yujie	4min30s	Funny, dry, not a lot of words, exciting music in the background	Mainly showing the characteristic life in the countryside, the shots are rather exaggerated. Overall happy and fulfilling	2million
3	Hanhan Guo	4min	Dresses plainly, speaks with an accent, and introduces himself with his 170-pound weight as the beginning of each video.	A day in the life of a rural woman from a third-person perspective, covering mostly household chores.	50,000
4	Rural Fangjie	1min	Less frequent updates, more lifelike, more colloquial text content	Mostly singing native songs or showing rural food, with more first-person perspectives	4,000
5	Rural silly girl	4min	Updated very frequently, the videos show fewer signs of editing and are very long, with folksy characters.	Mostly related to parents in-law and children, telling rural stories	5,000
6	Rural Tao	15s	The image is mainly based on imitating actress Liu Tao, with content consisting of singing old songs and sharing uplifting stories	Most of the video content consists of singing and sharing content related to children and rural life	15,000
7	Nostalgia	4min	The art style is warm and cozy, showcasing the strength of women. It reflects the perseverance and charm of rural women. The background music is soothing and harmonious.	The promotion focuses on traditional rural culinary techniques and China's intangible cultural heritage. Bring people back to their childhood memories	800,000
8	Rural Huniu	40s	The style is simple and natural, with a backdrop of Northwest rural scenery. The video sound is lively and down-to-earth.	The main focus is to showcase the natural scenery of Northwest rural areas with a simple and elegant style. The content is about family and daily life.	10,000
9	Xiaosi He	45s	Despite having a certain physical impairment and a difficult life, the vlogger remains optimistic. The videos are cheerful	Most of the videos tell the story of a happy life with family, and some talk about the personal experiences and current family situation.	10,000

Table 1: (continued).

10	Rural Yueyue	15s	The videos feature energetic songs and eye-catching subtitles. The shooting angles and editing are relatively conventional.	The videos introduce her own products and display the product breeding base, acting as an advertisement to attract customers.	1,500
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Account Information Summary: Rural women vloggers have different account Names, for example, address and name Type: Accounts such as "Rural Yueyue", "Rural Fangjie", "Rural Hu5a". Single name Type: Accounts such as "Shimei Han", "Shanmixi", "Chuancao Cheng". Directly reflecting personal identity: Accounts such as "Rural Haorerxi", "Rural Xifu". Literary Type: Accounts such as "Nostalgia", "Hometown"

They also use different account avatar, like self-portrait/personal life photo/family photo/artistic photo/scenery photo

They have different role identity in rural area, such as daughter/wife/mother/daughter-in-law/new peasant/unclear. Their video durations are also different, with some lasting only a few seconds and others lasting several minutes. Some are less than or equal to 15 seconds, some are more than 15 seconds and less than or equal to 1 minute or greater than 1 minute and less than or equal to 5 minutes, some even greater than 5 minutes.

They use different background music. Gentle and Soft Type/Lively Type/Passionate Type/Sentimental and Expressive Type/Dynamic Type/Same-period Sound or Voiceover

The video Topics are different. Image Display Type/Daily Life Type/Food Teaching or Sharing Type/Performance Display Type (Singing/Dancing)/Rural Scenic Type/Agricultural Production Type/Live-streaming Type/Comedy Parody Type/Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Type

The appearance location is various. Home/Farmland and Mountains/Village Market/Mall/Entertainment Venue or Restaurant/Other Indoors or Outdoors

They use different languages. Standard Mandarin/Local Dialect/AI Voiceover/No Human Voice.

Account Analysis: Upon analyzing the accounts, the following findings were discovered: Transmitter - Construction of the Personal Image of Rural Women. The appearance of rural women in the accounts is mostly simple and natural, with little to no makeup, and often seen with children, doing household chores, or working in the fields. The majority of rural women are unemployed, but some are from wealthy families pretending to be rural women for views, earning millions of dollars in income. The image of rural women is diverse, with some writing poetry, some being bold and unrestrained, and some showcasing intangible cultural heritage. Audience - Feedback from the Audience. The audience had preconceived notions about rural women, viewing them as uneducated and poor. The short video platform has allowed the audience to gain a closer understanding of rural life, and to some extent, change their fixed mindset. Most of the audience appreciates the qualities of rural women and learns from their videos, but some still view them as unhygienic and discriminate against them. More Rights - Real Empowerment or False Empowerment

The short video platform is seen as a tool for empowerment, giving rural women new opportunities. However, they still have not escaped the traditional family-centered, care-oriented lifestyle[8]. The case study of the Douyin host, Dongbei Yuji, breaks the norm of the traditional image of rural women, introducing Chinese intangible cultural heritage and rural culture in her videos. She collaborates with others to analyze the impact of self-media on rural women and advocates for women's rights. She showcases the strength of women, setting an example for numerous rural women. However, many hosts still use their spouse or daughter as their label or showcase their hardships in life.

4. Conclusion

The individual has broken free from the state of being spoken for, defined, and represented, and is seen as a subject with equal rights, displaying themselves and being seen[9]. The empowerment of new media technology has strengthened the voice of rural women. Women are no longer the silent majority, breaking free from the shackles of the culture of silence. This research, using Douyin platform accounts of rural women as the research object, conducts scientific sampling, classifies and summarizes their account information, and analyzes the characteristics and shortcomings of rural women's image presentation.

In summary, the rural women hosts on this platform are bold in their expression, displaying their images. However, the image presentation still has limitations, due to the platform's training and societal pressure. By focusing on the superficial image of "women being seen", one may easily conclude that women's attention and social recognition, as well as economic power, have increased. However, when delving into the specific content of "women being seen", it can be found that their image is belittled, their identity is tarnished, and their roles are marginalized[10]. What they present is often a stereotypical image that conforms to mainstream values. In the future, the presentation of rural women's images needs to be further deepened. Rural women individuals need to actively learn new media communication knowledge, improve their media literacy, and raise their moral standards and legal knowledge. The new media platform can guide creators to produce more valuable content, encourage the publication of high-quality content, and improve the quality of short videos. Strengthen the quality supervision of products in live streaming, to avoid the emergence of low-quality products. The government should improve education for rural women, promote their self-awareness, and provide policy support for the behavior of rural women publishing videos on new media platforms.

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