

Research on the Influence of New Media on Female Reproductive Rights

—*Content Analysis Based on China’s Family Planning Policy*

Yao Yao^{1,a,*}

¹University of Westminster, London, The United Kingdom, HA1 3TP

a. w1849392@my.westminster.ac.uk

*corresponding author

Abstract: The topics related to China’s family planning policy have always attracted attention from the media, the Internet, and academic research circles. For all the attention, some people have proposed research and discussion on women’s reproductive rights. Based on the history of China’s family planning policy, this paper will focus on analyzing its role and influence in the communication of female fertility policy and social phenomena from the perspective of the media. According to the research, media communication has a profound and huge impact on women’s reproductive rights. On the one hand, with the development of new media platforms, media platforms pay more and more attention to social issues such as gender equality and the rights of women. On the other hand, contact and interaction with media content will not only directly affect women’s conception of fertility but also indirectly affect others by influencing women.

Keywords: New media, Global, Family planning, Reproductive rights of women

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the gradual enhancement of people’s awareness of gender equality, global attention to women is also increasing. Governments or social organizations in various countries have also launched many solutions to social problems related to women. With the development of new media, media platforms pay more and more attention to social issues such as gender equality and women’s rights. Among them, women’s fertility has always been a topic of concern. The emphasis on women’s fertility is one of the manifestations of respecting the independence of women’s reproductive rights. It involves not only the reproduction of human beings but also the physical and mental health of women themselves. At present, there are relatively few research academic papers on the impact of media on women’s reproductive rights in China. However, in the academic circles of Western countries such as Europe and the United States, there are research papers on this aspect, although most of them revolve around the abortion issue. But in essence, abortion is a specific expression of women’s reproductive rights. Women around the world have used a variety of channels to protest against issues such as the ban on abortion in order to fight for their own interests. Among them, the media coverage of women’s reproductive rights is mostly “stigmatized and politicized”. Researchers like Carrie Purcell, Shona Hilton, and Lisa McDaid described the stigma of abortion in a paper published by the NIH. Among the issues reflected in the

majority of the articles are that women seeking abortion is an inactive and illegal choice. Media coverage of these negative views stigmatizes women who want to have abortions, which is tantamount to challenging women's reproductive decisions[1]. In addition, Zoe Larkin published an article on abortion media coverage in 2020. Through a new report by NARAL Pro-Choice America and Global Strategy Group(GSG), the author found that most abortion coverage in mainstream media is “politicized and problematic”[2]. Therefore, the reproductive rights of fallen women have been greatly affected, and the media plays a very important role in it. However, this paper mainly studies the influence of media based on China’s family planning on Chinese women’s reproductive rights. The research theme of this paper is based on China’s family planning, trying to explore the law and degree of media’s influence on Chinese women’s reproductive rights and put forward ideas and suggestions. This paper makes research by enumerating examples, presenting data and analyzing and comparing. It is divided into four parts: the first part introduces the background of women’s reproductive rights, and then illustrates the existing methods and approaches to protect women’s reproductive rights. The second part mainly analyzes the negative and positive impacts on women’s reproductive rights under traditional media and new media. The third part mainly analyzes the positive influence and role of the development and progress of media on women’s reproductive rights under the background of China’s family planning. The fourth part is the conclusion, putting forward how the media should do to realize the protection of women’s reproductive rights can play an obvious role. The research of this paper aims to explore the changes in the influence of Chinese media on women’s reproductive rights and how many changes there are. By studying this problem, the national government and social organizations can pay more attention to female reproductive rights. At the same time, the whole society, especially the media and women, should be encouraged to make full use of the comprehensive impact of media communication in the digital era on women’s reproductive rights, so as to realize the true protection of women’s reproductive rights.

2. Reproductive Rights of Women

2.1. Introduction to the Background of Female Reproductive Rights

In 2014, the United Nations published a manual entitled Reproductive rights are Human Rights, which mentioned that reproductive rights are actually human rights and are not new rights. Reproductive rights mainly refer to the various civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of individuals and couples in their sexual and reproductive life[3]. A series of measures to protect women’s reproductive rights summarized by the United Nations have not attracted more attention and publicity reports from the media around the world. In many regions or media reports, social problems related to discrimination against women are still often found. From the definition of reproductive rights given by the United Nations, it is not difficult to see that the issue of women’s reproductive rights can be related to many social problems that women encounter. This includes both married and unmarried women.

2.2. Methods and Approaches to Protect Women’s Reproductive Rights

In addition to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on Human Rights and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, statements have been made on various fronts. Countries in America, Africa and Europe have also made relevant decisions on reproductive rights. To protect women’s right to give birth freely, the New Zealand government has stipulated that employers must reserve their jobs for those who take maternity leave. After maternity leave, unless the company closes down or shuts down, employers must unconditionally accept the mothers to return to their original jobs[4]. These decisions show that women’s rights have been taken seriously. Although public awareness of women’s reproductive rights is not strong enough, the United

Nations is trying to implement the treaty every year. Countries around the world are also actively cooperating[3]. Despite this, people around the world still face the problem of not being able to guarantee their reproductive rights. It is the power of the media to make these details visible to the public. No matter which era, the media is an important medium to spread information, and it can still have a huge impact on women's interests. Making good use of the communication efficiency of the media platform is the most effective way to attract people's attention.

3. Factors Affecting Female Reproductive Rights in Media Communication

3.1. The Concept and Difference of Traditional Media and New Media

The traditional media's way of obtaining information is more reflected offline, where it stresses uniqueness. Whether in newspapers, periodicals, or radio, traditional media pay more attention to the unique, such as some exclusive reports. Moreover, traditional media report more based on the overall direction of government development and the content needed by social groups. With the continuous development of social science and technology and the comprehensive popularization of the Internet, the emergence of new media has led to the development of media platforms and given more people the opportunity to show themselves. For example, anyone can post a video on Tik Tok and start a live stream. They can even write their own scripts, be actors, and so on. Compared with traditional media, new media pursue more effectiveness through the connection between platforms. New media rely more on headlines to attract people, it needs to quickly convey useful information to people. In the new media environment, people can not only listen to information but also communicate and express their own opinions and ideas. Social media offers the possibility of massive access to information as well as a platform for online communication and interaction about anything. For the majority of women who have grown up in an environment of the continuous development of the Internet, social media will have a significant impact on their internal individual values and behaviors. The emergence of new media is undoubtedly an important opportunity for women to safeguard their reproductive rights.

3.2. Analysis of Gender Inequality in Media Communication

At present, there is a serious problem of gender stereotyping in most of the media we have seen, and even a problem of female media workers being targeted. According to IMS, only 24 percent of the people who heard, read or saw in newspapers, television and radio news were women. Forty-six percent of news reports even reinforced stereotypes, while only four percent of media outlets chose to confront gender stereotypes[5]. In addition, men still generate 62.1 percent of all print news at the largest circulation of newspapers and wire services, according to a 2015 report by the Women's Media Center, according to MIC's "Male-Dominated Media Coverage of Reproductive Rights" by Julie Zillinger. This dominance and its subsequent impact on coverage can lead to a media landscape that does not reflect women's actual experiences, which in turn can have negative consequences. Research has repeatedly shown that media representation is particularly important to women and can affect young women's self-concept in a very real way.

4. The Impact of Media on Women's Reproductive Rights

4.1. China's Family Planning Policy on Women's Reproductive Rights

In the early days after the founding of New China, Chinese people had a high desire to have children, and the Chinese government also adopted a policy to encourage childbearing at the very beginning. But the first census shows that China's population is growing too fast. So the Central

Committee of the Communist Party of China put forward appropriate fertility control. In the 1970s, China implemented a “late, small and sparse” population policy. “Late” means that men get married after the age of 25, women get married after the age of 23, and women give birth after the age of 24. “Rare” means that the birth interval is more than 3 years; “Few” means a couple has no more than two children. In 1978, the central government put forward the population policy of “preferably one or at most two”. At this time, the family planning policy mainly relied on publicity and public awareness to carry out. Such as the production of family planning posters, family planning bulletin boards and columns in newspapers, joint initiatives, and other forms of publicity and interpretation of the policy. One of them, a proposal issued in 1979, took the form of such a proposal. Throughout the 1970s, the natural growth rate dropped from 23.33 per thousand in 1971 to 11.61 per thousand, a drop of 11.72 thousand points.

According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics, it can be seen that the 1970s, especially the late 1970s, was a period of fundamental transformation in China’s population development. The pressure brought by the rapid population growth since the founding of New China has made people realize that population control is imminent. The Chinese government began to carry out family planning and successively formulated and improved a clear family planning policy, bringing the momentum of a high birth rate and high growth of the population under rapid control. The population has entered a period of planned and controllable growth following unplanned and spontaneous high growth. During this period, the birth rate and natural growth rate declined rapidly, from 30.7‰ and 23.4‰ in 1971 to 18.2‰ and 11.9‰ in 1980, respectively[6]. But since 1980, when “one child per couple” became mandatory, there has been a retaliatory increase in the birth rate of the total population, except for a slight decrease in 1980, and it has never returned to the low level of the 1970s. At the time of China’s liberation, many married women were expected to have more children because of the deep-rooted cultural influence of the feudal period, and there was even a “son preference” in China at that time. So women were already in a situation where their reproductive rights were violated. On the basis of absorbing enough public opinion, the Chinese government launched the "late birth" plan, which was the most suitable policy for Chinese women at that time to truly protect equality. Women did not have too much power and channels to protect their own rights and interests at the time, when Chinese media was not developed enough, which to a large extent protected the reproductive rights of most women. Especially in feudal China, the marriageable age for men and women was 14 and 16 respectively. After liberation, the Chinese government’s “late birth” proposal undoubtedly greatly protected women.

4.2. The Influence of Media Communication on Female Reproductive Rights

According to a report on January 1, 2013 blogs in China Daily published an article “Family planning why negative coverage increased, from 14 solstice December 30, 2012, successively has the Southern daily, South metropolis daily, the popular daily life, the China youth daily, a total of seven illegal behavior of negative reports about family planning department[7]. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese media reports and articles about family planning were basically one-sided propaganda that “Family planning benefits the country and the people”, and there were almost no negative reports about family planning and family planning departments. So, has there been an increase in family planning violations in recent years? In fact, compared with the 1980s and 1990s, there have been fewer, not more, illegal activities by family planning authorities in recent years. Why has the illegal behavior of the family planning department decreased and the negative coverage of family planning increased? At that time, family planning was a basic national policy in China, and long articles or reports in newspapers, radio, television and other media promoted this policy, but no media focused on the issue of gender equality, or dared to challenge this topic. Then,

in the process of policy implementation, as the implementation of the policy of the relevant departments and local governments or the grass-roots didn't understand the intentions of the central government the first time, have some deviation, because even some incorrect way of publicity, the media in some places for the sake of so-called "achievement" make some let people resistance behavior. These practices and behaviors ignore women's dominant position in the implementation of the family planning policy.

In recent years, with the rapid development of China's science and technology economy, the Internet has been constantly popularized and the scale of Chinese netizen has been expanding. According to the 50th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China by the China Internet Network Information Center(CNNIC), as of June 2022, the number of Chinese netizen was 1.051 billion, and the Internet penetration rate reached 74.4 percent. Among all Internet users, the proportion of female Internet users is also increasing. According to the 32nd Statistical Report on the Development of Internet in China published by CNNIC in July 2013, the gender ratio of Chinese Internet users was 55.6:44.4 by the end of June 2013. According to CNNIC the 49th Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet in 2022 , as of December 2021, among all Internet users, the proportion of men and women is 51.5:48.5[8]. According to the data comparison, the gender ratio of Chinese netizen has been developing in the direction of continuous optimization. From 2013 to 2021, the proportion of female netizen in China increased significantly. Online media reports and discussions on women's reproductive rights and women's rights are also increasing, and some even touch on sensitive topics about women's reproductive rights in today's society. As reported by Sina News on March 02, 2022, Huang Xihua, a deputy to the National People's Congress, suggested that single women's reproductive rights and the equal rights of children born out of wedlock should be guaranteed. The National Health Commission and Women's federations should introduce policies to allow single women to enjoy the same reproductive rights and benefits as married women[9]. With the increasing proportion of women using the Internet, women have more opportunities to learn about relevant reports and information through modern media, and thus have more opportunities to interact and speak out through media platforms, which promotes women's rights to receive more attention and attention from the whole society.

4.3. Discussion

In such an environment, the only contribution the media can make to women's reproductive rights seems to be the announcement of specific contributions made by the government or social organizations for women's reproductive rights or the platform provided by social software for everyone to communicate. Only mutual communication and ideological collision can cause the topic to get more people's attention and attention. Although today's media can give a voice to every member of the public. At present, most media still only exists in a form of equality. Internet social networking platforms are open to everyone, but there is still a big gap between women and men in the use of Internet digital technology. In developing countries alone, women account for 41 percent of Internet penetration, while men account for 59 percent, according to the United Nations. At present, women's reproductive rights and even other aspects of women's rights are still affected by some factors and cannot be guaranteed. For example, some work units take into account that women need to be pregnant and give birth and stipulate certain additional conditions when recruiting women. There are also terms such as "female driver," which reflect female stereotypes in media reports. These discriminatory restrictions, which pervade recruitment and even employment in almost every industry, are absurd and cruel[10].

5. Conclusion

Media can play an obvious role in safeguarding women's reproductive rights. It can be seen that the precondition for the media to play a role is that the media can break gender stereotypes, not attract heat in traditional forms, and challenge problems and concepts brought by traditional society. Therefore, as a medium, it is necessary to spread correct values in the process of information dissemination, guide public opinion appropriately, and promote people's understanding and recognition of gender equality. Secondly, we should develop female media and construct the female public sphere. Of course, the purpose of establishing female public sphere is not to exclude men, but to express female voices, obtain equal rights of discourse, and safeguard female interests. Thirdly, the media should set an example by using advanced culture to educate women, improve women's quality, increase the number of women in employment and promote gender equality. In an effort to draw the attention of governments and social organizations around the globe to women's reproductive rights, this paper makes suggestions and attempts to analyse the impact of the media on women's reproductive rights and its causes from the perspective of China's family planning policy. Given the short time frame, data collection needs to be enhanced further, and a thorough examination and knowledge of women's reproductive rights in other nations, particularly in developing countries, is still required. The author will keep gathering pertinent data and further the study of women's reproductive rights in developed and developing nations in Europe and the United States.

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