

# Research on Male Gaze in Mass Media Opinion Guidance from the Perspective of Feminism

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**Abstract.** This paper is a study and analysis of the gender consciousness embedded in the mass media in the news reports. Social media provides women with an open and inclusive discourse field in the way of autonomous and interactive expression, which also produces female discourse different from that in the context of mass media. In the process of civilization construction, the role composition of mass media not only reflects many social problems, but also participates in the construction of people's social cognition. From the perspective of mass media, we can get a glimpse of the current situation of gender. To be specific, from the perspective of the brand new social and cultural phenomenon and concept of "male gaze", this paper will take criminal news released by the official media as real case, and further analyze and criticize the potential gender opinion guidance in the press release of China's official media based on the change of social gender consciousness and the awakening of feminism.

**Keywords:** Mass Media; Male Gaze; Gender; Feminism.

## 1. Introduction

China entered a full-scale reform and opening-up phase in 1978, and drastic changes occurred at all levels of society. Not only did China make a qualitative leap in political and economic terms, but people's minds and spirits were also liberated. At the same time, after a series of cultural interactions with the West, feminism gradually emerged in mainland China, and the mainstream discourse under news communication began to focus on the female perspective. Whether from different perspectives, such as the trend of commercialization, women's increased education level, or women's own progressive consciousness, women have gradually embarked on the pursuit of further affirmative action. The 1980s saw the third high point of the women's liberation movement. Women pursued independence and equality of thought and gradually began to demand the same voice as men.[1]

Media coverage, as a front-line position reflecting the development of the times and an important channel constituting mass social awareness, began to undergo structural changes. However, the state discourse in China's official mainstream media still occupies a dominant position, and today, as society continues to develop, the public opinion guidance in news communication has subtly changed under this discourse system, and some attempts to use patriarchal structures to obscure gender power relations have been disclosed. In terms of the historical dimension, the social perception of male strength and female weakness is based on the backdrop of the traditional manual labor-oriented society. In this traditional perception, women were considered as the "second sex" subordinate to men, and women were naturally opposed to the strong image represented by men, thus, women were defined as the "vulnerable" group in social life. In the traditional representation, women are only the "beautiful symbols" of the patriarchal society, and are not considered to have a sense of autonomy and independence. However, with the development of society, the biological gap has less and less influence on the social contribution of both genders, and the traditional narrative of the "underdog" is no longer appropriate. Women's desire for equal expression and respect has led to a game between the emerging power of women in news communication and the traditional state discourse. Women's desire for equal expression and respect has led to a game between the emerging power of women in news communication and the traditional state discourse. [2]

## 2. Feminism in Mass Media

### 2.1 The Image of Female in Mass Media

Feminism is a range of socio-political movements and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Feminism incorporates the position that societies prioritize the male point of view, and that women are treated unjustly within those societies.[3]

In the field of mass media, women are as important subjects as men. However, in the male-dominated national discourse system, men are usually the gazers, while women are the gazed, and to be "objectified". Whether in the media stream or in the press, women live in a fixed framework of male aesthetics, passively and unconsciously acquiesce to these unwritten rules. In Chinese folklore, men set many "standards" for female potential, the perverse aesthetic paradigm of "girls should not weigh more than fifty kilograms" and "girls should be fair-skinned, young-looking, and thin-type" has set great limits on how Chinese women are portrayed in the mass media.

Observations are made from several of the most representative online news platforms in China, such as Sohu News, Sina News, Phoenix News and Netease News, etc. A cross-section of one of these time periods was selected to study the top ten news items in the daily click ranking. Among the top ten daily clicked online news sections, many aspects such as soft news, hard news, and domestic and international news were covered. It was found that out of the 500 selected samples, women-related online news reports directly occupied 31.8% of the total, as many as 159 articles. This shows how active women are in online news reports. Among these 159 articles, 44.65% of the total 159 women's online news articles were reported in the entertainment section, 17.61% in the social section, and only a small percentage in the sports section, politics, military, and many other fields combined in total. It can be seen that women's online news is concentrated in the entertainment and social sections. After analysis, these news reports on women are widely distributed, covering 14 areas such as marriage, affection, crime, and sexual cases. These new web sites focus more on depicting women's bodies in their news reports, making women the objects to be watched and placed under the male spectacle.[4]

In crime news, for example, male criminals are often given a weaker presence, so that bystanders focus more on the case itself. Female criminals, on the other hand, appear to be scrutinized, with their gender being their greatest shackle and a good means of gaining attention in the mass media. The news tends to emphasize the gender identity of "women" first, resulting in the presence of men in social news as the norm and women as the atypical "exception". On June 17, 2014, the Legal Times, in its article "12 female officials have been investigated this year, some of them have been corrupted by sex for power".[5] It listed the corrupt female officials notified since 2014, and pointed out in the article that the key words of female officials' corruption are "power and sex trade", "distressed by love", "imbalanced mentality" and "life pursuit is out of the way". On June 19, the Global Times published a commentary: "These gender-typical terms have been widely used in media reports. It is regrettable that such inertia in public opinion has been so prevalent." [6] The term "power and sex trade" is the most controversial, meaning that female officials are dependent on men in the officialdom and are not capable of doing anything on their own, and is the most sexist. This news report not only reports with an impressionistic mindset, but also influences the news report itself to a certain extent, potentially leading public opinion to go condemn gender-related issues. This kind of gender-specific reporting makes the persuasiveness of the report itself questionable, which greatly reduces the credibility of the news and the standard impartiality of the news. There are also many positive examples of news articles in which "scientists," "doctors," "lawyers," and other groups that have made outstanding contributions are by default setting to male, while the presence of female gender is specifically emphasized in the news.

Overall, the issue of potential discrimination against women in the mass media is evidence of the core feminist concept that "society prioritizes the male perspective and women are treated unfairly in society." Also, the credibility is a fundamental issue that the news media should focus on, and for

news reporting, it is also a responsibility that the media should assume to the public. It is the responsibility of the media to seek facts and report information objectively. The media's news coverage is not only to deliver information, but also to help audiences make good judgment based on the information. The media should not rely on its own communication advantages to sell gimmicks, float on the surface, and use sensationalism to attract readers, which is irresponsible for the media. Meanwhile, compared with the traditional media era, the current media era also pays more attention to personalization and diversified expression, and the single narrative no longer meets the taste of users, but changes to require a more full and vivid media image.[7]

## 2.2 The Discursive Power of Female in Mass Media

Looking at China's demographics, according to the data presented in the China Statistical Yearbook (2022), the ratio of men to women in China 2022 is 105.07 to 100. The male population is 723.34 million, accounting for 51.24 percent, and the female population is 688.44 million, accounting for 48.76 percent, with a total population sex ratio of 100 for women and a male to female ratio of 105.07. It is not hard to see that Chinese men are more predominant than Chinese women, which means that under age-appropriate conditions, men will hold more jobs than women in all fields.

This is exactly the case in the news media as well, where the majority of practitioners are men and the middle and senior management are predominantly male. [8] The ratio of men to women in the overall volume of journalism is similarly the proportion of men is larger. According to the China Journalism Development Report (released in 2020), as of December 31, 2019, a total of 232, 830 journalists nationwide held valid press cards. In terms of gender, 117,860, or 50.62 percent were male, 114, 970. or 49.38 percent were female, which has subtly increased the right to speak of men in the workplace. Although the participation of female journalists has shown an upward trend in recent years, the historical background and the long-standing acquiescence of the rules have greatly increased the probability of women being marginalized in the workplace. Before the introduction of the reform and opening-up policy, when China's market-oriented economy was not elevated yet, even dating back to the economic structure that has always been in place in ancient China, it is easy to find that it was still dominated by agriculture. This resulted in a self-perceived and widespread belief that male labor was far more significant than female labor. Agriculture and labor-oriented occupations in later have high physical requirements for workers themselves, and men seems that are more powerful than women, so they are more popular at that time. Thus over time society marginalized women as a workforce. But with the development of social economy and the changing needs of society, women's social status has also been improving, and with the current trend of diversification, women's development in the fields of mass media or in other positions is still expected by all.

## 3. Mass Media Opinion Guidance under the Male Gaze

### 3.1 Research of Feminism under the Male Gaze

The male gaze has been a social and cultural phenomenon since a long time ago, and can be seen in both Chinese and Western cultures. Traditional Chinese feudalism, with its stereotype of "men go out to make a living, and women stay at home and take care of family" or Western Christian culture, which accuses women of being the root of all evil, all reflect the unequal treatment of women in society and culture. [9]

In the perspective of news communication, J. Herbert Altschull summarized the beliefs of professional journalism into four points: the media is free from outside interference, from government, advertisers and even the public; the media serves the "public's right to know"; the media seeks the truth and responds to the truth; the media reports the facts objectively and fairly. The media serves the "public's right to know"; the media seeks the truth and responds to it; the media reports the facts objectively and fairly.[10] In terms of gender inequality, there are several characteristics of female journalists: low percentage, few leaders, and low attention. That is, the total percentage of women among journalists is low, female journalistic leaders are lacking, and women's voices are rarely

noticed. What feminism seeks is not the dominance of one gender over the other, but to be treated fairly, equally, and with respect. Immersed in the male-dominated mass media discourse system, women have unconsciously accepted bias for a long time and gradually lost their resistance until today it has evolved into a difficult time to hold a voice in the mass media.

Despite the fact that in today's society, most women are out of the home, media coverage of women continues to perpetuate the "family-centered thinking". Media coverage continues to perpetuate the traditional gender division of labor. The media consciously emphasizes the female identity of the subject of the report, and the professional and family conflicts and anxieties brought about by this identity. In the coverage of professional women, the media used to portray women in a punitive tone, exaggerating the conflict between women's professional and traditional family identities, placing women at the center of anxiety, and emphasizing the irreconcilability between social identity and family roles.[11] Media coverage continues to follow the notion that women are only truly successful if they have both a family and a career, conveying that the focus of women remains on the family, contrary to the media values of today's pluralistic development. Gender and cultural differences are elements that cannot be ignored in today's society, and every woman should wake up early in the new trend of the times and try to narrow the gap and fight for the right of news discourse.

### 3.2 Critique of Feminism under the Male Gaze

Feminism in the field of mass media and news communication faces two different development paths: one is to try to distinguish itself from the dominant male discourse and create women's own discourse system, but this will show a distinct cognitive bias between men and women, resulting in a gender dichotomy between men and women. The second is to follow the trend of feminism in the mass media and introduce women into the mainstream discourse system, but the deeper imbalance between men and women's social status hidden behind it will be concealed.[12] How to find the common ground from these two different paths, so as to avoid the shortcomings and make a breakthrough in the field of feminism in mass media is the question the society are facing now. But before that, we still have to base on the fundamental position of reducing gender differentiation and gaining women's voice in the media, in order to obtain further equality of women's social status.

It is noteworthy that with the liberation of social thinking, the number of "reflective" reports is increasing. These reports aim to discuss gender discrimination in social life, such as patriarchy and employment discrimination, and reflect on the current situation of gender inequality in society. The reports seem to "redress" the grievances of women, but to a large extent, they are still not free from the bias of women as the weaker sex in the context of masculinity. The media represent women as the "victims" of a patriarchal society, placing them in a vulnerable position in society and denying their initiative.[13] The existing gap between the two genders is further magnified, and the objective is to convey that "gender discrimination is an established reality". The media coverage stops at revealing the current state of social inequality, but does little in the way of action at a later stage. This pattern of reporting does not seem to have a positive effect on society, except for furthering the social perception of "women as the weak".

## 4. Conclusion

The unbalanced development of male gaze dominance and feminism that still exists in the mass media is the goal to be pursued for improvement nowadays. And in the meantime, the news should put credibility in the first place, and take credibility as the basis to guarantee the development, so as to correct the social opinion guidance through the impartiality of reporting, to equalize the female discourse with the male discourse, and to raise the mass media development to a new height.

As the central theme of the article, "Feminist Mass Media Opinion Guidance under the Male Gaze" shows, men have gradually weakened women's voice in the mass media to gain dominance, and continue to maintain gender differentiation in the media at this stage. And today, with the growing power of women, the mass media is becoming more accessible to women, and the proportion of

women's voices is gradually increasing, which is a positive trend. In fact, at this stage, gender discourse presents a complex multi-level state, in which discourse with gender awareness moves forward in twists and turns. This state of "pessimism and optimism coexist, hope and disappointment coexist" echoes the collision, replacement and mixing of old and new gender values in the period of social transformation. There are two superficial reasons for this state: first, the multi-level nature of contemporary mass media; Second, gender discourse in contemporary mass media is being combined with many other issues of social transformation (such as economic structural changes, Eastern and Western cross-cultural communication, etc.). The deep reason still lies in the multiple games and different combinations of forces behind the media text. Whether it's women uniting to resist the threat from male forces, or the current upsurge in the social movement for equal rights, women are revitalizing their long-oppressed muscles and bones, and they are constantly attacking the dominant position of male discourse in the current system with a new and vigorous attitude. The mass media should also correctly portray women and give them their rights, so that the whole industry can continue to develop and progress. The day when women are truly emancipated as equals still needs the joint efforts of all of human beings.

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