

# Female Narratives and Platform Feminism in Chinese Stand-Up Comedy: Emotional Capitalism and Pseudo-Empowerment

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the integration of female narratives, platform feminism, and emotional capitalism in contemporary China through the case of the stand-up comedian Director Fang, who rapidly rose to prominence on Chinese social media platforms in 2025. Centering on escaping from her abusive marriage, Director Fang transformed individual experiences into public expression through her performances on the show *King of Stand-up Comedy 2*, which triggered platform-wide circulation and discussion. Her female narratives activated online emotional communities among users, which platform logics quickly amplified and repacked sentiment as female power, producing a highly visible yet depoliticized popular feminism phenomenon. As her visibility grew, Director Fang and her agency gradually shifted toward neoliberal feminism, branding her as an inspiring, independent woman who achieved self-improvement through personal effort. With nationwide solo tours and advertising collaborations, the platform influence of Director Fang was redirected toward commercialization. In this trajectory, a pseudo-empowerment of feminism was constituted, as it offered women a sense of recognition but left structural gender inequalities untouched and turned female suffering into commercial values. By analyzing this transformation, this paper proposes a hybrid form of feminism and illustrates how platformed female narratives have developed into emotional capitalism in Chinese stand-up comedy.

## Keywords

Female Narratives; Platform Feminism; Emotional Capitalism; Pseudo-Empowerment; Stand-Up Comedy.

## 1. Introduction

As public attention to female topics has risen on Chinese social media platforms in recent years, Chinese female stand-up comedians have gradually moved from marginalized positions to public spaces shaped through the convergence of platformization and commercialization. Their performances usually convey social issues primarily through gender discourse, using feminism's structural critiques of gender inequality and patriarchal oppression as the narrative base. However, they do not choose to directly challenge the social structure through rights movements. Instead, propelled by platform logics, their narratives are further transformed into popular feminism, generating extensive emotional resonance and discussions among audiences and thereby attaining visibility. Through processes of self-branding and commercial marketing, these narratives subsequently evolve into neoliberal feminism. TV shows and social media platforms jointly constitute a unique type of platform feminism based in contemporary China, turning feminist issues into communicative carriers that are rendered visible, regulated by platform mechanisms, and restructured by commercialization.

This article uses Director Fang as the primary subject of analysis. Director Fang is a stand-up comedian who achieved rapid, widespread popularity on Chinese social media platforms in the second half of 2025. She is neither a celebrity nor a professional performer. Instead, she identifies herself as a “50-year-old freshman to stand-up comedy,” originating from a rural area in Linyi, a prefecture-level city in Shandong Province. Her performances do not revolve around sophisticated themes but draw on the 30-year experience of her abusive and suffering marriage. By July 11, 2025, the release of her first performance on the TV show *King of Stand-Up Comedy 2* (henceforth KC), *Determination to Leave*, short video clips related to her performance quickly circulated across Chinese social media platforms such as Douyin, RedNote, and Weibo. Taking the hashtag “#DirectorFang” on Douyin as an example, which has had a topic heat index of zero for a very long time. Yet, the day after the episode's release on KC, it surged to nearly 1 million (985,644)[1], indicating that Director Fang's performance generated substantial attention and rapid dissemination within a very short period. Simultaneously, her official accounts across all three social media platforms showed significant increases in followers and engagement, attracting extensive user participation in discussions and driving topic diffusion. Platform users produced various forms of user-generated content (UGC), including fan-made video clip edits, discussions of marriage issues or topics related to female suffering, and reaction videos to the episode. As of November 30, 2025, Director Fang had accumulated 1.325 million followers and 6.524 million engagements across the three platforms[2]. Meanwhile, Director Fang and her agency began releasing video advertisements in collaboration with 18 brands by July 26, 2025, 15 days after the episode's release. They also launched her nationwide solo tour, *Director Fang's Signature Show*, on August 14, 2025. This trajectory from a high platform exposure to commercial operations illustrates the process through which female narratives are logically regulated by social media platforms, converting emotional resonance into traffic and further capitalizing on that traffic. It also reveals the dissemination mechanism in contemporary China's social media environment, where specific topics appear to emerge spontaneously but are in fact shaped by platform logics that users are unaware of.

This paper uses Director Fang's performance episode on KC, dissemination data from RedNote and Douyin, and user comment samples as primary research materials and data. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Affective Disposition Theory[16], Emotional Community[4], and Emotional Capitalism[5], this paper conducts an integrated analysis of narrative designs, audience emotions, and commercialization processes. This paper interprets how contemporary Chinese female stand-up comedians, represented by Director Fang, generate a synergistic effect between comedic presentation and social media discussions, and how platform logics convert online visibility into user-driven traffic, thereby facilitating commercial transformation. It also analyzes the role of persona construction and script lines in the dissemination of female stand-up narratives[18], revealing the potential mechanisms of emotional motivation and the commercial logic underlying Director Fang's practices that appear to speak on behalf of women. Through an in-depth examination of Director Fang's case, this paper seeks to address several questions. First, when female stand-up comedians enter mainstream platforms, are their narratives of female suffering merely expressions of personal viewpoints, or commodified stories packaged by capital? Second, how are audiences' emotional engagement shaped by the impact of gender issues, platform logics, and commercialized content? Third, when feminism becomes an object of platform traffic and consumption, does it operate under the guise of structural critiques while leading female audiences into the traps of the emotional economy? Accordingly, this study aims to illuminate how, within the context of contemporary China's platform feminism, female narratives in stand-up comedy are simultaneously shaped by emotions, platforms, and capital, ultimately generating a paradox of pseudo-empowerment.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. The Enduring Impact of Patriarchal Marital Norms in China

The gendered expectations surrounding marriage in contemporary China cannot be understood without acknowledging the deep historical roots of Confucian patriarchy. Classical Confucian texts established an enduring moral framework in which women's role in marriage was strictly defined and enforced. Classical Chinese literature, such as the *Liji*, emphasizes that "faithfulness is the virtue of a wife," asserting that a woman, once married, must remain with her husband for life and should not remarry after his death. The *Baihutong* similarly says that "there is no justification for deserting one's husband," reinforcing the expectation of unconditional loyalty[6]. These rules entrenched a patriarchal marital structure in which women's virtue was measured by obedience, endurance, and lifelong service to the husband and the family. Therefore, they shaped a cultural discipline where women leaving a marriage was morally stigmatized and initially forbidden, though legalized in Chinese modern society.

This historical discourse continues to influence contemporary attitudes and legal structures surrounding divorce. Although the Marriage Law of 1950 abolished arranged marriages and formally granted women equal rights to file for divorce, enabling greater institutional autonomy, the social and judicial environment has remained ambivalent toward women's marital exit. The 2001 Marriage Law sought to simplify divorce procedures further and restrict judicial discretion, ostensibly creating a more accessible legal pathway[7]. Yet, judicial processes are very complicated and slow to implement in practice. More notably, the 2020 Civil Code introduced a mandatory one-month "cooling-off period," which significantly curtails women's ability to leave harmful or abusive marriages by framing divorce as a disruption to family stability rather than a legitimate form of personal autonomy[6]. This tension between legal rights and cultural expectations reinforces the structural barriers women face when attempting to exit oppressive relationships, forming the sociocultural backdrop against which contemporary narratives of female suffering, such as those articulated by stand-up comedy performers like Director Fang, gain public resonance and symbolic power.

### 2.2. The Rise of Female Narratives in Chinese Stand-Up Comedy and Their Platformization

In recent years, Chinese stand-up comedy has become an important cultural site for articulating feminist concerns, with the public reception of Yang Li's 2020 performance marking a significant turning point. On Douyin, the hashtag #FemalePower alone has accumulated a heat index of 677 million, 680.5k posts, and over 1.77 billion likes, illustrating the scale of the public attention for gender narratives. Similarly, hashtags associated with Yang Li have generated extensive engagement. The hashtag for her Chinese name alone has achieved a heat index of 28.4 million, 3.2k posts, and 330 million views on Douyin. Yang's sharp critique of gender discourses not only triggered widespread online engagement but also encouraged a growing number of female stand-up comedians to foreground gender inequality, marriage pressure, and patriarchal norms in their routines. These performances effectively activated platform publics, generating large volumes of reposts, commentary, and user-generated content. However, this visibility simultaneously exposed female comedians to intensified backlash. Studies on Chinese anti-feminism show that digital misogyny often diverts public attention away from the structural roots of gender inequality and instead frames debates as antagonistic conflicts between feminists and anti-feminists[8][9]. This dynamic reflects a broader pattern within Chinese popular feminism, in which feminist expression spreads alongside platform logics that sensationalize controversy while depoliticizing systemic issues. In Yang Li's case, platforms reframed gender critiques as significant gender antagonisms, overshadowing her structural critique of gender discourses. Similarly, the case of Director Fang illustrates how social media

platforms can repackaging feminist storytelling into neoliberal narratives of individual resilience and success that reinforce a consumable pseudo-empowerment. Although both performers draw from classical feminist commitments to empowerment and social critique, the platformized environment often redirects their narratives toward emotional consumption and marketable identities. As a result, neither case successfully translates the high visibility into meaningful structural empowerment for women, revealing the limits of platformized popular feminism in contemporary China.

### 3. Theoretical Framing

This study will apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical framework. CDA conceptualizes language as a form of social practice, wherein each instance of discourse is not a neutral expression but is closely related to power structures, ideologies, and social norms[3]. To understand the social meanings embedded in Director Fang's performance design at multiple levels, I adopt Fairclough's triadic theoretical approach[10]. The first level is the discourse level, which focuses on script content, narrative strategies, and emotional display, examining how Director Fang depicts her experience of a suffering marriage and the broader female predicaments, and how she generates emotional resonance and moral evaluation among audiences. The second level is the genre level, which investigates how KC's stage design, edited audience interactions, and visual effects, together with the strategies of Director Fang and her agency, use comedic framing to transform individual narratives into wide social issues related to women. The third level focuses on identity and moral construction, concentrating on how discourse constructs or reshapes Director Fang's social identities, such as "middle-aged rural woman" or "marital victim," and on how the judges on KC and platforms use evaluative language to assign legitimacy, sympathy, and value judgments to these identities, thereby shaping audience emotions and public opinion. This approach enables discourse meaning to move between micro-level linguistic expressions and macro-level social logics, positioning the text not as a singular expression but as a form of social action with power, capital, and emotional effects.

In addition, this paper employs Affective Disposition Theory (ADT) as a theoretical foundation for analyzing the design of Director Fang's performances. ADT posits that audiences' moral evaluations of characters, their emotional alignment, and the affective responses they experience determine whether identification and emotional support emerge[16]. This paper examines how Director Fang and her agency activate these ADT mechanisms to generate strong moral identification and emotional compensation among viewers.

In analyzing the coded results of sampled user comments on RedNote and Douyin, this paper draws on the concept of Emotional Community. Emotional communities are defined as groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value, or devalue, the same or related emotions[4]. The research interprets the various forms of collective emotional behavior among women on social media platforms as emotional communities and uses this framework to support the analysis.

To examine Director Fang's commercialization trajectory, this paper applies Eva Illouz's theory of Emotional Capitalism, which describes the dual process by which emotional and economic relationships mutually shape one another[5]. This paper also engages with the theoretical perspectives of popular feminism and neoliberal feminism. Banet-Weiser conceptualizes popular feminism as a form of feminism disseminated through media and consumer culture, characterized by its focus on visibility and commodification. Popular feminism transforms political activism into a sense of empowerment that is publicly displayed and shared. Feminist slogans, affective storytelling, and rhetoric of female power become cultural commodities that generate visibility and social participation. However, this visibility is inherently paradoxical.

The platforms that amplify feminist expression simultaneously depoliticize it, converting collective resistance into individual emotional engagement and consumption. Consequently, popular feminism operates within the logic of media capitalism. It creates affective solidarity but rarely challenges structural inequalities[12]. Catherine Rottenberg's work on neoliberal feminism identifies a discourse that promotes self-responsibility and self-optimization, asserting that women can achieve empowerment through personal ambition, career success, and consumption choice. Within this framework, structural gender inequalities are reframed as personal challenges that can be overcome through individuals' efforts[13]. This study reveals how female narratives in contemporary female stand-up comedy, after attaining visibility through platform dissemination, expand the social influence of feminist issues and achieve a shift toward commercialization through emotional capitalism, resulting in a form of consumable pseudo-empowerment.

#### 4. Methodology

For Director Fang's stand-up performance in KC, this paper analyzes the episode transcript of *Determination to Leave*, released on the official iqiyi.com website on July 11, 2025[14], by employing ADT theory alongside her narrative strategies and emotional design. In addition, this paper applies Mondada's multimodal transcription method[15] to examine the program design of one selected highlight segment in detail.

To analyze Director Fang's mediated persona and social media platform mechanisms, this paper conducts a quantitative analysis centered on Douyin. The research materials include Douyin-based data on Director Fang, covering demographic analyses of her official account, trends in likes and follower growth, and the public presentation of her business contact information. The Douyin topic heat index is generated by the platform using a weighted model that incorporates search volume, user submissions, views, likes, shares, comments, and related behaviors. The research materials also include the growth trajectory of the "#DirectorFang" topic heat index and performance analyses of related Douyin topics. Furthermore, this paper examines the operational patterns of UGC within the platform's logical system.

For platform feminism behaviors emerging on social media under the banner of Director Fang, this paper conducts qualitative analysis using cross-platform coding. Octoparse is used to collect data from RedNote and Douyin by searching for the keyword "Director Fang." From the search results, the 50 highest-engagement posts on each platform are selected as research samples, and information such as titles, main text, counts of likes, favorites, and comments, comment content, like counts on comments, and the number of secondary comments is recorded. To avoid distortions caused by low-interaction data, the 15 most-liked primary comments under each post serve as the units of analysis, yielding 750 valid primary comments per platform and 1,500 in total. In addition, commenters' genders are manually identified and coded to analyze differences in stances, emotional expressions, and modes of identification across gender groups. During the coding stage, this paper divides sampled comments into nine thematic categories based on their core meanings: A. resonance with female suffering; B. supportive or encouraging discourse; C. discussions of fabricated hype and program effects, including comments on stage design, audience interactions, and references to script lines; D. personal attacks directed at the ex-husband; E. gender antagonism; F. critiques of feminism; G. conflicts in viewpoints; H. perceptions of capital intervention; and I. pure entertainment consumption. Through cross-platform comparison, this paper examines the differences and commonalities in platform feminism behaviors related to Director Fang across RedNote and Douyin, illustrating how high visibility contributes to the formation of cross-platform emotional communities of women.

Additionally, this paper incorporates supplementary media-text analyses, including a profile interview with Director Fang published in *Sanlian Life Weekly*[21] following the release of her episode on KC. This report provides key information about her real-life experiences with marriage and domestic violence, as well as her mental journey after entering stand-up comedy and successfully obtaining the divorce.

## 5. Narrative Strategies, Emotional Designs, and Interactive Outcomes of Director Fang's Performance

### 5.1. The Performance *Determination to Leave*

Director Fang appeared on stage wearing a printed shirt, with an ordinary and slightly overweight body and no visible accessories. Her short haircut was very common among ordinary middle-aged Chinese women, and her face showed no signs of makeup. By choosing a plain appearance, she allowed audiences to instantly identify her social status, leading viewers to anticipate that her performance would likely speak for everyday Chinese women. At the beginning of her performance, she constructed a humorous and authentic persona through self-deprecating labels such as "village information-center director," "gossip lover," and "rumor starter." This strategy, combined with her modest styling, reduced the psychological distance between performer and audience, enabling viewers to form an immediate impression of her as a typical rural middle-aged woman. She then adds that she is a "50-year-old freshman to stand-up comedy" and that her "menopause and debut arrived together." The contrast between "50" and "freshman," and between "menopause" and "debut," further enriches her persona as an ordinary, unprivileged woman who enters a new profession in her 50s[18]. As Raney argues in the context of ADT, when a performer is framed as a victim of structural oppression, audiences would quickly develop emotions of sympathy, protection, and a desire for the individual to achieve a reversal of fate[16]. Accordingly, within the first minute, the audience's sympathy, goodwill, and expectations of a happy ending had already been established, providing the mental set for both the humor and the pain that follow during the rest of the performance.

The middle section of Director Fang's performance presented a more complex emotional mechanism. She recounted experiencing long-term domestic violence from her ex-husband and the indifference of her parents, who prioritized family reputation and refused to support her divorce. This experience was profoundly traumatic. However, she avoided presenting it through tragedy, accusation, or raw emotionality. Instead, she employed humorizing trauma, such as referring to her short and thin ex-husband as a "corgi" and saying, "He wasn't just unable to beat me. I felt like he wouldn't live long." She also used narrative reversal by emphasizing that although she suffered abuse, she successfully fought back, sending "both his (ex-husband's) father and him (ex-husband) to the hospital." This strategy aligned with the Benign Violation Theory [17], since her over-fighting back against domestic violence seemed reasonable and acceptable in this case, and could be counted as humorous. Audiences recognized the severity of her experience while simultaneously experiencing reduced psychological discomfort through the humor of this plot twist, thereby increasing their acceptance of tragic stories. ADT again played a pivotal role here. When audiences perceived that she, as a victim, remained resilient and could recount her past through humorous language, their emotional disposition shifted toward respect, admiration, and a wish for her eventual success[16]. In other words, audiences wanted her to live well and escape her marital predicament. When the scenario they anticipated materialized, they experienced immediate gratification. This dynamic explains why each moment of humorized trauma elicits applause, cheers, and even tearful standing ovations.

This mechanism aligns with findings from the *Sanlian Life Weekly* interview[21]. When talking about her real-life experiences, Director Fang noted that she had been beaten by her ex-

husband until her “face was bruised and swollen.” Yet in her performance, she downplayed this and instead highlighted her successful resistance, which turned out to be fabricated. In traditional Chinese norms, women facing domestic violence are often expected to endure, self-blame, and preserve family respectability, while lacking discursive authority and public space for expression. By bringing her suffering life onto the stage and transforming pain into verbal agency that draws laughter, she constructed a moral victory. Audiences’ pleasure in witnessing a marginalized subject finally gaining voice, attention, and symbolic revenge. This pleasure is not superficial entertainment but a form of moral consolation[11].

**5.2. The “April 8th”: Focused Analysis of a Highlight Clip**

At the final stage of the performance, Director Fang employed a tricolon structure that served as the highlight of the whole show. See the following transcription[14].

Transcription 1. The “April 8th”

Participants:

DF = Director Fang

AUD = Audience

JUD = Judges

CAM = Camera

F = Female

M = Male

Notations:

\* for gestures done by DF

+ for gaze done by DF

\$ for gestures done by AUD

¥ for gaze done by AUD

& for gestures done by JUD

% for movement done by CAM

1 DF Until the year before last, I didn’t even know my birthday’s April 8th.

+>>gaze neutral forward-----+

CAM %>>frontal medium close-up-----%

DF \*>>minimal movement, upright posture-----\*

+...+gaze L to R across AUD and JUD, closed mouth-----+,,,,,+

(1.0)

2 DF Because on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023°, I signed my stand-up comedy contract and became a comedian°.

\*tone rise-----\*

+...+gaze L to R across AUD and JUD-----+,,,,,+

\*...\*smiley voice-----\* , , \*

\*...\*accelerated tempo-----\* , , \*

CAM %>>frontal medium close-up-----%

DF +...+smiling gaze toward AUD and JUD-----+,,,+

(3.0)

AUD \$. . .applause------\$

CAM %cut to AUD close-up, 5 JUD, 4F/1M. -----%

AUD \$>>all clapping and cheering-----&

JUD &>>all clapping and cheering-----&

(3.0)

CAM %wide overhead shot twd AUD, around 50 seated AUD-----%

AUD \$>>around 50 seated AUD clapping and cheering-----&

(3.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up A, 6 JUD, 3F/3M-----%

JUD &>>1F stands, crying into hands; 1F looking down and crying, others clapping&

(2.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up B, 9 JUD, 6F/3M-----%

JUD &>>2F crying heavily, wiping tears; others smiling and clapping-----&

(3.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up C, 1 JUD, 1M-----%

JUD &>>1M nodding repeatedly, smiling and crying-----&

(2.0)

CAM %returns to DF frontal medium close-up----->>%

(6.0)

DF +>>smiling gaze toward AUD-----+,,,+

...+Left hand scratches head once+...+,,,+

3 DF On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024°, I left the marriage with nothing but my two daughters, and got my divorce certificate°.

\*tone rise-----\*

\*...\*smiley voice-----\*,,,\*

\*...\*accelerated tempo-----\*,,,\*

CAM %>>frontal medium close-up-----%

DF +...+smiling gaze toward AUD-----+,,,+

AUD \$.\$. \$heavier clapping and cheering immediately-----&

(1.0)

CAM %wide overhead shot twd AUD and guest panel, around 50 AUD-----%

AUD \$>>all clapping and cheering, with 5 standing up to clap-----&

(2.0)

CAM % guest panel close-up D, 14 JUD, 6F/8M-----%

JUD &>>2M standing aside to clap with hands overhead; 2M standing to clap heavily; 1F standing to cheer with hands overhead and crying face; others smiling or crying to clap---&

(4.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up E, 9 JUD, 4F/5M-----%

JUD &>>1F raising hands overhead to cry; 1M standing up to clap; others smiling or crying to clap-----&

(2.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up F, 1 JUD, 1F-----%

JUD &>>clenching both hands into fists, bending her arms and waving forward frequently, crying loudly, and cheering-----&

(4.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up G, 3 JUD, 1F2M-----%

JUD &>>1F standing, wiping tears with hands; 1M standing, clapping heavily with smile; 1M remaining seated, smiling and clapping-----&

(3.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up H, 1 JUD, 1M-----%

JUD &>>ready-to-cry expression-----&

¥>>gaze twd DF-----¥

(2.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up I, 1 JUD, 1F-----%

JUD &>>crying heavily, clapping and then wiping tears with hands-----&

(3.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up J, 1 JUD, 1M-----%

JUD &>>raising head to hold back tears, clapping hands, and then lowering head to wipe tears with hands-----&

CAM %returns to DF frontal medium close-up----->>%

4 DF On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025°, nothing happened.

\*tone rise\*

\*accelerated tempo\*

\*...smiley voice-----\*,\*

+...smiling gaze twd AUD and JUD-----+,,,+

\*...bending arms and punching fwd AUD and JUD slightly-----\*,\*

CAM %>>frontal medium close-up-----%

DF \*...closing mouth-----\*,\*

+...gaze twd AUD and JUD-----+,,,+

AUD \$laughing immediately-----\$,,\$

CAM %guest panel close-up K, 2 JUD, 1F/1M-----%

JUD &>>1F smiling and wiping tears with hands; 1M smiling and crying-----&

(2.0)

CAM %guest panel close-up K, 1 JUD, 1F-----%

JUD &>>can't help smiling and wiping tears with tissue-----&

(2.0)

CAM %returns to DF frontal medium close-up----->>%

5 DF I had a peaceful° and happy° day. Thank you everyone, I'm Director Fang!

\*tone rise-----\*

\*smiley voice-----\*

\*accelerated tempo-----\*

CAM %>>frontal medium close-up-----%

DF \*...raising L hand and taking a bow-----\*,\*

AUD \$clapping and cheering immediately, with some raising hands overhead to clap\$

Regarding the performance strategies used in this segment, Director Fang employed a tricolon structure that advanced step by step, repeating “April 8th” as a memorable term to guide the audience’s emotions from calmness to warmth and ultimately to a state of tearful resonance. In the first line of this segment, she spoke in a neutral, even tone with an unmarked facial expression. After finishing the line, she swept her gaze across the audience, deliberately creating a brief moment of suspended silence to generate anticipation.



**Figure 1.** Clip 1 from *Determination to Leave*

She then smiled distinctly and, in a light and upbeat tone, introduced the first meaning of “April 8th,” the day she signed her contract to become a stand-up comedian. She paused again and scanned the audience, waiting for emotional feedback. At this moment, KC used 25 seconds with 6 camera transitions to display the reactions of the audience, contestants, and judges as they applauded and cheered in various ways. 4 of these close-up shots focused on 16 contestants and judges, implicitly signaling the KC show team’s endorsement of this moment and shaping the emotional baseline for online audiences.



**Figure 2.** Clip 2 from *Determination to Leave*



**Figure 3.** Clip 3 from *Determination to Leave*

Next, with the same upbeat tone and smiling expression, Director Fang introduced the second meaning of “April 8th,” the day she successfully finalized her divorce, accompanied by expressive arm movements. KC responded with another 20-second sequence of 9 camera transitions capturing the audience, contestants, and judges’ reactions. Her lines again employed humorizing trauma to narrate the divorce experience through a comedic frame, immediately eliciting an intensified emotional response. Applause and cheers grew even louder, with close-up shots of 30 contestants and judges highlighting this reaction.



**Figure 4.** Clip 4 from *Determination to Leave*



**Figure 5.** Clip 5 from *Determination to Leave*

Finally, when introducing the third “April 8th,” she remarked that “nothing happened,” using an anticlimax to create a punchline and a dramatic turn while leaving a momentary sense of suspense. She then added, “I had a peaceful and happy day,” followed by a 24-second sequence of 10 camera transitions that captured the emotional peaks of everyone, including close-up shots of 42 contestants and judges. At this point, Director Fang concluded her performance, completing the emotional trajectory described by ADT[16]. Throughout the performance, the audience witnessed her initial vulnerability, then her suffering, and finally her happiness and liberation. Especially for many female viewers, Director Fang’s performance transcended entertainment, becoming a form of vicarious psychological revenge and a means of resisting fate. Her onstage success symbolized not only personal triumph but also intentionally conveyed that “women can succeed,” “unprivileged women can succeed,” and “the oppressed can reverse their fate.” In this highlight tricolon clip, all the program’s editing captured strong emotional resonance, indicating KC’s intentional preference for filming individuals with strong emotional expressions. This built-in bias created a specific emotional atmosphere, preconditioning the emotional responses of online audiences who will later watch the broadcast.



**Figure 6.** Clip 6 from *Determination to Leave*



**Figure 7.** Clip 7 from *Determination to Leave*



**Figure 8.** Clip 8 from *Determination to Leave*

Throughout the performance, Director Fang leveraged various humorized expressions and a strategically crafted persona to activate ADT mechanisms of moral identification and emotional gratification. She deliberately bound her persona to that of a particular social group, ordinary, unprivileged middle-aged women who have suffered in marriage, and used the performance to enact a symbolic victory on their behalf. This framing encouraged audiences to internalize the implication that “supporting Director Fang is equivalent to supporting all women who have suffered,” whereas “questioning Director Fang is equivalent to denying these women’s experiences.” This psychological framing was the underlying reason a platform feminism movement later emerged in her name across social media.

### 5.3. The Visual Presentation Bias of KC

This paper examines the visual presentation of Director Fang’s performance, *Determination to Leave*, as edited by the KC production team for streaming platforms. Notably, KC does not include sections in which performers interact with ordinary audience members, nor does it design commentary or discussion sections among contestants. As a competitive show, nearly all interactions are limited to evaluations conducted exclusively by the host and judges after the performances. In the final episode, after Director Fang’s performance concluded, the program arranged for the host and four culturally authoritative judges from the entertainment industry to engage with her through commentary and emotional summaries. The tendency to position well-known industry figures as the sole evaluators structurally removes ordinary viewers from the public discursive space. Moreover, the judges’ commentaries focused on praising Director Fang’s courage in expressing female suffering, affirming the social value of her performance’s theme, and highlighting the authenticity and emotional intensity of the performance. These highly affective statements functioned to position her as a spokesperson for ordinary women. As Fairclough emphasizes, media discourse does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs it, and different discourse choices generate distinct orientations of meaning[10]. When commentators replaced diverse discussion with a unified emotional

discourse, online audiences were guided toward a prescribed understanding of Director Fang's performance. Furthermore, media discourse exerts disciplinary force by determining who may speak, what can be expressed, and what should remain silent. As discussed in the previous subsection, the program's editing preferences privileged shots of emotionally charged audience reactions and close-ups of contestants and judges crying or cheering, thereby reinforcing an officialized display of sentiment. This ensured that only supportive attitudes were presented as public opinions. Combined with the unified judge commentary section, these visual displays communicated to online audiences that feeling moved was expected, questioning was unnecessary, and analytical distance was inappropriate. KC packaged female suffering in an entertaining and affective way, granting visibility but circumscribing it within a genre framework that transformed pain into consumable emotions.



**Figure 9.** Clip 9 from *Determination to Leave*

Simultaneously, the commentators' statements operated not only as expressions of emotion but also as mechanisms of legitimation. Drawing on Van Leeuwen's theory of legitimation[19], beliefs and value orientations gain acceptance not through intrinsic logic but through the recognized authority of those who articulate them. Since the commentators held authoritative positions in the domains of variety entertainment, film, and stand-up comedy, their supportive narratives were legitimized as the normative emotional response. Through this process, female suffering was converted into a socially sanctioned and consumable emotional resource, while the voices of ordinary audiences remained absent from the conversation. Director Fang, endorsed by celebrity authority, became a validated victim figure who symbolically rose above the shared social condition faced by countless ordinary women. This process of legitimation did not address underlying social problems and weakened the structural, rational critique. Instead, it immersed audiences in immediate emotional experience, allowing sympathy to flow seamlessly into consumption support and eventually reinforcing the effect between the entertainment industry and consumerism.

## 6. The Platform-Driven Traffic Boost

### 6.1. Quantitative Analysis on Director Fang's Audience Profile Data

To verify the dissemination mechanisms and pathways of fan engagement, I collected and analyzed audience profile data of Director Fang's official Douyin account, "Linyi Director Fang." The regional distribution shows that Shandong Province accounts for the highest proportion of users at 16.74%, with a preference index (TGI) of 258.94, far exceeding the national average. This concentration is not incidental. First, Director Fang's self-positioning as a rural resident from Linyi, Shandong, aligns closely with the persona constructed in KC. Second, her narrative

resonates with the marital and familial challenges common in the rural areas of northern prefecture-level cities in China, making her stories culturally legible and emotionally relatable to this audience. Meanwhile, although Beijing ranks fifth in audience share, its TGI is 292.20, the highest nationwide[2]. This indicates an additional dissemination pathway beyond regional affinity, one that urban or highly educated users are also willing to discuss and circulate content about Director Fang. Thus, this means that the appeal of Director Fang's dissemination is not limited to a specific regional population but has formed a consensus of emotions that transcends social and geographical boundaries.

The gender distribution of Director Fang's Douyin followers reveals an even stronger skew. Female users account for 75% of the audience, with a TGI of 163, while male users constitute only 25%, with a TGI of merely 47, which is far below the average[2]. This indicates that the dissemination of Director Fang's narrative on Douyin is fundamentally aimed at women. Male users tend to adopt a detached viewing stance, or even to express skepticism and oppositional commentary, whereas female users are the primary participants of emotional engagement and UGC reproduction. This pattern fully aligns with the cross-platform user comment sampling analyzed in Chapter 7, in which supportive or empathetic comments overwhelmingly originate from women, while speculation about friction and feminist critiques appear predominantly in comments from men or anonymous-gender users.

In terms of age distribution, users aged 31–40 constitute the largest share at 34%, followed by the 24–30 group at 26%, and the 18–23 group at 21%. However, the TGI values present an inverse structure. Users aged 18–23 have the highest TGI at 150, followed by the 24–30 group at 148, and then the 31–40 group at 100[2]. This dynamic suggests a differentiation between primary viewers and active participants. Although many middle-aged women follow Director Fang's Douyin account, their level of interaction is far lower than that of Gen Z women, who are the primary emotional participants and disseminators. These younger, mostly unmarried users tend to resonate with Director Fang's narrative through observations of their mothers' and grandmothers' marital experiences, and through anticipatory awareness of potential risks of future marital conflict, family pressures, or gender inequality. In other words, within fan cognition, Director Fang not only represents the current predicaments of middle-aged women but also serves as a symbolic sample for young women's anxieties about structural gender risks. Chapter 7 will further examine this perspective through quantitative analysis of specific user-comment samples.

## 6.2. Quantitative Analysis on Director Fang's Platform Persona

This paper conducts a multidimensional quantitative analysis of the dissemination of topics related to Director Fang on Douyin. According to Douyin TrendInsight's heat index analysis, the primary hashtag "#DirectorFang" has accumulated a heat index of 6,206,378, with over 11,000 primary user posts, approximately 117 million total likes, and more than 5.2 billion views. These figures indicate the formation of a long-term, stable traffic pool, suggesting that the topic has moved beyond the KC's episode and entered a stage of sustainable content development. The secondary hashtag associated with her identity as a stand-up comedian, "DirectorFangStandUpComedy," has reached a heat index of 932,067 and 1.47 billion views. Several other emotion-centered hashtags have also surpassed 1 billion views, demonstrating clear narrativity and emotional dissemination characteristics. When focusing on the primary hashtag "#DirectorFang," the overall dissemination trend shows that the Douyin heat index remained at zero on July 10, 2025. With KC's episode broadcast by July 11, the index surged to 325,378 that day and peaked at 985,644 on July 12. This rapid escalation indicates that Director Fang's platform visibility did not emerge from long-term accumulation but was instead amplified abruptly through the immediate emotional responses of online viewers following the broadcast. The heat index approaching 1 million reflects that platform content related to

Director Fang achieved extensive platform-wide exposure within a very short period, surpassing the dissemination ceiling for many other contestants in KC. Moreover, this peak was not an isolated phenomenon. For two weeks beginning July 12, the topic's popularity remained high, reaching a secondary heat index peak on August 5. Although the latter was considerably lower than the initial peak, it still remained at a notable level, indicating that Director Fang did not fade from the public attention after the episode. Instead, she maintained exposure by continuously posting videos on her official account, as well as by the persistent UGC across the platform[20].

To further verify the relationship between dissemination peaks and emotional engagement, this paper analyzes the follower-growth trajectory of Director Fang's Douyin account. After what she suggested, "on April 8, 2023, I signed my contract to become a stand-up comedian", the account reached 10,000 followers on April 22, 2023. Following the broadcast of KC's episode on July 11, 2025, the account rapidly surpassed 100,000 and 300,000 followers within three days and exceeded 600,000 by July 24, 2025[2]. This growth rate clearly demonstrates that the explosive traffic was entirely driven by the episode's broadcast. Through specific narrative strategies combined with the show's emotionally oriented editing preferences, Director Fang elicited substantial emotional responses from platform users within a short time, which the platform's recommendation logics then amplified.

In addition, this paper analyzes the new likes on Director Fang's Douyin account between July 10 and November 30, 2025. There were two pronounced peaks emerged, both closely tied to specific videos posted by Director Fang. The first peak corresponds to a short video she posted on July 12, featuring the line "a peaceful and happy day," which received 345,000 likes, 4,811 comments, and 15,700 shares. This spike fully coincides with the July 12 peak in the topic heat index, demonstrating that emotional and transmissible script lines are keys to this platform-wide dissemination. The second peak occurs on August 5, when Director Fang posted a video urging audiences not to purchase scalped tickets for her nationwide solo tour. This video reached 746,000 likes, 14,700 comments, and 61,000 shares[22]. Unlike the July 12 peak, the August 5 video does not focus on performance narratives but instead shifts toward the management and mobilization of collective fan behavior. This shift indicates a transition in dissemination logic from emotional resonance to commercialization. Alongside the tour promotion, the video constructs a new way linking online emotional identification to offline consumer support, encouraging fans to move beyond affective experience and engage in quantifiable economic participation. Chapter 7 will further analyze this transition.



**Figure 10.** Trend Line of the Douyin Topic Heat Index for "#DirectorFang"

## 7. The Formation of Emotional Community Among Cross-Platform Female Users

### 7.1. Performance Results of RedNote User Comment Samples

This paper analyzes users' emotional responses on RedNote and Douyin and the platformization of topics related to Director Fang, based on coding of sampled user comments from these platforms. The coding results of 750 comment samples from RedNote show that 160 comments fall into the category of resonance with female suffering, mainly focusing on domestic violence, marital distress, and the loss of agency experienced by women in intimate relationships. Terms related to family generations, such as "mom/mother/my mom," appear 62 times, "grandma" 24 times, "daughter" 17 times, "divorce" 36 times, and "cry/moved/tearful" 68 times. These patterns indicate that Director Fang's narrative not only stimulates individual emotion responses but also encourages commenters to reconnect their personal experiences, maternal or intergenerational experiences, and structural gender issues.

Supportive and encouraging comments constitute the largest category, with 300 occurrences. In the word frequency analysis, positive evaluation words such as "good", "great", "powerful", "strong", "excellent", "support", "keep going", and "like" appear 173 times. At the same time, words symbolizing female empowerment, such as "queen" and "her majesty the queen," appear 86 times, demonstrating the strong emotional resonance and visible personal admiration among fans.

Comments related to script fictionalization and show editing total 102. The keyword "fabricating" appears 24 times as users debate the script's reality. Among them, 11 comments explicitly point out that Director Fang has the suspicion of "fabricating", "hyping," or "selling misery", and 7 of the users who made this point were male. More noteworthy, however, are another 32 comments stating that "the truth doesn't matter" and "there's no need to worry about whether it's fabricated", emphasizing that focusing on women's real experiences and structural gender issues is more meaningful than verifying the authenticity of the performance script.

Additionally, 39 comments quoted the original lines of Director Fang's performance as expressions of personal resonance or emotional response. The most frequently cited line is the climate closing sentence from *Determination to Leave*, "a peaceful and happy day", which appears 18 times; the same segment's "April 8th" appears 5 times; and "Chinese women give up on themselves too early," mentioned by Director Fang in the subsequent performance of *KC*, appears 4 times. These patterns indicate that certain lines in Director Fang's script have transformed from performance language into transmissible public emotional symbols. In particular, 20 comments directly discuss the show editing, on-site interaction, and backstage production design. These include mentions of her boss's name 5 times, and the name of the main guest "Yang Tianzhen" 6 times, indicating that some viewers were aware of the operation of the show and could recognize content production and commercial mechanisms, rather than simply using the victim narrative as the basis for authenticity judgment.

Furthermore, 7 comments involve direct personal attacks on Director Fang's ex-husband. Although these comments constitute a small proportion of the total sample, they collectively received 32,000 likes, indicating that such aggressive expressions, while not mainstream, carry a strong affective appeal within specific audience segments. Gender antagonism comments total 33, of which 19 articulated gender-based value hierarchies such as "having daughters is better," "sons will destroy you," "mothers of sons can never escape," and "fortunately, Director Fang didn't have a son." Another 4 comments treat men as an inherently non-empathetic group, stating, for example, that "men cannot understand women's situations." These patterns suggest that RedNote users tend to adopt a non-radical form of structural attribution,

interpreting marital oppression and familial risks through women's lived experiences and extending these interpretations to gender-structural issues at the group level. Moreover, 8 comments expressed value conflicts, all from female users who described sharing Director Fang's performance or interview clips with parents or male acquaintances, only to receive dismissive responses such as "the story is made up" or "what's so moving about this," accompanied by evaluative terms to them like "irrational" or "hopeless." This pattern reveals that the emotional resonance surrounding Director Fang is differentiated not only by gender but also by generation, indicating that women's interpretive frameworks regarding gendered suffering and narrative significance diverge across age groups. Comments reflecting perceptions of capital intervention count 17, with 11 explicitly stating sentiments such as "I'm glad she's getting ad deals" or "she's finally making money." These responses indicate that audiences may not resist Director Fang's commercialization trajectory; rather, they regard her market entry and economic gains as symbolic of women achieving self-improvement and attaining incremental success. Lastly, comments categorized as pure entertainment consumption total 121 and contain no explicitly feminist implications.

Regarding the composition of commenters on RedNote, 723 of the 750 users are identifiable as women (96.4%), only 5 as men, and 22 are of indeterminate gender. Sentiment analysis shows that 608 comments express clear support, 131 remain neutral or without an evident stance, and only 11 express explicit opposition. Overall, discussions about Director Fang on RedNote indicate the characteristics of an emotional community grounded in shared experiences and mutual witnessing among women, rather than a controversial or antagonistic atmosphere common to traditional online discourse[4]. Although controversies over fictionalization and commercialization persist, many users intentionally shift the discussion away from the authenticity of the performance to structural social issues. This indicates that, within RedNote users' awareness, Director Fang's narrative has transcended individual experience to become a symbolic representation of women's social realities.

## 7.2. Performance Results of Douyin User Comment Samples

To examine the dissemination characteristics on short-video platforms, this paper presents the coded results for 750 Douyin comment samples. Comments categorized as resonance with female suffering appear 228 times. Their contents are similar to those on RedNote, frequently involving the marital predicaments of mothers and grandmothers, personal experiences of suffering marriages, and intergenerational female destinies. Keyword statistics show that "mom/mother/my mom" appears 103 times, "grandmother" 45 times, "daughter" 28 times, "divorce" 59 times, and "cry/moved/tearful" 90 times. Compared with the RedNote samples, this category is higher both in volume and emotional intensity, with a stronger focus on maternal experiences and divorce. Douyin users not only resonate emotionally but also more frequently share personal and ancestral experiences in the comments, extending individual feelings into collective memory and thereby reproducing emotions and narratives.

Supportive and encouraging comments count 117, fewer than the 300 observed in RedNote samples. In this category, supportive terms such as "good," "great," "impressive," and "agree" appear 86 times, while "queen" and "her majesty the queen" appear 22 times. This indicates that, although supportive attitude remains the dominant stance among Douyin users, they are less inclined to express support through pure praise and more inclined to couple it with more evaluative commentary.

Comments related to script fictionalization and show editing are notably high on Douyin, reaching 256 entries, the largest of all categories. The words "fake," "persona collapse," and "fabricated" appear 104 times. Among these, 19 comments explicitly allege that Director Fang is fabricating or hyping her story; the majority of these, 12, come from male users, with the remaining 7 from users whose gender is not indicated. Another 65 comments argue that the

discussion should focus on real social problems rather than the factual authenticity of the performance script. In addition, 130 comments quote Director Fang's lines as a means of resonance or analysis, including 68 instances of "a peaceful and happy day," 41 of "April 8th," and 9 of "Chinese women give up on themselves too early." This confirms the high transmissibility and platform logic friendliness of these lines on short-video platforms. A further 42 comments discuss show editing design, guest performance, and stage atmosphere, with the name of Director Fang's boss mentioned 23 times and "Yang Tianzhen" 10 times. These data suggest that Douyin audiences exhibit not only high emotional engagement but also a relatively strong sense of media. Some viewers can identify performance and production mechanisms and reflect on editing logics in an unprofessional way.

Comments involving direct personal attacks on the ex-husband appear 11 times, accounting for a small proportion of the sample. Gender-antagonism comments total 41, similar in content to those on RedNote, and are largely posted by female users discussing gender preference, for example, praising the birth of daughters and devaluing the birth of sons. Feminist criticism comments number 12, slightly more than on RedNote. These critiques primarily accuse Director Fang of "stirring up gender antagonism" or "using tragic narratives to gain sympathy," indicating that opinion divergence is more pronounced in the Douyin comment space. Conceptual conflict comments total 8, mostly written by female users and similar to those on RedNote. They also typically describe sending the video to parents or boyfriends and receiving dismissive responses, suggesting that users perceive the persistence of significant generational and gender differences.

Comments expressing perceptions of capital intervention reach 35, of which 27 explicitly mention advertising collaborations and commercial collaborations, conveying a mixed stance of both satisfaction and caution. Many comments state that "she deserves to make money, but I hope she does not exploit female audiences," revealing a complex attitude toward her commercialization, where they expect women to gain material rewards while worrying about excessive capital marketing. Pure entertainment consumption comments number only 50, far fewer than on RedNote, indicating that Douyin users engage less in light, entertaining interaction under this topic.

Regarding commenter gender composition, 689 users are identified as female, 32 as male, and 29 as having an unidentified gender. As in the RedNote sample, female users constitute an overwhelming majority, though the proportions of male and unidentified-gender users are slightly higher on Douyin. Attitude distribution shows 676 supportive comments, 52 neutral, and 22 oppositional. The overall trend remains positive, but viewpoints are more diverse and more inclined toward debate. Within the sample, Douyin users' comments comprise not only emotional empathy but also multiple forms of rational reflection and critical analysis

### 7.3. Cross-Platform Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the comment samples from RedNote and Douyin reveals that the two platforms jointly constitute an emotional community centered on female users, while also presenting both differentiated patterns and convergent tendencies in their dissemination logic and narratives. RedNote, as a predominantly female-oriented platform, features an overwhelmingly female user base in the sample. Its comments focus primarily on emotional resonance and supportive expressions, forming a female emotional community grounded in mutual psychological consolation. The language is usually gentle, and the interactions exhibit a sense of collective identification and warmth. By contrast, although Douyin likewise features women as the primary participants, it functions as a platform open to all genders. Its comment environment is more complex, with a broader range of topics and more in-depth discussions.

In terms of emotional expression, RedNote comments exhibit a soft, empathetic tone. Users frequently express resonance through statements such as "her experience is like my mother's"

or “I am just like her.” Douyin comments, although also empathetic, are more likely to extend beyond it to raise questions and engage in reflective analysis. This difference reflects certain platform attributes. RedNote prioritizes emotional connection and a community atmosphere, whereas Douyin’s logic promotes public discussion and discursive diversity. Notably, Douyin’s volume of comments addressing disputes over fictionalization and show editing mechanisms is more than twice that of RedNote. Male commenters account for a larger proportion of these comments, and the content concerns performance authenticity, narrative structure, and show mechanisms on both platforms. This suggests the awareness of media among certain audience groups on both platforms, though it is more pronounced in Douyin’s discursive context. It also indicates that the short-video algorithmic logic encourages diverse and controversial content. Another prominent commonality across both platforms is the large-scale citation of specific lines from Director Fang’s performance. As discussed in Section 5.2, Director Fang and her agency intentionally designed certain lines with platform dissemination logic in mind. The tricolon expression featuring “April 8th” successfully became one of her signature phrases and a widely circulating communicative symbol, repeatedly quoted and remixed by users across platforms.

Regarding gender positions and feminist expressions, the comment samples on both platforms include discussion of generational and gender differences. RedNote comments tend to adopt a more moderate form of attribution, interpreting institutional and structural injustices through women’s lived experiences, although some comments display antagonism toward men. On Douyin, more direct gender-position narratives and feminist critiques appear, indicating a more open and controversial environment in which users are more inclined to express diverse views on social issues.

In terms of perceptions of commercialization, RedNote users generally view it as a sign of female independence and express blessing when Director Fang receives advertising opportunities. Douyin users, while recognizing commercialization, display a dual stance. They agree that Director Fang can achieve economic returns while also worrying about potential over-intervention by capital. This complex stance reflects an emerging transition within emotional communities from pure emotional solidarity to more rational, critical engagement. Users simultaneously hope that survivors of suffering marriages can achieve renewal through commercial opportunities, and gradually become aware of how capital may commodify social issues related to women, and further towards their female audience base.

In sum, cross-platform comment patterns related to Director Fang form a shared emotional community centered on experience sharing and emotional resonance, enabling her narrative to extend from an individual fate to a symbol of collective female experiences. At the same time, the two platforms display distinct differences in emotional depth, degree of controversy, media awareness, and commercial sensitivity. RedNote comments emphasize an emotional cohesion grounded in support and resonance, whereas Douyin comments further reflect consciousness of risks and critical reflection. This interplay of convergence and divergence across platforms facilitates the evolution of the Director Fang’s phenomenon, which evolves from a single performance to a cross-platform practice of women’s emotional resonance.

## **8. Commercialization and Pseudo-Empowerment Construct the Emotional Capitalism Trap**

In the rapid commercialization that followed Director Fang’s rise to fame, the female narrative shifted from an account of individual experience to a consumable emotional resource, forming a trap of the emotional economy. This trap is built upon a form of pseudo-empowerment, in which Director Fang, the female subject, is packaged within commercialized dissemination structures as a success model of self-improvement. Such empowerment does not emerge from

actual improvements in structural gender conditions but from brand marketing and capital operations[13]. As Illouz's theory of emotional capitalism argues, once emotional relations become deeply intertwined with capitalist logic, they are transformed into mobilizable forms of capital[5]. Director Fang's success on social media illustrates how she and her agency repeatedly activate and leverage audience emotions. Her narratives of rebirth after divorce were rapidly constructed by media and audiences into an inspirational symbol of a woman reversing her fate, while commercial advertisements, tour promotions, and fan consumption became the primary channels through which this emotional resonance was sustained.

Facing such sudden platform-wide popularity, Director Fang and her agency demonstrated an explicitly proactive and receptive attitude toward commercialization. On July 26, 2025, only 15 days after her first KC performance, she posted her first branded video advertisement across several official social media accounts. In the opening line of this advertisement, she smilingly declares, "I finally got an ad deal, I'm so happy," projecting a sincere, unpretentious persona while openly expressing pleasure at her commercial engagement. By November 30, 2025, she had released advertising content in collaboration with 18 brands across platforms. Moreover, within one month after becoming popular, her agency also rapidly planned a nationwide solo tour, Director Fang's Signature Show, which opened in Beijing on August 14, 2025. Notably, her account biographies across multiple platforms publicly display a business contact WeChat ID, often placed in the first line, signaling an explicit ambition for broad commercialization. Simultaneously, her RedNote commercial offer page lists 100,000 RMB for a sponsored image-text post and 150,000 RMB for a sponsored video post, indicating that her persona has been quantified into substantial market value[22]. In subsequent KC performances, she even mentions that she has "worked hard and bought (her) own apartment" after being well known. This commercialization process embodies the logic of neoliberal feminism, in which empowerment is no longer tied to structural reform but is redefined as personal success and self-improvement[13]. Director Fang is presented as an ordinary, socially marginalized rural woman who redeems herself and achieves success through personal effort. Her persona has been transformed into consumable brand values, mobilizing audience emotional responses and turning those responses into the foundation of her own commercialization.

Throughout the commercialization process, Director Fang continues to appear in public as a formerly disadvantaged figure achieving upward mobility, maintaining a persona of optimism and authenticity that sustains public attention and engagement[5]. From the audience's perspective, these commercial activities have not provoked backlash. Instead, many female users interpret them as deserved economic compensation for Director Fang's past hardships. Across her platform accounts, branded videos have attracted numerous highly liked comments from female users such as "I'm happy she's finally making money" and "How can I support her so the brand knows I'm buying because of her?" Such expressions reflect how fans use consumption to apply symbolic compensation for women who have endured suffering. This collective feeling of being "happy for her" exemplifies emotional capitalism, where individuals gain moral consolation through emotional responses combined with consumptions. Here, audience goodwill is absorbed by capital and transformed into purchasing power. While female audiences may appear to draw collective strength from supporting another woman, their emotions are in fact commodified as a form of consumable empowerment. In this mode of popular feminism, women's shared empathy becomes the driving force behind platform traffic, advertising conversion, and the sustained visibility of content. The danger lies in substituting emotional resonance for structural reflection, rendering female suffering as consumable narratives rather than actions for social action addressing real inequalities[12].

From the perspective of the media mechanism, Director Fang's commercialization pathway aligns with the legitimation mechanisms embedded in KC's production structure, as previously mentioned. Media texts do not merely mirror reality, while they construct selective versions of

reality based on producers' positions, interests, and objectives[10]. Her commercial narrative is legitimized through optimization by the KC production team, her agency, and brand partners, and is further reinforced by platform logic recommendations. Audiences accept this narrative because they repeatedly recognize the authority of its disseminators. In KC, the authoritative disseminators are celebrity guests and producers; in the commercial context, they are the agency and brand partners[19]. Her commercialization is legitimized because the existing communicative power structure allows her to be seen.

Ultimately, this process draws audiences into the trap of emotional economy. Beneath the appearance of empowerment, consumption behaviors are drawn into female narratives. Audiences gain immediate emotional resonance through KC's edited performance clips, platforms amplify traffic through topics centered on female power, and commercial brand partners capitalize on the peak of public attention through tours and brand collaborations. Director Fang's lived experiences thus become reproducible and marketable symbols, while public discussions centered on marital suffering function as representations of pseudo-empowerment. Although women's subjectivity appears elevated, it is simultaneously disciplined within systemic logics of commodification. The "peace" and "happiness" in her famous line derive not from improvements in structural gender conditions but from quantifiable market gains such as advertising offers, tour revenue, and brand collaborations. Through self-branding and the deployment of pseudo-empowerment characteristic of popular feminism, Director Fang's female audience becomes ensnared in a circuit in which their emotions are consumed by capital.

## 9. Conclusion

This paper uses Director Fang's stand-up performances and the cross-platform dissemination as a core case to illustrate how female narratives in contemporary China's digital platform environment shift from individual expressions to emotional resonance and commercial transformation. Director Fang's rapid rise to prominence is a product of KC's editing designs, platform logic preferences, and collective audience emotional responses. By using marital suffering as the narrative point of departure, Director Fang's performances enabled audiences to quickly develop moral and emotional alignment through the mechanisms described by ADT. On platforms such as RedNote and Douyin, this process generated an emotional community dominated by female users, allowing individual experiences to expand into a collective emotional resource. However, once this emotional visibility accumulated large-scale traffic through platform mechanisms and was subsequently integrated into commercial processes by her agency and brand partners, Director Fang's public persona began to exhibit the defining characteristics of popular feminism. Female suffering became transformed into emotionally charged symbols suited for public circulation, and discussions framed around female power gradually depoliticized from structural critique as they were repeatedly cited, reproduced, and adapted into consumable content. At the same time, her inspirational narrative of success achieved through personal effort aligned closely with the value logic of neoliberal feminism, which reframes female empowerment as individual self-optimization rather than a systemic challenge to gender inequality. As audiences expressed their goodwill toward her success, they simultaneously, and often unintentionally, participated in the circuits of emotional capitalism, where consumption acquired moral meaning, and emotional resonance was converted into economic action through the mechanism of "feeling happy for her." Thus, the Fang phenomenon presents a hybrid form of feminist structure. On one hand, her performance provided a symbolic affective outlet for women who lack expressive space in everyday life. On the other hand, this platform-based visibility represented a form of pseudo-empowerment during the commercial transition. It emphasized women's self-improvement while ultimately embedding

female audiences within consumption traps shaped jointly by platform logics and capital, thereby drawing them into regulatory mechanisms. Director Fang's success demonstrates that while emotional resonance can generate momentary collective strength, its commercialization may ultimately dilute structural feminist critique. This duality indicates that female narratives in the digital era require attention not only to how female speakers articulate their experiences but also to how these articulations are reshaped under the combined influence of platform logic, marketing, and affective mobilization.

Through the case of Director Fang, this paper reveals the operational mechanisms and the limitations of platform feminism in contemporary China. It further cautions that increasing visibility for feminist content does not preclude the risks of emotional capitalism and commercialization, which can absorb and reconstruct feminist meanings. Future research can extend this inquiry by comparing different types of female performers and platform systems to explore how structurally grounded female narratives might be rebuilt within digital contexts, enabling women to move from mere visibility toward substantive social change.

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