



The platformization of socially constructed gender realities: the 'Fat Cat incident' (2024)

Aiqing Wang, Thomas William Whyke, Zhennuo Song, Zeyang Wang & Yibo Fan

To cite this article: Aiqing Wang, Thomas William Whyke, Zhennuo Song, Zeyang Wang & Yibo Fan (16 Oct 2025): The platformization of socially constructed gender realities: the 'Fat Cat incident' (2024), *Feminist Media Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2025.2573730](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2025.2573730)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2025.2573730>



Published online: 16 Oct 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



The platformization of socially constructed gender realities: the 'Fat Cat incident' (2024)

Aiqing Wang^a, Thomas William Whyke^b, Zhennuo Song^b, Zeyang Wang^c and Yibo Fan^d

^aDepartment of Languages, Cultures and Film, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom; ^bSchool of International Communications, University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China; ^cWomen's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom; ^dSchool of Media and Law, NingboTech University, Ningbo, China

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the "Fat Cat Incident" (2024), where a young Chinese gamer's suicide after an online relationship breakdown sparked intense online discourse. Through inductive thematic analysis and qualitative sentiment analysis of 1,200 user comments from the female-oriented Xiaohongshu and male-dominated Zhihu platforms, we demonstrate how Chinese social media facilitate the social construction of polarized gender realities. Xiaohongshu users predominantly framed Fat Cat as an emotionally impulsive "hopeless romantic" while defending his ex-girlfriend's right to financial compensation, whereas Zhihu users portrayed Fat Cat as a manipulated victim while characterizing his ex-girlfriend as a calculated "gold-digger" employing PUA tactics. The incident reveals three key processes: (1) gender norm construction via polarized discourse, (2) tragedy commodification into "liuliang" (traffic) and memes, and (3) transactional relationship normalization and digital gender segregation. This demonstrates how platforms shape social realities by reinforcing gender divides, monetizing emotion, and commodifying personal loss, offering critical insight into gender politics in China's digital public sphere.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 December 2024
Revised 2 October 2025
Accepted 7 October 2025

KEYWORDS

Social construction of reality; gender dynamics; chinese social media; 'Fat Cat incident'; online discourse; digital culture; platform economy; Gender Antagonism; Commodification of Tragedy

Introduction

Since May 2024, Pang Mao "Fat Cat" has dominated China's Weibo "hot search" (re sou) list, a platform with 588 million monthly active users (Weibo 2024). "Fat Cat" was the screen name of Liu Jie, a 21-year-old professional gamer who committed suicide on April 11 2024 by jumping from a Chongqing bridge. The incident captivated mainstream media, social media influencers, and netizens known as chi gua qunzhong "onlookers" ("the melon-eating masses"), as Fat Cat's sister revealed on Douyin, mainland China's TikTok equivalent, that his suicide was linked to his online emotional and financial entanglements with 27-year-old Tan Zhu.

Fat Cat met Tan Zhu online through the game *Honor of Kings*. Tan Zhu repeatedly requested transfers totaling 510,000 yuan, then broke up with Fat Cat in April 2024, citing his lack of "emotional value." Before dying, Fat Cat sent his remaining 66,666 yuan to Tan

Zhu. His game boosting income was meager, yet he worked constantly for her (Weibo 2024). While covering Tan Zhu's expenses, Fat Cat limited his own meals to 10 yuan, with his last post stating: "I don't want to eat vegetables. I want to eat McDonald's." This evoked widespread sympathy online, with netizens leaving flowers and ordering take-aways, especially McDonald's and bubble tea, at the bridge (Diming Ma 2024).

Without official guidance, discussions on Chinese social media platforms Xiaohongshu and Zhihu present contrasting gendered interpretations, transforming the incident into a social conflict. Xiaohongshu, the "Chinese Instagram," is a lifestyle platform with primarily 18-to-35-year-old urban females (Lai Lin Thomala 2023). Zhihu is a question-answering platform with approximately 72% male users (Thomala 2024). Both platforms have become key spaces for social discourse, despite not being designed for political debate (Altman Yuzhu Peng 2022; Wenru Tian, Yiyang Xiao and Longkun Xu 2021). Yujia Lin (2023) identified 11 feminist themes on Xiaohongshu including gender equality, discrimination, and violence. Peng (2020) explored how Zhihu users' gender views reflect post-reform China. Studies of women's career success, marriage, and sex education on Zhihu demonstrate its nature as a public sphere dominated by patriarchal discourses (Luomei Lyu 2020; Peng, Jenny Zhengye Hou, Majid KhosraviNik and Xiaoxiao Zhang 2023; Wen Shi, Yuxuan Lin, Zihan Zhang and Jing Su 2022; H Zhang 2022). Hanzhe Chi, Renhao Liu and Jingye Pan (2022) compared gender dynamics on Xiaohongshu and Hupu, finding platforms reinforce stereotypes. Kai Bao's (2024) study showed feminist representations differed on Weibo and Zhihu, citing user distinctness and platform structure as crucial variables.

While scholarship has examined gender discourse on individual platforms, comparative analyses across platforms with opposing demographics remain limited, with current research failing to theorize how platform affordances shape divergent gender realities or how personal tragedies are commodified.

This study is guided by the central research question:

How do platform-specific dynamics across Chinese social media platforms Xiaohongshu and Zhihu shape the social construction of gender realities in the context of viral public controversies?

Through examining the "Fat Cat incident," we investigate how these platforms function not as neutral arenas but as active sites where gender antagonism is algorithmically curated, regulated through Confucian revivalism, and economically exploited.

Literature Review

Digital publics and online participation in contested discourse

Digital publics scholarship recognizes that networked media have transformed public communication by expanding participation and reshaping visibility, attention, and legitimacy. Digitally mediated mechanisms—circulation through sharing, commenting, and reposting—extend the discursive boundaries of the public sphere, enabling diverse actors to shape public perception (Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp 2022; Kecheng Fang and Maria Repnikova 2018; Suay Melisa Ozkula 2021). Yet, this techno-mediated empowerment does not translate into discursive equality. Participation remains constrained by socio-technical affordances, state oversight, and commercial imperatives (Jing Feng,

Yueyao Yu and Tong Xu 2023; Vincent Guangsheng Huang and Hongyu Wu 2023; Aifang Ma 2024). Market logics incentivize emotionally provocative content to maximize attention, resulting in ecosystems that are ideologically skewed, emotionally charged, and fragmented (Joel Gehringer 2024; Dounia Mahloulou 2025; Yan Wu and Matthew Wall 2019).

Chinese social media platforms—Weibo, WeChat, Zhihu, and Xiaohongshu—exemplify platform-mediated discourse. China’s social media ecosystem features dual state regulation and commercialization. This creates communicative environments where platform architecture, user demographics, and political-economic constraints shape discourse. Algorithmic amplification and state control influence how public opinion forms, how counter-narratives circulate, and how identity-based conflicts are mediated. Morally charged incidents escalate into online mobilizations (David Craig, Jian Lin and Stuart Cunningham 2021; Yan Sun, Rachel Wang, Dongmei Cao and Rouyi Lee 2022). These “opinion storms” sometimes escalate into crises (Yudi Chen, Yun Li, Zifu Wang, Alma Joanna Quintero, Chaowei Yang and Wenying Ji 2022; Hoda Daou 2021; Jürgen Pfeffer, Thomas Zorbach and Kathleen M Carley 2014). Platforms with gendered user bases, such as Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, provide sites for examining how realities are constructed during high-affect events. Algorithms prioritizing high engagement generate consensus cues (Shira Dvir-Gvirsman 2019; Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014) that distort public opinion, catalyze reactive participation, and reinforce feedback loops. Per Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) spiral of silence and John C Turner’s (2010) social conformity theory, users repeatedly exposed to emotionally charged, negative commentary overestimate dominant views, forming echo chambers that intensify homogeneity (Matteo Cinelli, Gianmarco De Francisci Morales, Alessandro Galeazzi, Walter Quattrociocchi and Michele Starnini 2021; J. Anthony Cookson, Joseph E Engelberg and William Mullins 2023; Shira Dvir-Gvirsman, R Kelly Garrett and Yariv Tsfati 2018). This amplifies singular events while undermining diversity within platform-specific publics.

Commodifying gender: platform capitalism and the logics of visibility

Demographic stratification across platforms—age, gender, socioeconomic background, education—creates divergent, often antagonistic opinion storms (Y Zeng 2016). Zhihu attracts middle-class males favoring technical rationality and anti-political correctness rhetoric, while Xiaohongshu serves urban young women emphasizing emotional expression and embodied experience (Bao 2024; Yuejie Gu, Ying Yang, Ariel Saiyinjiya, Wanyu Wu, Qingyun Chen, Siqi Chen and Ioana Literat 2024). These cultures generate asynchronous, occasionally colliding platform-specific opinion storms. Such collisions exacerbate frictions and identity-based antagonisms, particularly regarding gender (Yue Deng, Zheng Chen, Changyang He, Zhicong Lu and Bo Li 2024). Gender conflicts exceed ideological disagreement, becoming struggles over cultural authority and social identity (Sun et al. 2022; Maritza Vasquez Reyes, Caitlin Elsaesser, Jocelyn R Smith Lee, Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario and Robin Stevens 2025; Angela Xiao Wu and Yige Dong 2019).

The capitalist logic of social media platforms’ shapes opinion storms through economics and consumerism. Platforms use algorithmic infrastructures, incentivization systems, and traffic schemes (liuliang), for “visibility monetization” (Sheng Zou 2023). User engagement equals symbolic capital and financial gain (Kecheng Fang 2022; Jian Xu 2024). As

such, platforms shape content flow, rewards, and creator pay by favoring attention-grabbing topics. With traffic yielding returns, algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content. This drives producers to craft emotionally charged, controversial material to boost visibility (Oscar Alvarado and Annika Waern 2018; Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J Boczkowski and A Kirsten 2014). This in turn mobilizes responses from indignation to anxiety, creating “emotional consumption” (Yan Jin, Jih-Syuan Lin, Bob Gilbreath and Yen-I Lee 2017; Margarita Rodríguez-Ibáñez, Antonio Casáñez-Ventura, Félix Castejón-Mateos and Pedro-Manuel Cuenca-Jiménez 2023). Such engagement inflates metrics while polarizing discourse, and entrenching identity essentialism.

Gender politics and discursive struggles in the digital sphere

Gender topics dominate global social media, as emotional intensity boosts visibility polarization. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018) attributes gender discourse’s virality to emotional resonance, creating “affective platform politics.” Gender discourse intersects with socio-political dimensions—body, power, identity—generating tension (Bróna Murphy 2011; Karel Šima 2021). This positions gender as central to algorithmically driven “hot topic production” (Atoosa Kasirzadeh 2022).

Gender discourse proliferation reveals reality’s constructed nature. L Berger Peter and Luckmann Thomas (1966) argue social reality emerges through interactive meaning-making. Digital platforms provide arenas for expression, contestation, and rearticulation of gender norms, intensifying reality’s performative reconstruction. Online, gender becomes a struggle site where users produce, negotiate, and challenge normative meaning.

In China, digital gender discourse shows a polarized, dualistic configuration. Feminist narratives surge on Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili, addressing gender-based violence and empowerment. This represents localized digital feminism challenging patriarchal structures through expanded discursive agency (Rui Hou 2017; Bin Wang and Catherine Driscoll 2019). Simultaneously, anti-feminist narratives have intensified. Feminist figures like Yang Li and Lee Jinglei face backlash, accused of promoting gender antagonism and masculinity. These counter-discourses manifest as discursive stigmatization (Debbie Ging and Eugenia Siapera 2019). Online misogyny represents an affective response to anxieties from identity disruption, socioeconomic precarity, and perceived erosion of male privilege.

The polarization of China’s gender discourse is also embedded in sociocultural contexts. First, state driven narratives and traditional norms constrain gender politics. Reintegrated Confucian values emphasize harmony, familial ethics, and feminine gentleness. In contrast, feminism is portrayed as a “Western import” destabilizing social order (Eunae Han and Injung Lee 2023; Jiaqi Xu 2025). This positions feminism as a threat, catalyzing anti-feminist sentiment. Secondly, platform economies have made women a monetized demographic (Sue Thornham and Feng Pengpeng 2010; Siyuan Yin 2022). As algorithms favor emotional, identity-driven content, female creators have been pushed towards affective narratives. This boosts feminist visibility while targeting female audiences. Thus, gender discourse antagonism is co-produced through state governance and platform capitalism. Feminist narratives gain algorithmic amplification commercially while

facing censorship. This tension reflects the competing logics of commodification and control, illuminating the value shifts and evolving digital governance in Chinese society.

Research gap

Scholarship has examined gender discourse on individual Chinese platforms (Lin 2023; Peng 2020; Rongji Zhang, Yumin Chen and Xiang Zhao 2024), but comparative analyses across opposing platforms remain limited. Research focuses on content analysis (Chi, Liu, and Pan 2022) or corpus comparisons (Bao 2024) without theorizing how platform affordances construct divergent gender realities. While studies explore commercial influence (Fang 2022; Zou 2023), mechanisms commodifying personal tragedies for “liuliang” within gendered discourse remain undertheorized. We know little about the operation of these dynamics on Chinese media platforms that face strong state censorship and commercial imperatives. This dual condition produces a distinctive socio-political environment where contestation is enabled and constrained on Chinese social media platforms, yet remains underexplored in comparative scholarship. Analyzing the “Fat Cat” incident across Xiaohongshu and Zhihu, this study employs Social Construction of Reality theory (Berger Peter and Thomas 1966) to address these gaps. Our analysis shows how platforms function as sites where gender antagonism through personal tragedy is algorithmically curated (addressing Kasirzadeh 2022), regulated through Confucian revivalism, and economically exploited (building on Yin 2022). This documents the social construction of gender norms in Chinese social media, contributing to debates on platform governance and gender polarization in the context of digital authoritarianism.

Theoretical framework: the platformization of socially constructed gender reality

Examining platform-specific gender discourses in the Fat Cat incident reveals how divergent gender realities are constructed in digital spaces. We drew from public sphere theory (Lincoln Dahlberg 2011; Nancy Fraser 1990; Jurgen Habermas 1989), platform capitalism research (José Van Dijck, Thomas Poell and Martijn De Waal 2018; Nick Srnicek 2017), and feminist technology studies (Banet-Weiser 2018; Judy Wajcman 2010). Our preliminary analysis revealed the active social construction of competing gender “truths” crystallizing along platform lines.

Berger Peter and Thomas (1966) posit the social construction of reality through three stages: externalization (projecting meanings), objectivation (attaining objectivity), and internalization (the objectivated world retrojects into consciousness during socialization). They bridge Durkheim’s objective social facts with Weber’s subjective meanings, explaining how subjective meanings become objective facticities. They redefine the sociology of knowledge from its traditional focus on ideology and intellectual history toward analyzing everyday, common-sense “knowledge”—the taken-for-granted reality of ordinary people. Drawing on Schutz, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Mead, they argue the sociology of knowledge must examine how whatever passes for “knowledge” in society becomes socially constructed as reality.

Berger and Luckmann’s theory applies to digital environments. Couldry and Hepp’s (2017) “deep mediatization” examines how digital media shape social reality through algorithms. This demonstrate how platforms use hashtags to construct shared meanings.

While criticized for underestimating power structures (Patricia Hill Collins 1992), material conditions (Dorothy E Smith 1987), and embodiment (Robert W Connell 2002), our adaptation incorporates feminist technology studies (Wajcman 2010) and platform capitalism research (Shoshana Zuboff 2019).

Wajcman's (2010) technofeminist framework shows how social media undergoes gendering beyond its design. Digital spaces are reconfigured when people use them, with platforms developing gendered characteristics through user interactions and community norms. Wajcman explains that gender relationships embed within technology, with masculine and feminine identities gaining meaning through functioning technological systems. This explains how platforms construct gender through sociotechnical affordances and discursive communities. Zuboff (2019) calls this "surveillance capitalism," which reveals how platforms influence reality through behavioral economies that intervene in real-world dynamics, collecting data while shaping behavior. Platforms create social divisions through algorithmic curation, engagement incentives, and markets that work by predicting user's future behaviours.

Our findings show: (1) how platform affordances facilitate polarized gender perspectives; (2) how discussions become platform-specific "truths" through the recognition of commercial exploitation and memetic ridicule; (3) how users construct gender realities through relationship economics and digital gender segregation. Documenting this cycle in Chinese digital spaces, we contribute to debates on platform governance, visibility politics, and gender polarization.

Methodology

Data collection

To examine the "Fat Cat incident," we used Zhihu and Xiaohongshu's integrated search function using keywords "Fat Cat incident" (Pang Mao shijian), "Tan Zhu," and related hashtags such as #Pang Mao jiejie fasheng# and #Pang Mao qiannüyou huiying#. We included substantive content on gender dynamics, excluding emojis or one-word replies. To avoid confirmation bias, we gathered broad data without pre-filtering, letting insights emerge during analysis.

We collected 1,200 comments (600 per platform) from the most engaged-with posts. Comments were sorted by "most recent" and "most liked" to capture dominant narratives. This follows JungAe Yang's (2016) argument that higher-ranked content reflects greater interest and influence. Data collection spanned April–May 2024 following Fat Cat's death. Discussions were peaking at this time, enabling us to capture the discourse arc from initial reactions through gender narrative shifts, commercial exploitation, and investigation outcomes.

Data analysis

To examine meaning-making around the "Fat Cat incident," we employed inductive thematic analysis. Following Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, we familiarized ourselves with the data through repeated reading, then generated initial codes without theoretical constraints. Three analysis levels followed Juliet Corbin and

Table 1. Distribution of themes across platform comments.

Theme Category	Sub-themes	Zhihu (<i>n</i> = 600)	Xiaohongshu (<i>n</i> = 600)	Total (<i>n</i> = 1200)
Gender Shortcomings and Irrationality Narratives		427 (71.2%)	411 (68.5%)	838 (69.8%)
	Female manipulation/gold-digging	275 (45.8%)	74 (12.3%)	349 (29.1%)
	Male emotional excess/naivety	152 (25.3%)	337 (56.2%)	489 (40.8%)
Commodification of Tragedy		99 (16.5%)	119 (19.8%)	218 (18.2%)
	Commercial exploitation critique	76 (12.7%)	19 (3.2%)	95 (7.9%)
	Memetic ridicule/mockery	23 (3.8%)	100 (16.7%)	123 (10.3%)
Transaction-Based Relationship Models		74 (12.3%)	70 (11.7%)	144 (12.0%)
	Negating male financial obligation	59 (9.8%)	15 (2.5%)	74 (6.2%)
	Normalizing economic relationships	15 (2.5%)	55 (9.2%)	70 (5.8%)

Anselm Strauss (2008) grounded theory. Open coding identified initial concepts. Axial coding established relationships between codes using their “coding paradigm” of conditions, context, strategies, and consequences, leading to different sub-themes. Selective coding integrated sub-themes into core categories by asking: “What is the main analytic idea?” and “How can we explain the variation between categories?” This process identified three key categories: gender shortcomings and irrationality narratives, commodification of tragedy, and transaction-based relationship models (Table 1).

By allowing patterns emerge from discourse rather than imposing categories, this inductive approach reveals how users construct divergent gender realities, thereby capturing the organic process through which platform-specific “truths” crystallize. The three-level coding moves beyond surface-level content differences to identify mechanisms whereby platforms facilitate the social construction of reality—directly addressing platform-specific dynamics.

We integrated qualitative sentiment analysis to examine emotional undertones. This method, defined by Nazan Öztürk and Serkan Ayvaz (2018), offers in-depth examination and captures language complexity (Thu T Nguyen et al. 2019), contrasting with surface-level quantitative analysis (Rui Gaspar, Cláudia Pedro, Panos Panagiotopoulos and Beate Seibt 2016). Berger Peter and Thomas (1966) argue that language sustains and shapes subjective reality, continuously affirming and altering perception. Emotional undertones and platform-specific linguistic choices function as tools for the social construction of reality, revealing how affective dimensions shape divergent gender realities. Data was analyzed in the original Chinese language to preserve linguistic nuances. Platform-specific terminology and neologisms like *tiangou* (beta orbiter), *PUA*¹ and *laonü* (gold-digger) were maintained to preserve cultural significance. Bilingual researchers interpreted culturally specific expressions to ensure accuracy. This reveals how digital conversation constructs, maintains, and contests gender narratives.

For methodological rigor, we employed researcher reflexivity through journaling and team discussions to address biases; thick description through detailed documentation; peer debriefing with uninvolved colleagues; negative case analysis by seeking contradictory data; and member checking by sharing preliminary findings with platform users. These strategies ensured the authentic representation of findings while acknowledging

qualitative inquiry's interpretive nature (Lorelli S Nowell, Jill M Norris, Deborah E White and Nancy J Moules 2017).

Findings

Our analysis of 1,200 comments revealed three processes of gender reality construction in Chinese digital spaces, following Berger Peter and Thomas's (1966) framework. First, platform-specific gender discourses manifest as users project critiques of gender deficiencies and emotional irrationality onto the Fat Cat incident. Second, the tragedy transforms into a platform for discussions on commercial exploitation and memetic ridicule. Third, users highlight the transaction-based relationship models and digital gender segregation emerging from the incident.

Gender shortcomings and irrationality narratives

The Fat Cat incident reveals how Xiaohongshu and Zhihu users vent frustrations. Users project critiques of gender shortcomings and irrationality onto key figures, reflecting broader cultural narratives. Zhihu users direct criticisms at the female protagonist, whilst Xiaohongshu users support female empowerment while condemning male emotional impulsivity. This contrast demonstrates how digital spaces shape collective consciousness.

Female manipulation/Gold-digging

In the Zhihu thread "Why do many couples break up after the Fat Cat's incident?," top answers with 12,003 and 7,120 likes state: "Both men and women feel unhappy after reading the news: men want to break up because their girlfriends are like Tan Zhu; women want to break up because their boyfriends are not like Fat Cat" and "Q: Why there are fewer and fewer good men like Fat Cat? A: Because they died." One Zhihu user writes: "The one who should be criticized most is Tan Zhu for playing with Fat Cat." Another user projects male vulnerability onto Tan Zhu, framing her as a "gold-digger" and manipulator. In Zhihu posts about the Fat Cat incident, "PUA" appears frequently alongside laonü ("gold-digging woman").

Commenters emphasize generational asymmetry, portraying Tan Zhu as a "boss-level" emotional manipulator who exploits her younger partner's inexperience and age. One Zhihu user writes: "They were not equal—Tan Zhu was 27, Fat Cat only 21. There was hidden manipulation. She repeatedly said 'Will you transfer the money or not? If not, don't talk to me,' or 'I have a mortgage to pay, send me 20,000 first.' If this isn't emotional blackmail, what is? Fat Cat was just starting to learn about love and met a boss-level gold-digger." Such comments reveal a gender reality structured around power differentials, where older women allegedly weaponize emotional maturity and financial demands against inexperienced men.

Another popular comment generalizes: "Gold-diggers today don't even target the rich anymore; they aim at younger men. And who among them can resist such temptation? These gold-diggers offer little in return—sometimes nothing at all, not even real intimacy. They dangle promises, threaten to leave, and drain men for everything, especially money,

but also emotional value.” These sentiments portray an evolving archetype of the laonü—not as a high-class seductress of wealthy men, but as a calculated extractor of value from vulnerable younger men. The framing of Tan Zhu as emblematic of this shift casts women as strategic actors within exploitative romantic economies, and men as naïve and economically disposable.

Male emotional excess/naivety

Conversely, on Xiaohongshu, users attack Fat Cat himself, reinforcing a gender reality where male emotional vulnerability is morally suspect. The label “hopeless romantic” appears repeatedly, often sarcastically, to mock Fat Cat’s naivety and emotional excess. A user ridicules: “Nobody forced him to eat the 10-yuan takeaways,” while another writes: “He was unstable, desperate for love and thus clingy, and he killed himself just for the so-called lost love.” Such responses delegitimize male emotional expression while valorizing female self-protection and independence. Men who exhibit emotional dependence are ridiculed as irrational and unmanly. These expressions construct a moral order where romantic sincerity becomes gendered weakness, with affective labor coded feminine and emotional restraint masculine.

These reactions reveal two platform-specific frames: on Zhihu, women strategically extract value from naive men (e.g., frequent pairing of laonü with PUA and “never pay” prescriptions); on Xiaohongshu, male romantic excess is a moral and financial liability (e.g., “hopeless romantic” mockery and acceptance of male provision as proof of love). The same actors (Fat Cat/Tan Zhu) are evaluated with opposite valences across platforms, creating mutually exclusive, polarizing frames.

Commodification of tragedy

The Fat Cat incident illustrates how personal tragedy becomes a marketable digital product. What began as personal tragedy was reframed as a platform for commercial exploitation, ideological contention, and social commentary. Platforms recontextualized the event to reinforce existing narratives: on Zhihu, users condemned the commercial exploitation of Fat Cat’s death, whereas on Xiaohongshu, users engaged in ridicule and memetic play turning Fat Cat into cultural shorthand for male foolishness.

Commercial exploitation critique

A Zhihu user notes brands like McDonald’s Vietnam and influencers are “clearly exploiting commercial interests onto the incident, turning tragedy into clout-chasing opportunities.” After Fat Cat’s preference for McDonald’s over cheaper vegetables, McDonald’s Vietnam created a slogan: “If you don’t like vegetables, eat chicken with BBQ cheese.” This sparked outrage, mocking his death in a “cold-blooded” and “unprincipled” manner (Hoang Vu 2024). Chinese food delivery platforms turned Fat Cat’s memorial into a commercial test. A Zhihu user condemns: “Eight major food chains—Wallace, Dicos, Tasting, Niu Yue Bao, Zhu Xiaoxiao, Mixue Bingcheng, and Chabaidao—were exposed for sending empty packages or water instead of actual food items to customers ordering memorial offerings, while only McDonald’s delivered genuine products with extra portions.” This deception

during mourning demonstrates how tragedy becomes corporate opportunism, with brands calculating that grieving customers would not verify orders. Chabaidao's '1-million-yuan charity donation in Fat Cat's name' and '10x compensation' show performative remorse. A Zhihu user writes, 'McDonald's has caught this heaven-sent fortune, stores are packed with people, business is booming,' showing how overall tragedy became recognized as commodification on the platform.

Memetic ridicule/mockery

On the other hand, some Xiaohongshu netizens ridicule Fat Cat as an 'ATM,' tiangou 'beta orbiter' ('licking dog') and beital 'backup' ('spare tire'), posting jokes like 'I suggest a three-day holiday is set up to mourn for Fat Cat' and '510,000 yuan for two meetings and a life, he beat 100% Sparkies in this country.' Sparky (Fei Yang Yang) from the Chinese animation 'Pleasant Goat and Big Big Wolf' (2005-) has become an internet neologism where adult netizens interpret Fei Yang Yang as ingratiating himself with Mei Yang Yang (Beautiful Sheep), who only adores Xi Yang Yang. Fei Yang Yang has become synonymous with tiangou 'beta orbiter,' used by male netizens to chastise peers or for self-mockery. Another popular Xiaohongshu comment reads: 'Some guys die for love, others die from overdrafting their credit cards. If your boyfriend is crying and sending you takeaway every day, dump him before he stains your Dior.' This post connecting to the French luxury goods company Dior demonstrates how Fat Cat becomes not a person, but a metaphor for emotionally excessive, financially naive masculinity, ridiculed as weak, dirty and useless. The mockery reframes his death not as tragedy, but as a moral warning—weaponizing shame against male emotion. Fat Cat's death is stripped of personal tragedy and reconstructed as a morality tale against emotional vulnerability, especially for men. Through ridicule and memetic circulation, the 'hopeless romantic' becomes a symbolic loser—a digital spectacle for antagonistic gender discourse. This exemplifies how platform mechanisms sustain gender-based suffering.

Transaction-based relationship models

On Zhihu, narratives of male victimhood and female financial exploitation reinforce gender segregation across digital spaces. On Xiaohongshu, users discuss economic relationship models normalizing male financial provision, offering 'practical tips' for women navigating these dynamics.

Negating male financial obligation

A Zhihu user highlights platform differences: 'Fat Cat's life only has a tiny bit of meaning after it is lost. Thousands of male plebs empathize with him and ordered cheap takeaways to be sent to where he jumped. But female influencers on Xiaohongshu and other platforms distastefully advise fellow women to stay away from irrational beta orbiters like Fat Cat, in case their expensive dresses are stained by Fat Cat's blood.' Another writes: 'Never pay for women. Not even a bottle of water. If you show weakness once, you'll end up like Fat Cat—milked dry, laughed at, and dead. Date smart, not hard,' reflecting gender antagonism, where intimacy is viewed

through self-protection, suspicion, and zero-sum logic. One user sarcastically summarizes the police report's implications: "Isn't Chongqing police's description just eight characters: Encouraging men: 'scam but don't die' (lao er bu si)/Encouraging women: 'scam and profit' (lao you suo de)." This shows institutional messaging interpreted as legitimizing gender-based financial exploitation, where relationships become competing economic schemes. Tragedy becomes a catalyst for ideological crystallization: male users retreat to rationalist echo chambers while projecting blame onto women, constructing identity through opposition.

Normalizing economic relationships

Some Xiaohongshu users justify Tan Zhu's economic gains, "Not paying the money back after the breakup makes her a gold digger? I think Tan Zhu is the biggest victim. After two years sexual relationship, she has to pay back the cost. Even a prostitute charges for sex." Others defend Tan Zhu's conduct: "Why is Tan Zhu blamed? This is very absurd. How can moral judgement interfere rights protected by law?" and "If Fat Cat was super rich and gave Ms Tan millions of yuan but she still decided not to marry him, then it became a story about true love like Titanic and nobody could criticize Ms Tan." A Xiaohongshu user writes: "Sisters, remember: his money is part of the relationship, not a loan. If he truly loves you, he'll invest without asking back. Men who care about ROI (Return on Investment) aren't boyfriends—they're investors." This illustrates a heterosexual transactional logic, where male financial contribution becomes proof of love, and female value extraction becomes acceptable. Romance is redefined through economic rationality, with affective connection subsumed under the logic of cost-efficiency and capital flow.

These narratives show gender antagonism and transactional expectations becoming relational norms in digital spaces. On Zhihu, the "hopeless romantic man" becomes a cautionary tale, whose emotional openness is pathologized to justify a defensive, zero-sum masculinity. On Xiaohongshu, the "gold-digging woman" becomes an agent of strategic extraction, rebranding financial gain as emotional entitlement. Users reinforce defensive postures and economic scripts, transforming intimacy into a battleground over the moral ownership of love and the economic valuation of affection. This entrenches platform-specific gender realities mirroring a broader shift where distrust, strategic self-interest, and antagonistic identity politics redefine gender roles in contemporary China.

Discussion

Xiaohongshu and Zhihu reveal opinion divides along gender lines. On Xiaohongshu, users supported Tan Zhu while condemning Fat Cat as a "hopeless romantic," mocking his financial choices. Zhihu users vilified Tan Zhu as a "gold digger" while expressing empathy for Fat Cat, using terms like "PUA" for emotional manipulation. Since entering China in the 2000s, PUA has devolved into sexual manipulation, with practitioners using humiliation and misogyny to exploit gender inequality (Mian Xu and Yao Yixin 2019). The Fat Cat incident thus exposes tensions regarding gender roles, financial expectations, and gendered norms. These tensions create "polarizing cultural values" reinforced across platforms—one normalizing transactional models versus one emphasizing male vulnerability. As Wajcman (2010, 150) argues, "Rather

than conceiving of gender as fixed and existing independently of technology, the notion of performativity, or 'gender as doing,' sees the construction of gender identities as shaped together with the technology in the making." Users construct gender identities through platform engagement, and consequently technologies participate in gendering, developing distinct "genderscripts" guiding the interpretation of events.

Qiqi Huang (2022, 2023) identified that tensions in Chinese digital feminism show social media platforms as battlegrounds for gender-based power dynamics. For instance, intellectual women targeted by anti-feminist backlash often face intersecting vulnerabilities. Similarly, the divergent reactions to Tan Zhu reveal how platform-specific gender dynamics shape narratives. "Toxic masculinity" in Chinese cyberspace, fueled by traditional gender norms and anti-feminist sentiment, can expose women to harassment, abuse, and false accusations (Zhijuan Chen and Liangqi Ding 2024). Hyun-Jae Lee (2023) notes digital anti-feminist tactics like doxing, while potentially empowering some targets, foster exclusionary attitudes and false security. The Fat Cat case illustrates this: social media enabled the exposure of potential gender-based exploitation, but the witch hunt against Tan Zhu shows how digital anti-feminism reinforces patriarchal structures. This underscores feminist movements must leverage social media for justice while protecting against abuse.

Social media prosumers frame events differently from the mainstream media, creating alternative produced realities. For example, following the Tangshan attack where women were beaten after one rejected a man's advances, Weibo users spread false information about the victims' deaths prompting 320 account closures and 352 suspensions (Beijing Daily 2022). Similarly, clout-chasers exploited Fat Cat's suicide by spreading rumors about Tan Zhu for traffic (Lianhe Zaobao 2024). Weibo suspended 235 accounts and deleted 2,569 posts for cyberbullying (Xizi Zhang 2024). Dong Zhou, Jinyu Zhu and Yihan Guo (2022) observe that China's state controlled media operates in opposition to open social media, creating uncertainty in regulating digital doxing. Two Chongqing influencers revealed Tan Zhu's address during livestreams. Another called her "a sluttish woman" (Zhang, Chen, and Zhao 2024). Netizens, including Fat Cat's own sister, urged Tan Zhu to repay Fat Cat's family and demanded police investigation for fraud. Tan Zhu consequently suffered cyberbullying through threats, rumors, harassment, doxing and hate speech (Zaobao 2024). Users also impersonated Tan Zhu for traffic; one Bilibili user compiled "A collection of Tan Zhu's apologies!" showing four women claiming to be Tan Zhu apologizing. This exemplifies Zuboff's (2019) "behavioral futures markets," where platforms transform experiences into commercial assets. "Traffic-seeking" makes attention-grabbing content valuable behavioral surplus in the digital economy. Manipulating social dynamics generates user engagement, creating a blend of social necessity and economic exploitation despite the suspension of social media accounts.

The divided responses to the Fat Cat incident on social media illustrates that "a sociology of knowledge must deal not only with the empirical variety of 'knowledge' in human societies, but also with the processes by which any body of 'knowledge' comes to be socially established as 'reality'" (Berger Peter and Thomas 1966, 3). Weeks after the online fallout following Fat Cat's suicide, his sister's actions proved illegal. Police determined the relationship involved mutual transfers without fraud, and Tan Zhu agreed to repay the difference. His sister faced investigation for violating Tan Zhu's privacy and

manipulating public opinion through sock puppet accounts (Jiani Liu 2024). After gaining nearly 3 million followers whose sympathy became cyberviolence, her accounts were closed (Zhang, Chen, and Zhao 2024; Yan Zheng and Xiang Wang 2024).

Chinese state media's approach to online harassment has evolved alongside China's #MeToo movement. Several Weibo posts claim the Fat Cat incident is manipulated by "foreign power" (*jingwai shili*), following mainstream media warnings against foreign influence (Fan Ping 2022a, 2022b). While official narratives emphasize protecting women through cultural values and legal mechanisms, restricted media and uneven legal frameworks prevent victims like Tan Zhu from seeking justice through official channels (Simon Denyer and Wang Ziye 2018). Chinese women face dual challenges: government oversight through content removals and commercial pressures driving traffic-seeking (Hou 2017). This dual constraint explains why, despite widespread attention, few systemic mechanisms emerged to address harassment beyond reactive moderation. The response of Chinese netizens to the Fat Cat incident has not evolved from direct harassment to structured reporting mechanisms, contrary to Qian Huang's (2021) findings. Limited criticism of Tan Zhu impersonators shows how controlled media limits effective intervention. Public discourse is also often shaped by government partnerships with profit-driven entities directing opinion, selectively amplifying certain perspectives while suppressing others (Hou 2017). Furthermore, commercial media can shape public incidents through engagement metrics, contributing to the harassment of female figures like Tan Zhu.

Conclusion

This study examined how the Fat Cat incident illuminates socially constructed gender realities in Chinese digital spaces. By analyzing user comments across female-dominated Xiaohongshu and male-dominated Zhihu, we identified three processes: gender shortcomings and irrationality narratives, the commodification of tragedy, and transaction-based relationship models.

The polarized reactions demonstrate how social media actively constructs divergent gender realities. On Xiaohongshu, users supported Tan Zhu while condemning Fat Cat's emotional impulsivity, framing relationships as economic transactions requiring male financial investment. On Zhihu, users expressed sympathy for Fat Cat while vilifying Tan Zhu as a manipulative "gold-digger," positioning men as victims. This digital gender segregation creates platform-specific echo chambers where contradictory "truths" become reified.

Our analysis further reveals how the Fat Cat tragedy was transformed into economic capital. While Zhihu users condemned the exploitative marketing of the incident and exposed eight Chinese food chains for sending fake memorial offerings, Xiaohongshu users turned Fat Cat into a memetic warning against male emotional vulnerability through metaphors synonymous with famous media and commercial brands.

The case reveals three implications for understanding gender conflict in contemporary China. First, digital platforms actively shape social realities through gender segregation via algorithmic curation and demographic composition. Second, relationship economics are normalized within platform-specific communities, in this case through codified financial expectations in heterosexual relationships. Third, the tension between individual

agency and institutional power in China's controlled media environment reveals how state actors and commercial platforms influence—yet fail to regulate—the construction of gender narratives.

This research contributes beyond the Chinese context. For digital media scholars in a global context, our findings demonstrate how platform architecture and demographics fundamentally shape discourse and reality construction. For gender studies scholars, it reveals how digital platforms reinforce rather than resolve gender divides across contexts. For media policy experts, China's "liuliang economy" offers an intensified version of attention economies emerging worldwide.

Future research should explore interventions to bridge platform-specific echo chambers and promote constructive gender dialogue. Cross-cultural comparative studies could reveal whether similar patterns exist in Western or other non-Western digital environments. Examining how official narratives intersect with grassroots discourse could also illuminate the power dynamics shaping social construction processes in digitalized public spheres.

Note

1. The term PUA (pick-up artists) originated in the early 1970s. Individual PUAs place emphasis on interaction, self-improvement and tactics as the all-important means of sexual seduction and success, over social status or physical attractiveness (Oliver Hambling-Jones and Andrew John Merrison 2012; Andrew Stephen King 2018; Eric Weber 1970). In China, PUA denotes an abhorrent act intent exclusively on sexual intercourse and emotional manipulation, and Chinese PUAs harness through humiliation and misogyny to destroy women's self-esteem (Xu and Yixin 2019).

Acknowledgements

This study is part of the research conducted within the Research Priority Area in Gender Studies of the Institute of Asia and Pacific Studies (IAPS), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Nottingham Ningbo China.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Alvarado, Oscar, and Annika Waern. 2018. "Towards Algorithmic Experience: Initial Efforts for Social Media Contexts." In *Proceedings of the 2018 chi conference on human factors in computing systems*, Montreal, QC, Canada, pp. 1–12.
- Banet-Weiser, Sarah. 2018. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Duke University Press.
- Bao, Kai. 2024. ""Comparative Analysis of Representations of Feminism Across Chinese Social Media: A Corpus-Based Study of Weibo and Zhihu." *Social Media + Society* 10 (3): 20563051241274688. doi:10.1177/20563051241274688.
- Beijing Daily. 2022. "Resou! Fabu Tangshan Daren Shijian Yaoyan, 320 Ge Weibo Zhanghao Bei Guanbi [Hot Search! Rumours About the Tangshan Attack Incident' 320 Weibo Accounts Were

- Closed].” *Beijing Daily*, June 17. <https://bj.bjd.com.cn/5b165687a010550e5ddc0e6a/contentShare/5b16573ae4b02a9fe2d558f9/AP62ac73e7e4b01c9fa7b1be49.html>.
- Berger Peter, L., and Luckmann Thomas. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: First Anchor.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
- Chen, Yudi, Yun Li, Zifu Wang, Alma Joanna Quintero, Chaowei Yang, and Wenying Ji. 2022. “Rapid Perception of Public Opinion in Emergency Events through Social Media.” *Natural Hazards Review* 23 (2): 04021066. doi:10.1061/(ASCE)NH.1527-6996.0000547.
- Chen, Zhijuan, and Liangqi Ding. 2024. “Negotiation Between Ambition and Reality: The Path to Chinese Feminist Media’s Development.” *Global Media & China* 9 (2): 140–156. doi:10.1177/20594364241230430.
- Chi, Hanzhe, Renhao Liu, and Jingye Pan. 2022. “Users’ Behaviour Under the Uneven Gender Ratio of Social Media Platforms-Taking Hupu and Xiaohongshu as Examples.” In SHS Web of Conferences, Changsha, China, vol. 148: 03003. EDP Sciences.
- Cinelli, Matteo, Gianmarco De Francisci Morales, Alessandro Galeazzi, Walter Quattrociocchi, and Michele Starnini. 2021. “The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media”. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 118 (9): e2023301118. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2023301118>.
- Collins, Patricia Hill.. 1992. “Transforming the Inner Circle: Dorothy Smith’s Challenge to Sociological Theory.” *Sociological Theory* 10 (1): 73–80. doi:10.2307/202018.
- Connell, Robert W.. 2002. *Gender*. New York: Polity Press.
- Cookson, J. Anthony, Joseph E. Engelberg, and William Mullins. 2023. “Echo Chambers.” *Review of Financial Studies* 36 (2): 450–500. doi:10.1093/rfs/hhac058.
- Corbin, Juliet, and Anselm Strauss. 2008. *Basics of Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.): Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. 2017. *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. 2022. “Media and the Social Construction of Reality.” *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology*, edited by Rohlinger, Deana A., and Sarah Sobieraj 27–39.
- Craig, David, Jian Lin, and Stuart Cunningham. 2021. *Wanghong as Social Media Entertainment in China*. New York: Palgrave macmillan.
- Dahlberg, Lincoln. 2011. “Re-Constructing Digital Democracy: An Outline of Four ‘Positions’.” *New Media and Society* 13 (6): 855–872. doi:10.1177/1461444810389569.
- Daou, Hoda. 2021. “Sentiment of the Public: The Role of Social Media in Revealing Important Events.” *Online Information Review* 45 (1): 157–173. doi:10.1108/OIR-12-2019-0373.
- Deng, Yue, Zheng Chen, Changyang He, Zhicong Lu, and Bo Li. 2024. “Persuasion or Insulting? Unpacking Discursive Strategies of Gender Debate in Everyday Feminism in China.” In Proceedings of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Honolulu HI, USA, pp. 1–19.
- Denyer, Simon, and Wang Ziye. 2018. “Chinese Women Reveal Sexual Harassment, but #MeToo Movement Struggles for Air.” *Washington Post*, January 9. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/chinese-women-reveal-sexual-harassment-but-metoo-movement-struggles-for-air/2018/01/08/ac591c26-cc0d-4d5a-b2ca-d14a7f763fe0_story.html.
- Dvir-Gvirsman, Shira. 2019. “Political Social Identity and Selective Exposure.” *Media Psychology* 22 (6): 867–889. doi:10.1080/15213269.2018.1554493.
- Dvir-Gvirsman, Shira, R. Kelly Garrett, and Yariv Tsfat. 2018. “Why Do Partisan Audiences Participate? Perceived Public Opinion as the Mediating Mechanism.” *Communication Research* 45 (1): 112–136. doi:10.1177/0093650215593145.
- Fang, Kecheng. 2022. “What Is Zimeiti? The Commercial Logic of Content Provision on China’s Social Media Platforms.” *Chinese Journal of Communication* 15 (1): 75–94. doi:10.1080/17544750.2021.2016877.

- Fang, Kecheng, and Maria Repnikova. 2018. "Demystifying "Little Pink": The Creation and Evolution of a Gendered Label for Nationalistic Activists in China." *New Media and Society* 20 (6): 2162–2185. doi:10.1177/1461444817731923.
- Feng, Jing, Yueyao Yu, and Tong Xu. 2023. "Content Regulation Laws for Chinese ISPs: Legal Responsibilities in Free Speech and Filtering of Harmful Content." *Law and Economy* 2 (11): 53–59. doi:10.56397/LE.2023.11.07.
- Fraser, Nancy. 1990. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25 (26): 56–80. doi:10.2307/466240.
- Gaspar, Rui, Cláudia Pedro, Panos Panagiotopoulos, and Beate Seibt. 2016. "Beyond Positive or Negative: Qualitative Sentiment Analysis of Social Media Reactions to Unexpected Stressful Events." *Computers in Human Behavior* 56 (2016): 179–191. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.040.
- Gehringer, Joel. 2024. "The Postmodern Public Sphere: ICT, Misinformation and Simulated Civil Society." In Roseanne M. Mirabella, Tracey M. Coule, and Angela M. Eikenberry (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Perspectives on Nonprofit Organizing and Voluntary Action*, 149–163. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Gillespie, Tarleton, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and A. Kirsten. eds. 2014. *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Ging, Debbie, and Eugenia Siapera, eds. 2019. *Gender Hate Online: Understanding the New Anti-Feminism*, 45–67. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gu, Yuejie, Ying Yang, Ariel Saiyinjiya, Wanyu Wu, Qingyun Chen, Siqi Chen, and Ioana Literat. 2024. "Commerce Meets Activism: # StopMenstualShaming and the Dynamics of Feminist Advocacy on Xiaohongshu." *International Journal of Communication* 18: 22.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT press.
- Hambling-Jones, Oliver, and Andrew John Merrison. 2012. "Inequity in the Pursuit of Intimacy: An Analysis of British Pick-Up Artist Interactions." *Journal of Pragmatics* 44 (9): 1115–1127. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2012.04.008.
- Han, Eunae, and Injung Lee. 2023. "Empowering Women in Counseling by Dismantling Internalized Sexism: The Feminist-Multicultural Orientation and Social Justice Competencies." *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 45 (3): 213–230. doi:10.17744/mehc.45.3.03.
- Hou, Rui. 2017. "Neoliberal Governance or Digitalized Autocracy? The Rising Market for Online Opinion Surveillance in China." *Surveillance & Society* 15 (3/4): 418–424. doi:10.24908/ss.v15i3/4.6610.
- Huang, Qian. 2021. "The Mediated and Mediatized Justice-Seeking: Chinese Digital Vigilantism from 2006 to 2018." *Internet Histories* 5 (3–4): 304–322. doi:10.1080/24701475.2021.1919965.
- Huang, Qian. 2023. "The Discursive Construction of Populist and Misogynist Nationalism: Digital Vigilantism Against Unpatriotic Intellectual Women in China." *Social Media + Society* 9 (2): 20563051231170816. doi:10.1177/20563051231170816.
- Huang, Qiqi. 2022. "Anti-Feminism: Four Strategies for the Demonisation and Depoliticisation of Feminism on Chinese Social Media." *Feminist Media Studies* 23 (7): 3583–3598. doi:10.1080/14680777.2022.2129412.
- Huang, Vincent Guangsheng, and Hongyu Wu. 2023. "Contingent Symbiosis: News Start-Ups and Local Cyberspace Administration in Contemporary China." *Information Communication & Society* 26 (3): 512–529. doi:10.1080/1369118X.2021.1954973.
- Jin, Yan, Jih-Syuan Lin, Bob Gilbreath, and Yen-I. Lee. 2017. "Motivations, Consumption Emotions, and Temporal Orientations in Social Media Use: A Strategic Approach to Engaging Stakeholders Across Platforms." *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 11 (2): 115–132. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2017.1285769.
- Kasirzadeh, Atoosa. 2022. "Algorithmic Fairness and Structural Injustice: Insights from Feminist Political Philosophy." In Proceedings of the 2022 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society, Oxford, United Kingdom, 349–356.
- King, Andrew Stephen. 2018. "Feminism's Flip Side: A Cultural History of the Pickup Artist." *Sexuality & Culture* 22 (1): 299–315. doi:10.1007/s12119-017-9468-0.

- Lee, Hyun-Jae.. 2023. "Digitalpolis and the 'Safe' Feminism: Focusing on the Strategies of Direct Punishment and Gated Community." In Kon Kim, Heewon Chung (Eds.), *Gated Communities and the Digital Polis: Rethinking Subjectivity, Reality, Exclusion, and Cooperation in an Urban Future*, 15–36. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Lin, Yujia. 2023. "Feminist Voices Under the Lens of 'Barbie': An Analysis of Discourse Transmission and Mass Resonance in Xiaohongshu." *Arts, Culture and Language* 1 (4): 1–8. doi:10.61173/s4en2442.
- Liu, Jiani.. 2024. "Chongqing Jingfang Tongbao Pangmao Shijian Xiangqing: Tan Mou Bu Choucheng Zhapian Fanzui, Buy U Lian [Chongqing Police Publishes Details of the Case Regarding 'Fat Cat': Tan Will Not Be Charged for Fraud and the Case Will Not Be Accepted for Filing]." *Beijing News*. May 19. <https://www.bjnews.com.cn/detail/1716122104129531.html>.
- Lyu, Luomei.. 2020. "How Do People Define Women's Success in Chinese Cyberspace." In 2020 3rd International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2020), Chengdu, China, 746–750. Atlantis Press.
- Ma, Aifang. 2024. *China as a Double-Bind Regulatory State: How Internet Regulators' Predicament Produces Regulatees' Autonomy*. Springer Nature.
- Ma, Diming.. 2024. "Jidian Pang Mao Fanying Shidao Renxin, Dan Waimai Zhende Keyi Bu Dong Le [Sympathy for Fat Cat Does Not Have to Be in the Form of Takeaways]." *Beijing News*. May 4. https://www.sohu.com/a/776210587_616821.
- Mahlouly, Dounia. 2025. "The Myth of the Vulnerable Audience: Exploring Counter-Intuitive Approaches to Post-Truth Populism in the New Mass Media." *The Journal of Dialogue Studies* 12: 193–214. doi:10.55207/GXDI1320.
- Murphy, Bróna.. 2011. "Gender Identities and Discourse." In: Andersen, G. and Aijmer, K (Eds.), *Pragmatics of Society* 53–77. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Nguyen, Thu T., Shaniece Criss, Amani M. Allen, M. Maria Glymour, Lynn Phan, Ryan Trevino, Shrikha Dasari, and Quynh C. Nguyen. 2019. "Pride, Love, and Twitter Rants: Combining Machine Learning and Qualitative Techniques to Understand What Our Tweets Reveal About Race in the US." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16 (10): 1766. doi:10.3390/ijerph16101766.
- Noelle-Neumann, Elisabeth. 1974. "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion." *Journal of Communication* 24 (2): 43–51. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x.
- Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules. 2017. "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16 (1): 1–13. doi:10.1177/1609406917733847.
- Ozkula, Suay Melisa.. 2021. "What Is Digital Activism Anyway? Social Constructions of the "Digital" in Contemporary Activism." *Journal of Digital Social Research* 3 (3): 60–84. doi:10.33621/jdsr.v3i3.44.
- Öztürk, Nazan, and Serkan Ayvaz. 2018. "Sentiment Analysis on Twitter: A Text Mining Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis." *Telematics and Informatics* 35 (1): 136–147. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2017.10.006.
- Peng, Altman Yuzhu. 2020. *A Feminist Reading of China's Digital Public Sphere*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Peng, Altman Yuzhu.. 2022. "Digital Nationalism Versus Gender Politics in Post-Reform China: Gender-Issue Debates on Zhihu." *Global Media and Communication* 18 (3): 281–299. doi:10.1177/17427665221125537.
- Peng, Altman Yuzhu, Jenny Zhengye Hou, Majid KhosraviNik, and Xiaoxiao Zhang. 2023. ""She Uses Men to Boost Her Career": Chinese Digital Cultures and Gender Stereotypes of Female Academics in Zhihu Discourses." *Social Semiotics* 33 (4): 750–768. doi:10.1080/10350330.2021.1940920.
- Pfeffer, Jürgen, Thomas Zorbach, and Kathleen M. Carley. 2014. "Understanding Online Firestorms: Negative Word-of-Mouth Dynamics in Social Media Networks." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 20 (1–2): 117–128. doi:10.1080/13527266.2013.797778.
- Ping, Fan.. 2022a. "Guojia Anquan: Jingwai Shili He Zhongguo Tese (Shang) [National Security: 'Foreign Power' and Chinese Characteristics I]." VOA. August 18. <https://www.voachinese.com/a/how-real-are-threats-against-china-s-national-security-20220817/6705164.html>.

- Ping, Fan.. 2022b. "Guojia Anquan: Jingwai Shili He Zhongguo Tese (Shang) [National Security: 'Foreign Power' and Chinese Characteristics II]." VOA. August 18. <https://www.voachinese.com/a/how-real-are-threats-against-china-s-national-security-part-2-20220817/6705185.html>.
- Rodríguez-Ibáñez, Margarita, Antonio Casáñez-Ventura, Félix Castejón-Mateos, and Pedro-Manuel Cuenca-Jiménez. 2023. "A Review on Sentiment Analysis from Social Media Platforms." *Expert Systems with Applications* 223: 119862. doi:10.1016/j.eswa.2023.119862.
- Shi, Wen, Yuxuan Lin, Zihan Zhang, and Jing Su. 2022. "Gender Differences in Sex Education in China: A Structural Topic Modeling Analysis Based on Online Knowledge Community Zhihu." *Children* 9 (5): 615. doi:10.3390/children9050615.
- Šima, Karel. 2021. "From Identity Politics to the Identitarian Movement." *National Stereotyping, Identity Politics, European Crises* 27: 75.
- Smith, Dorothy E.. 1987. *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Tronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Srnicek, Nick. 2017. *Platform Capitalism*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Sun, Yan, Rachel Wang, Dongmei Cao, and Rouyi Lee. 2022. "Who Are Social Media Influencers for Luxury Fashion Consumption of the Chinese Gen Z? Categorisation and Empirical Examination." *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 26 (4): 603–621. doi:10.1108/JFMM-07-2020-0132.
- Thomala, Lai Lin.. 2023. "Monthly Active Users of Xiaohongshu App in China 2020-2023." *Statista*, November 16. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1327421/china-xiaohongshu-monthly-active-users/>.
- Thomala, Lai Lin.. 2024. "MAUs of Zhihu Inc. in China Q1 2021-Q4 2023." *Statista*, April 29. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1298392/zhihu-monthly-active-users/>.
- Thornham, Sue, and Feng Pengpeng. 2010. "'Just a Slogan' Individualism, Post-Feminism, and Female Subjectivity in Consumerist China." *Feminist Media Studies* 10 (2): 195–211. doi:10.1080/14680771003672320.
- Tian, Wenru, Yiyang Xiao, and Longkun Xu. 2021. "What Xiaohongshu Users Care About: An Analysis of Online Review Comments." In 2021 International Conference on Public Relations and Social Sciences (ICPRSS 2021), Kunming, China, 386–391. Atlantis Press.
- Turner, John C.. 2010. "Social Categorization and the Self-Concept: A Social Cognitive Theory of Group Behavior." In *Rediscovering Social Identity*, edited by T. Postmes and N. R. Branscombe, 243–272, Psychology Press.
- Van Dijck, José, Thomas Poell, and Martijn De Waal. 2018. *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Oxford: Oxford university press.
- Vasquez Reyes, Maritza, Caitlin Elsaesser, Jocelyn R. Smith Lee, Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario, and Robin Stevens. 2025. "Perceptions of Girls and Young Women on the Role of Gender and Social Media Conflict Implicated in Violence." *Journal of Youth Studies* 28 (2): 318–334. doi:10.1080/13676261.2023.2271404.
- Vu, Hoang.. 2024. "McDonald's Vietnam Apologizes for Slogan Mocking Tragic Death of Chinese Man." *VNExpress*, May 7. <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/news/mcdonald-s-vietnam-apologizes-for-slogan-mocking-tragic-death-of-chinese-man-4742923.html>.
- Wajcman, Judy. 2010. "Feminist Theories of Technology." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (1): 143–152. doi:10.1093/cje/ben057.
- Wang, Bin, and Catherine Driscoll. 2019. "Chinese Feminists on Social Media: Articulating Different Voices, Building Strategic Alliances." *Continuum* 33 (1): 1–15. doi:10.1080/10304312.2018.1532492.
- Weber, Eric. 1970. *How to Pick Up Girls!: Discover Exactly How to Meet Beautiful Women; in Bars, Buses, Trains—Even on the Street!.* New York: Symphony Press.
- Weibo. 2024. "Weibo Announces First Quarter 2024 Unaudited Financial Results." *Weibo IR Home*, May 23. <http://ir.weibo.com/>.
- Wu, Angela Xiao, and Yige Dong. 2019. "What Is Made-in-China Feminism (S)? Gender Discontent and Class Friction in Post-Socialist China." *Critical Asian Studies* 51 (4): 471–492. doi:10.1080/14672715.2019.1656538.

- Wu, Yan, and Matthew Wall. 2019. "The Ties That Bind: How the Dominance of WeChat Combines with Guanxi to Inhibit and Constrain China's Contentious Politics." *New Media and Society* 21 (8): 1714–1733. doi:10.1177/1461444819830072.
- Xu, Jian. 2024. "From 'Wanghong' to 'Wanghong Thinking': New Research Agenda and Critical Reflection." *Communication and the Public* 10 (2): 81–85. doi:10.1177/20570473241264896.
- Xu, Jiaqi. 2025. "Stigmatizing Feminism in Nationalist Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a Chinese Anti-Feminist Online Forum." *Journal of Gender Studies* 1–18. doi:10.1080/09589236.2025.2475206.
- Xu, Mian, and Yao Yixin. 2019. "Renren Handmade PUA Kecheng Peixun, Jiuqing Weibuweifa? [Are the Immoral PUA Courses Legal?]." *Southern.com*, June 11. Accessed 29 May 2024. http://news.southcn.com/nfplus/nftz/content/2019-06/11/content_187918403.htm.
- Yang, JungAe. 2016. "Effects of Popularity-Based News Recommendations ("Most-Viewed") on Users' Exposure to Online News." *Media Psychology* 19 (2): 243–271. doi:10.1080/15213269.2015.1006333.
- Yin, Siyuan. 2022. "Re-Articulating Feminisms: A Theoretical Critique of Feminist Struggles and Discourse in Historical and Contemporary China." *Cultural Studies* 36 (6): 981–1004. doi:10.1080/09502386.2021.1944242.
- Zaobao, Lianhe. 2024. "Pang Mao Shijian Fanzhuan Chongqing Jingfang Zhi Sizhe Jiejie Caokong Yulun Yidao Wangbao [The Fat Cat Incident Has a Twist; Chongqing Police Says His Sister Has Manipulated Public Opinion and Initiated Cyberbullying]." *Lianhe Zaobao*, May 20. <https://www.zaobao.com.sg/realtime/china/story20240520-3689974>.
- Zeng, Y. (2016a). "Citizens, Governance and Social Media in China: Evolving Socio-Cultural, Economic and Political Dimensions." Doctoral Diss., University of Delaware.
- Zhang, H.. 2022. "The Pressures on Leftover Women and Men Under the Chinese Patriarchal System." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 12 (2): 85–91. doi:10.18178/ijssh.2022.V12.1071.
- Zhang, Rongji, Yumin Chen, and Xiang Zhao. 2024. "'I'm a Female-PhD and I'm Married': Resisting Gender Stereotypes of Female PhDs on Zhihu." *Journal of Gender Studies* 33 (4): 404–417. doi:10.1080/09589236.2023.2281387.
- Zhang, Xizi.. 2024. "Zai Pang Mao Shijian Zhong, Jingti Qunti Xiaoying Xia De Yulun Shixu [For the 'Fat Cat Incident', Be Cautious About the 'Disorder of Discourse' in the Context of Herd Effect]." *Rednet.cn*, May 6. http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/202405/06/t20240506_38993117.shtml.
- Zheng, Yan, and Xiang. Wang. 2024. "Pang Mao Shijian Fanzhuang: Zhenxiang Zhishang Bushi Liuliang Zhishang [The Twist of the Fat Cat Incident: Truth is More Important Than Public Attention]." *The Paper*. May 19. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_27436267.
- Zhou, Dong, Jinyu Zhu, and Yihan Guo. 2022. "Does Internet Connect to Social Justice Perception in China?" *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 917039. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2022.917039.
- Zou, Sheng. 2023. "Provincializing "Web Traffic": Data Imaginaries and Vernacular Construction of Liuliang in China." *Communication Culture & Critique* 16 (4): 221–227. doi:10.1093/ccc/tcad021.
- Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. "Surveillance Capitalism and the Challenge of Collective Action." *New Labor Forum* 28 (1): 10–29. doi:10.1177/1095796018819461.