

Legitimizing postfeminist discourse: Feminist vlogs and attention economies on TikTok and Bilibili

Abstract:

As a recent phenomenon in Chinese digital spaces, feminist vlogging renders large attention in media academia. Previous research understood this phenomenon as a global expansion of neoliberalism. However, little attention is paid to the interactive strategies and discursive patterns the vloggers apply on different platforms. This research argues that postfeminism in China is deeply entangled with China's Wanghong culture and economy (Han, 2020; Crag, Lin & Cunningham, 2021), in terms of attention monetization, cultural logics of the different platforms, and the tension between empowerment and labor. To highlight the nuance of postfeminism in China, this study proposes "platformized pseudo-feminism" as a working concept to investigate vlogging practices of a highly visible feminist wanghong, Shen, on TikTok (Douyin), and Bilibili. The study conducts a multimodal discourse analysis with an emphasis on comparative interface analysis (van Dijck, 2013) and the discursive construction of legitimation (van Leeuwen, 2007). The analysis addresses 1) thematic topics in Shen's video, 2) audience engaging strategies, and, based on these two dimensions, 3) how they relate to interface designs. This helps to answer how attention is retained and mobilized through platform-specific designs and product positioning. In particular, I found Shen's vlogs employ three legitimation strategies with different positioning on TikTok (Douyin) and Bilibili: 1) creating homophily by encouraging commenting, 2) inviting audiences to naturalize her feminist agenda as well-established common sense, and 3) sharing her intimate life experience with audiences.

Keywords: attention economy, multimodal discourse analysis, platform, postfeminism, China

Reference

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