Anti-labeling: Silence spiral in the "X Yuan" case from the Perspective of Female communication

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Abstract: In the Internet era, it is inevitable that the excessive consumption of user symbols brings about the phenomenon of discourse carnival. From the event of "debutante" in 2021 to the network buzzword called "X Yuan", some women have been stigmatized. The Chinese character "Yuan" represents good temperament and posture in original meaning, but it has changed to derogation, leading to the anti-labeling behaviors of female groups. Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, it was found that in the "X Yuan" case, the process of women's reaction to the labeling reflected the spiral of silence: At the early stage of the event, the stronger the opinion perception of criticizing "X Yuan", the more silent the women were. In the medium term, opinion leaders led women to support anti labeling. With the participation of the hardcore and more ordinary users, the female group realized that the label of "X Yuan" was strongly related to their own identity, so they formed the "anti-silence spiral", working together with the anti media stigma.

Keywords: Labeling, Feminism, Silent spiral

1 Introduction

Since 2021, after the event of "Group buying debutante", such events as "Fo Yuan"(well-groomed and exquisite girl in Buddhist temple), "Bing Yuan"(exquisite girl in ward) and "Cai yuan" (exquisite girl at the vegetable market) have aroused continuous attention again. Under the background of online celebrity economy, this series of "X Yuan" appellations are used by netizens to criticize women who do not conform to their own values. The different meanings of the former morpheme "X" implie different specific situations. As a result, social media such as Weibo have reflected on the media stigma and labeling in the "X Yuan" event.

2 Literature Review

2.1 A review of Studies on Female labeling

Nowadays, the phenomenon of gender labeling in cyberspace and the trend of women's seeking identity have aroused the research from multiple perspectives. Sheila Zitney, a foreign gender researcher, made a general analysis of the impact of gender identity on the well-being of individuals and groups from a sociological perspective(Personality& Social Psychology Bulletin, 2022) and pointed out that gender inequality is an important reason for increasing the spiritual burden of women. Marconi Busi, an African linguistics professor, analyzed the stigmatization cases of women in southern Africa from the perspective of political science and pointed out that women can dispel the stigma by strengthening their social awareness and building their image of independence, wisdom and power.

Domestic scholars have made a specific study on the impact of the group "labeling" communication from the perspective of news and public opinion, indicating that one of the reactions is the awareness of the audiences. As a consequence, gender discrimination severely attacks and criticizes the "labeling" of women. Another scholar Zhang Jintao pointed out that symbolic consumption on the media platform accelerated the stigma of women and formed a carnival of network culture by using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

2.2 A review of Research on the Spiral of Silence and the Anti-spiral of Silence

Since it was put forward by Elizabeth Noel Newman in 1974, the theory of silent spiral has been highly concerned by scholars at home and abroad, and has made many research achievements. Based on the theory of peer effect, American scholar Megan Duncan found that the opinion atmosphere formed in the comment area affected the content of participants' actual comments through experimental research on the news comment area, supplemented the theory of news research, and also led to the thinking of "anti silence spiral". The scholar Junia Ortiz obtained the influence of psychological factors formed in the long-term social context on the silence spiral through a questionnaire survey, which provides experience for the connection between the silence spiral and women's status.

Qiao Huan, a domestic scholar, has made a more detailed study of the silence spiral phenomenon of China's Internet from the network information level, indicating that users still have a fear of isolation in the virtual world. Additionally, most users will be affected by the herd mentality so they are likely to turn the opinions into the mainstream view. Researcher Jiang Daping used the method of combining case with theory to show that there are formation of factors the silence spiral in networks: isolated fear, perception of opinion atmosphere, relevance, prediction of future development trend and anonymity.

Driven by the silence spiral, opinion leaders are constantly pouring into the eyes of users.

Under its leadership, a "anti silence spiral" of resistance has been formed. Chen Qiang, a domestic scholar, and others made a detailed analysis of online public opinion, pointing out that under the guidance of information superiority and belief firmers, the initial "cognitive core" of online public opinion will form a new "cognitive core" with the rational change of Internet users, and finally a situation where minority views become the mainstream views will emerge. Another communication researcher, Yu Xin, used the method of simulation to study and find that the role of opinion leaders in communication reflects the interaction between personal characteristics and network location. The opinion leaders will magnify the influence scale and active results of the same view through some "echo effect", thus covering up the voice of the other side.

However, the above research has not yet studied the female stigma typical of "X Yuan" from the perspective of audience and female communication. Moreover, these studies do not answer the question of how to rectify the name of women and build identity from silence to counterattack when they were confronted with stigma. Therefore, this paper attempts to answer the following questions: How does the mechanism of silence spiral in women groups work, during the period: From the critical opinion climate of "X Yuan" at the beginning of the event to the voice of women groups and the social resistance to the stigmatization of women. And what are the characteristics and effects of women's anti-labeling?

3 Research Methodology

We attempts to answer the above questions by means of questionnaire and semi-structured interview.

3.1 Questionnaire method

3.1.1 Assumption Establishment

Based on the above questions, the following assumptions are proposed:

H1: At the beginning of the "X Yuan" related events, the stronger the opinion environment perception of criticizing "X Yuan", the more women tend to be silent.

H2: In the middle of "X Yuan" related events, the more opinion leaders speak for women, the more women tend to support anti-labeling.

H3: In the later period of the "X Yuan" related events, the more ordinary female users around them speak for women, the more women tend to support anti-labeling.

H4: In the later period of the "X Yuan" related events, the stronger perception of the correlation between the "X Yuan" label and female identity, the women tend to support the anti-labeling.

In order to prove the hypothesis, this study adopts the questionnaire survey method, sampling the population and making a questionnaire.

3.1.2 Sampling Method

The corresponding research object of this hypothesis is the female group who knew about this event. First of all, we conducted a representative sampling of this group, and selected college students who use Weibo as the study population. Secondly, the general sampling frame is prepared based on whether or not they know the event of "Group buying debutante" and the name of "X Yuan". Thirdly, we conduct stratified and multistage sampling for the sampling frame with 95% confidence interval and 3% sampling error. 200 students were selected as samples.

The survey has completed the data collection, sorting and analysis process on October 15, 2022. The survey mainly focuses on open and closed questions. The main contents are: (1) Confirmation of basic information: including age and gender. (2) The dimension reduction sentence part of the independent variable X (the intensity of criticism of "X Yuan"). (3) The dimension reduction statement part of the dependent variable Y (the willingness of the individual to speak). This questionnaire contains 19 questions as well as 14 single choice questions, 2 multiple choice questions, 1 questionnaire question and 2 blank filling questions. It is distributed online and offline through WeChat friends circle, QQ space, questionnaire star sample library and off-line.

3.2 Semi-structured Interview Method

3.2.1 Preparation of Interview Outline

The interview questions are mainly divided into three parts.

The first part mainly involves the basic information of the interviewees, including their gender, age and region.

In the second part, the research questions are down scaled to interview questions. Including their specific views on the "X Yuan" event, the specific psychological changes of their voice on the Internet, and the way to anti-labeling.

The third part, the preparation mainly deals with possible deeper excavation. During the interviews and the conduct of the study, the researcher tried to avoid the four ethical issues and transgressions highlighted by scholar Al- an Bryman: (1) causing harm to research participants. (2) not using informed consent documents or materials. (3) violating the privacy of research participants. and (4) deceiving research participants. The interviewees were also allowed to remain silent or withdraw from the interview if they had any questions they did not want to answer or if they were dissatisfied with the interview process. Interview materials that the interviewees declared that they did not want to disclose were not included or cited in this study. The entire research process was conducted in strict compliance with ethical and moral principles of scientific research, and each participant voluntarily chose whether or not to participate in the study after being fully informed about the study. The researcher treated each participant with

respect and as much equality as possible in accordance with the principle of responsibility for the research and kept the research process and all original data strictly confidential.

3.2.2 Interviewee Selection

In this study, 10 interviewees aged 18-24 who used Weibo were interviewed in depth for 15 minutes. The interview began on October 15, 2022 and ended on October 18, 2022. The interviewees first include typical samples of answers in the questionnaire survey, and then collect more research samples through the author's release of information on the social platform. According to the maximum sampling principle of the qualitative research method, when the 10th interviewee was recruited, all the interview content was enough to answer the research questions, and the sample collection was ended. The interviewees are different in terms of education level, specialty, location, etc., and the degree of homogeneity is low.

The interview was conducted in a combination of telephone and WeChat text interview, and the processing of the interview content was jointly completed by the two research members. The basic information of the interviewees is shown in the table1.

Table 1 Basic information

Item	Gender	Age	Resident area	Interview Highlights
S1	Female	21	Shanghai	Prejudice comes from people's examination of external factors such as environment
S2	Female	20	Beijing	Don't comment due to the experience of account suspended
S3	Female	21	Baoding,Hebei	Consider the factors of irrational expression
S4	Female	20	Xi'an,Shanxi	Revise the text repeatedly before posting and usually set the permissions visible only to friends
S5	Female	21	Guilin,Guangxi	Concerned about the number of reposts and words of attitude
S6	Female	21	Chengde,Hebei	Only comment on events with the same opinion as herself due to the fear of cyber violence
S7	Female	23	Tianjin	Carefully deliberate the opinion of the opinion leaders
S8	Female	21	Beijing	Brave to comment without being influenced by others
S9	Female	22	Beijing	Follow the majority opinion to change attitude
S10	Female	21	Harbin,Heilongjiang	Will not comment if events are less relevant to own interests

4 Research Analysis and Conclusion

A total of 217 questionnaires were collected in this survey, among which there are many female interviewees, accounting for 61.8%. Most of them are young people of 18-24 age that accounting for 46.1%. From the perspective of descriptive analysis, the number of people who use microblog "very frequently" accounts for 36.4%. However, 25.3% of people said they never

made comments on microblogging, indicating that the attribute of microblogging is mainly to obtain information. In the "X Yuan" related events, the opinion perception has become an important influencing factor of the silence spiral mechanism, showing a strong correlation. The opinion climate in the event has undergone three key changes. In other words, the spiral of silence mechanism has also undergone three turns. The variables are respectively the intensity of public opinion criticism, the communication effect of key opinion leaders, and the active counterattack behavior of ordinary users. Among them, the third transformation involves the perception of the relationship between "X Yuan" and the identity of the female audience, which causes their willingness to fight against the labeling.

4.1 Opinion perception: female group silence in critical context

With "X Yuan" as a new network buzzword, it is growing rapidly in the form of popcorn. At the beginning of the event, due to the influence of the group pressure dominated by criticism and the critical reporting of professional media, the audience preferred to be silent or observe around. Even if they want to express their opinions, they only stay at the level of interpersonal communication. The opinion atmosphere makes the majority opinion of the public as a kind of judgment authority to guide the trend of events. According to the questionnaire, 35% of users chose not to express or discuss their opinions about "X Yuan". In addition, 34.21% of the audience expressed that most of the views they contacted were critical views, and 24.21% of the users expressed some critical views through communication channels including interpersonal communication. But 15.26% of the users said that they had expressed their partial agreement with the view that women speak for themselves through interpersonal communication. Through correlation analysis of opinion environment perception and women's silence behavior at the beginning of the event, the results show that H1 is valid ($r=0.782$, $p=0.000$ * *). At the initial stage of "X Yuan" related events, the stronger the perception of the opinion environment of criticizing "X Yuan", the more women tend to be silent. The interview also supports this conclusion. When individuals first came into contact with the "X Yuan" event, seven interviewees said they would not make any comments or opinions on the event. Furthermore, two interviewees said that they would carefully watch the views of others in the discussion area, and would also remain silent if their views were inconsistent. The interviewees of S4, S5 and S6 all said that they were "afraid of being abused, discriminated against and abused for their minority views" As a result, under the influence of such factors as fear of harm to individual groups caused by irrational factors and fear of being isolated, low correlation with their own interests, fear of being blocked and blacklisted, the audience has not yet had the impulse to dispel the stigma of feminism. The media bias caused by symbol consumption persists.

4.2 Backbone force: key opinion leaders guide the group's cognitive transition

With the continuous fermentation of the event, the views expressed by the parties or

key opinion leaders have a more obvious impact on the spiral of silence of the audience. The force of the backbone shows a tendency to break the spiral. The strengthening of consensus will accelerate the interaction of social members. And with the promotion of information technology, more and more people have the opportunity to participate in social communication. The "cognitive core" of the masses in the network gradually transited to the initial "cognitive edge", that is, from the perspective of criticizing such "X Yuan" groups to opposing the labeling of women. According to the questionnaire, 21.58% and 36.84% of the testees said that "a lot" and "part" of key opinion leaders responded to the female label. Through the correlation analysis between the voice of key opinion leaders and the labeled behavior of women's support in the middle of the event, the results showed that H2 was vaild (r=0.745, p=0.000 * *). In the middle of the "X Yuan" related event, the more key opinion leaders speak, the more women tend to support the anti labelling. When key opinion leaders spoke for women in this event, eight interviewees said that they would evaluate the opinion of key opinion leaders and make appropriate comments, forwards or likes. The key opinion leaders as the backbone in the network guide public opinion from the perspective of removing stigma. They also led users to stop keeping silent and to stop hiding their attitude of "fighting back for women". For example, S8 of the interviewees said, "I will continue to add my own ideas, forward microblogging and add a few words of my own ideas along with Internet celebrities."; S2 of the interviewee said, "I will pay attention to the number of people who have forwarded and the comments that have expressed their attitudes, and I will be more sure of my own views." The number of key opinion leaders and the number of speaking for women in social media have a strong correlation with the number of comments forwarded by ordinary users. As a result, the belief of those who firmly believes in this event has become increasingly strong, and will continue to acculturated the general public, eventually leading to the reversal of public opinion. The audience began to try to break the restrictions of group pressure and group polarization, and there was a tendency to break the spiral of silence.

4.3 Identity connection: ordinary women form an "imaginary community"

When more groups related to their own homogenization join in the fight against women's labels, women gradually break the spiral of silence. In the later period of the "X Yuan" event, the tendency or action of ordinary users and women around them to fight back against the labeling became stronger and stronger. The questionnaire survey showed that nearly 52% of the testees saw the female anti labeling around them. The correlation analysis between the voice of ordinary users and women's support for counterattack labeling behavior shows that H3 is valid (r=0.736, p=0.000 * *); 18.95% and 35.26% of the testees respectively said that they had a very strong idea of female identity or already had similar ideas. H4 is valid (r=0.723, p=0.000 * *). According to Benedict Anderson's "imaginary community": perception between people is similar and can affect each other, and the sense of identity being stigmatized can be transmitted. On this basis, when the online criticism of "X Yuan" labeled women became more and more intense.

78.95% of the testees chose "tend to vocalize". When the number of voices of ordinary women increased, four interviewees said they would post comments or forward or like others' comments on social platforms. And two testees said they would communicate with their friends around them, affecting the people within their power. Among them, S2 of the interviewees believed that increasing the number of people expressing their opinions could "enhance confidence", and they were more sure of their views on speaking for women; S10 of the interviewees said that the same opinion atmosphere not only "reduces the self doubt", but also "realizes the supplement of views".

Based on the long-term social context, the actions of ordinary groups make them more sure of the relevance of the "X Yuan" label and their own identity. "The phenomenon of women being severely criticized has always been" "The current network data can be permanently saved, and everyone is no exception" "Although this matter does not involve themselves, as a woman, I think we should fight against it".. It can be seen that the emotional resonance between ordinary women gives them a sense of belonging to the collective. This process has the characteristics of social construction, which implies the possibility of female groups working together to eliminate stigma. It is worth noting that among some samples "inclined to vocalize", and the highest proportion is "neutral voice intention" (18.95%), "strong voice intention" (14.74%), and "very strong voice intention" (14.21%). To some extent, this shows that the voice of ordinary women has more influence on the average level of quantity, that is, more and more people tend to voice for women. However, it is moderately strong in degree, and there is no absolutely consistent positive correlation between them.

4.4 Anti labeling: an attempt at collective resistance and stigma elimination

The behavior of female groups in the anti labels has a distinctive feature of self-identity, which is mainly reflected in promoting the people around them to pay more attention to women. Seven female interviewees said that they would take practical actions to correct the name of women in the face of the stereotype of women and the stigma of the media reflected in the "X Yuan" incident. For example, S1 of the interviewee said, "I hope you can pay more attention to humanistic care and pay more attention to 'humanity' rather than malicious interpretation of others just because of the environment in the photos"; S5 of the interviewees said that "they will integrate the attitude of speaking for women into their daily life, such as writing articles and guiding their family members to pay more attention to women", "Yuan can also be referenced forward, and magic can defeat magic".. With the development of feminism, more and more women as the "second sex" that has been belittled, have a more acute sense of identification and resistance to the male discourse hegemony in social life in the context of the current modernization transformation. After several turns of "X Yuan" related events, it can be inferred that the dynamic formation process of women's anti label social representation has entered the stage of symbolic response. Individuals or groups begin to describe and explain new events. For example, guiding family members to pay attention to women, using "X Yuan" in the positive

direction, and "edification" the men around them provide a new way to eliminate the stigma of "X Yuan" media. Therefore, this subjective discourse practice deconstructs the stigmatized "X Yuan". As a resistance practice, it not only promotes the elimination of stigma, but also deepens women's gender identity.

5 Summary and Reflection

The rise of the new media platform reshapes the relationship between people and society, and also provides a field for communication of diverse cultural ideas. The "X Yuan" incident is a typical example of this change. In this study, the "X Yuan" incident and the phenomenon of women's anti labels were studied by questionnaire and semi-structured interview on the spiral of silence theory and label theory. This paper tries to answer what kind of spiral of silent mechanism the female group experienced behind the "labeling" and how to carry out the "anti labeling" action. It is found that the assumptions H1, H2, H3 and H4 are valid. This shows that blind criticism and irrational expression in cyberspace are still the main factors of audience silence. Therefore, the society should pay more attention to women's topics.

This study puts forward the mechanism and process of the silence spiral of female groups and the performance of anti labeling behavior, which has the characteristics of social construction. It reflects the positive social significance of women's fight against the labeling phenomenon. At the same time, it also provides a case for women's self justification cation and self-identity in the network context of modern China. However, it is worth noting that the reasons for the stigma of "X Yuan" are complex. It is closely related to the long-term social foundation, online popularity economy, stereotype and other factors, which makes it difficult to quickly dispel the prejudice against women in society and slows down the process of women seeking identity.

This study attempts to systematically analyze the audience perspective and its spiral of silence mechanism in the "X Yuan" event, but there are still shortcomings. Due to some objective factors, the number of effective responses to the questionnaire and interviewees is few. In addition, the typical degree of the interviewees should be carefully investigated in the sample selection process. In future research, researchers in sociology and psychology may need to pay more attention to the phenomenon of female anti labeling in the network environment and expand the research on the role of silence spiral mechanism in different age groups.

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