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Harnessing the Power of Social Media: Exploring the Role of TikTok in

Addressing Language-Based Discrimination Issues in Hong Kong

As we all know, in today's society, discrimination incidents happen from time to time. Discrimination incidents happen all over the world, and Hong Kong is one of the places where discrimination is very serious. However, why is the problem of language discrimination particularly serious in Hong Kong? Hong Kong is a former British colony and since July 1, 1997, when the sovereignty of Hong Kong was handed over to the People's Republic of China, the HKSAR government initiated a "biliterate (Chinese, English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Mandarin, English)" language policy. However, this did not bring any benefit, but rather deepened the discrimination against Mandarin in Hong Kong. (Li, Y., & Liu, X., 2022) On May 21, 2023, a language discrimination incident occurred on a Cathay Pacific flight. On a May 21 flight from Chengdu to Hong Kong, a flight attendant discriminated against and ridiculed because a passenger misspoke the English of a blanket. The incident was recorded and posted on TikTok, today's most popular short-form social media platform, a platform that uses short videos to share events and personal lives, not only to post videos, but it also allows videos to be shared. It is also one of the most popular

platforms, and although the main audience is young people, there is no limit to the

audience of this platform. Anyone can post their own comments and thoughts about

the event on this platform, so this platform can quickly make the event ferment and

receive wide attention from the society. According to research TikTok has an

estimated 800 million active users worldwide, and TikTok was downloaded 738

million times in 2019. TikTok's total downloads exceeded 1.5 billion - making it the

seventh most downloaded app of the 2010s. the largest market for TikTok downloads,

at 323 million in 2019 (if you exclude Chinese Android downloads). (Tower, 2020)

Such usage and downloads can easily drive social opinion, and for this case of

linguistic discrimination, through the release of TikTok, this incident took just two

days between the time it happened and the time we found out about it. Such a rapid

fermentation will cause a very high level of social attention and a large amount of

public opinion. We discovered this event through TikTok and wanted to ask a

research question. What is the role of TikTok in addressing language-based

discrimination issues in Hong Kong? This question also led us to conclude that

TikTok, as one of the most popular social media, can drive social opinion and serve as

a platform for free commentary that not only allows events to ferment quickly, but

also gives them a high level of attention. We use discourse analysis to prove our point.

First, we collect comments on TikTok. Second, we analyze collected comments by

using discourse analysis. Finally, we will draw our conclusions from the analysis.

Jacques, et al. believe that the incident with the new coronavirus was also one of

the things that allowed the discrimination story to grow rapidly on social media. Since

the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in racism, xenophobia, and violence has targeted Asians and Asian Americans (hereafter referred to as Asians). As a result, harmful effects on Asian populations include widening health disparities, people around the world have also become more racist against the Chinese. (Jacques et al., 2023) Not only did we find out about language discrimination through TikTok. Just like in 2019, there is suddenly a new coronavirus and Asians are thrust into the limelight in the whole world. Instead of analyzing the origin of the New Coronavirus positively, many people had the idea of discriminating against Chinese people, and this idea also fermented rapidly through social media platforms, which made more people have the idea of racial discrimination, and with the idea of racial discrimination, people also had more ideas of discrimination against Asians, such as language discrimination and appearance discrimination. However, through further occurrences of the New Coronavirus and the latest reports in the media, such racism is slowly diminishing as people are discovering that the source of the New Coronavirus does not necessarily come from China. This brings us to the importance of TikTok, a short video platform that presents the development of the New Coronation virus in the simplest way possible, in a video format that is the most intuitive way for young people to understand what is happening. This is exactly why we are studying whether social media can drive social opinion and thus change the way people think about discrimination. With the latest coverage of the New Coronavirus on TikTok, people are less discriminating against Chinese and more scientifically researching the source of the New Coronavirus, rather than just discriminating against Chinese and thinking

that they brought the virus. This has not only changed people's perception of discrimination against Chinese, but also through the increasing coverage of discrimination in social media, people are taking the issue of discrimination more seriously and more people are joining the team to resist discrimination. The author of this article says don't be concerned that videos on discrimination will be shared to raise health awareness through TikTok. Again, this is used in our research to demonstrate the important role TikTok plays in society. TikTok can drive social opinion and generate a lot of social attention.

Betton, et al. published an incident about discrimination in his September 2013 article. A protest on Twitter in September 2013 is a stark example of how people with mental health issues can use social media to challenge stigma. Thousands of people were offended by the "mentally ill" Halloween costumes advertised on the website of national supermarket Asda's George costume line. The incident quickly festered on social media platforms. However, this also applies to our study; TikTok is a short-form video platform, but videos on this short-form platform can be disseminated through share the video, and Betton believes that when thousands of people share a video or tweet, it may create a sense of solidarity while minimizing one of the recognized limitations of "direct contact," which is to treat the experience of one or a few people as the exception , rather than the norm. Not only will this drive a high level of social interest, but it also proves to us that when an event festers quickly on a social media outlet like TikTok, it draws widespread attention, if not world attention. This drives down the incidence of discrimination. (Betton et al., 2015)

To collect TikTok comments relevant to the Cathay Pacific discrimination incident, a systematic approach was employed. The incident occurred on May 21, 2023, during a flight from Chengdu to Hong Kong. Comments were collected from TikTok by searching for hashtags related to the incident, such as #CathayPacificDiscrimination or #LanguageBasedDiscrimination. The comments collection process spanned a period of two weeks following the incident to capture a substantial number of comments for analysis. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives. Comments were selected based on their relevance to the incident and their potential to provide insights into language-based discrimination. The selection criteria included comments that criticized Cathay Pacific's service staff attitude, dissatisfaction with the airline's official statement, and criticisms related to political stances and discrimination against mainland passengers and internal employees. It is important to acknowledge that the collected comments represent a subset of opinions expressed on TikTok and may not capture the entire spectrum of responses to the incident. Additionally, due to the dynamic nature of social media platforms, the availability and visibility of comments may vary over time.

Discourse analysis was chosen as the methodological approach for analyzing the TikTok comments due to its suitability for exploring language-based discrimination and social media discourse. Discourse analysis focuses on studying the social construction of meaning through language and communication. By analyzing the discursive practices within the comments, this approach allows for an examination of

the power dynamics, ideologies, and social representations underlying language-based discrimination. In this study, a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework will be employed. CDA seeks to uncover hidden ideologies, power relations, and social inequalities in discourse. It goes beyond surface-level analysis and aims to reveal underlying structures and meanings that shape the social context. By applying CDA to the TikTok comments, we can gain insights into how language-based discrimination is manifested, challenged, and negotiated within the online environment.

The Cathay Pacific discrimination incident on May 21, 2023, serves as a significant case study to explore the role of TikTok in addressing language-based discrimination issues. The incident involved allegations of disrespectful behavior by certain crew members towards passengers who used the term "carpet" to refer to a blanket in English. This incident garnered considerable attention and sparked conversations about language-based discrimination in Hong Kong. Analyzing the TikTok comments related to this incident allows us to delve into the public discourse surrounding language-based discrimination, particularly within the context of Hong Kong. By examining the perspectives, reactions, and discussions generated on TikTok, we can gain insights into how social media platforms like TikTok can influence public awareness, challenge discriminatory practices, and foster dialogue regarding language-based discrimination issues.

The discourse analysis of the collected TikTok comments revealed several key themes and patterns pertaining to the role of TikTok in addressing language-based discrimination issues in Hong Kong. Through a comprehensive examination of the

comments, there are the following three insights emerged.

Firstly, many comments criticized the service staff of Cathay Pacific, highlighting instances of poor attitude and lack of professionalism. Passengers expressed their dissatisfaction with the behavior of the crew members involved in the incident. This indicates that TikTok provides a platform for individuals to voice their concerns and hold companies accountable for discriminatory practices.

Secondly, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the statement issued by Cathay Pacific Airways in response to the incident. Commenters felt that the airline's apology lacked sincerity and failed to address the underlying issue of language-based discrimination. This finding suggests that TikTok enables the amplification of public scrutiny and holds organizations accountable for their actions.

Thirdly, some comments extended beyond the specific incident and criticized Cathay Pacific for allegedly having a problematic political stance. These comments linked the discrimination incident to broader issues of discrimination against mainland passengers and internal employees, highlighting tensions related to the anti-China chaos in Hong Kong. This indicates that TikTok serves as a platform for discussions on sociopolitical matters and allows individuals to raise awareness about systemic discrimination.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that TikTok fosters a sense of community and empowerment among individuals who have experienced or witnessed language-based discrimination. Many comments expressed solidarity with the victims, shared personal experiences, and offered support. This sense of community on TikTok

encourages individuals to share their stories and contribute to a collective effort in combating discrimination.

All in all, the analysis of the TikTok comments demonstrates that TikTok plays a significant role in addressing language-based discrimination issues. By providing a platform for public discourse, TikTok enables individuals to express their opinions, raise awareness about discrimination incidents, and hold organizations accountable. It also fosters a sense of community and empowers individuals to share their experiences, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of addressing language-based discrimination in Hong Kong.

The results of this analysis align with previous research on the role of social media in addressing discrimination issues. Studies have shown that social media platforms provide spaces for marginalized groups to raise consciousness on public health issues, racial discrimination, and injustices. TikTok, specifically, has emerged as a platform where individuals can express their experiences, challenge stereotypes, and advocate for social justice.

In conclusion, the discourse analysis of TikTok comments related to the Cathay Pacific discrimination incident reveals the significant role of TikTok in addressing language-based discrimination issues in Hong Kong. The findings highlight the power of social media platforms like TikTok in raising awareness, fostering community engagement, and challenging discriminatory practices. These insights contribute to our understanding of how social media can be harnessed as a tool for social change and the importance of inclusive and respectful communication within organizations.

The findings from the discourse analysis of TikTok comments provide valuable insights into the role of TikTok in addressing language-based discrimination issues in Hong Kong. The results indicate that TikTok serves as a powerful platform for individuals to voice their concerns, share experiences, and challenge discriminatory practices. By analyzing the comments, we can draw meaningful conclusions regarding the impact of TikTok on addressing language-based discrimination.

The first key conclusion is that TikTok enables individuals to raise awareness about discrimination incidents and hold organizations accountable. The criticism directed towards the service staff of Cathay Pacific demonstrates that TikTok provides a public space where individuals can express their dissatisfaction and demand better treatment. This has implications for companies like Cathay Pacific, as they must recognize the power of social media platforms in amplifying public scrutiny and take steps to address language-based discrimination within their organization.

The second conclusion is that TikTok fosters a sense of community and empowerment. The solidarity expressed by commenters towards the victims of discrimination highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment where individuals can share their stories and seek support. TikTok acts as a virtual community that encourages individuals to come together, challenge stereotypes, and contribute to the collective effort in combating discrimination. This sense of community empowers individuals and contributes to a broader movement for social justice.

Furthermore, the discourse analysis revealed that TikTok serves as a platform for

discussions on sociopolitical matters related to language-based discrimination. The comments criticizing Cathay Pacific's alleged political stance and its treatment of mainland passengers and internal employees demonstrate the interconnectedness of language-based discrimination with larger socio-political issues. TikTok provides a space where these discussions can take place, raising awareness about systemic discrimination and fostering dialogue on broader societal issues.

Overall, the findings underscore the significance of TikTok in addressing language-based discrimination in Hong Kong. By providing a platform for public discourse, TikTok contributes to the dismantling of discriminatory practices, raises awareness about incidents, fosters community engagement, and empowers individuals to share their experiences. The power of social media platforms like TikTok in promoting social change should not be underestimated, as they have the potential to shape public attitudes, influence organizations, and drive meaningful conversations on important societal issues.

In a nutshell, TikTok as a short video platform that allows free comments, after our analysis through the comments of TikTok and the investigation and study of the Cathay Pacific discrimination incident, we found that in the era of advanced social media, TikTok can not only make an event ferment quickly, but also make this event quickly get a high level of social attention. Through the fermentation of TikTok for the Cathay Pacific incident, it has attracted a lot of attention from the society, and many people have published their comments. The comments are also divided into two aspects, on the one hand, they think that bilingualism and trilingual system can be

promoted, but most of the comments show that more people still tend to oppose language discrimination, and through the fermentation of the comments and the high attention of the society, many people have changed their minds. The results of the study show that TikTok has played a significant role in addressing the issue of language discrimination. After analyzing the TikTok comments, some people shared their experiences of language discrimination and expressed their opinions about the Cathay Pacific incident, which not only attracted a lot of social attention, but also made more people express their dissatisfaction with language discrimination. This has reduced discrimination based on language in society and has led to a decrease in all types of discrimination. After the Cathay Pacific incident, Cathay Pacific apologized and punished the flight attendant who discriminated against the passenger. Our research confirms our question, Harnessing the Power of social media: Exploring the Role of TikTok in Addressing Discrimination Issues, that social media plays an important role in today's information age. It can not only promote the attention of the society, but also promote the reduction of discrimination issues. The fermentation of the Cathay incident has also contributed to the concern of language discrimination in Hong Kong and the reduction of discrimination against Mandarin speakers, which is the best result of this study. Based on our current study, we do not have the means to collect every user comment, but this study will allow us to increase the attention to discrimination. In future studies, we can also use the collection of a large number of comments on social media and intelligent language models to help us classify and filter the comments, and select more representative and valuable comments for

analysis, so as to provide more accurate evidence to prove our research objectives. This method is not only applicable to the study of linguistic discrimination, but also can be applied to all kinds of discrimination problems by using the influence and social attention of popular social media. It is also applicable to many social issues that are not identified and bring them to a high level of social attention.

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