What topics do Chinese anti-feminists like? A quantitative analysis based on Weibo data crawling

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Abstract

Anti-feminism has been popular in recent years in China, accompanied by the rise of the right-wing worldwide. Weibo, one of the biggest social media platforms in China, became a battlefield for the fight between feminism and anti-feminism. In this paper, we crawled data from Weibo and used topic modeling and discourse analysis to find out their favorite topics and analyze the common speech pattern to better understand them as new cyber, social and political phenomena.

Introduction

Anti-feminism has gotten more and more popular in China, corresponding with the trend of right-wing speech nationwide and worldwide, which is also characterized as a part of alt-rightism. Alt-right in western countries is defined as the radical subculture based on the rejection of the liberal paradigm and identity-based rights and is known for its support for white supremacy and hostility towards immigrants, Muslims, feminism, and political correctness (Fang, 2021). Paradoxically, the Chinese alt-right used similar discourse to reject western hegemony and by this method construct their own national and racial identity (Zhang, 2019).

Feminism used to be popular in Chinese cyberspace, involving nearly half of the population, and now it received the most attention and attack as well, compared to immigrants, Muslims, or LGBTQ rights. This paper examines the anti-feminism speech on Weibo, one of the biggest social media platforms in China. We crawled data from Jan 2020 to Dec 2021; we used

"feminism fist" (nvquan, 女拳, a common homophonic calling for feminism with denigration) as the keyword for searching, and we conducted context analysis: topic modeling and discourse analysis based on the results. Anti-feminism existed before 2020, but its voice became more and more resonant with the breakout of Covid-19 since 2020. Here is the graph downloaded from Baidu Search Index, supported by Baidu, the largest Chinese search engine. We could see that the index of "feminism fist" has significantly arisen since 2020.
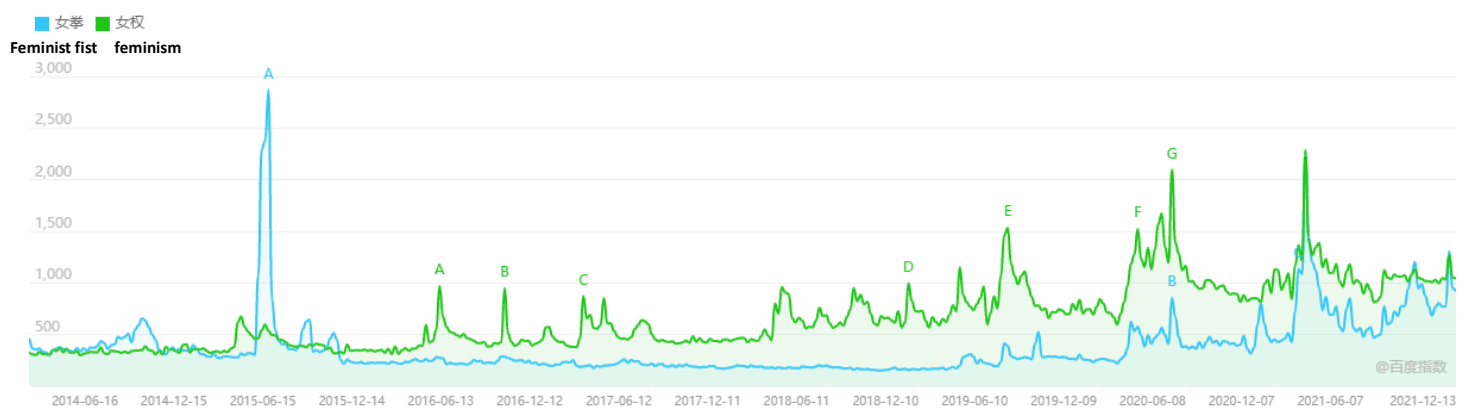

Fig.1 Baidu Search Index for "feminism" and "feminism fist" from 2014 to 2021

There could be multiple explanations: The lockdown and xenophobia emotions with the rejuvenation of male-chauvinism traditions, the economic stagnation, increasing unemployment with the rising of anti-globalization, the rejection of western liberal ideology, and the urge to take back men's dignity as seen disdained by feminism.

Literature review

"The person is political." (Kleinman, 2007) The feminists in the 1960s used this sentence to describe their experiences as products of societal arrangements and ideas that reflected patriarchy and social inequality. However, when the time comes to the 2020s, the anti-feminists used similar words to describe the harm and threat every individual feminist has on the whole

society. They tend to capture extreme anti-feminists speech and actions, attributing the disseminated men-hate, all the gender conflicts, and even the skyrocketing divorce rates and plummeting birth rates in China to the fault of extreme feminists. Anti-feminists and alt-rightists are networked in Chinese social media platforms and establish their own identity through reposts, likes, and comments with each other (Fang, 2021). Zhang (2019) and Fang (2021) have conducted text analysis or social network analysis on the Chinses alt-right community, however, researches of text analysis focusing on the Chinese anti-feminist speech is rare. Thus this paper will try to conduct such analysis based on both quantitative and qualitative skills.

Data and methods

We crawled the original Weibo posts containing the keyword of "feminist fist" from 1st Jan 2020 to 15th Dec 2021. And we got 14109 posts, 2671 of them attached topic hashtags to participate in some popular news discussions. We used Python to load the Chinese segmentation package *Jieba* to take the texts apart. Before generating the statistical model we examined the word frequency for the topics (with hashtags on both ends) of all posts and we generated a word cloud. The top 10 words are *Yang Li, East China University of Science and technology, driver, Central China Normal University, Zhu Jun, countryside, won the lawsuit, domestic violence, police, announcement*, which will be useful in our further analysis.

Fig 2. Word Cloud for Weibo anti-feminism search results

(excluded words directly related to male or female)

We then used LDA (Latent Dirichlet allocation) Model (Blei et al., 2003) to find the pattern for anti-feminism topics. We test the availability of modeling by trying out different numbers of topics and numbers of keywords for each topic and we finally set them 5 and 5. To further understand those topics we identified and interpreted the themes of each topic. And we chose some representative posts with high coefficients for detailed analysis.

Table 1. LDA model with top words

Topic	Top words	Translation
Lalamove driver event	司机" "打拳" "社会" "权利" "货拉拉"	**Driver, punching, society, rights, Lalamove**
Anti-American-ideology	"中国" "社会" "孩子" "美国" "恶心"	**China, society, children, America, disgusting**
Killings and criminals	"新闻" "宣判" "舆论" "一审" "律师"	**News, lawsuit sentence, public opinion, first instance of court, lawyer**
Gender conflicts in colleges	"杨笠" "北师大" "问题" "社会" "男女"'	**Yang Li, Beijing Normal University, problems, society, female and male**
Failed allegations of sexual harassment and counterattack by men	"朱军" "中国" "拳打" "北京师范大学" "田园女权"	**Zhu Jun, China, punching, Beijing Normal University, Tianyuan Feminism (Chinses pseudo-feminism)**

Topic A: Lalamove driver event

It is a piece of social news that happened in Feb 2021 that a woman jumped out of the car driven by a male driver of Lalamove company at night and died. The driver was charged as negligent homicide by Changsha District Court and it arose many doubts between men. Many believed that the man didn't have any responsibilities with the women's death and she died

because of her "persecutory delusions", which is often the characteristic of feminist viewpoint towards men. They even believed and invented the saying that "feminism has already penetrated to Public Security Organizations of Changsha, urging "men's awakening from women's suppression".

Topic B: Anti-American-ideology

This topic became increasingly popular after the relationship between China and America got strained and it transformed into a kind of strong attacking paradigm taking advantage of nationalism spirits. The anti-feminists could easily accuse a feminist' ideas too "western liberalized" (baizuo) and thus she must be a foreign spy that could be reported to police for 500,000 RMB, which is why they called them "500,000" (Wushiwan). A classic speech is like: "I have told you that white men have no moral attitudes. Extreme liberalism shows backlash that is destroying western countries. Our country has received certain shocks due to some public intellectuals importing those culture junks. They are traitors of the nation, without them, we would be better."

Topic C: Killings and criminals

The killing between husband and wife has been getting more and more social concerns in China. Usually, it takes the form of the husband killing the wife, the ex-boyfriend killing the ex-girlfriend, the man killing the woman. Such case would arise women's great sorrow and pity, sometimes with fear and hatred towards men. So, if it is the reverse killing — the woman killed the man, anti-feminism would rush forward to talk about how feminists hate men and how terrifying of the damage and tearing such hatred would bring to our society. Here is a post on the event that a stranger woman in Hefei rob a one-year-old boy and threw him off the roof to

death. "It is said that the criminal was a Douban feminist and they have discussed the implementation of the crime. If it's true, then feminism is no doubt terrorism."

Topic D: Gender conflicts in colleges

The conflicts between young men and women are getting fierce in the past years, and we noticed that the collective figure of anti-feminists seems to be quite young — as Yang Li became the most frequent keyword in our anti-feminism topic wordlist, who is well-known for her sarcasm of the "normal but confident" boys in our daily life in a talk show program whose audiences are mostly young (Chen, Wu, 2018). She was cyberbullied by males for months and she was accused of hurting men's self-esteem and confidence, making large-scale gender confrontations. Meanwhile, the university also became the interactive battlefield for feminism and anti-feminism. A typical event happened in Peking Normal University and girls urged boys not to use the elevator to avoid the embarrassment who live in the same apartment. "Today we lost the right of taking the elevator, tomorrow we lose the right to go outside, the day after tomorrow we will lose the right to breathe. How much more we Chinese males are going to compromise?"

Topic E: Failed allegations of sexual harassment and counterattack by men

The boys are often accused of being promiscuous, behaving unfaithfully or violently to their mate based on real events and facts. The first wave of counterattacks traced back to the event that happened in Tsinghua University in 2020, a girl accused a boy who passed by implemented sexual harassment to her: touched her bottom purposedly. She published his personal information on a social media platform and forced his apologies. However, when situations got intense the surveillance camera showed the boy didn't touch her, giving back his innocence.

The girl's false accusation made all anti-feminists angry. Another famous case in the East China University of Science and Technology tells a similar story: the girl accused the boy at first but the truth turned out to be her fault, and anti-feminists see such things as the inevitable evil outcome of extreme feminism. This event as a Weibo topic shows the highest participation of anti-feminism discussion based on our statistics. Zhu Jun, the famous host of CCTV who had been accused of sexual harassment in 2018 but won the first trial in Sep 2021, ranked the 3rd in our frequency of anti-feminism topic lists. A classic anti-feminism speech would be like: "The Tsinghua girl didn't get strict punishment at first, and we have to push through with the feminists bitching around, and now the social atmosphere of calumniation has spread out, the opposition between male and female would only get more and more serious."

Popular topics: another evidence

Topics with hashtags (a total of 2671 of them) that appeared in our crawled data with the keyword "feminist fist" are counted for examining the reliability of our LDA model. We can observe that the LDA model topics and keywords all show up as the top 15 most frequent topics in the following ranking list, showing certain consistency and stability.

Table 2. The topics with hashtags count from all the posts crawled (counts > 15)

Topic	Translation	Counts
华东理工大学	East China University of Science and Technology	127
华中师范大学	Central China Normal University	76
朱军胜诉	Zhu Jun won the lawsuit	63
严格限制老婆花钱也是家暴	Limitations on wife's spending are also domestic violence	37
女性的结婚意愿明显低于男性	Females' wedding willingness is much lower than male	31
奔驰杨笠视频引争议	Dispute on Mercedes Benz brand ambassador Yang Li video	30
奔驰杨笠	Benz Yang Li	29
95岁女院士鼓励女性打破玻璃天花板	95-year-old female academician encouraged women to break the ceiling	28
上海警方通报潍坊西路酒店命案	Police of Shanghai announced the hotel suicide on Weifang Road	25

安徽一景区女游客挤爆男厕所	**Female tourists crowded out male restrooms in a scenic spot in Anhui**	24
田园女拳	**Countryside female fists**	21
山东小伙娶回俄罗斯女网友	**A young man in Shandong married a Russian female netizen**	20
女权	**Feminist**	19
货拉拉乘客坠亡案司机提出上诉	**The Lalamove driver in passenger fell dead case filed an appeal**	19
北京师范大学	**Peking Normal University**	19
货拉拉司机过失致人死亡案一审宣判	**Lalamove driver negligent homicide pronounced judgment**	17
哈利波特魔法觉醒侮辱女性玩家	**Harry Potter: Magic Awakened assaulted female players**	17

Conclusions

This paper dealt with 14109 posts ranging from Jan 2020 to Dec 2021, tracking the rising anti-feminist speech since Covid-19. The generative statistical model LDA and the word cloud based on topic appearance frequency help conduct qualitative analysis. Anti-feminism in social media platforms can be featured as constructing shared imagination of men-hate and women-destruction created by feminism based on real-world events, especially the crime or sexual harassment cases that are exposed disadvantageous to women. And they showed resentment, sneer, and defamation towards feminists, by this process they reassure their male identity and existing hierarchy that are apparently favorable male ruling. It is very interesting that they pay all attention to the case of women insulting men with words but pay no attention on the massive cases the men actually killed and threatened the women's lives to draw the conclusion that "men are already being bullied by women for too long". A particular character of Chinese anti-feminists, as suggested by the second generative topic of our model, is that they tend to fight against western ideologies and feminism together by accusing feminism of imported goods from western countries and thus always have some connection with each other. And they keep trying to prove that feminists are harmful to the whole society and even the whole nation. Anti-feminism is indeed connected to xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism thus it is indeed meaningful

to discuss alt-rightism as a whole.

This paper focused on the keyword "feminist fist" on Weibo with topic modeling, and we suggest that further researches can try different social media platforms (Zhihu, for example) with network analysis on the popular anti-feminists. Also, more exquisite analyses based on individual anti-feminists ' thinking logic and cognitive abilities can be further examined with psychological and social methods to better understand their assumptions and viewpoint.

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