

Discussion on Gender Issues in Online Novel Comment Sections in the Context of Social Media: An Analysis Based on Feminist Communication Theory

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Abstract

Based on feminist communication theory, this study analyzes gender discussions in the comment sections of online novels. It finds that these sections serve as key spaces where female readers actively challenge gender stereotypes and reshape power dynamics through collective expression, despite algorithmic and societal constraints. A case study of *Nirvana in Fire* illustrates reader engagement with gender roles and equality. While these discussions foster inclusivity and inspire diverse character creation, they also risk homogenization and extreme views. The study recommends platform moderation, balanced authorship, and improved media literacy for optimization.

Keywords

Social Media; Online Novel Comment Sections; Gender Issues; Feminist Communication Theory; Discourse Power; Gender Stereotypes; Gender Power Relations.

1. Introduction

In the digital age, both social media and online novels have become crucial components of popular culture, deeply integrating into people's daily lives. Originating in the 1970s, social media has gone through conceptualization and personalization stages, and now has developed into an indispensable platform for social interaction, information dissemination, and communication. From early platforms like Six Degrees and Friendster to globally renowned ones such as Facebook and Twitter today, as well as domestically widely used applications like WeChat and Weibo, social media has reshaped people's patterns of social interaction and information exchange with its characteristics of universality, interactivity, openness, and real-time nature[1].

Online novels have also experienced vigorous development. In recent years, the scale of China's online literature reading market has continued to expand. By the end of 2023, the market scale had reached nearly 300 billion yuan, with approximately 540 million reading users, over 36 million works, and more than 24 million authors. Online novels cover a rich variety of genres, including urban, fantasy, romance, and science fiction, which are deeply loved by readers and occupy an important position in the cultural and entertainment industry[2].

Under the context of social media, significant changes have occurred in the dissemination and communication of online novels. Readers are no longer merely passive recipients; instead, they actively participate in discussions through comment sections, forming a unique online cultural landscape. Among various topics, gender issues have become one of the focal points in comment sections, covering aspects such as gender roles, gender equality, and feminism[3].

Analyzing gender issues in online novel comment sections from the perspective of feminist communication theory holds great significance. Feminist communication theory aims to reveal gender inequality in the field of communication, criticize male chauvinism, and strive for equal

communication rights for women. Applying this theory to analyze online novel comment sections helps gain an in-depth understanding of the presentation and evolution of gender concepts in online cultural communication, and insight into women's discourse expression and identity recognition in cyberspace[4]. By exploring gender issues in comment sections, we can observe how women use online platforms to voice their opinions, challenge traditional gender concepts, and the difficulties and obstacles they face. This not only enriches the research content of feminist communication theory but also provides new perspectives and ideas for online culture research, promoting the development of online culture towards greater diversity and equality.

2. Theoretical Foundation: Feminist Communication Theory

Feminist communication theory is the product of the integration of feminist thoughts and communication studies, and its development process is closely linked to the evolution of the feminist movement. It examines communication phenomena from a gender perspective, committed to revealing gender inequality in the field of communication, and provides a unique perspective for understanding the relationship between gender and communication[5].

Tracing the development context of feminist communication theory, it can be dated back to the late 1960s to the early 1970s. During that period, the feminist movement was in full swing, and women began to conduct in-depth criticism of gender inequality existing in various fields of society, including the field of communication. In 1978, the publication of *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media* co-authored by American communication scholars Gaye Tuchman, Arlene Kaplan Daniels, and James Benet marked the official birth of feminist communication theory. This work systematically explored the portrayal of women in the media for the first time, revealed the widespread gender stereotypes and the marginalization of women in the media, and aroused extensive academic attention to communication and gender issues[6].

Since then, feminist communication theory has continued to develop and gone through several important stages. In the early stage, feminist communication theory mainly focused on striving for women's equal rights in the field of communication, such as equal employment opportunities and the right to media expression. With the deepening of research, scholars gradually realized that gender inequality in the communication field is not only reflected in the right level but also in the in-depth cultural and ideological levels. Thus, the research focus shifted to criticizing gender-discriminatory communication content and mechanisms, and analyzing how the media constructs and strengthens gender inequality through symbols, discourses, and other means. For example, scholars found that in media content such as advertisements, movies, and TV dramas, women are often stereotypically portrayed as housewives, sexy objects, and other roles, emphasizing women's appearance and sexual characteristics while ignoring their intelligence, abilities, and professional achievements. This kind of image construction further consolidates traditional gender concepts and restricts women's development.

Entering the 21st century, with the rapid development of globalization and new media technologies, feminist communication theory has shown a trend of diversification and interdisciplinary development. On the one hand, the research perspective has become more diversified, involving cross-analysis of multiple dimensions such as gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, focusing on the unique experiences and problems of women with different identities in communication. On the other hand, the integration with disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies has become increasingly close. By drawing on the theories and methods of these disciplines, the depth and breadth of research have been expanded. For instance, using the social construction theory of sociology to deeply explore the

social construction mechanism of gender concepts in the communication process; and relying on the cognitive theory of psychology to study the audience's cognition and interpretation process of gender information in the media[7].

Feminist communication theory contains many core viewpoints, among which the focus on gender inequality in the media is an important content. In terms of media content, a large number of studies have shown that there are significant differences in the media coverage of men and women. Men are often portrayed as authoritative, rational, and successful figures, occupying a dominant position in important fields such as politics, economy, and technology. In contrast, women are mostly depicted as emotional, dependent, and family-oriented, with a relatively low proportion in media reports, mainly concentrated in fields such as entertainment, fashion, and family life. In news reports, the proportion of men as information sources and experts is much higher than that of women, and women's voices and opinions are often ignored or marginalized. In terms of media employment, women also face many inequalities. Although the number of women employed in the media industry has gradually increased, the proportion of women in senior management positions and key decision-making positions is still relatively low, showing an obvious "glass ceiling" phenomenon. Women also often receive unfair treatment in terms of salary and career development opportunities[8].

Feminist communication theory attaches great importance to the issue of women's right to speak. In the traditional communication pattern, the male-dominated communication system makes it difficult for women's voices to be fully expressed and heard, leaving women in a state of "speechlessness" in the communication process. Feminist communication theory advocates breaking this unequal communication pattern, creating more opportunities for women to voice their opinions, enabling women to truly express their views, needs, and experiences on the media, and realizing self-empowerment. The emergence of some feminist media and online platforms has provided a space for women's independent communication. Through these platforms, women can share their stories, discuss issues of concern to women, challenge traditional gender concepts, and promote the development of gender equality.

3. The Ecosystem of Social Media and Online Novel Comment Sections

The rise of social media has opened up a new space for the dissemination and discussion of online novels, and its unique characteristics have had a profound impact on the dissemination and commenting of online novels. Social media has the feature of instantaneity, breaking the limitations of time and space, enabling the information of online novels to be transmitted to readers around the world in an instant. After an author releases a new chapter, readers can immediately access and read it without going through the long wait of the traditional publishing model. On social media platforms, topics and recommendations related to online novels can spread rapidly in a short period, attracting the attention of a large number of readers. This instantaneity has greatly improved the dissemination efficiency of online novels, allowing works to accumulate popularity and reputation more quickly.

Social media also has strong interactivity. Readers are no longer passive recipients but can directly interact with authors and other readers through methods such as liking, commenting, and sharing. Readers can express their views on the plot and characters of the novel in the comment section, put forward suggestions and questions, and authors can also reply to readers' comments in a timely manner. This interaction strengthens the connection between authors and readers and enhances readers' sense of participation. Some online novel authors will adjust their subsequent creative directions according to the feedback from readers in the comment section, and even let readers participate in the selection of the plot, such as allowing readers to vote to decide the direction of the story among multiple plot options, which further stimulates readers' enthusiasm and initiative[9].

Under the influence of social media, online novel comment sections have gradually become an important space for discussing gender issues. In terms of the composition of user groups, the readership of online novels is broad, covering people of different genders, ages, occupations, and regions, but female readers account for a relatively large proportion. Relevant data shows that on online novel reading platforms, the proportion of female users exceeds 60%, making female readers an indispensable force in online novel comment sections. When reading online novels, female readers often think about and discuss gender roles and gender relationships in the novel from their own gender experience. In the comment sections of romance novels, female readers often discuss whether the female protagonist's character is independent and strong, and whether she has gotten rid of the traditional "love-obsessed" image. In the comment sections of novels in genres such as fantasy and martial arts, female readers will pay attention to whether female characters have sufficient development space and opportunities to show themselves in a male-dominated world.

The discussion enthusiasm about gender issues in online novel comment sections remains high. Taking Weibo as an example, topics related to gender issues in online novels often make it to the hot search list, triggering the attention and discussion of a large number of netizens. After some popular online novels are adapted into film and television dramas, the discussions about gender roles in the dramas in the comment sections become even more intense. When a TV drama adapted from a popular fantasy novel was broadcast, the reading volume of topics such as "the marginalization of female characters in the drama" and "whether the growth line of female characters is reasonable" on Weibo reached hundreds of millions, with discussions exceeding one million. These discussions are not only limited to the analysis of gender portrayal in novels and film and television dramas but also extend to the reflection on gender equality issues in real life, reflecting the importance and influence of online novel comment sections as a space for discussing gender issues.

4. Specific Manifestations of Gender Issues in Comment Sections

4.1. Discussions Related to Character Portrayal

In online novel comment sections, the portrayal of female characters is one of the focal points of gender issue discussions. When female characters are portrayed in traditional images, they often trigger negative comments from readers. In some ancient romance novels, female characters are set as weak and dependent on men, their fates are completely determined by men, and they lack self-awareness and independent personality. Readers will point out in the comment section that this kind of character portrayal is a stereotype of women, a belittlement and objectification of women, and reflects the constraints of traditional gender concepts. One reader commented: "The female protagonist cries all day long and relies on the male protagonist to solve everything. Such a female character is too unattractive, and it feels like going back to the ancient era where men were superior to women." This comment reflects readers' dissatisfaction with traditional female character images and their expectation for the diversification and independence of female characters.

On the contrary, when novels depict modern independent female images, they usually receive a large number of positive evaluations. These female characters have independent thoughts, firm beliefs, and strong abilities. They pursue equality and autonomy in career and love, showing the demeanor of women in the new era. In urban workplace novels, the female protagonist stands out in the workplace with her wisdom and efforts, realizing her self-worth without relying on the help of men. Readers will praise in the comment section that such character portrayal is real and vivid, reflecting the strength and charm of women, and setting an example for women. "The female protagonist is so awesome. She does not back down in the face of workplace challenges and moves towards success step by step with her own strength.

This is the female image we want to see." Such comments reflect readers' recognition and love for modern independent female images, as well as the society's pursuit of gender equality concepts.

4.2. Gender Perspectives in Plot Settings

In the plot settings of online novels, aspects such as romance storylines and workplace storylines contain rich discussions on gender issues. In terms of romance storylines, the plot of "women being stronger than men" has attracted widespread attention in recent years, but it has also triggered many controversies. Some readers believe that the plot of "women being stronger than men" breaks the traditional gender power structure, provides women with more right to speak and dominance, shows women's equal status in love, and is a positive gender expression. In fantasy novels, the female protagonist is powerful while the male protagonist is relatively weak. The female protagonist protects the male protagonist while they grow together. This kind of plot is regarded by some readers as an innovation to the male-dominated love model in traditional fantasy novels.

However, some readers hold a reserved attitude towards the plot of "women being stronger than men". They believe that some plots of "women being stronger than men" are only superficial settings, and in fact, they are still infiltrated by male chauvinist consciousness. Although the female protagonist is strong in strength, she is overly dependent on the male protagonist emotionally and psychologically, or the male protagonist has absolute advantages in other aspects such as wealth and status, making the setting of "women being stronger than men" merely a formality. Some readers also worry that the plot of "women being stronger than men" may trigger new gender opposition, leading to the belittlement and discrimination of male characters, which is not conducive to the true realization of gender equality.

In the plot setting of workplace storylines, gender issues also receive much attention. Readers will discuss whether the portrayal of the workplace environment for female characters in the novel is real and whether there is gender discrimination. In some novels, female characters face numerous difficulties and obstacles in the workplace, such as fewer promotion opportunities, unequal salary treatment, and sexual harassment. These plots reflect the gender inequality issues that women face in the workplace in real life, triggering readers' resonance and reflection. Some readers will share their similar experiences in the workplace in the comment section, calling on society to pay attention to and solve workplace gender inequality issues. For those novels that can truly show women's struggle and growth in the workplace, readers will give high evaluations, believing that they have practical significance and social value.

4.3. Discussions on Authors' Gender and Creation

Readers have a keen perception and in-depth discussion on the creative styles and content preferences of authors of different genders. Generally speaking, female authors are more delicate in emotional description, good at portraying the inner world of female characters, and showing the emotional changes and growth process of women. In the field of romance novels, works by female authors often resonate more with female readers because they can describe true and touching love stories from a female perspective. A female reader commented: "After reading so many romance novels, I still think those written by female authors are more appealing. Their psychological description of the female protagonist is so accurate, as if they have written out the thoughts in my heart."

Male authors have advantages in world-building and plot structure. Their works often show grand narratives and complex logic. In novel genres such as fantasy and science fiction, works by male authors are more common. They can create fantasy worlds and wonderful adventure plots, attracting a large number of male readers. However, this gender-based creative style and content preference are not absolute. With the development of society and the change of gender

concepts, more and more female authors have begun to engage in fields such as fantasy and science fiction, showing unique creative perspectives and talents. Male authors are also striving to improve their ability in emotional description and trying to create more delicate emotional stories.

The gender of the author also has an important impact on the dissemination and acceptance of works. Some readers may have preconceived notions about works based on the author's gender, which may affect their choice and evaluation of the works. In some cases, works by female authors may be considered more suitable for female readers, while works by male authors are more popular among male readers. This gender stereotype limits the dissemination scope of works to a certain extent. However, there are also many excellent works that break this gender boundary and win a wide range of readers with their wonderful content and unique style. Some fantasy novels created by female authors have attracted a large number of male readers with their exciting plots and rich imagination. Romance novels created by male authors have also been loved by female readers because of their unique interpretation of love. This shows that in the field of online novels, the quality and innovation of works are the key factors determining their dissemination and acceptance, while the author's gender is only one of the influencing factors.

5. In-depth Analysis Based on Feminist Communication Theory

5.1. Competition for the Right to Speak

In the traditional field of literary criticism, relying on their dominant position in social culture, men have long occupied the center of the right to speak. Their views and evaluation standards are often regarded as authoritative, and they have a decisive influence on the interpretation and judgment of literary works. In the research of classic literary works, the views of male scholars are more likely to be published and disseminated in mainstream academic journals, while women's voices are often marginalized. However, under the context of social media, in online novel comment sections, this situation is changing. With their large number and active participation, female readers strive to gain the opportunity to express themselves in the comment section and try to break the male-dominated comment atmosphere.

The openness and convenience of social media have provided women with an unprecedented platform to voice their opinions. No longer restricted by traditional comment channels, female readers can express their views on online novels in the comment section anytime and anywhere. Through various means such as text and emojis, they freely express their emotions, views, and needs. In the comment section, female readers will share their feelings about the novel plot, analyze the inner world of female characters, and discuss the rationality of gender relationships in the novel. In the comment section of a popular urban novel, female readers launched a heated discussion on the female protagonist's experience in the workplace. They shared their own workplace experiences one after another, pointing out that the description of the female protagonist's workplace difficulties in the novel truly reflects the gender inequality in real life, and at the same time, put forward their own suggestions and views on the female protagonist's response methods in the novel. This active participation and expression have made the voices of female readers gradually stand out in the comment section.

To better strive for the right to speak, female readers also enhance their influence through group interaction. They form various discussion groups and topic circles in the comment section to conduct in-depth discussions on gender issues of interest. In the comment sections of some feminist novels, female readers form "Women's Power Discussion Groups" to jointly explore the growth and self-realization of female characters in the novels and share their insights and inspirations. Through this kind of group interaction, female readers can not only

support and encourage each other but also gather strength to form a strong public opinion momentum, thereby attracting more attention to gender issues.

However, female readers also face many challenges in the process of striving for the right to speak. Some male readers may question and oppose the views of female readers, and even launch verbal attacks. In the comment section, when female readers criticize gender inequality in the novel, they may be refuted by some male readers, who believe that female readers are too sensitive and overinterpret the novel. The algorithm recommendation mechanism of social media platforms may also affect the realization of female readers' right to speak. Algorithms usually recommend content based on users' interests and behavioral habits. If the comments of female readers do not meet the preferences of the algorithm, they may be recommended to fewer users, thereby limiting their spread scope.

5.2. Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Stereotypes

Traditional gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in literary works and social concepts, imposing many restrictions on women's development. In online novel comment sections, readers' discussions play a positive role in breaking these stereotypes. In traditional romance novels, the female protagonist is often portrayed as gentle, weak, and dependent on men. This stereotype limits the diversity and development space of female characters. However, in the comment section, readers have questioned and criticized this traditional image. They believe that female characters should have richer personalities and diverse abilities, and should not be limited to traditional gender role settings.

Some readers will share their ideal female images in the comment section, which often have the qualities of independence, strength, and courage, breaking traditional gender stereotypes. In the comment section of a time-travel novel, readers had a heated discussion about the female protagonist's image. One reader commented: "After traveling through time, the female protagonist did not rely on the male protagonist, but made a place for herself in ancient times with her wisdom and courage. This kind of independent and self-reliant female image is really likable." This appreciation for the independent female image reflects readers' denial of traditional gender stereotypes and their pursuit of new gender cognition.

With the deepening of discussions in the comment section, new gender cognition is gradually being constructed. Readers have begun to realize that gender should not be a factor restricting personal development. Both men and women should have equal opportunities and rights to show their diverse qualities. In online novels, more and more works have begun to shape gender relationships with equal awareness, where male and female protagonists grow together on the basis of mutual respect and mutual support. In a workplace novel, the male and female protagonists are colleagues. They compete and cooperate with each other at work, jointly solving work problems and achieving common career development. This equal gender relationship has been widely recognized by readers in the comment section, further promoting the formation of new gender cognition.

Online novel comment sections also provide a space for discussions on diverse gender concepts such as transgender and non-binary genders. Some readers will share their views on transgender characters in the comment section and discuss the presentation methods and significance of diverse genders in novels. This kind of discussion helps break the traditional binary gender concept and promotes social understanding and tolerance of diverse gender groups. In a science fiction novel, there is a transgender character, and the discussion about this character in the comment section is very heated. One reader said: "The appearance of this transgender character has given me a new understanding of gender and made me more understanding and respectful of those groups with different genders." This positive discussion on diverse gender concepts reflects the important role of online novel comment sections in promoting the reconstruction of gender cognition.

5.3. Examination of Power Relations

Gender power relations are clearly reflected in online novel comment sections. In some cases, relying on the dominant position formed in social culture for a long time, male readers have a strong ability to control the direction of discussions. In the comment sections of novels in genres such as fantasy and martial arts, male readers often occupy a dominant position, and their views and preferences are more likely to affect the direction and focus of discussions. When discussing issues such as martial arts settings and plot development in the novel, the remarks of male readers are more likely to receive attention and responses, while the views of female readers may be ignored. Some male readers will emphasize the importance of elements such as battle scenes and upgrade systems in the novel based on their own interests and cognition, thereby guiding the discussion to focus on these aspects, while topics such as emotions and character relationships that female readers care about are difficult to be fully discussed.

However, female readers are not completely in a passive position. They resist in various ways and try to change this unequal power relationship. Female readers will use the strategy of emotional resonance, taking their own emotional experiences and life experiences as the entry point to arouse the resonance of other readers, thereby enhancing the influence of their views. In the comment sections of romance novels, female readers often share their insights and experiences in love, which echo the plots in the novel. This emotional resonance can attract the attention and support of more readers, making the views of female readers receive more attention in the discussion.

Female readers also use technical means of online platforms, such as liking, sharing, and creating topics, to expand the spread scope of their views and break the male control over discussions. When the views on gender equality put forward by female readers are recognized by other readers, they will use likes and shares to make more people see these views, thereby forming a greater public opinion momentum. Some female readers will create topics related to gender issues to attract more readers to participate in the discussion, making gender issues a hot topic in the comment section, and thus changing the direction of the discussion.

The gender power relationship in online novel comment sections is not fixed but in a dynamic state of change. With the continuous awakening of female consciousness and the improvement of female readers' participation, the right to speak of women in the comment section is gradually increasing, and the gender power relationship is developing in a more equal direction. In the comment sections of some novel genres that were originally dominated by men, the voices of female readers are becoming louder and louder, and their views and suggestions have begun to receive more respect and adoption. In the comment sections of some suspense novels, relying on their delicate thinking and unique perspective, female readers conduct in-depth analysis of the character psychology and plot details in the novel, put forward many valuable views, and gradually occupy a place in the discussion.

6. Case Study

Taking the comment section of the popular online novel *Nirvana in Fire* as a case for in-depth analysis is typical and representative. With its wonderful plot, plump character images, and profound connotation, *Nirvana in Fire* has attracted a large number of readers and triggered heated discussions on social media. The discussions on gender issues in the comment section are particularly prominent.

In the comment section of *Nirvana in Fire*, there are many popular comments that fully reflect gender views and elements of feminist communication theory. One popular comment reads: "Princess Nihuang is really admirable. As a woman, she can command 100,000 iron cavalry to protect the country, which is better than many men. Her existence breaks the traditional gender

limitations and shows the strength and wisdom of women." This comment highly praises Princess Nihuang, a female character, for her independence and strength, believing that she breaks the constraints of traditional gender roles and shows the ability of women to be equal to or even surpass men. From the perspective of feminist communication theory, this reflects the deconstruction of traditional gender stereotypes. In traditional concepts, women are often considered weak and dependent on men, and are not suitable for engaging in work in fields such as the military. However, the image of Princess Nihuang subverts this stereotype, showing women's outstanding talents in the military field, and providing a strong example for women to strive for equal social roles and status.

Another popular comment says: "The female characters in the play are not just foils for men. Each of them has an independent personality and pursuit. Whether it is the intelligent Concubine Jing or the tough and brave Gong Yu, they all play an important role in the story. This kind of portrayal of female characters is worthy of praise." This comment emphasizes the independence and importance of female characters in the play, opposing the view of regarding women merely as appendages of men. In feminist communication theory, the right to speak and the subject status of women are important concerns. The diverse portrayal of female characters in *Nirvana in Fire* provides more space for women's discourse expression, allowing women to appear in the story as independent individuals and show their value and pursuit, which reflects the pursuit and emphasis on women's subject status in feminist communication theory.

There is also a comment pointing out: "Although there are many excellent female characters in the play, men still occupy a dominant position in some important decisions and the core of power. This reflects the inequality of gender power in real society. It is hoped that future works can show more about the development of women in the field of power." This comment insightfully observes the imbalance of gender power relations in the work and links it to real society, reflecting a profound reflection on gender power relations. Feminist communication theory focuses on the power structure in the communication process and is committed to revealing and changing the power relationship of gender inequality. This comment expresses the expectation that women can obtain more development opportunities in the field of power, reflecting the demand for equal gender power in feminist communication theory.

Through the analysis of the popular comments in the comment section of *Nirvana in Fire*, it can be clearly seen that under the context of social media, online novel comment sections have become an active place for discussing gender issues. Readers express their views on gender roles and gender equality through comments, showing their reflection on traditional gender concepts and their pursuit of feminist ideas. These discussions not only enrich the cultural connotation of online novels but also provide vivid cases for the practice and development of feminist communication theory, further highlighting the important value of feminist communication theory in analyzing online cultural phenomena.

7. Impacts and Insights

The discussion of gender issues in online novel comment sections has exerted multiple impacts on online literature creation. From the positive perspective, this kind of discussion provides creators with rich inspiration and feedback, prompting them to pay more attention to gender equality issues in creation and shape more diverse and three-dimensional gender roles. Many online novel authors have begun to attach importance to readers' opinions on gender roles in the comment section, and adjust the character settings and plot development in their subsequent creation to meet readers' expectations for gender equality. Some authors have been inspired by the discussions in the comment section and created works with unique gender perspectives, such as fantasy novels with female protagonists, which show the growth and

struggle of women in the male-dominated fantasy world and break the situation where men dominate in traditional fantasy novels.

However, there are also some negative impacts. Some creators may over-cater to the preferences of readers, leading to the homogenization and superficialization of the creative content. If readers show a strong preference for a certain gender role setting or plot mode in the comment section, some creators may follow suit blindly and create a large number of similar works, ignoring the innovation and ideological depth of the works. For example, if the plot of "women being stronger than men" is popular among readers, some creators may set up such plots forcibly regardless of the rationality and logic of the story, making the works appear rigid and false.

The discussion of gender issues in the comment section also has a subtle impact on readers' gender concepts. On the positive side, by participating in the discussion, readers can be exposed to different gender views and ideas, broaden their horizons, and help cultivate more equal and inclusive gender concepts. In the comment section, readers can see the views on gender issues from people of different genders and backgrounds. These diverse views can stimulate readers' thinking, prompt them to reflect on their original gender concepts, and thus form a more rational and mature gender cognition.

Nevertheless, there are also some potential negative impacts. There may be some extreme or one-sided gender views in the online comment section, which may mislead readers and intensify gender opposition and prejudice. In some comment sections, there will be extreme remarks about men or women, such as "all men are irresponsible" or "women should stay at home and take care of their husbands and children". If readers accept these remarks without thinking, it may strengthen their gender stereotypes and lead to the intensification of gender opposition.

To promote the healthy development of discussions on gender equality in online novel comment sections, joint efforts from multiple parties are required. Online platforms should play an active role in strengthening the management and guidance of the comment section. On the one hand, it is necessary to establish a sound comment review mechanism to filter out remarks that contain gender discrimination and insults, and create a harmonious and civilized discussion environment. On the other hand, platforms can guide readers to conduct rational and in-depth discussions on gender issues by setting topic recommendations and holding discussion activities. For example, launching a topic activity of "the embodiment of gender equality in online novels" to encourage readers to share their understanding and views on gender equality in online novels, and inviting experts and scholars to make comments and guidance to improve the quality and level of the discussion.

Authors should also actively participate in the discussion of gender issues, listen to the voices of readers, and at the same time maintain their creative independence. Authors should take the opinions and suggestions on gender issues put forward by readers in the comment section seriously, integrate them into their own creation, and continuously improve the quality and ideological connotation of the works. At the same time, they should adhere to their own creative concepts, not be swayed by readers' opinions, and create works with unique styles and values. Readers themselves need to improve their media literacy and enhance their ability to distinguish right from wrong. When participating in discussions in the comment section, readers should maintain a rational and objective attitude, not follow the trend blindly, and not make extreme remarks. They should learn to analyze problems from multiple perspectives, respect different gender views, and actively participate in discussions to promote gender equality. By reading relevant books and articles, participating in training courses, and other ways, readers can improve their gender awareness and media literacy, so as to better understand and deal with gender issues in online novel comment sections.

8. Conclusion

From the perspective of feminist communication theory, this study analyzes gender issue discussions in social media-based online novel comment sections and uncovers their gender connotations and social significance.

The study finds that social media's instantaneity and interactivity enable vigorous gender discussions in comment sections, with topics covering character portrayal, plot setting, and authors' gender-related creation. Readers actively debate these issues to advocate gender equality and reflect on traditional gender norms. Feminist communication theory analysis reveals that comment sections serve as a key space for women to fight for discourse power: despite challenges, female readers break male-dominated atmospheres via active expression and group interaction. These discussions deconstruct traditional gender stereotypes, build new gender cognition, and drive the evolution of gender power relations toward equality—with female readers resisting male control through emotional resonance and platform tools. A case study of Nirvana in Fire's comment section verifies these conclusions: popular comments reflect readers' focus on gender roles, pursuit of equality, and reflection on power relations, demonstrating the theory's application value.

Gender discussions in comment sections impact online literature creation (providing inspiration for diverse gender roles but risking homogenized content) and readers' gender concepts (fostering inclusive views but potentially spreading extreme ideas). To promote healthy discussions, platforms should strengthen management and guidance, authors need to balance reader feedback with creative independence, and readers must enhance media literacy for rational participation. Future research could expand to more novel types and cultural contexts, use advanced technologies (e.g., natural language processing) for big data analysis, and conduct interdisciplinary studies combining gender issues with class, race, or sexual orientation to support online culture diversity and social gender equality.

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