

Analysis of Female Narratives in In-depth Reports from the Perspective of New Media

—Taking the "Extreme Women" Series Reports of New Weekly as an Example

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Abstract. In the new media era, in-depth reports have undergone a series of changes. With the rise of female power, efforts have been made to explore female perspectives, and diverse female images have gradually come to be seen. The "Extreme Women" series launched by New Weekly combines short video interviews with figures and in-depth reports to present female images in various fields and levels. It strives to break free from abstract concepts and ideologies, care for specific individuals, and listen to their stories. With "breaking through limits" as its core theme, the series presents in depth the images of women who break through limits at different levels.

Keywords: in-depth reports, female narratives, characters

1. Introduction

Against the contemporary background where digital technology reconstructs the media ecology, in-depth reports are facing the dual challenges of information fragmentation and the scarcity of audience attention. According to the 55th Survey Report of the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the number of short video users has reached 1.012 billion, accounting for 94.8% of the total number of netizens [1]. This indicates that audio-visual and real-time communication forms have become dominant. This major transformation in the communication pattern has forced traditional media to actively explore the integrated and innovative path of "in-depth content and new media forms". At the same time, global social movements such as the #MeToo movement and women's economic empowerment have made gender issues a core concern in the public discourse space.

Since its founding, New Weekly has observed and recorded China's social changes with a keen perspective, and its slogan is "China's most cutting-edge lifestyle weekly". It has innovated traditional media concepts, created a unique set of distinctive media methodologies, and launched a series of popular original topics and in-depth reports. The "Extreme Women" series is a depth reporting column focusing on feminist issues launched in 2024. Its core content and characteristics

are related to the presentation of real experiences: the program focuses on women who break through the boundaries of life, listening to how they overcome obstacles in daily life and accumulate strength through tiny inner changes. It features dialogues from diverse perspectives: the interviewees include women from different professional backgrounds such as writers, actresses, scholars, and entrepreneurs, such as Qi Jinnian, Yu Xiuhua, and Ye Tong, who share their thoughts and choices when facing life, career, and intimate relationships. It also involves discussions on social issues: the program not only focuses on personal growth but also covers broader social issues such as gender equality, intergenerational differences, and social prejudices, attempting to reflect social phenomena through individual stories. By sharing real stories and experiences, the program aims to arouse the audience's emotional resonance, provide new perspectives and courage, and encourage more women to find their own "limits" when facing life challenges. With the rapid development of new media technology, profound changes have taken place in the communication methods and narrative strategies of traditional media. As an important form of news communication, how in-depth reports maintain their depth and professionalism in the era of information explosion has become a crucial issue for journalists [2]. Meanwhile, the rise of feminist thought and social attention to gender equality have made women's issues increasingly prominent in news reports. Against this background, the "Extreme Women" series reports of New Weekly have emerged. Through in-depth interviews and character reports, they show the challenges and growth of women at different life stages, providing the audience with a platform to understand and reflect on women's issues. The column not only records the "extreme moments" of women but also discusses how to maintain one's true self and pursue equality in a complex social environment. In the future, the series will continue to explore more women's stories and examine the role and value of women in society.

"The first element of news is people, and the fundamental task of news reporting is to express facts through people." Walter Lippmann emphasized the importance of people in news reporting in *Public Opinion* and pointed out that the fundamental task of news reporting is to express facts through people. In character reports, the personality traits and three-dimensional images of characters are shaped by describing their behaviors and narrating their life experiences. Along the development path of news reporting, whether starting from the subjectivity of "people" or from the event itself, the final focus is always "people" [3]. Therefore, the importance of character reports in journalistic professional practice cannot be ignored.

The "Extreme Women" series has precisely addressed the gap in the key elements of in-depth reports and launched a series of dialogues. The innovative practice of the "Extreme Women" series reports (2024) by New Weekly has dual research values: first, as a transformation sample of in-depth reports in the converged media era, its narrative strategy provides insights for resolving the "depth paradox"; second, as a typical case of feminist media practice, it demonstrates unique value in breaking gender stereotypes and constructing a new type of gender discourse. This study attempts to fill two gaps in existing research: the systematic deconstruction of the narrative system of in-depth reports in the new media context and the concrete presentation of feminist theory in journalistic practice.

2. Image construction: real and diverse women's stories

Different from the traditional approach of analyzing characters from a news perspective, the series focuses on women from different backgrounds and occupations, depicting solid and rich character images through segments of in-depth "extreme moments". It shows the challenges and growth of women in life, career, and emotions through real personal stories. For example, the writer Qi Jinnian shared her experience from becoming famous at a young age to reconstructing herself,

demonstrating the struggle of East Asian women between family and self. This diversified perspective not only enriches the connotation of feminism but also explores the inner qualities, growth experiences, and mental journeys of typical characters. These characters are not the traditional images of selfless dedication and kindness but rather individuals with strong personal charm, independent personalities, and rich three-dimensional traits.

2.1. The return of subjectivity in female images

With the rise of feminist thought and social attention to gender equality, women's issues have become increasingly prominent in news reports. Traditional news reports often take a male perspective as the dominant one, and female images are often marginalized or stereotyped in reports. However, with the rise of female power, more and more media have begun to focus on female perspectives, explore women's stories, and present diverse female images. Feminist Media Studies points out that media play an important role in shaping social gender concepts. Presenting women's stories through in-depth reports can not only break traditional gender stereotypes but also promote social attention and discussion on gender equality [4].

The selection of typical characters is extensive. It includes not only well-known "successful women" but also ordinary women rooted in the vast land, ensuring both breadth and depth in character selection. The writing method is flexible; excellent character reports integrate rich detailed descriptions, sincere emotional expressions, and fascinating story narration, which can touch the readers' hearts and trigger in-depth thinking. The topics of "Extreme Women" are attractive and unique while maintaining professionalism. The first chapter focuses on Zhang Yingming, a talented female student admitted to Tsinghua University with reduced scores. It deeply portrays her image of being unyielding, cheerful, lively, and full of love for life, guiding young women to be progressive, confident, and outstanding. She hopes to have the ability to start from scratch no matter where she is, and that women's success should be based on freedom and self-sufficiency, and that she has the confidence and courage to start from scratch anywhere. She has a firm sense of self, constantly iterates and improves herself, and possesses the spirit of pursuing excellence and a strong desire for self-growth.

Vivid stories are used to depict character images. In the fifth article, Yu Xiaodan shifted from engaging in literature to designing "atypical bras" for breast cancer patients, exploring the complex emotions of people behind her works as well as the hidden and unclassifiable physical and psychological dilemmas of women. She shares her observations on herself, others, and the little-known aspects of women's bodies. In East Asian mother-daughter relationships, the most common tensions and conflicts almost focus on the body. She discusses the issue of aging and strives to break the window of silence regarding women's bodies. This is a common and effective method.

2.2. Capturing the mutual achievement of external and internal traits

In the "Extreme Women" series reports, the mutual construction of the external and internal images of characters also deserves attention. Through accurate descriptions of external images and subtle expressions of internal emotions, the reports shape rich and three-dimensional character images. The parties or insiders in character reports have subjectivity; therefore, when describing the external characteristics of characters in character reports, it is necessary to not only summarize accurately but also express them subtly. When news producers first express a story or event, and correspondingly, the characters related to the protagonist in the story or event also respond and express their views on the event, this enables the initial outline of the character image in the in-depth character report.

Semiotics points out that the mutual construction of external and internal images is an important means of shaping character images. By describing external images and exploring internal emotions, the reports not only enhance the three-dimensional sense of the characters but also arouse the readers' emotional resonance [5].

For example, the seventh article "Ye Tong, the 'Versatile Best Actress', Fears Most Being Asked Why She Doesn't Age" skillfully connects the description of the character's external image with that of her internal traits. When constructing the character, not all details are presented one by one; instead, it is described as: "She had a neat head of silver-gray short hair, which was my deepest first impression when I saw Ye Tong. During the interview with Ye Tong, I often felt her playfulness and casual sense of humor. When she was focused, her eyes would fix on the person or thing in front of her, observing quietly and simply; when she was relaxed, her words and expressions were lively, with witty remarks from time to time, and when talking about exciting topics, she would laugh like a child." "Ye Tong, with her white hair hanging loosely, wearing a short-sleeved white T-shirt, sat by the window playing the electric guitar. Some netizens exclaimed that the female celebrity had aged and was not as she was in their memories, while others left comments: 'It's just like a young person dyed their hair "grandma gray"; she has great vitality.'" Then, it naturally transitions to Ye Tong talking about the mutual achievement with her roles, how women can live authentically, dismantle labels and packaging, accept herself at different age stages, and have her own thoughts on the current popular aesthetics. A vivid image of an "ageless woman who always looks forward, loves new things, and has critical thinking about traffic" is presented in a three-dimensional way. The report not only presents the excellent traits in traditional value judgments but also shows highly differentiated characteristics.

2.3. Symbolic construction: multi-dimensional decoding of female images

In the special topic "Yu Xiaodan: Body Politics in Bra Design", the report deconstructs the female body through a triple symbol system: Visual symbols - close-up shots of scars after breast cancer surgery, challenging the myth of the perfect body; Linguistic symbols - "This is not underwear, but survival equipment", reconstructing the functional meaning of the item; Behavioral symbols - scenes where the designer and patients try on clothes together, constructing an equal dialogue relationship. This symbolic practice echoes Butler's "gender performance" theory, elevating the body from the biological category to the dimension of political expression. The series reports also carefully design intergenerational dialogues. Representatives of the post-60s generation, with Ye Tong as the example, focus on the core topics of age anxiety and self-remodeling, with a narrative style mainly based on nostalgic montage. Representatives of the post-80s generation, with Qi Jinnian as the example, discuss original families and individual independence, with a narrative style of stream-of-consciousness monologue. Representatives of Generation Z, with Zhang Yingming as the example, explore academic discrimination and cross-border innovation, mainly using gamified narration.

3. Narrative characteristics: vivid perspectives and styles

The "pyramid structure" of traditional in-depth reports is being replaced by "honeycomb narration". Each issue of the "Extreme Women" report consists of three layers: Core layer - 3,000-character in-depth feature articles (story core); Extended layer - short video interviews (emotional touchpoints); Interactive layer - UGC content under #HerLetter# (relationship chain activation). This multi-layered narrative structure confirms Jenkins' "transmedia storytelling" theory, which constructs a three-dimensional meaning network through the complementary characteristics of different media

platforms. Data shows that the completion rate of short videos in this series of reports reaches 78%, an increase of 210% compared with pure text reports, confirming the advantage of multimodal narration in competing for attention [6].

Roland Barthes once said: "The nature of narrative originated synchronously with human history; there is no, and will never be, a nation without narrative in any corner of the world." This article analyzes the text of the character reports in this column, and conducts research and summary from the perspectives of narrators, narrative perspectives, and narrative strategies. It expresses positions and triggers readers' thinking. Different from news-style character reports, this series of reports has a distinct sense of self and a very distinctive style. It not only reports on an event or a person but also expresses unique values and communicates with readers. Through diversified narrative perspectives, the "Extreme Women" series reports show the challenges and growth of women at different life stages. Unlike traditional news reports, this series not only focuses on women's external achievements but also deeply explores their inner world and emotional experiences. By combining multiple narrative perspectives such as first-person narration and third-person narration, the reports present rich female images. Narratology points out that the choice of narrative perspective directly affects the reader's understanding of the story and emotional resonance. Through diversified narrative perspectives, the "Extreme Women" series reports break the limitation of a single perspective in traditional news reports, allowing readers to understand and feel women's stories from multiple angles [7].

3.1. In-depth exploration of feminism and life practice

The series of interviews deeply explores the embodiment and application of feminist theory in real life. The interviews not only focus on personal growth but also cover topics such as gender equality, intergenerational differences, social prejudices, "erotic capital", "mother-daughter relationship", and "marriage and independence" - all important topics in feminist theory. For example, the anthropologist He Wapi explores the stigmatization of female victims through analyzing case reasoning, demonstrating the application of feminism in specific social issues. She discusses her observations on justice, rumors, human nature, and public opinion after seeing the depth of human nature, the depth of entanglement, and the depth of darkness. He Wapi focuses on the answers behind cold cases and pursues simple justice. She can block fear and anger when dealing with terrifying cases and calmly record the process and evidence. She has sensitivity and insight into the dilemmas faced by women.

The series pays attention to issues such as women's collective dilemmas and problems, personal growth, self-reconstruction, career, family, dreams, and popular aesthetics. It also focuses on various special industries, setting an example and giving confidence to thousands of women, making rich female images more "visible". Whether they are women who became famous at a young age or women like A Bao (in her 20s or 60s) who write about desires at the grassroots level, they are all "extreme women". A Bao is like a thorny grass that was abducted, defrauded, suffered from wind and rain, and even after being uprooted, can take root again. Although she is an illiterate woman, she has a strong desire to write; in her humble life, she has the courage to rebuild her home and holds simple beliefs, growing like a seed. "Extreme women" are not limited; each of them is a vivid individual. "Extreme women" are a path leading to specific individuals; at the end of the path, there are straight and broad roads as well as gardens with branching paths. Putting aside social classes and titles, they polish themselves with the "stones" in their hearts, bleeding and scabbing without caring - in the daily life of this world, striving to settle oneself despite pain is the "limit" of women.

3.2. Combining emotional resonance with social issues

In the new media environment, emotional narration has become one of the important strategies for in-depth reports. Through real stories and emotional experiences, the "Extreme Women" series reports arouse the audience's emotional resonance. The reports not only present women's successes and achievements but also deeply explore their confusion and struggles when facing life challenges. Emotional Communication Theory points out that emotions play an important role in information dissemination. Through emotional narration, the reports can not only enhance the audience's sense of participation and identity but also trigger extensive social discussions on women's issues [8].

The "Extreme Women" series of in-depth reports arouse the audience's emotional resonance through real dialogues and stories, while discussing social issues such as gender equality and social prejudices. For example, through the #HerLetter# activity, readers share their confusion and insights, while guests provide support and suggestions through reply letters. This interactive form not only enhances the appeal of the reports but also provides a new platform for discussions on social issues. The "Extreme Women" series of interviews showcases the diverse expressions of feminism, from academic research to personal narration, and from social actions to emotional experiences. This diversified expression not only enriches the connotation of feminism but also provides a more comprehensive perspective for understanding feminism. This in-depth report covers women of different generations, from the post-60s to the post-80s, demonstrating the differences and commonalities among women of different generations when facing gender issues. This intergenerational dialogue not only reveals the development of feminism in different historical stages but also provides a historical context for understanding contemporary feminism.

4. The dual application of zero-degree perspective and emotional narration

Against the background of new media technology reshaping the communication pattern, in-depth reports not only need to complete the basic function of information transmission but also must respond to the public's in-depth expectations at the emotional and value levels. The rise of social media has promoted the transformation of the communication model from one-way indoctrination to two-way interaction, and emotional connection has become a key factor in enhancing user stickiness and content influence. Meanwhile, in the post-truth and emotional online public opinion environment, the tension between reason and emotion, objectivity and empathy has become increasingly prominent, putting forward higher requirements for news narrative strategies. It is against this context that the "Extreme Women" series reports explore a balanced path between humanistic care and professional standards through the combination of zero-degree perspective and emotional narration.

4.1. Emotional narration: the construction of empathy in in-depth reports in the new media environment

When conducting in-depth character reports on new media platforms, it is necessary to balance the public's information needs and emotional needs to maximize the communication effect. Social platforms such as Weibo and WeChat not only undertake the function of information transmission but also become important channels for two-way emotional interaction between the media and the audience. The development of new media can expand the audience's perceptual dimension, enabling them to generate new emotional reactions and cognitive experiences while obtaining information, forming a superimposed effect of communication. However, there are also many negative emotions

in the current online environment, such as lying flatism, consumerism, social anxiety, and emotional apathy, which are impacting the transmission of positive values. Phenomena such as cyberbullying, rumors, and excessive entertainment emerging in the post-truth era have further intensified public negative emotions. Therefore, in-depth reports should proactively guide positive values, present human warmth and social beauty with the help of new media, and rebuild public trust and emotional connections.

With women's stories as the narrative core, the "Extreme Women" column deeply explores the humanistic values that can arouse resonance. It emphasizes a hierarchical progression in character construction: starting from external characteristics such as appearance, language, and actions, and gradually deepening into the inner world and spiritual traits. By using delicate narrative techniques, it shapes real and three-dimensional character images, and finally achieves emotional resonance with the audience. For example, in the report on Jiang Yilei (Papi Jiang), the column avoids her public image as a short video creator, and instead focuses on her "extreme trait" of continuous content output and her self-positioning and rational choices in cross-border attempts. It presents an image of a sober, restrained, and insightful contemporary woman, greatly enhancing the appeal and communication power of the report.

4.2. Zero-degree narration: a balanced strategy between objective discourse and implied values

"Zero-degree Narration" is another important narrative strategy in the "Extreme Women" series. This concept originates from the neutral writing theory proposed by Roland Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*, which emphasizes that authors should suppress subjective emotions and value judgments, and entrust the right of understanding to readers through objective and calm narration. In journalistic practice, zero-degree narration requires journalists to avoid directly expressing positions and realize implicit value guidance through the selection of facts and presentation of details, thereby enhancing the objectivity and credibility of the report [9].

In the application of zero-degree narration, this column does not completely exclude emotions, but outlines the characters' fates with restrained and implicit writing, leaving sufficient room for readers' interpretation. For example, in the report on Qi Jinnian, the journalist calmly records her process of self-exploration and spiritual reconstruction; in the narration of Yu Xiuhua, the report presents her living posture of "living openly with a body covered in mud" in a nearly plain description style, and her dignity emerges naturally without judgment. This narrative strategy not only maintains journalistic professionalism but also provides a broader platform for displaying the strength of the characters themselves.

Through the organic combination of emotional narration and zero-degree narration, the "Extreme Women" series not only realizes the positive guidance of values but also ensures the objectivity and authenticity of the reports, providing an important model for the narrative innovation of in-depth reports in the new media era. The practice of this column shows that in-depth reports are gradually moving from "information transmission" to "meaning production", and their innovation is reflected in three aspects: deconstructing gender stereotypes with symbolic strategies, activating public discussions with emotional narration, and expanding the discourse space with technological empowerment. Future research can further focus on the impact of algorithm recommendation on the visibility of female narratives and the negotiation mechanism of gender discourse in cross-cultural contexts, thereby promoting the continuous development of in-depth reports in terms of public nature and professionalism.

5. Conclusion

Against the dual background of the evolution of the new media ecology and gender awareness, the "Extreme Women" series reports of New Weekly are not only a successful attempt at the integrated transformation of in-depth reports but also a socially significant breakthrough in female narration. Through the construction of real and three-dimensional images, the narrative strategy of interweaving emotion and zero-degree narration, and the keen integration of public issues, it provides a tense sample for us to understand in-depth reports and female discourse practice in the new media era. The fundamental innovation of this series lies in its resistance to "abstract ideologies" with "specific individuals", and its redefinition of "limit" as a daily and brave life state through the stories of women with diverse occupations, generations, and situations. It uses transmedia storytelling to expand communication effectiveness without sacrificing depth due to the logic of short videos.

It is worth mentioning that the reports maintain narrative restraint in emotional resonance and leave room for readers' interpretation in value guidance, reflecting the rare content determination in the post-truth era. It proves to us that the communication of women's issues neither needs preaching nor catering to traffic; the real influence comes from the sincere respect and presentation of others' life experiences. In the future, such narrative practices also need to be alert to the risk of being dissolved by technological rationality, such as the compression of the diversity of issues by algorithm recommendation or the "symbolization" tendency of women's stories in the new media context. The true value of in-depth reports should still lie in continuing to promote dialogue, enhance understanding, and safeguard the concreteness of people and the complexity of stories in the noisy public opinion field.

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