

The Communication Characteristics of meme Culture in Social Media among Adolescent Groups and Its Influence

-- Taking Tik-Tok as an Example

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Abstract

This study explores the production, dissemination, and consumption of meme culture in the adolescent community in a panoramic way, and through content analysis, summarizes the characteristics of its birth in the process of text and moving pictures, the dominance of satirical emotions, the fragmentation of information delivery, entertainment expression, and early intervention in the content of adult society. Through the interview method, the analysis concludes that meme culture will bring adolescents stress relief, provide social capital, and promote understanding of current social events, as well as implicit social distance and negative language socialization effects.

Keywords

Irony; Identity; Community; meme culture.

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, Internet memes, as an emerging cultural phenomenon, have rapidly integrated into people's daily lives. The values and moral values spread by many memes are contrary to the positive thoughts of society. For example, some memes will satirize the relevant issues of social reality, fail to guide young people to have a correct understanding and view of Chinese history, and affect young people's independent thinking and analysis and judgment. Ability, as well as some jokes will impact the minds and outlook of young people, which may lead to some illegal and criminal incidents or things that damage social morality. Moreover, due to the rapid spread of memes among teenagers, the cultural level of teenagers will decline. As teenagers gradually deepen their understanding and familiarity with memes, they will be separated from their original knowledge and culture, leading to cultural degradation and aphasia.

The Internet itself is a mass media, and its basic function is to carry and transmit all kinds of information. In this regard, it is not substantially different from other media, such as radio, newspapers, television, magazines, etc. As a mass media, the Internet faces the public. When it carries and transmits information, it must use language forms common in society. Of course, there are also certain variations.

In the new media era, relationships between people have spread from real life to online platforms, building new communities in virtual space. Here, memes gradually becomes the unique dialect of the field. People use it to cultivate a tacit understanding and get to know each other. It is the basis for identification and the basis for the maintenance of the group. Memes, with their metaphorical and flexible verbal expressions, have become a novel language phenomenon in the Internet era and have increasingly become a word game widely participated in by netizens in the current virtual space. Popular "memes" such as "Liangliang", "Net Yiyu", "Shi Dong Ran Reject", "Fat House Happy Water", etc.

The cultural phenomenon of meme means something new and innovative, which can enrich the diversity of language and often reflect and comment on current affairs, social issues or cultural phenomena. They provide a platform for individuals to express their opinions, criticize social norms, or share experiences in a relaxed, approachable way. Meme culture, which uses humor, sarcasm or clever puns to elicit laughter and create a sense of shared entertainment among internet users, has the power to influence popular culture, shape trends and influence the way people communicate and interact online.

Tik-Tok is an open medium that uses audio, video, and pictures as content. It is a product of mature digital technology and the progress of the times. It has the characteristics of strong interaction, fragmentation, entertainment, etc., and is deeply loved by the majority of teenagers. As the most popular short video social software in China, Tik-Tok has become the new business card of the social era. The various popular memes that appear in its short videos have a broad and profound impact on young people establishing correct values. Its output methods and content are profound. Affects young people's value cognition, value judgment, value pursuit and value goals.

The research question of this article is, in the meme culture phenomenon of Internet short video platforms represented by Tik-Tok, why do teenagers spread memes? What are the characteristics and expressions of the meme culture spread by teenagers? How does meme culture spread within the youth community, and what impact will it have?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Characteristics of the spread of meme culture on the Internet

WANG Zijian and LI Lingling discussed the communication characteristics of memes in the form of the Internet in "The Implications, Connotations and Communication Logic of Internet "Meme" Culture". They believed that: First, the spread of memes is a cultural carnival of mass imitation. Netizens have joined in one after another, constantly participating in copying, modifying, and recreating. Everyone is the successor and editor of Internet memes, and memes have become the most representative "producer text" among a wide range of products. Second, people form a community of interests centered on memes. The cyber people who understand and understand memes gather together under the centripetal force of the corresponding memes to form a new community - a "interesting community" built around the meme culture mainly through the Internet for information exchange, emotional sharing and identity recognition. , which is characterized by fast topic changes, interactive and proliferative communication, so topics are easy to break out of the circle, and individuals will get involved in multiple interesting communities. Third, the meme culture breaks the previous routines of using words and sentences and supplements the existing language system in the form of simplification, homophony, and extension. In the process of communication, some people assign symbolic value to memes, which is "encoding", and other people analyze their symbolic value and add more new meanings to them, which is "decoding".

ZHAO Guangya's "Exploration on the Practical Logic and Motivation of "Meme" Culture in the Internet Age - Taking the Virtual Community of Station B as an Example" took the "Meme" culture in the virtual community of Station B as an example and found that in practice it not only presents a playful and self-deprecating characteristics, and also shows typical subculture style characteristics through collage and isomorphism. In the spread of social media, "meme" culture has been accepted and recognized by the public for its internal motivations such as eliminating boredom and performing impression management.

2.2. Social Psychology Behind Internet Buzzwords

Sun Xiaobei points out in "The Study of Internet Buzzwords in the Field of Subculture" that the use of buzzwords has a clear intention of rhetorical behaviour, which is mainly classified into three kinds: metaphor and exaggeration, parody, and irony, which correspond to the collage, isomorphism, and ideological practice in the way of subcultural style construction, respectively. Carnival experience is also the inner power of the subcultural practice of Internet buzzwords, in which people get surreal and intellectual mental pleasure in the language carnival of Internet buzzwords.

CHEN Yimin, in "The Interpretation of Cyber-popular Words at the Linguistic Level", classified and summarized the popular hot meme back in 2008, and put forward three characteristics of meme, which are: firstly, cyber-popular words are a social phenomenon. Secondly, a meme is a product of collective identity and conventional language. Thirdly, the figurative, formatting and simplicity in the construction of words and phrases of Internet buzzwords make them vivid, easy to refer to and convenient to express, which satisfy the intrinsic requirements of the rapid popularity and wide dissemination of Internet buzzwords.

MAN Xiong, in his article "Style-Resistance-Acquisition: A Study of Internet Popular Words in the Context of Youth Subculture", argues that Internet popular words present a different style of resistance from that of traditional Western subcultures, i.e., retreating resistance, which influences people's daily life, linguistic interactions and cognitive behaviour in an unobtrusive manner; Internet popular words hide subcultural resistance in "mild" and "gentle" ways. Internet buzzwords hide the resistance of subculture behind the appearance of "moderation", which has forcefully realized the cultural functions of youth subculture in deconstructing traditions, overstepping class, and giving voice to themselves; Internet buzzwords are also in the process of accepting and counter-adopting, which makes the relationship between mainstream culture and youth subculture no longer in a permanent opposition, but ambiguous and complicated.

2.3. Research hypotheses

Summarizing the above literature and theories, firstly, scholars such as WANG Qingjie and SUN Xiaobei believe that meme embody alternative expression and emotional catharsis of the social status quo, with strong ironic characteristics, and realize the function of deconstructing traditions in youth subculture. Therefore, this study proposes hypothesis one: the stronger the sense of contrast of meme, i.e., the stronger the irony and strong contrast to the real life, the higher the attraction to the youth group.

Secondly, the views of scholars such as GAO Leah and ZHAO Guangya reflect the fact that the initial purpose of meme culture is to entertain and to relieve boredom. Meanwhile, according to the communication game theory, this study proposes hypothesis two: the more playful the meme is, the higher the degree of transmission of the meme to the youth group.

Finally, it can be concluded from the research of scholars such as CHEN Yimin and WANG Zijian that meme culture has a close correlation with identity. This study proposes hypothesis three: the higher the degree of transmission of a certain type of meme within a community, the more young people will obtain a sense of group and cultural identity, and use it to construct social relationships.

3. Research Analyses

3.1. The production of meme culture: a content analysis perspective

Table 1. Coding results

Primary Characteristics	Secondary Characteristics	Index	Number	Frequency
Physical characteristics	Expression	Text	176	44%
		G.I.F.	140	35%
		Pictures	56	14%
		Voice	28	7%
	Word Count	Greater than 20 characters	56	14%
		Less than or equal to 20 characters	92	23%
Greater than 15 characters		248	62%	
Emotional Characteristics	Emotional Expression	Positive	80	20%
		Negative	192	48%
		Neutral	128	32%
	Levels of irony	Strong	254	63.5%
		Average	98	24.5%
		NO	48	12%
Source Characteristics	Type	Realistic abstract memes	270	67.5%
		Social celebrity memes	116	29%
		Homophones memes	14	3.5%
	Borrowed Culture	Local culture	46	11.5%
		Chinese culture	266	66.5%
		Japanese culture	22	5.5%
		American culture	64	16%
	Source of material	Game	34	8.5%
		Variety show	118	29.5%
		News	134	33.5%
		History	20	5%
		Anime and Animation	24	6%
		Movies and TV shows	70	17.5%
	The groups involved	K-12 students	72	18%
		Undergraduate students	120	30%
Adults		208	52%	

3.1.1. Expression forms dominated by text and motion pictures

It can be seen through the data that the proportion of pure text type meme is the largest, followed by moving pictures.

Language and text are important carriers of cultural communication. In cyberspace, network meme culture represented by language and text is a common type of communication. In traditional Chinese culture, there are strict grammatical rules on sentence formation. But the network meme culture group is not satisfied with these rigid logical norms, they usually play a whimsical use of harmonies, mix and match, abbreviation and other methods to create a language and text network meme. For example, the network abbreviation meme "v50" means "give me WeChat transfer 50 yuan", which originated from the "Crazy Thursday" promotional activities launched by KFC, and has been spoofed by netizens playing the meme as follows "v50, eat crazy Thursday". With the high flexibility of language and writing and the strong meaning-carrying capacity, language symbols represented by language and writing can derive brand-new meanings in new contexts.

As the public enters the era of "reading pictures", visual symbols have become an important carrier for people to convey information and construct meaning. As a matter of fact, what is really readable is not the written word, but the beautiful, novel and visually appealing pictures that accompany the words. Different from the communication characteristics of language and text, the visual communication symbols represented by emoticons are more popular with the Internet meme culture group by virtue of their vivid images and intuitive and easy-to-understand characteristics. The classic plot clips of film and television works and the words and behaviours of public figures usually become the direct inspiration of the network meme culture group, and the creators also incorporate humorous and meaningful words into the production process of emoticons. Most of the classic network meme culture emoticons come from mainstream and popular culture works with a certain degree of influence, which to a certain extent brings the communication distance between network meme culture and mainstream and popular culture closer.

3.1.2. Transmission and acquisition of information in a fragmented way

It can be seen through the data that the word count of meme is mostly less than or equal to 15 words, and a few are more than 15 words.

Under the influence of society's fast-paced lifestyle, modern people show the characteristics of an eager mind. The reading of the public also gradually pursues the principle of economic practicality and high efficiency, i.e., receiving the most accurate and concise information in the shortest time and at the lowest cost. The fragmented information in cyberspace is exactly in line with the public's demand for "short and fast" reading. However, when a large amount of fragmented information floods into the mind in a short time, the logical connection between the information is often ignored. Long-term flat fast browsing habits make it difficult for people to concentrate on reading for a long time, and people are more and more resistant to receiving complete and coherent grand narratives and systematic knowledge, getting lost in the sea of fragmented information. In this context, network meme culture producers split systematic texts from mainstream culture and popular culture into fragmented text fragments, and on the basis of retaining certain symbolic elements of the original text fragments, they subvert the original meaning logic of the text fragments through reordering or hybridization and reorganization. For example, the Internet meme "zhenxiang" is used to tease a person who breaks a promise by saying what he or she thinks is not true, and it only takes two simple words to quickly make people understand the meaning of what it expresses.

3.1.3. Irony-based Emotional Themes

Most of the creative inspirations of the producers of Internet meme culture come from the real life of the society, and the texts of Internet meme naturally reflect the dynamic changes of the current social environment and characterize the mentality of the members of the society. Employment, as the foundation of people's livelihood, has always received great attention from all walks of life. In the post epidemic era, the employment situation in China is still severe.

Enterprises in the Internet, finance and other industries have started a new round of large-scale salary cuts and layoffs in order to reduce human resource costs. However, as the enrolment of colleges and universities across the country has expanded in recent years, the number of fresh graduates from colleges and universities is increasing day by day. As a result, the structural contradiction between supply and demand between the small number of jobs and the large working population remains prominent. At the same time, people have long been imbued with Confucianism and scholarly sentiments, and "He who excels in study can follow an official career" has been the ultimate goal of most talented elites from ancient times to the present. National civil service examination and provincial civil service examination as the most direct and fair way to join the national or local governance team, by the aspiring young people endowed with a beautiful vision of realizing the value of life.

In response to the current phenomenon of difficult job search and hot public exams, the makers of "Unemployed after graduation", "no door to serve the country" and other Internet hot stems, a graphic reflection of the current stage of the employment of young people groups facing difficulties. In addition to the topic of employment, which has attracted a lot of attention, online meme culture producers have also extensively touched on social and livelihood topics such as housing, education and marriage.

In recent years, as cyberspace governance continues to intensify, people's space for emotional catharsis is constantly being squeezed. The media have blocked the channels for people to vent their negative emotions through a series of means such as agenda setting and topic shifting. As a result, cyber memes have become the symbolic resources that people can use to achieve emotional catharsis. Most of the endless network memes are the symbols of individual negative emotions, for example, "positive invalid", "social animal" and other network memes are the active stigmas of the youth group in the deep social involution of the predicament, and they use self-deprecating ways to relieve the hopelessness and discouragement of negative emotions. They use self-deprecation as a way to relieve the negative emotions of hopelessness and despondency.

3.1.4. Entertaining life themes, early intervention in adult society

It can be seen from the data that the memes are mainly realistic and abstract, mostly from news and variety shows, and the topics involve mostly college students and adult groups. Youth culture can best reflect the essential characteristics of social change, which is not just a self-indulgent game for young people, but a symptom of social crisis and a metaphor for social change. Whether at the beginning of the production of Internet meme culture, the producers aim to make people laugh, or after the production of Internet meme culture, the humorous and absurd style is presented, through the whole process of the production of Internet meme culture, the idea of happyism and entertainment is always embodied.

Such memes as "the clown is actually myself" and "acting like a clown" are game terms used by the communicators for real life relationships, and the communicators choose this kind of labeled and metaphorical network meme text with comedic colour as a performance tool, which is satirical and self-mocking to the relationship life of young men and women. It is ironic and self-mocking of young men and women's love life.

In addition, the fact that the memes disseminated by the adolescent group come from the Internet and cover a wide range of topics also means that they are involved in the adult society in advance through these memes, and understand what they will face in the future, which is a kind of socialization embodiment through social media. For example, the meme "Office worker" is originally a helpless and teasing expression of working people's own situation, but this Internet meme reflects a kind of passive, decadent and negative mentality that exists in the current society, and teenagers use it in completing all kinds of homework assigned by the school,

completing the social practice during holidays, and carrying out internships and other scenarios.

3.2. Dissemination of meme culture and its influencing factors: the perspective of questionnaire analysis

In this study, 135 questionnaires were distributed and returned, and the Cronbach's coefficient was 0.937, which passed the reliability test; the KMO value was 0.938, which passed the validity test. 15.56% of the respondents were 13-14 years old, 37.78% of the respondents were 14-15 years old, 44.44% of the respondents were 16-17 years old, and 2.22% of the respondents were 18-19 years old. Males accounted for 53.33 per cent and females 46.67 per cent. The respondents' schools covered junior high school, private high school, public high school international department, general high school, and secondary vocational college. 18.52% of the respondents were from the Northeast region, 21.48% were from the Northwest region, 11.11% were from the Southwest region, 20.74% were from the Southeast region, and 28.15% were from the North China region.

The results of correlation and regression analyses show that there is a significant positive correlation between the degree to which respondents consider memes to be ironic and the attractiveness of memes to them; the model passes the F-test, which means that the research model has significance; and the value of the VIF is less than 5, which means that there is no covariance problem, and the model is better. The regression coefficient is 0.62. The model R^2 value is 0.351, which means that the level of irony of memes explains 35% of the variation in the attractiveness of memes to adolescents. Hypothesis one is valid, the higher the sense of contrast of the meme, the more attractive it is to the youth group.

The results of correlation and regression analyses show that the degree of respondents' perception of memes as playful is significantly and positively correlated with their degree of spreading of the memes; the model passes the F-test, implying that the research model has significance; and the VIF values are all less than 5, implying that there is no covariance problem and the model is good. The regression coefficients were 0.16, 0.19, 0.42, and 0.15. The R^2 value of the model was 0.636, which implies that the playfulness of memes explains 63% of the variation in the spread of memes by adolescents. Hypothesis two is valid, the higher the playfulness of the meme, the stronger the spread of it by the youth group.

The results of correlation and regression analyses show that there is a significant positive correlation between respondents' propagation of specific types of memes within the community and the degree to which they identify with the community; the model passes the F-test, which means that the research model has significance; and the value of the VIF is less than 5, which means that there is no covariance problem, and the model is better. The regression coefficient is 0.59. The model R^2 value is 0.358, which means that the correlation factor explains 35% of the variation in the development of identity among youth. Hypothesis three is valid, the more the youth group spreads their particular type of meme within the community, the more they will develop identification and belonging.

3.3. Influence of meme Culture on Adolescents: an Interview Method Perspective

This study adopts the form of on-site interviews to recruit 10 Tik-Tok teenage users, aged 15-16, as research subjects. The screening criteria for the interviewees of this study are: 1. high school students; 2. normal verbal comprehension as well as expression ability; 3. normal values; 4. agreement and voluntary participation in this study. Based on the interview data, it was summarized into 4 themes:

3.3.1. Stress Relief

In real life, the expression of individual emotions is usually transmitted with the help of body movements and facial expressions. Digital emotions in cyberspace are mostly an extension of real-life emotions, and individuals usually rely on symbols to reproduce and transmit their emotions in the absence of physical presence. Memes can allow adolescents to detach themselves from specific emotional events and view them from a more entertaining perspective, examining themselves.

Interviewee A: Nowadays, the pressure on students is getting bigger and bigger, and since memes are entertaining, students can play memes moderately after studying to relax and reduce pressure.

Interviewee E: I like to use the phrase "positively wasted", that is, every time a new semester starts, a new month starts, I set a goal, but I never achieve it.

3.3.2. Social capital

Mememes have a kind of viral magic, and their "self-replication" refers to the spread of the content between people, in this sense, it becomes a kind of social currency. Modern teenagers are keen on chasing social capital, and in the social scene, they need to show their knowledge, ability and talent to reflect their status. Mememes have attributes that precisely meet the need to show their social status in conversations, some mememes can show their sense of humour, some mememes can show their high intelligence, or reflect their status in the circle culture. By using some mememes in social interaction, you can increase your sense of social dominance at a very low cost.

Interviewee B: When I go out for a trip or attend an event, I will send a sentence "Thanks for the invitation, I am in xxx".

Interviewee F: There are some phrases that you have to think for a while to understand, but if you use them in chatting, you will look more advanced because other people will ask what it means.

3.3.3. Distance and exclusion

Adolescent groups will imitate the use of mememes that match their style in existing communities, thus forming community identity, but at the same time, implicit social distance and rejection will arise. This kind of distance and exclusion includes two aspects, on the one hand, the communication is reduced due to the lack of understanding of some mememes, and on the other hand, the sarcastic mememes with strong targeting cause resentment from others.

Interviewee A: In a group, if someone does not understand a certain meme, it may cause him/her to feel uncomfortable in social situations.

Respondent C: Some people share their lives on social media, for example, there was a person who posted a video of himself playing basketball, but he wasn't particularly strong at basketball. He just wants to share his life, but some people may comment on him with "Can you rap?"

Interviewee H: Students often watch ghost clips together. For example, the "Italian Cannon" in the film and television ghost animal circle, people who have not seen the ghost animal version of the "Bright Sword" will be confused about this terrain, and naturally, they will not be able to get into the circle's smooth communication.

3.3.4. Socialization

Individual socialization begins with the mastery of language, and all socialisation is predicated on language socialization. Language, including words, speech and other meaning symbols, is a symbolic system of consensus and a means for people to think and communicate with each other. Only after mastering a language can an individual accept the corresponding social customs and attitudes and mould his personality. As a form of language, meme also has a socialization function, helping young people to better perceive society. At the same time,

excessive use of memes may cause adolescents to lack normal communication and language expression skills, which may have a negative impact on socialization.

Respondent I: Memes can help us grow up. The speed of communication of memes enables teenagers to keep up with current events and expand their knowledge, which is beneficial to our learning and growth. At the same time, parents or learning institutions can encourage students and children to play positive memes to expand their knowledge with memes, not to play bad memes or memes with a negative message, to help children grow.

Interviewee F: I think this really affects their ability to communicate and language expression, take her class as an example, her language expression in addition to memes have no way to use other language to express, the impact is still very bad, if she one day really goes to a more formal occasions, she can not speak with the environment to match the language.

4. Conclusions of the Discussion

4.1. Summary

The rapid development of digital technology has built an open and diversified information society for the public, and the changes of the times have changed people's cognitive thinking and lifestyles, and online meme culture has emerged in the innovation of digital media and the change of the times.

This study explores the production, dissemination, and consumption of meme culture in the youth group in a panoramic way, and through content analysis, summarizes its characteristics in the process of its birth, which are mainly text and moving pictures, dominated by satirical emotions, fragmented delivery of information, entertaining expression, and early intervention in the content of adult society. Through the questionnaire data analysis, it is learned that the irony of memes will affect the attraction of memes to adolescents, and the playfulness of memes will promote the dissemination of memes, meanwhile, adolescents' use of characteristic types of memes within the community will enhance their identification with and belonging to the community. On this basis, this study analyses the effects of meme culture on adolescents' stress relief, provision of social capital, and promotion of understanding of current social events, as well as implicit social distance and negative linguistic socialization through the interview method.

4.2. Outlook

When new social problems or social events occur, people no longer use the old ways of expression to objectively state them, but generalize them into new words to record history, describe society and reflect reality. The Internet meme culture revellers make use of the Internet meme culture text to record the reality of social life and social development, thus making up for the shortcomings of the slow reception of real-life information caused by the "off-domain".

When the Internet meme is deeply wedged into the speaker's thinking mode, it is very easy for the speaker to find no other words and sentences to replace the Internet meme in real social situations. This kind of sudden brain "went dead", will force the speaker into a passive state of communication, and even produce a sense of anxiety and frustration more resistant to expression. It means that when the speaker is talking to the other party, the substantive content of the conversation is usually filled with a large number of repetitive and homogeneous network memes. When the other party receives less effective information, this kind of communication is similar to meaningless communication, which is also essentially aphasia of expression.

Meme culture texts will be injected with the viewpoints and attitudes and emotional stances of the makers and disseminators, and the attitudes or opinions pointed out in these meme texts

have a certain degree of radicalism. When the audience's emotions and opinions are involved in the group by brushing the meme, it has an irresistible power. At this time, the individual consciousness of most communicators is replaced by the collective unconscious, and individuals are more likely to be a "social justice warrior". Vulgar stems such as "Chicken you are too beautiful", "you old six" and so on have already involved personality insults and language violence against others, seriously disturbing the spiritual world of young people, and even conveying undesirable value orientations.

The current research and discussion on meme culture has paid less attention to the socialization effect of meme culture on adolescents, and we expect that more research will be conducted in this area in the future.

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