

# ***Community Identity and People's Perception and Production of Internet Slang Written in Acronyms***

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**Abstract:** Internet slang has been a subject that has attracted researchers in the field of linguistics in recent years. In this paper, a quantitative and qualitative method is presented to study the relationship between community identity and people's perception and production of Internet slang written in acronyms, taking the community of fans in China, for example, and the phenomenon of the subculture incorporation in the aspect of the acronyms. It is demonstrated that there is no direct correlation between community identity and how people perceive and create acronyms. The influence of mass media and the Internet, government/official intervention, and people's propensity to follow trends may contribute to the subculture's incorporation in this aspect. The features of the most popular and the least popular acronyms outside the fan community are also presented in the paper.

**Keywords:** Internet slang, acronym, community identity, fan community, subculture incorporation

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

With the development of technology and the widespread availability of the Internet, more and more people have started to use Internet slang both on the Internet and during face-to-face communications. One of the most commonly used types of Internet slang is the acronym. The use of acronyms as Internet slang in China originated from the community of fans [1]. It is concluded that the creation and sharing of various types of content, as well as interactions amongst fans, help to shape fan culture in the community [2]. Fan culture is a significant part of subculture in the new media environment. It is not limited to specific genres, as found in sports, music, and SF fandoms [3]. The fan culture in China is such a unique phenomenon that you can hardly see it in other cultural backgrounds. On social media, admirers of various stars occasionally quarrel and harass one another, which might draw unfavorable attention from the public. Therefore, the fans started to use acronyms of idols' names so that non-fans wouldn't pay much attention to them and that their idols wouldn't be attacked for the fans' impolite behavior on the Internet. Additionally, they employ acronyms to steer clear of touchy subjects like politics, sexuality, and foul language. As time went by, the fandom produced an increasing number of acronyms. With the rapid expansion of the Internet, citizens nationwide have begun to use and even produce them.

## 1.2. Research Questions

The research focuses mainly on the following questions: 1. How does community identity affect people's perception and production of these acronyms? 2. What causes the phenomenon of the incorporation of acronyms? 3. Why did some acronyms go viral while others didn't?

## 1.3. Purpose of the Research

The research aims to study the relationship between community identity and people's perception and production of Internet slang written in acronyms, taking the fan community as an example, and the phenomenon of subcultural incorporation in the aspect of Internet slang to fill the research gap in this field. It is assumed in this paper that during this research, it might be found that many of the "outsiders" of the fan community can also understand and use the acronyms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Internet Slang

With the widespread availability of the Internet, numerous studies have been conducted on various facets of Internet slang, focusing on their classifications, definitions, features on different aspects, and their impact on people's lives. The term "Internet slang" (sometimes known as "Netspeak") refers to the particular vocabulary, abbreviations, and idioms that individuals use when interacting online. The following linguistic characteristics of Netspeak are highlighted by Crystal: lexicon, neologisms, blending, abbreviations, acronyms, and punctuation [4]. In addition, he describes seven contexts in which Internet slang is used, including chat groups, virtual worlds, the web, blogging, and instant messaging [4].

The language used in cyberspace should be considered a new variety of languages, so experts in CMC (computer-mediated communication) are constantly curious about how it differs from other languages [5]. Crystal suggests that Netspeak is a contemporary language that has not frequently appeared in the history of the race [4]. The distinctive characteristics of Netspeak, which are taken from one of its situational forms, make it enjoyable. Nowadays, these manifestations are starting to be used outside of the context of CMC. He proposes that Netspeak has primarily influenced vocabulary with graphology in some written varieties and daily conversation, giving forms from the underlying computer technology a new application for individuals who wish their talk to have a cutting-edge quality [4].

### 2.2. Acronym

According to several linguists, the acronym is an abbreviation [6]. The word "acronym" is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a word formed from the initial letters of other words or (occasionally) from the initial parts of syllables taken from other words [7].

In China, acronyms are frequently used as a form of Internet slang by taking out every first phoneme of every character of the word and combining them sequentially to form an acronym as a new word. However, most of the research at present focuses on acronyms as Internet slang in English.

The use of acronyms in Internet slang is a linguistic phenomenon that has emerged with the widespread use of the Internet and social networks. Acronyms are used in the context of Internet slang to communicate fast and effectively in online conversation [8]. It reflects how language is evolving as well as the necessity for clear, succinct communication in online interactions.

According to Quirk et al., the two primary categories of acronyms are 1. acronyms pronounced as separate letters (known as "alphabetisms"), such as VIP (essential person); 2. acronyms pronounced

as words such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) [9]. The acronyms investigated in this paper belong to the former type. These years, this kind of acronym has been widely investigated in China, but most of the research focuses mainly on one particular acronym. There is little research aiming to study the common features of the acronyms used in a specific community.

### 2.3. Social Identity and Linguistics

Social identity is a person's perception of who they are based on their membership in a group [10]. The social identity theory is the most significant contribution of Henrik Tajfel to psychology. He proposes that the groups (e.g., social class, family, football team, etc.) to which people belonged were a significant source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of being a part of the social world [10]. Social identity and linguistics are closely intertwined. While some theories propose a unidirectional influence from social to linguistic identity, others argue for a bilateral connection [11]. Language can also serve as a means of expressing and maintaining one's social identity [12]. Several studies have focused on the relationship between social identity and language. However, the methodology used in most of the studies is qualitative research inquiry with interviews or questionnaires. Therefore, a quantitative research method is added in this paper.

### 2.4. Subculture Incorporation

Subculture incorporation refers to assimilating or integrating a subculture's values, ideals, behaviors, and practices into the dominant and mainstream culture or society [13]. Most relevant research highlights the complex dynamics of subculture incorporation and the potential consequences for the subculture and the dominant culture, not the reason behind it.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Study Context

Xiaohongshu is one of the most popular Chinese social media and e-commerce platforms. It is sometimes referred to as "Chinese Instagram." As of 2022, Xiaohongshu had over 200 million monthly active users. According to reports, 70% of its users were born after 1990, making it a group of young individuals. The application allows users and influencers to post, discover, and share product reviews related to multiple fields, including beauty and health. On the website, travel bloggers are well recognized for posting frequently about tourism and leisure destinations. Xiaohongshu also operates Xiaohongshu Mall, which offers a variety of international products to Chinese users. The following 30 acronyms were selected in this research from the posts from the Xiaohongshu, which are the most frequently used on social media in China, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The acronyms studied in the research.

Acronym	Chinese Character	Chinese Pinyin	Meaning
AWSL	啊我死了	a wo si le	Ah, I'm dead
BHYS	不好意思	bu hao yi si	Excuse me / sorry
BP	白嫖	bai piao	To have something without paying
BDJW	不懂就问	bu dong jiu wen	I don't know/understand, so I'm asking
YYGQ	阴阳怪气	yin yang guai qi	To say something mockingly, ironically
CX	抄袭	chao xi	To plagiarise
DBQ	对不起	dui bu qi	Sorry

Table 1: (continued).

DDDD	懂得都懂	dong de dou dong	Anyone who understands knows
DRL	打扰了	da rao le	Sorry to bother you
GKD	搞快点	gao kuai dian	Be quick
GNPS	关你屁事	guan ni pi shi	It's none of your business.
KSWL	嗑死我了	ke si wo le	I ship them so much
KDL	嗑到了	ke dao le	I ship them
LP	老婆	lao po	Wife
NSDD	你是对的	ni shi dui de	You're right
PLMM	漂亮美眉	piao liang mei mei	Beautiful girl
PYQ	朋友圈	peng you quan	Moments (on WeChat)
QSWL	气死我了	qi si wo le	I'm so angry
SZD	是真的	shi zhen de	It's real
SJB	神经病	shen jing bing	Psychopath
WB	微博	wei bo	Weibo (a social media)
SRDS	虽然但是	sui ran dan shi	Although..., ...
SJ	视奸	shi jian	Gaze intensely
XFXY	腥风血雨	xing feng xue yu	Foul wind and bloody rain
XQL	小情侣	xiao qing lu	Lovebirds
YYDS	永远的神	yong yuan de shen	The eternal god
XP	性癖	xing pi	Sexual proclivities
ZQSG	真情实感	zhen qing shi gan	Genuine feelings
ZBC	真不错	zhen bu cuo	That's really nice
XSWL	笑死我了	xiao si wo le	I'm laughing my arse off

## 3.2. Participants

Chinese young people aged 17-26 were chosen as participants in the research. 80 valid questionnaires were collected to analyze, and nine participated in the interviews.

## 3.3. Procedure

### 3.3.1. Questionnaire

First, a questionnaire with five parts was designed and given out:

- 1) Basic information (gender, age, profession);
- 2) Their perception and production of acronyms;
- 3) Their self-awareness of whether they belong to the fan community or not;
- 4) Whether they belong to the fan community from an objective point of view;
- 5) Other questions about their perception and production of acronyms.

The 2nd part of the questionnaire examines whether the participant understands the meaning of the 30 acronyms and whether he or she has ever used them.

The 3rd and 4th parts were designed based on McMillan's theory – the sense of community. Questions of these two parts were developed based on four dimensions (membership, influence, reinforcement, and shared emotional connection) [14]. The participants were required to rate themselves from points 1 to 5 according to the extent. The scores were added up separately in the two parts to compare with the scores they earned and the answers they gave in the other parts. After the

analysis of the questionnaires, interviews were arranged to double-check the results from the questionnaires.

#### 4. Findings & Discussion

##### 4.1. The Relationship between Community Identity and People's Perception Production of Acronyms

To present the relationship between people's perception, production of acronyms, and community identity, 30 pairs of data were selected randomly from the second and fourth parts of the questionnaires to form Functions Images, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

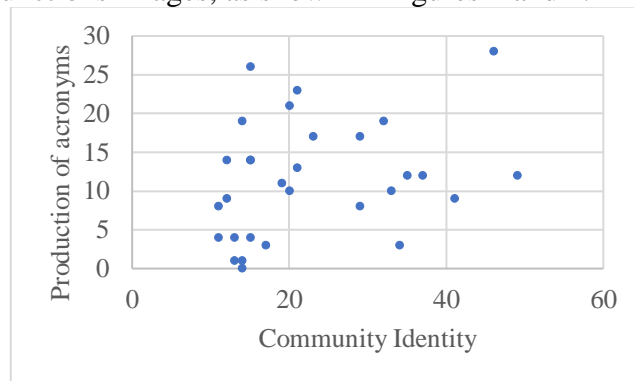


Figure 1: The relationship between community identity and people's production of acronyms.

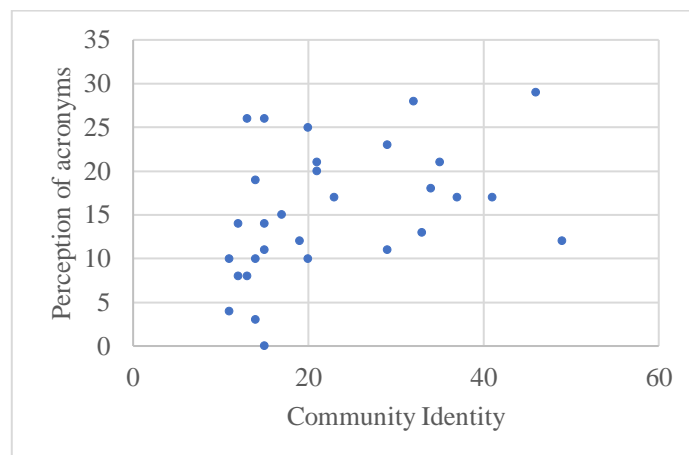


Figure 2: The relationship between community identity and people's perception of acronyms.

It is evident that community identity is uncorrelated with people's perception and production of acronyms, respectively. In other words, they are not linearly related to each other. Furthermore, 19% of the participants do not know fan culture at all, but there are just 6 out of 80 people who never use acronyms. This proves that the fan community did experience the phenomenon of subculture incorporation.

## 4.2. Factors Contributing to Subculture Incorporation in the Aspect of Acronyms

### 4.2.1.Factor 1: The impact of mass media and Internet

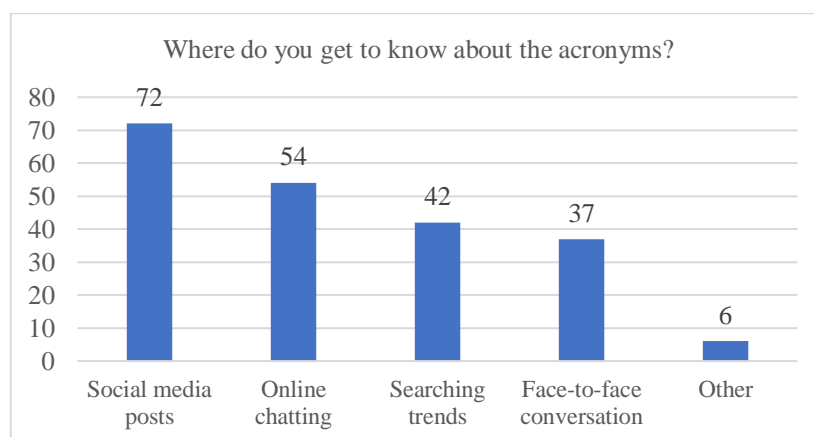


Figure 3: Where do participants get to know about the acronyms?

Thanks to the Internet, individuals now have new options to participate in subcultures that they might not otherwise have access to. According to the data collected from the questionnaires, most participants learned about the acronyms through the Internet, including social media, online chatting, and search trends, as shown in Figure 3. In China, the number of fans is immense. As a result, the posts from the fan community can be viewed frequently on social media. And to gain popularity and maximize the benefits, e-commerce platforms, and media outlets will use the acronyms as well to appeal to and attract younger consumers and netizens.

### 4.2.2.Factor 2: Government and official intervention

There is an enormous number of official accounts and major newspapers using acronyms in their posts or articles. After an extensive review of social media, it is found that official accounts, including the Beijing Municipal Committee of the Communist Youth League and People's Daily, one of the major newspapers in China. The former account has more than 2,138,000 subscribers at present. The number of subscribers of the latter account is about 152,000,000. These acronyms are exposed to the public with great frequency.

### 4.2.3.Factor 3: People's intention to follow the trends

In the questionnaire, 17.57% of the participants stated that they use acronyms just to follow the trends. According to the social cognitive theory, portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly tied to observing others within social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences [15]. The theory claims that when individuals watch a model engage in a behavior and experience the results, they retain the chronology of events and use it to direct future behavior. An observer may act out a behavior they have already learned due to observing a model [15]. In other words, imitation of other people's behavior is essential for human survival; people do not discover new behaviors only by attempting them or succeeding or failing. In addition, people desire to be recognized by others. They have the intention to join the community. It may not be the fan community, but it comprises young people nationwide. When they can't catch up with the fad, they feel left out.

Subcultures can be incorporated into or spread throughout society, transforming the subculture and the dominant culture. Subcultures can provide people with a sense of identity and belonging. Still, they can also foster hegemony and destructive behaviors, so it's crucial to understand that they can

have both positive and negative consequences. For instance, young individuals could lose the capacity to use proper words and characters if they simply continue to communicate primarily using acronyms. It represents a loss of culture and traditions.

#### **4.3. Features of the most popular acronyms and the most unpopular ones outside the fan community**

In the research, six acronyms were picked from 30 of them to study. 3 of them are the most popular ones, while the other 3 are the most unpopular ones:

(1) YYDS

87% of the participants know the meaning of it, and 77% have used it. It means “the eternal god”. It’s similar to the English acronym “GOAT (the greatest of all time).” This acronym can be used as a compliment or support to a person or preference for an object. It has a positive connotation, is catchy and easy to say, is more adaptable than “the eternal god” as a whole, and is less embarrassing for people to utter. Furthermore, it is already a conventional expression to compliment someone or something.

(2) XSWL

85% of the participants know the meaning, and 77% have used it. It means, “I’m laughing my arse off.” It’s similar to the English acronym “LOL (laugh out loud)” but in a more exaggerated way. This acronym is usually used to express that someone finds something funny or to express satire. It is easy to type, funny to use, and can be applied in multiple situations. It is also a conventional expression used by young people frequently.

(3) PYQ

83% of the participants know the meaning, and 66% have used it. It is the acronym of a function on WeChat called “Moments” in Chinese, where people can upload texts or photos to share them with friends (similar to Facebook). It is widely used by netizens in China. It is easy to type, trendy, and conventional as well.

(4) XFXY

Only 5% of the participants know the meaning of it, and 4% have used it. It means “foul wind and bloody rain.” It describes a state where fans are in a heated battle or fight with each other (usually fans fancying different idols). It is used almost just by the fans, so the scenarios in which it can be used are minimal. It is hard for non-fans to understand, so it doesn’t resonate with people emotionally.

(5) BDJW

9% of the participants know its meaning, and 4% have used it. The purpose of it is “I don’t know/understand, so I’m asking...”. It is always used before asking a question, so it doesn’t have a particular meaning. It’s not necessary to use, and it depends on personal habits. It’s also hard to understand for people who don’t interact with the fan community.

(6) CX

9% of the participants know its meaning, and 10% have used it. It means “to copy, to plagiarise.” The usage of this acronym is also somewhat constrained.

The reasons for the acronyms’ popularity, as indicated by the responses gleaned from the interviews, may include the following: they can be applied in multiple situations; they are used frequently by others; they are easy to memorize or understand; they can be pronounced smoothly and fluently; they can resonate with people emotionally; they are convenient and quick to type; they have positive and friendly meanings; they are amusing and funny to use.

The reasons for the one not being famous can be: the scenarios in which they can be used are minimal; they are prone to ambiguity; they are hard to understand; they are not necessary to use (there are better expressions to replace them). These features are consistent with the analyses in the research.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, a survey was applied to demonstrate the relationship between community identity and people's perception and production of Internet slang written in acronyms. It is proved that community identity is not affecting people's perception and production of acronyms nowadays. Concluding the discussion above, we may also state that the incorporation of acronyms is happening because of the impact of the mass media and the Internet, government and official intervention, and people's intention to follow the trends. The reasons why some of the acronyms become popular outside the fan community are the following: they can be applied in multiple situations; they are used frequently by others; they are easy to memorize or understand; they can be pronounced smoothly and fluently; they can resonate with people emotionally; they are convenient and quick to type; they have positive and friendly meanings; they are exciting and funny to use. The reasons for the one not being popular outside the fan community can be that the scenarios in which they can be used are minimal, they are prone to ambiguity, they are hard to understand, and they are not necessary to use. Due to limited time, the major limitation of the present study is the relatively biased sampling profile. Participants' gender was not taken into consideration; 70% of the participants are female, and most of them are students. Their screen time was not taken into consideration as well. Besides, there is little existing research focusing on the community of fans. Therefore, future research should explore the factors influencing people's perception and production of acronyms. Methods with more efficiency should be proposed as well.

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