

The Research on the Impact of Internet Buzzwords on Adolescents from the Perspective of Carnival Theory

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Abstract: With the high penetration of the Internet into people's daily lives, the public and world have almost "barrier-free" communication with each other, and the accompanying Internet buzzwords have also influenced people subtly. Millennials, who have grown up in the Internet era, also carry the role of Internet buzzwords in this situation. This paper takes teenagers as the research object and analyzes the influence of Internet buzzwords on teenagers and the potential risks from the perspective of carnival theory. By discussing the current situation and impact of the use of Internet buzzwords by teenagers, this paper finds that relevant measures and suggestions can be put forward from different social subjects related to teenagers, such as the government should actively guide the use of Internet buzzwords and formulate relevant laws and regulations to standardize the use of Internet buzzwords; the media should pay attention to the development and evolution of Internet buzzwords while at the same time, make suggestions on the negative social impacts of Internet buzzwords; schools and parents, in addition to controlling the use of time to prevent cyberaddiction, should also help young people correctly analyze the Internet buzzwords and guide young people to use them appropriately, and help young people standardize their usage in teaching and learning activities. Meanwhile, young people should improve their language literacy and self-discipline.

Keywords: carnival theory, carnivalization, adolescents, internet buzzwords

1. Introduction

Soviet thinker Bakhtin combined the origin of carnival culture around the phenomenon of carnival and elaborated a series of conceptual terminologies such as "carnivalization" and "carnavalesque" derived from the carnival, and Bakhtin put forward the theory of carnival, which believes that there are two kinds of life in real life, one is daily life and the other is carnival life, and that the two different life scenes will produce two different feelings of the world. The unique background and meaning of the theory are also presented in modern cyberspace. Bakhtin's theory of carnival deconstructs the phenomenon of carnival, in which clowns are "crowning" and "decrowning" in the carnival square, and constructs the Utopia of all people bantering. In virtual cyberspace, people's way of expression and communication is different from that in real life: in the carnival square built by the Internet, people enjoy the equality of communication across time and space, and the cost of expressing their views and communicating with each other is hugely reduced; meanwhile, the anonymity of the

Internet also provides drama for the cyber square. The carnival field is extended from the corporeal physical space to the virtual space of the network, and through the pseudo-anonymity of social media, countless carnalized network terms are derived, with which netizens use to communicate and express their views. Against the backdrop of the information explosion era, the millennials have almost grown up with the Internet, and are the true “digital natives”. With the high penetration and accessibility of the Internet, the public and the world have almost “barrier-free” communication, and almost every individual in society has long been inseparable from the Internet in a subtle way. Internet buzzwords have also been cross-influencing real life, and contemporary teenagers, with their unique backgrounds, have experienced some “side effects” when dealing with Internet buzzwords.

The adolescents studied in this paper refer to the group defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the age range of 10 to 19 years old [1], and the impact of Internet buzzwords on this group is explored under the threshold of the carnival theory proposed by Bakhtin. Starting from explaining the basic concepts of carnival theory, this paper takes into account the phenomenon of Internet buzzwords and the unique growth experiences of the millennial youth group, analyzes the impact and potential risks of Internet buzzwords on the youth under the perspective of carnival theory, and finally draws solutions and conclusions.

2. The Basic Concept and Characteristics of Carnival Theory and the Phenomenon of Internet Buzzwords

2.1. The Basic Concept of Carnivalization (Carnavalesque)

The outstanding Soviet thinker Bakhtin in his books *Problematics of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Creativity of Francois Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* combed the origins of carnival culture around the phenomenon of the carnival and explained a series of concepts and terms such as “carnivalization”, “carnavalesque”, and so on, which were derived from the carnival. Although Bakhtin himself did not explicitly put forward the basic concept of carnival theory, a series of concepts derived from carnival have been advanced layer by layer and form a unified whole of Bakhtin's carnival theory.

Carnival refers to Bakhtin's belief that there are two kinds of life that people live in real life, one is daily life, and the other is the carnival life, and that the two different kinds of life produce two different feelings of the world. In the carnival, three important scenes should not be ignored: the carnival ceremony-the ceremony of crowning and decrowning the clowns, which breaks the traditional order; the carnival meaning the square where the carnival is performed, but also “the symbolic field where cultural meanings are extended” [2]; the carnival laugh-it has comprehensiveness, relativity, duality, and direct at everything and everyone, even the participants in the carnival, and full of desecration and distortion of the sacred.

Bakhtin pointed out that carnival should not be understood in a narrow sense, and that in the long course of history, disappeared folk festivals in the process of decay and extinction have transferred some carnival-like carnival factors such as rituals, props, masks, and so on to carnival [3]. He emphasizes that “the most important values of the carnival are: the subversion of hierarchy, the spirit of equal dialogue, the insistence on openness, the emphasis on incompleteness, mutability, duality, the spirit of alternation and change, the spirit of destroying everything and changing everything, the spirit of death and new life [4].”

2.2. The Phenomenon of Internet Buzzwords

Internet buzzwords, as a lexical phenomenon, reflect a hot topic that has been widely concerned by the public for a period of time. They are constantly changing and developing, reaching a social consensus through word of mouth. The popularization of the Internet has further elevated the subject

position of the general public. Under the environment of pan-entertainment, the frequency of updating Internet buzzwords has become faster, the meaning of spoofing has become deeper, the fun has become stronger, and the connotation has become more and more concise, and a lot of Internet buzzwords can gain the majority of people's favor just by virtue of the homophone.

Meme, also known as mim, mee, mein, meemu, cultural gene, etc., was first proposed by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*, which refers to a kind of genotypic information that is constantly evolving, mutating, and passed down in human culture through replication and transmission. In Internet culture, meme refers to a cultural symbol that is equal to Internet buzzwords and expresses specific meanings or emotions through images, videos, language, music, and other means and has become a popular culture on social media due to its easy-to-understand, interesting, and humorous characteristics. Internet memes, as a form of meme culture, usually spread through Weibo, WeChat, TikTok, and other online channels, thus widely affecting people's daily lives [5].

Generally speaking, there are three main sources of Internet buzzwords: firstly, social events and major events; secondly, compelling words or sentences presented by mass media such as movies and TV dramas, news reports, etc.; and thirdly, official terms and terms used in mainstream society. Because of their openness and entertainment, they are recognized and used by the majority of young people and reflect the general emotional tone, consensus, and value orientation of young people.

2.3. The Presentation of Carnivalization Characteristics in Contemporary Internet Language Using

In the carnival ritual, all kinds of noble, vulgar, witty, and funny language fill the square, and people do not care about the meaning other than the language itself. It is also these changing features that make it easier for people to fall into a state of "carnival" when producing and using Internet buzzwords [6]. In the era of new media, the peer-to-peer communication mode fits the spiritual core of Bakhtin's carnival theory, especially since the network has greater freedom and tolerance, the anonymity of the network also gives people more space for expression, and other characteristics are similar to Bakhtin's carnival of equality, a sense of ritual, universality, openness, and other characteristics, and the square in the network has been infinitely enlarged.

If people's words in the real world are produced in a certain context after rational thinking with personal style and a certain logic, then the Internet buzzwords are a completely emotional expression of content, generated from a certain event on the Internet (known as the "famous scene" on the Internet), and through the continuous dissemination and internalization of netizens, it becomes a synonym for quick release of emotions. Internet buzzwords are presented in the form of universality, viral dissemination, and a sense of ritual, and netizens set off a carnival in cyberspace through one Internet buzzword after another. From the production to the dissemination of an Internet buzzword, it may only take three hours. This mode of "low-threshold production, high-efficiency dissemination" allows netizens to find their unique entertainment activities in their communities, and they take the Internet platform as a carnival "square". Netizens take the place of thinking by carnival-style laughs and language and replace authority with a playful and entertaining way to express themselves and start catharsis through the production, exchange, and usage of Internet buzzwords in the carnival square.

3. The Current Situation and Impacts of Adolescents Using Internet Buzzwords and Its Related Solutions

3.1. Circumstance of Adolescents Using Internet Buzzwords

The 49th Annual Development Report of the Internet in China pointed out that as of December 2021, the total number of Internet users in China reached 1.032 billion, and the number of mobile Internet

users was 1.029 billion. In the age structure of Chinese netizens, “Internet users aged between 10 and 39 account for 50.5% of the total number of Internet users”. The trend of minors’ internet contact is obvious. As shown in Figure 1, since 2018, the scale of China’s underage Internet users has maintained growth for four consecutive years, reaching 191 million in 2021, and the Internet penetration rate of minors is 96.8%, 1.9 percentage points higher than that of 2020 (94.9%), which indicates that the youth group plays an important role in China’s Internet users.

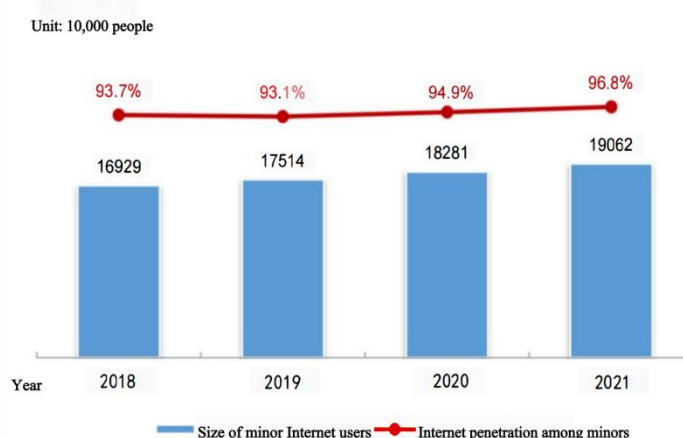


Figure 1: The scale of juvenile internet users and internet penetration rate nationwide from 2018 to 2021 [7].

In sharp contrast to the strong desire for expression is the relatively weak position of young people in society. Whether in terms of body and mind, thinking, economic capacity, or political status, adults are still the dominant players in the entire social hierarchy, and young people still have to live within the framework of rules set by adults. The emergence of a new medium of information transmission, the Internet, has provided an excellent outlet for youth. Young people are active in their thinking, strong in their learning ability, and full of curiosity about new things, especially the “Post-2000s” generation, who have been in contact with the Internet since birth and have the ability to access the Internet within their reach.

As the age of accessibility to the Internet society continues to decrease, from elementary school to university, from top to bottom, all stages of young people are concerned about the same Internet buzzwords, the young people can almost be integrated so that the use of Internet language conduct “barrier-free communication”. Playing with students using online slang on campus is not a piece of news. Recently, a video on the Internet has become a vivid embodiment of elementary school students using memes: in the video, the teacher corrected homework by mentioning the word “backpack pants”, and the students began to laugh and tacitly look at each other. When the teacher asked why he was laughing, another boy came up to the podium to perform the movements: it originated from a personal introduction by a Chinese singer idol Cai Xukun on the program and was used by netizens as a stunt to banter on the Internet. In addition to the “backpack pants” Cai Xukun was wearing in the video at the time, his background music, the dance moves and self-introductions he displayed, and even his fan name were all used as different memes by netizens, creating a carnival on the internet.

The carnival square has shifted from the Internet to real life once again, and the classroom has been transformed into a place for teenagers to carnival. Carnival language is used to comment on real-life events so as to gain a sense of belonging to a group. Moreover, the use of such socially acceptable and popular carnival language provides positive feedback in real life, which leads to the production of dopamine as a result of the sense of accomplishment.

3.2. Impacts and Potential Risks

In the network carnival, the freedom without the intervention of thinking is meaningless, and the people under this freedom are still passive, deviating from the original intention of the theory of carnival, which is also Bakhtin's concern about the gradual narrowing, barrenness, and vulgarization of the carnival rituals of folklore, expressed when he talked about folkloric carnivals [8].

The explosive development of short video platforms has become a "fuel" for Internet buzzwords. A 30-second video with Internet buzzwords and fast-paced graphics can easily get people hooked. Children who have little self-control like to imitate, coupled with an undeveloped perspective, can easily be "brainwashed" by the content of the video. These vulgar and non-nutritive memes are slowly influencing children's language expression system. They no longer think, but use these buzzwords as their daily life "pet phrase". They show that they are following the Internet trend by imitating Cai Xukun's dance moves and words. When the teacher asked them the true meaning of some Internet buzzwords, they had no way of saying what they meant.

For middle school students whose values are being formed, exposure to Internet buzzwords is not a bad way to quickly learn about society, but unhealthy practices on the Internet can also harm the forming values. For example, showing off wealth can distort middle school students' monetary value, forming a deformed consumerism of not buying anything that is not expensive, not wearing anything that is not brand-name, blindly worshipping money, or even going astray to make quick money or fraud.

For university students, obsession with the "usage of memes" and lack of exposure to different media and information sources may contribute to the formation of narrow personal views, which in turn may lead to misunderstanding of political and cultural issues. Internet big data algorithms are calculated based on a user's browsing history to recommend content that is more suitable for the individual. Excessive "meme usage" invariably enhances the homogenization of Internet information, forming an "information cocoon" that can lead to narrow and radical cognition. With the continuous development of the Internet, the entertainment and popularity of the Internet buzzword culture is more and more accepted and recognized by the public, but due to the dependence on specific events and phenomena, produced by a specific group of people, the "explosive meme" has a short life cycle and high turnover frequency, and is not destined to carry a profound meaning and value [5].

For adolescents, the lack of experience and mature values prevents them from independently and correctly evaluating their ability to access information. Invisible peer pressure drives teenagers to an online carnival square, where everyone knows the same things, evaluates the same things, and speaks the same words: Internet slang and buzzwords are the essential media for the carnival and the keys to communication in the carnival square. In order to seek affirmation and recognition from their peers, and with the support of "group psychology", adolescents use these Internet buzzwords to take off the mask of anonymity in the carnival square but still use carnival language to gain the attention of the public in reality, thus enjoying the joy of the carnival in reality.

There are also some mutations of Internet buzzwords. For example, through the pinyin abbreviation of words, or the abbreviation of English sentences, the speed of communication is accelerated and convenience is improved. This tends to affect the public's accurate cognition of Chinese characters and word usage, which is not conducive to the inheritance of Chinese characters, and also affects young people's thinking and learning; the misuse of meme culture has also appeared to a certain extent as an undesirable value orientation. For example, some memes fight against mainstream values, such as "three years is a huge win, the death penalty is not a loss" (originated from criminal law, prohibiting sexual intercourse with teenagers under 14 years old, which is used in the comments of some pictures of beautiful Lolita, demonstrating a playful and morbid expression of appreciation), and some buzzwords that dissolve the seriousness of social news and disrespect the

victims, such as “septic tank warning”(a piece of news about a wife was murdered and dismembered by her husband, damping her in the septic tank, netizens use it to tease the phenomenon of wife’s connivance to her husband). All these are undoubtedly a challenge to social values, which will distort the values of young people in the long run [9]. Also, the infliction of cyberbullying on others through Internet buzzwords has an accurate negative impact on cyber harmony. For example, the undifferentiated sarcastic abuse of the *Genshin impact* players, through Internet meme attacks to lead to war and gain streams; the malicious teasing about Guangxi people’s accent, deepening the public’s stereotypical impression of the locals, and so on.

3.3. Related Solutions

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman states, “If serious public discourse becomes infantile baby talk, if, in short, the people degenerate into a passive audience, and all public affairs are reduced to a sideshow, then the nation will find itself in peril” [10].

The aphasia and aberrant socialization caused by relocating the online carnival square to real life reflect the negative effects of carnival disorder that people are subject to. Carnival is just a Utopian idealization of life, and excessive erosion of the boundaries between the two worlds will eventually make real life absurd and disorderly. If the network carnival is treated as a kind of real life, the existing social order and system regulations will be disintegrated, and the audience with a sense of fluke will have a wrong tendency in words and behaviors, and some public opinion judgment and moral judgment will disturb the existing stability, and the real society will be out of control [11].

For teenagers, this blurring of boundaries is bound to cause more helplessness and confusion than for mature adults, and they are so immersed in group revelry that they have no way of realizing that a problem has arisen, thus allowing the language of online revelry to become the enemy of personal growth. However, at a time of high Internet penetration, it is not possible to completely prohibit the Internet from infiltrating the growth process of adolescents to eliminate the negative impact. How to guide adolescents to maintain rational thinking while producing and using Internet buzzwords, not to allow buzzwords with vulgar and insulting connotations to pollute the Internet communication environment of adolescents, and use Internet buzzwords moderately in real life are issues that all people should consider carefully.

Data from the survey on education and management of minors’ access to the Internet showed that 91.2% of parents would educate their children to a certain extent about Internet safety, and 84.6% of teachers said that their schools had set up Internet safety education courses for their students. 54.0% of parents required that their children’s Internet access behavior must be under their supervision, and 79.7% of parents would make an agreement with their children and allow their children to access the Internet for entertainment moderately. Among the underage Internet users, the proportion of those who have set up the youth mode(refers to the “youth anti-addiction system” launched on platforms such as short videos and live broadcasts) is 48.2%; the proportion of parents who have set up the youth mode for their children is 47.3% [7]. From this data, it can be seen that society has certain control measures over the youth group’s access to the Internet, but it is not possible to penetrate deep into the Internet to monitor the generation and development of each Internet term, not to mention controlling its impact on the youth group’s growth. However, society can still prevent the harm of public opinion terms on the Internet to adolescents from different aspects and guide the adolescents.

Mutual constraints between freedom and order are the remedy to separate the network and reality [12]. As the government, it should actively guide the use of Internet buzzwords and formulate relevant laws and regulations to regulate the use of Internet buzzwords, so as to prevent Internet buzzwords from becoming synonymous with online language violence. As the media, while paying attention to the development and evolution of Internet buzzwords, they should also report and analyze the negative social impacts and potential drawbacks of Internet buzzwords, so as to help young people

look at Internet buzzwords comprehensively and objectively. Schools and parents, in addition to controlling the use of time to prevent indulgence, should also pay attention to the use of Internet buzzwords by teenagers promptly, help teenagers to correctly analyze the Internet buzzwords, and guide teenagers to moderately use the Internet buzzwords, in the teaching activities, can be interspersed with social phenomena and the Internet buzzwords to explain, to break down the illusion barriers inside and outside of the carnival field, to help teenagers to correctly understand and help them to regulate the use of the Internet buzzwords. The teaching activities can be interspersed with explanations of social phenomena and Internet buzzwords to break down the fantasy barriers inside and outside the rave scene, help teenagers understand correctly, and help them standardize their use. At the same time, young people should improve their language literacy and self-discipline, not take the initiative to produce network buzzwords with insulting connotations, and supervise each other in their daily exchanges on the Internet to standardize the use of network buzzwords, so as to avoid plunging themselves into the chaos and disorder of being unable to distinguish the reality of the “carnival” from the social aphasia of not being able to correctly express their emotions.

4. Conclusion

In the face of the impact of Internet language on young people and strategies to improve it, the public should have a clear understanding of its potential harms and the countermeasures for different groups. Children’s language expression system is slowly being affected by vulgarity and bad words with no nutritional value. For middle-school students, who are in the process of forming their values, the bad culture on the Internet will also make their forming values fall victim to the bad culture. For college students who are addicted to “using memes” and lack exposure to different media and information sources, it may also contribute to the formation of personal narrow views, leading to narrow or radical cognition. In addition, there are some mutations of Internet buzzwords. For example, they affect the public’s accurate perception of Chinese characters and adolescents’ thinking and learning, and even, to a certain extent, have an undesirable value orientation, which, in the long run, may distort adolescents’ values.

Faced with this situation, the government should actively guide the use of Internet buzzwords so that they do not become synonymous with online language violence. The media should help young people to look at Internet buzzwords comprehensively and objectively. Schools and parents should pay attention to the use of Internet buzzwords by teenagers and help them understand and standardize the use of Internet buzzwords in their teaching activities. Besides, teenagers should improve their language literacy and self-discipline, and standardize the use of Internet buzzwords. To avoid falling into the chaos and disorder of the “carnival” reality, which is inseparable from social aphasia that can not express one’s emotions correctly. In terms of limitations, this paper has not yet used the interview method to investigate based on cases, and future scholars can use more case studies to strengthen the research on the negative impact of Internet buzzwords and the proposed strategies to weaken them.

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