

Contextual Collapse Perspectives on the Socialisation Practices of Text-Pleasing Syndrome in Online Media Environment

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Abstract. The development of media technology has allowed different social contexts to be integrated into online networking platforms, and users face the breakdown and risk of uncontrolled social management in multiple contexts, which has given rise to a variety of new types of social interaction that are different from traditional offline face-to-face communication. The masses use softened language to maintain pluralistic online social relationships, and use ingratiating texts to achieve their performative purposes. The group power structure and the use of symbolic violence regulate the innovative development of the Internet context, and the self-alienation and the lack of media construct a new round of contextual collapse. Starting from the symbolic representation of text-pleasing syndrome, we explore its metaphorical multi-contextual collapse and the way to alleviate the social dilemma so as to construct a new context, and deeply consider the human-technology-society relationship triggered by media availability.

Keywords: text-pleasing syndrome, contextual collapse, dramaturgical theory, media availability, symbolic violence.

1. Background and research questions

1.1. Introduction to the phenomenon

With the rise of online social media, a variety of new types of social interaction that are different from traditional offline social interaction have emerged in social media, and the medium of conversational messaging between people has gradually expanded from face-to-face language and long letters to instantaneous short texts that complement offline interactions. The development of the media environment has driven the transmutation of interpersonal communication, and the media availability of new media has produced more possible ways of socializing. People actively present themselves on social media and adapt to social changes in diverse ways, resulting in a new type of media phenomenon, text-pleasing syndrome. "Text-pleasing syndrome" refers to the fact that in the process of online communication, people soften the text with the help of intimate tone words and emoticons in order to make their words more vivid and emotional, so as to achieve a better communication purpose. It is mainly manifested in some texts' being intimate and emotional, the most common is the increase of end of the modifiers "ha, la, yo, di, ~", which can make the discourse look more comfortable, and give a sense of intimacy and connectivity. For example, "ok" can be changed to "okey-dokey", "okie-dokie", "okay..."; "Well" can also be changed to "uh huh" or "Uh-huh". "I am so busy" becomes "I am soooo busy" or "I am so busy!!!" in which punctuation is added at the end of the sentence. "Text-pleasing syndrome" is not only limited to text, but also includes emoticons and emojis to soften the tone of voice. It is now a common social behavior with a high level of awareness and acceptance among Internet users.

1.2. Introduction of theory

Context Collapse theory (CCT) was proposed to understand the interpersonal dilemma in social media. It can be initially traced back to dramaturgical theory proposed by Irving Goffman, who believed that "when we enter a social environment, we need to know the roles that other people play and what kind of roles we play in this scene" ^[1], and that people play different roles in different social

scenes and selectively perform their own idiosyncrasies, and behaviors, i.e., different self-presentations in different contexts, showing different selves through performances. Later, Merowitz brings the separated contexts into the perspective of the electronic media era, arguing that contexts begin to merge in the electronic media era, and that "this merging is not a simple combination of two contexts, but rather an evolution into a new context with new unified rules and roles" ^[2], which brings about a renewal of the mode of interaction.

In the changing context of new media, Boyd proposes the context collapse theory based on Goffman and Merowitz's view that the segmented social environments of the real world are merged by social media, and "social media users are forced to simultaneously cope with mixed social environments rooted in different norms and requiring different social responses, which inevitably triggers tensions of user self-expression and anxiety" ^[3]. As different audiences merge into the same context through social media, it is difficult for people to manage their online identities using traditional face-to-face communication techniques, leading to inappropriate displays of self-image and awkward social contexts.

1.3. Research questions and methodology

Based on the theory of contextual collapse, in the practice of social media use, people adopt a variety of communication techniques to cope with the anxiety and collapse of the context in the social process. Taking WeChat as an example, WeChat gathers users' "friends" with a certain degree of contact into an interpersonal network, and these "friends" come from different regions, ages, classes, etc., and know the users at different times with different contexts of interaction. Faced with the integration of such contexts of interaction on WeChat, which poses the risk of context collapse, users adopt "ingratiating text" and other methods to achieve a good self-representation in multiple contexts.

This study focuses on the phenomenon of "text-pleasing syndrome" in WeChat, and mainly adopts text analysis and interview method, mainly based on the pleasing text in the WeChat platform, and interviewing people who have used pleasing texts to explore the metaphorical context collapse crisis behind "text-appealing syndrome", and how users present themselves in this context, ultimately realizing the intertwining of the users, the media, and the society.

2. Symbolic representations of text-pleasing syndrome

In a study of semiotics by scholar Lee Heng-Wei, it is argued that "language is a means used by intelligence to represent things that are not in sight", and that independent symbolic representations develop into independent linguistic symbol systems that "allow humans to build rich worlds in their imaginations" ^[4]. Users use symbols such as inflections to give social meaning to their textual communication. The templated and routinized "pleasing text" constitutes a set of linguistic symbol systems, which, through the use of emotional symbol metaphors, triggers the audience's empathy and resonance and allows them to participate in the interactive practice of encoding and decoding, and the sender and receiver of the information complete the interpretation of the symbols, recreate the meaning, and realize the social identity in the textual chatting interactions.

Scholar Guan Mengyao, in her research on "text-pleasing syndrome", believes that nowadays the Internet popular "text-pleasing syndrome" is divided into text-friendly (softening the tone of voice by adding intonation, nicknames, etc., in order to pull in the distance), text-reinforcing (expressing strong emotions through the repetition of words, punctuation, etc.), and text-pleasing (a method of giving up one's ego based on the purpose of interest) ^[5]. Based on the semiotic perspective, the following symbols are the signs of "text-pleasing syndrome":

1. Simulate the colloquial symbols of everyday expressions, such as the intonation "la", "da", "oh", etc.;
2. Intimate nicknames for social relationships, such as "honey" and "baby";

3. Add semantic emoticons, including but not limited to emoticons that come with the WeChat platform, such as "smile" and "cry", as well as "^_^", which simplifies human facial expressions and movements. "etc;

4. Punctuation to strengthen the expression of emotions, not only the traditional Chinese symbols, but also all kinds of abstract hot terrier, symbols given a new meaning in the context of the Internet , such as "~" "()" ,which are often added at the end of the text to play a similar role as modal particle to soften the tone ;

5. Constructing emoticon symbols for virtual social contexts;

6. Multiple symbols are superimposed or repeated to reinforce tone and emotion, such as "hahahahahahahaha" instead of "haha", "okie okie" instead of "okie", "uh huhuhuh" instead of "uh huh", etc.

In the pleasing text, the "medium" of the material form of the text symbol itself, that is, the "signifier" of the symbol. The text and expression data on the wechat platform are given a new "signified", that is, the image of the text in the hearts of users and interactors. These ingratiating characters, combined with figurative meanings such as "polite" and "friendly", has spawned a wave of use by users who want to perform and build a persona in the social arena.

3. Multiple Contextual Collapse and Textual Pleasing syndrome Generation

Contextual collapse theory emphasizes the blurring of boundaries and fusion of multiple contexts, and the difficulty of managing role identities in different contexts, leading to collapse. The WeChat platform integrates many separate social contexts and different forms of interpersonal relationships, blurring the boundaries between the public image of user-facing many friends and the private image of a single friend, and between the real social image offline and the virtual social image online, resulting in multiple contextual collapses, i.e., an imbalance in the user's self-presentation, which lays the foundation for the emergence of the "text-pleasing syndrome" (TPS). This is the basis for the emergence of "text-pleasing syndrome".

3.1. The paradoxical collapse of cognitive alienation and performance expectations

3.1.1 dual-context collapse at the level of the self

Based on Goffman's theory of mimesis, "people can consciously control their behavior, displaying behaviors that are acceptable and hiding behaviors that belong to their true selves and do not conform to the expectations of others" ^[6], the reason behind "text-pleasing syndrome" is the user's performance and persona creation for the online self-image. Behind "text-pleasing syndrome" is the user's performance of online self-image and the creation of a persona. A good online image can help users gain a certain self-identity and sense of achievement, and bring satisfaction and happiness. Therefore, the user's self-presentation on WeChat is usually a beautified and processed ideal version of the self, which retains the basic image and characteristics of the user in the real world, even though it is false to a certain extent. Although the boundaries between real and virtual contexts are gradually blurring, there is still a certain connection, and the construction of users' image of themselves as actors on the social stage is affected by real-life factors and constraints, so the network image presented by users of social platforms relies to a certain extent on their real-life image. Network performance has a certain degree of creativity and independence, bringing new self-knowledge and value realization.

Two types of contextual collapses usually arise: the collapse of the separation of the real self from the virtual image, and the collapse of audience reaction and social expectations. One, with the purpose of persona creation and image maintenance, users' self-perception is biased and alienated, and their real selves are lost in the digital world. Second, people have a desire to transform and reshape their self-image in the presentation of social platforms, with the expectation of creating a perfect persona and becoming a performing star. However, the audience's disapproval and non-cooperation with the performer often occurs in WeChat text communication, which destroys the multiple perfect contexts and social relationships that the performer manages to maintain, and thus creates a breakdown and

anxiety. Performers want to portray humor, gentleness, loveliness, and other stage images to attract the audience through text communication, but at the same time, they are also worried about the embarrassment when the audience discovers the shortcomings of the real image, as well as the anxiety about whether they can successfully portray their own persona, and this external expectation of being gazed at is transformed into the performer's internal motivation to portray her own image, which is then externalized into a pleasing handling of the text.

3.1.2 Risk Avoidance of Audience Gazing

The softening of text on the Internet is a positive expression of the user's self and a restoration of social expectations. In the research on "text-pleasing syndrome", when it comes to the feeling of others' "text-pleasing" behavior, 60.56% of people think they will feel respected, 13.15% think they will feel uncomfortable, and 26.29% say they have no feeling and don't care. No feeling and no matter^[1], which means that "text pleasing syndrome" to a certain extent realizes the purpose of user performance and persona building, and helps to maintain social relationships. On the one hand, showing a cute and polite self-image and hiding unfavorable qualities of the self through good text symbols is conducive to obtaining social recognition and external support, which helps to integrate the virtual image with the real self in the audience's impression; on the other hand, the construction of such a good virtual image meets the user's expectation of the audience's reaction, and reduces the risk of contextual collapse.

At the same time, however, based on these data, we can also see that people's attitudes towards "text-pleasing" behavior vary, depending on individual cultural backgrounds, life experiences, perceptions of self and others, and other factors. The avoidance of the risk of contextual collapse of "text-pleasing" is only based on the matching of actor and audience roles, and the uncertainty of such matching deepens the risk of cognitive alienation and unmet social expectations of users. For example, some viewers like intimate nicknames such as "dear" and "honey", which is a sign of social closeness, while others with a strong sense of social boundaries may think that the actual social detachment is not compatible with the language of intimate interaction, or they may regard this kind of model "ingratiating" as a sign of social closeness. Other viewers with a strong sense of social boundaries would consider the actual detached social relationship as not matching the intimate interaction of language, or would recognize the patterned "pleasing words" as perfunctory, impure motives, and overly pompous.

3.2. Paradoxical collapse of emotional expression and lack of media

Paul Levinson first put forward the theory of compensatory media, that is, the media need to be constantly compensated and remedied, and believes that compensatory media are inherently dual, the new media is the compensation for the deficiencies of the old media, the new media is bound to be more advanced than the old media before it in some aspects, but it may be lagging behind the old media in other aspects^[7]. In this sense, WeChat, as a new type of text medium, has the advantages of immediacy, convenience, and multidimensional communication compared with the traditional medium of verbal communication, which compensates for the temporal and spatial limitations of the traditional medium. WeChat allows for the expression of information in a variety of forms, such as image, text, and voice, and realizes a multifunctional aggregation of social interaction, such as instant online communication, voice calls, and public sharing of information. However, WeChat also deprives the user as a performer of the ability to observe and master the audience's reaction, and the user can only perform in front of an "invisible audience" and an "imaginary audience", thus reviewing and regulating his/her own behavior. In addition, online social networking has lost the action, tone, expression, and other elements of offline communication, and the emotion and meaning of textual expression have been greatly reduced. The conflict between the complex needs for emotional expression and the missing functions of the medium has triggered a series of social user anxieties and embarrassments.

3.2.1 Imagine the invisibility of the audience

The concept of "imagined audience" was proposed by Boyd. The development of technology has led to more complex representations of space and place metaphors, resulting in the possibility that the audience one imagines in a virtual space may be very different from the actual audience. When users show themselves chatting with friends on WeChat, they need to match their performative roles with the textual content, and the imagined audience directly affects their choice of content distribution. Users can't see the other party's expression, action and other feedback after they send a message, and can only speculate the psychology and emotion of the other party based on the other party's reply, and the other party's reply is also after going through the persona performance and disguise. In this case, in order to reduce the risk of arousing negative emotions from friends and to avoid the failure of interpersonal context management, the use of softened text is conducive to the display of one's own positive emotions and reduces the potential for damaging interpersonal relationships. For example, by adding probability words such as "may", "probably", "might", and "next time" to your rejection, you can make the rejection seem less cold and hard, and politely express your reluctance. In fact, uncertain probability words express definite impossibility, and distant promise expectations merely make up for the lack of response at the moment.

At the same time, taking into account that the audience is in a state of emotional uncertainty and that the performer is at different distances from different audiences, a hard reply may cause discomfort and distress to the audience, whereas a softened text is a better way to show the politeness and friendliness of the message sender. The use of emotional words such as "okey-dokey" instead of the word that appear to be overly provocative or cause unnecessary disputes, or at the end of the sentence, using a parenthesis to add a qualifying statement such as "It's just my personal opinion.", "I'm not targeting anyone, and just talking about things" and other qualifying statements can avoid misunderstandings and disputes, and make communication smoother and more enjoyable.

3.2.2 Compensatory nature of emotional symbols

Because of the lack of non-verbal communication support, online communication becomes too flat and mechanized, while the lack of interaction can lead to an increase in the psychological distance between people and make people become strangers to each other. In addition, due to the inability to express emotions through facial expressions and body language, the understanding of online text communication is also prone to errors, resulting in less-than-ideal communication between the two parties. These problems make people feel confused and alienated amidst the tumult of technology. Of course, WeChat, as a multi-functional aggregation platform, has the ability to send pictures, sounds, videos and other functions, forming a social way that is mainly text-based and compensated by multi-form media. Users enrich simplified text communication by sending non-text symbols such as emoticons and emojis. By adding intonational auxiliaries and emojis to text, users simulate the context of face-to-face communication and compensate for the emotions that do exist in the medium. For example, when expressing gratitude to someone, using a simple "thank you" is monotonous, while adding a "smile", "rose" emoji, or "heart" emoji is not. If you add a "smile", "rose" emoticon, or "heart" emoticon, it can transform the abstract mental activities of the message sender into concrete image symbols to be transmitted to the audience, mimic the expressions and actions of real communication, supplement the details outside the language, and reduce the loss of information exchange. In the process of decoding the symbols, the audience interprets the meaning of the symbols, which also makes the symbolic message more diversified.

A study by Wellman et al. found that in the online environment, people's socialization is greatly expanded. Many people will interact with weakly connected groups or strangers, which is very different from the traditional interpersonal communication model^[8]. As a result, there are many "acquaintances" on WeChat who have few social interactions but maintain weak social ties, which are unfamiliar to users but do exist in the context of interpersonal interactions. The embarrassment and anxiety of facing "familiar strangers" triggers a new round of contextual collapse, and users usually face the dilemma of the lack of language in unfamiliar contexts, when the use of pleasing text

can eliminate the embarrassment of "having nothing to say". Of course, this situation does not only occur between "familiar strangers", but also close acquaintances, due to the lack of emotional communication and empathetic experience of the event, the user sometimes shows the embarrassment of silence, not knowing how to break the collapse of the unidirectional context. Emoji images are full of banter and revelry, a rebellion against traditional culture. All kinds of emotional expressions that cannot be said directly can be interpreted through emojis, creating a soft channel for an image-based ideographic discourse system that breaks down linguistic and textual barriers. Using a series of metaphors, collages, symbols, and other techniques, emoticons carry their own easy-to-popular grassroots and civilian cultural temperament, which is close to real life and can also supplement the connotation of words. For example, when the interactive party tells the performer about an angry incident, the performer has difficulty in comforting him, so he sends an emoticon with the content of a green apple and the accompanying text "心苹气和", which integrates harmonies into the textual language, compensating for the lack of text, and this expression is more intuitive than "don't be angry", adding humour in addition to comforting emotions.

4. New Contextualisation Possibilities under Media Availability

The concept of "availability" was proposed by James Jobson, which "refers to the possibility of human action in a particular place, existing in a particular relationship between a person and the environment through human perception", and Pan Zhongdang divided it into the availability of information production, social availability, and mobile availability^[9]. WeChat, as a multifunctional aggregation medium, has unparalleled communication advantages. The multifunctional aggregation creates a group emotional atmosphere of using pleasing texts and facilitates the spread of context collapse anxiety. At the same time, it itself has a certain social elasticity, which brings the possibility for users to construct a new social context using ingratiating text.

4.1. Communicable and connectable: communication breakdowns

Digital media, due to its multifaceted availability, dissolves social life and public action, and through the emotional connection of social media to provide power for the communication of group contexts, subject anxiety has become a lingering "trouble" of mediated life^[10]. WeChat confines users with social connections to the framework of the chatting interface, providing the function of communication and exchange, which can convey emotions and connectivity. A private social medium is easy to integrate into trivial daily life scenes, close to the common emotions of interesting groups, and causes resonance and spontaneous dissemination.

Richard Dawkins put forward the concept of "modeling", arguing that cultural communication is transmitted through non-genetic means, especially imitation^[11]. As a chatting software, WeChat's friend circle function, group chat function, multi-selective forwarding function, and unique drift bottle and shake function provide the possibility of mass copying and pasting and rapid spreading of information. Anxiety about social expectations spreads rapidly through WeChat, creating an emotional experience that is tangible and deeply resonant. The common emotional experience brings about a spiritual connection between WeChat users, thus building a group with the same feelings and perceptions and creating a common emotional atmosphere.

The anxiety of contextual collapse pervades social relationships as empathic emotions spread and common groups expand. This climate of anxiety amplifies the fear of the unknown for the imagined audience, the desperate need for emotional compensation, and the preference to seek stability in the midst of anxiety - i.e., to create a favorable social image through performance that conforms to expectations of audience response. However, this stability in anxiety is uncertain, full of unknowns and risks, and brings anxiety and embarrassment in equal measure, so users develop contextual collapse in the repeated switching of anxiety-stability-anxiety, and lose the ability to manage online social interaction.

4.2. Editable and scalable: creating contexts

Face-to-face communication is direct and fast, with a short social response time and language that cannot be deleted or changed once it is sent, so communicators need to take a certain risk of social failure. WeChat has the ability to withdraw and edit repeatedly. As an online communication software, it allows the user behind the screen to send a message after careful thought, and in the process of thinking, the user can edit and embellish the text, providing social scalability. Users can more fully conceptualize what kind of message to send, and choose more carefully when and how to send it. Withdrawal of messages and repeated editing makes users more careful in their expressions, and when users are overly concerned about how they express themselves, they show a tendency to ingratiate themselves.

WeChat is also quick and easy to send, with a low-cost threshold for users to encode symbols. While other posting-based social media platforms express the publisher's thoughts through a complete semantic system such as a long article or story, WeChat expresses meaning through a series of broken and continuous symbol systems. In the chat window users do not need to finish all the content at once, they can cut the overall content system and divide it into several phrases or even words to send. Emotions are expressed in the combination of multiple symbols, and the interpretation of meaning can be diversified, which also brings scalability to the production of textual content. Users create a new social context in an editable and scalable medium, i.e. a way to manage multiple self-identities by avoiding potential risks.

5. Rethinking: Symbolic Violence Statutes New Social Contexts

Bourdieu proposes symbolic violence, arguing that "power or capital can become symbolic and exert a particular dominant influence" ^[12]. Language is a powerful tool to express ideas and convey information, and it may also contain certain power relations, so language is also a kind of symbolic violence, and speaking is a way of disciplining power. In social communication, people use words to express their views, opinions, and emotions and to try to establish empathy and understanding with others. The nature of text-pleasing behavior is an acknowledgment of the power structure of the social group for various reasons, such as avoiding conflict, gaining support, or maintaining relationships. The need to maintain social relationships forces users to unconsciously statute themselves under symbolic power structures, binding them to an anxious breakdown of self-expression and self-perceived alienation of online virtual images. At the same time, symbolic power also requires users to use pleasing texts that may be different from the actual expression of emotions, and under the pressure of being expelled from the group if they do not use them, users eventually make the compromise of emulating the group, and are trapped in the negative emotional atmosphere of the group constructed by the social media, and are exploited by the digital capital. When text-pleasing becomes the norm, not pleasing is indifference.

In addition, the relationship between avatars and real selves is an important issue in digital social contexts. On social media, people can portray themselves through selective display and editing in order to conform to social expectations or to receive specific feedback. While to some extent this is a way of expressing oneself, it can also lead to the creation of false and inauthentic images and a widening of the difference with the real self.

6. Conclusion

Not all speaking behaviors are motivated by a desire to please others. Sometimes people use a variety of ways to express their views and opinions, perhaps to promote some kind of change, to facilitate dialogue, or to express their true thoughts and feelings. Such expression is not only a form of self-affirmation, but also helps to preserve an individual's independence and autonomy. However, the reuse of a large number of social approaches and the copy-paste of contextual communication templates have dissolved their original creativity. The diffusion of text-pleasing behavior has even

risen to "text-pleasing syndrome", which has become a new context of communication among modern people, and the issues behind it, such as the change of social structure, the statute of symbolic power, and the dissolution of individual differences by the commonality of the group, still need to be paid attention to and studied in depth.

In the entertainment landscape society, technology has become the stage and medium for mimicry, revelry, and modeling, and the complexity and diversity of society and symbols allow anxiety and embarrassment to flow and grow, with multiple contradictions and contextual collapses that stimulate the public's social nerves in the process of mitigation and regeneration. The "text-pleasing syndrome" is only a microcosm of the social media context. How to fundamentally alleviate the contradictions in human-technology relations and the dilemmas of interpersonal interactions requires human beings to find the answers through mutual adaptation and promotion of technology.

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