A Study of Online Self-Deprecating Culture Through Buzzwords Among Youngsters

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Abstract. In recent years, online self-deprecating buzzwords have been used frequently, forming a phenomenon of youngsters' self-deprecation. In the context of social transformation, online self-deprecating culture through buzzwords has become a popular subculture among youngsters in China. Youngsters use self-deprecating buzzwords for emotional release and view expressions in boring lives, self-adjustment and self-protection under social pressure, and emotional support and identity resonance through online interactions. It may lead to consequences of self-awareness degradation and self-perception weakness, alienation in social interaction and misunderstanding of group image, and deviation of social value and reduction in political identification, which must be noticed and solved actively. To eliminate its negative impacts, youngsters themselves should rationally participate in the online self-deprecation culture; the media should create a good online discourse space for youngsters; the government should cooperate with other relevant departments to strengthen organizational synergies, improving the quality of public services. However, it cannot be regarded as a completely negative subculture as it promotes the innovation and development of social culture.

Keywords: Online self-deprecation culture; Buzzwords; Youngsters.

1. Introduction

Online self-deprecating culture is a new subculture phenomenon in China. In the Internet age, social media platforms provide Chinese youngsters with a field to present themselves, which reflects their social mentality. The online self-deprecating culture is becoming more and more popular on social media platforms, and ordinary people's mockery of themselves is a self-relief in virtual society and a deconstruction of the strong discourse system. Online self-deprecation through buzzwords is essentially a way of online socializing and a result of the continuous promotion and popularization of online social media, while the widespread popularity of self-deprecating buzzwords has had a profound impact on popular culture and online subculture. The phenomenon of self-depreciation is influenced by traditional perception, social environment, and the context of the internet [1]. In the background of social transformation, Chinese youngsters usually use buzzwords to make fun of themselves on social media platforms to fight against social pressures. The online self-deprecating culture can be seen as a comprehensive manifestation of popular ideologies and lifestyles in today's Chinese society, showing the plight of contemporary youngsters and the influence of the social environment on their mentality. Therefore, it is significant to study online self-deprecating culture through buzzwords among youngsters.

Self-deprecating humor can be seen as a special kind of humor that draws on a person's or an in-group's perceived social, behavioral or physical shortcomings with a non-serious intention [2]. For one thing, self-deprecating language, in which speakers lower or humble themselves toward their addressees, is an important means that speakers use in conversation to level with each other and become of 'one mind' [3]. For another, the context of self-deprecating humor shows its impact as a signal for self-esteem, as well as its use as a buffer against others' development of negative perceptions of the self [4]. Besides, students use humor to express, share, and commiserate over daily struggles, but also that the problems related to work/study balance and mental health, are experienced as a persistent feature of student living [5]. Previous research about online self-deprecating culture has focused on the functional area, while the cultural mechanisms and identity logic hidden behind it

are ignored. So why do youngsters use buzzwords to make fun of themselves online? What are the potential risks of the usage of self-deprecating buzzwords for the young generation or the whole society? What strategies should be adopted to cope with the popularity of online self-deprecating culture among youngsters?

In order to answer the above questions, this paper is going to interpret online self-deprecating culture among youngsters based on the previous literature. The author hopes to explore the reasons for its prevalence and the potential risks of online self-deprecating buzzwords, and then provide targeted suggestions to help the healthy growth and development of youngsters.

2. Reasons Why Youngsters Use Buzzwords to Make Fun of Themselves Online

2.1. Emotional Release and View Expressions in Boring Lives

As the daily repetition of learning and working lives makes youngsters feel bored, online self-deprecation allows them to release negative emotions and also provides a way for them to express their opinions.

Online self-deprecation allows Chinese youngsters to release negative emotions. As surrounded by intensive learning and working environments, Chinese youngsters may get tired of mechanically repetitive lives. And in the face of such difficulties as the grim economic situation, the involution of the working environment, and the blocked road for promotion, the young generation has encountered obstacles everywhere. Hence, their self-confidence has been broken and their right to speak has been deprived from time to time as there is often an imbalance in the allocation of resources and wealth in society. In their usage of self-deprecating buzzwords online, the humor behind actually manifests surrealism. Chinese youngsters are constantly looking for a symbolic manner that allows them to express their emotions and release their pressure fully. Therefore, online self-deprecation through buzzwords can be seen as a cathartic behavior, in which youngsters resist inner conflicts and anxieties, reduce burdens and pressures, reconcile and accept themselves, and relieve mental pain by emotional catharsis.

Online self-deprecation also provides a way for Chinese youngsters to express their views. Youngsters facing economic and social difficulties express their dissatisfaction in the form of self-deprecation, reflecting on and criticizing social reality, which is essentially a form of their social participation. Chinese youngsters who have just entered the workplace are facing the pressure of life and work as well as the peculiar sense of role tearing when they step into society from the age of students. And during this important period, what crushes them is the high demands they expect from themselves. Through humorous words or emoticons, they express their opinions on social platforms, integrating self-deprecation with their interest demands, life visions, and daily hobbies. At the same time, it allows youngsters to express their demands for collective interests and their dissatisfaction with current society in humorous and accessible words. They inject power in their self-deprecating discourse, and thus potentially express their demands and claims.

2.2. Self-Adjustment and Self-Protection under Social Pressure

The diversity and openness of modern society have placed Chinese youngsters in an era of unprecedented social competition, in which everyone needs to think seriously about how to survive and develop in this social environment. As Chinese youngsters are subjected to heavy pressure in terms of academic achievement, employment prospects, interpersonal interactions, and family relationships in their daily lives, they may feel anxious, helpless, or even desperate, thus tending to use self-deprecating buzzwords for self-adjustment or self-protection on social platforms.

Self-deprecation is not a unique product of the Internet age, as appropriate self-deprecation is actually a significant method for people to get along with society. Socialization asks the young generation to learn the standards, norms, values, and desired behaviors in society, during which the exchange of opinions, views, and emotions with others is deepened all the time. When encountering setbacks and failures, Chinese youngsters will be trapped in anxiety due to the psychological gap

between excellent peers and themselves, however, they have to accept this reality caused by various internal and external factors. Then online self-deprecation can play the role of self-adjustment, keeping their psychological balance and bringing inner relief. Besides, when describing misfortunes, Chinese youngsters use self-deprecating buzzwords to break the ice so that they can protect themselves without being sympathized.

In addition, compared to direct expression of opinions, self-deprecation acts as an extremely safe way of self-presentation in social communication. A child may show modesty through a display of self-deprecating behavior at various levels, rather than in an all-or-nothing style [6]. When facing challenges, Chinese youngsters usually choose to keep a low profile through self-deprecation, underestimate their own abilities with modest words, and reduce others' expectations by showing weakness, which is another kind of self-protection, so as to ensure smoother communication. The young generation holds as long as they laugh at themselves first, the ridicule of others cannot hurt them. Self-deprecating humor can also bolster a person's persistence at an assigned task [7]. Being good at self-deprecation can make one look not special and being modest and harmless can make oneself safer.

2.3. Emotional Support and Identity Resonance through Online Interactions

In the background of social transformation in contemporary China, Chinese youngsters are standing in a period of confusion, facing the pressure of further education or future employment. At the same time, various social media platforms in the digital era have provided a relatively free virtual place for youngsters to express, share, and exchange ideas, which expands the space for netizens to obtain and exchange information. Chinese youngsters obtain emotional support and identity resonance through self-deprecation in the process as they can speak freely on the anonymous network without worries.

During the spreading process of online buzzwords, groups of youngsters with the same experiences gather together. In fact, a loose group can be formed with just a little excuse, creating a weak sense of group consciousness. After posting their stories on social media platforms, netizens with similar experiences will share their stories in the comments section, thus generating an emotional bond in cyberspace. Through online buzzwords, personal narratives are noticed, and self-deprecation is recognized. Therefore, group identity will be produced by collective empathy with everyone being both speaker and listener. The usage of online self-deprecating buzzwords allows youngsters to articulate their inner worlds in an entertaining way, through which individual expression ultimately leads to collective identity resonance. Online self-deprecation originates from the group dilemma of the young generation in China, which cultivates a unique discourse style among youngsters through specific buzzwords, emoticons, and other symbols, and leads them to self-categorize. During this process, their emotional resonance and sense of belonging to the community are formed, and the group identity under virtual social interaction can also be constructed.

In order to obtain the acceptance and recognition of the online group, the young generation will actively understand and use the self-deprecating buzzwords. Social media also provide an interactive platform for Chinese youngsters who share the same worries, which is conducive to reducing the mutual distance between group members and enhancing identity resonance. By making fun of themselves through buzzwords, they obtain emotional support through mutual sharing, recognition, empathy, and encouragement from each other. By complaining about the same problems and exporting the same emotions, they can often find solace and relief in the communication and resonance of these emotions. Therefore, they also gain a sense of security in belonging to a specific group, which further strengthens their emotional identity.

3. Literature References Influence of Online Self-Deprecation Culture on Youngsters

3.1. Impact on Self-Awareness

It is undeniable that online self-deprecating buzzwords satisfy the youngsters' demand for stress relief to some extent. However, excessive self-deprecation among youngsters leads to their devaluation of self-worth and weakens their perception of self-competence.

In a sense, self-deprecation is an act of deconstructing one's spirit and personality through discourse, which gradually undermines dignity. If the young generation indulges in this form of expression, such negative emotions as low self-esteem, suspicion, uneasiness, and decadence will be bred. Excessive self-deprecation may lead to paralysis of their mindsets, resulting in deviations of self-worth. Individuals escape from reality in paralysis and generate self-doubt in self-deprecation and self-degradation, which may lead to self-dwarfing in the end. When youngsters use self-deprecating buzzwords for self-adjustment and self-protection, they devalue their self-worth and generate a sense of inferiority. This kind of inferior sense makes them hesitate and stagnate in the dilemma, which not only damages their mental health but also affects their social performance.

Besides, excessive self-deprecation through buzzwords will seriously weaken one's self-confidence and willpower and have a detrimental effect on one's physical and mental health. Therefore, young people may lose themselves in long-term self-deprecation and have a weakened perception of their own abilities, which in turn leads to a negative attitude towards challenges and a loss of motivation to accomplish goals. Actually, conflicts and contradictions do not disappear but rather cause more problems as negative emotions through self-deprecation accumulate over and over.

3.2. Impact on Social Interaction

Although the online self-deprecating culture through buzzwords can certainly cause group resonation, its popularity will lead to both the alienation of youngsters in social interaction and a misunderstanding of youngsters' image in society.

Individuals immersed in the group identity and identity resonance brought about by online self-deprecation may lead to excessive dependence on social platforms, and even lose the ability to have normal interpersonal interactions, express opinions, and regulate emotions. The repetition of self-deprecation prevents individuals from understanding themselves scientifically and grasping the relationship between the individual and society accurately, thus causing confusion between the virtual and the real. Youngsters' habit of making fun of themselves online leads to their reluctance to face-to-face interactions and the degradation of social skills. When they subconsciously bring the self-deprecating culture into their daily lives, they may pass on their negative emotions to others, undermining normal interpersonal relationships. The inclusion of self-deprecating hashtags reduced the source effect of positive information by reducing perceived arrogance and increasing perceived sense of humor of target individuals [8].

Youngsters construct online communities and use self-deprecating words as their code of communication while isolating themselves from the rest groups of society, thus increasing the gap between groups. The user's intended self-presentation as a witty, funny individual fails to hit its target and may contribute to other users' negative perception of their persona [9]. When the self-deprecation of the young generation makes others feel uncomfortable or embarrassed, it will lead to misunderstanding or even discrimination. Stigma of youngsters may emerge in the process, further widening the value differences between generations and hindering the harmonious development of social relations.

3.3. Impact on Value Deviation

Under the humorous appearance, self-deprecating buzzwords conceal young people's dissatisfaction with modern society, which can easily lead to the deviation of their values and reduce their political identification with society.

On the Internet, these memes activate inherent biases in a culture or society, sometimes replacing logical approaches to persuasive argument [10]. Online behavior often has strong political significance, and some self-deprecation is actually a kind of resistance with ironic meanings, implicitly expressing emotions and values. Youngsters' self-deprecation reflects the current social problems of educational injustice, employment pressure, and academic discrimination. Online self-deprecation, with a seemingly diffuse dissolution, unconsciously treats positive education and propaganda as empty and impractical sermons. When youngsters describe themselves as imperfect images through self-deprecating buzzwords, it lowers expectations of both them and others. Such low expectations will lead to low action desire, running against positive values and affecting the vitality and spirit of the whole society.

In addition, the homogeneity and encapsulation of information dissemination in online communities lead to a narrowing value perception of youngsters, which is gradually solidified in the spreading course, resulting in a crisis of collapsed beliefs and misplaced values among youngsters. If self-deprecation becomes a popular subculture, the young generation may rationalize the negative attitudes toward challenges and take failure for granted. When youngsters are exposed to such self-deprecating discourse for a long period of time, they subconsciously blame the whole society and the outside world for their difficulties, so they gradually lose their interest in public issues and their ability to distinguish between right and wrong, thus generating the phenomenon of political alienation. In that case, they will give up striving and struggling, meanwhile, positive values will be gradually dissolved in society.

4. Suggestions on Online Self-Deprecation Culture

4.1. Individual Optimism

Behind such curing discourse as online self-deprecation through buzzwords, how to face frustration in life is a question that every youngster cannot escape. The key to the problem is to have objective knowledge and rational judgment of oneself, to detect the problem and solve it in time, so as not to fall into the situation of losing oneself. It must be recognized that although self-deprecation can temporarily ease the tension of young people's lack of competence, it cannot solve the essential problem. It is important to treat setbacks in a dialectical way and establish a positive attitude towards life. In fact, many difficulties and challenges in individual socialization cannot be avoided, but the meaning of life lies in constantly overcoming difficulties in order to confirm oneself. The young generation should know themselves objectively and improve themselves through continuous reflection.

Youngsters are the most important users, creators and receivers of buzzwords, and they are the main force in creating online self-deprecating culture. Therefore, the young generation should rationally choose to participate in the culture, maintain healthy mindsets, and establish positive values and morals. They should respect others' feelings when using self-deprecating buzzwords to avoid discomfort and misunderstanding. In addition, when young people use humorous words to express their reasonable opinions, they should also be alert to the negative temptations, refusing to spread improper content and maintaining the stability of the network environment.

4.2. Media Guidance

In the context of the Internet, online media is not only a key factor influencing social cognition, emotions and values, but also the main field where online self-deprecation through buzzwords among youngsters occurs. To strengthen the governance of online culture, it is necessary to utilize the role of different media to create a favorable atmosphere of social public opinion and to cultivate a positive and healthy social mentality.

In the popularity of online self-deprecating culture, the establishment of positive values among the young generation depends on the guidance and correction of the mainstream media. Therefore, the media should adhere to professional ethics in the spread of self-deprecating culture rather than

disseminating meaningless content to cater to the preferences of youth groups. The mainstream media should also create a good online discourse space so that youngsters can realize that self-deprecation does not mean self-denial, but a better understanding and acceptance of oneself, which will lead to positive development of online self-deprecating culture. Managers, operators and communicators of social platforms must abandon meaningless content, strictly check online information, and disseminate high-quality information. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the management of self-media. They should be guided to spread morality and goodness, set up a correct view of public values, assume social responsibility, and inspire youngsters with healthy and uplifting content.

4.3. Government Support

With regard to the problems of educational anxiety and employment difficulties reflected in the popularity of online self-deprecation through buzzwords, it is necessary for the government, group organizations, schools and other relevant departments to strengthen organizational synergies, promote reforms in education, employment, housing and other undertakings, and improve the quality of public services, to solve the difficulties, reduce the obstacles and ease the pressure on youngsters.

In order to guide youngsters to establish positive values, the government must understand the in-depth meaning of self-deprecation, which reflects the helplessness of the young generation in the face of social pressures. Therefore, when taking measures, the government should take the social background into full consideration and try to take youngsters out of their psychological plight. The government needs to provide quality information resources for youngsters to satisfy their needs for knowledge. And relevant departments can cooperate to provide psychological counseling for youngsters so that they can have a positive and optimistic outlook on life. Only by helping the young generation solve development problems with practical initiatives can we fundamentally defuse the risk of the prevalence of online self-deprecation and enhance the political identity of youngsters in society.

5. Discussion

This paper explains the reasons why youngsters use buzzwords to make fun of themselves online, analyses the negative influence of online self-deprecation culture on youngsters, and provides corresponding suggestions. Research finds that the self-deprecating use of online buzzwords by youngsters represents emotional release and view expressions in boring lives, self-adjustment and self-protection under social pressure, and emotional support and identity resonance through online interactions. The prevalence of online self-deprecation culture has an effect on youngsters' self-awareness, social interaction and value deviation. Therefore, the author proposes targeted strategies from three aspects, including individual optimism, media guidance and government support.

As a product of social transformation, online self-deprecating culture among youngsters originates from the young generation and spreads in cyberspace, which is a comprehensive reflection of popular symbols, ideologies and lifestyles in society. With the rapid development of society and the acceleration of people's living rhythm, self-deprecating culture has gradually become widely popular, reflecting the development of social culture in a specific period. The humorous expression of online self-deprecation makes people think deeply about the dilemma of social reality and individual survival. In the background of prevalent consumerism and fierce competition, social classes are solidified. Besides, the global economy is in a downturn after the pandemic, which puts pressure on the young generation to further education and employment. Hence, young people are prone to fall into an overly negative state, releasing signals of anxiety and restlessness, which runs against the right way of social and cultural development. In fact, the self-deprecating buzzwords mainly play the role of emotional relief but do not really deny their value. Youngsters vent their helplessness in the form of flirtation and obtain more emotional value by seeking group recognition. Therefore, the popularity of online self-deprecating culture also promotes the innovation of social culture to a certain extent, and what is implied behind it is not only a psychological portrayal of the young generation but also a

true microcosm of the social reality. The development of social culture should be both open and tolerant, respecting the expression of diverse cultural groups. In the prevalence of online self-deprecating culture, youngsters continue to construct new forms of expression with creativity and imagination, promoting the diversified and personalized development of social culture.

6. Summary

Overall, as a new subculture phenomenon in China, online self-deprecation through buzzwords among youngsters reflects the complex mentality of the young generation in contemporary society, which includes dissatisfaction and complaint, as well as reflection and introspection, and is a special means of emotional catharsis and psychological repair. Hence, online self-deprecating culture cannot be regarded as a completely negative subculture as there is a positive attitude behind it. Youngsters themselves have a positive consciousness, with the social environment pushing them to strive. Therefore, the social positivity of online self-deprecating culture among youngsters is also a valuable issue of further study.

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