

The Study of Youth Deviant Expression Through Online Anonymity Mechanisms Based on the Viewpoint of the Youth Subculture

Shiyu Chen*

Faculty of International Media, Communication University of China, Beijing, 100024, China

**Corresponding author: Shiyu Chen.*

Abstract

In recent years, a series of negative youth subcultural phenomena, mainly represented by Zu'an culture, online toilet culture, and Manjiao culture, have become increasingly active in cyberspace. These phenomena are diverse in form and medium, but essentially take online anonymity mechanisms as their operational premise, verbal violence or deviant expression as their core content, and adolescents as their core participant group, while exhibiting common characteristics of circle-based identity and affective polarization. Through systematically reviewing relevant literature, This paper progresses layer by layer across four dimensions—phenomenon types, anonymity mechanisms, affective polarization, and group norms—to reveal the generative logic and operational mechanisms of such negative deviant expression, and therefore identifies three major areas of consensus in existing studies. On the basis of existing findings, this research identifies the aforementioned research gaps, and then provides a directional foundation for subsequent empirical research.

Keywords

youth subculture, anonymity mechanisms, deviant expression

1. Introduction

In the last few years, some youth subcultural phenomena based on online anonymity systems have received prolonged academic interest. Even though these phenomena differ in shape and medium, they have similar structural features and can be described as negative deviant expressions. The present section starts with the description of cases, followed by a consecutive presentation of academic definitions and analysis of various types of negative youth deviant expression, and finally ends with a summary of their common characteristics.

Prior to the formal discussion, it is important to make a clarification on the literature retrieval and screening process. The databases that are used in this study are CNKI and Wanfang Data (Chinese databases) and Web of Science (foreign language databases). Its search algorithm will be the Boolean logic search, and it will use such keywords as youth subculture, online anonymity mechanisms, deviant expression, and their English equivalents to limit the time scope by limiting the search to literature written after 2020 and discarding non-relevant subject areas through the initial screening. Based on these criteria, additional screening is performed based on the thematic relevance and standardization of the literature sources, and certain literature with a very high degree of overlapping of objects of research and conclusions are eliminated. Following the screening, the

20 articles remaining are chosen as the foundation of this literature review, which consists of 18 Chinese and 2 English articles.

2. Phenomenon Types and Characteristics of Negative Deviant Expression under Youth Subculture

2.1 Conceptual Clarification from Youth Subculture to Deviant Expression

Youth subculture is a broad and inclusive concept. The most popular forms of youth subculture, which are often seen by the masses, like star-chasing culture and ACG culture, tend to revolve around explicit content objects like celebrities, works, and cultural products, and develop the core topics, group identity, and interaction of the members. Nevertheless, with the evolution of cyberspace, a kind of youth subculture with significantly different features has been developing over time: it does not rely on particular content objects but uses adolescents emotional catharsis as its major driving force; it is more aggressive in its expressions, has more potential to inflict material damage on others, and is more insular than the previous type. This kind of culture is what is defined in this research as the “negative youth subculture”.

In essence, negative youth subculture should also be considered as a specific type of deviant expression that has been expressed in two dimensions. Content-wise, this kind of subculture consists of insults, attacks, ridiculing other people, or self-degradation that finally becomes online violence and vulgar expression; linguistically, it regularly employs a huge amount of offensive words and exploits unique symbols and coded language to avoid the censorship of platforms, which generate a significant quantity of negative content products that are not typical of the general youth online subcultures. This term “deviant expression” will later be used throughout this work in the same sense as the central behavior of the given type of culture due to its inherent features.

Zu'an culture, online toilet culture, and Man jiao culture are exemplary cases of this kind of negative youth subculture.

2.2 Phenomenological Description of a Series of Cases

The Zu'an culture is one of the earliest cases that have entered the academic sphere of perception in terms of similar phenomena. Cao Xiaojuan [1] was the first to put it into the analytical scheme of youth subculture, stating that the Zu'an culture is a subcultural phenomenon in the youth that is spread via new media platforms and popular among modern youth and involves emotions like venting and dissatisfaction. It began in the Zu'an chat room of the online game League of Legends, where players developed a particular sharp method of insults between each other as a means of venting their emotions without the language self-cleaning system blocking them. It was transmitted by subcultural communities, including Bilibili, and a significant amount of derivatives by subcultural groups. Particular attention was paid to the fact that adolescents who do not have the capacity to make sense of media content are vulnerable to becoming members of this group. On this basis, Xu Ruijie and Yang Xi [2] went further into the comprehension of the Zu'an culture, not only systematically outlining its cultural features of vulgarity and violence in language, covert ways of expressing meaning, and youth circle preference, but also exposing the underlying threats and dangers in the course of its dissemination. Based on the perspective of participants' mentality and using interviews, Liu Peng [3] explored the effects of verbal violence on youth social mentality, concluding that exposure to such vulgar and aggressive language not only harms the so-called insulted but also causes groups of players to acquire over time the habit of accepting verbal violence as a normal mode of social interaction, which eliminates the deviant character of aggressive expression at the participant level. The above studies move away from the internal cause analysis of the phenomena and demonstrate the same feature of the participants regarding the form of identity: they represent themselves with stable game IDs, and the IDs have been separated from real identities. Teammates and opponents may recognize their game identities, but cannot know their real identities thereby creating somewhat a full picture of Zu'an culture.

The most discussed issue in the last few years concerns online toilet culture. Chen Haiting [4] used the concept of “toilet accounts” on the platforms including Weibo, Xiaohongshu as well as Douyin as research objects, which he defined as a new form of online subcultural behavior that functions under the model of user submission-operator review-anonymous posting by the account. Its ancestor was the shout-out bots created in

about 2019, which were originally used to exchange interests in ACG communities like games and anime. Later, the idea of the toilet changed over time to become a cultural arena, where negative feelings, catharsis, and verbal abuse were dominant themes. The research also indicates that the main participants in online toilets are focused on groups of women teenagers aged 14-18, and online toilets primarily aim at virtual characters, celebrities, and some fan creators based on their topics of discussion. It is a classic example of negative youth subculture in this study due to its anonymous submission mechanism, its argot-based boundary system, and its younger-age participant group.

Manjiao culture can be considered a paradigm of deviant expression on short-video platforms. According to Li Yeming et al. [5], it is a youth subcultural phenomenon based on Kuaishou, which builds cultural identity in the process of deconstruction of mainstream discourse (e.g., jokingly referring to Kuaishou as Manjiao). Its main manifestations include adversarial narratives and behavioral patterns of self-debasement. It is largely expressed in visual alienation due to too many beauty filters, self-objectification in absurd behaviors, social carnival of dangerous imitation, and content output with distorted values. Both Manjiao culture and online toilet culture have the qualities of anonymity, younger age, and the loss of value, but the dissimilarities in media carriers, i.e., The distinction between visual distribution via short videos and written submission makes them express themselves in different ways of deviant expression. Similarly, regarding the identity form, the connection between Manjiao culture and anonymity is the least strong of the three scenarios; namely, user identities are not entirely obscured. Nevertheless, the account users are not the acquaintances of the users, and therefore, they do not have to experience real-world social consequences of the video content. What limits their behavior in this subculture is not identity concealment technology but the disconnection with real-world social relationships. This exactly implies a crucial evaluation: even within a non-anonymous setting, disconnection with real-world social restrictions is enough to decrease the sense of behavioral responsibility of adolescents, thus creating deviant performance.

To sum up, despite the differences between Zu'an culture, online toilet culture, and Manjiao culture in terms of media carriers, discursive strategy, and form of attack, all these cultures are typically located at an online level of low identity constraint and have youth as a central group of participants, who altogether form the main image of the negative youth subcultural phenomena that are under investigation in the present research.

2.3 Commonalities of Deviant Expression Within Negative Youth Subculture

In terms of the above cases, negative youth deviant expression has strong commonalities in five dimensions.

First, it is often located in a networked setting where the sense of identity constraints is reduced. Anonymous players behind game IDs in Zu'an culture, deep backstage anonymity of online toilet culture through submissions and virtual identities of short video accounts in Manjiao culture have different mechanisms of specific weakening, but all disconnect the direct relationship between online behavior and real-world consequences, which is the underlying condition in the functioning of these phenomena. Second, verbal violence or deviant expression is at the center of the operation. The above cases have in common the fact that they all rely on attacking, belittling, deconstructing others or self-debasement as the key content enabling the realization of the deviant expression. Third, group identity based on circles and on-track norms is developed. The boundaries of members of the community are defined through common argot symbols, similar attitudes toward exclusion, and ongoing interaction rituals, and the behavior of the deviant becomes re-coded as a normal behavior in the group. Fourth, the majority of participants are adolescents. It has been estimated by surveys that students form the largest percentage of internet users in China [2]. Using online toilet culture as an example, the main participants of online toilet culture are focused on individuals who are aged 14-18 [4], and likewise, most participants in the Manjiao culture are also minors [5]. Fifth, it is fueled by the production and flow of negative emotions. Ni Ran [6] can summarize this mechanism as affective polarization, i.e., the transformation of negative emotions, which in anonymous settings and collective interaction, turn into systematic generation of hostility.

A common underlying factor among the aforementioned cases is the weakening identity constraint, which serves as the initial point in this research. Subsequently, this paper will examine the way anonymity technologies and platform institutions give external conditions to deviant expression and, on that foundation, how the interaction of affective polarization and group norms creates legitimacy for deviant expression.

3. Identity Constraints: Technical and Institutional Conditions for Deviant Expression

The different types of deviant expression described in Part One are varied in terms of their target of attack, discursive strategy, and group structure, yet they depend significantly on the use of online anonymity mechanisms to function. That is why, when writing about the generative conditions of deviant expression, researchers have always focused on the identity constraint weakening as the main focus of analysis. The identity constraints are based on anonymity, however, anonymity is not simply a technological setup, that defines the level of identity recognition of the users; it also has an institutional aspect that is the set of principles that guide the management of identity information by platforms and the way users perceive this management. They both act as objective demands of the platform side, creating the background for the appearance of this kind of deviant expression.

3.1 The Weakening of Identity Constraints and Two Explanatory Paths of Expression

In regard to the impact of anonymous technologies on expression, the current body of research has developed two explanatory tracks that are based on varying levels of emphasis.

Other scholars pay attention to the negotiation process involving social norms and their work on the mechanisms of anonymity that encourage freedom of speech. It creates an explanatory path. According to Goffman's dramaturgical theory, other studies indicate that posting behavior in an anonymous state is basically a phenomenon of "front-staging the back stage"; that is, users in an anonymous state have no impression management burdens and are therefore able to show their real personal thoughts and express negative feelings that they hide in their daily lives under the guise of "authenticity". [7] On a different perspective, Zhang Xu and Tang Xiangtian look at the anonymous behavior of individuals in platform algorithms, technology settings, and social organization, adding to this rationale. Their hypothesis is that identity hiding is exactly what allows the repressed true self to perform its fullest and eventually generate the communicating result of the fact that anonymity is not the absence of presence but the presence in another form. [8] Chen Haiting also begins with the theory of carnival by Bakhtin, who argues that anonymity gives the common people the ritual ability to crown and decrown, thus experiencing aggressive expressions as an egalitarian public-square carnival instead of moral violation. It extends the reasoning to the group ritual of psychology, offering a justification of the linking conditions in which extreme emotions become part of the group realm of vision and coalesce into intense deviant expression. [4]

Similarly, there is another group of researchers who concentrate more on structural risks and institutional factors caused by anonymity, which is a form of a responsibility diffusion path. The linguistic dimension of the "algospeak" phenomenon, available in the current systematic reviews of this topic internationally, brings a novelty into the study of deviant expression in anonymous environments, stating that the communicative practice of coded language and symbol usage made by social media users is a strategic interaction between algorithmic censorship by the platform and evasion strategies by the users, providing a new angle to the research of deviant expression in anonymous environments by introducing the concept of linguistic strategy innovation. [9] In later studies, Chinese researchers, using the example of the collective anonymous group of "momo" warn that the psychology of the crowd mentality, where people think that the law will not punish the masses, reduces the sense of responsibility of individuals sharing the same nickname and makes them more susceptible to malicious speech. [10] Moving beyond the outcome of the process, Shuai Siyu and Wang Shuai [11] go further into the mechanism behind it, particularly detailing the technical path whereby anonymity mechanisms can be used to achieve risk-free deviant expression in three approaches: information stripping, semantic blurring, and cross-platform isolation.

The two paths also show that two aspects of weakening identity constraints are at play, which are why people have the courage to express themselves in anonymous settings and why this form of expression is prone to deviance. Nevertheless, available studies can be seen as generally considering anonymity as an identical state of being "present or absent"; more precisely, they have not offered a consistent response to the question of whether variations in the level of anonymity impact the form and severity of deviant behaviour.

3.2 Perceived Anonymity and the Institutional System of Identity Constraints

At the technological affordance level of discussion, the main concern is how anonymous states can alter expressive behavior, but the question of who determines the border of identity visibility and what kind of

behavioral expectations can be formed by users within the given boundary must be explored further at the institutional level. The available studies cover various aspects of the process based on different viewpoints that together create a path of transmission. On this path, the platforms determine the extent of the visible identity of users with varying methods of login and rules of management that influence the sense of safety of users, and the perception of safety in its turn influences the severity or leniency of the individual moral self-control that finally impacts the strength of deviant expression.

A review of the literature will lead to the disclosure of institutional premises through the cultural history viewpoint. Studies indicate that existing “re-anonymization” is a deliberate selection made by users subjected to an algorithmic surveillance regime; such a collective pseudonym is not only a purely technologically given, but it depends on certain institutional platform configurations. To put it bluntly, users hiding their identity is not done in an institutional void, but within the limits of visibility created by the platforms. The present study differentiates the active anonymity behavior of users with passive anonymity that was facilitated by platforms at the beginning of the Internet, which shows that users have the ability to make autonomous decisions during the anonymity process and that the modern platform institutions are setting limits on decisions of users regarding the concealment of identity. [12] Whereas, this research does not provide an answer to the question of how differently institutions operate on the level of user behavior intensity and influence over user psychology as it only performs theoretical analysis in the context of cultural history.

The intermediary link of user psychology is further developed through recent research based on the General Aggression Model (GAM). The present study involved a survey of 493 Weibo tree hole users and finally revealed that perceived anonymity, groupness, and acceptance of violent language are the three main situational factors of verbal violence. The term of collective moral disengagement, which is proposed by the study, discloses the intermediary link via which anonymity mechanisms operate: anonymity itself does not result in aggressive behavior, but, with its help, the moral self-regulation efficacy decreases, and people in group situations reassess aggressive behavior as being acceptable. [13]

Further investigation in this field has been carried out using the methodology of empirical research on platform governance in order to demonstrate how institutions themselves are governed by governance practices. The most recent study, drawing on Communication Privacy Management theory and structural equation modeling analysis, determines that the clarity of platform anonymity regulation management can significantly moderate the level of trust and privacy risk perception among users; i.e., the greater the clarity of the regulation rules, the higher the level of trust, and the lower the level of privacy risk perception, whereas the tendency to self-express grows. This result tentatively touches the subject of studies on the relationship between institutional disparity and users’ self-expression. [14] Nevertheless, it must be observed that the dependent variable in the present study considers willingness to self-express broadly; the model does not directly examine aggressive expressive action related to deviance, and additional research is anticipated.

To sum up, studies on anonymity mechanisms have put together an analytical picture of the anonymity institution using various points of view that respond to the question of what the institution offers, what psychological processes are transmitted, and by what regulation of governance can deviant behavior among young people be regulated. Nevertheless, there is no empirical solution as to how differences between institutions influence the level of deviance; specifically, the formal variations in the manifestation of deviance at varying degrees of anonymity remain to be researched systematically.

4. Affective Polarization and the Interactive Construction of Group Norms

While discussing the relationship between anonymity mechanisms as a technological arrangement and youth deviant expression, compared with anonymity technology and institutional arrangements themselves, this can easily be seen that users’ perceptions of privacy under anonymity mechanisms have a deeper influence on the emotional expression and the norms of young users that engage in such deviant expression. The present chapter examines the issue from two perspectives, affective polarization and group norms, explaining why negative youth deviant expression could become a systemic group phenomenon.

4.1 Affective Polarization: From Individual Emotion to Systemic Hostility

Affective polarization is not caused by just one mechanism. The available studies address it on various levels but together follow a chain of transmission: negative emotions that originate in individuals increase in volume with each level and are repeatedly given value in the process of group interaction until they become fixed in the form of platforms communication structures into a cycle of producing hostility.

The initial studies, by investigating the situation with Zu'an culture, reveal the sequence of events that leads to the transition of youth as victims of violence to the position of perpetrators and distributors through the analysis of communication processes. The chained propagation mechanism indicates the micro-level dynamics of affective polarization. The anger and hostility are not restricted to the individual but instead, over time through successive identity changes, become layered accumulations and progressively increasing emotional levels. [2] This identity transformation and escalation enables the understanding of the way emotions are first accumulated and piled up into groups, how such deviant expression can bring more young people to join them, and how experiences of victimization become transformed into aggression.

In connection with this problem, another research paper, which is grounded in extended online ethnographic monitoring and in-depth interviews, presents deep insight into linguistic deviance in online space and can be considered as an essential additional aspect of how affective polarization is integrated with the formation of group norms. According to the researchers, the members of mutual flaming groups turn deviant behaviour into routinized behaviors of being “on track” through three processes, which are the othering of negative emotions, entertainmentization of violence, and valorization of violent language. It turns aggressive affect into the fundamental regulation in the functioning of a group, turning deviant behavior not only into an emotional polarization but also into a normative polarization. [15]

Further study by Ni Ran [6] builds on this path toward group circulation, suggesting the idea of “emotional currency”: the notion that online controversy is a cultural good that may be circulated, exchanged, and spread between communities. When the anger of an individual gets into the group circulation, it is not a personal feeling any more but a commodity with exchange value which can be consumed and reproduced again and again. This result follows the line of reasoning behind the active management of emotion, starting with catharsis through to production. Chen Jiyin and Jia Chaoran [16] extend this route to the platform structure. Their paper develops a five-stage evolutionary model of online violence incident communication as follows: latent public opinion fermentation stage to formation stage, rising stage, violence formation stage, and lastly, decline stage. The stages involve the increasing influence of opinion leaders, the bad influence of leakers, the response strategies of the parties concerned, the impact of stacking effects of typified events, and the group polarization effect of information cocoons, respectively. Besides, according to the agenda-setting theory, the research also highlights the idea of the event stacking effect in the context of deviant expression: the high concentration of the same events or the revival of the historical events adds to the communicative power by reviving the online memory. This finding can shed more light on why deviant expression on anonymous platforms has cyclic outbreaks and is hard to eliminate.

To conclude, the affective polarization principle underlying the relatively negative deviant expression of young people in online settings may not be as easy as simple emotional contagion or conformity conduct, but rather as an outcome of the dynamics between individual mental processes, the formation of group norms, and macro communication structures within anonymous settings. The systemic product, combined with group norms, also increases the participation of participants emotionally and rationalizes their actions.

4.2 Group Norms and “On-Track” Identification

In the case of affective polarization being the internal motivational source of deviant expression, group norms serve as an explanation of how deviant expressive actions become normalized and even legitimate within groups. In the context of this problem, current studies have built a link between the social mentality and group interaction with the final goal of reaching common norms and cementing their spread, however, there are obvious differences in the evaluative attitude to subcultures and the focus on the links of mechanisms.

The systematic study of Jiang Ling and Qiang Luting [17] on the new phenomena emerging in youth online subcultures in the post-pandemic era gives a context of community mentality on which the development of group norms is based. The research provides five group mindsets, namely, deindividuation and groupism in

online communities; one-sided emotional polarization and the psychology of seeking self-satisfaction; spiritual homelessness and the emergence of imaginary enemy; inner loneliness and anxiety, as well as uncertainty about life; and adoration of traffic-generating celebrities and immature fan mentality. Due to the conflict between the accelerated wealth accumulation and inner world development in the process of youth growth and the voice of distrust, which can be present as external factors, and the objective conditions arising from the regulation of linguistic freedom and normativity in cyberspace, these young individuals are compelled to acquire support and a feeling of identity using these forms of deviant expression, creating the above five psychologies. All these group mentalities form the psychological hotbed of spreading deviant behavior among youth groups and offer the social psychological basis of forming group norms.

Further studies based on Marxist cultural theory divide youth subcultures into four typical models: fan culture, cynical culture, meme culture, and otaku culture, where several of them are interrelated with the formation of group norms in the context of deviant expression. Young people have diverse expressive behavior online because of the differences in language and values associated with each social media community. There are norms of values that can be used by young people to get a more profound sense of identity psychologically, which also contributes to the rationalization of negative youth deviant expression. Of special importance is the diffusion mechanism of meme culture discussed in the research, i.e., it is the replication, variation, and selective retention of cultural information. It offers an intellectual framework to explain how deviant expression quickly spreads and becomes established in anonymous groups. [18]

In addition, other research studies that are based on the analysis of youth subcultures offer an alternative evaluative position which states that even though some online subcultures present a threat to the mainstream values, the majority of online subcultures play positive roles in the reconstruction of identity, emotional belonging, participation in the creation of culture, and reduction of anxiety. Referring back to this article's description of deviant expression, the dialectical viewpoint can be used as a reminder that deviant expression within negative subcultures is not wholly negative; it may serve to relieve social tension and express cultural resistance in particular conditions. [19] This dialectical perspective can be a reminder that deviant expression in negative subcultures is not entirely negative; in certain conditions, it has the role of reducing social stress and cultural resistance.

The most recent international studies, using a long-term ethnographic approach, offer a cross-contextual comparative point of view in this article. Siltala et al. [20] carried out long-term field observation of the completely anonymous Finnish imageboard Ylilauta and discovered that cultural forms are not necessarily unilaterally shaped by technology or institutions even on a fully anonymous site, but are more dependent upon group relations, group boundaries, and linguistic conventions created by people on the site, forming behavioral styles into recognizable group styles. It has closed the gap of norm creation, starting with nothing and ending with something, and is useful in providing references for future local research.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Consensus and Limitations of Existing Research

In light of the presented analysis, current research has developed a fairly clear consensus on these issues.

Initially, anonymity is one of the main conditions under which negative youth subcultures operate. Looking at the various examples of negative youth deviant expression discussed earlier, anonymity mechanisms serve as the psychological basis of disinhibition effects and identity transformation. Secondly, deviant expression does not occur as a singular behavior of individuals but as an outcome of interactions in groups. Starting with affective polarization and ending with on-track identification and group mentality, and finally with group style, scholars have elucidated the group-based generative processes of deviant expression in different aspects. The very fact that these two factors are interactive constructions is what turns deviant expression into a systematic group process instead of a random individual act. Lastly, negative forms of deviant expression in cyberspace are more harmful to the formation of youth values and social order than general youth subcultures. Not only do they create online violence, but they are also used to deconstruct mainstream discourse using linguistic deviance, rationalization of non-mainstream values, and other methods.

However, existing research still has clear divergences and deficiencies in the following aspects.

First, concerning the cause-effect link between anonymity and deviant behavior expression, current studies have indicated that it is not a fixed technical condition, but a changing cultural strategy, which has its consequences on the particular institutional environment and the process of group interaction. Nevertheless, studies investigating differences in degrees of anonymity have not been carried out systematically, being a notable gap in research; such an understanding of what role different levels of anonymity play in determining the form and strength of deviant expression has not been developed. Second, the mutual connection between algorithm-based governance and anonymous deviant expression has not been addressed with enough focus. Youth online deviant expression is made up of linguistic deviance and symbolic transformation of systematic expression. This phenomenon has been noted by some researchers, but deeper studies have not been conducted on the way in which the cat-and-mouse game between platform algorithmic censorship and user deviant strategies influences the development of deviant expression. Third, regarding the research methodologies, the current research is mostly qualitative analysis and theoretical speculation. Quantitative studies and mixed-methods studies are few in number, and most of them focus on a single platform with the culture created within it, without comparative studies across platforms.

5.2 Reflection and Future Directions

According to the above analysis, the author of the present paper claims that the issue of youth deviant expression based on the online anonymity mechanisms in the context of youth subculture can be explored in more detail in the following areas.

In the theoretical stage, it demands the need to break away from the linear causality idea of anonymity causing deviance and develop a multidimensional analytical framework. Future studies may be able to elaborate on this analytical framework by considering gradient variations in the extent of anonymity, the social construction of group norms, the cognitive processes underlying emotional polarization, as well as the institutional limits of platform management.

In the empirical research stage, it is critical to conduct systematic cross-platform comparative research, taking into account the way technological differences at various levels of anonymity on different platforms influence different types of deviant expression. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to the dynamism of the evolution process of deviant expression. The available studies are mainly cross-sectional analyses and do not involve tracking studies on how anonymous deviant expression responds to strategic changes in platform governance policies. Further research tracking in this aspect can also be widened further.

In the sphere of governance practice, there is a need to move beyond the simplistic “ban-and-control” mechanism. As demonstrated by available research, anonymity measures are not only a safe haven for deviant expression but are also a significant aspect of youth self-expression and identity exploration. The essence of governance is to be able to differentiate between constructive subcultural expression and deviant behavior that is harmful to others and society, which should ensure that the legitimate expressive needs of youth are met, without allowing negative impacts on others and the community. This will result in a win-win situation between youth expression and the preservation of the online ecology.

References

- [1] Xiaojuan Cao. (2020). An analysis of “Zu’an culture” from the perspective of youth subculture. *Sinogram Culture*, (S1), 145–147.
- [2] Ruijie Xu, & Xi Yang. (2022). On the Harm and Treatment of Zu-an Culture. *Journal of Ningbo Open University*, 20 (02) : 29-32+77.
- [3] Peng Liu. (2022). A survey of college students’ social mentality under the influence of “Zu’an culture”: Based on interviews with 26 college students as game players. *Journal of Neijiang Normal University*, 37 (9), 78–83.
- [4] Haiting Chen. (2025). Revelry of the lost: A study of “network toilet” from the perspective of subculture. Master’s thesis, Guangzhou University.

- [5] Yeming Li, Danlu Lei & Tingting Liu. (2025). Pathological tracing, symptom analysis and governance approaches of “Manjiao culture”: A critical study from the perspective of youth subculture. *Public Communication of Science & Technology*, 17 (21), 125–134.
- [6] Ran Ni, Jie Qian, Xinyu Bai. (2024). A study on the communication mechanism of affective polarization in online subcultural groups: Starting from “remote shouting bot” All-media Explorations. (09) : 138-140.
- [7] Yuhui Xie, & Shiyuan Cheng. (2024). An analysis of self-presentation of “online toilet” users in anonymous social networking: Based on dramaturgical theory. *Public Communication of Science & Technology*, 16 (22), 64–66+72.
- [8] Xu Zhang, & Tiantian Tang. (2024). Concealment as revelation: Platforms, motivations and performances of youth anonymous social networking. *China Youth Study*, (5), 44–51.
- [9] Isam, H. (2024). Algospeak and digital culture: Navigating social media challenges. In *Lecture Notes in Networks and Systems* (Vol. 1234, pp. 655–668). Springer.
- [10] Huadong Chen, & Ludan Liu. (2025). Can collective anonymity avoid cyber violence? A case study of “momo” groups. *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 33 (1), 1–14.
- [11] Siyu Shuai, & Shuai Wang. (2026). A study on digital invisibility and role reshaping in anonymous submissions by youth groups. *Radio & TV Journal*, (2), 1–5.
- [12] Wei Meng. (2024). Cultural exploration of online anonymous social networking. *People’s Tribune*, (7), 90–93.
- [13] Xin Chen. (2024). Research On The Phenomenon Of Verbal Violence And Influencing Factors In Chinese Weibo Treehole Account: From The Perspective Of General Aggressive Model. Master’s thesis, Shanghai International Studies University.
- [14] Xiaofen Ma, Jiahui Li & Yong Zhou. (2026). Transparent anonymity: Maintenance of privacy boundaries and generation of trust mechanisms in Weibo bots. *Contemporary Communication*, (1), 92–98.
- [15] Yuan Yang, & Yue Zeng. (2024). “HU-PEN” Group: On-orbit Identity Construction of Youth Groups’ Language Deviant Behavior. *Journalism & Communication Review*, 77 (5), 56–65.
- [16] Jiyin Chen, & Chaoran Jia. (2025). Influencing factors and mechanisms of communication power in online violence incidents. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, (2), 136–147.
- [17] Ling Jiang & Luting Qiang. (2021). The New Phenomenon of Youth Network Subculture and Group Mentality. *Contemporary Youth Research*, (2), 46–51.
- [18] Shutong Zhao, & Gang Du. (2025). Internal Logic and Response Strategies of Contemporary Chinese Youth Subcultures. *Journal of North University of China (Social Science Edition)*, 41 (2), 109–114.
- [19] Shiyu Zhao. (2025). Giving play to the positive role of online subculture in the cultivation of youth values. *Chinese Social Sciences Network*. <https://www.cssn.cn>,
- [20] Siltala, A., Ylä-Anttila, T., & Luhtakallio, E. (2026). Culture in online anonymous interaction: Negotiating imageboard group style on Ylilauta. *New Media & Society*, 28 (3), 1295–1315.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of the science project.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with first publication rights granted to the journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).