

Emotional Outlets and Cultural Revelry of Contemporary Youth: A Subcultural Interpretation of Online Crazy Talk

Mo Shang*

Beijing University of Financial Technology, Beijing, China

**Corresponding author: Mo Shang.*

Abstract

As an emerging online subculture form created by contemporary youth in the digital media context, online crazy talk has gradually become a unique way of emotional expression and symbolic resistance, attracting growing academic attention. This study adopts a narrative review method to systematically sort out domestic and foreign research findings on the discursive features, communication mechanisms and socio-cultural connotations of online crazy talk. Based on Birmingham School subculture theory, emotional communication theory and emotional regulation theory, the paper constructs an integrated analytical framework to interpret this subcultural phenomenon. The research finds that online crazy talk is marked by the deconstruction of traditional discourse logic, the emotional presentation of sorrow hidden behind absurd pleasure, and a communication mode driven by in-group emotional resonance and participatory secondary creation. The prevalence of online crazy talk is closely linked to structural pressure amid social transformation, the evolution of youth emotional expression demands, and the technical advantages of digital media platforms. This phenomenon bears positive implications for individual emotional adjustment, group identity construction and online expression innovation, while it also brings hidden troubles such as rigid cognitive inertia, excessive emotional escalation and online group polarization. This paper clarifies the internal emotional logic and cultural connotation of online crazy talk, enriches the theoretical understanding of youth digital subculture, and provides a reference for subsequent research layout and network cultural governance practice.

Keywords

crazy talk, online subculture, contemporary youth, emotional expression, media communication

1. Introduction

Against the dual background of social transformation and the rapid development of digital technology, contemporary youth are confronted with multiple survival pressures including academic involution, workplace anxiety and class solidification, falling into significant emotional dilemmas [1]. At the same time, the iterative upgrading of Internet technology has fostered a new ecosystem of online expression, breaking the monopoly of traditional elite culture on expression and providing diverse carriers of emotional expression for young people [2,3]. Moreover, contemporary youth's extreme pursuit of emotional value has driven online culture to tilt toward emotional expression and resonance [2]. In this context, online crazy talk has emerged as an important way for

young people to express emotions and connect with each other in cyberspace [1,4-5]. Online crazy talk presents the contradictory trait of seeming absurd and nonsensical yet triggering extensive emotional resonance. It is not an expression of real mental breakdown, but a gentle resistance and emotional adjustment strategy adopted by contemporary youth in a high-pressure environment [4,6]. This unique online subcultural phenomenon reflects the real living conditions and cultural demands of contemporary youth, but has not yet received systematic and in-depth interpretation in existing literature [7-8]. On this basis, this paper takes online crazy talk as the research entry point to explore the youth's emotional logic and cultural connotation behind it, and provides a new research perspective for understanding the living conditions of contemporary youth and the development of online subcultures.

This paper puts forward core research questions around online crazy talk: First, what core characteristics and expressive forms have been summarized in existing studies on online crazy talk, and what communication mechanisms have been identified in cyberspace? Second, with the dual attributes of emotional outlet and cultural revelry, what living conditions and cultural demands of contemporary youth do relevant studies interpret from online crazy talk? The research objectives of this paper mainly include four aspects: First, systematically sort out the core characteristics, typical expressive forms and communication laws of online crazy talk summarized in existing literature, and clarify the basic features of this online subcultural phenomenon. Second, synthesize the social, media and cultural motivations for the rise of crazy talk discussed in previous studies, and clarify its internal connection with the living environment of contemporary youth. Third, collate and analyze the functions and values of crazy talk in youth emotional counseling and social connection pointed out in relevant research, and explain its rationality and particularity as a youth emotional adjustment strategy. Fourth, through reviewing studies on crazy talk, interpret the real emotional dilemmas and cultural choices of contemporary youth reflected in existing literature, provide a specific and vivid research perspective for understanding contemporary youth online subcultures, and offer reference ideas for youth emotional counseling and online cultural guidance. This paper supplements the gaps in existing research that lack attention to the active cathartic expression of online crazy talk and insufficient exploration of the diversified linkage mechanisms of its popularity [5,7,8], enriching the research results related to online subcultures and youth emotional expression. Meanwhile, this paper combines the Birmingham School subculture theory and emotional communication theory with specific online cultural phenomena, expanding the theoretical application scenarios for online subculture research and providing theoretical support for interpreting contemporary youth's digital media expression behaviors [2,6,9]. The research on the motivations, functions and potential risks of online crazy talk reviewed in this paper can provide a practical basis for understanding the real emotional needs and living conditions of contemporary youth, and offer practical ideas for colleges and social institutions to carry out youth emotional counseling [8,10]. In addition, the rational guidance path of crazy talk summarized in existing studies can also provide references for online cultural governance and the construction of a healthy online expression environment, promoting the positive development of online subcultures [5,8].

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Basis

2.1 Review of Relevant Literature

Existing relevant research mainly focuses on four major fields, laying a basic framework for this study: First, research on the characteristics of online subcultures and youth group expression, relying on the Birmingham School subculture theory, clarifies the core characteristics of online subcultures such as resistance and entertainment, as well as the playful and gentle form of resistance of youth subcultures in the Internet era [6,9], laying a theoretical foundation for interpreting the subcultural attributes of crazy talk [4]. Second, research on contemporary youth's emotional dilemmas and expression strategies points out the current situation of emotional repression of young people under high pressure and the limitations of traditional expression, sorting out the playful emotional expression strategies and collective catharsis characteristics of young people adapting to the Internet [1,10], providing a realistic basis for understanding the emotional outlet value of crazy talk. Third, research on media technology and the communication mechanism of online culture confirms that new media break the monopoly of elite culture on expression and algorithms boost the fission communication of online culture, and also reveals the trend that media development drives online culture to focus on emotional value [2,3], providing a media perspective for analyzing the communication characteristics of crazy talk. Fourth, there are still obvious gaps in existing research, with insufficient attention to the active cathartic expression of crazy talk,

a lack of discussion on the diversified linkage mechanisms of its popularity, and no systematic analysis of its potential risks and guidance strategies [5,7,8], which is exactly the research expansion space of this paper.

2.2 Core Theoretical Basis

2.2.1 Birmingham School Subculture Theory

The subculture theory of the Birmingham School focuses on the resistance and ritual nature of youth subcultures, arguing that youth subcultures are symbolic resistance to mainstream culture and social structures, and that young people construct their own cultural identity through unique discourse, behaviors and rituals [6,9]. This theory provides a core perspective for interpreting the gentle resistance nature of online crazy talk. As a new form of youth subculture in the Internet era, crazy talk becomes a symbolic resistance of contemporary youth to the high-pressure social structure through the expressive form of deconstructing traditional discursive logic [4,6].

2.2.2 Emotional Communication Theory

Emotional communication theory focuses on the generation, flow and resonance of emotions in the communication process, holding that digital media provide a carrier for the rapid communication and collective resonance of emotions, and emotional value has become the core driving force of online cultural communication [2]. This theory provides theoretical support for analyzing the emotional core and communication mechanism of crazy talk, explaining why it can trigger strong emotional resonance among young people and become a collective emotional catharsis for youth groups [5,7].

2.2.3 Emotional Regulation Theory

Emotional regulation theory holds that individuals regulate their emotions through various strategies to achieve a balance of mental state [11]. This theory provides a basis for analyzing the individual psychological functions of crazy talk. Relevant studies suggest that through humorous reconstruction and cognitive reappraisal, crazy talk helps young people transform negative emotions, serving as a new spontaneous emotional regulation strategy for contemporary youth [10].

3. Research Approach and Scope

This study adopts a narrative review approach to systematically synthesize existing research on online crazy talk as an emerging form of youth subculture. Rather than presenting primary empirical data or conducting first-hand investigation, the paper integrates and critically examines relevant literature from multiple perspectives, including online subculture studies, youth emotional expression, and digital media communication. Through thematic analysis of existing findings, the study identifies recurring patterns in the discursive features, emotional logic, and communicative mechanisms of online crazy talk discussed in previous studies. In addition, a comparative analytical perspective is employed to examine convergences and divergences across existing literature, while a theoretical synthesis is conducted by integrating the Birmingham School subculture theory, emotional communication theory, and emotional regulation theory to construct a comprehensive analytical framework for reviewing relevant studies. The scope of this review focuses on two main dimensions. First, it covers existing academic discussions related to online crazy talk and analogous forms of digital emotional expression, such as internet memes, youth discourse practices, and emotionally driven communication in digital media environments [3,12-13], which together provide the analytical foundation for understanding the characteristics and evolution of this phenomenon. Second, it pays particular attention to contemporary youth as the central agents of digital subcultural practices—especially college students and early-career individuals—who are widely identified in the literature as the primary creators, disseminators, and interpreters of online crazy talk under shared structural pressures and emotional conditions [1,5,7]. By defining these dimensions, the study establishes a clear analytical boundary while ensuring focused engagement with the most relevant research domains.

4. Discursive Characteristics and Communication Mechanism of Online Crazy Talk

4.1 Text Form: Expressive Paradigm of Deconstructed Logic

Existing studies indicate that the most prominent feature of online crazy talk lies in the complete deconstruction of traditional discursive logic, forming a unique textual form that breaks traditional expression norms in both language use and structural form [5,7]. In terms of language use, crazy talk breaks grammatical norms and expression conventions, extensively adopting rhetorical exaggeration, repetitive sentence patterns and fragmented narration to amplify emotional experience through extreme language expression. Meanwhile, some texts integrate emoticons, online buzzwords and homophonic puns, enhancing the fun and online attributes of expression. In terms of structural form, crazy talk presents nonlinear and jumping characteristics, lacking a clear narrative main line and logical connection. Instead of taking rational logic as the thread of textual connection, it takes the creator's emotional flow as the core, making the text a direct carrier of emotions [10].

4.2 Emotional Core: From Negative Catharsis to Positive Adjustment

Literature shows that the emotional expression of crazy talk presents a distinct trait of melancholy expressed in joy [7,10]. On the surface, it is an extreme catharsis of negative emotions such as anxiety, irritability and helplessness, but in fact it contains the positive psychological adjustment intention of contemporary youth. Through seemingly crazy expressions, creators externalize and release their inner negative emotions, breaking the traditional social requirement of restraint in emotional expression and realizing the true catharsis of emotions. This catharsis is not merely the transmission of negative emotions, but the reconstruction of negative emotions in a playful and humorous way, allowing creators to gain psychological comfort and emotional relief in expression, transforming from negative emotions to mental balance and achieving a positive emotional adjustment effect [5,10].

4.3 Communication Characteristics: Circle-based Resonance and Reproduction

Relevant studies reveal that the communication of online crazy talk shows a strong circle-based characteristic, with contemporary youth, especially college students and new workplace employees, as its core audience [5,7]. This group faces similar survival pressures and value confusions, forming the core circle for the spread of crazy talk. In the communication process, crazy talk takes emotional resonance as the core driving force. Audiences within the circle generate a strong emotional identity with crazy talk due to similar life experiences and emotional feelings, promoting its rapid spread within the circle. Meanwhile, crazy talk has strong reproducibility. Audiences are not mere recipients but active secondary creators. They adapt and reconstruct the original crazy talk texts based on their own life experiences to form new textual content, continuously enriching crazy talk in reproduction and realizing its sustained communication within the circle [3,4].

5. Deep Motivations for the Rise of Online Crazy Talk: The Collusion of Structure, Mentality and Media

Existing literature generally holds that the rise of online crazy talk is not accidental, but the combined result of three factors: structural pressure in the period of social transformation, psychological changes of contemporary youth, and technological empowerment of digital media [2,5,7]. The three factors interact and support each other, driving the rapid popularity of this online subcultural phenomenon.

5.1 Structural Root: Pressure Transmission in the Period of Social Transformation

Scholars point out that the structural contradictions and pressure transmission in the period of social transformation are the fundamental motivation for the rise of crazy talk [4,6]. Contemporary youth are facing unprecedented competitive pressure, forming a closed loop of triple pressures in study, workplace and life. At the academic level, the involvement of further education is intensifying, and young people are facing layers of competition from basic education to higher education, with a continuous rise in academic pressure. At the workplace level, the job market is highly competitive, and new employees are confronted with problems such as difficulty in employment, high work pressure and confusion about career development, making workplace anxiety a common emotion. At the life level, the reality of class solidification makes young people feel the

limitations of development, with life pressure and future anxiety intertwined. These pressures have plunged contemporary youth into deep emotional repression, while traditional emotional expression channels fail to meet their catharsis needs, providing a social soil for the rise of crazy talk [1].

5.2 Psychological Change: From Expression Suppression to Emotional Performance

Research suggests that the significant change in contemporary youth's emotional expression mentality is the internal motivation for the rise of crazy talk [5,10]. With the diversified development of social concepts, the traditional social requirement for young people to restrain emotions and express rationally has gradually weakened. The emotional expression needs of young people have undergone a fundamental transformation, shifting from expression suppression to emotional release and from conforming to norms to being true and free. Contemporary youth pay more attention to the expression of their own emotions and the satisfaction of their own feelings, pursuing the authenticity and individuality of emotional expression. Breaking the constraints of traditional expression, crazy talk allows young people to express their true inner emotions without scruple, becoming the best carrier for them to realize emotional performance [1,4].

5.3 Media Boost: Technological Empowerment of Digital Platforms

Previous studies confirm that the development of Internet technology and the technological empowerment of digital platforms are the key supports for the rise of crazy talk [2,13]. The communication characteristics and technological logic of digital platforms have profoundly shaped the expressive form and communication path of crazy talk. On the one hand, digital media breaks the monopoly of elite culture on expression, granting ordinary young people equal rights of expression and providing a platform foundation for the creation and communication of crazy talk. On the other hand, technological mechanisms such as algorithm recommendation and social sharing help crazy talk achieve fission communication, enabling it to reach more target audiences in a short time. Meanwhile, the interactive characteristics of digital platforms make the creation and communication of crazy talk a collective behavior, promoting emotional resonance and circle connection among young people [5,13].

6. Social Regulatory Functions of Online Crazy Talk: Emotional Regulation and Meaning Construction

Literature review shows that online crazy talk is not only a carrier of emotional expression for contemporary youth, but also a social regulatory method with multiple values [10,11]. It exerts important regulatory functions at the individual, group and cultural levels, realizing the dual construction of emotional regulation and cultural meaning.

6.1 Individual Level

From the perspective of individual psychology, existing research verifies that crazy talk has an important emotional regulation function, serving as an effective strategy for contemporary youth to improve psychological resilience and maintain self-boundaries [10,11]. As a new spontaneous emotional regulation method, crazy talk helps young people externalize and release their inner negative emotions through humorous reconstruction and cognitive reappraisal, transforming negative psychological experiences and achieving a balance of mental state. Meanwhile, by expressing through crazy talk, young people convey their emotional boundaries and needs to the outside world, making others pay attention to their real psychological state. To a certain extent, this maintains their psychological boundaries, reduces psychological harm caused by emotional repression, thereby improving their psychological resilience and enhancing their psychological ability to cope with pressure and setbacks [10].

6.2 Group Level

From the group level, scholars argue that crazy talk acts as a belonging code for youth groups, promoting the construction of circle identity and the strengthening of emotional connection [4,6]. The core audience of crazy talk is young people facing similar pressures, who form unique circle cultural symbols through common discursive practices. In the process of creating, disseminating and interacting with crazy talk, young people feel emotional resonance and identity with each other, building a strong sense of circle belonging. Meanwhile,

crazy talk becomes a medium for communication among young people, connecting originally unfamiliar young people due to similar emotional experiences, strengthening the emotional bonds of youth groups and forming a highly cohesive emotional community [3,5].

6.3 Cultural Level

From the cultural level, existing studies point out that the rise of crazy talk has promoted the innovation of youth expressive paradigms and exerted a certain impact and reconstruction on the values of mainstream culture [4,7]. In terms of expressive paradigms, crazy talk deconstructs the traditional rational discursive logic, constructing a new expressive paradigm centered on emotions and characterized by individuality, changing the expression habits of young people and making emotional expression an important part of online culture. In terms of values, crazy talk demonstrates contemporary youth's value pursuit of valuing the self and focusing on emotions, breaking the traditional cultural value orientation of emphasizing rationality over emotions, promoting social culture to develop in a more inclusive and diverse direction, and making attention to individual emotional value a new cultural consensus [2,6].

7. Potential Risks and Rational Reflection on Online Crazy Talk

Although existing research affirms the multiple positive values of online crazy talk, scholars also note that as an emerging online subcultural phenomenon, it also entails many potential risks in its development process [8]. Without reasonable guidance, it may exert negative impacts on youth groups and the online cultural ecology. In this regard, existing literature suggests that we need to maintain a rational cognition, objectively view its values and problems, and explore scientific guidance paths.

7.1 Potential Risks of Online Crazy Talk

7.1.1 Solidification of Cognitive Inertia and Dissolution of Practical Ability

Studies indicate that long-term reliance on crazy talk for emotional catharsis may lead to the solidification of cognitive inertia and the dissolution of practical ability among young people [8]. Crazy talk catharsizes negative emotions in a playful and humorous way, allowing young people to gain instant psychological comfort in emotional expression. However, such emotional catharsis expression often lacks rational thinking and solutions to problems. If young people overly rely on crazy talk to escape real pressure, they may gradually lose the ability to rationally analyze real problems and form cognitive inertia. Meanwhile, the entertaining expression of crazy talk may immerse young people in the pleasure of emotional catharsis, weakening their motivation to face real problems, trapping them in the dilemma of only catharsis, no action and making it difficult to truly solve the pressures and problems they face [7,8].

7.1.2 Emotional Pollution and Circle Polarization in Cyberspace

Relevant literature warns that centered on negative emotional expression, the concentrated spread of a large number of similar texts of crazy talk may trigger emotional pollution in cyberspace and exacerbate circle polarization [8]. On the one hand, a large number of negative emotional expression texts on online platforms may immerse users in an atmosphere of anxiety, dissatisfaction and irritability, forming the circular spread of negative emotions. This not only fails to achieve real emotional relief, but may also aggravate the psychological burden of young people and trigger group emotional anxiety. On the other hand, the circle-based communication characteristic of crazy talk may trap young people in an information cocoon, making them only interact with people in the circle with similar emotional experiences and find it difficult to accept different views and voices, thereby exacerbating confrontation and polarization between circles and undermining the communication atmosphere in cyberspace [3,8].

7.2 Rational Guidance Paths for Online Crazy Talk

For the online subcultural phenomenon of crazy talk, existing research advocates that we should neither simply deny its positive value nor ignore its potential risks. Instead, we should adopt an attitude of tolerance and guidance to maximize its positive functions and minimize negative impacts [5,8]. First, face up to the youth's emotional needs and build diverse emotional counseling channels. Relevant departments, colleges and social institutions should see the real emotional dilemmas of contemporary youth from crazy talk, abandon

prejudices against youth's emotional expression, and build diversified and professional emotional counseling channels, such as providing psychological counseling services, launching emotional regulation courses and building youth exchange platforms. This will enable young people to have more professional and effective emotional counseling ways besides online catharsis, fundamentally alleviating the youth's emotional pressure [1,10]. Second, guide young people to express themselves rationally and cultivate their problem-solving abilities. Through online publicity, campus education and other means, guide young people to correctly understand the value and limitations of crazy talk, making them realize that emotional catharsis is only a way to relieve pressure, not a fundamental way to solve problems. Meanwhile, focus on cultivating young people's rational thinking and practical abilities, guiding them to not only learn to express emotions reasonably but also analyze problems rationally and solve them actively when facing pressures and problems, avoiding falling into the misunderstanding of only catharsis, no action [8]. Third, strengthen online cultural governance and create a healthy online expression ecology. Online platforms should fulfill their main responsibilities, standardize the spread of crazy talk through algorithm optimization and content review, reduce the spread of excessively negative and vulgar crazy talk texts, and avoid triggering online emotional pollution. Meanwhile, platforms should actively spread positive online culture, guiding online culture to develop in a rational, inclusive and diverse direction, making cyberspace a healthy platform for young people to express emotions reasonably and communicate actively. In addition, society should create an inclusive cultural atmosphere, respect the personalized expression of young people, promote the positive interaction between mainstream culture and online subcultures, and realize the positive development of online subcultures [5,8].

8. Conclusion

This paper conducts a systematic narrative review focusing on online crazy talk as a typical digital subculture of contemporary youth. By combining and summarizing relevant research results, it forms the following core conclusions. Firstly, online crazy talk has formed stable inherent characteristics in discourse expression, emotional implication and communication mode. It subverts conventional rational discourse logic, presents the emotional trait of releasing inner depression through seemingly playful and absurd language, and relies on homogeneous group emotional resonance and continuous participatory re-creation to realize widespread dissemination, becoming a typical emotional expression carrier for contemporary young people. Secondly, the rise and popularity of online crazy talk is the combined result of social structure, individual psychology and media technology. The superimposed survival pressure in the process of social transformation lays the social foundation for its emergence; the shift of young people from emotional restraint to authentic emotional release provides internal psychological motivation; the popularization and algorithmic dissemination mechanism of digital media platforms create indispensable technical conditions for its rapid spread and diffusion. Thirdly, online crazy talk exerts multi-dimensional social adjustment value at individual, group and cultural levels. On the individual level, it helps young people release negative emotions, optimize psychological state and enhance psychological resilience under pressure; on the group level, it builds shared discourse symbols and emotional consensus, consolidates in-group identity and emotional connection among young people; on the cultural level, it breaks the single rational expression tradition, reshapes youth expression paradigms, and promotes the inclusive and diversified development of social value concepts. At the same time, online crazy talk also has prominent potential risks. Long-term over-reliance on such absurd emotional venting may induce young people to form cognitive inertia and evade real problems, accompanied by problems such as negative emotional diffusion in cyberspace and the solidification of group barriers and ideological polarization. Therefore, it is necessary to adhere to the attitude of tolerance and guidance, respect young people's real emotional demands, guide rational emotional expression, improve youth problem-solving practical ability, optimize network content governance, and promote the benign interaction between mainstream culture and youth subculture. On this basis, future research can expand research methods, introduce cross-cultural comparison perspectives and carry out long-term tracking analysis, so as to further deepen the understanding of the development law and evolution trend of youth online subculture in the digital era.

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