

Research on The Negative Role of Internet Memes in Youth Communication and The Correct Guidance Strategy

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Abstract

In the era of rapid Internet development, Internet memes have become highly popular among young people due to their unique expression and widespread dissemination. Memes reflect their emotions and state of mind and serve as a means for observing social phenomena and cultural trends. The popularity of Internet memes provides young people with new forms of communication and expression in complex social environments while fostering creative thinking and observation. However, due to their varied meanings and potential misuse, Internet memes can influence and shape young people's values and worldviews, sometimes leading to adverse effects. This study aims to analyze the impact of Internet memes on developing young people's values and explore appropriate ways to integrate memes into ideological and political education. A qualitative research approach is employed, utilizing literature analysis and case studies to understand how young people use and perceive memes. The findings indicate that while memes can serve as creative tools for social reflection, their uncontrolled use can lead to misinformation, oversimplification of complex issues, and the formation of uncritical thinking patterns. Therefore, a deeper understanding of appropriate meme usage and the role of educators in guiding young people is essential. Digital literacy-based educational approaches should be implemented to help young people understand memes' meaning, context, and social impact. Additionally, thoughtful supervision and regulations that do not stifle creativity should be applied to ensure the healthy and positive development of Internet memes.

Keywords: *Correct guidance, Internet culture, Memes, Negative effects, Youth interactions.*

A. Introduction

The rapid development of the Internet has revolutionized how young people communicate, engage with social issues, and express themselves (Boyd, 2014). One of the most striking digital phenomena is the rise of Internet memes—widely shared images, videos, or text-based content that often convey humor, satire, or symbolic messages (Shifman, 2013). Memes have become essential to online interactions, allowing young people to participate in cultural discourse creatively and engagingly. Through memes, they express emotions, comment on societal trends, and react to current events (Milner, 2016). Their simple yet impactful nature has made them an influential tool for shaping opinions and fostering community engagement in digital spaces (Highfield, 2016).

However, the widespread use of memes also presents challenges regarding their influence on young people's values and worldviews. While memes offer a platform for creativity and critical commentary, their oversimplified, humorous, or even misleading nature can distort perceptions of reality (Phillips & Milner, 2017). The rapid spread of memes enables the

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circulation of misinformation, the reinforcement of stereotypes, and the trivialization of profound social and political issues (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Additionally, certain memes are used maliciously, promoting cyberbullying, radical ideologies, or political propaganda, further complicating their role in youth culture (Zannettou et al., 2018). Given these concerns, there is an urgent need to explore how memes influence young minds and how they can be used constructively within digital communication.

Despite the growing relevance of memes in online discourse, academic literature on their sociopolitical impact remains limited (Gal et al., 2016). Existing studies primarily focus on memes as tools for marketing, entertainment, and online activism (Denisova, 2019). However, few have examined their more profound effects on critical thinking, ideological development, and decision-making among young people. Moreover, there is a lack of research on how young audiences interpret, internalize, and interact with meme content in politically charged or socially sensitive contexts (Ross & Rivers, 2019). This research gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of memes' role in shaping youth perspectives.

To address these gaps, this study aims to analyze the influence of Internet memes on youth interactions, social awareness, and ideological development. It seeks to explore the positive and negative aspects of meme culture, emphasizing how memes can be either empowering tools for engagement or sources of misinformation and cognitive bias. Furthermore, this study proposes strategies for integrating media literacy and critical digital engagement into youth education, helping them navigate the online world with greater awareness and responsibility (Buckingham, 2019). Doing so offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and media practitioners in promoting a balanced and informed approach to digital content consumption.

Understanding the role of memes in shaping youth perspectives is crucial in today's digital society, where social media significantly influences public discourse and individual beliefs (Jenkins et al., 2016). Without proper guidance, young people risk becoming passive consumers of digital content, lacking the critical thinking skills necessary to discern factual information from manipulated narratives (Silverman, 2015). This study contributes to ongoing discussions about youth media literacy, responsible digital engagement, and the integration of online culture into educational frameworks. By examining the complex relationship between memes and youth identity formation, this research provides a foundation for developing ethical and educational guidelines for the responsible use of memes in digital communication.

B. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the impact of Internet memes on developing young people's values and worldviews. A descriptive qualitative approach provides an in-depth analysis of how memes shape youth perceptions, encourage digital engagement, and influence their ideological development. The research integrates literature analysis and case studies to examine meme trends, meanings, and societal implications. By analyzing digital content and youth interactions with memes, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how these cultural artifacts contribute to shaping opinions, reinforcing beliefs, or spreading misinformation.

The research procedure consists of four key stages. First, a literature review is conducted to establish a theoretical foundation by examining previous studies on memes, digital media culture, and youth ideological development. Second, data collection involves selecting and categorizing memes from various online platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, Reddit) based on themes of social, political, and cultural discourse. Additionally, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions are conducted with young people (aged 16–25) to understand their

interpretations and perceptions of memes. Third, case study analysis examines specific meme trends significantly influencing youth discourse, public opinion, or ideological debates. Finally, the collected data is interpreted and synthesized to identify patterns in how memes shape young people's values and digital literacy.

The study utilizes three primary techniques for data collection: document and content analysis, interviews, and observational analysis. Content analysis is applied to assess meme themes, their evolution, and their dissemination across online platforms. Interviews and focus groups allow researchers to explore how young people internalize, react to, and engage with memes in different social and political contexts. Observational analysis involves monitoring meme-sharing behaviors on social media to understand their viral nature and the factors influencing their popularity. The data is then analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involves coding and categorizing meme-related discourse into recurring themes such as satire, misinformation, political engagement, and youth activism. This method helps identify how memes shape young audiences' critical thinking and ideological perspectives.

Ethical considerations are carefully addressed in this study. All participants in interviews and focus groups provide informed consent, and their responses are anonymized to protect their identities. Only publicly available memes are examined when analyzing digital content, ensuring that privacy and contextual integrity are maintained. The study also recognizes the potential biases in meme interpretation and strives for a balanced perspective by incorporating multiple viewpoints from young people, educators, and digital media experts. Through this systematic approach, the research offers valuable insights into the role of memes in shaping youth discourse while proposing strategies for integrating media literacy education to promote critical engagement with digital content.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. The Connotation and Characteristics of Internet Memes

Definition and Origin of Memes

A meme is "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture." A meme acts as a unit for carrying cultural ideas, symbols, or practices that can be transmitted from one mind to another through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena with a mimicked theme (Poskiene, 2014). Supporters of the concept regard memes as cultural analogs to genes in that they self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures. Memes are popular among young people because they are creative and easy to spread. Internet memes reflect the way of thinking and language style of modern young people and have become an important way for them to express themselves and vent their emotions on social networks. However, the blind pursuit and abuse of memes can also distort or ignore some valuable socio-cultural transmissions, so it is important to understand their definition, characteristics, and implications. Internet memes are an important part of Internet culture, reflecting netizens' unique perspectives and interpretations of society and life, but there are also problems of excessive entertainment and vulgarization (Maddox, 2018). This requires us to start from the perspective of regulation and guidance, not only to reflect the unique charm of Internet memes but also to prevent them from excessively guiding young people to form abnormal values, leading to the dilution of mainstream social values.

One of the origins of Internet memes can be traced back to the misrecognition and misuse of the word "Geng," which reveals the interesting and accidental nature of the evolution and spread of the Internet language. At the same time, as a transliteration of "gag", "meme" also reflects the characteristics of cross-cultural communication and integration in online culture.

This process of misuse and transliteration not only enriches the language of the Internet but also reflects the creativity and flexibility of Internet users in communication, and with the rapid development of Internet technology, especially the rise of social media, Internet memes as a new form of cultural communication came into being. The popularization of the Internet has accelerated the speed and scope of information dissemination, providing fertile soil for the generation and popularity of Internet memes. The rapid spread of Internet memes reflects the new characteristics of information dissemination in the Internet era, that is, fast, extensive, and interactive.

Characteristics of memes

Mememes have become important to Internet culture due to their unique humor, simplicity, and colloquialism. They are lively and funny and can quickly touch people's heartstrings, especially young people, and ignite their laughter and empathy. The content of memes is often derived from the details of life or unique interpretations of current hot events, so it is very close to the life situation of college students, which can often resonate with their hearts and prompt them to share and spread on social networks (Galip, 2024).

Internet memes have also become a new cultural symbol, representing a specific online community and its unique value orientation and becoming one of the ways for young people to express themselves and show their individuality. This reflects the innovative spirit of language and emotional expression of contemporary college students, who are no longer satisfied with traditional forms of language but are actively looking for new and more innovative language tools to express themselves.

Mememes are highly malleable and diffuse. Once most netizens accept and recognize an Internet meme, it will spread quickly like wildfire and even cause more derivative memes, forming a prosperous scene of memes. Among them, the memes generated by hot events can often get the fastest spread and diffusion because they are directly related to everyone's life and touch the hot concerns of users.

Mememes are highly generalized, humorously improve people's acceptance of events, and appropriate use can adjust the atmosphere of the chat and increase the entertainment interest. With the emergence of more and more memes on the Internet, malicious content is mixed in, and the current "meme" culture presents a mixed situation. Playing "mememes" needs to be moderate, and excessive playing of "mememes" will make them lose their original humorous nature and even break the law.

2. The Negative Impact of Internet Memes on Ideological and Political Education

With the rapid development of Internet technology and the continuous change of online content and environment, Internet hot memes are becoming increasingly popular among young people with their humorous and easy-to-understand characteristics. They have become quasi-nouns on the Internet today and developed into a unique language form and cultural imagery (Issers, 2021). The popularity of Internet memes is closely related to the influence of ideology and politics, and they reflect young people's social mentality and emotional value to a certain extent. However, the popularity of memes also comes with risks and challenges. Over-reliance on emotional values may lead to a decline in emotional regulation, and the abuse of online memes may affect social order and the purity of values.

The phenomenon of group polarization in online public opinion

The phenomenon of group polarization in online public opinion refers to the homogenization of a particular group's views, attitudes, and behaviors due to the influence of online media, especially the views on specific issues that may tend to be more radical or extreme.

This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among college students and can have the following adverse effects. First is social cognitive bias. As an integral part of social activities, college students' ability to reflect public opinion and transmit information has an important impact on the stability and development of society. Group polarization in online public opinion may bias college students' perception of social phenomena, making their cognition of specific issues too one-sided and extreme. Second, there is the confusion of values. Due to the anonymity and virtuality of network information presentation, the phenomenon of selective contact and selective retention of information recipients has been exacerbated. In this case, college students may be confused about the correct value concept. In the extreme public opinion environment, there may be confusion about value orientation, hurting real life. Thirdly, it affects social stability. College students are the future of society, and their ideological dynamics play an important role in the stability and harmony of society. However, suppose there is group polarization in online public opinion. In that case, it may lead to the possibility of college students' collective action, which will potentially threaten social order and stability.

False Information in The Online Environment Causes Irrational Emotions

Disinformation and public opinion online are often highly misleading and inciting. They may induce college students to irrational emotions, such as anxiety, excitement, anger, and even panic (Johann & Bülow, 2019). Driven by this chaotic emotion, college students may be impulsive or emotional when dealing with and resolving personal and social problems and even hurt themselves or others. First, online disinformation often leads to confusion and further inciting emotional reactions. When college students cannot distinguish between accurate and false information online, they will be easily misled, form wrong cognitions and judgments, and cause confusion and distress in emotional reactions. Second, online disinformation can also cause a collective panic among the population. Long-term exposure to online subcultures, especially those with harmful and vulgar content, may gradually affect teenagers' critical awareness and rational thinking skills. This degradation is manifested in the fact that they are often only satisfied with superficial information acquisition and lack the willingness and ability to dig deep and think. In addition, online disinformation can trigger a polar reaction from the masses. Some inflammatory online information may incite people to irrationally attack groups that do not conform to their views, exacerbating social antagonism and disrupting social order.

The Influence of Online Public Opinion has Challenged The Effectiveness of Traditional Classroom Teaching Methods.

With the widespread influence of online public opinion, the way college students receive and process information has undergone significant changes, which undoubtedly brings new challenges to music politics educators. First, due to the influence of big data and algorithmic recommendations, college students' information reception is increasingly inclined to be personalized and fragmented. This requires educators to use more flexible and diverse teaching methods, such as situational teaching and interactive teaching, in the teaching process to attract the attention of college students and improve the teaching effect (Koza, 2015). Secondly, network public opinion often leads to group polarization among college students, which requires educators to focus on guiding college students to carry out independent thinking and critically distinguish and process information in the network in the teaching process to prevent them from falling into the dilemma of thinking. In addition, online public opinion often exists in the form of incitement and extremism, which may hurt the values of college students. Therefore, in ideological and political education, educators need to guide college students to establish correct values, provide reliable sources of information, and help them correctly understand and deal with online public opinion.

3. Strategies for guiding Internet memes from the perspective of ideological and political education

Innovate The Mainstream Cultural Content Ecology

As a part of Internet pop culture, Internet memes have gradually penetrated the daily lives of teenagers. To a certain extent, they have influenced their ideological concepts and social behaviors (Mielczarek, 2024). Therefore, in the process of ideological and political education, we should adequately deal with the problems related to Internet memes, actively embrace their positive elements, and introduce them into the educational content to improve the interactivity and effectiveness of education. First, ideological and political educators should be open and accepting of memes. Internet memes are often vivid and engaging and easy to resonate with young people so that they may become an effective tool for ideological and political education. Of course, when introducing memes, we must screen them and only keep and guide the positive, healthy parts. Second, ideological and political educators should innovate educational methods and use Internet memes to express or explain ideological and political theories. In this way, theoretical knowledge can be closer to the reality of teenagers' lives and improve their understanding and acceptance of knowledge. However, it is often tricky for serious ideological and political education content to arouse the interest and experience of young people. In contrast, integrated educational content into Internet memes can enhance attractiveness and appeal (Rogers & Giorgi, 2024). Therefore, we should integrate Internet memes and other popular Internet elements into mainstream culture to make them closer to young people's lives and psychological demands. Finally, we should strengthen the education of the core socialist values, adhere to the dominant position of the discourse system of ideological and political education in the field of online public opinion, especially in the circle of young people, guide young people to rationally view and use hot Internet memes, and prevent the potential impact of meme culture on mainstream values.

Form Emotional Resonance and Value Identity

As an important part of Internet culture, Internet memes profoundly impact the minds of the public, especially young people. Therefore, the supervision and guidance of the government and relevant institutions on Internet memes is not only related to the health of the Internet environment but also an important part of ideological and political education. First, the government and relevant agencies should strengthen the legal regulation of memes. Internet memes that contain vulgar, violent, illegal, and other harmful elements shall be cracked down on and prohibited by law. At the same time, legal supervision also needs to keep pace with the times and promptly make corresponding management regulations and handling measures for emerging Internet memes. Second, governments and relevant agencies also need to regulate the network. Technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence can be used to track and analyze memes that appear on the Internet and promptly discover and deal with bad memes to prevent them from hurting the public, especially teenagers. Regarding social regulation, the public, especially teenagers, should also be guided and encouraged to participate in the supervision of memes. In ideological and political education, it is necessary to strengthen media literacy education for young people to distinguish truth and falsehood, good and evil, and develop good habits of Internet behavior. Finally, in ideological and political education, the government and relevant institutions especially need to guide the healthy development of Internet memes actively. Relevant online activities can be held to guide young people to create and disseminate positive memes and, at the same time, to officially recognize and promote the emergence of outstanding memes so as to increase the dissemination and influence of the core socialist values in the network.

Use New Media Platforms for Positive Guidance

New media platforms have played an important role in modern society, changing how information is disseminated and providing new possibilities and opportunities for ideological and political education. However, how to use these platforms to provide adequate positive guidance has become an important issue facing ideological and political education. First, we can quickly and widely disseminate the core values of socialism through new media platforms. With the rise of new media platforms, more information has been disseminated to more people, and we should make good use of these tools to spread our values to most netizens in a form that young people like to see. Second, the interactive nature of new media platforms also opens up new paths for political education. Educators can interact with learners in real-time through online Q&A and discussions and deepen their understanding of ideological and political theories. At the same time, it can also listen to and guide the speeches of netizens and realize personalized online psychological counseling and public opinion guidance. In addition, the effective use of new media resources for situational and experiential teaching is an important way to improve the effect of ideological and political education. With the help of online resources, hot news, case analysis, etc., young people can perceive the profound connotation of the core socialist values through personal experience and practice. Finally, the use of new media to carry out ideological and political education must shoulder the role of managers and guides of the online community, guide and guide netizens to express their emotions promptly, deal with controversial issues rationally, and maintain the cleanliness of cyberspace from the source.

4. The actual impact and reflection of Internet memes

The popularity of the term "lying flat" reflects the inner state of contemporary young people in the face of pressure and anxiety. They choose to compromise and no longer participate in social psychology, such as "involution." This attitude can decrease their enthusiasm for work, study, and life, affecting their personal development and social participation (Ayele, Cecchetti, & Reber, 2025). At the same time, "lying flat" is the attitude of young people who choose to give up their struggle and live downstream in the face of fierce competition, class solidification, and inner poverty. Such attitudes may not only lead to the stunting of personal development. However, they may also potentially impact the mainstream values and culture of society, leading to the dilution of mainstream values in society. "Lying flat" is a psychological adjustment mechanism for young people in the face of stress and anxiety (Artamonov, 2021), which reflects their anxiety, depression, and compromised social mentality. This mindset can lead them to run away from challenges rather than respond positively when faced with them. There is a potential impact on mainstream values and culture. It may lead to the dilution of mainstream social values, and it is necessary to guide young people to rationally view and use Internet hot memes by strengthening the education of socialist core values.

The popularity of Internet memes also shows the release of young people's pressure and negative psychological emotions in social competition (Alonso & Sandoval, 2024). One of the side effects of the accelerated development of modern society is the "involution" of excessive social competition, which increases the psychological pressure on people. When social pressure exceeds the psychological threshold normal people can bear, negative emotional experiences will accumulate into negative psychological energy, and positive emotional experiences will become a necessary way for people to regulate psychological emotions and release negative psychological energy. At this time, the expression of words that can relax and relieve emotions will attract the attention of young people.

The proliferation of Internet memes not only leads to the anomie of personal language expression and lack of cultural literacy but also extends to the ecological environment of the Chinese language, affecting the quality of the people and the inheritance of history and culture. The anomie of language expression endangers the ecological environment of the Chinese

language. In the era when stalking and playing memes have become the Internet trend, people no longer export chapters but "cannot speak without stalks." Fragmented, meaningless, and logically chaotic Internet stalks make people's thinking intermittent, shallow, and disorderly, weakening their ability and level of expression.

D. Conclusion

Internet memes have become a significant form of communication among young people, shaping their cultural interactions, social awareness, and ideological perspectives. As a powerful tool in digital discourse, memes influence youth culture and contribute to broader social patterns and cultural development. Their widespread use highlights the importance of understanding how they shape opinions, reinforce societal norms, and sometimes spread misinformation. Given their potential to empower and mislead, it is crucial to critically examine their role in shaping young people's values and engagement with social issues. As meme culture evolves, research in this field must be expanded to explore its more profound implications on youth identity, critical thinking, and societal discourse. Memes' dynamic nature requires interdisciplinary approaches combining media studies, psychology, and education to analyze their impact comprehensively. Further studies should focus on how young audiences interpret and internalize meme content, particularly politically and culturally sensitive contexts. By advancing research on this topic, scholars can provide valuable insights into the broader implications of digital communication on youth behavior and social development.

To ensure that Internet memes contribute positively to youth culture, promoting media literacy education and critical digital engagement is essential. Young people should be encouraged to approach memes with a discerning mindset, recognizing their humor and creativity while being aware of their potential for distortion and manipulation. Avoiding over-indulgence and blind acceptance of meme content can help prevent the spread of misinformation and the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes. Educators, policymakers, and media practitioners are crucial in guiding young people toward balanced and responsible digital content consumption. In conclusion, Internet memes will remain influential in youth communication and cultural expression. While they provide a platform for creativity and social commentary, their impact must be critically examined to ensure they contribute positively to youth development and social discourse. By integrating education, guidance, and ethical digital practices, we can foster a more informed and responsible meme culture that supports meaningful dialogue, cultural preservation, and the constructive evolution of youth communication in the digital era.

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