

Youth Subculture Performance from the Perspective of Emotional Communication——A Research Based on the Phenomenon of Post-Print

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of “Traffic is King,” the internet has been inundated with a plethora of videos and content that are vacuous, information-deficient, and traffic-driven. On social media platforms, audiences have created numerous linguistic expressions rich in “meme” characteristics, such as “meaningless words.” As an important component of youth subculture, “meaningless words” primarily creates characters through collages, spoofs, parodies, and other forms, with its mode of expression being more direct and simplistic. It constitutes an important means of satire and ridicule on social media platforms. Why do contemporary youth produce “meaningless words”? Why do “meaningless words” spread so widely? This paper will explore the production mechanism of “meaningless words” from the perspective of emotional communication.

Full Text

Preamble

Youth Subculture Performance from the Perspective of Emotional Communication——A Research Based on the Phenomenon of “Meaningless Words”

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Abstract: In the context of “Traffic is King,” the internet is flooded with videos and content that are empty in meaning, lacking in information, and designed solely to attract traffic. On social platforms, audiences have created numerous language expressions rich in “meme” characteristics, such as “meaningless

words.” As an important component of youth subculture, “meaningless words” primarily creates characters through collages, spoofs, parodies, and other forms, with expression that is more direct and simple. It serves as an important vehicle for satire and “roasting” on social media platforms. Why do contemporary youth produce “meaningless words”? Why does “meaningless words” spread so widely? This paper explores the production mechanism of “meaningless words” from the perspective of emotional communication.

Keywords: emotional communication, youth subculture, meaningless words

1 Introduction

With the development of self-media and digital technology, an increasing amount of meaningless, information-poor video content has entered public view, driven by the “eyeball economy.” The competition for traffic has promoted the emergence of increasingly sensationalist dramas and low-quality essays. Simultaneously, cyberspace has gradually become an important channel for young people to express themselves and articulate their emotions. As a new cultural form within the internet environment, youth subculture has attracted greater attention due to its anti-authority and anti-hegemonic characteristics. Youth groups utilize cyberspace for discourse expression and emotional catharsis, which has gradually developed into a distinct youth subculture phenomenon. In this context, languages with “meme” attributes such as “meaningless words” have begun to emerge. “Meaningless words” primarily creates expressions through collage, spoof, parody, and other forms, with more direct and simple expression. It serves as an important vehicle for expression, satire, and “roasting” on social media platforms. We observe that many people are dissatisfied with low-quality content, so they use parody to imitate nonsense and satirize these works, achieving a form of resistance. This raises several questions: Why do today’s youth produce “meaningless words”? What exactly is the motive behind this phenomenon? Why does “meaningless words” spread so widely? What is it about “meaningless words” that meets the spiritual needs of contemporary youth?

2.1 Literature Review on the Phenomenon of “Meaningless Words”

In recent years, Chinese scholars have conducted multi-dimensional research on the cultural phenomenon of “meaningless words.” Ding Weiqiang from Jiangsu Normal University, in his 2022 paper *An Analysis of the Status Quo and Causes of Online “Meaningless Words,”* summarized and categorized the types of “meaningless words” from the perspective of their meaning. Xie Lili from Liaoning Normal University analyzed “meaningless words” from the perspective of their sources, characteristics, and creative methods in her 2022 article *A Brief Discussion on Network “Meaningless Words.”* Luo Min and Hu Mingyuan from Jinan University analyzed the irony and self-reference of “meaningless words” based

on John Fiske's cultural consumption theory in their 2022 work *Meaningless Words: From Ironic Parody to the Vortex of Self-Reference*.

However, although these studies have examined the meaning and concept of “meaningless words,” they have overlooked its widespread dissemination mechanism and generation motivation among young people.

2.2 Literature Review on “Youth Subculture”

With the broad participation of the younger generation in various fields, the concept of “youth” has gradually entered people's field of vision. The American Chicago School and the British Birmingham School have conducted fruitful research on youth subculture issues, forming unique theoretical research methods and paradigms. In the mid-1970s, the Birmingham School introduced ideological construction theory, cultural hegemony, and structuralist semiotics into subculture studies, analyzed the “resistance” style of subculture from the perspective of class and power, and proposed the “resistance-integration” paradigm to reveal the sociological mechanisms of the emergence and development of youth subculture. Since the 1980s, in the context of globalization and informatization, the Birmingham School's study of youth subculture has been reflected upon and corrected for its overemphasis on the determinism of class and other grand structures. “Post-subculture theory” emerged as the times required, and the theory of youth subculture achieved more complete development.

Jia Taixin from Harbin Normal University, taking *Talk Show Conference* as an example, studied the impact of online talk show programs on youth subculture and described the characteristics of youth subculture as diverse, entertainment-oriented, and virtually real. Wu Yimeng from Shanghai University combined the “Use and Satisfaction Theory” with the development of youth subculture, approaching from the audience perspective to provide enlightenment for enhancing the communication effect of online variety shows. Wang Zechen from Xi'an Finance and Economics University, in his 2023 article *Emotional Consolation and Flexible Resistance: Linna Belle from the Perspective of Youth Subculture*, explored the important role of group identity and identification in fan interactions, pointing out that “youth in confusion will produce a kind of ‘We’ group identity, which can help Linna Belle fans enhance their self-concept, enable young people to quickly join social circles and seek a sense of pride and security in the group, and the consistent values can be recognized by Linna Belle fans.”

All of these studies have conducted multi-level research on “youth subculture,” but they have not linked the phenomenon of “meaningless words” with youth subculture, ignored the important role of emotional transmission in the generation and development of youth subculture, and have not analyzed the mechanism and motivation of subculture output such as “meaningless words.”

2.3 Question Raised

Therefore, starting from the theory of emotional communication, this paper attempts to take the typical youth subculture exhibition of “meaningless words” as an example to analyze its production mechanism and the spiritual needs of contemporary youth groups reflected by it.

3.1.1 Assumption Establishment

In order to fill the gap in the study of youth subculture performance from the perspective of emotional communication, we chose the research method of audience survey. According to the output mechanism of “meaningless words,” we propose the following assumptions:

H1: The more young people need emotional relief, the more “meaningless words” they produce.

H2: The more young people choose to “lie down,” the more “meaningless words” they produce.

H3: The stronger the tendency of young people to attack language formalism, the more “meaningless words” they produce.

In order to test these hypotheses, this study adopts a questionnaire survey to answer the above questions by setting questions across different dimensions.

3.1.2 Sampling Method

The corresponding research object of this hypothesis is young people who come into contact with “meaningless words” and spread it on social media platforms. We designed the *Questionnaire on the Reasons for Producing “Meaningless Words”* (see Appendix) on the Questionnaire Star platform and then released it via QQ, WeChat, and offline channels. The survey completed the data collection, collation, and analysis process on February 10, 2023. The survey focused on both open and closed questions, with a total of 19 questions. The main contents include: (1) Confirmation of basic information, including gender, age, educational background, etc.; (2) Emotional catharsis, “lying down” psychology, and tendency to attack language formalism. Through the respondents’ cognitive status of the above three independent variables, the tendency and degree of different respondents in emotional catharsis, “lying down” psychology, and criticism of language formalism were obtained; (3) The output part of “meaningless words.” The reasons for the public to produce “meaningless words” can be identified by using questions from several dimensions such as the scene, frequency, and attitude toward “meaningless words.”

3.2.1 Preparation of Interview Outline

The interview questions are mainly divided into three parts. The first part mainly involves the basic information of the interviewees, including their occupation and city. The second part reduces the research questions to interview

questions, including the scene of their use of “meaningless words,” a specific example of “meaningless words,” and their views on the phenomenon of “meaningless words.” The third part mainly involves problems that may be explored in depth.

3.2.2 Interviewee Selection

This study conducted a 15-minute semi-structured in-depth interview with 12 randomly selected interviewees. The interview began in January 2023 and ended in February 2023. The 12 interviewees have differences in age, occupation, location, and understanding of “meaningless words,” and the degree of homogeneity is low. The interview was conducted via telephone interview, WeChat text interview, or one-on-one face-to-face interview. The processing of interview content was completed by myself. See the table for the basic information of the interviewees.

Table 1 The Basic Information of the Interviewees

Gender	Occupation	Region	Know anything about “meaningless words”
Female	Editor	Beijing	Bank Teller
Zhejiang	Female	Postgraduate	Product operator
Undergraduate	Beijing	Xi’an	Beijing
Female	Not yet	Shanghai	Female
Freelance	Shandong	Teacher	Programmer
Anhui	Beijing	Not yet	Inner Mongolia
Female	Undergraduate	Female	Lawyer
Beijing	Tianjin		

4.1 Description of Sample Features

More than 60% of the samples were female, and 34.21% were male. From the distribution of the highest education level, most of the samples are “undergraduate,” with 219 respondents, accounting for 72.04%. From the perspective of age distribution, the majority of the samples are in the “18-25 years old” group, with a total of 224, accounting for 73.68%. From the perspective of occupation distribution, most of the samples are “students,” accounting for 46.71%, followed by “office workers,” accounting for 38.82%. There were 190 samples from Beijing, significantly higher than any other region.

4.2 Description of Structural Analysis Results

A total of 304 valid questionnaires were collected in this survey, among which 84% had been exposed to “meaningless words.” Through the investigation of the channels through which people encounter “meaningless words,” it was found that social media and close friends are the two major ways for people to access

relevant content of “meaningless words.” The primary usage scenario is “communicating with friends.” It can be seen that “meaningless words,” as a text with strong meme attributes, possesses powerful social communication properties. In addition, regarding the frequency of audience exposure to “meaningless words,” medium frequency (11-20 times per week) is the most common.

In this study, both independent and dependent variables were measured using a five-level Likert scale. Therefore, in data analysis, corresponding variables were generated by summing and averaging the measurement statements, which were then included in subsequent statistical analysis. Pearson correlation analysis found a significant positive correlation between emotional catharsis and the frequency of individuals using “meaningless words” ($r = 0.213$, $P < 0.05$), supporting research hypothesis H1. There was a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.152$, $P < 0.05$) between “lying down” psychology and the frequency of individuals using “meaningless words,” supporting hypothesis H2. There is a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.303$, $P < 0.05$) between the tendency to criticize language formalism and the frequency of individuals using “meaningless words.” The research hypothesis H3 was supported. This indicates that the stronger the need for emotional catharsis, the stronger the psychological tendency toward “lying down,” and the stronger the tendency to attack language formalism, the more frequently individuals use “meaningless words.”

From the above results, social and emotional factors are essential elements in the generation and dissemination of “meaningless words.” Among the main ways for young people to encounter “meaningless words,” social media and friends around them are social channels that can achieve emotional influence through information exchange and dissemination. Therefore, when spreading “meaningless words,” these two factors work together to change people’s emotions in communication with strong social attributes, achieving the effect of boosting the rapid online and offline spread of “meaningless words.” At the same time, after being exposed to “meaningless words,” the audience will continue to share with their friends according to the “sociable” and emotional factors in the communication process. Communication with friends is characterized by strong relationships, which makes “meaningless words” spread widely under the influence of many factors including emotions, occasions, and external environment, becoming a phenomenon with obvious characteristics and a wide range of audiences.

At the same time, emotions include both positive and negative dimensions, which leads to a wider range of scenarios and frequencies for the use of “meaningless words.” In terms of emotional catharsis, the audience may feel pressure, frustration, and other negative emotions, so they have the need to use “meaningless words” to relieve embarrassment and experience pleasure. When the audience is in a positive mood of excitement and joy, they will also have the need to share their happiness. In this case, “meaningless words” will also become an expression of choice for young people because of its unique expression of humor and playful joking. In terms of the psychology of “lying down,” scholars

Li Shuai and Zhao Weilong from the Central University of Finance and Economics pointed out in their 2022 article *Arousal or Avoidance: Preparation of Lying Down Questionnaire and Related Psychological Factors* that “lying down is divided into avoidance lying down and awakening lying down, which are two completely opposite life states.” This finding is also consistent with the fact that emotions contain both positive and negative attributes, further expanding the context in which “meaningless words” is used. Among the elements of attacking language formalism, on the one hand, there are the audience’s feelings of resistance, and on the other hand, it reflects the sentiment of pursuing free and valuable language expression. Therefore, this index also has a duality, which further broadens the occasions for the use of “meaningless words” and promotes its output and dissemination. In addition, from a longitudinal perspective, the above data show that three factors—namely the need for emotional catharsis, lying down psychology, and the tendency to attack language formalism—are positively correlated with the use of “meaningless words.” Therefore, as the intensity of emotion deepens, it will inevitably promote the output of “meaningless words” in a larger range and at a higher frequency.

4.3 Description of Interview Results

When we conducted in-depth interviews on the usage scenarios of “meaningless words” and the reasons for using them, we were surprised to find that the respondents’ answers confirmed our ideas.

4.3.1 Using Scenarios of “Meaningless Words”

“I respond to my friends’ ‘meaningless words’ when I’m relaxed and happy, but I don’t respond to people I don’t know or strangers who use ‘meaningless words’ to communicate with me, whether online or offline, because we don’t have a high level of intimacy and I don’t think it’s appropriate.” “I often use ‘meaningless words’ online. For example, when I comment on topics I am interested in on Weibo, it helps me find like-minded people. I often unconsciously use ‘meaningless words’ when playing offline with my friends. In some awkward situations, I use ‘meaningless words’ deliberately to relieve embarrassment, but not much.” “I only use it with friends who are also familiar with the meme; otherwise, my use of the meme will cause embarrassment if others don’t understand it.”

“Meaningless words” first appeared on the Internet, and its viral spread was promoted by netizens’ widespread use on social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat and video platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili. According to the interview results, although there is a difference in the frequency of using “meaningless words” in online and offline scenes, it is not the most critical factor affecting the output of “meaningless words.” Audiences use “meaningless words” online mainly for emotional communication purposes such as communication, sharing, and expressing opinions, which has social and communication attributes. In offline use, the scope of the target group is limited to “relatives and friends,” which further highlights the emotional connection and emotional

transmission characteristics in the production process of “meaningless words.” It can be concluded that social and emotional factors have a significant impact on the output of “meaningless words.” The stronger the social nature and the higher the need for emotional expression, the higher the frequency of using “meaningless words.”

At the same time, “meaningless words,” as a kind of youth subculture, enables users to find groups who also understand and play with memes and join different groups and circles. In the group, the audience’s behavior of producing “meaningless words” is recognized by group members, and it is easy to produce and spread “meaningless words” more frequently under the influence of group dynamics.

4.3.2 Reasons for Using “Meaningless Words”

“I use meaningless words mainly to rebel and ridicule, meaning that I neither approve of what you are saying nor want to continue the conversation with you.” “Meaningless words is all about memes, which are perfect for awkward situations.” “Meaningless words is mainly able to express the true thoughts of the heart; in some embarrassing occasions on which people are not convenient to directly express emotions, the use of meaningless words can not only convey their true thoughts but also be more polite, and does not affect everyone’s feelings.”

The above results show that the reason why people use “meaningless words” is mainly based on the emotional features contained in “meaningless words,” such as sarcasm, humor, and directness. It has the characteristics of sarcasm. While expressing people’s own opinions, they can also show their emotions to the other side. Analyzing the reasons for its use, some groups make use of the humorous features of “meaningless words” to relieve embarrassment and promote the development of social interaction to a more positive state. The other group has a sense of resistance and mockery: to vent negative emotions and express their true thoughts, to attack language formalism and show their dissatisfaction with meaningless and worthless language expression, and to magnify their own “lying down” psychology, conveying an attitude of refusing to engage in communication by using “meaningless words” to not respond positively to the topic in the communication process. Therefore, it is found that people’s need for emotional catharsis, “lying down” psychology, and tendency to attack language formalism are the main reasons for frequent use of “meaningless words.” The research hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

5.1 Reasons for the Output of “Meaningless Words”

Through the combination of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview, this paper studied the output and dissemination phenomenon of “meaningless words” and attempted to analyze the causes and influencing factors of the output of “meaningless words.” The study found that the generation and

dissemination of “meaningless words” is highly social and emotional, so it can be widely spread on social media and among relatives and friends. At the same time, the frequency of the output of “meaningless words” is correlated with the need for emotional catharsis, the psychology of lying down, and the tendency to attack language forms. The stronger people’s need for emotional catharsis, the stronger the psychology of lying down, and the stronger the tendency to attack language formalism, the more frequently they use “meaningless words.”

5.2 “Meaningless Words” Plays an Important Role in Expressing Views and Communicating

“Meaningless words” mainly refers to the slightly funny remarks and videos in the field of new media, which seem to say something but contain no useful information. The core of its expression effect lies in humor and low information density, and the essence of its grammatical structure lies in repetition. This study proposes that “meaningless words” is affected by the need for emotional catharsis, the psychology of lying down, and the tendency to attack language forms, explores the usage scenes of “meaningless words,” and analyzes the social and emotional factors reflected in the use of “meaningless words,” so as to provide some references for the study of the subject, communication mechanism, and communication channels related to the phenomenon of “meaningless words.”

As a kind of youth subculture, “meaningless words” is closely related to the stratification, emotionality, and sociability of the youth group. The generation of “meaningless words” is related to the attitude of the youth group in pursuing relaxation and freedom. At the same time, it implies the resistance and mockery of young people toward all kinds of worthless and meaningless social phenomena in life. The emergence of “meaningless words” provides a new way of expression for young people to express their inner emotions more truly and plays an important role in expressing views and communicating.

5.3 When Using and Disseminating “Meaningless Words,” People Should Still Pay Attention to the Occasions and Objects

It is worth noting that “meaningless words” is more commonly used in informal situations due to its meme nature, so the use of “meaningless words” in formal situations should be considered more carefully. Due to the low information density contained in the dialogue, both sides may have difficulties in understanding, which may even lead to unnecessary misunderstandings that do not play a positive role in communication. At the same time, we should avoid excessive use of “meaningless words” because its expression contains more repetitive components and strong emotional characteristics. Excessive use may affect the efficiency of learning, work, making friends, and other aspects. At the same time, because individuals have different cognition of the concept of “meaningless words,” we should also consider individual differences when using “meaningless words” with

the audience.

On the other hand, we should pay attention to the influence of “meaningless words” on teenagers. The Internet provides a broad platform and audience for the generation and dissemination of “meaningless words,” but there are many young people among them. Many self-media outlets use “meaningless words” to chase clout, transmit bad values, or publicize some violent contents, which is easy to form “propaganda oxygen” among teenagers. When watching videos and reading articles, teenagers may have biased judgment on “meaningless words” due to their limited experience. It is worth mentioning that a lot of “meaningless words” is based on classic works, poems, and famous sayings, such as: “listen to your words, such as listening to your words,” which may have a negative impact on teenagers’ learning of related content. This is all worthy of vigilance and reflection.

5.4 Conclusion

In addition, in future studies, researchers in the field of communication may need to pay more attention to the generation and communication mechanisms of numerous emerging phenomena in youth subculture, explore the spiritual needs of contemporary youth through the study of various phenomena, and use them to guide various communication practices.

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Appendix 1: A Questionnaire on the Reasons for Producing “Meaningless Words”

Dear Sir/Madam,

How do you do? We are conducting a survey on attitudes toward “meaningless words,” and we are looking forward to your careful completion. Examples of “meaningless words” include: “three people like three people,” “listen to your words, such as listen to words,” “seven days, such as every other week,” “if I am not fat that would be quite thin,” and so on. Thank you for your support and help!

. Basic Information

1. **What is your gender?** A. Male B. Female
2. **What’s your age?** A. Under 18 years old B. 18-25 years old C. 26-35 years old
D. 36-45 years old E. 46 years old and older

3. What is your highest degree (including current education) so far?

A. Graduate B. Undergraduate C. Junior college and below

4. What is your current occupation? A. Student B. Office worker C.

Freelancer D. None E. Others

7. Which of the following statements do you think is “meaningless words”? A. I had just left when you arrived

B. There are two trees in the yard, one is a date tree, the other is also a date tree

C. YYDS

D. Why are you putting me off? Do you care about me? I don’t think you care at all

8. How do you know “meaningless words”? A. Social interaction platforms such as Weibo and Wechat

B. Video platforms such as Douyin and Bilibili

C. Connect with others offline

D. Other

. Subject Survey (5-level Likert Scale)

Emotional Catharsis: 9. Please answer the following questions according to your real situation.

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) I care more about others’ impression of me
- (2) My mood is easily affected by various factors (such as work, study, emotional problems, etc.)
- (3) I need to deliberately control my emotions
- (4) I often feel that I have emotions to vent
- (5) I will not choose a mild way to vent my emotions (including shopping, playing games, singing, sports, teasing, etc.) within a reasonable range.

Lying Flat Psychology: 10. Please answer the following questions according to your real situation.

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) I don’t think school grades are important. Passing is good
- (2) If you can’t afford to buy a house, you won’t buy one

- (3) Team work is the same as doing more or less, as little as possible
- (4) I don't care about other people's opinions and opinions, and I don't force myself to do things I don't
- (5) What would you like to change about your current life

Language Formalism: 11. Please answer the following questions according to your real situation.

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) I often worry that not speaking tactfully will affect my image in the eyes of others
- (2) I always think twice when responding to questions, and sometimes I lie or go against my heart
- (3) On some occasions out of some need to say lies or against the heart
- (4) I feel regret or dissatisfaction with myself after telling lies or going against my heart.
- (5) I want to be free to speak the truth, tell the truth, and speak from the heart.

. The Output of Nonsense Literature

- 12. When do you use “meaningless words”?** A. Communicating with Friends and Family online
B. Communicating with strangers online
C. Communicating with friends and family offline
D. Communicating with strangers offline
E. Use at any time, regardless of the occasion

- 13. How often do you use “meaningless words”?** A. Never used
B. 1-10 times a week
C. 11-20 times a week
D. Use 21-30 times per week
E. Use more than 30 times per week

14. What is your attitude toward the use of “meaningless words”?
(Likert 5 scale)

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) “Meaningless words” can help me express my true emotions

- (2) When I need to let off steam, I will choose to use “meaningless words”
- (3) I feel at ease using Nonsense literature
- (4) “Meaningless words” can narrow the distance between each other
- (5) “Meaningless words” is the embodiment of relaxation, can enhance the relationship

15. What is your attitude toward the use of “meaningless words”?

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) “Meaningless words” does not conform to the expression habit I do not use
- (2) “Meaningless words” doesn’t help me get my point across quickly
- (3) “Meaningless words” will hinder normal communication
- (4) “Meaningless words” will trigger my boredom in communication
- (5) In order to avoid invalid questionnaire, please choose “strongly agree.”

16. What do you think of Nonsense literature?

A score of 5 indicates strong agreement, 1 indicates strong disagreement, and the lower the score, the lower the agreement.

- (1) Low information density and low value
- (2) Short, flat, fast, easy to express and understand
- (3) It is sufficiently interesting
- (4) Derivatives of negative subculture, which are more objectionable
- (5) It has certain social functions

17. What is your attitude toward Nonsense literature? A. Having a meme can express emotion and support!

B. It is not often used or excluded. Neutral!

C. Does not conform to the language expression habits, exclusion!

18. What do you think of the future development of “meaningless words”? A. Will be formally integrated into daily life

B. It is just a fad and will be obsolete.

C. Other

19. What is your opinion on the use of “meaningless words,” or what you need to add to the topic of “meaningless words”? Please leave

your valuable opinion.

Appendix 2: Outline of In-depth Interview

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.