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

**Authors:** Jue Wang

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### Abstract

Since 2022, the subculture of “crazy literature” has gained increasing popularity among young people, and the discourse characteristics of its texts as well as the emotional motivations underlying them have begun to attract attention and discussion. Through discourse analysis, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires, this study finds that: in terms of discourse characteristics, “crazy literature” frequently employs rhetorical devices such as repetition and accumulation, constructing vivid visual imagery through logically incoherent discourse; regarding emotional motivation, it reflects young people’s intense needs for emotional catharsis and self-regulation; concerning interaction patterns, “crazy literature” is not merely an isolated emotional expression of individuals, but rather a vehicle for young people’s social desires, exhibiting characteristics of a “carnival” interactive ritual.

### Full Text

## Youth Subculture Performance from the Perspective of Emotional Communication: A Study Based on the Phenomenon of “Crazy Literature”

**Jue Wang**

College of European Languages and Cultures, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, China

*Corresponding author E-mail: [margueritewanguj@163.com](mailto:margueritewanguj@163.com)*

**Abstract:** Since 2022, the subculture of “crazy literature” has gained increasing popularity among young people, drawing attention to the discursive characteristics of its texts and the emotional motivations underlying them. Through discourse analysis, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires, this study reveals

that, in terms of discourse characteristics, “crazy literature” frequently employs rhetorical devices such as repetition and accumulation, constructing vivid imagery through logically disordered language. Regarding emotional motivation, it reflects youth’s strong needs for emotional catharsis and self-regulation. In its interactive mode, “crazy literature” is not an isolated form of individual emotional expression but rather a vehicle for youth’s social desires, exhibiting the features of a “carnival” interactive ritual.

**Key words:** emotional communication; subculture; crazy literature

## 1 Introduction

Since 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic in China has shown a trend of multi-point outbreaks, impacting the nation’s economic growth rate and leaving young people facing a reality of fewer employment opportunities and surging academic pressure. In this context, youth have increasingly inclined toward expressing their dissatisfaction with social structures through forms such as “lying flat,” “Buddhist mentality,” and “going crazy,” thereby forming a subculture with distinctive features and rich connotations. Among these, “crazy speech”—characterized by illogicality, nonsense, and strong imagery—has become particularly popular among young people and gradually evolved into “crazy literature” reminiscent of Qiong Yao’s dramatic style. We have observed growing participation among youth in the creation and dissemination of “crazy literature,” which has successfully carved out a discursive space through pure emotional expression. This raises important questions: Why do contemporary youth produce “crazy literature,” and what specific motivations and spiritual needs lie behind it? What accounts for its widespread dissemination?

### 2.1 Literature Review on Youth Subcultures

Youth group subcultures have attracted scholarly attention from multiple perspectives. The study of “subculture” originated with the Chicago School of Sociology, where American scholars such as Robert King Merton focused on marginalized youth groups in society and derived youth’s rebellious subculture from social structural conflicts. Subsequently, the Birmingham School introduced the concept of “class” and summarized subcultural characteristics as “resistance,” “stylization,” and “marginality.” However, in the 1980s and 1990s, “post-subculture” scholars represented by David Muggleton (2000) criticized the Birmingham School’s subculture theory, and “subculture” gradually shifted from a political concept to “an orgy of symbols with no meaning attached.”

In addition to broadly tracing the theoretical development of “subculture,” domestic scholars have paid special attention to connecting the concept with contemporary youth’s creative and communicative activities. Key research topics include youth “involution,” popular terms such as “lay flat” that project images of youth cultural life, and “consumer subcultures” such as blind boxes and virtual idols. However, most of these studies focus on youth consumption and

re-creation of existing cultural products, with few examining original communication phenomena with distinctive textual characteristics like “crazy literature” from the perspective of emotional communication.

## 2.2 Literature Review on Emotional Communication Theory

The concept of emotional communication originates from psychology. Western scholars Gendron, Lindquist, and Barsalou proposed in *Emotional Lexicon Shapes Emotional Perception* that “emotional language can provide context for emotional perception,” laying a psychological foundation for emotional communication theory. In the 1990s, the social sharing of emotion theory gradually emerged, focusing on the perspective of social sharing to explore the process of emotional transmission from individuals to groups.

In domestic research, scholars Yunze Zhao and Zhen Liu from Renmin University of China systematically organized the concept and principles of emotional communication, arguing that it has the potential to promote the vertical development of public opinion studies and should be examined from multiple perspectives of news and communication research. However, most existing research focuses on public crisis or public opinion management, rarely combining it with youth groups—who exhibit complex and diverse emotions—to further explore the mechanisms of emotional transmission among young people.

Therefore, this article will proceed from emotional communication theory to address the following questions: Why do contemporary youth produce “crazy literature” and what specific motivations lie behind it? What psychological needs does it fulfill? Why has “crazy literature” spread so widely?

## 3.1 Research Methods

This study first conducted pilot research using in-depth interviews. The interview questions were divided into three parts. The first part covered basic respondent information, including gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and location. The second part transformed research questions into interview questions, covering motivations and methods for creating “crazy literature,” as well as frequency and platforms of dissemination. The third part explored deeper issues, including understanding of “crazy literature,” most impressive examples, feelings before and after publishing, and expected audiences for “crazy literature.”

Following the principle of “strength sampling” and using a “snowball” sampling method, this study conducted 30-minute semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 participants involved in creating and disseminating “crazy literature.” The interviews ran from December 2022 to February 2023. According to the principle of maximum sampling in qualitative research, by the time the 10th interviewee was recruited, the content was sufficient to answer the research

questions and respondent homogeneity was low, so sampling concluded. Interview results were transcribed verbatim, producing a 2,770-word transcript. Basic respondent information is shown in Table 1 .

Based on interview results, hypotheses were formulated, and through questionnaires, more comprehensive and extensive data were obtained on young people's use of, dependence on, emotional attitudes toward, and motivations for "crazy literature" to inform further qualitative research. Corresponding hypotheses are proposed as follows:

**H1:** The higher the interactive emotional needs of young people, the higher the frequency of "crazy literature" production.

**H2:** The greater young people's need for self-regulation and persuasion, the more immersed they are in "crazy literature."

**H3:** The greater young people's need for emotional relief, the more they depend on "crazy literature."

The target population for these hypotheses is college students. The author selected all students at Tianjin Foreign Studies University as the research population, constructed a sampling frame based on student ID numbers, and conducted stratified multistage sampling with a 95% confidence interval and 3% sampling error, selecting 500 students as the sample. Data collection, collation, and analysis were completed on February 6, 2023. The questionnaire contained 14 questions, including 10 multiple-choice and 4 matrix questions.

Using a combination of online and offline methods, questionnaires were distributed through WeChat Moments, Qzone, the Questionnaire Star sample database, and offline channels.

## 3.2 Data Analysis

A total of 226 samples were collected in the questionnaire survey. Female respondents predominated (182 respondents, accounting for 80.53%), while male respondents were fewer (44 respondents, accounting for 19.47%). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 24 years old, from freshman to third-year graduate students.

### 3.2.1 Analysis of the Correlation Between Youth Social Needs and Release Frequency of "Crazy Literature"

Regarding publishing frequency, nearly half (45.58%) of respondents publish "crazy literature" at least once a month, 29.3% publish at least once a week, and 7.96% publish more than five times a week. In terms of typical social needs, nearly half (43.5%) reported "generally strong" social needs, the highest proportion; nearly 30% (30.97%) reported "relatively strong" or "very strong" social needs.

The author further conducted Pearson correlation analysis and found a significant positive correlation between youth's "social needs" and "publishing frequency of crazy literature" (correlation coefficient = 0.285\*\*,  $p < 0.000$ ). This indicates that the higher the interactive emotional needs of young people, the higher the frequency of "crazy literature" production, supporting research hypothesis H1.

### **3.2.2 Correlation Analysis of Youth Self-Regulation and Persuasion Needs and Immersion in "Crazy Literature"**

From descriptive analysis, in terms of self-regulation and persuasion, less than 10% reported no need for adjustment or persuasion when encountering difficulties, while nearly 50% expressed such needs, indicating that contemporary youth have relatively strong self-regulation needs when facing difficulties. Regarding immersion in "crazy literature," 35.4% of youth reported being "relatively immersed" or "very immersed," experiencing relatively strong emotions when creating and disseminating "crazy literature."

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between youth's "needs for self-regulation and persuasion" and "immersion in crazy literature" (correlation coefficient = 0.225\*\*,  $p < 0.001$ ). This shows that the greater the need for self-regulation and persuasion, the more immersed young people are in "crazy literature," supporting hypothesis H2.

### **3.2.3 Correlation Analysis Between Youth's Emotional Catharsis Needs and Dependence on "Crazy Literature"**

From descriptive analysis, regarding emotional venting, only 15.7% of respondents expressed "not strong" or "not too strong" needs, indicating that young people have relatively strong needs for emotional release. Regarding dependence on crazy literature, most reported not being too dependent, with less than 20% showing dependence tendencies.

However, further analysis of youth's "demand for emotional relief" and "dependence on crazy literature" found a significant positive correlation (correlation coefficient = 0.403\*\*,  $p < 0.000$ ). This demonstrates that the greater the need for emotional relief, the more young people depend on "crazy literature," supporting hypothesis H3.

## **4.1 Picture Shaping and Chaotic Stacking: The Rhetoric of Language Symbols in "Crazy Literature" Discourse**

According to Hebdige's subcultural theory, meaning is not expressed directly but conveyed at the symbolic level through "style." As a typical youth online subculture, "crazy literature" possesses its own unique discourse and symbolic representation.

On the one hand, unlike the straightforward “intertextuality of language and pictures” in traditional emoticons, much “crazy literature” tends to abandon conventional rhetorical devices for emotional expression such as modal particles, degree adverbs, and emotional vocabulary. Instead, it repeatedly piles up exaggerated and primitive verbs, displaying a strong sense of imagery difficult to achieve in traditional communication narratives and thereby forming its unique and extensive communicative effect. For example, phrases like “turning into a monkey” and “crawling gloomy” left deep impressions on many interviewees: “(roaring) (turning into a monkey) (flying into the virgin forest) (swinging vines) (flying monkeys eating bananas) (roaring) (turning into a monkey) (flying into the virgin forest) (swinging vines) (screaming) (twisting) (crawling gloomy) (crawling) (twisting) (dark creeping) (tumbling) (crawling furiously) (ghost growling) (crawling) (splitting) (walking ashore) (Writhing) (spasticity) (creeping) (twisting walk).”

On the other hand, the repetition and stacking of vocabulary and sentences serve to strengthen emotion and tone. According to American linguist Sapir, repetition is a “self-evident and symbolic” grammatical procedure whose popularity is most natural. Consequently, another form of “crazy literature” tends to repeat a series of logically disordered discourses, creating a strong sense of “collapse” and “dementia” that gives the audience a powerful emotional impact. As many interviewees mentioned, examples include “mental stability” and “going to college is not crazy”:

“It doesn’t matter, a minute of mental stability is also very powerful! If you are not energetic, even a minute of stable relationship is amazing! Even if you don’t have the energy, it’s great to stabilize for a minute!”

“How can people not go crazy when they go to college? Just hold on! How can people not go crazy when they go to college? Just hold on! How can people not go crazy when they go to college? Just hold on!”

Therefore, by repeatedly piling up discourses with disordered logic and strong imagery, “crazy literature” conveys intense emotions and resonates with large numbers of young people through its unique symbolic style, gradually developing into an exclusive subcultural circle.

## 4.2 Emotional Catharsis and Self-Regulation: The Need for Self-Reconciliation Behind “Crazy Literature”

In the pilot interviews, the author compiled interviewees’ understanding of “Crazy Literature” motivations into a manuscript, used the Weici Cloud platform for word segmentation and frequency statistics, and visualized keywords as a word cloud (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). As shown, words such as “collapse,” “stress,” “vent,” “emotion,” and “regulation” appear frequently, pointing to youth’s needs for emotional catharsis, self-regulation, and persuasion behind “crazy literature.” According to questionnaire results, H2 and H3 are clearly established, further verifying the hypothesis that behind the popularity

of “crazy literature,” beyond its unique rhetorical discourse representation, lies contemporary youth’s need for “reconciliation with oneself” through emotional catharsis and self-regulation.

This finding aligns with scholar Katz’s classification of media communicators’ and audiences’ motives, where emotional needs, self-integration needs, and stress relief needs play important roles. Simultaneously, under the historical and cultural background of East Asian collectivist culture that encourages emotional suppression, the increasingly “atomized” survival mode in modern society has exacerbated interpersonal alienation, making young people more in need of emotional catharsis and self-regulation. The author plotted the emotional types of youth when creating and disseminating “crazy literature” from questionnaire data into a radar distribution map (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]), finding that “depression” and “irritability and anger” account for the largest proportion—the main emotional types requiring venting—followed by “easy and happy,” indicating that youth tend to vent emotions and regulate themselves through humorous means.

Investigating its effects, the author charted changes in young people’s psychological pressure after publishing “Crazy Literature” as a pie chart (Figure 3 [Figure 3: see original paper]), revealing that 71.24% of youth experience reduced psychological pressure through creating and disseminating “Crazy Literature.” However, notably, nearly 60% (58.41%) reported only “slightly reduced” pressure, while 24.78% said their psychological pressure “has not changed.” The demand for self-regulation emerges, but the actual effect remains relatively limited. In interviews, nearly 70% of respondents stated that “crazy literature” represents purely emotional catharsis rather than a solution to the root causes behind the emotions, with its self-regulation effect remaining only at the level of emotional balance.

### 4.3 Interactive Ritual and Banter Carnival: The Empathic Interaction Mode of “Crazy Literature” Texts

Although “Crazy Literature” lacks typical features of aggregation and circles seen in other subcultures (such as “fan circle culture” and “working-class culture”), and is neither isolated individual emotional catharsis, it possesses specific interaction rituals that demonstrate a unique carnival landscape.

First, the above verification of H1 has established that “crazy literature” reflects youth’s strong interactive emotional needs. However, these social needs exhibit clear group differentiation. According to survey results (Figure 4 [Figure 4: see original paper]), 72.12% of respondents do not want their relatives and elders to see their “crazy literature,” and 77.43% do not want teachers and leaders to see it. In interviews, almost all respondents expressed concern that elders and leaders would “misread” the emotional message of “Crazy Literature,” thereby deepening generational divides.

According to Koslin’s interaction ritual theory, four basic elements enable inter-

action rituals: physical presence, mutual attention and limitations on outsiders, a shared focus of attention, and a shared emotional experience. Therefore, youth with strong social desires create, comment on, and repost “crazy literature” on social networking platforms, immersing themselves in “crazy” emotional expressions while separating themselves from other groups through rebellious textual characteristics, forming a grand “carnival” interactive ceremony. In this ceremony, participants actively “uncrown themselves,” dissolving their own uniqueness within the diminished “crazy” identity, thereby narrowing the distance with other participants. Meanwhile, as an “informal carnival language,” “crazy literature” arouses strong emotional resonance through playful, humorous, and self-deprecating means, forming what Bakhtin termed a “carnivalized” communication landscape.

#### 4.4 Summary

In summary, “Crazy Literature,” with its unique rhetoric of discourse symbols, has become a window for contemporary youth to vent emotions and a means of self-reconciliation, forming a “carnival”-style group communication effect. However, “Crazy Literature” is not only a rebellious deconstruction and game against mainstream culture but also a portrayal of some young people’s anxiety. Therefore, much work remains to be done to deeply consider the living conditions and specific anxieties behind “crazy literature” and to prevent it from becoming a “negative culture” that engages in “deconstruction for deconstruction’s sake.”

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