**New Features of Circle Culture in the We-media Era**

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【Abstract】In the era of self-media, online circles are not only a way of life for contemporary youth, but also represent the social culture of contemporary youth. Online circles have the characteristics of strong organization, closed exclusivity, and confrontation. By using media technology to complete personalized group differentiation, circle culture uses special communication channels to reconstruct and extend real social relations in cyberspace, and constantly impacts the mainstream culture of society, thereby continuously inheriting and developing.

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In the era of self-media, relying on the constantly updated Internet technology, virtual social networking has flourished, making it normal for people to use Internet social media for social interaction. This not only makes people more detached from the real life space, gradually forming a self-extraction from the real society, presenting a new social life state, but also constructs a network collective life that is different from the past, making the boundaries between the public and private spheres in individual social life more blurred. With the development of network technology, a large number of new virtual communities have emerged, and they continue to show strong cohesion, becoming the key force in creating derivative spaces. These new communities have attracted widespread attention in the academic community, and the "network circle" has come from this.

Generally speaking, "online groups" can be seen as a virtual gathering space formed by a group of netizens through the Internet for a specific reason, representing a new type of social relationship. Compared with traditional social relationships, the composition of "online groups" emphasizes the common interests and hobbies of its members and the cultural identity, especially the subculture.

**Organization, closed exclusivity, and confrontation are the prominent characteristics of online groups.**

As a new cultural form, the increasingly popular online circles have significant characteristics. With the continuous changes in the form and structure of the circles, the academic community has gradually increased its research and discussion on them. In the process of preliminary exploration and research on online circles, the academic community's focus is mainly on the role played by online circles in the process of information dissemination, and their structural characteristics are summarized. The flow of information within the circle is no longer the traditional linear type, but forms a circle with a "center". The circles are nested with each other to form a huge network. Due to the closed structure of each circle in the picture, the dissemination of confidential information is more convenient. The circles are nested and superimposed with each other, forming more "intermediary circles", which is conducive to the participation of each circle in the dissemination and diffusion of information. In this process, even if some public information enters a small circle, it can be spread to the entire network at a high speed in a short time, greatly accelerating the speed of information dissemination. In such a special formation structure and information dissemination characteristics, online circles have the following significant characteristics.

First, organization. Network circles can be regarded as a kind of self-organization, that is, they can organize, create and evolve on their own without external instructions, and can autonomously move from disorder to order to form a structured system. Generally speaking, circles established for purposes such as interests, learning goals or social needs have a certain intensity of communication relationship and will gradually form a certain organization. In emerging circles, if members generally have a strong identity and a unified sense of belonging, they will develop towards organization in continuous communication and interaction. For example, fan circles are a community circle composed of fans who love the same idol. At present, with the popularity of fan circle culture, its organizational characteristics are becoming more and more obvious, which is specifically manifested in its ability to coordinate and orderly carry out large-scale and continuous collective activities on the basis of strict division of labor and cooperation. At the same time, the fan circle has further promoted the formation of a fan class with a clear structure and clear division of labor under the self-organization mechanism. With the development of network communities, WeChat groups, QQ groups and some APP communities spontaneously organized by netizens will further evolve, and their organizational characteristics will be more rapidly and maturely manifested, thereby establishing a continuous system for engaging in collaborative behavior under a unified will.

Second, closed exclusivity. The emergence of the Internet makes it easier for every netizen to find their own belonging. In the online community based on the circle group, they will open their arms to their own "tribe", but in this kind of high degree of freedom and full anonymity of the network space, the closed consciousness of members and the limited access to information within the circle group will continue to widen the gap in concepts and lead to new rifts in the network community. The circle group culture prevalent in forums, WeChat, and two-dimensional websites continues to show strong conservative characteristics in terms of rules, identity, gender, etc. The circle group members hold preconceived prejudices and solidified ways of thinking, and it is difficult to accept others and gain recognition from others. This makes the ultimate experience of the circle group culture gradually tend to be closed, and the exclusivity is becoming more serious. Frequent and violent conflicts between different circles will become a normal landscape in online communication.

Third, confrontation. Internet circles represent a special cultural phenomenon in modern society, forming a group interaction behavior based on specific value recognition, reflecting certain social emotions, and expressing certain group life concepts and behavioral concepts. On the one hand, Internet circles reflect the emerging cultural needs of the people, and circle culture to a certain extent shows confrontation and deconstruction of mainstream culture; on the other hand, the dissemination effect of the views of "opinion leaders" in different Internet circles will be further enhanced, and even break the "dimensional wall" and "go out of the circle" to expand the influence of their respective opinions and views, thereby generating isolation and confrontation between multiple Internet cultures, resulting in the differentiation and intensification of conflicts among different groups of people.

**Circle culture has clear “cultural boundaries”**

In the era of self-media, people must constantly endure various physical and psychological challenges brought about by the explosion of information. The development of information technology has gradually replaced the various relationship circles of individuals in reality with virtual communities constructed by online communities. People no longer identify themselves only through traditional organizations or work units. The formation of social relationships and the acquisition of identity and group belonging require individuals to be more proactive in interacting with the outside world. In this context, online circles have further assumed the function of connecting individuals with society and have become a major lifestyle for contemporary youth.

Use technology to differentiate through personalization. The medium is the message. As media technology continues to innovate, it also forms a force that draws people into different cultures. Due to differences in user positioning, supporting technology, performance, usage, interface design, interaction rules, operating model, product marketing, and cultural identity, different products will attract different types of people, shape the behavior patterns of members, and may even form a unique culture. For example, social media platforms use algorithmic technology to complete accurate personalized user descriptions and use this to create exclusive communities, so that users who have been personalized and segmented can form new interpersonal circles on the platform, and the continuous interaction between group members further strengthens the group culture, thereby further forming the symbolization and labeling of user-exclusive communities. For example, in the choice of short video platforms, the natural differentiation of the population has already emerged: the user groups of Douyin and Kuaishou are labeled with cultural interests; Zhihu and Douban have gradually become media platforms with elite and literary labels; Qutoutiao and Pinduoduo have become representatives of "outside the fifth ring road" and "small town youth".

Regardless of the symbols and labels, each Internet product will attract and have users of the corresponding category. When each product is labeled with social identity, status or cultural interest, it itself becomes a circle. The role of media technology application itself in segmenting people will become more prominent with the continuous innovation of network technology and the diversification of applications. As technology differentiates users by individuality, the stickiness of users in different circles continues to increase, and social media will gradually show "cultural boundaries" in the later stages of operation. Once the circle culture is fixed, people will only communicate and carry out activities within their respective "cultural boundaries". Over time, closed circles, single culture and lack of information will lead to people's vision becoming narrower and narrower. Users in the circle constantly "set limits on themselves", indulge in "information cocoons" for a long time, gradually abandon the tolerance and understanding of multiculturalism, no longer have the ability to observe and criticize the entire society, and are more likely to intensify conflicts and even cause group "polarization".

With the help of "memes" for specialized dissemination. In the era of self-media, the subjects of information dissemination are civilianized and personalized, and the information dissemination is highly interactive and fast. Self-media has become the main way for people to disseminate and communicate information. Everyone can show themselves to the maximum extent in a personalized "network circle group" and enjoy a virtual public life with full autonomy. Ordinary people also have more opportunities than ever before to become "Internet celebrities" through various platforms. What everyone wants to express can be disseminated on a large scale at the moment, and quickly recognized and interacted with members of their own "circle", and everyone's personality is unprecedentedly highlighted.

Through a large number of simplified communication processes of imitation and being imitated, group culture can be continuously consumed and produced. Cultural memes that have special significance in the extremely simplified special communication process have extremely strong vitality in this process. In 1976, Richard Dawkins first called cultural genes spread through imitation memes in his book The Selfish Gene. He believes that memes are the basic units of cultural communication or cultural imitation, which are transferred from one brain to another and continue to reproduce. The spread of group culture is special in that it is completely based on the spontaneous behavior of netizens and is difficult to control by external forces. In the process of network culture communication, network memes that rely on the psychological needs of social recognition and the imitation willingness of communicators can continuously replicate themselves, and in various forms, not limited to visual symbols, text features, and language styles. The main feature is that they are easy to identify and remember, and easier to imitate and copy. Therefore, memes can be more widely used in the content production and dissemination process of group members, and successfully achieve dissemination effects, so that group culture can be continuously inherited and developed. The continuous production and dissemination of memes in group culture not only makes members of the group be branded with a certain group culture, but also consolidates a clear "cultural boundary" for the group culture. A typical example is the two-dimensional group, where members create new memes based on their understanding of two-dimensional culture and spread them within the group. In the process of mutual communication and dissemination, their fans further strengthen the characteristics of two-dimensional culture, and thus gradually form a cultural boundary called the "dimensional wall".

**While online groups are redefining social relationships, they are also seeking to mainstream group culture.**

Reconstructing and extending real social relations. The online circle, which represents a new organizational form, is no longer limited to the virtual space. In the foreseeable future, it will become an important channel to connect social members and meet individual social needs, and it is also an important manifestation of social public lifestyle. Looking back at the early online circles that were established based on virtual relationships, the interaction between members clearly showed an anonymous free communication that broke away from real social relationships. However, with the development of social platforms, especially the emergence of strong relationship social networking represented by WeChat, the relationship circle existing in the network is difficult to exist independently from real social relationships, and real social relationships are gradually copied to virtual space. Compared with the real society, individuals have more autonomy in the construction and management of social relationship circles through the Internet. People are increasingly inclined to redefine their social relationships through online circles. For example, "chance encounters" in real life can be transformed into intimate relationships through strengthening online interactions. Individuals manage real social relationships by implementing different strategies. At the same time, virtual communication also provides more possibilities for the formation of new real social relationships. People can meet new friends through various platforms and expand online relationships to offline organizations by holding offline activities. For example, young people make friends through video barrages, online game platforms, and online live streaming platforms. These platforms have become important channels for social interaction for the new generation. At the same time, building circles through various platforms to connect oneself with society has also become an important lifestyle for young people.

Although online groups reconstruct and extend individuals’ real social relationships, and provide more possibilities and freedom in forming social relationships, group interactions cannot completely break away from the differential order of real relationships. For example, in some social relationships, due to the closed nature of group space and the openness of interaction, the constraints of the real social power structure and group atmosphere on online group members become more obvious.

Communicate and interact with mainstream culture. Today's circle culture no longer focuses only on the subculture groups that were prominent in the early Internet era, nor is it against mainstream culture. Internet circles reflect the group lifestyle of contemporary youth, and Internet circle culture also represents the social culture of youth groups. On the one hand, the regulatory power of various organizations in real society has gradually declined under the impact of the individualization trend in the self-media era; on the other hand, people also have more platforms and channels to express themselves, develop their personalities, and meet the growing demand for personalized expression. At present, it has become a typical "Internet buzzword" that revolves around a popular game, an Internet celebrity or an entertainment star, and has become popular on the Internet. The changes brought about by this are not only reflected in the cultural field, but also in the economic field. The consumption methods and consumption culture generated by Internet circle culture are constantly popular, such as "Internet celebrity economy" and "micro-business economy". This also indicates that today's circle culture may merge, communicate and even transform with tomorrow's mainstream culture. In the process of interaction between the two, the circle culture impacts the mainstream culture to a certain extent, and the mainstream culture will also respond to it. The two cultures realize mutual transformation in the process of interaction, and young people are also using the lifestyle of online circles to construct a collective life different from the past, actively influencing and transforming the real social culture, and participating in and changing the society. For example, for China's two-dimensional circles, there is a typical cultural boundary - "dimensional wall", which is used as a metaphor to construct an imaginary barrier, but driven by various factors, the circle no longer completely isolates related topics such as nationality as "three-dimensional" topics, but gradually transforms them into a "cute" discourse system that can project emotional identification, and derives a series of unique network buzzwords; in recent years, the fan circle has also been working hard to construct a group image of rationality, enthusiasm for public welfare, and patriotism. This also means that the network circle culture that originally had a "dimensional wall" is not completely self-enclosed, but will interact with other circle cultures or mainstream culture, and even actively seek mainstreaming to a certain extent.

In summary, online circles can be seen as a new organizational form in the era of self-media. People can interact with each other very conveniently through the Internet, transcending the time and space limitations of traditional social interactions and achieving real-time communication and interconnection. In this close interaction process, circle culture also presents multiple and multiple structural characteristics with the help of unique meme communication, and has achieved new developments in combination with the continuous innovation of media technology, which will bring new challenges to real social relations and mainstream culture. How does the circle-based online society affect the real society? How does circle culture affect mainstream culture? These are all issues that need further research in the future.

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