

# Generation Z Perception of LGBTQ+ Group in China According to Social Media Responses and the Extent: Its Impact through Case Studies and Questionnaire Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Chinese internet social media plays a significant role in understanding modern diffusing and teaching theories, which lead to behavior identification and conceptualization of the LGBTQ group in contemporary Chinese society. With the development of popular social media platforms, the minority of sex groups can be observed with their media social norms, private comments, and responses. This study collects data that illustrate the main source of LGBTQ knowledge and values for generation Z and discusses its mechanism. By a combination of a case study and quantitative questionnaire, the negative and false impressions of the LGBTQ group of generation Z are reported. It is argued that even though diffusing and teaching functions have been fully accepted by social interactions through social media, the impact they have upon LGBTQ groups is still negative.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ group, generation Z, social stigma, social media.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the prominent development of the Internet and its correlated applications, social media as the fruit of such progress has penetrated people's daily lives to various extents. With a higher degree of social inclusion, the LGBTQ+ group is not the terror of the public in a gradual way. There is an increasing number of TV series, films, and network literature about this group, and most of them are popular in mainland China with high video views and page views. In the Chinese context, social media reforms people's perception of the LGBTQ+ group to a great extent [1-3]. According to the USA TODAY website, the LGBTQ+ group is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity [4]. Under the impact of strict censorship and traditional virtue, topics related to sexual diversity have not been widely discussed in China. Although homosexuality in China was decriminalized in 1997 and delisted as a mental illness in 2001, the LGBTQ+ community has never received any legislative protection

for their rights [5]. Due to the inadequate popularity of the sexual diversity culture, and the distress of being stigmatized and discriminated against, the non-heterosexual individuals in China continue to live invisibility.

However, the increasingly wide utilization of social media in recent years has brought a new era for the Chinese LGBTQ+ community [6]. Social media has gradually become a place for LGBTQ+ people to promote their culture. This new platform gives sexual minorities an opportunity for self-expression. With the growing tolerance and social acceptance, more and more Chinese people, especially the young generations, support the LGBTQ+ community. Nevertheless, like a double-edged sword, social media also negatively impacts the Chinese LGBTQ+ community, stigmatizing and abusing them online.

For the current research, whether the development of the Chinese new media platform works as a positive and healthy mechanism for the identification of LGBTQ groups, or it will promote the stigmatization and stereotypes, is an urgent question that needs to be

answered. To answer how the new era of online social interactions and public discourse will change the public knowledge of LGBTQ groups is a helpful step to the question. That is to say, a picture of how the perception of the LGBTQ group of generation Z is transformed by social media is a priority in this research. Through the data collection analysis and the interaction of user-generated content analysis, this article aims to discuss the multidimensional impact of social media on public perception of LGBTQ groups in China. It is convincible that by doing so, people are more likely to know that social media platforms do to their understandings of the minority group, rather than amusing themselves with an irrational illusion of the fake picture of LGBTQ culture.

## 2. CASE STUDIES OF LGBTQ+ GROUPS

This section will illustrate the impact of social media on LGBTQ+ groups through five case studies on the Internet. Viewing these real cases can have a more straightforward and vivid understanding of the situation of LGBTQ+ groups and today's public attitudes towards them.

Case 1: The popular social media mobile application, Tok-Tok, has become one of China's most commonly used applications. No lack of users may potentially be a member of the LGBTQ+ group, but some are not afraid to show their unconventional side to others. For instance, videos in an account named "Crush on HanHan" document the daily lives of a lesbian couple. In their video published on April 16, 2021, they express their desire to marry each other and their frustration with China's malicious social and political situation towards the LGBTQ+ group. In the total of 46,439 comments on the video, countless users expressed their sympathy and blessing to the couple. User, "No Worry For Rain", commented "why can't these people get married still and when will they be able to marry?"; the majority of others commented under their comments like "have faith in our country[government]" or "sooner or later would happen". Such comments demonstrate the young generation's tolerance and empathy for this couple and the entire group. Through social media, this couple shows their own couple's lives as lesbians, which is no different from couples with traditional sexual orientation. To some extent, it also enables people who do not know this group to have a brand new or more comprehensive understanding of this group of people, which may also have a subtle influence on the initial opinions of users who see this video and the people around users about this group.

Case 2: A case study of internet celebrity: Abbily is a 19 years old well-known online influencer. His sexual identity is male, but all his posts on the Internet all showed a girlish appearance. He also confessed on social platforms in a candid and frank way that his gender cognition has been female since a young age. Because of

his outstanding and gorgeous appearance, Abbily had over 200 million fans on Weibo (the Chinese version of Twitter). It is worth mentioning that many people who belonged to the LGBTQ+ group supported Abbily on social media, complimenting him for his brave in revealing his gender identity on social media.

In March 2021, Abbily announced on Weibo that he had successfully become a girl. He wrote that he suffered much mental stress in recent years, and his physical condition was poor. Abbily also posted a few pictures of the sex change application form and shots of undergoing surgery. During that time, Abbily received blessings and best wishes from most netizens. However, later on, some powerful keyboard men were suspected of the reality of those pictures. They found similar pictures on the Internet, and it turned out that Abbily used net pictures to deceive and win the favor of the public. Combing common senses, gender conversion surgery needs a long period of recovery, but Abbily did a live stream on social media frequently in the past few months. Moreover, based on Chinese law, only people over 20 years old can access gender conversion surgery. Nineteen years old Abbily cannot undergo the conversion.

After discovering the truth, netizens were filled with anger and started to attack Abbily on social media. They thought Abbily's behavior consumed a lot of people's goodwill towards transgender groups. It is considered that Abbily did not belong to the LGBT+ groups. He dressed in girlish clothes and wanted to win people's attention and network traffic. Taking him as an example, many true transgenders may be unwilling to stand out bravely in public. They may be feared of being considered the same type of people as Abbily.

Meanwhile, those Internet celebrities' behaviors on social media may make some people distasteful about the transgender or even the whole LGBT+ group. Abbily's experience showed the public's awareness of the protection of the group members and the intention of maintaining the interests of the group. Also, the negative effect on the public perception of the LGBTQ+ Group may be posted on social media.

Case 3: A case study of netizen's attitude towards homosexuality on Zhihu. In China, a social platform called Zhihu is a question-and-answer website in which the netizens can freely create and discuss questions together. Zhihu is similar to the American website Quora. It is a place that allows people to share their knowledge and see the perspectives of other people. Zhihu is a safe space in many people's eyes because everyone has the equal right to speak on it. As a reason for this, many topics related to LGBTQ+ are being discussed by the netizens in recent years.

In 2012, a Zhihu user posted a question that asked why is homosexual normal on the platform. It soon attracted responses from many netizens. Even till 2021,

there are still people sharing their views on these questions. 73 Zhihu users shared their opinions on the rationality of the LGBTQ people's existence.

The assessment of homosexuality from the users is split up into a few categories, and the main two categories are normal and abnormal. An anonymous user who believed homosexuality is an abnormal phenomenon answered the question in 2020. The user said that the behavior of acknowledging the normality of homosexuality is to follow political correctness, and it is of high influence by western society. This user also said that homosexuality violated human biological attributes, local customs, and the mainstream culture. This user believed homosexuality was an illness that's the same as pedophilia, corpse fetishism, animal fetishism, and so on. Other than these opinions, this user also expressed a worry that many homophobic/ anti-sexual minority people agreed with, which was the worry of the decline in birth rate and extinction of mankind led by homosexuality. Most of the netizens commented below that this user's post disagreed with his/her opinion and believed homosexuality should be viewed as heterosexuality. Netizens who disagreed deemed that love should be pure regardless of people's gender.

A netizen called "VvYang" said that sometimes being normal was the same as conforming to the majority. He believed that when homosexuality seemed abnormal, it was because homosexual people were unlike people who had the dominant sexual orientation. But if the definition of normal turns to things that would not damage society and other people. Then, homosexuality should be rational. Furthermore, homosexuality is not a "disease" of psychological or physical trauma caused by a bacterial virus or external damage. Therefore, homosexuality is also not an illness but an ordinary sexual orientation. That netizen thinks that what determines whether homosexuality is normal is how we define normality instead of the existence of homosexuality itself.

Although there are many dissenting voices toward homosexuality in the Zhihu discussion session, the people who fully understand the LGBTQ+ community can use this platform to inform more positive facts about this community and advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals [7].

Case 4: A case study of the football player Li Ying: Li Ying is the first Chinese athlete to come out as a lesbian. Her career as a football player was brilliant and enviable. Li Ying was one of the best football players on the women's national team, and she helped her group gain the first score in the 2014 Football Asian Cup. With her attendance at the Asian Cup, the Chinese team won over the Thai team comprehensively. In 2018, the Chinese Football Association announced the list of female players for the Asian Games, and Li Ying was selected. A great number of her achievements are worth mentioning.

Shockingly, this high-profile football star came out as a lesbian in June 2021 on Weibo-- Twitter's Chinese vision. Li Ying posted a photo of her and her girlfriend, Chen Leilei (a micro-influencer with over 370,000 fans on Weibo). She wrote that "You are the source and objective of all my tenderness", attached with the photo to show it was the first anniversary of their relationship. Some well-wishers posted their comments. However, more homophobic words such as "You are so disgusting" were commented on. Later on, Li Ying's post was deleted without any explanations.

It is confusing that Li Ying, one of the best players, failed to be selected for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Many posters on Weibo and Zhihu comment that the main reason is her lesbian identity. Considering she admitted herself as a lesbian publicly, Li Ying's professional career may be affected to a great extent. And many people appeal to athletes who belong to LGBTQ+ groups and do not come out in public for their career path. In recent years, China has appealed that athletes are the best role models for teenagers. It is worth considering if teenagers' mindsets may influence athletes' experiences, such as Li Ying on social media. The next generation may be unwilling to come out publicly since their future and career may be affected by their sexual orientation. It may be safer to hide the identity of LGBTQ+ groups. Li Ying's case reveals that social media may pose a negative effect on the public perception of LGBTQ+ Group

Case 5: A case study of the Chinese billionaire-- Sicong Wang. On June 15, 2021, a live streaming celebrity called Yining Sun revealed screenshots of her conversation with Sicong Wang, the son of a famous Chinese billionaire, on Weibo (a Chinese social platform). In her post, Wang was coercing Sun to be his girlfriend and sending her bullying messages. Sun accused Wang of sexual assault by expressing her fear of Wang's harassment and threats. In the screenshots, Sun claimed to be lesbian with another internet celebrity called "Wuwu". After seeing Sun's post of the screenshots, many netizens flooded Weibo and started to laugh at Wang's playboy image. Many people showed their sympathy for Sun and started to attack Wang on social media. By June 17 evening, the hashtag "Wang Sicong is a horrible pursuer" had been clicked more than 10 million times on the social platform [8]. But later, Wang claimed that Sun was faking her lesbian image online to swindle for popularity and money. Many netizens did not take his words seriously at the moment. Until the breakup of Sun and her girlfriend happened shortly after the incident between Wang and Sun, the netizens changed their attention to Sun. On June 21, Sun's "girlfriend" Wuwu claimed that her love relationship with Sun was ended. Wuwu said they separated peacefully, but soon she posted screenshots of her chats with Sun on the Internet. Sun said she found the new business opportunity to make more money during the Livestream in the chat records. She suggested Wuwu

create more intimate interactions with her intentionally to attract more fans and popularity. The screenshots posted by Wuwu did not directly prove Sun's fake lesbian identity but still showed how she exploited the lesbian's image for making a profit.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire is designed to collect information from respondents by a set of questions. The earliest documented questionnaire was composed by Jeremiah Milles in 1753, which is generally known as the Dean Milles' Questionnaire [9]. One hundred twenty numbered questions which topics varied from the parish's history and manors to the armorials of the leading families, the geology, and archaeological remains. The manuscript of this questionnaire is purchased and stored in Bodleian Library, cataloged as "MSS. Top. Devon b. 1-7, c. 6, c. 8-17, c. 19, e. 7-8, and titled as Milles Devonshire Manuscripts". However, the earliest use of the questionnaire in academic research can be traced back to Sir Francis Galton's study in 1838, intending to inquire about the mind involved the detailed recording of people's subjective accounts of whether and how their minds dealt with phenomena such as mental imagery. Through statistical analysis of questionnaire survey results, we can clearly understand and collect data from the studied group in specific aspects to objectively conclude and summarize conclusions related to the research topic.

The types and distribution methods of questionnaires have become diversified in this era. The distribution methods are no longer limited to the traditional way of sending questionnaires by letter or gathering interviewees together to fill in the questionnaire at a certain time and place. With the development of the Internet, the online questionnaire also began to rise. Such questionnaires can be directly managed and analyzed using interactive forms or applications on the Internet. The convenience of online questionnaires can be simply attributed to the low management cost, the survey results can be immediately recorded in the online database, and the questionnaire can be easily modified when necessary. Such advantages provide flexibility for researchers and questionnaire fillers. At the same time, the flaws of the online questionnaire cannot be ignored because the survey cannot reach the people without computers or Internet access, such as the poverty-stricken population and the elderly so the response sample is biased toward the young people who have much time to surf the Internet and have the ability to complete these surveys. However, to some extent, this limitation in this study provides help for more effective recovery and analysis of questionnaires. As the objects of this study are Generation Z in China, that is, those born between 1995 and 2009 and greatly influenced by the Internet and smartphones, and other technological products due to the

period they live in, this group is generally likely to have access to online questionnaires. Even those born in earlier generations who are not familiar with network technology may not access the questionnaire distributed by this study. Since they are not included in the research object, the final analysis of the questionnaire results and the universality of the conclusion will not be affected due to such confinement.

We adopt a similar instrument to examine the hypothesis proposed that the group image of LGBTQ on the Internet would affect the perception of Generation Z to this group. At present, the Chinese LGBTQ community seems to be still in the category of minority culture in the public cognition, but it has occupied a large position in the social interaction of Generation Z, including the large proportion of LGBTQ penetration in the mainstream media [10]. Since an implicit overcorrection issue exists on the Internet, web-based data is not reasoned enough for us to determine and test Generation Z's perception of the phenomenon we noticed. Moreover, the limited objects of the research cannot be revealed and differentiated on the Internet explicitly. The questionnaire is therefore desirable in the research.

According to premier preparation work, we roughly divided the background and respondents. We regard generation Z's perception as affected by the internet LGBTQ image would deepen the social stereotype (which might be positive) or evolve a new dimension of labeling. The primary influence through the Internet is "over correctness" in the LGBTQ, which would indirectly affect the formation of the LGBTQ on the Internet. Increasing LGBTQ content online definitely expands the public understanding of the LGBTQ community, while the expansion probably leads to an unknown outcome, which can be inferred at review the polarization of the continuous LGBTQ-based TV series and movies. It is reasonable to suppose that the magnified life and exaggerated image of the LGBTQ community on the Internet, as well as the endless non-professional related movies and television series, will somehow change the original Generation Z's perception of LGBTQ. New stereotypes and labels are more likely to be based on LGBTQ images on the Internet than on the nature of science education.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The generation Z participants are aged between 12 to 26. Then we subdivide the groups into those aged under 18 and 18-26, and LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ. Their highest/current education level is distributed in high school, undergraduate, junior college, and technical secondary school. The questionnaire was launched by four researchers on Chinese social media platforms, and the respondents are mainly of the same age as the researchers. The questionnaire is in Chinese mandarin

since the main research participants focus on Generation Z in mainland China. The result was collected over 7 days with relatively high efficiency, and 86% of the total was collected in the first two days. We forwarded the questionnaire on the social platform, and the second spread was carried out through networking with friends. The rest could be done in the same manner. No changes were made during the questionnaire collection period. We collected 150 responses in total, among which 88 out of 150 were collected in QQ and the rest from WeChat. The responses include 37 LGBTQ and 113 non-LGBTQ.

The Internet plays a significant role in diffusing and teaching theories, and behaviors and conceptualizing the LGBTQ group in contemporary Chinese society. The data illustrates that the main source of LGBTQ knowledge for generation Z respondents is the Internet, including social media sites, movie and TV dramas, and online literature. Even though 37 LGBTQ respondents rate their self-knowledge of the group as high as 8.75 out of 10 on average, their main source is still the Internet. As the most sufficient and effective platform for teaching LGBTQ facts, the survey aims to link the relationship between online LGBTQ images to generation z's perception of real LGBTQ, whether bringing a correct orientation to generation Z.

Acknowledged that positive and negative tweets on the website are roughly in balance in generation z's perception, the main negative perception is mainly from "excessive correctness" used by people who are not LGBTQ. 86% of the respondents recognize that the current online LGBTQ image is incomplete and mentioned that disguised LGBTQ attracts attention would lead to wrong orientation. 70% of the respondents regard the phenomenon that bundling homosexual CP in the TV series as mainly negative to help set up a correct LGBTQ image to the public.

There is a proportional correlation between the degree to which people reflected on the negative images of LGBTQ online and their understanding. Ninety-nine participants who self-assessed their knowledge of the LGBTQ community are greater than or equal to 6, 70% of which think that the negative impact is dominant related to the recent bundling of couple images on the Internet, 83.9% recognize the increase of "LGBTQ dividend", and only 13.1% think the LGBTQ group image in film/literature/games is complete and correct. In comparison, 51 participants who self-assessed their knowledge of the LGBTQ community are less than or equal to 5, 66.7% of which regard the negative impact as dominant, 56.8% agree with the existence of the "LGBTQ dividend", and 15.7% think the internet group image of LGBTQ is completely correct. We classify the respondents with self-assessments above or equal to 6 are high engagement and deep understanding of participants in the LGBTQ community or culture, which refers to

more reflective consideration of this topic than low engagement people.

However, it is worth noting that the LGBTQ group in the respondents reveals a more comprehensive understanding of the bundling of LGBTQ images on the Internet than non-LGBTQ groups. 29.73% of LGBTQ respondents still consider that the bundling of LGBTQ couples on the Internet is positively driven, while only 13.28% of non-LGBTQ participants think so. Furthermore, low-engagement and non-LGBTQ participants report more negative LGBTQ-related tweets than high-engagement and LGBTQ participants. The high engagement leads to not only deeper reflection but also greater acceptance of the current situation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Through the data collection analysis and the interaction user-generated content analysis, it is reported in this research that the widespread and untrue online images of the LGBTQ community can seriously negatively impact and lead Generation Z to develop a false perception of this group. Among them, the potential threat to the LGBTQ community lies in the misdirection of the Internet that will create a new dimension of stereotyping or reinforce the existing social stigma. In the time of digitalization, the Internet plays a decisive role in promoting minority groups. While the LGBTQ group is magnified to the public, the true meaning is also ignored. It is only possible to promote a fine Internet environment to spread correct LGBTQ images respectfully by admitting that the social media platforms today are doing harm and casting prejudice. With the stigmatizations and stereotypes described in this research, studies aiming at helping LGBTQ groups to make genuine declarations and get rid of social stigma are within reach.

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