



# Mitigation Effect of Online Subcultural Community on Graduates' Employment Anxiety: Senses of Participation, Trust, and Achievement

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**Abstract.** This study aims to explore strategies for alleviating employment anxiety among recent graduates from four ordinary undergraduate universities in the northwest region of Hubei Province, with a focus on how participation, trust, and achievement within online subcultural communities can help them successfully navigate their career paths and fulfill their life values.

**Keywords:** Online Subcultural Community; Internet; Undergraduates; Employment Anxiety

## 1 Introduction

According to statistics, the number of university graduates in China reached a record high of 11.58 million in 2023. The ongoing process of "urbanization" in China has engendered social anxiety due to its large population, dense talent pool, and intense competition [1] The fiercely competitive job market, perpetuating involution of social structure, and prevailing life atmosphere exert immense pressure and anxiety on graduates. Numerous studies have demonstrated that employment anxiety has emerged as one of the most severe mental health issues among graduates; impeding not only their healthy development but also hindering smooth progress in employment initiatives within higher education institutions.[2] As young college students exhibit greater openness towards novelty and display proactive tendencies, they have embraced or even spearheaded these online discourse communities during this transformative era.

## **2 Concept: Online Subcultural Community and Its Significance for Employment Anxiety Alleviation**

### **2.1 Definition of Online Subcultural Community**

Contemporary subcultural communities gather individuals with shared interests, ideologies, and values through online platforms such as forums, social media, and specific websites. These virtual communities resemble real-world structures and facilitate the exchange of information, experiences, and resources through various forms of communication. [3] It is imperative to acknowledge the positive ramifications these communities bring forth. Online subcultural communities furnish participants with an interactive platform for communication and knowledge acquisition that can profoundly influence their interests and professional advancement. Moreover, they serve as sources of psychological solace and social support, effectively mitigating stressors and anxieties encountered in both personal lives and occupational domains.

### **2.2 Significance of Online Subcultural Community in Alleviating Employment Anxiety among General Undergraduates**

Employment anxiety is a negative emotional state resulting from unclear employment intentions, Social support, job environment, family background, self-efficacy and self-esteem uncertainties are among the factors influencing graduates' employment anxiety.[4]

With the emergence of online subcultural communities playing a significant role in contemporary youth's lives, they provide adaptable and receptive graduates with a relatively free and relaxed platform for sharing experiences and communication.

Firstly, online subcultural communities offer graduates a platform for sharing and communication that is relatively free and relaxed. This allows them to engage with individuals who share similar interests and career paths, enabling the exchange of job search experiences, strategies for career development, and relevant resources. Through communication and sharing among community members, graduates gain valuable advice and support that reduces uncertainty and anxiety in their job search. Secondly, these communities broaden graduates' professional perspectives by facilitating access to resources such as the latest trends, skill requirements, and employment opportunities in their chosen fields. Community members often share their professional experiences and success stories which deepen graduates' understanding of their career development paths. This acquisition of information expands career horizons helping graduates better understand their own interests and strengths thereby increasing competitiveness in the job market. Thirdly, online subcultural communities provide psychological support while maintaining a "safe distance." During the job search process when faced with rejection or uncertainty leading to frustration; community members can offer encouragement during difficult moments helping graduates realize they are not alone in their struggles. Such psychological affirmation helps maintain a positive mindset improving confidence levels throughout the job search process. Finally, online subcultural communities offer opportunities for graduates to

engage in relevant practical activities and projects, such as internships or cooperative projects facilitated by the community, which can enhance their skills and provide valuable experience. These practical opportunities not only enrich graduates' resumes but also help them establish professional networks and increase their chances of employment [5]

### 3 Research Overview

#### 3.1 Research Object

Utilizing a sample of graduates from four universities in the northwest region of Hubei Province, who completed their studies in 2023, this research primarily employs questionnaires to assess their current levels of employment anxiety. Specifically, the study examines graduates' experiences and perceptions regarding participation, trust, and achievement within network subculture communities. Overall, a total of 2752 questionnaires were distributed during the survey, out of which 2481 valid responses were collected, in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Basic Information of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Sample size	Proportion (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1402	56.51%
	Female	1079	43.49%
<b>Discipline</b>	Arts	1092	44.01%
	Sciences	1389	55.99%
<b>Source of students</b>	Urban area	602	24.26%
	Rural area	1879	75.74%

#### 3.2 Research Design

The questionnaire design consists of three main sections. The first part aims to gather basic information about the graduates, including their gender, age, major, and family environment, among other factors. The second part focuses specifically on exploring the graduates' employment anxiety, examining both their subjective feelings and physiological behaviors associated with employment anxiety. The third part delves into various aspects of the online subcultural community, investigating whether graduates are engaged in this community, the frequency of their participation, the reasons behind their involvement, and how participation in the online subcultural community impacts their sense of participation, trust, and achievement. To measure responses, a Likert 4-point scale ranging from 1 (completely inconsistent) to 4 (completely consistent) is utilized throughout the questionnaire.

### 3.3 Research Findings

The findings from this research demonstrate that employment anxiety is a prevalent concern among graduates, with a majority of them obtaining high anxiety scores when it comes to their subjective feelings about employment, in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Respondents' Scores of Employment Anxiety

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation	Average score per question
Subjective feelings of employment anxiety	2481	8	32	12.18	5.09	2.02
Physiological behaviors of employment anxiety	2481	8	27	12.79	5.21	1.93
<b>Total</b>	2481	16	59	24.97	9.41	1.97

The involvement of graduates from four general universities in the online subcultural community is primarily categorized based on the frequency of their participation. Building upon this foundation, a subsequent questionnaire survey was conducted to explore the extent to which graduates perceive a sense of participation, trust, and achievement within the online subcultural community. The objective of this investigation is to examine the self-efficacy that graduates derive from their involvement in this community. The findings with regards to this research are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Participation of General Undergraduates in Online Subcultural Communities

Variables	Category	Sample size	Proportion (%)
<b>Participation frequency</b>	Participation	1828	73.70%
	Non-participation	653	26.30%
<b>Sense of participation</b>	Acquisition	2039	82.19%
	Deficiency	442	17.81%
<b>Sense of trust</b>	Acquisition	1557	62.74%
	Deficiency	924	37.26%
<b>Sense of achievement</b>	Acquisition	1488	59.99%
	Deficiency	993	40.01%

As illustrated in the table, a significant proportion of graduates, totaling 73.70%, have demonstrated active engagement within the online subcultural community, while the remaining 26.30% have not participated. This statistic emphasizes the considerable involvement of current university students within this community.

The survey findings indicate a substantial improvement in the sense of participation among 1828 graduates from general universities who actively engage in the online subcultural community. Among these respondents, a noteworthy 82.19% expressed feeling accepted and recognized through their participation, while the remaining 17.81% claimed to lack a sense of participation during their involvement. Furthermore, the online subcultural community emerges as a significant catalyst in enhancing graduates' sense of trust. Specifically, 62.74% of participants reported

gaining more trust and support within the community, attributing this to the shared vision, values, and understanding present among its members, who wholeheartedly support their choices and decisions. Moreover, the act of engaging with the online subcultural community has had a profound impact on graduates' sense of personal development. Approximately 59.99% of respondents stated that through their participation, they have acquired valuable knowledge and skills, which in turn enhances their competitiveness and equips them to effectively navigate employment-related challenges.

In summary, the data analysis results demonstrate a notable positive impact of participation in the online subcultural community in alleviating graduates' employment anxiety.

## **4 Recommendation: Alleviating the Employment Anxiety of General Undergraduates Based on Online Subcultural Community**

### **4.1 Establishing Graduates' Confidence in Employment with the Sense of Participation**

According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, when individuals transition into a relatively independent and free adult stage, they often encounter the challenge of reconciling their self-identity with societal expectations. Driven by traits such as criticism, liberalism, and post-modernism, many university students in China prioritize the pursuit of nonconformity and the expression of individuality. This embrace of a personality-first philosophy aligns with the inherent characteristics of network subculture.<sup>[6]</sup> Consequently, the participation activities facilitated by the online subcultural community can be seen as a manifestation of the internal confusion experienced by these graduates. This confusion arises from their struggle to forge a clear self-identity amidst the abrupt transition to adulthood, as well as the frustrations stemming from the unexpected challenges encountered in the real world.

Through participation in the construction of online subcultural communities, individuals engage in compensatory behaviors to establish a sense of self-identity and defend against external influences such as fashion, idols, and niche interests provided by these communities. By doing so, they create a barrier for self-identity recognition,<sup>[7]</sup> which can instill confidence in ordinary undergraduate graduates when faced with overwhelming employment pressures. This provides a sense of inner fulfillment and enhances self-confidence to some extent. Therefore, promoting and encouraging graduates to actively participate in online subcultural communities and establish their own self-identity within these communities holds significant practical significance in enhancing the sense of participation and self-confidence for ordinary undergraduate graduates.

## 4.2 Building Graduates' Social Network with the Sense of Trust

Advancements in high-tech technologies, such as full-screen smartphones and 4K HD, have significantly impacted university students' engagement in network subculture. These advancements have provided students with more convenient means of communication, higher-definition content, and a wider range of subculture-related materials, making it easier for them to participate in the online subcultural community. The post-pandemic era has witnessed the rapid growth and diversification of network subculture, thanks to the internet's rapid development. Notably, in the fields of two-dimensional animation and internet slang, platforms like "Moegirlpedia" have emerged as comprehensive hubs for subculture-related knowledge and scientific popularization. Consequently, university students spend a significant amount of time immersed in these network subcultures and actively participate in their respective communities to fulfill their niche hobbies, such as animation and cosplaying. Moreover, the active involvement of these graduates in various network subculture communities helps alleviate the sense of detachment from reality they experience when facing employment challenges. Engaging in these communities helps them gain a sense of trust, both in terms of subjective psychological relief and physiological relief from employment-related anxiety. Overall, the integration of technology, the convenience of communication, and the diversity of content in online subculture communities have created favorable conditions for university students to actively participate in these communities and find solace in their shared interests. [8] This, in turn, contributes to their overall well-being and confidence in tackling the challenges of the real world.

## 4.3 Enhancing Graduates' Employability with the Sense of Achievement

From a sociological perspective, the role of network subculture communities in modern society has become increasingly significant. These communities unite individuals by establishing shared values and cultural symbols, providing them with a sense of purpose and recognition. Within these communities, people can connect with each other through shared hobbies, interests, and values, fostering a sense of belonging, identity, and achievement. For graduates, joining these online subcultural communities can enhance their employability. These communities offer access to job information, career advice, and the opportunity to improve skills and abilities through shared experiences and resources. Furthermore, these communities provide individuals with a platform for self-realization, allowing them to channel their strengths and talents, resulting in a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment within the community. In summary, by satisfying individuals' psychological needs, joining online subcultural communities also provides opportunities for personal success and self-actualization.

Joining an online subcultural community can help graduates expand their social circle and network, and gain access to more career information and job-hunting skills through communication and sharing within the community. Additionally, graduates can establish connections with industry experts and professionals by participating in offline events and conferences, and obtain valuable career advice and guidance.

## 5 Conclusion

With regards to employment, joining an online subcultural community can help graduates expand their social circle and networks, providing them with a sense of participation, trust, and achievement. This can help alleviate anxieties and feelings of loss experienced by young individuals facing employment difficulties. While online subcultural communities cannot replace traditional education and vocational training, they do offer unique support and assistance to graduates from general universities, enabling them to better navigate employment pressures and challenges. Additionally, these communities provide interesting and meaningful examples of how to foster connection, community, and a sense of belonging in the digital age.

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