

Network Subculture Communication in the Digital Age with the Replication of Meme as the Core: A Case Study of "the Popularity of Wang Ju"

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Keywords: Network subculture, Meme, Cultural communication

Abstract: Taking the popular phenomenon "the Popularity of Wang Ju" in May 2018 as an example, this paper uses case analysis and network ethnography to analyze how meme promotes the spread of network sub-culture and how meme successfully replicates itself in the digital age. In the phenomena of Wang Ju's popularity, the Successful Duplication of Meme includes four stages: assimilation, memory, expression and transmission. In these four stages, meme has six main functions: expression of feelings, communication of emotions, resonance of feelings, connection of emotions, unity of action and creation of meaning. In the dissemination of "Ju Culture", there are still some problems, such as vulgar language, the lack of strong meme and fast fever decline.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development and widespread application of digital technology, the digital age arises at the historic moment. New media, such as network media and mobile media, have been widely used in the world by means of digital technology and continue to develop vigorously. At the same time, the rise of new media also provides the soil for the spread of Internet subculture. Network subculture is a new generation of culture formed with the wide rise of the Internet. Like the development of the Internet, it embodies the characteristics of grassroots and democratic freedom. Humor, authenticity, frankness, weirdness, democracy and irony are the core elements of the subculture of cyber language. Meme plays an important role in the dissemination of Internet subculture^[1]. At the end of May 2018, Wang Ju, the so-called "The hell is empty while Wang Ju is in the unfashionable "Produce 101" (a kind of women's draft show in China produced by Tencent)", became popular in Sina Weibo, WeChat and other major social platforms quickly, and even formed a network sub-culture called "Ju Culture". The expression packs, the support limericks and the "The Treasure Book of Wang Ju' Words", the jokes and spoof short videos, as important components of the "Ju Culture", are rapidly spreading among young people. For example, the word "Ju outsider", which has a very high appearance rate on the major social platforms, is interpreted as follows: People who don't know who Wang Ju is and hasn't seen Produce 101, but who have been surrounded by information about "voting for Wang Ju".

2. The Concept and Main Form of Meme

Meme (Mi Mu) also has been translated into "Mo Yin", "Mi Yin", "Mi Yin" and so on in Chinese. The word "meme" derives from Greek "mimeme" whose original meaning is to imitate. Among Internet users, especially the English users, meme is used to refer to content units that are quickly transmitted and gradually changing in their communication on the Internet, including "ideas presented in written text, pictures, language moves or other cultural forms"^[2]. The concept of "meme" was first proposed by British biologist Dawkins in his book "Selfish Genes" in 1976. He analogies the evolution of human society and culture with the theory of evolution in biology. The gene is composed of hundreds of thousands of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA), which controls the

heredity and variation of organisms^[3]. Similarly, "meme" is a cultural unit that seeks to replicate for its own survival, and is the "intermediary" and "catalyst" in the process of social and cultural evolution of human being^[4].

"Meme" mainly includes four categories: text, image, audio and video. In social media, the form of meme is more frequently embodied in paragraphs, expression packs, spoof gifs and short videos. Nowadays, the popular meme on the social platform can satisfy the emotional or psychological needs of the audiences to a large extent, so that the audiences can produce emotional resonance under certain stimulation, thus triggering the reprinting, dissemination, reproduction and redistribution of them. The emotional resonance produced by meme can be roughly divided into resonance of happiness, anger, sadness and anxiety. In addition to stimulating the emotional resonance of the audiences, meme can also promote the emotional communication of the audiences to a certain extent. Relying on meme, audiences can express their views and feelings, and seek emotional sympathy with others.

3. Theoretical Framework

In 1998, in order to replicate successfully, Heylighen proposed that there must be four stages for meme, and proposed the criteria for selecting successful meme. These four stages are assimilation, retention, expression and transmission. They are interrelated forming the replication chain and life cycle of meme.

The process of assimilation is the process of finding new hosts. The successful meme must "infect" the new hosts and enter its memory. Such meme must have three elements: noticed, understood and accepted. Noticed means that meme should be highlighted enough to attract the attention of new hosts; understood means that meme can adapt to the cognitive structure of potential hosts; accepted means that new hosts are willing to believe in the meme; The longer the meme are retained in the host's memory, the more likely they are to spread and influence other individuals. This stage is highly selective, with only a few memes preserved. Expressions refer to the fact that when communicating with other individuals, meme must be transformed from memory patterns into physical forms that can be perceived by others, such as words, texts, pictures and behaviours. The host tends to express those memes which he thinks are interesting and important, and need repetition. The transmission refers to the meme expression which requires a stable material carrier or medium to prevent information loss or distortion, such as sound, books, photos, CD-ROM, etc.

Heylighen put forward the meme selection criteria theory in 2011. He believed that the most practical way to predict successful meme, that is, fitter meme, is to formalize universal selection criteria. If a meme is more in line with one of the criteria, it will exceed the other meme in quantity. The four selection criteria proposed by Heylighen are objective, subjective, intersubjective and meme-centered^[5]. As shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Meme Selectivity Criteria Proposed by Heylighen.

Selection criteria Stage	Subject	Object	Intersubjective	Meme as the core
Assimilation	Unique	Novel, simple and coherent	Authoritative and official	Self-Justification
Memory	Constant and controllable	Coherence and unity	Coincidence degree	Self- enhancement tolerance
Expression			Expressiveness	Induce
Transmission			Attention degree	Induce

Based on this theoretical framework, in the case of Wang Ju's popularity, this paper analyzes how does meme propagate the "Ju-Culture" of the network subculture through successful

replication.

4. Case Review: The Birth of "Wang Ju's Popularity" and "Ju Culture"

Wang Ju is one of the contestants of Tencent's self-made video talent show Produce 101. Originally, her popularity and rank in the show were low, and she was negatively evaluated and questioned by many audiences because of her "less nymphean" appearance. But the number of micro-blogs, which are related to Wang Ju, showed a significant growth trend in May 24, 2018. At the same time, a lot of spoof expression bags about Wang Ju began to spread on social media such as micro-blog and WeChat. These expressions packages, with their exaggerated and funny expressions and the language that keeps up with the trend of the internet, quickly spread to all corners of the internet, so that many "passers-by" began to come into contact with the program Produce 101 and Wang Ju. Subsequently, the micro-blog fever of "sister Ju" and "Wang Ju" is also rising. And only 5 days later, her micro-blog's heat was much higher than that of the top runner. Judging from the WeChat Index, the popularity of Wang Ju has exceeded many key opinion leaders (celebrity with traffic amount), the index in 29th has broken through tens of millions, and the sequential growth has increased by 453%. Hence, Wang Ju jumped from 96 to 36 in the ranking of popularity in the program, and then succeeded in promoting to the top 22, even reaching the second place at one time. During the period of rapid increase of Wang Ju's fever, a large number of related canvassing words began to circulate in the circle of friends, micro-blogs and posting bars, such as, "If you vote and I vote either, sister Ju will immediately be famous, but if you don't vote, and I don't vote, sister Ju will knock out." As a result, it is very consistent with the characteristics of Internet culture, and spread in the social platform. Her fans call themselves "Tao Yuanming" and call the canvassing event "Jufeng Action" for Wang Ju, and create the exclusive language about sister Ju - the Treasure Book of Wang Ju's Words. This "Ju Feng action" successfully transformed the action intended to "Save Wang Ju" into an action of mass entertainment and carnival.

In addition, it also spawned a new network subculture -- "Ju Culture" which is different from the traditional chrysanthemum culture. This "Ju" refers to a person's name "Wang Ju" rather than the plant "chrysanthemum". "Ju Culture" refers to a network subculture developed around the creation of Wang Ju, the Produce 101 contestant. It is similar to the early "Lin Culture (a similar culture related to a star, named Cai Yilin in China)". "Ju Culture" can be classified into the culture of support, originating in Japan at the earliest time, which refers to a kind of culture formed by fans to encourage their favorite idols. The common support culture includes the representative color, food, clothing, advertising, light board, flower basket and so on. "Tao Yuanming's" support is closely integrated with the prevailing local culture. Simple cards with art words written in watercolor pen and expression packs with doggerel, a variety of popular words related to "Wang Ju" dispel the seriousness and aggression of the negative views of Wang Ju on the network, and increase the entertainment of the event itself.

5. The Core of Dissemination of "Ju Culture": The Successful Duplication of Meme

5.1. Four stages of meme's successful reproduction in the dissemination of Ju Culture

5.1.1. Assimilation

"Ju Culture" firstly introduced to the public is the expression bags spoofing Wang Ju. On the one hand, these expression bags and actions, accompanied by humorous and playful language, with distinct personal characteristics, are exaggerated enough to attract the attention of the public. On the other hand, the linguistic symbols used in the expression packages featured by Wang Ju are close to the characteristics of the current Internet. They can have common meaning space with the host and adapt to its cognitive structure, so they can obtain a certain degree of acceptance. Only by satisfying these three successful elements of meme including noticed, understood and accepted, can the effect of "infection" be achieved and the public be willing to use such expression packs in daily life.

5.1.2. Memory

Not only can a series of exaggerated visual symbols leave a deep impression to people, but also "Ju Yan Ju Yu (an anthology of Wang Ju's words)" is also refreshing. "Ju Yan Ju Yu" are composed of quotations and jokes about Wang Ju. For example, the Ju-style canvassing slogan appeared in the circle of friends is like this: "If you don't vote and I don't vote neither, how does teacher Wang Ju become famous? If you don't do it and I don't do it neither, sister Ju will knock off. You vote and I vote, Wang Ju must be famous. If you do not love her, and I do not love her neither, sister Ju will not be here the next time." First of all, these sentences are symmetrical and rhyming. They can be read aloud and own the potential of viral transmission. Secondly, it is easy to reproduce, recreate and extend, for example, "If you do well, and I do well, Wang Ju can catch up with the wind; If you work hard, and I work hard, sister Ju can do wonders. If you are lazy and I am lazy, too, sister Ju have to lose her job "and so on. These humorous statements can be a memory of the public.

5.1.3. Expression

In addition to these linguistic and non-linguistic symbols, the WeChat group on "Ju" has also become a driving force for the dissemination of "Ju Culture". The phrase "all those who enter the group are sisters" always appears on the WeChat group related to Wang Ju, because at first the members of Wang Ju's WeChat groups were mainly gay and the female. It seems that Wang Ju has become a social bond for these members, and because of Wang Ju, her fans have an opportunity to show their imagination and get recognition in the group. The representatives are the group remarks and names. Most of the WeChat groups related to Wang Ju have the character "Ju", such as "the Origin of Ju", "The Yard of Ju", "Ode to Ju" and so on. Most members of the groups linked the word of "Ju" to their own knowledge, and changed their group notes to "Ju Tea", "Wang Ju is the most important", "Wang Ju can look down everything", "Sister Ju Pin" and so on. To a certain extent, the WeChat groups related to Wang Ju promote the emotional communication between members. Members can use the core meme of "Ju" to express their views and feelings, and seek emotional resonance with others.

5.1.4. Transmission

The expression of meme requires a stable material carrier or medium to prevent information loss or distortion, such as sound, books, photographs, CD-ROMs, etc. The main media of meme's expression in this incident are pictures and spoofed short videos. The stable material carriers are mainly Ju-style surroundings, including "Tao Yuanming" self-made T-shirts, the support sheets, bags and so on.

5.2. The manifestation and function of meme in "Ju Culture"

There are various forms of expressions in "Ju Culture" which mainly include catchy poems, funny jokes, interesting expression packages, spoof short videos, exclusive language "The Treasure Book of Wang Ju's Words" and Wang Ju's related surroundings. These doggerels, jokes, expression bags and videos are the main performance forms of meme. For example, Wang Ju's expression packs, which have high popularity and frequency of use, are in the form of "pictures + words". They integrate Wang Ju's personal characteristics and current network popular culture in content. Therefore, in this era of visual experience, this way of combining pictures and texts with popular network culture is undoubtedly more communicative. Firstly, images appeal to vision, and their visual impact undoubtedly has better eye-catching ability in the era of picture reading; secondly, picture-text collocation helps to construct the visual image of discourse, especially with concise slogans in the debate, which can effectively enhance the understanding and cognition of the visual image of discourse; Thirdly, borrowing the images, expressions or cartoon of stars who are familiar to the public, and recreating them through PS, have a prototype narrative meaning, which can increase the polyphonic information of a picture.^[6] In the Ju Culture, meme is novel, simple and coherent. Its form of expression is helpful for netizens to receive relevant information and leaves

relevant impressions.

On the other hand, "Tao Yuanmings" reflect their true emotional expression and needs and psychological state by copying, reproducing, processing, creating and making meaning to Wang Ju, the core cultural unit, for example, Wang Ju's exclusive language "The Treasure Book of Wang Ju's Words". Through the use of a number of adapted traditional words with the core word--"Ju" such as the expressions mentioned above like the "Ju outsiders" , "the serious condition of Ju" , "things like Ju", " the serious voice and color of Ju", "one Ju two gains" and so on, "Tao Yuanmings" can not only express themselves quickly, but also establish emotional connections with individuals with the same standpoint to get emotional recognition and arouse emotional resonance. For example, the word "one Ju and two gains" is interpreted as follows: Whenever you want to take a takeaway, you may raise money for Wang Ju. When you are thin, Wang Ju is alive. It reflects the popularity of takeaway among modern young people and the desire of young people for slim shape. It can be seen that meme is a vital form of emotional communication and expression, including the user's choice tendency and meaning endowed, but also a projection of social mentality.^[7] In Ju Culture, meme's mode of communication is expressive, easy to get greater attention, and has a certain degree of persuasion, so there will be such a number of netizens to join in.

In this campaign to canvass for Wang Ju and avoid her being eliminated, "Tao Yuanmings" also set off a wave of passers-by's imitation by using WeChat's floating bottle as a social channel for strangers to canvass. WeChat's floating bottle is a plug-in of WeChat whose main functions are making friends with strangers and releasing emotions whose main ways are picking up floating bottles and throwing them. Strangers' social platform has a large number of user resources. Its means to access other users is the most convenient and fast, which is undoubtedly a large platform for communication. "Tao Yuanmings" responded to a stranger's greeting or other social behavior by picking up drifting, and then directly copied and pasted all kinds of canvassing templates they created, which were flexible according to the sponsor's response. For example, the text content of a bottle is: No one wants to play? Tao Yuanming's reply is: Let's play a game of protecting Wang Ju, and then copy and forward the canvassing template. This contradictory behavior is rapidly popular on micro-blogs and WeChat. The popular reason of it is that it can give people a new sense of novelty, playfulness and mobilization, resulting in many passers-by carnivalesque imitation, joined in the "Jufeng action". With the advent of the era of visual communication, in the social movement, meme is considered to be able to rally consensus, unify action and give things meaning.^[7] This drifting bottle canvassing action is called "bottle control" by "Tao Yuanmings". "Bottle control" refers to the control of drifting bottles. This term belongs to the adaptation of the term "review control". "Review control" is a very common behavior in the fans' support activity. When there is a social topic related to their idols, the support circle of fans will organize fans to comment positively on the topic and actively praise the occupation of the hot comment area. The control of evaluation is often organized by the exclusive backup departments (commonly known as "anti-black group", "purification group", etc) and has a unified set of process regulations.

6. Conclusion

In the phenomena of Wang Ju's popularity, the network sub-culture - "Ju Culture" was derived, and meme played a great role in its dissemination. First, it attracts the attention of the audiences and becomes a memory point for them. Second, it projects the mentality of audiences and establishes the emotional connection and communication of individuals. Third, it unites the audiences and initiates mobilization activities. However, in the dissemination of "Ju Culture", there are still some problems, such as vulgar language, the lack of strong meme and fast fever decline. This is also a problem that must be vigilant in the cultural dissemination.

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