How to Break the 'Clustering' Nirvana: Interpretation of the Phenomenon of Youth Network 'Clustering' from a Psychological Point of View

Feng Chen

Guangdong Ocean University, Zhanjiang, Guangdong, China

Abstract: In the network society, the "clustering" of youth has become a prominent group phenomenon, characterized by homogeneity and conformity, extensive autonomy, identity independence, behavioral constraints. From a psychological perspective, this phenomenon stems from the psychological need for individual pursuit, emotional compensation, and self-satisfaction as a psychological reference point. It also arises from the need for self-identity and a sense of belonging, alongside the manifestation of emotional homogenization and the psychological mechanism of escaping freedom. While youth clustering in the online realm has certain positive roles and impacts to some extent, it also harbors numerous risks and hidden dangers, such as cognitive bias, psychological alienation, identity disorder, and subject mutism. Therefore, strategies for guiding the psychological development of young people in the context of online cluster culture are proposed to achieve risk prevention and resolution.

Keywords: Youth; Clustering; Network; Cognition; Mental Health

1. Introduction

Network has become embedded in the youth's lives and learning, the 54th China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China shows: China had nearly 1.1 billion Internet users (1,099.67 million), with an Internet penetration rate of 78% until June 2024[1]. Rapid advances and changes in information technology have profoundly altered the manner and context of interpersonal interactions. The network society has evolved into a new type of social form, and network groups based on common interests and emotional ties have prompted the new Internet youth to interact frequently in the virtual world and real life, thus network clustering forms. Social and cultural phenomena in the internet reflect network clustering culture, which forms a new mode of cultural expression and practice. Network cultural intertwining has not only constructed the clustering's unique expressions, values and behavioral patterns, but is also profoundly shaping and influencing the youth's learning and daily life.

2. Characteristics of The Youth Network 'Clustering'

2.1 Extensive Autonomy

It can be observed in youth clustering that the thoughts and behaviors of young people tend to show a convergence triggered by multifaceted similarities. The youth clustering is a medium in fundamentally that enables young people to build personalized clustering communities by virtue of their own self-dominance and by connecting with peers with similar ideas based on common interests or goals. For example, the "two-dimensional clustering" and "e-sports clustering" are new clustering created by youth groups, which are also products of the times. At the same time, young people have more pure freedom of choice in the face of the network clustering, within the clustering, members maintain a relatively equal status, they are not only participants in the activities, but also play a dual role in decision-making and supervision. Therefore youth groups show a stronger dependence and trust on the network clustering they choose on their own. The autonomy of the network clustering constitutes a great attraction to the youth group which has also become a prominent manifestation of the phenomenon of youth network "clustering".

2.2 Independence and Behavioral Constraints

The youth network clustering has the characters of independence and behavioral constraints. Youth clustering builds a space for young people

to think and make decisions on their own, and young people in the clustering have full rights to self-knowledge and independent action, while young people in the clustering are also bound by the norms of the clustering group. Once a clustering is formed, it exhibits a certain unity and cohesion, and naturally establishes appropriate group norms within it. In the pressure of groups, young individuals will tend to follow established group norms and standards in order to gain wider group acceptance and acceptance. In addition, the differences among the network clustering are significantly reflected in the content of information received by youth, the types of people they interact with, and the network socialization environment in which they live, among other aspects. Young people in a specific network clustering often inadvertently ignore the information outside the clustering, and the long-term high intensity input of homogenized information, on the other hand, for the network clustering constructed an "invisible wall".

2.3 Homogeneity and Conformity Identity

It can be observed in youth clustering that the thoughts and behaviors of young people tend to show a convergence triggered by multifaceted similarities. On one hand, the conformity identity is formed by the group's subtle influence in close interaction; on the other hand, the homogeneity is shown by the youth's active cooperation in order to maintain harmony with the group. The conformity identity of the phenomenon of youth network clustering also highlights the homogeneity of information within the clustering. Youth are often exposed to homogenized information in clustering with specific labels, then youth in the same clustering focus on and serve only their own clustering 's culture. They focus closely on the core of their own clustering culture and pay little attention to people and information outside the clustering, therefore they unconsciously shield themselves from the culture outside the clustering and unconditionally receive the culture inside the clustering, So a preference for screening personal information based on the culture of network clustering forms.

3. Causal Analysis from a Psychological Perspective

3.1 Emotional Homogenization from the

Emotional Dimension

"Clustering" of youth networks is characterized by a high degree of concentration and homogeneity. At the age of big data, diversified information reception channels and content reflect the homogenization of data after screening properties in essence, which builds a "Information Cocoons". Emotions are the subjective experience of an individual's attitude toward an objective object and the behavioral feedback. Based on the accumulation of homogeneous information in the "information cocoons", young netizen tends to accept similar information stimulation in the open Internet environment, thus it forms an "emotional cocoons" which results in the tendency of convergence and diffusion of physiological emotions. When faced with real-life frustration and anxiety, they turn to their favorite cultural domains for solace and joy, while they also sooth the buildup of negative emotions in the mutual comfort of their peers. Young people are eager to socialize while they don't want others to really pry into their inner world, so they tend to gain a sense of security by maintaining a certain social distance. However, the group to which it belongs has been irrigated by a single emotion for a long time, and the expression of individual thinking and feeling in a single dimension as well as the formation of thoughts, mindsets and values presents a closed loop[2]. Driven by the group mentality, the heterogeneity of the individual is swallowed up by homogeneity, and unconscious, savage, cruel, primitive qualities prevail.

3.2 Individual Psychological Needs and Psychological Substitution

The vertical and fine division of network clustering culture fits the psychological needs of young people to express their individuality, and young people within the clustering can use a series of extremely delicate cultural symbols to highlight their individuality in a high-profile way. In this way, it fills the lack of self in the real world and realizes the external expression of the pursuit of individuality. Secondly, it is a psychological substitute for emotional fulfillment. The German philosopher and educator Sprague once said, "No one is as deeply alone as a young man, eagerly waiting to be approached and understood, and no one is as deeply calling from afar as a young man."[3] Loneliness is prevalent as a notable

psychological trait among youth groups, especially in the current social environment with a high proportion of only child. While pursuing individualized development, young people have a deep desire to integrate into the collective in order to gain an emotional sense of belonging and identity. Compared with the traditional mode of socializing with acquaintances, socializing under the network clustering culture is favored by youth for its lack of burden and pressure. They are more willing to open their hearts on such a platform so that their inner emotional needs can be effectively satisfied and compensated. In addition, it is a psychological reference to self-worth and social value. Young people's individuality and sense of subjectivity have been significantly enhanced by the influence of the Internet clustering, and they use the unique language of the clustering or cultural creations to express themselves and highlight their individuality. At the same time, their behavioral decisions are constrained by the notion of "collective identity". Through the behavior of the network clustering, it reflects the youth group's influence on society and the degree of social recognition which reflects the "youth's responsibility"[4].

3.3 Escaping from Freedom from Fromm's Escape from Freedom

Fromm's book, Escape from Freedom, is considered a seminal work in the field of social psychology which delve into the central theme of the inquiry "What factors contribute to social groups showing similarities in thinking, feeling, and behavior?"[5] From the surface observation, the formation of clustering originates from the natural aggregation of young people based on diversified interests; but from the deeper analysis, it is actually a reflection of young people's confusion and maladjustment in the face of the reality of freedom, and then seeks a sense of psychological security in the inner clustering. In the view of Fromm, an individual's pursuit of security undergoes a process of transformation from passive acceptance of external conferral to active and positive seeking. On the journey of youth individualization, it implies a dual nature, leading to a situation in which they enjoy both freedom and profound isolation. With the development of youth's mind and body, an ambivalence is born: On the one hand, they are eagerly pursuing personal independence and recognition from the outside world, trying to get rid of the outside world's constraints and limitations; on the other hand, it is difficult for them to give up their dependence on their parents, and they deeply expect to get the understanding and warmth of their relatives. However, parents often have difficulty in accurately grasping the interests and actual needs of youth. This is why youth groups turn to the virtual realm for a sense of security and belonging. A large number of young people with similar interests gather in online clustering to build a vast Utopian world.

3.4 Needs for Self-Identification and Self-Belonging

Gaining self-identity is one of the core needs in the process of youth network clustering. Lacan notes that children aged about 6 to 18 months gradually recognize their own body image (e.g., in a mirror) and establish a basic consistency of identity which is called the "mirror phase" [6]. This stage is crucial to the construction of the individual's self and subjectivity, and the "mirror self" can help the individual to confirm his or her identity and deepen the recognition of the real. In essence, youth development is a gradual journey of exploring and identifying with "mirror images". Nowadays network clustering is like the clearest mirror image, which enables youth to see their "other selves" and meet peers with similar interests greatly satisfies the sense of identity. It greatly satisfies the sense of identity that youth need and pushes them to move from self-empowerment to group identity. Another core needs is self-belonging. The convenience of modern society has made distance no longer a barrier and has greatly broadened the breadth of emotional communication. However, it has also led to a disconnect in proximity interpersonal interactions and an increasing superficiality of emotional interactions. In addition, the specific linguistic expressions of network clustering enhance the sense of belonging. When youth's sense of belonging is satisfied in the network clustering, they will even pay for the clustering regardless of the return, which also marks the basic completion of the network "clustering" of youth[7].

4. Potential Risks of the Youth Network 'Clustering'

4.1 Cognitive Dissonance

"Information Cocoons" leads to cognitive dissonance. Network information is categorized and filtered to be disseminated in a fragmented form to different clustering. Clustering members frequently receive homogenized information, but access to external information is extremely limited, therefore the clustering will become a "cocoon of information" which results in the cognitive narrowing of youth[8]. As the American psychologist Keith Sunstein said, people who live in an "information cocoon" are unlikely to be able to think things through, because their preconceptions will gradually become entrenched. Cognitive dissonance is further amplified and strengthened in the network clustering, affecting youth's "three views on life" and emotional stability. It prevents youth from adapting to real life and taking the initiative to solve problems, which is not conducive to the development of young people's mental health.

"Echo chamber effect" leads to cognitive dissonance. The "echo chamber effect" describes that ideas and beliefs become increasingly entrenched through repetitive transmission in the system without interaction, which results in conflicting or contradictory information and ideas often being rejected or difficult to present fully[9]. When a certain idea is widely regarded as a "general consensus", it replaces the dominant scale of value judgment and builds a unique system of moral evaluation within the clustering, such as the notion in the fan community that "if you don't spend money on celebrities, you don't pay for them." This phenomenon easily have a negative impact on youth, whose values are still in the process of being shaped, leading to a deviation in their perception of ethical norms. Once this evaluation system transcends the boundaries of its clustering and intrudes into the real society or other communities, it inspires strong antagonistic and aggressive tendencies. Ultimately, it often leads to disorder, which evolves into a series of network violent actions, resulting in a blunted moral consciousness and moral cognitive deviation in the long run.

4.2 Psychological Alienation

In the age of new media, youth spend a lot of time browsing content of interest. However, These high-frequency information constantly refreshes their cognition, but fails to effectively broaden their horizons. On the contrary, it

makes them dependent on the Internet, wanting to find comfort and encouragement from it, and gradually detaching themselves from real life. In the long run, it will make people dissatisfied with real life and be difficult to adapt, then paranoia and escapism appear, so that youth immerse in online clustering socialization. In the network world, they show independent thoughts and optimistic attitudes; however, when they return to reality and face the setbacks and blows in life, they are very prone to negative emotions and lose confidence in real life. In the end, the youth in the network clustering face a paradoxical state: on the one hand, they enjoy the "collective carnival" on the network, but on the other hand, they feel the "lonely individual" in the real life. The prolonged feelings of severance easily bring heavy psychological burden on youth and negative impact on their physical and mental health. Such as low self-esteem and self-confidence conflicts are intertwined, and the ability to resist stress and emotional regulation is reduced; if timely guidance and intervention are not provided, more serious consequences may be triggered[10].

4.3 Identity Disorder and Subject Mutism

The characteristics of network clustering culture mainly include entertainment, virtualization, and niche, which have a definite impact on the positive psychological character for youth. For example, the entertaining features of the culture may lead to the blurring of youth's outlook on life, values and history, and may even give rise to some historical nihilism; in addition, the virtualization features of network clustering culture may cause crises in terms of identity disorder and subject aphasia.

4.4 Generalization of Value Identity

In order to ensure that the culture of the clustering is sufficiently pure, the insiders will ostracize the outsiders who hold different views. Because of different perceptions, out-groups do not enter a clustering voluntarily, which automatically creates clear boundaries and increases the discursive gap. Network clustering has a very strict hierarchical discourse differential order. Clustering that come together for interests are usually managed by group leaders who have a voice. At the same time, some niche cultures are also popular among the youth groups, including the rice clustering and

the second generation. Under the situation, youth may suffer from group blind thinking and take the values of the clustering as their own code of conduct. In the long run, a one-sided value identity will be formed which reject even question the mainstream ideology.

5. Counter Measures

5.1 Breaking the "Information Cocoon" and Being the "Megaphone" of Mainstream Culture

The growth and development of youth should not be bound by clustering like a "sealed wall", but it should be seen as a "revolving door", so youth can pass through at will and expand outward using the clustering as a starting point[11]. Therefore, society needs to deepen its guidance to youth in the clustering and encourage them to develop an open and enterprising mindset for escaping the risk of information barriers. Mainstream media can use effective incentives to encourage youth in their clustering to explore the cultures of other clustering and to broaden their horizons through increased inter- clustering communication and interaction. The official media can also actively explore the use of the celebrity effect to integrate mainstream and non-mainstream cultures, so as to make the youth network clustering in positive energy and to provide the youth in the clustering with diversified information resources, so that they can quickly and efficiently access information outside the clustering[12]. It can't only help young people get rid of the constraints of the "information cocoon" and break down the information barrier, but also realize the "cocoon" from the inside out, and truly achieve the goal of "breaking through the wall and out of the clustering".

5.2 Focusing on the Non-Objective Nature of Love and Actively Realizing Self-Transcendence

Fromm argues that the individual's affirmation of freedom stems from his or her ability to love. Love is not an emotional connection to a particular individual, but a state of mind, a choice. It is embodied in the recognition and affirmation of the loved one as the essence of human nature, and at the same time, loving a person also means caring for and cherishing the whole of humanity. If the individual confines himself to the love of a single object and is

indifferent to other companions, however, this is not love in the true sense of the word, but merely a symbiotic dependence or an extension of egocentricity[12]. Network clustering operate in a closed mode: on the one hand, clustering open up channels for youth to relieve their loneliness and express their individuality; on the other hand, clustering build a "miniature society" in which participants often sacrifice much of their individuality in order to integrate into the group. Thus, the pursuit of true freedom lies in developing the capacity for genuine love, which means expanding from the love of a single individual to "the care of all people, the love of the world, and the value of life"[13]. Freedom and transcendence are often closely linked. Freedom represents the autonomy to reach the realization of one's potential, however, transcendence symbolizes a transformation which is a bridge to the full realization of one's potential and an integral part of the self-actualization process. Fromm asserts that what human beings really aspire to is freedom in the positive sense, just like free development-rather than negative freedom. Fromm says: " Freedom is not only a matter of quantity but also of quality. We must not only preserve and extend the traditional liberties but also strive for a new kind of freedom, one which enables us to realize and cherish our own individuality, and which gives us the faith in ourselves and in life. "This requires youth not only to adhere to the traditional freedom of independent thinking, independent choice and bearing the consequences, but also to cultivate foresight and vision, and to have the wisdom and ability to deal with life's difficult problems. In this way, we can break free from the shackles of all established relationships, neither escape nor attach ourselves to them, and realize the "essential" leap of self-knowledge and self-fulfillment.

5.3 Respecting the Subjective Position of Youth and Strengthening Identity and Emotional Ties to Youth

Educators should first and foremost adopt an attitude of respect and adhere to the principles of equality and democracy for youth, then they have the humility to understand and learn from the cultural characteristics and expressions of the online communities to which the youth belong. In this interactive process, the educator needs to change his or her role from receiving

information to imparting knowledge, and actively play a leading role in building personal influence, thereby establishing a close internal connection with the youth in the clustering. In addition, educators can also take other measures, such as fostering "opinion leaders" who have both political theory and a voice in the clustering. It can utilize peer education and leadership effects to enhance the spread of mainstream voices and promote shared growth.

The educator can also use the clustering culture as a means to build an interactive mechanism of "integration, care and feedback". Based on respect and understanding, it establishes an emotional connection with youth and guides them to interact rationally in network clustering. We suggest: firstly, active integration can be achieved by "entering the clustering" to narrow the psychological distance with young people and ensure effective communication with them. Secondly, we can utilize offline interactions to bring together youth so as to proactively care for and support them in actively expressing their personal opinions. We need to respond to and understand the voices of youth in a timely and in-depth manner, at the same time we should organize and analyze the emotional state of youth which make youth feel warmth. Third, it is important to respond to them in a timely manner and to dissect the interests of youth from a peer perspective. We provide psychological support for reasonable needs, and patiently guide and channel radical views. We need to establish a solid relationship of trust with the youth, and guide them to rationally scrutinize the network clustering culture rationally with emotional resonance.

5.4 Building a Platform for Youth Exchange and Emphasis on Guiding Youth Values

In the context of the digital media age, clustering tend to exhibit more dynamic mobility. There is a certain tension between the identity of the network clustering group and the logic of individual behavior. Whereas it is particularly important to build a platform for youth exchanges, which aims to create a positive communication atmosphere and make the communication environment more inclusive for the youth in the network clustering. Thus, it promotes the intermingling of diverse clustering cultures and alleviates the mismatch between clustering youth and the demand for cultural products. This allows for the full penetration and

effective implementation of ideological and political education. The government, as the leader of governance, needs to further strengthen the supervision of online platforms through various means such as enacting laws and regulations and guiding the establishment of community norms. When positive and negative information intersect on the communication platform, a diversified feedback system is continuously improved to create an open and inclusive online environment. At the same time, the organic combination of online and offline activities motivates youth to take the initiative in controlling the duration of "in-clustering" activities and actively integrating them into real life. It allows youth to experience a pluralistic and coexisting mode of communication and cultural atmosphere, and to avoid the risk of falling back into a disconnect with reality.

6. Conclusion

In the rapid development of the Internet, the phenomenon of the "clustering" of young people which presents new features has become normal. The "clustering" of young people make information spreading faster and wider, however it also impact on the physical and mental health of youth in deeply, such as cognitive bias, psychological alienation, identity disorder and subject mutism. Therefore this thesis proposes four solutions to solve above problems from a psychological perspective: breaking the "information cocoon" and being the "megaphone" of mainstream culture; focusing on the non-objective nature of love and actively realizing self-transcendence; respecting the subjective position of youth and strengthening identity and emotional ties to youth; building a platform for youth exchange and emphasis on guiding youth values. It actively promotes the development of online information dissemination and the healthy development of youth.

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