



The Labelling Phenomenon for Generation Z and the Coping Strategies: Based on the Theory of Interaction Ritual Chains

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Abstract

With the development of the Internet, the network has become an important platform for Generation Z groups to express themselves, and Generation Z has gradually become a group of social concern. In recent years, Generation Z has been labelled as “lying flat,” “Buddha-like,” and “involution,” and the phenomenon of labelling has become prevalent. This article is based on the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains, analyzing the existence of individual Self-Cognition bias, internal group fragmentation, and social cognitive distortion in the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z. A series of targeted coping strategies are proposed, such as reshaping Self-Cognition, promoting group integration, and correcting social cognition, aiming to guide Generation Z to view labels correctly and reduce the negative impact of labelling. This is not only of great significance for the development of Generation Z individuals, but also has a positive effect on creating a harmonious social environment and promoting social progress.

Subject Areas

Sociology

Keywords

Generation Z, Labelling, Interaction Ritual Chains

1. Introduction

In the context of the Internet era, Generation Z, as a newly emerging youth group, has attracted wide attention from all sides in terms of their behavior, perception and lifestyle. Generation Z generally refers to those born in the period from 1995 to 2010. They grew up in an environment full of digital and global characteristics

and were deeply influenced by Internet culture in their growth. The Internet has provided Generation Z with numerous and diverse information resources, and has also created convenient social platforms. With these, they can more freely present themselves and showcase their personalities. Although labels often serve algorithms, in an environment where algorithms encourage self-labelling, people will also begin to view themselves more in a labelled way. Labels can sometimes become a symbol of “persona”, which in turn can affect people’s behavior [1]. In the current environment where freedom of expression is given, the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z has become a hot topic.

2. The Research Problem and Literature Review

2.1. Generation Z Labelling as a Social Phenomenon

The widespread popularity of the Internet has accelerated the speed of information dissemination. As the first generation of people growing up with the development of the Internet and digital technology, Generation Z has been exposed to smart phones, social media and instant messaging tools since childhood. These experiences have made their lifestyle, values and behavior patterns significantly different from those of previous generations. Generation Z’s interests, habits and views are easier to observe and summarize, thus being labelled. Generation Z seeks group identity and emotional resonance through labelling. When they find their place of belonging through labels in interactive rituals and generate positive emotional energy, they will further strengthen their identification with the labels and continuously reinforce them in subsequent interactions.

On the social media platform, a variety of sub-cultural groups have sprung up like mushrooms, of which the anime culture is undoubtedly a very representative model. Fans of Generation Z who are keen on the anime culture have a strong interest in animation, games, cosplay and other fields, and they have built a unique community in cyberspace. The label “anime” has become a key symbol of their identity. They actively share their feelings around the anime works and actively create works of peers. As a result, the connotation of the “anime” label continues to be enriched, gradually extending from the original simple cultural hobby to a comprehensive label containing unique aesthetics, values and social ways.

In addition, the rapid spread of Internet memes has given new labels to Generation Z, such as the word “lying flat”, which was initially a humorous expression of their life pressure on the Internet, presenting their helplessness and exhaustion in a highly competitive social environment. This vocabulary is not only a natural expression of inner emotional helplessness, but also a method of deconstructing one’s own stress and pain points in reality, becoming a tool borrowed by frustrated individuals when facing difficulties and needing resonance to comfort themselves [2]. Subsequently, it quickly resonated on the Internet and became a popular label for Generation Z, with its meaning continuously evolving through dissemination. From the initial negative response, it gradually evolved into a new connotation of seeking self-reconciliation and adjusting the pace of life on a spiritual level,

reflecting Generation Z's re-creation and reinterpretation of this label.

However, explosive information mixed with extremist consciousness, such labels are constantly read and recognized by people, allowing the inner voice of Generation Z to circulate, amplify, and empathize. Similar individual identities trigger similar emotions and emotional logic. The current prevalence of labelling reflects to some extent the characteristics of the Generation Z group, but it also easily leads to people's simplified and one-sided understanding of this group, forming fixed thinking patterns, and resulting in prejudice and misunderstanding, leading to the phenomenon of Generation Z identity stigmatization.

2.2. The Theory of Interaction Ritual Chains and Generation Z Labelling

The theory of Interaction Ritual Chains was proposed by American sociologist Randall Collins, which emphasizes that social interaction is a chain composed of a series of continuous interaction rituals [3]. Ceremonies are dynamic symbols, while symbols are static. Each successful interactive ritual generates emotional energy, driving the emergence of the next interaction. The theory of Interaction Ritual Chains connects micro-interactions with macro-social structures, providing a new perspective for explaining social behavior and reproducing social structures. In the online environment, physical coexistence can be achieved through virtual means, just like many online live broadcasts and video conferences where Generation Z participates. Even in different geographical locations, the interactive foundation of "physical coexistence" can be achieved. People's thoughts are not only influenced by language, but also strictly limited to the context of the language used. The shared emotional state is also easily triggered in online interactions, such as when Generation Z sees touching online stories, they collectively generate emotions, or express anger towards a certain social injustice event, etc. These emotional experiences will be transformed into emotional energy, which will have an impact on their subsequent online behavior and interaction choices.

The theory of Interaction Ritual Chains provides a new perspective for analyzing the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z. Generation Z interacts frequently in the online space, and they use platforms such as social media and online forums to share their lives, opinions, and feelings, thus constructing interactive ritual domains. In these domains, labels often become the focus of common attention, triggering discussions and emotional resonance among Generation Z, and affecting their emotional energy and Self-Cognition. Identity is a characteristic or attribute of human existence as a society, which is a common cognition about a collective. In relevant online communities, the label "anime" has triggered a heated discussion among Generation Z, who have expressed their own opinions around anime content such as animation, games and cosplay, and actively shared their love for anime works and their unique understanding of roles. Because of the common concern about the label "anime", they have generated strong emotional resonance and gained emotional energy in their interaction and communication, which has strengthened their recognition of their identity as a member of the anime group.

As long as there are enough points of water ripple oscillation and the force of oscillation is strong enough, it can trigger a wider range of ripples [4]. At the same time, the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains emphasizes the transmission and influence of emotional energy in interaction, which helps to explain how the phenomenon of labelling spreads and spreads among Generation Z, as well as the profound impact it has on them. When a Generation Z posts positive content related to a certain label on the Internet, it triggers likes, comments, and shares from other Generation Z, and emotional energy is continuously transmitted in this process, attracting more Generation Z to participate in interactions related to the label, expanding the influence of the label and having a more profound impact on Generation Z's behavior patterns, values, and other aspects.

The generation born between 1965 and 1979 is known as Generation X. It was first proposed by Canadian author Douglas Coupland in his book "Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture". The generation born from 1980 to 1994 is called "Generation Y". It is logical that the generation born after the popularization of the Internet in 1995 is called "Generation Z". Due to the needs of business layout and marketing prediction, capital profiles certain categories of consumer groups, who focus on experience and data, and prefer interest communities. Although these behavioral tendencies and consumption concepts are essentially generated by certain geographical connections, shared growth experiences, and collective memories, after being labelled, Generation Z also consciously or unconsciously participates in the shaping of this group. In addition, the Internet has broken the traditional authoritarianism, with its low threshold, grassroots and other characteristics, weakened the inequality of people's information access, and accelerated the flow of social information. The emerging communitarianism meets the psychological needs of people in modern society to be noticed, listened to, and admired. Generation Z is able to share, plant grass, construct self-identity and group identity on social media, and form a diverse community culture, which further promotes the dissemination and strengthening of labels among Generation Z. In the 1960s, sociologist Goffman, a representative figure of symbolic interactionism, proposed the concept of "stigma", which refers to being labelled as a "spoiled identity" and classified as a social discrimination label. Labelling leads to stigmatization, which affects individuals' self-identity and social image [5]. With the gradual expansion of the influence of "label theory" and "stigmatization theory", some experts and scholars have a deeper understanding of the negative control function of labels. Chen Qian believes that when regional images are disseminated through media, they are often influenced by subjective and objective "noise" from multiple audiences, resulting in one-sided "stereotypical" images. Research on labelling is mostly based on social construction of identity and stereotypes [6].

The current research on the labelling of Generation Z has gone beyond a single "stigmatization" perspective and instead explored the more complex identity games triggered by labels in the digital age. Some scholars have examined the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z in the macro-context of digital platform society, while others have also begun to pay attention to the diverse and intersecting

identity of Generation Z.

In summary, contemporary research on the labelling of Generation Z has shifted from early descriptions and critiques of phenomena to in-depth exploration of the complex identity construction mechanisms, the impact of platform algorithms, and group agency behind it.

3. Research Design

3.1. Purpose and Content of the Survey

The purpose of this survey is to understand the basic situation of Generation Z's labelling process from the perspective of Interaction Ritual Chains. Due to the relatively large scope of Generation Z, we mainly select college students on campus as the main target of Generation Z's labelling process. When I use Generation Z labels (such as "Buddha-like" or "lying flat"), do I feel like I belong to this group? Do I feel angry or frustrated due to negative evaluations of Generation Z labels from others? Do I think the Generation Z label is a cultural capital that can enhance personal image? The above questions are the main content of this survey, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Survey Content.

Primary Category A	Secondary Category B	Core Category C
A01 When I use the Generation Z labels, I feel like I belong to this group		
A03 I believe that Generation Z labels can accurately express my emotions and attitudes		
A04 Using Generation Z labels makes me feel unique		
A05 I may feel angry or frustrated due to negative evaluations of Generation Z labels from others	Psychological identification	
A12 I would consider others to be more personalized or fashionable because they use the Generation Z labels		Self-cognition
A14 I will feel proud because others recognize the labels of Generation Z		
A16 I think the label of Generation Z reflects their values and moral standards		
A17 I will feel dissatisfied because others violate the values represented by the Generation Z labels	Psychological bias	
A18 I think the label of Generation Z has imprisoned my thinking		
A11 I think the Generation Z label is a cultural capital that can enhance personal image	Personal Development	

Continued

A08 I think Generation Z labels can help us resist pressure from other groups		
A02 When I see others using Generation Z labels, I feel a sense of familiarity and identification	Group relations	Group cognition
A06 I believe that the Generation Z label can help enhance the cohesion of the Generation Z group	Group cohesion	
A09 I will develop a favorable impression of others for using the Generation Z labels		
A10 I believe that Generation Z labels can help us maintain our own interests		
A15 I think Generation Z labels can help us gain more opportunities	Social interactions	Social cognition
A20 I often get stuck in a self-verification dilemma due to labels		
A19 I will feel angry and ashamed because others use the Generation Z label to evaluate me	Social bias	

By using SPSS data analysis software to analyze the data extracted from the survey, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each concept were obtained. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient greater than 0.7 indicates good reliability, 0.8 indicates very good, and above 0.9 indicates excellent. Through data analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the overall scale reached 0.8 or above, indicating good internal consistency and high reliability, as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Reliability Test of Survey.

Potential dimensions	Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-cognition	Psychological identification	7	0.836
	Psychological bias	2	0.840
	Personal development	1	0.907
Group cognition	Group relations	2	0.821
	Group cohesion	1	0.891
Social cognition	Social interaction	4	0.888
	Social Prejudice	1	0.889

By conducting exploratory factor analysis (CFA) to test the construct validity within the overall scale, the rationality of the item design is examined. Before

analysis, the KMO test value was 0.92, indicating that the data are suitable for factor analysis. After using principal component analysis and oblique rotation, three common factors with characteristic roots greater than 1 were precipitated, which is highly consistent with the theoretical concept. Factor one (self-cognition) includes items A01, A03, A04, A05, A11, A12, A14, A16, A17, A18, etc. The factor loadings are all above 0.70. Factor two (group cognition) consists of items A02, A06, A08, etc. Factor three (social cognition) clearly loaded items A09, A10, A15, A19, etc. Each item has a high load (>0.60) on its corresponding factor, which can effectively and reliably measure the multidimensional psychological structure of the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z, ensuring the quality of the survey.

3.2. Survey Methods and Survey Subjects

This research activity distributed online questionnaires using the Likert scale, with a total of 109 questionnaires collected, all of which were distributed among the youth population on university campuses. Therefore, the questionnaire had an effective rate of 100%. The main methods used are quota sampling and structured interview. Quota sampling method refers to the use of survey objectives to identify characteristics related to research purposes as indicators for quota allocation, ensuring that the proportion of samples with a certain characteristic is consistent with the proportion of samples with this characteristic in the overall population. In order to make the sample distribution more reasonable, the following quota was used for sampling in this study: Select 6 representative provinces and regions, including economically developed areas (Zhejiang, Jiangsu), economically less developed areas (Anhui, Hubei), and economically underdeveloped areas (Shaanxi, Xinjiang). Randomly select 1 university from each province and city, for a total of 6 universities as sampling schools. Basic coverage of the main demographic and identity dimensions of Generation Z is required, and sampling is conducted based on key heterogeneous characteristics such as gender, age, discipline, and region. As the survey target is the Generation Z group, the questionnaire was distributed only to the group of freshmen to seniors, and a WeChat group chat exclusively for college students was specifically found for questionnaire distribution, as shown in **Table 3**.

The characteristic of semi-structured interviews is that the standardization level of the entire study is very high in the design, implementation, and data analysis process. In detail, there are unified requirements for the criteria and methods of selecting interviewees, the questions raised during the interview, the way and order of questioning, the way the interviewee answers, and the way the interview is recorded in structured interviews; Even for the selection of interviewers and external conditions such as interview time, location, and surrounding environment, consistency is required, emphasizing the control of irrelevant variables. This survey conducted in-depth interviews with 10 people, and combined with non-probability sampling, selected 10 people. The sampling quota for the survey questionnaire was the same as that of gender, age distribution, and other characteristics.

The five people were deeply involved in a series of circles such as fan circles and fandoms, and enjoyed surfing the Internet and were familiar with labelling. The other five people did not have a deep understanding of labelling and did not join a specific circle, as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 3. Distribution of demographic background information.

Dimension	Classification	Number of people	Percentage
Gender	Male	52	47.7
	Female	57	52.3
Major	Natural science	30	27.5
	Humanities	70	64.2
	Other majors	9	8.3
Year	Freshman	9	8.3
	Sophomore	30	27.5
	Junior	35	32.1
	Senior	35	32.1
Region	Well-developed regions	60	55.0
	Relatively Developed Regions	30	27.5
	Underdeveloped regions	19	17.5
Interview format	Online	109	100.0
	Offline	0	0.0

Table 4. Interviewee Information.

Serial number	Gender	Age	Interview format	Whether involved in the circle
S01	Female	23	Telephone	No
S02	Male	22	Face-to-face	No
S03	Male	22	Face-to-face	No
S04	Female	21	Telephone	Fandom
S05	Female	23	Telephone	Cosplay
S06	Female	22	Telephone	No
S07	Male	21	Face-to-face	Korean Entertainment Circle
S08	Female	23	Telephone	No
S09	Male	21	Telephone	Japanese Entertainment Circle
S10	Male	23	Telephone	Chinese Mainland Entertainment Circle

This survey selects the Generation Z group as the main survey subjects and the Generation Z youth group as the sample sampling box. In the in-depth survey, the

respondents' understanding of labelling varies greatly. The reason for choosing different samples as survey subjects is based on two reasons. On the one hand, the Generation Z youth group generally lacks understanding of labelling; on the other hand, due to significant differences in the research on labelling among the ten survey members, it is possible to better explore the impact of labelling on the ten members from different perspectives.

From January 10, 2025 to February 10, 2025, survey questionnaires were distributed and collected. On the evening of February 14, 2025, a half-hour in-depth investigation was conducted on students who were not included in a specific circle and did not understand labelling. On February 20, 2025, the same in-depth interviews were conducted on students who understood labelling and were in a certain circle at the same time. During the investigation, there were difficulties in making progress due to distance issues. Fortunately, through joint efforts, the students were able to successfully complete the interview content through online interviews.

4. Research Analysis

4.1. Self-Cognition Bias Leads to Identity Misreading under Label Dominance

Among the 109 survey samples that were effectively collected, 26.61% of respondents agreed to feel angry or ashamed due to negative evaluations of Generation Z labels by others, and 17.43% of respondents strongly agreed, as shown in **Figure 1**.

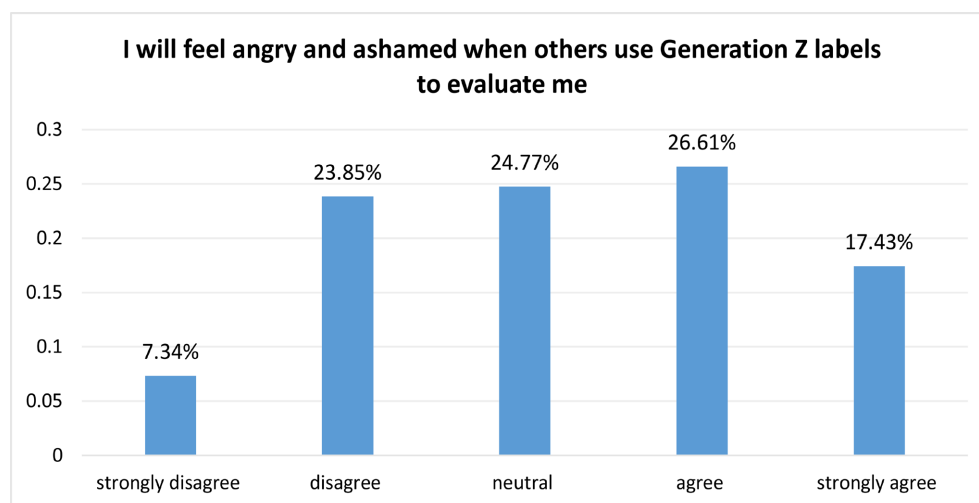


Figure 1. I will feel angry and ashamed when others use Generation Z labels to evaluate me.

This indicates that Generation Z has a high sensitivity to negative external evaluations and a clear emotional response. 48.62% of Generation Z agree or strongly agree that labels constrain their own thinking, as shown in **Figure 2**.

During the interview, student S04 believed that although labelling played an important role in building group identity, individuals did not actively accept labels. When exposed to a group's labels, even if they did not fully match the label

traits in some aspects, they were influenced by a large amount of related discussions and atmosphere on the Internet, and participated in interactive rituals related to labels within the circle, unconsciously using this label to define themselves. S01 also expressed that even if they do not come into contact with specific circles, the prevalence of labelling can still give them a certain understanding of the label, because they are not very clear about the meaning expressed by the label, so sometimes it is quite nonsensical. For example, in the case of “Buddha-like”, one may doubt whether their occasional efforts are out of sync with others, gradually blurring the boundaries of their understanding of their true self.

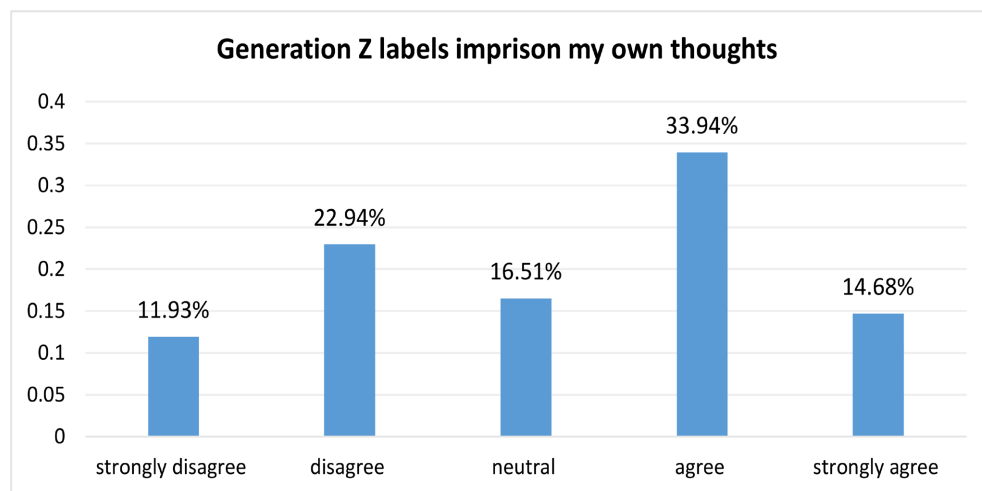


Figure 2. Generation Z labels imprison my own thoughts.

Heidegger once said, “In order to become who we are, we are always embedded in the essence of language, and therefore cannot escape from it and seek the essence of language from elsewhere.” [7] In the chains of interaction rituals, Generation Z frequently comes into contact with various labels, which gradually penetrate into their cognitive system. Due to the highly generalized nature of labels, which extract commonalities from a group, it is difficult to accurately match the diverse and complex characteristics of individuals. Therefore, from the core elements of the Interaction Ritual Chains theory, the shared focus plays a crucial role in it. Taking the label of “procrastination” as an example, from a common circle perspective, the Generation Z has formed a shared emotional state around sharing experiences and complaining, that is, self-mockery and helplessness of their own procrastination behavior. This emotional energy is constantly transmitted in interaction, strengthening the individual’s sense of identification with the label. However, this sense of identity often deviates from an individual’s true behavioral patterns and personality traits. A Generation Z who was originally able to efficiently complete tasks in most cases may be influenced by labels and excessively magnify their procrastination behavior due to frequent participation in such interactions, ignoring their own strengths in time management and task execution, resulting in a bias in Self-Cognition and difficulty in accurately assessing their

abilities and potential. Their confidence in learning, work, and other aspects may also be undermined, affecting personal growth and development. There is a “distinction” or “energy difference” between the labeler and the labelled, which puts the labeler in a more dominant position relative to the labelled, while the labelled is in a relatively disadvantaged position. Being in an interactive environment dominated by labels for a long time, Generation Z tends to mistake the image depicted by labels for their own image, causing a deviation between Self-Cognition and their true self, and hindering the healthy construction of their unique personality and self-identity.

4.2. Internal Tearing within the Group Leads to the Formation of Value Conflicts in Labels

The survey results show that respondents generally agree that the Generation Z label can reflect their values and moral standards, with 55.05% choosing “agree” and “strongly agree”, as shown in **Figure 3**.

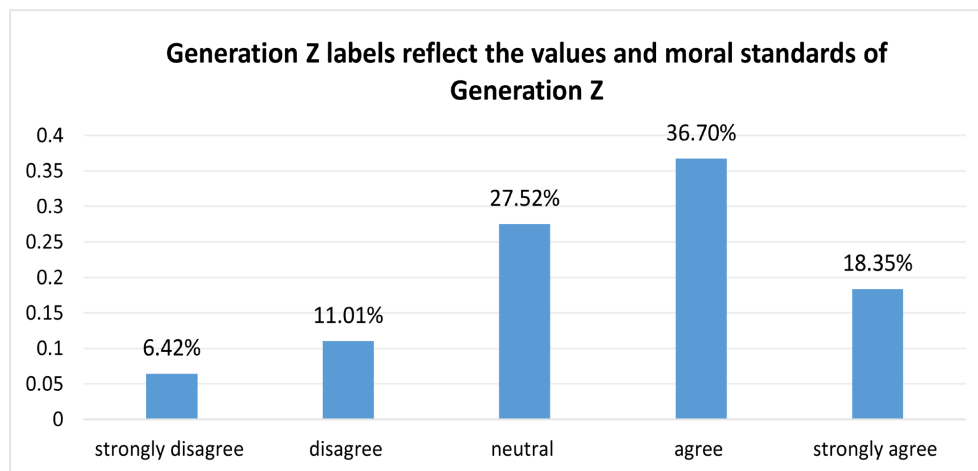


Figure 3. Generation Z labels reflect the values and moral standards of Generation Z.

When others violate the values of Generation Z, there is a proportion of dissatisfaction, with a total of 46.79% choosing “agree” and “strongly agree”, indicating that respondents generally have a strong sense of identification with this emotion, as shown in **Figure 4**.

During the interview, student S07 believed that labelling can indeed provide psychological comfort and a sense of belonging to individuals through emotional resonance between groups. But at the same time, in the event of ideological collisions, various debates may arise, inevitably evolving into online violence, seeking moral superiority through collective condemnation. This not only causes confusion in the thinking of Generation Z individuals, but also disrupts the Pure Land that nurtures the core values of society. S10 also expressed that there are often some haters fighting in the entertainment industry. Although he is not always clear about the cause, he inevitably participates in this online war, but the consequences of his participation are meaningless.

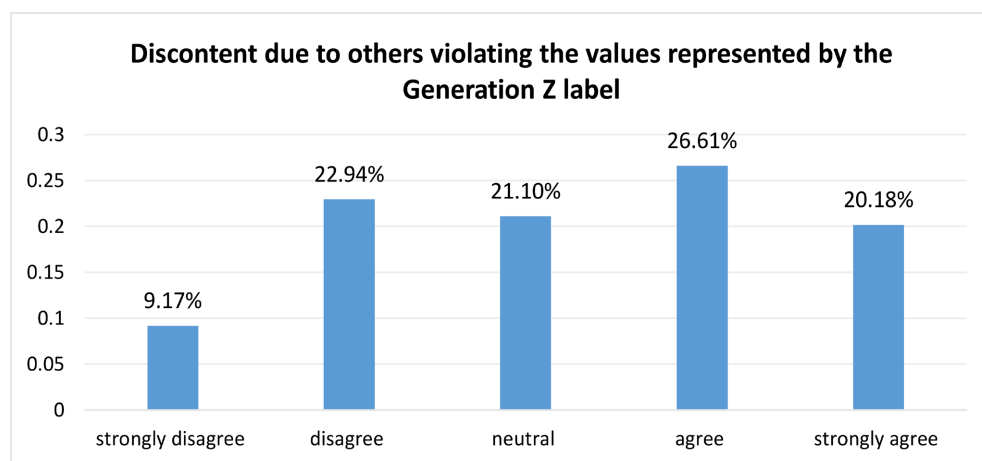


Figure 4. Discontent due to others violating the values represented by the Generation Z label.

In the interactive environment between the Internet and reality in which Generation Z operates, various labels have become key markers for different sub-groups to construct their own identities. Different labels attract individuals from Generation Z with similar ideas, interests, or behavioral patterns to converge, forming relatively independent yet interconnected interactive ritual circles. When a person truly experiences a sense of belonging to the collective, they will generate positive emotional responses [8]. Labelling, through emotional resonance, can bring positive impacts to individuals and groups at multiple levels. It can not only enhance group cohesion and promote social change, but also strengthen group identity, promote social support, and provide psychological comfort to individuals through shared attention and emotional sharing through online labelling. By using labelling reasonably, we can better leverage its advantages in enhancing emotional resonance and promoting social harmony and progress.

However, when the interactive ritual circles represented by different labels intersect, conflicts in values are inevitably triggered due to differences in their respective core values. This conflict essentially stems from the significant differences in common focus, shared emotional states, and emotional energy among different labelled groups. The direction indicated by the label has different suggestive effects, which can form positive or negative self-suggestion effects. Of course, both positive and negative label effects will have a significant impact on individual cognition and behavior. The interactive ritual system constructed by each group based on their own labels strengthens their identification and adherence to their own values, making it difficult to understand and accept the heterogeneous values of other label groups, leading to opposition and conflict, ultimately exacerbating the internal division within the Generation Z group. Within the Generation Z, different labels carry vastly different values, which can easily lead to value conflicts within the group and disrupt harmony and unity. Taking the labels of “consumerism” and “minimalism” as examples, in interactive scenarios such as online shopping platforms and fashion forums, Generation Z, who advocate for “consumerism”, regards buying the latest products and pursuing fashion trends as a reflection

of their quality of life and self-worth. They share their shopping spoils on social media, share their consumption experiences, and form an interactive ritual centered on consumption, gaining emotional satisfaction and group recognition in the process. The Generation Z, who uphold minimalism, advocates for a minimalist lifestyle, emphasizes the practicality of items, and pursues spiritual abundance. They share their experiences of detachment and advocate for rational consumption, building their own interactive ritual space.

A high degree of emotional connection is an important characteristic of interaction rituals. When these two types of Generation Z meet in cyberspace, they collide fiercely around the values represented by the labels of “consumerism” and “minimalism”. Those who support consumerism feel that the lives of minimalists are boring and do not know how to enjoy life. However, minimalists criticize consumerists for being too materialistic and lacking in reflection on the essence of life. This debate not only exists in language, but also extends to behavior. For example, in campus dormitory life, Generation Z, who have a tendency towards consumerism, purchase a large number of fashionable items, which may cause dissatisfaction among roommates who adhere to minimalism and make dormitory relationships tense. In online communities, the debates between the two sides attract more Generation Z to come and participate, exacerbating the division within the group. From the perspective of Interaction Ritual Chains, different labels have become the focus of attention for different groups, each building their own unique shared emotional state and emotional energy. However, these emotional energies based on different values are mutually exclusive, making it difficult for Generation Z to form a unified value orientation and action force within the group, weakening the cohesion and centripetal force of the group, and having a negative impact on Generation Z’s overall advantages in social participation, cultural creation, and other aspects.

4.3. Social Cognitive Distortion Leads to One-Sided Labelling of Generation Z Images

In the survey results, nearly half of the Generation Z group has fallen into a self-verification dilemma due to labelling in the online society, as shown in **Figure 5**.

S03 believes that nowadays there are many hot words that may seem inexplicable at first, but with the continuous spread of social media and pass from mouth to mouth in the surrounding areas, they realize that these are hot words in society and gain further understanding of them. In his view, media dissemination provides fertilizer for these label words, helping them to spread continuously. S05 also has some troubles. Although he likes cosplay, he is not understood by his family and thinks he is wearing strange clothes. Despite the support and comfort of friends in the same circle, he sometimes finds it difficult to explain his preferences to his family and friends. He has had a period of distress and depression.

Media has a wide audience coverage ability, and with the help of labelling, it can push specific social issues or group emotions into a broader public view,

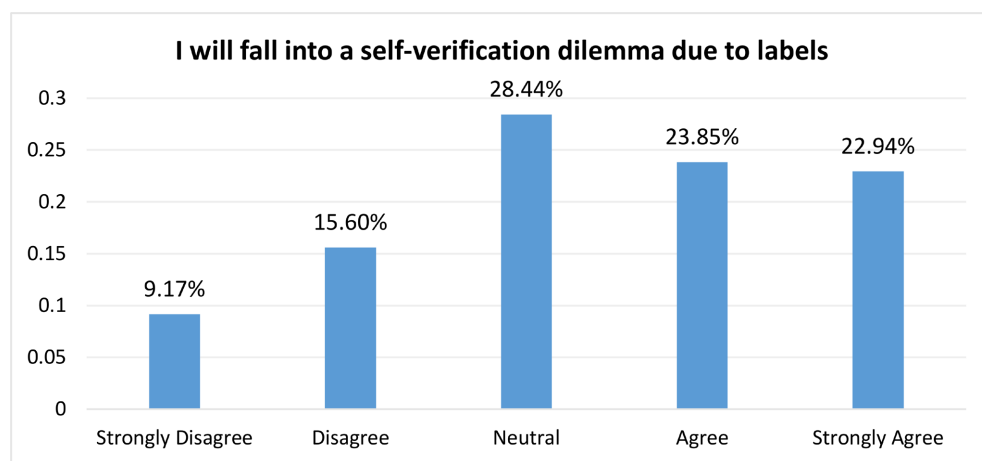


Figure 5. I will fall into a self-verification dilemma due to labels.

expanding its influence. For example, the “MeToo” movement uses personal experiences and emotional expressions in media reports to link issues of sexual harassment and abuse with women’s pain and resistance, arousing resonance and support worldwide. With the help of labelling, it can promote widespread public discussion and participation, forming social hot topics. The reasonable use of labelling by the media can more effectively leverage its advantages in dissemination and promote the development of society towards progress and harmony.

Labelling does have a certain positive effect in certain specific contexts, but it can also easily lead to one-sided cognition and social stereotypes, which can have negative effects on individuals, groups, and society. The cultural background of labelling phenomenon is formed by society’s simplified cognition of group differences, reflecting the neglect of diverse values in society. In the current overall environment of information dissemination, there is a distortion of social cognition, which makes the labelling image of Generation Z one-sided. Behind this, there is actually a deep communication logic and cognitive logic. Modern society is in the context of information explosion, with a large amount of information flooding various communication channels. As a key channel for information dissemination, the media has shown a prominent tendency to report on content related to Generation Z in order to attract audience attention and seize traffic high ground in the fiercely competitive situation. Algorithm recommendations accelerate the dissemination of labelled content, but also make the information cocoon effect more severe. For the purpose of judging news value and considering communication effectiveness, the media tends to select labelling behaviors or phenomena that are topical and novel.

From the perspective of the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains, the media’s reporting style makes specific Generation Z labels a common focus of interaction across society. Through news reports, social media topic pushes, and other forms, these labels are widely spread to attract the public’s attention and guide them to discuss and pay attention to them. After receiving these filtered and amplified label information from the media, the public quickly forms stereotypes of Generation

Z based on their limited cognitive experience and thinking patterns. The majority of the public finds it difficult to have in-depth exposure to every individual in the Generation Z, and can only rely on information conveyed by the media to construct their understanding of the Generation Z. The social media dependence of Generation Z is closely related to their mental health, and excessive use of social media may lead to anxiety and loneliness. In this process, the public participates in interactive discussions around Generation Z labels, sharing specific emotional perceptions of Generation Z generated by media coverage, such as surprise, questioning, and other emotions towards certain labelled behaviors, forming a one-sided emotional energy. For example, when the media focuses on reporting on the high consumption of Generation Z in the field of trendy toys, the public often has negative evaluations of Generation Z based on their own consumption concepts, such as “irrational consumption” and “materialism”. This emotional cognition continues to spread and strengthen in the interaction and communication of the public.

Due to the lack of comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Generation Z by the public, relying solely on labelled information presented by the media to make judgments, it is difficult to recognize the rich personality and diverse values of Generation Z. Generation Z grew up in the era of digitization and globalization, and their ideas and behaviors are influenced by various factors, resulting in a high degree of diversity. However, one-sided labelled reporting limits the public’s perception to individual prominent behaviors, ignoring the positive performance and contributions of Generation Z in other fields. Moreover, providing a fixed, rigid, and even singular framework for cognitive issues to Generation Z invisibly exacerbates intergenerational conflicts and reflects differences in values between different generations. Once this one-sided social cognition is formed, it will continue to self-reinforce in the social public opinion field. Subsequent information dissemination and discussions often revolve around these established labels, and new reports and perspectives are difficult to break through existing cognitive frameworks. For example, when the label “anime enthusiast” was widely spread and deeply bound with Generation Z, when people mentioned Generation Z, the first thing they associated with was the image of indulging in animation and virtual world, further deepening the society’s stereotype of the image of Generation Z, so that the true and complete image of Generation Z was covered, leaving only the appearance defined unilaterally by the label, which seriously hindered the society’s correct understanding and effective guidance of Generation Z.

4.4. The Relationship between Research Results and the Theory of Interaction Ritual Chains

The research results show that the Generation Z interacts around the label of “Generation Z” and produces corresponding emotional and behavioral outcomes. Firstly, group gathering and boundary formation are prerequisites for all these interactions. The data shows that the label “Generation Z” itself has become a powerful

group symbol, as shown in **Figure 3**, with 55.05% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that the label reflects their values. This causes Generation Z, who hold the label, to automatically gather psychologically and draw a clear boundary between them and “non-Generation Z” or “label evaluators”, setting a clear field for interaction rituals.

Secondly, the common focus is highly concentrated on the values and moral standards carried by the Generation Z label. **Figure 3** shows that over half of the respondents agree that labels represent their values, and once external behavior conflicts with these values, it immediately becomes the focal event that ignites group emotions. As shown in **Figure 4**, 46.79% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that others violate their values and feel dissatisfied.

Thirdly, when the common focus is challenged, strong and shared emotions arise within the group. As shown in **Figure 1**, as many as 44.04% of the respondents felt “angry and ashamed” due to being labelled for evaluation; **Figure 2** and **Figure 5** indicate that nearly half of the respondents will fall into a “self-verification dilemma” or feel that labels “imprison their own thoughts” due to labels. This reveals that interaction rituals can also create shared anxiety and stress within groups.

In short, the Generation Z Label serves as a powerful interaction ritual hub that unites the group and sets boundaries. Group members form a common focus around the label, and when the focus is challenged by internal and external factors, strong emotions of defense or struggle erupt, ultimately reproducing the unity and emotional energy of the group through interaction. This is not only a labelling behavior, but also a continuous and tense social interaction ritual.

5. Strategies for Addressing the Labelling Issue of Generation Z

5.1. Reshaping Self-Cognition to Help Individuals Break Free from Label Constraints

In the theoretical framework of the Interaction Ritual Chains, individuals are easily exposed to a large number of labels assigned by the outside world during the process of interacting with the network, which can have an impact on their Self-Cognition. The identity theory holds that individuals shape their identity through interactions with others, which is consistent with the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains. The online cultural environment has had a profound impact on the Self-Cognition of Generation Z. Relevant departments need to strengthen the supervision of online content, crack down on vulgar, false information, and discriminatory and misleading label dissemination behaviors, and create a healthy online cultural environment. Build a network content grading system, implement strict review processes for content related to Generation Z, prevent the spread of one-sided and negative label information, carry out online civilization promotion activities, lead online platforms and content creators to establish correct values, disseminate positive information, schools and media should fully leverage their own advantages, and provide professional Self-Cognition guidance for Generation Z.

Schools can integrate Self-Cognition education into their curriculum system, develop specialized online and offline integrated courses, and media can produce high-quality documentaries and interview programs to present successful cases of Generation Z in different fields, helping them set an example and promote mutual supervision and growth in online social interactions. With this approach, Generation Z can maintain a clear mind during online interactions, continuously improve their Self-Cognition, and break free from the constraints of labels. This high-quality interactive ritual helps Generation Z gain a deeper understanding of themselves, break free from external labels, correct individual Self-Cognition biases, and avoid identity misreading under label dominance.

S02 has his own perspective on the reshaping of Self-Cognition. Due to unfamiliarity and lack of understanding with specific circles, information collection is one-sided and simplistic. Therefore, one can actively seek to understand information, rather than passively accepting this label based on the general public's understanding of it. S04 student expresses that it is actually possible to use other forces to unify and manage the phenomenon of labelled communication between circles. We are willing to accept unified management and hope to create a better circle environment.

5.2. Promote Group Integration and Resolve Value Conflicts Caused by Labels

In the online environment, Generation Z has built various groups based on their own interests and hobbies. However, the emergence of labels seems like an invisible barrier, exacerbating the conflict of values between groups. It is necessary for government agencies to formulate and improve relevant policies and regulations to ensure the equal rights and interests of Generation Z in cyberspace and real life, and to prevent discrimination or unfair treatment against specific groups due to labels. The labelling dissemination in social media relies on algorithm recommendations and user interaction to optimize recommendation algorithms and reduce the spread of labelled content caused by algorithm bias. By utilizing algorithmic adjustment measures, we aim to ensure that users have access to diverse content and viewpoints, breaking the information cocoon. We have formulated and introduced regulations for managing online platforms, explicitly prohibiting platforms from using algorithms to push content that reinforces group label opposition. This will create a fair and harmonious online and social environment for Generation Z.

From another perspective, in order to lead mainstream media to fully utilize the function of public opinion guidance, the media needs to prevent excessive exaggeration of the differences and conflicts between Generation Z groups, and should report more positive examples of different groups working together and making progress. Schools can optimize their curriculum by integrating cross-cultural communication, teamwork, and other content into daily teaching, in order to cultivate students' awareness of respecting different groups. By conducting online

and offline training activities, help Generation Z improve their communication skills and empathy, learn to think from the perspective of others, and understand the values of different groups. In online interaction, Generation Z should be encouraged to actively engage in beneficial discussions, abandon aggressive remarks, and advocate rational communication. Social platforms can establish a “civilized communication reward mechanism” to reward users who express objective and rational opinions and promote group integration, such as virtual medals, points, etc. Generation Z should actively expand their social circle, meet friends from different groups, deepen their understanding of each other through daily communication and joint activities, break stereotypes formed by labels, and promote group integration through positive interactions between individuals.

Student S08 states that he has not delved deeply into any particular circle, but he also wants to take this step and try to connect with a positive atmosphere within the circle. He feels that through the transmission of labels, he can have more room for improvement and enhance my abilities. S09 also hopes to interact and communicate rationally with friends in the online society, using label-based language that only requires mutual understanding during the interaction process to make him feel no longer lonely.

5.3. Correcting Social Cognition and Reshaping the Image of Generation Z

The dissemination of online Interaction Ritual Chains has the characteristics of rapid and widespread dissemination. However, some media excessively exaggerate certain labelling features of Generation Z in order to attract attention, leading to a bias in the public’s perception of Generation Z. The fragmented, viral, and irrational dissemination of social media can easily cause semantic barriers, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, resulting in a seemingly ambiguous “stigmatization”. The impact of labelled communication on online public opinion is significant, especially in hot events where labelled content often becomes the focus of public opinion. The media leverages its powerful discourse power to create labels through directional and stigmatizing language, and spreads the labels to the public, thereby triggering social resonance and response. The government should introduce policies related to cultural dissemination to regulate media coverage and online content creation. Encourage media to produce and disseminate high-quality content that showcases the positive contributions and diverse lifestyles of Generation Z, and limit the dissemination of overly entertaining and labelled reports related to Generation Z. Through economic leverage and policy constraints, guide the media industry to shift its focus to the positive values of Generation Z. Mainstream media should play a leading role, proactively set topics, plan a series of reports, deeply explore the outstanding achievements of Generation Z in rural revitalization, technological research and development, cultural inheritance, and other fields, attract public participation in discussions, share heart-warming stories of Generation Z, and create a positive public opinion atmosphere

for the whole society to pay attention to Generation Z.

Schools, businesses, social organizations, and other institutions can enhance society's understanding of Generation Z through diverse activities. Generation Z individuals need to enhance their self-expression skills in daily interactions, utilizing social media platforms to create and share high-quality content, telling their growth stories, learning experiences, career explorations, and more. On the other hand, it is necessary to actively communicate and interact with people of different age groups to break down intergenerational barriers. In addition, when facing misunderstandings about Generation Z from the outside world, Generation Z should explain and communicate with a rational and objective attitude, correct others' erroneous perceptions, and promote the formation of a comprehensive and authentic understanding of Generation Z in society through individual positive actions.

Student S06 expresses his hope that the society can provide more tolerance and understanding for the youth of Generation Z, and a little wave of the Internet society will cause a big wave among the groups. Therefore, more attention and understanding for the group of Generation Z will not only enable them to have more confidence in integrating into the society, but also enable the society to promote our progress.

6. Conclusions

With the continuous development of society and the diverse lifestyles of Generation Z, the content contained in current labels has become increasingly extensive and diverse. In the virtual network world, everyone can reshape social relationships, weave and render various novel and named information behind the screen with the help of various communication symbols. Through emotional sharing and symbol capital accumulation, Interaction Ritual Chains promote group unity. Based on the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains, this study analyzes the various risks caused by the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z and proposes coping strategies. As the main force of the digital age, Generation Z faces situations such as individual Self-Cognition bias, internal group tearing, and social cognitive distortion due to the widespread dissemination of labels in online interactive rituals. These situations hinder their personal growth and group integration, and also have a negative impact on social harmony and development.

At the level of risk response, this study proposes relevant strategies for reshaping Self-Cognition, promoting group integration, and correcting social cognition. Although this study uses the theory of Interaction Ritual Chains to analyze the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z, there is still room for improvement in the depth of combining theory with practice. The theory of Interaction Ritual Chains has rich connotations and elements. When analyzing the formation mechanism and dissemination process of labelling phenomenon, the various dimensions of the theory have not been fully explored. The exploration of some complex interactive relationships and deep social psychological factors is not deep enough. The

labelling phenomenon of Generation Z is in a continuous process of development and change, and new labels and interaction modes continue to emerge. However, this study mainly analyzes the current situation and lacks dynamic tracking research on this phenomenon. This makes it difficult for research results to fully reflect the evolution trend of the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z, and there is a certain lag in predicting and guiding future development.

In the future, we look forward to seeing Generation Z shape a positive and healthy Self-Cognition through interactive rituals, free from negative labels, and fully unleash their potential. Different groups of Generation Z can break down barriers between each other, achieve deep integration, and create a diverse and inclusive social and cultural atmosphere together. The general public can abandon stereotypes about Generation Z, form a comprehensive, objective, and authentic understanding, and provide broader space and support for their development. As research continues to advance and become more comprehensive, we believe that a more scientific and systematic theoretical system and governance framework can be established to provide strong theoretical support and practical guidance for solving the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z and similar social problems. This is helpful for promoting the harmonious development of Generation Z and society, and can also contribute to building a better society. Conducting research and implementing governance on the labelling phenomenon of Generation Z is a long-term and complex process that requires joint efforts from all sectors of society. It is hoped that through continuous exploration and practice, a fairer, inclusive, and beautiful development environment can be created for Generation Z.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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