

From Periphery to Center: A Review of ACGN Internet Subculture Research

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Abstract: As of 2021, the number of ACGN users in China has reached a staggering 400 million. It is estimated that the market scale of the second dimension will reach 75 billion yuan by 2023. ACGN Internet subculture is gradually shifting from the periphery to the mainstream. Researching ACGN Internet subculture, with contemporary university students as the core, will help us better understand their psychological needs and value orientation. It will enable us to grasp their future development, propose corresponding strategies, guide them in understanding and utilizing ACGN Internet subculture correctly, cultivate a scientific online value, and guide them to engage in appropriate online behaviors.

Keywords: ACGN Internet subculture; University students; Development history; Education

ACGN Internet subculture encompasses cultural products and derivatives such as Animation, Comic, Game, and Light Novel^[1]. In the 1980s, ACGN Internet subculture began to rise in Japan, with forms like animation, comics, and games gaining popularity among young people. Classic ACGN works like “Mobile Suit Gundam” and “Yu Yu Hakusho” started to receive widespread attention. In the 1990s, with the widespread availability and advancement of the internet, ACGN subculture began to flourish online, resulting in rapid and extensive dissemination of ACGN works. Simultaneously, aided by the convenience of the internet, ACGN subculture started to expand its influence worldwide, gradually evolving into ACGN Internet subculture.

In the early 21st century, ACGN Internet subculture continued to grow, and many ACGN works began branching into multiple domains, such as anime adaptations of comics and game adaptations of anime. This transmedia development model further promoted the dissemination and influence of ACGN Internet subculture.

Today, ACGN Internet subculture has become a global cultural phenomenon, attracting a large number of enthusiasts and professionals. ACGN works have significant influence not only in the entertainment industry but also play a vital role in the creative industry and related value chains. Meanwhile, ACGN Internet subculture continues to evolve and innovate, giving rise to new forms and themes, continuously attracting new audiences. With the growth of the new generation consumer group, namely the post-90s and post-2000s generation, as well as the solid fan base of the Z Generation who grew up in the era of mobile internet, young people exhibit a high level of acceptance towards ACGN culture. By 2021, the number of Chinese fans of ACGN-related content had reached 400 million. The ACGN market size^[2] in 2023 is projected to reach 75 billion RMB, with a compound annual growth rate of 20% between 2017 and 2023. ACGN Internet subculture is gradually moving from the social fringes towards the mainstream.

1. Current research status both domestically and internationally

Foreign scholars have a relatively early origin in the research on ACGN Internet subculture. Western countries, particularly the

United States, have shown more focus on studying subcultures. For example, the Chicago School in the United States has dedicated attention to subculture research^[3]. Their research often focuses on phenomena such as violence, theft, and even drug use, as well as the youth and working class. European countries have mostly concentrated their research on phenomena like mod, punk, and hippies. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the UK is a notable representative in this regard^[4]. For example, Dick Hebdige, starting with semiology, argues that subcultures express some kind of “resistance” through “style” but are ultimately neutralized by mainstream culture. Keywords such as resistance, style, and incorporation are essential. In the book “After Subculture: Critical Studies In Contemporary Youth Culture” edited by Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (2012), they primarily discuss the growth of subculture theory and its impact on various aspects of social processes. Researchers from Europe and the United States focus more on the overall concept of subculture rather than limiting it to ACGN Internet subculture. Representative works in this period include William Foote Whyte’s “Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum” (1994) and Howard S. Becker’s “Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance” (1963).

On the other hand, Japanese scholars focus their research on ACGN Internet subculture in terms of expression, communication, and community formation within social media and virtual communities. They also investigate its dissemination and influence in different cultural contexts. Scholars like Yasuo Yamaguchi in Japan have analyzed the historical development of Japanese anime culture. Renowned Japanese sociologist Homare Endo, in his book “Chinese Animation, New Humanity: How Japanese Animation Changed China,” provides a reasonable explanation for the early dissemination activities of Japanese anime culture in China and the influence it has had. Endo specifically examines how “foreign animation,” including that from Japan, has influenced the mindset and behavior of the post-80s generation in China.

Both in the early days and in contemporary times, there have been relatively few studies on ACGN Internet subculture among university students, especially in the realm of light novels (LN). Wen Chunmei^[5] approaches the topic from a cultural criticism perspective and argues that the imaginative space of ACGN Internet subculture provides a “utopia” for teenagers, offering them a sense of confidence that may be difficult to attain in the real world. Li Dongdong^[6] asserts that mainstream culture and ideology still hold dominance, and ACGN Internet subculture lacks the ability to challenge them effectively.

Scholars such as Yuan Zhizhou^[7] and Wen Lei^[8] have conducted research on the phenomenon of “danmu” culture, providing comprehensive and in-depth analysis of its content, form, and effects. Additionally, Wang Dakuo^[9] summarizes various types of popular ACGN Internet subculture buzzwords, including character-based, personality-based, and behavior-based buzzwords. It is argued that online banter contributes to adding enjoyment to one’s life, establishing group identity, and striving for discursive power, but it may also have certain negative influences.

In summary, research on ACGN Internet subculture has become a broad and diverse field of study abroad, exploring its content, cultural influences and social significance from different perspectives and levels. These studies provide important academic references and insights for a deeper understanding of the global impact and cultural significance of ACGN Internet subculture.

With the continuous development of mobile Internet technology in China, university students are increasingly exposed to ACGN Internet subculture, and the social impact it brings is becoming more profound. However, due to its rapid changes and diversity, research on ACGN Internet subculture among university students is still in its early stages. The focus of research mainly lies in summarizing and analyzing the phenomena of ACGN Internet subculture, while studies on the education and guidance of university students in this realm are relatively scarce.

2. The conclusion

Studying ACGN Internet subculture can help us understand the behaviors and modes of expression of contemporary university students in the digital society. By researching these subcultures, we can gain a better understanding of their attitudes, values, identity,

and how they establish and maintain social relationships in the online space.

This understanding can aid in formulating relevant strategies and effectively guiding the education of modern university students. Firstly, it can promote the development of creativity and imagination among university students. ACGN Internet subculture emphasizes creativity and imagination, stimulating people's creativity through diverse characters, storylines, and worldviews. Researching the educational guidance effect of ACGN Internet subculture on the development of creativity and imagination among university students, such as fostering innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities, is important.

Secondly, it can cultivate cultural expression and critical thinking among university students. ACGN Internet subculture covers a wide range of themes and cultural elements, including history, society, and technology. Research on how to use ACGN Internet subculture as an educational guidance tool to cultivate the cultural expression abilities and critical thinking of university students can encourage them to reflect on and analyze the social, psychological, and ethical issues portrayed in subcultural works.

Lastly, it can broaden cross-cultural communication and global perspectives among university students. ACGN Internet subculture has a cross-cultural appeal, attracting enthusiasts from around the world. Researching the role of ACGN Internet subculture in cultivating cross-cultural communication and global perspectives among university students can promote their understanding and respect for different cultures through the dissemination and exchange of subcultural works, expanding their international background.

In conclusion, the purpose of studying ACGN Internet subculture is to deepen our understanding of the behaviors and modes of expression of contemporary university students in the online space. It aims to uncover the creativity and imagination of young people and explore the impact of the digital society on social interaction and cultural dissemination. Such research can provide important references and guidance for the formulation of educational, cultural, and social policies.

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