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Entertainment-oriented Use of 'Depression' on Chinese Social Media and Its Impact on Stigmatization of Depression Groups: A Survey Study

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of entertainment-oriented uses of the term 'depression' on public attitudes and stigmatization. Utilizing a quantitative method collecting data from an online survey of 110 Chinese internet users, the research explores how exposure to casual or humorous references to depression correlates with attitudes towards individuals who actually suffer from depression. Key findings reveal that engagement with entertainment-related content is prevalent, particularly among younger demographics. The study shows that frequent exposure to such content increases the likelihood of using similar statements in casual contexts and decreases people's trust in others' depression claim. It is strongly correlated with more negative attitudes toward individuals with depression. Moreover, people who worry more about the misleading effects of entertainment-related term use show stronger willingness to offer support to depression patients.

The results are guide for public education and policy. It highlights the need to take steps to address the harmful effects portrayed by recreational use of depression on social media. Recommendations include improving the education system, setting online support groups, and restricting time spent on social media.

Keywords:- Depression, Entertainment-Oriented Use, Stigmatization, Social Media, Empathy, Mental Health

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Depression has become a global pervasive mental health problem, which poses a huge challenge to social well-being, according to World Health Organization. Since depression has such a serious impact on people today, it is crucial to understand the factors that contribute to its stigma.

Nowadays, netizens tend to use the word 'depression' to describe their negative emotions, mostly in an imprudent and humorous way. The recreational 'depression' use (' Ξ Ξ %/Yuyuzheng', which has the similar pronunciation with '抑郁症/depression' in Mandarin) is a widespread phenomenon on Chinese social media, yet has not been deeply discussed in academic areas. With the rapid growth of streaming and the proliferation of online content, terms of mental illness like 'depression' are increasingly being

used casually on all kinds of occasions. They even prioritize entertainment value over clinical accuracy on Chinese social media.

1.2 Research Ouestion

This study proposes the research question 'how the recreational use of the word "depression" on social media relates to the stigma of depression'. Specifically, this study examines the relationship between the frequency of exposure to such narratives and public attitudes toward depression.

1.3 Originality and Contribution

Recreational 'depression' use (Ξ Ξ 症 , which has the similar pronunciation with 'depression' in Mandarin) is a widespread phenomenon on Chinese social media, yet has not been deeply discussed in academic areas.

Building on prior research, this study explores the particular phenomenon (trend to use ' $\pm\pm$ ' as a recreational

way to mention depression) and its impact on public attitudes, distinguishing itself by focusing on the correlation between the use of entertainment-related statements related to depression and the resulting stigmatization, thereby enriching the field's theoretical foundations.

The study extends existing frameworks by explaining why and how depression was stigmatized with the spread of entertainment-related use of the term, offering new perspectives to scholar discourse. In addition, we hope to introduce some professional data and analysis to the public, calling to realize the potential negative impact of the narrative to those who suffer from depression and avoid stigmatizing 'depression', intentionally or not.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Current Social Situation of Stigmatization on Depression

Depression is a major public health issue in modern society. It affects people from diverse aspects and increases pressure on health care systems. Studies have shown that stigma about depression has serious negative effects on not only patients themselves but also public medical activities.[1]

Research by Pescosolido et al has shown that stigma on depression is particularly pronounced in situations involving family, vulnerable groups like children, and self-harm, leading to significant social exclusion and discrimination. [2] This social distance exacerbates feelings of isolation and helplessness, causing those affected to internalize these negative attitudes. As a result, they may experience a decline in self-esteem and mental well-being, making it even harder to seek help or reintegrate into society.[3] A study by Subu et al has explored the outcomes of mental illness stigma in Indonesia, including status loss, discrimination, homelessness, unemployment, and treatment avoidance.[4]

A survey by Ding et al has shown that the overall mental health literacy of Chinese college students is at a low level, and there are significant differences in the mental health literacy of college students in different family environments and different social roles.[5] It warns us of the hidden trouble of acquiescing entertainment-related narratives in public sphere.

2.2 Streaming Media and Entertainment-Related Use

In the modern public sphere, social media has become indispensable for accessing information. However, the advent of streaming and shorts has related almost everything in our life with entertainment and recreation, including terms of mental illness, especially depression. Research

by Dou suggests that the media image of depression patients constructed by social media is not completely consistent with the real image of the group, which increases the risk of public misunderstanding.[6] Srijan Kumar et al has investigated why and how false information can be created and spread easily through the web and social media platforms, resulting in widespread real-world impact. [7]

These studies not only shed light on the impact of negative narratives spread by social media, but also laid the groundwork for the field's evolution by establishing frameworks and shaping subsequent research directions.

2.3 Research Gap

Previous studies have largely focused on broader mental health narratives and their effects on public attitudes. However, few of them have delved into the entertainment-driven discourse surrounding depression that is prevalent on platforms like Weibo or TikTok. This gap is critical because the casual and often humorous misuse of 'depression' could significantly alter public understanding and attitudes, potentially exacerbating stigma.

Moreover, while the stigmatization of mental illness has been studied in various cultural contexts, a closer examination of how these recreational uses contribute to or mitigate stigma is still strongly needed in China. By focusing on the Chinese context and the widespread use of '玉 \pm \pm \pm \div ', this study aims to fill the gap in current research, offering new insights into the intersection of social media, entertainment, and mental health stigma.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach, using a structured questionnaire to gather data. The design focuses on understanding the impact of entertainment-related use of the term "depression" on public attitudes and the stigmatization of individuals with depression. This approach was selected to quantify the relationships and attitudes prevalent among Chinese social media users.

3.2 Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire was designed with the primary objective of exploring how recreational references to "depression" on social media influence public perceptions and contribute to stigmatization. This objective guided the overall structure and specific content of the questionnaire, ensuring alignment with the research goals.

Based on the research questions and theoretical framework, questionnaire items were developed to measure: Exposure to entertainment-related content (e.g., 'How often do you encounter statements like 'I have depression'

used in a casual or humorous context on social media?'); Personal use of terms (e.g., 'Have you ever used or shared a statement like 'I have depression' in a casual or humorous way on social media?'); Attitudes toward depression (e.g., 'If a classmate/colleague confided in you about their depression, how likely would you be to offer your support?'); Sensitivity to terminology (whether casual use of 'depression' trivializes the experiences of those who suffer from it and how this might affect public understanding of mental health).

To enhance the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, scales from research by QZ Zeng et al on mental illness stigma were incorporated.[8] This approach helped ensure that the data collected would be robust and could withstand scrutiny.

3.3 Sample and Distribution

The questionnaire targeted Chinese internet users active on social media, as they are most likely to encounter entertainment-related uses of 'depression'.

The sample consists of 110 Chinese netizens, including 76 females, 33 males, and 1 non-binary individual (Figure 3.1). The age distribution is as follows: 23.64% under 18 years, 41.82% between 18 and 21 years, 13.64% between 22 and 30 years, and 20.91% over 30 years (Figure 3.2). The questionnaire was distributed online via popular social media platforms and relevant online communities, maximizing reach and participation. Participants were recruited voluntarily, and informed consent was obtained to address ethical considerations.

Gender Distribution

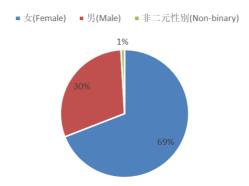


Figure 3.1 Gender distribution of sample

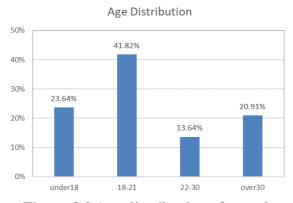


Figure 3.2 Age distribution of sample

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection was conducted through online surveys, which were published on social media platforms and related online communities. The investigation is open for 48 hours. Measures are taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants during data collection. After data collection, the answers are screened for validity,

eliminating duplicate or invalid entries to maintain data quality.

The collected data were input into Wenjuanxing, Excel and SPSS for analysis. Data cleansing was performed to address missing values and outliers, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the data set.

4. Results

4.1 Prevalence of Entertainment-Related Use

The sample of 110 participants provided insights into the widespread use of entertainment-related content involving the term 'depression.' The average exposure score was 3.37 out of 5, indicating a moderate level of engagement with such content. Figure 4.1 illustrates the prevalence of

entertainment-related narratives. It is noticeable that 20% of the respondents reported that they *never* encountered the phenomenon before, which was higher than we expected. To be more accurate, the ubiquity of this phenomenon was confirmed through a single sample t-test. The result indicated that the casual narratives related to depression widely existed on Chinese social media (value=1, t=16.997, p<0.001).

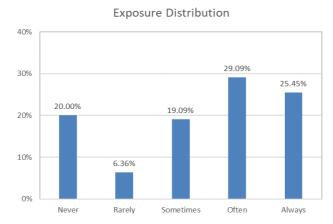


Figure 4.1 Distribution of exposure to entertainment-related uses of the term 'depression'

Table 4.1 ANOVA for exposure to different groups

EXPOSURE	F-statistic	p-value
age	5.851	0.001
gender	1.050	0.308

In Table 4.1, ANOVA was used to reveal differences in exposure levels based on age and gender. It turned out that younger participants showed higher exposure to entertainment-related uses of the term 'depression'. Gender, however, did not show significant differences in exposure

levels. To make it obvious, Figure 4.2 gave information of average scores on 'exposure' divided by four age groups. Respondents aged 18-21 are most likely to be exposed to the entertainment-related use of depression (e.g. Yuyuzheng).

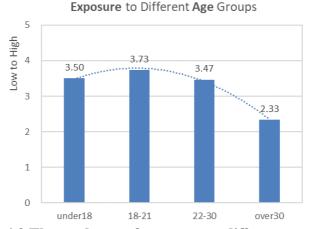


Figure 4.2 The tendency of exposure to different age groups

With multiple choices, Figure 4.3 identifies the platforms on which participants most frequently encountered these

terms. TikTok saw the highest frequency, with 69.09% frequently encountered before. WeChat, Weibo and Bilibili followed with figures just over 40%. Some respondents

also mentioned Red, which is another popular social media platform in China.

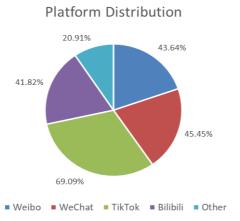


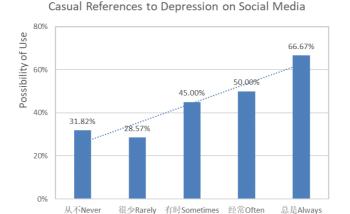
Figure 4.3 Platforms on which respondents encounter the statements

4.2 Relationship Between Frequency of Exposure and Attitudes

The study assessed the relationship between the frequency of using or sharing statements like 'I have depression' in a casual or humorous manner on social media and participants' attitudes towards depression. The question 'Have you ever used or shared a statement like "I have depression" in a casual or humorous way on social media?' revealed that 50.91% of respondents had engaged in such

behaviour. This behaviour was significantly correlated with the level of exposure to entertainment-related content according to Figure 4.4, and as shown by a linear regression analysis (β =0.222, p=0.020).

The qualitative responses to the follow-up question about reasons for using such statements indicated that most participants did so to express feelings of sadness or stress, as depicted in Figure 4.5. Among those who used, 39 out of 54 individuals claimed the primary reason was to express sadness or stress.



Correlation Between Encountering and Using

Figure 4.4 Possibility of using the statement according to different intensity of exposure

Frequency of Encountering

Reason for Using the Statement

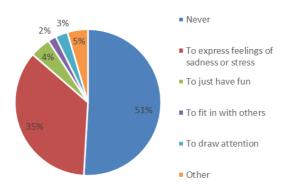


Figure 4.5 Reason for using or sharing the statement

Participants who reported using such statements demonstrated more *negative* attitudes towards individuals suffering from depression. These attitudes were measured using four questions regarding comfort, likelihood of distancing, willingness to offer support, and concerns about offending. Figure 4.6 shows different average scores associated with attitudes and actions according to individual use of the

statement. Higher scores were showed among those who never used the 'depression' statements, which was related to more positive attitudes and actions. The independent sample t-test results in Table 4.2 highlighted a significant relationship between the use of casual statements and the comfort level (p=0.002), distancing behaviour (p=0.002), and support attitudes (p=0.008).

Attitudes & Actions according to Individual Use

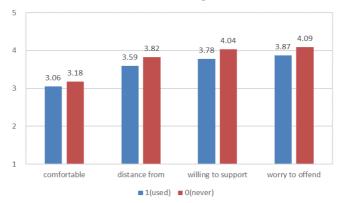


Figure 4.6 Average scores associated with attitudes and actions according to individual use

Table 4.2 Independent sample t-test for attitudes toward depression (factor: personal use of terms)

USE or not	t-statistic	p-value
comfortable	3.241	0.002
distance	3.126	0.002
support	2.710	0.008
offend	-0.184	0.854

4.3 Relationship Between Trust in Depression Claims and Attitudes

Trust in depression claims was evaluated through two

questions: 'If someone claims they have depression, to what extent do you believe this claim?' and 'To what extent do you feel the need to verify this claim (e.g., by

seeking confirmation from their parents or friends)?' The average scores were 3.24 for the belief in the claim and 3.55 for the need to verify it.

Attitudes & Actions affected by Level of Trust

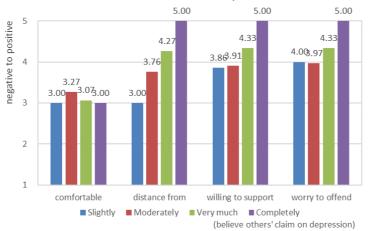


Figure 4.7 Average scores of attitudes and actions among different trust level

Overall, Figure 4.7 gives information that higher levels of trust were associated with more positive attitudes. Furthermore, correlation analysis in Table 4.3 demonstrated that

lower levels of trust correlated with increased distance (p<0.001) and reduced support (p<0.001).

Table 4.3 Correlation between the level of trust in depression claims and participants' attitudes

TRUST	Pearson Correlation	p-value
comfortable	0.054	0.574
distance	0.340	0.000
support	0.357	0.000
offend	0.071	0.464

4.4 Relationship Between Sensitivity to Casual Use and Willingness to Offer Support

The study also explored the impact of sensitivity to the casual use of the term 'depression' on the willingness to offer support. Sensitivity was measured by responses to the questions: 'To what extent do you agree that the casual use of 'depression' on social media trivializes the experiences of those who suffer from depression?' and 'To what extent do you agree that the casual use of 'depression' on social media affects the public's understanding of depression?'

Table 4.4 Linear Regression- Sensitivity to terminology and willingness to offer support

SUPPORT	Beta	t-statistic	p-value
trivialization	0.070	0.728	0.468
understanding	0.236	2.527	0.013

Regression analysis in Table 4.4 showed that participants who are more sensitive to casual narratives causing misunderstanding of depression are more willing to offer support (β =0.236, p=0.013).

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of Entertainment-Related Use and Its Popularity

The use of the word 'depression' for entertainment pur-

poses is becoming more common in Chinese social media posts and comments. The average exposure score was 3.37 out of 5. The phenomenon can be traced back to the rise of Internet memes and the widespread spread of exaggerated or understated mental health issues. However, the distribution does not follow a normal curve. the high percentage of respondents who chose 'never' suggests that some people haven't been aware of their exposure to these narratives, which needs alertness. Consequently, it is crucial to emphasize the necessity to increase awareness and monitor the way mental health issues are presented in the media.

The result showed significant differences in exposure levels across age groups. Among all respondents, younger people, especially those aged 18-21, are more likely to be exposed to the recreational narratives of depression. People in this age group may be more susceptible to social media trends and entertainment-related content, reflected by their higher engagement with digital platform.

5.2 Analysis of Usage Reasons

The study found that the frequency of exposure to entertaining content is highly associated with the possibility of using similar statements casually. According to social cognitive theory, individuals learn and imitate behaviours by observing media portrayals.[9] So frequent exposure to such content may normalize the casual use of mental health terms, thus trivializing the experiences of those who suffer from depression.

Shi categorized mental characteristics of post-2000s generation using internet memes or buzzwords into three aspects: entertainment focus, conformity and innovation, and emotional expression.[10] Most respondents used the word 'depression' in a casual manner to express personal feelings of sadness or stress. The use of such terms reveals individual need to express their struggles in a less serious way. Anyway, it doesn't mean they deliberately try to offend or discriminate depression patients. However, a more healthy and respectful way to express sadness or stress on social media is still needed for netizens.

Moreover, some respondents said they used such statements because they suffer from depression themselves, and they just wanted to claim it or resonate with their companions without burdening others. This kind of individual coping mechanisms indicates a lack of social inclusion to mental health issues. Also, the questionnaire design should take more comprehensive perspectives into account in the future.

5.3 Mechanisms of Entertainment-Related Use Intensifying Stigmatization

Recreation-related use of mental health terms can lead to

stigma by trivializing the experiences of those who suffer from mental health issues. The study found that people who have ever used such terms show more negative attitudes toward people with depression. Bond RM et al found that social media allows users to facilitate the acceptance of received knowledge, thus accelerating changes in individual attitudes and behaviours.[11] It indicates that casual or humorous descriptions might cause negative stereotypes and misunderstanding of mental illnesses.

The study also showed that lower level of trust in claims about depression is associated with more negative attitudes. High frequency of encountering depression claims in a recreational way makes people confused and less likely to trust them. When people are less willing to believe or confirm such claims, they are more likely to hold biases about mental problems. Interventions are urgently needed to restrict entertainment-related use of such narratives and enhance public understanding.

Despite lacking significant correlation, it's still worth mentioning that a high level of worry to offend depression groups (3.98 out of 5) was showed in the study, which may indicate the universality of social concerns for stereotypes such as vulnerability and instability.

Methods for challenging mental health stigma include education, contact and protest.[12] Interaction on Twitter about mental health features a dynamic blend of these approaches, with personal narratives at the core, thus channelling individual-led conversations to mainstream media and having an impact.[13] J. A. Naslund et al offer a perspective on how online peer-to-peer connections among people with serious mental illness could advance efforts to promote mental and physical wellbeing in this group. Introducing these approaches to Chinese social media might be a brilliant way to combat stigma on mental issues.[14]

5.4 Impact of Sensitivity and Empathy on Helping Behaviour

The study demonstrated that sensitivity to the casual use of mental health terminology and empathy towards individuals with depression significantly influenced the willingness to offer support. High sensitivity levels were associated with a greater likelihood of aiding and support. Individuals with a higher level of interpersonal sensitivity and empathy shows a greater willingness to give a helping hand and persist in doing so for an extended duration.[15] Mirror neurons are confirmed to be the neural basis of our empathic capacities, according to Antonella et al.[16] However, excessive use of social media and less time spent interacting with real people might lead to a reduction of empathy by diminishing the effectiveness of mirror neurons.[17] This finding also appeals to promoting healthy social media habits and promoting public aware-

ness to enhance supportive behaviours.

Consequently, it is urgent to advocate balanced and mindful use of social media. Government and organizations related to mental health should take action to make sure people are fully aware of the danger using social media excessively.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Key Findings

The research reveals that entertainment-related uses of the term 'depression' are widespread, particularly among younger demographics, with an average exposure score of 3.37 out of 5. The findings also demonstrate that frequent exposure to entertainment-related narratives correlates with a higher likelihood of using depression-related statements in a casual or humorous manner. Although many participants use these statements to express personal feelings of sadness or stress, this casual use is associated with more negative attitudes towards individuals with actual depression. Lower levels of trust in statements of depression and associated with increased negative attitudes. It also shows that people who concern more about the misleading of recreational expressions associated with depression are more willing to offer support.

6.2 Practical Implications

The results indicate that post-2000s generation are more likely to be affected by the problem of entertainment-related narratives. Therefore, it is important to enhance the education system to help them aware of the potential stigmatizing effects. Public mental health problems can't be ignored by the government and organizations. People should be educated to express emotions and pressure in a healthy way instead of deepening stigma of the weak. Online support groups might become a useful tool for challenging mental health stigma. Furthermore, platform operators should help balancing time spent on social media, which has positive effects on individual mental health, thus increasing empathy and respect for those suffer pain.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

One of the limitations of the study was the neglect of respondents' mental health condition. Also, the sample was limited to Chinese internet users, which only provided a limited perspective. Future research should include a more diverse demographic to provide a broader understanding of the issue.

The reliance on self-reported data may affect the accuracy of the findings. Interviews can be approached to obtain more concrete insights from other perspectives.

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Appendixces

Questionnaire Content:

1. Your Gender

Female/Male/Non-binary

2. Your Age

Under18 / 18-21 / 22-26 / 26-30 / Over30

3. How often do you encounter statements like 'I have depression' used in a casual or humorous context on social media?

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

4. Which platforms do you frequently see these statements ('I have depression' used in a casual or humorous context)? (Multiple choice)

Weibo / WeChat / TikTok / Bilibili / Other

5. To what extent do you agree with the statement that the casual

use of 'depression' on social media trivializes the experiences of those who suffer from depression?

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral /Agree / Strongly agree 6. To what extent do you agree that the casual use of 'depression' on social media affects the public's understanding of depression? Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral /Agree / Strongly agree

7. Have you ever used or shared a statement like 'I have depression' in a casual or humorous way on social media? If yes, what was your primary reason for doing so?

To express feelings of sadness / To just have fun / To fit in with others / To draw attention / Other

8. If someone claims that they have depression, to what extent will you believe it?

Not at all / Slightly / Moderately / Very much / Completely

9. To what extent do you feel the need to verify the claim (e.g., by seeking confirmation from their parents or friends)?

Not at all / Slightly / Moderately / Very much / Completely

10. How comfortable would you feel interacting with someone who has been diagnosed with depression?

Not comfortable / Neutral / Comfortable

11. How likely are you to distance yourself from someone if you knew they had depression?

Very unlikely / Unlikely / Neutral / Likely / Very likely

12. If a classmate/colleague confided in you about their depression, how likely would you be to offer your support?

Very unlikely / Unlikely / Neutral / Likely / Very likely

13. To what extent do you worry about offending or hurting them when asking them about their condition?

Not at all / Slightly / Moderately / Very much / Completely