

The Shimmer of Memory: The Autobiographical Writing of the Memory of Postgraduate Entrance Examination in the Social Media Space

Jinyun Jiang

School of Journalism and Communication, Shanghai University, Shanghai 200070

Abstract: With the help of special text structure and communication mechanism, Exam Memories in social media space has become an autobiographical memory text of online collaboration, recording the realistic situation and collective mentality of contemporary youth, and reflecting the subject emotion and the deep structure of citizens' life. From the perspective of memory practicing, this study conducts a case study on the postgraduate entrance examination of TikTok and Zhihu youth as the basic materials, and discuss students how to use social media to construct the collective memory of the postgraduate entrance examination. The study found that autobiographical writing in the social media space makes up for the mainstream discourse and reflects the unspeakable dilemma of unsuccessful candidates.

Keywords: media, memory practicing, postgraduate entrance examination, collective memory

1. Introduction

Since 2015, the number of students taking the postgraduate entrance exam in China has increased in a magical way, becoming a phenomenal social topic. This special phenomenon describes the youth life and collective mentality, as well as the social problems and cultural symptoms in the transition period. In most cases, the memory of "postgraduate entrance examination recall" is subject to the control effect of the mainstream memory, and is passively incorporated into the social memory. Specifically, in terms of type, the mainstream memory of "postgraduate entrance examination" focuses on highlighting achievement memory and praise memory, and consciously covers or weakening reflective memory and traumatic memory; in narrative, it focuses on progressive narrative and victory narrative. In the purpose, the memory orientation of "successful postgraduate entrance examination" will serve the memory resources of the concept of social community. But the voices of the failed candidates were drowned out by the media.

Liu Yaqui, a social memory researcher, calls the middle zone between individual memory and collective memory "the twilight of memory", which refers to "the discourse and residues that cannot be included in the mainstream under the framework of the mainstream structure". Under the collective memory constructed by the grand narrative, the individual memory is often in a state of neglect or weak presentation. The social platform has become a new carrier of online writing and memory expression for netizens. The relatively open and free expression space changes the relatively single official mainstream memory frame, and also makes it possible to emerge the light of "glimmer of memory". The memory of the failure in the postgraduate entrance exam on social media is the above concept of "the glimmer of memory".

This study discusses the writing of the memory text of failed candidates in the social media space. Through participatory observation and in-depth interview, they restore the journey of their postgraduate entrance examination in group images, and reflect their thinking on social phenomena.

2. The study results

Failed candidates, through the identity of free, equitability and other memory description, to construct the memory about the postgraduate entrance examination.

2.1 Wandering: the marginal people between the campus and the society

Kurt Lewin, a famous German psychologist, first put forward the concept of "marginal people". He believes that changes in social

role or status can change an individual's psychological and behavioral characteristics accordingly.^[1] Marginal people generally refer to "people completely engaged in both social groups and between the two groups." This concept appropriately describes the role of respondent K in the postgraduate entrance examination in the second year. She said: "It's awkward. I don't know what kind of identity I am in this society. After graduation, I rented an apartment near the school to prepare for the exam. It is an apartment, in fact, is the resettlement community, even the village committee, the neighbors are groups without regular jobs." Any construction of memory is rooted in specific cultural situations and social structures".^[2] Their peers have entered a new stage of life, either to work, or continuing to study. A person's social identity is, in part, a collection of documents and files, however, from the "campus" perspective, they do not have student ID cards; from the "social" perspective, no work and insurance. They are free between the two groups, but not completely belong to any group, lack of sense of belonging and security. They all have the same identity dilemma — did not get effective emotional support, stay away from parents and friends for a long time, psychologically alienated to the surrounding people, but also often confused about their own role positioning.^[3] In this dilemma, the past test students as if only until the end of the entrance examination, all the dust landing, they can be able to find their position in the society. Respondent X has a memo in her circle of friends: "These days are really anxious. I feel in a birth canal, with my head between the muscles on both sides, urging me to live or die." It can be seen that in the memories of the exam, the narrative of psychological pressure occupies the core position. Their narration centered on "anxiety" presents different types of memory forms such as identity distress and sailing against the current, and finally integrate the meaning with "confusion". "Confused" is a kind of memory mode, this memory existed widely among the educated youth who participated in the postgraduate entrance examination in the last century, but it was repeated in the postgraduate entrance examination. Although they did not suffer from the past, the "physical and mental pressure" brought by the postgraduate entrance examination has become another memory in their limited life experience.

2.2 Dilemma: the dream of studying under the economic distress is broken

After several failures, their sense of self-worth is in a slump. Wang, from a remote city, was not admitted to a key university, but she majored in English at a good school in Shanghai. This year, she failed for the second time. But respondent Wang's poor family did not allow her to take a third time. Her parents hope that she has to start work as soon as possible, and stop taking living expenses from the family, preferably to subsidize the expenses of the family. In the eyes of her parents, they can retire and enjoy life. But now, the daughter has not been working, and has to continue to take the postgraduate entrance exam to consume the family, which makes the parents cannot accept. The gap between my parents and myself made respondent recall full of sadness: "In order to earn money to live during my studies, I had to work while I was studying. I worked as a tutor, twice a week, for two hours at a time. But the road commute is too long, a half a day." In the most powerless of times, there are the most wanted goals, such is their helplessness and confusion. Although her hard earned money is spent in the most critical places, she has little to spend except for meals and exam materials. Three months before the exam, the living expenses saved were gradually consumed, and Wang fell into trouble. During the interview, she choked up several times, but she could fully write about the details and feelings of each node. This performance also echoes the conclusions of existing research on autobiographical memory. Memories evoked by negative emotions have a more intense and profound emotional experience than memories evoked by positive emotions, and emotions have a "imprinted" role in the processing of memory.^[4] In the more emotional events, their autobiographical memories are also more detailed. The individual suffering memory is more significant, and the imprint of negative emotions is more profound than the positive emotions, so the autobiographical memories stimulated are thus more specific and detailed.^[5]

3. The conclusion

With the wave of examinations, there will always be more failures than successes. It is for this reason that the successful examiners write the dominant discourse and become the visible dimension of collective memory, while the repeatedly unsuccessful candidates constitute the invisible imprint of collective memory. From the cases studied in this paper, the autobiographical writing in social media space compensates for the long-term domination of the dominant discourse by the successful, both by reflecting on the unspeakable reality of the plight of former students in the examinations and by writing reflective memories on the issue of fairness in the examinations, and by presenting a diverse memory narrative of the same event. The significance of individual memories of "failing the exam" transcends the content of the memory itself in the social media space.^[6] For the subjects of memory narratives, the writing

of memory content can help them satisfy the narrative motives of "self-healing of examination trauma", "manifestation of individual value" and "identity recognition". The narrative motivation of the subject.

Around the value of examinations, failed candidates write about their past examination experiences in a more authentic way, giving the collective memory of 'examinations memory' a vivid life experience and a complex growth process, replacing the previously romanticised memory construction of successful candidates. At the same time, social media platforms have brought to the surface the previously neglected middle ground between individual and collective memories. Individual memory writing connects the constructive nature of collective memory with the autonomy of individual memory, bridging the gap between the two and combining the simplified Habwachian construct of collective memory with the self-mindedness of individual memory.^[7] It is easy to see that the 'memory of the examination' in autobiographical memory writing is not a fixed, static event, but a mnemonic symbol of personal life experience that is constantly in flux as the pressure of social competition increases and continues, with the recollector constantly giving new meaning to the past memory of the examination in the context of the present.

References

- [1] Xu Vivien Weiwei. WeChat and the Sharing of News in Networked China. *Digital Journalism*, 2022, 10(9).
- [2] Young Rachel, Kananovich Volha, Johnson Brett G. Young Adults' Folk Theories of How Social Media Harms Its Users. *Mass Communication and Society*, 2023, 26(1).
- [3] Kumari Archana. Young People and the Future of News: Social Media and the Rise of Connective Journalism. *Mass Communication and Society*, 2020, 23(2).
- [4] Joel A.C. Baum, Oliver Christine. Institutional Embeddedness and the Dynamics of Organizational Populations. *American Sociological Review*, 1992, 57(4).
- [5] Carolyn Kitch. Anniversary Journalism, Collective Memory, and the Cultural Authority to Tell the Story of the American Past. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 2002, 36(1).
- [6] Couldry, Nick. Theorising media as practice. *Social Semiotics*, 2004, 14(2):115-132.
- [7] José van Dijck. Flickr and the culture of connectivity: Sharing views, experiences, memories. *Memory Studies*, 2011, 4(4).

Information for authors

Jin Yun Jiang (2000.6.1-), Female, Lianyungang, Jiangsu, Han Nationality, Shanghai University, Major: Journalism and Communication, Research Direction: Media Sociology.