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Unveiling the Dark Humour and Self-Image of Generation Z in a Polymedia Context

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Abstract:

This research explores the phenomenon of dark humour and its influence on the self-image of Generation Z (Gen Z) within the polymedia landscape. The research integrates insights from a multidisciplinary approach encompassing psychology, media studies, and cultural studies, it delves into the complexities of Gen Z's engagement with dark humour in the digital era and how Gen Z utilizes dark humour as a coping mechanism to navigate the challenges of modern life and confront taboo subjects.

Moreover, this study delves into the nuanced relationship between dark humour and Gen Z's self-image. It meticulously examines the transformative effects of the digital era on the dynamics of self-presentation, shedding light on how Gen Z meticulously constructs their virtual personas through the consumption and creation of dark humour content. However, ethical considerations and potential risks associated with dark humour receive due attention, emphasizing the critical importance of media literacy and fostering open dialogue to address the potential pitfalls of perpetuating harmful stereotypes or trivializing weighty issues.

Keywords: GenZ, Dark Humour, Self-Image, Polymedia Context, Psychology, Media studies, Cultural studies.

Introduction

Generation Z, often referred to as Gen Z, is a cohort born approximately between the mid-1990s and early 2010s. This generation has garnered attention for its distinct sense of humour, characterized by elements of darkness, irony, and satire. This article seeks to delve into the

complex relationship between dark humour and the self-image of Gen Z within the context of polymedia.

To comprehend the interplay between dark humour and Gen Z's self-image, it is crucial to examine the psychological mechanisms that underlie this form of humour. Dark humour serves as a coping mechanism for many individuals, allowing them to navigate and process uncomfortable or taboo subjects through irony and satire.

Furthermore, the polymedia landscape, encompassing a wide range of digital platforms and social media, plays a pivotal role in shaping Gen Z's engagement with dark humour. These platforms provide Gen Z with the means to consume, create, and share humour content, thereby influencing their perception of self and the world.

Moreover, humour plays a crucial role in self-representation and identity construction. Gen Z's humour style serves as a means of self-expression and social commentary, allowing them to establish their unique identities within their social circles and online communities.

This study aims to unravel the intricate dynamics between dark humour and the self-image of Generation Z within the polymedia landscape. This exploration is essential for understanding the unique characteristics of Gen Z's humour and its broader implications for their identity formation and social interactions.

The Nature of Dark Humour

Dark humour is a form of comedy that delves into sensitive and taboo subjects, such as death, suffering, and social issues. It employs unconventional and often unsettling means to address these topics. Several psychological theories shed light on the appeal and effectiveness of dark humour as a coping mechanism and a form of social commentary.

Freud's theory of humour(relief) suggests that dark humour allows individuals to release repressed feelings by transgressing societal norms and expressing their suppressed emotions. According to Freud, humour serves as a defence mechanism, enabling individuals to cope with anxiety and discomfort. By making light of serious or distressing subjects, individuals can momentarily alleviate their emotional burdens and find relief through laughter.

The incongruity theory, proposed by Francis Hutcheson, posits that humour arises from the juxtaposition of unexpected and incongruous elements. Dark humour often presents a stark contrast between the gravity of the subject matter and the humorous treatment of it. This incongruity provides cognitive relief and amusement, as the mind processes the unexpectedness and absurdity of the situation. The tension between the serious nature of the topic and the comedic approach creates a humorous effect.

The superiority theory of humour traces back to Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes suggesting that dark humour allows individuals to feel superior to their vulnerabilities and challenges. By finding humour in dark and difficult situations, individuals can momentarily distance themselves from their pain or struggles. This sense of superiority provides a psychological boost and empowers individuals.

These psychological theories help explain why dark humour appeals to some individuals as a coping mechanism and a form of social commentary. By confronting taboo subjects and transgressing societal norms, dark humour allows individuals to address uncomfortable topics and express their suppressed emotions. The unexpected and incongruous elements of dark humour provide cognitive relief and amusement. Additionally, the sense of superiority derived from dark humour empowers individuals to confront challenging situations with resilience.

It's important to note that the effectiveness and appropriateness of dark humour may vary depending on cultural and individual factors. While some people find solace and catharsis through dark humour, others may find it offensive or insensitive. Understanding the underlying psychological mechanisms can provide insights into why dark humour resonates with certain individuals, but it's crucial to approach it with sensitivity and respect for others' boundaries and perspectives.

Polymedia and its Impact on Humour

Polymedia refers to the convergence of various media platforms, such as social networking sites, video-sharing platforms, and messaging apps. This convergence has significantly impacted the way Generation Z (Gen Z) consumes and produces humour. The polymedia landscape provides Gen Z with a multitude of options to engage in humour and express their identities.

Social media platforms, video-sharing websites, and messaging apps offer Gen Z diverse avenues to participate in humour. They can share funny memes, create, and watch humorous videos, engage in witty conversations, and more. This broad range of platforms allows for the exploration and experimentation of different humour styles, as individuals can encounter various forms of humour and adapt them to their preferences.

As discussed by D. Buckingham, the flexibility and interactivity of polymedia platforms empower Gen Z to engage in self-representation through humour. They can craft their online personas by sharing funny content, creating humorous videos or memes, and participating in humorous conversations. This self-representation through humour enables individuals to express their personalities, attitudes, and perspectives, contributing to the formation of their digital identities.

Another aspect of polymedia platforms is the instantaneous feedback and social validation they offer. Likes, comments, shares, and other forms of engagement provide immediate responses to humour content. This feedback loop plays a role in shaping the nature and reception of humour within the Gen Z demographic. The desire for social validation can influence the type of humour shared, as individuals may tailor their content to elicit positive responses from their peers.

The affordances of polymedia platforms, such as immediacy, interactivity, and anonymity, also influence the nature and reception of humour within Gen Z. The immediate nature of these platforms allows humour to spread rapidly, generating viral trends and memes. Interactivity enables users to engage in collaborative humour creation and participate in humorous challenges or trends. Anonymity can encourage individuals to take risks and express themselves more freely through humour, as they may feel less inhibited by social constraints.

Overall, polymedia platforms are transforming the landscape of humour for Gen Z. The convergence of various media platforms provides a multitude of options for humour consumption and production.

The Role of Self-Image in Humour Expression

Self-image is a significant factor in how individuals engage in humour and present themselves to others, and for Generation Z (Gen Z), this self-image is closely tied to their digital

presence and the persona they cultivate across polymedia platforms. Researchers S. R. Horton and A. J. Wohl propose that individuals strategically construct their online identities to align with their desired self-image and to seek social approval.

Dark humour plays a role in differentiating themselves from previous generations and shaping their self-image. Gen Z seeks authenticity, edginess, and nonconformity in their self-presentation, and dark humour aligns with these values. By engaging in dark humour, Gen Z can establish a distinct self-image that sets them apart from traditional norms and expectations.

Dark humour allows Gen Z to challenge societal conventions and express their individuality. It enables them to confront taboo subjects, address uncomfortable truths, and transgress social boundaries. By embracing dark humour, Gen Z can project an image of being unafraid to tackle controversial or sensitive topics, demonstrating their willingness to push the boundaries of what is considered acceptable or conventional.

Moreover, dark humour can be seen as a form of rebellion against traditional standards of humour. Gen Z's self-image revolves around rejecting mainstream or "safe" forms of humour, opting for more unconventional and edgy comedic expressions. By engaging in dark humour, they distance themselves from the humour styles of previous generations and establish a sense of uniqueness and nonconformity.

The digital landscape of polymedia platforms provides Gen Z with an ideal platform to curate and express their desired self-image. Through carefully selecting and sharing dark humour content, Gen Z can shape their online identities and gain social approval from peers who appreciate and resonate with their humour style. By aligning their self-image with the values and preferences of their desired audience, Gen Z can strengthen their social connections and feel a sense of belonging within their online communities.

Polymedia and Audience Perception

The polymedia context, with its diverse platforms and instantaneous feedback mechanisms, amplifies the impact of audience reception on Gen Z's self-image as highlighted by researchers M. Sundaram and M. N. Limperos. In the polymedia landscape, Gen Z seeks attention and recognition, and the feedback they receive from their audience influences their humour choices.

The pursuit of social currency, or the desire to gain popularity and social standing within online communities, drives Gen Z to consider the impact of their humour expressions. They are motivated to stand out, generate reactions, and accumulate social validation through their humour content.

Likes, comments, and shares act as measurable indicators of audience engagement and approval. When Gen Z receives a high number of likes, positive comments, or shares on their humour content, they perceive it as a validation of their comedic abilities and a confirmation of their desired self-image. This positive reinforcement encourages them to continue exploring and sharing humour that aligns with their audience's preferences, including the adoption of dark humour if it garners positive responses.

The Clash of Generational Humour Styles

Dark humour often deviates from traditional notions of appropriateness and can be seen as more provocative or offensive by older generations who are accustomed to different comedic sensibilities. The use of taboo subjects, subversive themes, and edgy content in dark humour may be met with disapproval or misunderstanding from older individuals who adhere to more conservative or traditional values.

The polymedia landscape plays a significant role in exacerbating these intergenerational tensions. Humour spreads rapidly through social media platforms, reaching a wide audience that includes individuals from various age groups. The instantaneous nature of sharing and consuming humour content leaves little time for context or nuanced understanding, increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

As a result, clashes between Gen Z's dark humour and the sensibilities of older generations become more pronounced. Older individuals may perceive dark humour as disrespectful, inappropriate, or offensive, further widening the gap between generations. This clash reinforces Gen Z's self-image as boundary-pushers and rebels, as they find themselves challenging established norms and confronting generational differences through their humour expressions.

The tension between generations also stems from the broader cultural and societal shifts that Gen Z represents. This generation is often associated with social and political activism,

challenging traditional power structures, and pushing for change. Dark humour serves as a tool for Gen Z to critique and satirizes these structures and systems, often targeting issues such as inequality, social injustice, and hypocrisy. This critique can be unsettling for older generations who may perceive it as disrespectful or undermining societal values.

Researchers J. Bennett and L. Matthes explore the role of dark humour in reinforcing Gen Z's self-image as cultural provocateurs. By engaging in dark humour and challenging established norms, Gen Z asserts their identity as agents of cultural change, pushing boundaries, and sparking discussions around sensitive and controversial topics. This self-perception is reinforced by the clash with older generations, further solidifying Gen Z's reputation as rebels and boundary-pushers.

Gen Z's adoption of dark humour clashes with the sensibilities of older generations, leading to intergenerational tensions. The rapid dissemination of humour through polymedia platforms exacerbates misunderstandings and fuels generational conflicts. This clash of humour styles reinforces Gen Z's self-image as boundary-pushers, rebels, and cultural provocateurs who challenge established norms. The tension between generations arises from differences in comedic sensibilities and broader cultural shifts that Gen Z represents.

Dark Humour, Empowerment, and Vulnerability

Engaging in dark humour can be viewed as a complex act that involves both vulnerability and empowerment for Gen Z. By addressing taboo subjects and embracing dark humour, they openly acknowledge and discuss sensitive issues that were historically stigmatized or considered off-limits. This act of embracing dark humour fosters a sense of empowerment, as it allows Gen Z to reclaim agency over their experiences and challenges.

Historically, certain topics such as death, suffering, mental health, or social issues were often considered too sensitive or uncomfortable to discuss openly. Dark humour breaks these barriers by addressing these taboo subjects in unconventional and often unsettling ways. By using humour as a medium, Gen Z can engage in conversations and shed light on these issues, challenging societal norms and fostering a more open and honest dialogue.

In embracing dark humour, Gen Z asserts their autonomy and individuality, demonstrating their willingness to confront difficult and uncomfortable topics head-on. It provides them with a sense of empowerment, as they can navigate and express their experiences and perspectives in a way that feels authentic and genuine to them. Dark humour enables them to take control of their narrative and reshape the discourse around these sensitive issues.

However, engaging in dark humour also requires vulnerability. By addressing sensitive and taboo subjects, individuals expose themselves to potential criticism, judgment, or backlash from others who may find the humour offensive or inappropriate. It opens the door to potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations, which can lead to social consequences or conflicts.

Despite the potential risks, Gen Z's willingness to engage in dark humour demonstrates their courage to push boundaries and challenge societal norms. It reflects a desire to express their unique perspectives, experiences, and opinions, even if they might face opposition or criticism. This vulnerability is an essential aspect of their empowerment, as it allows them to be authentic and unapologetic about their humour choices.

Ethical Considerations in Dark Humour

The proliferation of dark humour in the polymedia context has raised significant ethical concerns that warrant attention. While freedom of expression is a core principle of online platforms, it is vital to strike a balance between this freedom and the potential harm or insensitivity that dark humour can perpetuate. Responsible digital citizenship and a comprehensive understanding of the potential impact of dark humour on marginalized communities are essential in navigating these ethical considerations.

Dark humour often involves pushing boundaries and addressing sensitive or taboo subjects. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that humour can have consequences, and certain jokes or comedic expressions may perpetuate harm or insensitivity, particularly towards marginalized groups. Recognizing the potential impact of dark humour on these communities is pivotal for cultivating an inclusive and respectful online environment.

In light of these ethical concerns, scholars like J. Burgess and A. Green emphasize the importance of critically examining the implications of humour in online spaces. This involves

engaging in open dialogue about the potential harm that dark humour can cause and being mindful of the power dynamics and social context in which these jokes are made. It is essential to foster an environment where individuals can discuss sensitive topics without promoting harm, discrimination, or marginalization.

Responsible digital citizenship entails being aware of the consequences of our online actions and taking responsibility for the content we create and share. This includes considering the potential impact of our humour choices and being sensitive to the experiences and perspectives of others. It is vital to recognize that humour should not come at the expense of others' dignity or well-being.

Effectively navigating the ethical boundaries of humour expression requires ongoing dialogue, education, and empathy. Engaging in conversations about the potential impact of dark humour on marginalized communities can help individuals develop a better understanding of the potential harm that certain jokes or expressions may cause. This dialogue should involve active listening, learning from diverse perspectives, and being open to self-reflection and personal growth.

While the theoretical framework presented sheds light on the appeal and potential benefits of dark humour, it is essential to recognize and address its shortcomings and limitations. Understanding the individual differences in humour reception, considering cultural context, and acknowledging ethical concerns surrounding potential harm and social impact are critical steps towards a more responsible and sensitive approach to dark humour expression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, dark humour plays a significant role in Gen Z's humour repertoire and shapes their self-image within the polymedia landscape. Throughout this essay, we have delved into the intricate relationship between dark humour, self-image, and polymedia by examining psychological theories, the influence of polymedia platforms, and the interplay between humour expression and self-presentation.

Psychological theories, such as Freud's theory of humour, incongruity theory, and superiority theory, provide valuable insights into the mechanisms that underpin the appeal and

effectiveness of dark humour. Understanding how dark humour allows individuals to release repressed feelings, find cognitive relief through incongruity, and feel superior to their vulnerabilities empowers us to comprehend why Gen Z is drawn to this form of humour.

Moreover, the polymedia landscape, with its convergence of various media platforms, offers Gen Z diverse avenues to engage in humour and express their identities. Social media platforms, video-sharing websites, and messaging apps provide a space for Gen Z to experiment with different humour styles, engage in self-representation, and receive immediate feedback and social validation. The affordances of polymedia, including immediacy, interactivity, and anonymity, shape the nature and reception of humour within the Gen Z demographic.

The interplay between humour expression and self-presentation within the polymedia context is a crucial aspect of Gen Z's engagement with dark humour. By strategically constructing their online identities and curating their digital presence, Gen Z aligns their self-image with their desired personas and seeks social approval. Dark humour allows them to differentiate themselves, challenge societal norms, and project an image of authenticity, edginess, and non-conformity.

However, it is important to acknowledge the ethical considerations surrounding dark humour. The clash between dark humour and the sensibilities of older generations, as well as the potential for perpetuating harm or insensitivity, necessitates a responsible approach to humour expression. Understanding the potential impact on marginalized communities and engaging in dialogue on sensitive topics is crucial for navigating the ethical boundaries of humour within the polymedia landscape.

In conclusion, the relationship between dark humour, self-image, and polymedia is a complex and multifaceted one. By exploring the psychological mechanisms behind dark humour, understanding the influence of polymedia platforms, and recognizing the ethical implications, we gain valuable insights into the role of humour in shaping Gen Z's self-image and social interactions.

Future Research Directions

Future research endeavours should aim to investigate the long-term effects of dark humour on Gen Z's mental health, interpersonal relationships, and societal attitudes. Exploring the cross-cultural variations in Gen Z's humour preferences and the impact of polymedia on self-image

across diverse cultural contexts would provide a comprehensive understanding of the universality or cultural specificity of dark humour. Interdisciplinary studies that integrate psychology, media studies, and cultural studies can offer nuanced insights into the complexities of dark humour in the polymedia context.

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Appendix

1. 😂🔥: "Laughing with an intense burn" - Used to express laughter at something dark or savage.
2. 🤔🤡: "Shrug it off with laughter" - Used when humorously acknowledging a confusing or absurd situation.
3. 😏🔪: "Ironically amused but with a twist" - Conveys a mix of sarcasm and dark humour.
4. 🤡💀: "Clowning around with death" - Represents playful yet morbid humour, often used in response to something outrageous.
5. 😈🌈: "Mischievous rainbow vibes" - Combines devilishness with a sarcastic twist, often used to express dark humour colourfully.
6. 🤯🚀: "Mind-blowing humour taking off" - Indicates humour that is mind-boggling or out-of-this-world.
7. 😂🔥: "Crazy laughter on fire" - Represents wild and hilarious amusement, even in the face of something absurd or dark.
8. 😬🔒: "Silently sealing dark secrets" - Used to indicate humour surrounding forbidden topics.
9. 🤪🤡😈: "Dizzying mischief and devilishness" - Conveys a combination of being overwhelmed and embracing wicked humour.
10. 😬🔪: "Nervously laughing at something dark" - Used to show a light-hearted response to a potentially uncomfortable or dark situation.
11. 😈🔪 implies a sinister or mischievous intention, invoking a sense of dark humour

(Emoji usage can be subjective and context-dependent, so interpretations may vary. These samples reflect common associations with dark humour among Gen Z in the polymedia landscape)