

# ***Research on the Formation Mechanism of the Contemporary Youth Subculture "Da Zi Culture"***

***— Based on the Application of Grounded Theory Research Method***

**Chuqiao Lv<sup>1,a,\*</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Southwest University, No. 2 Tiansheng Road, Beibei District, Chongqing, China*

*a. 1398710057@qq.com*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** In the process of modernization, subcultural phenomena within youth groups have gradually flourished, and relevant theoretical research has made substantial progress. However, the phenomenon of "Da Zi Culture" within youth groups is a newly emerging, complex subculture influenced by various factors, with scarce empirical research within the academic community. Therefore, this study aims to explore the core topic of the formation mechanism of the youth subculture "Da Zi Culture," investigating the motivation for participation, influencing factors, and the satisfaction gained by the youth engaged in "finding a partner." The research results indicate that the formation mechanism of the youth subculture "Da Zi Culture" primarily involves four factors: functional domain needs, emotional values, social values, and internal and external driving forces. Based on this, the study constructs a theoretical model of the formation mechanism of "Da Zi Culture."

**Keywords:** "Da Zi" Culture, Formation Mechanism, Grounded Theory

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Concept of "Da Zi"**

The term "Da Zi" originates from the Jiangnan dialect and traditionally refers to companions in various contexts such as meal "Da Zi" or card "Da Zi," indicating meal companions or card game partners [1]. Since April 2023, with the increase in outdoor activities, there has been a growing trend of people posting on social media seeking "Da Zi" companions. The posters predominantly exhibit a younger demographic, with a notable presence of individuals born in the 1990s and 2000s.

According to a joint survey conducted by the China Youth Daily Social Survey Center and an online questionnaire platform, 72.6% of the surveyed youth stated that they have "Da Zi" in their lives. Furthermore, 68.9% of the surveyed youth believe that seeking "Da Zi" is a courageous step to break out of their social comfort zones and explore new social patterns [2]. The "Da Zi" topic continues to attract attention on the internet, reflecting that the term "Da Zi" from dialects has transcended traditional contexts, transforming into a new social interaction method among young people. It is gaining popularity among an increasing number of individuals, becoming a fresh expression of emotional needs.

## 1.2. Contemporary Youth Social Interaction

The growth process of the "Millennials" or "Generation Z" currently in their youth stage is accompanied by the paradox of being an only child—marked by "advantageous yet lonely" circumstances—and immense academic pressure, factors that inhibit their normal social needs[3]. Labels such as "social phobia", "social butterfly", "MOMO" have become popularized social elements among the youth, reflecting a somewhat indirect acknowledgment of their social predicaments. This also indicates a collective psychology among the youth who hope to address issues, strengthen social emotional resonance, and foster collaboration.

The social psychological aspect of youth is a crucial factor influencing their ultimate social behavior. The "Da Zi Culture," with its thousands of followers within the youth demographic, evidently aligns with their social psychology. While the potential of "Da Zi social interaction" to help the youth break free from social predicaments is still subject to debate and further research, it has undeniably become a positive way for the youth to engage socially. The "Da Zi community" is gradually gaining recognition and participation from more young individuals in this process.

Furthermore, will the formation of the "Da Zi community" be influenced by factors such as real-life circumstances, emotional factors, and media technology? In terms of specific domains, what is the correlation among different influencing factors? These questions indicate a clear inadequacy in existing research in dissecting this emerging youth subculture phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to, while drawing on existing theoretical perspectives, minimize potential interference from them, conduct in-depth observations of the "Da Zi community," collect primary materials, and thus construct a more interpretive theoretical model.

## 2. Research Methodology and Data Sources

Grounded Theory, proposed by American scholars Glaser and Strauss in 1967, is a qualitative research method that serves as a bridge between theory and empirical research. As a research approach, Grounded Theory involves systematically collecting and analyzing materials related to a phenomenon, discovering, developing, and validating theories from the data [4]. Through Grounded Theory, continuous questioning and theoretical exploration can be conducted, allowing for the abstraction and correlation of various elements to construct relevant theoretical models. The "Da Zi Culture" within the youth demographic is a newly emerging, complex subculture influenced by various factors. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative research approach based on Grounded Theory, using interview data to explore the formation mechanism of the youth subculture "Da Zi Culture," identify relationships between different elements, and construct a theoretical model of the formation mechanism of "Da Zi Culture." This contribution aims to fill the theoretical gap surrounding this emerging youth subculture phenomenon.

In terms of data collection and sources, this study employs semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect and organize interview materials. The sample selection for this interview utilizes a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling, primarily selecting youth who have been in contact with and engaged in "Da Zi social interaction" at least twice as the interviewees. Based on the sampling results, the sample consists of 20 young individuals aged between 17 and 28, aligning with the age division of the youth demographic (14-35 years) outlined in the "Medium and Long-Term Youth Development Plan (2016-2025)." Of the participants, 12 are female, and 8 are male. The interviews were conducted from July to September 2023, with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. A total of 20 interview records and interview materials comprising 35,264 words were collected.

### 3. Category Extraction and Model Construction

#### 3.1. Open Coding

Open coding is the foundation of Grounded Theory research, and its coverage and accuracy in qualitative material are crucial determinants of the research's credibility [5]. In this study, interview data texts related to "factors in the formation mechanism of youth 'Da Zi Culture'" were analyzed through sentence-by-sentence coding. Key words were extracted, text connections and logical relationships were marked, synonyms were merged, and duplicates were eliminated, resulting in 96 initial concepts. Subsequently, these concepts were classified to obtain 40 initial categories. Due to space constraints, an example of open coding is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Categorization through Open Coding

Partial original statement (initial concept)	initial category
A01: Because our school is special, closed management, so there will be a certain lack of information, I want to know about the learning situation of other schools, and can also communicate with others. (There is poor information)	information communication
A02. "Partner social" is very suitable for me, everyone is the same frequency of people, is a stranger but everyone has a sense of boundaries, do not disturb each other. (Sense of boundary)	Sense of boundary
A05: The people who come to you either don't mind your social phobia, or they're more tolerant of you, which I think is great. (More inclusive)	High inclusion
A08: Because I feel that life is not interesting, I want to know some friends outside the circle, learn to cut hair every day, and touch the same information every day, it is boring. (Life is boring and boring)	Fun
A09: The reason that led me to do this is that I want to meet more people with different backgrounds and interests, and I also want to enrich my spare time.	enrich the life
A10. Because there are many workplace rules in the workplace, you can not go too close to your colleagues in the workplace, and your friends are working in other places, not in a city. (Influence of workplace rules)	workplace rules
A11. But I don't like to stay with a person for a long time, I think it is not fresh, so I like to find a partner. (nothing new)	Freshness
A13: No matter what I do, I am alone, so sometimes I feel lonely, and the most important thing is that I have no one to share my life with, so I want to find a partner. (Share life)	Wishing to share
A14: Very respect for the privacy of both parties, do not involve too much knowledge of personal circumstances. (Respect privacy)	Respect privacy
A15: Each gets what he needs, doesn't have to work to maintain the relationship, and lets both of you relax. (Lower burden)	Lower burden
A16: Because I want to achieve a goal by myself, and then I am not enough self-control, I want to find a partner who can understand each other and supervise each other. (Mutual understanding and supervision)	mutual supervision

### 3.2. Axial Coding

The task of axial coding is to continually refine and cluster on the basis of open coding, further identifying the inherent connections and logical relationships between initial categories, and enhancing the density of categories to form more comprehensive secondary codes. In this stage, the categories are reintroduced into the original data for analysis to explore potential relationships between categories and to distill more concise, higher-level axial categories. Utilizing the NVIVO-11 qualitative research software, this study conducted axial coding on the 12 categories from the open coding stage, ultimately refining them into four major axial categories: functional domain needs, emotional values, social values, and internal and external driving forces. The axial coding process in this study is detailed in Table 2.

### 3.3. Selective Coding

Selective coding involves selecting core categories, systematically supplementing them with other categories, and reorganizing fragmented concepts into a coherent "storyline" to form a theoretical framework [6]. Based on the study of youth "Da Zi Culture," logical relationships between the four main categories were identified. The premise for the formation of "Da Zi Culture" in the youth demographic is that this social pattern is practiced by a certain number of youth and receives recognition or support from a considerable number of them. The needs in functional domains such as life, study, and work are direct reasons for youth to consider and engage in "finding a partner." Emotional value and social value are two important value factors for youth in the process of "Da Zi social interaction," while internal and external driving forces serve as significant driving forces in the formation process of "Da Zi Culture." Internal driving force includes self-realization, while external driving force encompasses factors such as time, space, and technology. Based on this, the study constructs a conceptual model of the formation mechanism of youth "Da Zi Culture" with "functional domain needs," "emotional value," "social value," and "internal and external driving forces" as the core, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 2: Axial Coding Analysis

The categories of spindle encoding extraction		Initial categories for open code extraction	Interpretation of the Connotation of Relationship Structure
<b>Main category</b>	<b>Subcategory</b>		
Functional domain requirements	Quality of life	Entertainment experience, healthy diet, active exercise, Enrich one's life	The functional requirements are divided into quality of life, quality of work, quality of learning, and other aspects, which are the direct reasons for the formation of a "Da Zi Culture" among young people.
	Work quality	Relieve work pressure and workplace rules	
	Learning quality	Relieve learning pressure and exchange learning methods	

Table 2: (continued).

Emotional value	Relieve negative emotions	Mental internal friction and loneliness	Emotional value includes alleviating negative emotional value, obtaining positive emotional value, etc., which is one of the reasons for the formation of "Da Zi Culture" among young people.
	Obtain positive emotions	Relaxed and joyful, satisfying, interesting, fresh, emotional response and companionship	
Social value	social connections	Social anxiety friendly and simplified interpersonal relationships	The unique value of social interaction, such as social connections, social needs and social advantages, has influenced the formation of youth's "Da Zi Culture".
	Social needs	Social orientation, social integration, expanding circle, desire to share, information communication	
	Social advantages	Easy to try, high fit, low burden	
Internal and external driving forces	Self-actualization motivation	Mutual supervision, efficiency improvement, motivation acquisition, self-improvement, and opportunity acquisition	The internal and external driving forces include internal motivation, namely self-actualization motivation, as well as external driving forces, such as personality traits, spatiotemporal motivation, and technological motivation, which are important driving forces for the formation of the "Da Zi culture" among young people.
	Personality traits	Easy to approach, respects privacy, has a sense of boundaries, and is highly inclusive	
	Spatiotemporal dynamics	Strange territory, close proximity, and time matching	
	Technical Power	Social platforms and community organizations	

#### 4. Interpretation of the Mechanism Model of "Da Zi Culture" Formation

##### 4.1. Functional Domain Needs

Functional domain needs are the direct reasons for youth to choose "Da Zi social interaction." With

the development of the economy and society, the youth demographic has higher aspirations for their quality of life. Elements such as entertainment experiences, healthy eating, active exercise, and fulfilling lives have become ways for the youth to enhance their quality of life. Additionally, the quality of learning and work is a significant choice for the youth in different life stages, and issues like work pressure, workplace rules, learning pressure, and learning methods are unavoidable realities. The "Da Zi Culture" within youth subculture provides a path for the youth to address their current dilemmas. This involves forming combinations by seeking groups with aligned goals and overlapping needs in different domains, thereby collectively solving the problems they are currently facing. On one hand, this reflects the youth's bold attempts to explore new ways and experience new lifestyles. On the other hand, it indicates that these attempts can indeed address many of their urgent concerns.

#### **4.2. Emotional Values**

Emotional values, originating from the economic domain, describe the ability to bring comfort and pleasure to others [7]. In interpersonal communication, emotional values have always been a highly valued aspect. Some negative emotions, such as internal mental conflicts and loneliness, are challenging to resolve through traditional social interactions. For youth who express having such negative emotions, their interpersonal relationships are periodically fixed, making it challenging to break through through traditional social patterns. However, through "Da Zi social interaction," they can easily connect with people outside their social circles. Moreover, these individuals have already passed through the "finding a partner" stage, making them more suitable candidates. Thus, this type of interaction can help alleviate their negative emotions to some extent. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are obtained through raising the standards for selecting "Da Zi" partners and actively participating in interactions.

#### **4.3. Social Values**

The diversification of social values also contributes to the formation of "Da Zi Culture." The social needs of the youth demographic are often diverse, including basic needs such as information communication and fulfilling the desire to share, as well as needs aligned with society, expanding social circles, or direct social-oriented needs. "Da Zi social interaction" possesses social advantages such as easy experimentation, high compatibility, and low burden. Views on compatibility vary, but at least current research indicates that the compatibility of "Da Zi" in specific areas like studying, shopping, dining, and exercising is relatively high. Easy experimentation and low burden correspond to low "entry barriers" and "relationship detachment," giving the youth certain social advantages. Therefore, social relationships, social needs, and the social advantages corresponding to them possess significant potential in the formation process of "Da Zi Culture."

#### **4.4. Internal and External Driving Forces**

Self-realization motivation is the primary internal driving force, and individual goals vary. Whether it's mutual supervision, efficiency improvement, gaining motivation, self-improvement, or seeking opportunities and achievements, these can all serve as the main driving forces for engaging in "Da Zi social interaction." Personality traits belong to external driving forces, with a focus on the "Da Zi partner candidates" of the youth demographic. These "Da Zi partner candidates" are favored for their approachability, privacy respect, boundary awareness, and high inclusiveness. Of course, the formation of these traits may have a certain connection with "Da Zi Culture" itself. Temporal and spatial dynamics and technological dynamics are evident external driving force factors. Unfamiliar territories, suitable times, and geographical reasons provide the youth with reasons to engage in "Da Zi social interaction." The powerful aggregation capabilities of social platforms and community

organizations, as well as features like algorithm recommendations, also serve as crucial driving forces in propelling the formation of "Da Zi Culture."

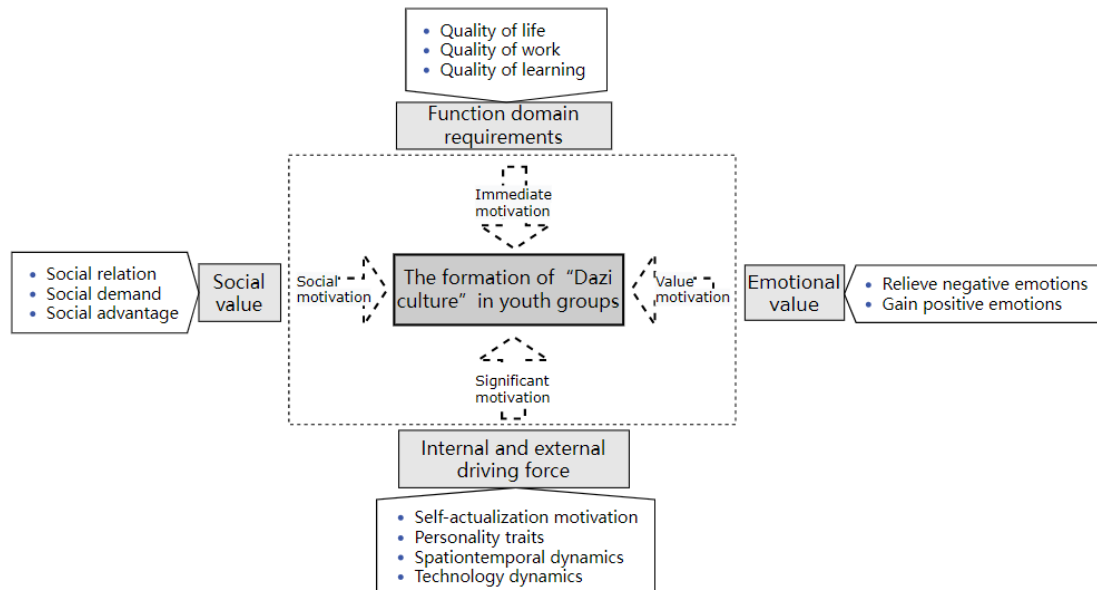


Figure 1: Model of the Mechanism of "Da Zi Culture" Formation in the Youth Demographic

## 5. Conclusion and Reflection

This study, based on grounded theory, conducted an investigation into various factors influencing the formation mechanism of "Da Zi Culture" within the youth demographic. The study ultimately deduced a formation mechanism model with functional domain needs, emotional values, social values, and internal/external driving forces as its core components. Among these, functional domain needs serve as direct motivators, while emotional values and social values are motivational factors. Internal and external driving forces play significant roles as motivational factors. Functional domain needs are often situational, allowing youth to choose "Da Zi" at any time when influenced by one of these factors. Emotional values and social values have a sustained influence on the youth demographic, with these two types of values mutually affecting each other. For instance, the quality of youth's social relationships can impact the generation of positive or negative emotions, and the expectation of gaining positive emotions or overcoming negative emotions can influence social choices. The primary driving force in internal and external motivation is internal motivation, namely the youth's self-realization motivation. In terms of external driving forces, the personality traits of "Da Zi" and temporal and spatial dynamics are influencing factors. The technological dynamic includes the powerful aggregation capabilities of social platforms, community organizations, and algorithm recommendations, which are crucial factors enabling the rapid formation and dissemination of "Da Zi Culture" within the youth demographic.

In the concrete practice of "finding a partner," these young individuals, through close contact and firsthand experience, gradually formed an acceptance of the culture of "finding a partner." Social identity theory, proposed by European social psychologists Tajfel and Turner, suggests that social identity refers to "individuals recognizing that they belong to a specific social group and simultaneously recognizing the emotions and value significance brought to them as group members" [8]. The youth demographic gradually assimilates into the embrace of "Da Zi," obtaining corresponding emotional feedback while satisfying their own needs. As they identify with this culture, they are also shaped by it in return. "Da Zi social interaction" allows the youth demographic to break

through the stereotypical impressions of "stranger interactions," evolving from isolation and distrust to gradually establishing connections. However, the stability and duration of these connections require long-term participatory observation and research.

In terms of theoretical value, this study starts from the core issue of the formation mechanism of "Da Zi Culture" within the youth demographic, conducts in-depth research on the youth "Da Zi" group, and, based on collected interview data, refines, summarizes, abstracts, and generalizes four interconnected factors. The study ultimately constructs a theoretical model regarding this issue. In terms of practical value, "Da Zi Culture" is a youth subculture that emerges during the gradual formation and widespread dissemination of new social interaction patterns among the current youth demographic. Reflecting the complex mindset and diverse demands of the youth demographic in modern society, this online youth subculture mirrors the real challenges of social development, providing an excellent perspective for understanding social change and development [9]

In summary, this study engages in dialogue and breakthroughs with previous research frameworks based on an experiential and empirical approach. However, the study also has certain limitations. Firstly, under the paradigm of qualitative research methods, subjective biases are inevitably present in the research process. Secondly, this study investigates existing factors influencing the formation mechanism of youth "Da Zi Culture," and it cannot make accurate predictions about potential changes in "Da Zi Culture" in the future. Thirdly, the interview sample in this study shows a slight female predominance and a primary age distribution in the 17-28 age range, implying potential limitations in the universality and representativeness of the research conclusions. It is hoped that with the continuous progress of future research, this theoretical model can achieve broader coverage and applicability.

## References

- [1] Wang, J. Y. (2023, June 12). "Da Zi" Socializing: New Expression of Emotional Needs for Young People. *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, 2023(005). DOI: 10.28656/n.cnki.nrmrh.2023.001906.
- [2] Wang, P. Z., & Sun, L. P. (2023, June 01). New Socialization Methods for Young People: 72.6% of Surveyed Youth Have "Da Zi" in Their Lives. *China Youth Daily*, 2023(010). DOI: 10.38302/n.cnki.nzggq.2023.001845.
- [3] Liu, M. Z. (2022). From Social Fear to Social Confidence: Psychological Analysis Behind Youth Socialization Issues. *People's Forum*, 2022(01), 114-119.
- [4] Chen, X. M. (2015). The Application of Grounded Theory in Educational Research in China. *Peking University Education Review*, 2015, 13(01), 2-15+188. DOI: 10.19355/j.cnki.1671-9468.2015.01.002.
- [5] Ma, J. (2022). Factors Affecting the Diffusion Impact of Network Public Opinion Governance Policies Based on Grounded Theory. *News Enthusiast*, 2022(09), 30-34. DOI: 10.16017/j.cnki.xwahz.2022.09.015.
- [6] Osborne, S. P., Radnor, Z., & Storks, K. (2016). Co-production and the Co-creation of Value in Public Services: A Suitable Case for Treatment? *Public Management Review*, 2016, 18(5), 639-653.
- [7] Wang, Y. (2022). Media Also Needs to Provide Emotional Value. *Youth Journalist*, 2022(16), 1. DOI: 10.15997/j.cnki.qnjz.2022.16.001.
- [8] Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University, p. 105.
- [9] Ping, Z. Q., & Wei, X. R. (2018). Social Conflict, Communication, and Governance of Online Youth Subcultures. *Chinese Youth Research*, 2018(11), 35-41. DOI: 10.19633/j.cnki.11-2579/d.2018.0174.