

# Symbolic Performance: An Interpretation of 'Animalization' Socializing in the Context of Internet

Yu Chenxi

*School of Journalism and Communication, Ningxia University, Ningxia, China*

**Abstract:** *With the rapid development of Internet technology, people also begin to adapt to the physical absence in the network, and gradually explore how to socialize in the network world. In this context, "animalization" socializing has become popular and successfully connected to social media, becoming one of the basic expression means of expression and communication in daily network socializing. However, the emotional needs and personalized expression needs of contemporary Internet users are also being met through "animalization" -- the "cute", "healing" and "contrast" shown by animal-like pictures or emojis. Therefore, "animalization" socializing has turned into a new popular trend in social networks. In this thesis, the formation, evolution mechanism and influence of "animalization" socializing were taken as the entry point, and the "animalization" socializing in the context of the Internet was also interpreted.*

**Keywords:** *"Animalization" socializing, Dramaturgy theory, Emotional resonance, Carnival theory*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, people have become accustomed to socializing on the internet and have formed unique social expression systems based on this. In these systems of social expression, "animalization" socializing expression, by virtue of its characteristics, has led to an increasing number of people accepting "animalization" socializing expression and building their own expression patterns on this basis. Currently, the three most common types of "animalization" socializing networking are based on harmonic stems, "animalization" socializing emojis and "animalised" avatars. These three categories are also driving the penetration of "animalization" socializing networking into all aspects of social life.

## 2. Definition and characteristics of "animalization" socializing

This paper adopts Professor Cai Bohua's definition of "animalization" socializing interaction, which is "a kind of animalistic interaction behaviour mediated by representational symbols through social platforms".<sup>[1]</sup> At this stage, the "animalization" socializing interaction of online users is mainly based on social media platforms to convey and share their suggestions and opinions with animalistic representational symbols. Socialisation" is mainly based on social media platforms, where users use representational symbols to convey and share their suggestions and opinions. In "A Theory of Play and Fantasy", Bateson mentions the concept of "metacommunication", and the process of "animalistic" socialisation, in which online users select and construct animal images to process and shape new meanings and behaviours, has also become "Metacommunication" is a concrete manifestation of this. Currently, there are several characteristics of the phenomenon of "animalization" socializing networking.

### 2.1. Healing - animals can be cute

In the age of online social interaction, users subconsciously amplify the "cute" attribute of animals when communicating socially, regardless of the nature of the animal. The "cute" nature and the healing properties are emphasized. For example, in the online society, the already cute cats and dogs have become more and more adorable as they are known as meowing and woofing, while the tigers, lions, spiders and other animals that may be feared by people have become healing in the "animalised" society, turning them into "little brain axes". The animals that might be feared by people have been transformed into cute things such as "little brain axes", "big scythes" and "big pearls". Thus, everything can be innocent, cute and healing in the "animalistic" society.

## ***2.2. Harmonisation - the animals' harmonic stems***

In the "animalization" socializing context, users are used to producing and reprocessing texts, and as a result, many relevant harmonic stems have emerged, which people choose to use to express their cuteness and non-aggressiveness, such as "you too have to go for it today duck" "There are many examples like the above, and these textual processes are not static, but also vary according to the habits of internet users. These texts are not static, but change according to the habits of users, but it is undeniable that these subjective texts play an essential role in the "animalization" socializing scene, and to a certain extent, enhance the spreadability of the texts.

## ***2.3. Creativity - everything can be social***

In today's "animalization" socializing world, internet users have started to create unique words, not only by harmonising them, but also by changing the original word to give it a deeper emotional expression, extending and recreating it on top of the original. For example, in the Xinhua dictionary, duck is a family of birds with a flat beak and short legs, webbed toes, good at swimming and unable to fly high. In social networking platforms, users first replaced the exclamation "yah" with "duck", adding a sense of mischievousness and cuteness to the original meaning. Later on, the word 'duck' was used instead of the real word 'pressure', and the phrase 'so ducky' was used in a number of ways. In addition, in the social discourse of "animalisation", there are also metaphors that give new connotations and usage rules to familiar animal words, many of which are familiar or not even considered different in real life, but have new semantic meanings and are rapidly gaining popularity in the online world. For example, "snakeskin" and "this is too snakeskin" are not snakeskin, but are used by internet users to express their discontent with something.

## **3. The selection and construction of animal images under "animalistic" socialization**

In cyberspace, the animal is not a physical animal, but a symbol, and our "animalized" society is a way of reconstructing and presenting meaning based on tradition. How we choose and reconstruct the many animal symbols is often a matter of the user's own cultural imagination of the animal's personality and emotions. In other words, people give these animals some of the personality of a human being, which is not possessed by the animal itself, but rather the characteristics and feelings that people expect to be conveyed or expressed in the process of socialising through animal images.

### ***3.1. The macro-context of the construction of animal images under "animalized" socialization***

The use of animal images to intervene in everyday social media expressions is a means of constructing online modernity, and "animalization" is not the only means, but it is also very important in this huge construction project. Before "animalisation", real people could also be a vehicle for the construction of online modernity, such as Ms. Zheng, who is well known for her figure in the eyes of 1818 Gold, and Xiao Wu, who is "good-looking". All of these are inseparable from the emotional appeal of a collective sexual revelry, which we call a media ritual. Internet users often socialise online based on the ritual of "full presence" on social media. For example, the popular video of a cat being placed on a piece of tape and then standing up and walking in fear was so funny that it led to imitations on social media, the content and form of which were basically the same at a glance. In a similar way, animals or animal images have entered directly into social communication. The parodies are not intended to convey any meaning or emotion, but rather to find excitement in online life, to seek a sense of presence and collective revelry.

### ***3.2. The construction of animal characters***

The construction and imagination of animal characters have been an instinctive human behaviour for a long time, and animal images existed in ancient Chinese poetry and mythology, which were more of an 'animal metaphor', a unique intention. The totems of ancient Chinese tribes and the construction of dragons, for example, were based on human emotions and an emotional imagining of animals. For example, the dragon is a symbol of the sons of Yan Huang and a representation of imperial power in China, but in the West 'dragon' is a representation of evil, and traditional tales celebrate dragon slayers. This shows that the construction of animal images is based on human's cultural heritage, triple standards and emotional appeals. In the age of online social media, users have already constructed a set

of emotional imagery about animals based on the above factors, and are reconstructing different animals.

### ***3.3. Evolution of animal imagery***

Animal images existed in ancient Chinese poetry and mythology, and were more of an 'animal metaphor' and a unique intention, the first stage of animal personification, known as Animal Personification 1.0. In the pre-social media era, people were introduced to already constructed animal images through animated films with animal protagonists, and these anthropomorphic animal images became known through traditional media, this was the era of animal personification 2.0, and in the social media era, people reconstructed meanings based on existing animal images. The new imaginings of animals are further removed from the animals themselves and carry more anthropomorphic emotions and special meaning symbols. For example, in the traditional Disney characterisation of Donald Duck as a patient but somewhat noisy gentleman, the image of Donald Duck has now been reconstructed for social interaction, reduced to a few small frames or pictures, usually with funny and strange expressions or movements, and accompanied by messages such as "Today is also a day full of energy" and "Despondent Duck". "A melancholy duck" and "A stuffed duck". At this stage, convenient social media and editing tools play an important role in enabling social media users to move from passive acceptance of animal images to active construction of meaningful subjects of animal images. This is the era of animal personification 3.0, which can also be called the era of anthropomorphism, because, in the social media era, the animal image has been completely transformed from personification to anthropomorphism, and the meaning of the animal image has been reconstructed.

### ***3.4. Selection of types of animal images***

In today's pluralistic world of subjects, media contexts and graphic forms have accelerated the process of constructing animal images. From the era of animalized images 1.0 to animalized images 3.0, how do we choose among the many animal images? From ancient totem myths to the current 'animalised' emojis, our choice of animal imagery has been based on three aspects.

#### ***3.4.1. The role of animals for humans***

Our choice of animal imagery is generally based on the emotional construct of what animals do for people, for example, we are more likely to choose cats and dogs or even poultry such as chickens and ducks in "animalization" socializing situations, but no one would choose to use a mosquito as a social symbol.

#### ***3.4.2. Personified according to the animal's own characteristics***

For example, we think of the rooster as a very industrious animal, so we use the image of the rooster for social networking in scenarios of hard work or encouragement.

#### ***3.4.3. Weakening undesirable factors and selective shaping***

We have a fear of large carnivores like the tiger, but when we use it for online social networking, we unconsciously weaken its scary factor, portraying something completely opposite and submissive, subjectively ignoring the tiger itself.<sup>[2]</sup>

## **4. The psychological motivation behind "animalistic" socialization**

With the development of technology, people have become accustomed to "animalization" socializing interaction, where animals are shaped into images that correspond to human beings and are special symbols for the expression of emotions by internet users, reflecting and shaping imaginary objects by the user community itself. The psychological mechanisms behind this portrayal are as follows.

### ***4.1. Collective psychological analysis***

The discourse of internet users in social media is increasingly 'animalistic', and in social contexts this 'animalistic' expression is a more rounded way of expressing emotions, reflecting the collective psychology of internet users' defence mechanisms. Our use of animal imagery goes some way to bridging the contextual deficit in social networks. The satisfaction of the "lack of communication cues"

and the sleek "animalistic presentation" is an important reason for the popularity of "animalization" socializing networking. The reason behind our "animalistic" socialisation is a psychological need to supplement the social media context, because in online interaction, we are in a state of confusion, you never know whether the person you are chatting with or playing games with is a human or a dog, so in the online social scene, we unconsciously form a kind of internal self. Therefore, in the online social sphere, we unconsciously develop a psychological protection mechanism within ourselves, trying to show our kindest and friendliest side to others in the online social sphere, in order to reduce potential social stress and conflict, and avoid arguments in the network. The dog-head emoji on forums and Weibo is the most common example of this. No matter how heated our words are, it seems that adding that dog-head emoji at the end can soften the intensity and serve as a lubricant, hence the phrase we often say: the sky is alive, the earth is alive, and the dog's head must keep us safe. Expression through a cute animalised figure can complement the panic and stress caused by a lack of context and reduce the likelihood of conflict in a virtual space. Although dog-heads are not our real thoughts, and the cute character we portray using animals in cyberspace is not the same as our real character, it is indeed a common psychology among internet users. We often use cute emojis to hide the lack of inner turmoil. But as we develop trust with others online, we become less 'animalistic' socially. But this is not always the case, as there are many influences on social media networks other than intimacy.

#### ***4.2. The need for emotional comfort***

The popularity of "animalization" socializing networking is based on the collective need for emotional comfort in the virtual network space of the Internet user community. This demand is reflected on two levels: the need for emotional comfort and the need for a popular discourse in the social community.

##### ***4.2.1. The need for social expression of emotions***

On social media platforms, people tend to gravitate toward the healing side of things. Especially in today's social pace, almost all internet users feel stressed in their daily lives, especially as Chinese society enters a critical period of transition, and this stress often translates into anxiety and confusion. To alleviate such feelings, people start to pursue healing things, things that are cute and cuddly, and which can soothe our moods. In the process of socialising online, people choose to "animalise" socially to heal the psychological wounds that are prevalent in cyberspace in order to communicate better.

##### ***4.2.2. The need for a social discourse***

In social networking platforms, we often identify ourselves as "living in the present" through online socialising. It objectively creates a sense of presence and avoids being labeled as "non-modern".

#### ***4.3. The need for realistic confrontation***

They live in a post-reform China, rich in material goods and diverse in ideas, and as the original inhabitants of the Internet, they are more unrestrained in the network. In the internet, they are able to break through the traditional social hierarchy, and many elements that could only move within the same class begin to move across classes. The boundaries between producers and consumers of information are gradually blurred, and they have even become what Toffler called "producers and consumers", and people unconsciously choose to use "animalistic" socialisation as a social method and standard in order to better grasp the online platform and gain practical benefits. The standard.

#### ***4.4. Identity under the circle***

In contrast to traditional mass media, the Internet itself does not completely break down the fragmentation of human relations, and even to some extent increases the complexity of users' social interactions. The anonymity provided by the internet has created new connections between users, even as they engage in 'animalistic' social interaction, becoming a community of imagination and action, where traditional identities in the real world no longer exist and all social interaction is transitive, where we share more of a representation and What we share is more of a representation and belief, and 'animalised' socialisation deepens this belief.

#### ***4.5. Missing image building needs***

In his 'mimetic theory' of self-image construction, Goffman suggests that social ontology is a grand

stage with separate contexts in which we reflect differently and behave appropriately according to the characteristics and state of the situation itself. Merovitz builds on his own insights, linking media, space and context. In his view, the use of different media produces different feelings, and different feelings lead to different contexts, which further influence people's way of thinking and acting. In the virtual world of the Internet, users prefer to hide their identities in the display world and to present and communicate new images in social media. The construction of a new image cannot be achieved without good communication, so people are selective in their interactions, constructing a perfect, mainstream image through "animalization" socializing interaction. The animal's own self-image and some of its good qualities make up for the lack of imagery in the image context. In online social interaction, we would assume that the person using the bunny emoji would be a sweet and gentle girl.

#### ***4.6. The need to compensate for physical absence***

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens has developed the concept of 'deterritorialization', arguing that 'social relations are 'detached' from territorial associations that interact with each other, from associations that are reconstructed through an infinite traversal of indeterminate time'. With this concept, he perfectly illustrates the three-dimensional relationships in modern society. Before the Internet era, people's spatial and temporal locations were highly consistent and therefore social practices based on them were intelligible, whereas today, with the rapid development of the Internet, the constraints of time and space have been broken and we can communicate and interact with people anywhere at any time, and people's social activities are uncertain. In the process of offline communication, we can use our own bodies and make use of physical symbols to supplement information. In the internet, however, the body is absent and people with different perceptual stereotypes and understanding systems make the interpretation of information more uncertain. This uncertainty is somewhat reduced by 'animalistic' socialisation.

### **5. Problems and countermeasures under "animalistic" socialization**

#### ***5.1. Problems with "animalistic" socialization***

In our everyday online social context, we are used to 'animalistic' social interaction, a more virtual social interaction in a physically absent online space, ignoring the difference between real society and online society. This has led to a number of problems that we must be aware of.

##### ***5.1.1. Self-improvement in enclaves***

The high pressure of real life has led to the pursuit of 'animalistic' socialising in the hope of relieving stress. Many adults even use 'animalistic' socialisation to pursue childish pleasures and refuse to grow up and grow up. Some scholars have pointed out that the "cute culture" in Japan has brought about a kind of closure of the Japanese people as a whole, which will later lead to the disintegration of internal cohesion, a gradual decline in learning ability and a downward trend in society as a whole. The "animalistic" society and the "cute culture" have certain similarities, so it is important to pay attention to the development of "animalistic" society in order to make timely adjustments before problems arise. The development of 'animalistic' socialising should be monitored so that adjustments can be made before problems arise.

##### ***5.1.2. Aberrations in interaction mentality and language development***

"It is a new way of opening up the social network and a new standard of social etiquette, replacing the initial greeting with a more animated approach. It is important to note, however, that it does not change the cold and unstable relationships that characterize online human relationships. Internet users simply rely on this kind of social interaction and leave as soon as they have got what they want. There is also a nonsensical lexical approach to 'animalistic' social interaction, which has an impact on the structure and aesthetics of the language."<sup>[4]</sup>

##### ***5.1.3. Compulsion of subcultures***

"Although it is not enough to completely change the real world, it has changed every member of society, especially young people, who, in the process of "animalistic" socialising, can easily get themselves trapped in the course of their "animalistic" socialisation, they can easily get themselves caught up in a symbolic consumerism of nothingness."<sup>[3]</sup> In today's world of entertainment, internet users are unable to distinguish clearly between their "self" and their "mirror self" when they are in the

midst of "animalistic" social interaction for a long time, and even from the "In the long run, this will lead to an obsession with the small world of the self and an inability to face the real world, resulting in a social phobia of real life.

## **5.2. Solutions**

In response to the problems associated with 'animalistic' socialisation, we need to promote and channel the positive aspects and control the negative ones, with a view to eliminating them.

### **5.2.1. Cultivate and shape a positive mindset from the network users themselves**

In terms of shaping a positive mindset, we must provide a channel for voice and expression; at least half of the problems with mindsets are due to the lack of a channel for voice. It is also important to monitor the mindset and to intervene socially when there is a collective mindset disorder.

### **5.2.2. Strengthening the construction of a discourse culture**

The vast amount of information available on the internet can lead to undesirable media exposure and a range of problems if not adequately guided. Therefore, as "animalistic" socialising becomes popular today, we need to encourage them to step out of their circles and tribes while accepting them. We need to strengthen the construction of civilised discourse and promote the use of discourse by internet users to build a good online environment.

### **5.2.3. Strengthen the guidance of mainstream culture**

The mainstream media should take a positive view of behaviour in online social networking, allowing freedom to develop while ensuring that basic directions are followed. At the same time, the mainstream culture can absorb some favourable emerging language patterns in the process of providing guidance and can be better guided.

## **6. Conclusion**

Harold Innes believes that the strengths of a new medium will lead to the birth of a new civilization. From "cheering ducks" to all kinds of small dogs and cats, to the animals' cute and funny emoji packs and moving pictures ..... "Animalized" socialization does not require a high threshold of understanding, and it is a natural pleasure for people to communicate. Although "animalistic" social networking provides us with a new social context, to a certain extent, it makes up for the missing image. However, we must always be self-reflective and remove the evil and make it clear.

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