An Analysis of the Psychological Causes and Countermeasures of Improper Online Speech by University Faculty

Huizhen Zheng*
Fujian Normal University, Fujian, China
***Corresponding Author, Email: 5933439@qq.com**

Abstract
While the public enjoys the benefits of "free expression" brought about by technological advancements, instances of improper online speech also occur. Even university faculty, known for their high reputation and quality, sometimes engage in such behavior. This study investigates the current state of improper online speech among university faculty through a questionnaire survey. The findings reveal that this behavior is not a result of a decline in professional ethics. Instead, it is more closely related to psychological factors such as conformity due to the belief that the law does not hold the majority accountable, self-control loss in anonymous environments, self-exposure to seek attention, cognitive dissonance from value conflicts, and a lack of belief in fairness. The article suggests addressing these issues from multiple perspectives, including psychological, institutional, and educational approaches, to enhance the quality of online speech among teachers.

Keywords
university faculty, improper online speech, psychological causes

1.Introduction

With the widespread adoption of the internet and the rapid development of information dissemination technologies, the online world has become an indispensable part of daily life. Network media, characterized by its high openness, interactivity, and convenience, has become the primary source of information for the public and a tool for online expression. It is now the most common medium through which people obtain information, form opinions, and initiate actions. However, this environment also brings certain challenges and risks. In the online setting, individuals' ethical behavior is more prone to deviate from moral standards, resulting in improper online speech such as baseless speculation, fabrications, and abusive attacks.

University faculty, who possess high cultural literacy and professional knowledge, are frequently active in online spaces. Many "internet celebrity" teachers and renowned faculty members attract significant public attention with their every word and action. The vast majority of university faculty are dedicated and virtuous, diligently fulfilling their roles in education. They effectively utilize online platforms for academic exchanges, teaching discussions, and teacher-student interactions. This not only enhances their academic influence but also brings positive effects to their institutions and students. However, a small number of university faculty members have posted inappropriate and erroneous statements online, drawing public scrutiny and causing negative repercussions. Such instances of improper online speech by university faculty can easily provoke public concern and doubt about the quality of the academic community. They also severely damage the societal im-

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.008

age of education and the culture of respecting teachers, potentially impacting students' mental health and academic growth. Therefore, this issue demands serious attention.

In recent years, numerous cases of improper online speech by university faculty have been reported. Is this a sign of a decline in professional ethics, or is it the result of impulsive actions by individual teachers? What are the psychological causes behind the improper online speech of highly educated and high-quality university faculty? These questions merit thoughtful consideration and exploration. Based on this, the present study conducted a questionnaire survey on improper online speech among university faculty in selected institutions in Fujian Province. By analyzing recent cases and identifying the psychological factors contributing to this behavior, we aim to propose targeted countermeasures.

2. Investigation of the Psychological Causes of Improper Online Speech by University Faculty

2.1 Compilation of the Improper Online Speech Questionnaire

Through the collection and analysis of cases of improper online speech by university faculty, it was found that such behavior primarily manifests in the following aspects:(1)Expressing Statements Contrary to Professional Ethics: Some teachers post indecent or inappropriate remarks online, such as defamation and insults, which severely violate professional ethics and negatively impact the reputation of their institutions.(2)Personal Attacks on Administrators or Students: A few teachers use online platforms to publicly defame and insult school administrators, students, or even principals, showing a lack of respect for others and professional integrity.(3)Posting Illegal or Inappropriate Comments: Some teachers publish illegal or inappropriate statements online, such as inciting posts or extreme comments, which not only go against the professional nature of teaching but may also violate relevant laws and regulations.(4)Irrational Negative Comments on Schools or Individuals: Some teachers irrationally and subjectively criticize school reform measures or development directions online, lacking objectivity and fairness, which tarnishes the school's image.(5)Emotional Venting on Online Platforms: Some teachers overly express their emotions online, such as dissatisfaction or anger towards the school or individuals.

Based on existing research on improper online speech, we categorized this behavior into four major types and designed a questionnaire with 22 items around these common types:(1)Rebellious Speech: This includes expressions of extreme views such as anti-party, anti-society, and anti-humanity, often due to cognitive biases, personal experiences, external influence, or support from foreign anti-China forces. An example is posting comments that harm national interests or violate social norms.(2)Emotional Speech: This refers to expressions triggered by negative social attitudes. Individuals who feel isolated, have low social participation, or exhibit extreme narcissism tend to have high anxiety, low impulse control, or high irritability, leading to emotional outbursts and extreme opinions online. For example, posting comments that vent personal emotions indiscriminately.(3)Profit-Driven Speech: This includes creating topics and hotspots to attract attention and gain benefits, such as spreading rumors or defamatory content for clicks, likes, or tips.(4) Conformist Speech: This occurs when individuals fail to critically evaluate the information they encounter and blindly follow trends, expressing opinions or supporting causes without understanding the facts.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

The questionnaire uses a 4-point scale, where respondents report the frequency of witnessing or engaging in improper online speech, with 1 indicating never, 2 occasionally, 3 often, and 4 always.

2.2 Belief in a Just World

The internet is a complex and popular cultural environment, and improper online speech is an overt behavior in this space. Implicit psychological factors often precede overt behavior, linking moral cognition, moral emotions, and moral will closely to psychology. Cognitive psychological changes can lead to "digital disorientation" and subsequent behavioral deviations, which is a root cause of moral misconduct. The Belief in a Just World (BJW), introduced by psychologist Lerner in the 1970s, is a significant cognitive factor that influences individual psychology and behavior. It posits that most people believe the world is fundamentally orderly and fair, where events follow certain rules, and everyone gets what they deserve. For instance, diligent work leads to rewards, and "good begets good, evil begets evil." Individuals with a high belief in a just world often exhibit fewer violations and legal intentions, whereas those with a low belief report more anxiety, depression, anger, and aggressive behavior.Research shows a significant negative correlation between BJW and online moral misconduct, indicating that BJW can negatively predict such behavior.Improper online speech constitutes a form of online moral misconduct, representing negative and deviant behaviors in the digital space. This behavior may be closely related to the Belief in a Just World (BJW).

This study uses the BJW scale developed by Dalbert et al.[4], and revised by Su Zhiqiang et al. (2021), to measure university faculty's BJW. The scale comprises 13 items, divided into personal BJW and general BJW. General BJW measures the perception of societal fairness, while personal BJW assesses the perception of fairness in personal experiences. The scale uses a 6-point scoring system, with higher scores indicating a stronger belief in a just world.

2.2.1 Survey Results

The online questionnaire was created using Wenjuanxing and distributed randomly online to collect data. A total of 240 questionnaires were collected. The basic information of the collected samples is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic Information of Respondents

		Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	48.7
	Female	122	51.3
Ethnicity	Han Chinese	232	97.5
	Ethnic Minority	6	2.5
Age	35 years and below	136	57.1
	36-40 years	41	17.2
	41-50 years	51	21.4
	Above 50 years	10	4.2
Discipline	Philosophy	6	2.5
	Economics	11	4.6
	Law	22	9.2
	Engineering	23	9.7
	Literature	27	11.3
	History	10	4.2
	Science	34	14.3
	Education	47	19.7
	Agriculture	3	1.3
	Medicine	7	2.9

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.008

	Management	26	10.9
	Arts	16	6.7
	Interdisciplinary Studies	6	2.5
Political Affiliation	CPC Member (including probationary)	212	89.1
	Communist Youth League Member	1	0.4
	Member of Democratic Parties	6	2.5
	Non-partisan	1	0.4
	Masses	18	7.6
Position	Subject Teacher	142	59.7
	Political Theory Teacher	20	8.4
	Counselor	72	30.3
	Homeroom Teacher	32	13.4
	Graduate Advisor	41	17.2
Professional Title	Senior	15	6.3
	Associate Senior	57	23.9
	Intermediate	121	50.8
	Junior	29	12.2
	None	16	6.7
Marital Status	Single	70	29.4
	Married	165	69.3
	Divorced	3	1.3
Years of Service	Less than 1 year	45	18.9
	1-3 years	47	19.7
	4-10 years	59	24.8
	11-20 years	62	26.1
	21-30 years	22	9.2
	31 years and above	3	1.3
Highest Education	Associate Degree	0	0
	Bachelor's Degree	21	8.8
	Graduate Degree	217	91.2
Highest Degree	Bachelor's	16	6.7
	Master's	111	46.6
	Doctorate	111	46.6
Institution Granting Final Degree	985 Universities	49	20.6
	211 Universities	33	13.9
	Non-985/211 Universities	122	51.3
	"Double First-Class" Universities	25	10.5
	Overseas Universities	9	3.8

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that the average self-reported improper online speech among university teachers was 1.01±0.068, with a minimum value of 1 and a maximum value of 2. For observed improper online speech of peers, the average was 1.02±0.113, with a minimum value of 1 and a maximum value of 2.14. Furthermore, since self-assessments are more likely to be influenced by social desirability, peer assessments were used to further analyze different types of improper online speech among university teachers. According to Table 2, for all 22 types of improper online speech surveyed, the option “Never” was reported most frequently, and the option “Always” was not reported at all. This indicates that, overall, improper online speech among university teachers is very rare. Among the reported behaviors, “Posting false information anonymously” was the most common, with 6.7% reporting “Occasionally.” This may reflect the impact of online anonymity on improper online speech. Emotional expressions were relatively more frequent among the four types of speech, with 4.2% reporting “Occasionally” and 0.4% reporting “Often” for “Posting emotional outbursts online,” totaling 4.6%. Conversely, reactive and profit-driven speech were relatively rare, with behaviors such as “Posting extremist religious violence

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

online," "Leaking state and workplace secrets," and "Spreading vulgar information for profit" each reporting "Never" at over 99%.

Table 2 Proportions of Different Types of Improper Online Speech

Improper Online Speech Behavior	Never (%)	Occasionally (%)	Often (%)	Always (%)
1. Posting false information anonymously	93.3	6.7	0	0
2. Posting defamatory remarks	95.4	4.6	0	0
3. Malicious spamming or flooding	96.6	3.4	0	0
4. Anonymously insulting others online	97.1	2.9	0	0
5. Posting remarks online that damage the authority of the central government or violate party policies	98.3	1.7	0	0
6. Posting remarks online that harm national interests, social public interests, or violate public order and customs	97.9	2.1	0	0
7. Posting discriminatory or insulting remarks about students online	98.7	1.3	0	0
8. Using professional convenience to post confidential information for personal gain online	99.2	0.8	0	0
9. Posting historical nihilistic false statements online	97.1	2.9	0	0
10. Posting religious extremist violent remarks online	99.6	0.4	0	0
11. Posting extreme anti-peace development remarks online	99.2	0.8	0	0
12. Posting emotional outbursts online	95.4	4.2	0.4	0
13. Posting aggressive remarks online to maliciously provoke online disputes	98.7	1.3	0	0
14. Recklessly commenting on others' situations online	97.5	2.1	0.4	0
15. Spreading malicious rumors for profit online	99.2	0.8	0	0
16. Spreading vulgar information for profit online	99.6	0.4	0	0
17. Spreading personal privacy information for profit online	99.2	0.4	0.4	0
18. Excessive commercialization and entertainment online for profit	98.7	1.3	0	0
19. Blindly taking a stance or supporting events online without understanding the truth	95.8	3.8	0.4	0
20. Indifferently commenting on events online and deliberately fanning the flames	97.9	1.3	0.8	0
21. Posting biased remarks online, such as gender, regional, or racial prejudice	99.6	2.5	0.4	0
22. Leaking state and workplace secrets online	99.6	0.4	0	0

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the belief in a just world and improper online speech. The results showed a significant negative correlation between university teachers' self-reported belief in a just world and their self-reported improper online speech ($r = -0.145$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the higher the belief in a just world among university teachers, the less likely they are to engage in improper online speech. In other words, when university teachers perceive society as just and believe their own experiences to be fair, they are less likely to exhibit improper online behavior. Conversely, a lower belief in a just world is associated with a higher likelihood of improper online speech.

In summary, the survey conducted in this study preliminarily reflects that university teachers generally possess high professional qualities and ethics, with improper online speech being uncommon. The instances of improper online speech among university teachers in recent years are likely exceptions, possibly related to specific circumstances of individual teachers, and often manifest as emotional outbursts. Additionally, since this study relies on self-reported data through questionnaires, it is susceptible to social desirability bias.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.008

University teachers may be reluctant or unwilling to report instances of improper online speech, even if they occur in real life. Therefore, the interpretation of the results should be approached with caution.

3.Psychological Causes of Improper Online Speech Among University Teachers

Considering the hidden nature of individual psychological factors and the influence of social desirability, this paper analyzes the psychological factors of improper online speech among university teachers through a combination of questionnaire surveys and social case studies.

3.1 The Herd Mentality of Impunity

The herd mentality is a phenomenon where individuals tend to follow the behavior and opinions of the majority under group pressure. This is particularly evident on online platforms, where the open and interactive environment makes university teachers' statements susceptible to the evaluations and reactions of others. In an effort to avoid conflict with group opinions, teachers might echo certain voices to gain group acceptance, leading to improper speech. On a platform teeming with diverse opinions and heated discussions, this conformity can deviate teachers from rational and independent thinking, potentially resulting in irresponsible or inaccurate statements that harm their professional image and public trust. The perceived safety and approval when aligned with others' opinions embolden them to speak out, exacerbating the phenomenon of improper speech.

3.2 The Self-Disinhibition Effect of Anonymity

Anonymity is a key feature of the online environment. Under anonymous conditions, university teachers might experience self-disinhibition, a psychological state resulting from the lack of identity recognition and social supervision. The anonymity and non-face-to-face nature of online communication reduce psychological barriers, leading some teachers to relax their usual behavioral constraints and professional ethics when expressing opinions. Without concern that their statements will be linked to their real identity, they lack external social and professional constraints, making them more prone to impulsive and aggressive behavior. Anonymity also leads to moral disengagement, weakening moral restraints and prompting behavior that breaches moral boundaries. In this state, teachers might neglect their moral responsibility and professional ethics, making statements that do not align with their identity and social expectations.

3.3 The Self-Exposure Drive for Attention

Despite enjoying high social prestige and recognition, university teachers often face significant mental stress in their daily lives and work. When they feel lonely or have low social engagement, or when their impulse control is low or they are excessively self-confident, they are more prone to emotional outbursts. In the absence of emotional support and guidance in real life, the anonymity and virtual nature of the internet become outlets for their emotions. They can express dissatisfaction and anger without real-world constraints, leading to improper speech. Additionally, online speech can quickly garner attention and approval. Some teachers may neglect their professional ethics to attract attention, creating a "contrasting" persona. The amplification effect of social media means that every word and action can be magnified and scrutinized.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

In pursuing personal influence, some teachers might make extreme or irresponsible statements to attract attention, further exacerbating the issue of improper speech.

3.4 Cognitive Dissonance from Value Conflicts

During social transition periods, some university teachers experience value conflicts, leading to the erosion of moral boundaries and resulting in improper online speech. When a teacher's inner beliefs clash with external pressures or group opinions, cognitive dissonance may drive them to make statements that do not fully align with their true beliefs to alleviate psychological conflict. While this behavior might provide short-term psychological comfort, it ultimately damages their professional image and credibility. When teachers make statements online that contradict their real identities, they might experience cognitive dissonance. To alleviate this discomfort, they may stubbornly adhere to these statements and even make more extreme remarks to maintain psychological balance. This dissonance-regulation process can reinforce uncontrolled speech behavior.

3.5 The Psychological Impact of Low Belief in a Just World

The belief in a just world, a fundamental psychological need, helps individuals perceive and adapt to their social environment. Unlike those with a strong belief in a just world, individuals with a low belief in justice often lack trust in societal fairness, making it difficult for them to develop mature and comprehensive moral beliefs. Moral beliefs and cognition play crucial roles in moral judgment and behavior. For those with weaker moral motivation, violating moral standards seems less unacceptable, making them more likely to engage in unethical or rule-breaking behavior. In the online space, they may disregard others' feelings and thoughts, engaging in improper online behavior such as anonymously insulting others or spreading false information.

4.Coping Strategies

4.1 Strengthening Educational Guidance

Schools and educational authorities should enhance moral education for teachers, guiding them to establish correct values and ethics. Regular teacher ethics training sessions, special lectures, and seminars should be conducted to raise awareness of professional ethics and social responsibility, ensuring that teachers adhere to professional norms in their online speech. Additionally, a role model mechanism should be established to commend and publicize teachers who demonstrate exemplary online conduct, creating a positive demonstration effect.

4.2 Improving Management Systems

A comprehensive regulatory system for online speech should be established, promptly addressing and punishing improper speech. Educational departments should formulate clear guidelines for online behavior and establish dedicated supervisory bodies to monitor teachers' online activities in real-time. Improper behaviors should be investigated and handled promptly, with appropriate penalties imposed based on the severity of the misconduct, creating a deterrent effect. A reporting mechanism should also be established to encourage teachers and students to jointly supervise and maintain a healthy online environment.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.008

4.3 Enhancing Psychological Resilience

University teachers should focus on developing psychological resilience, learning self-regulation, and controlling impulsive emotions. Schools should offer mental health courses and lectures to help teachers understand and master methods for managing emotions and relieving stress. Through psychological counseling and support, teachers can receive professional assistance to improve their emotional control abilities, preventing improper speech due to emotional outbursts online. Participation in mental health activities such as yoga and meditation should be encouraged to strengthen psychological resilience.

4.4 Providing Emotional Venting Channels

Diversified channels for emotional venting should be established to help teachers relieve stress from work and life. Schools can set up platforms where teachers can anonymously express their concerns and dissatisfaction, thereby releasing negative emotions. Regular team-building activities, such as sports competitions and cultural performances, should be organized to promote interaction and cooperation among teachers, enhancing collective cohesion. A psychological counseling hotline providing 24-hour support should also be established to ensure teachers receive timely help and guidance during emotional lows. These measures will offer healthy avenues for emotional release, preventing negative emotions from being reflected in online speech.

4.5 Creating a Just Atmosphere

Creating a fair, just, and cooperative work environment in universities is crucial for enhancing teachers' sense of belonging and recognition. This not only promotes collaboration and communication among teachers but also effectively reduces improper online speech. Universities should increase transparency in decision-making and information processes, ensuring teacher participation. Scientific and reasonable performance evaluation standards and procedures should be established, along with clear complaint and appeal channels, ensuring that teachers receive timely and effective resolutions when faced with unfair treatment.

5. Conclusion

This study finds that improper online speech among university teachers is mostly isolated and uncommon. It suggests that such behavior is likely more related to individual psychological traits rather than the psychological characteristics of the teaching profession as a whole and is often triggered by specific events leading to temporary irrational emotional outbursts. The professional nature of university teachers requires stricter norms and self-restraint in online speech to avoid impulsive remarks that attract social attention and debate, damaging the collective image of university teachers. In conclusion, improper online speech among university teachers results from a combination of psychological factors. To maintain the image of the teaching profession and social order, it is essential to address these issues through psychological support, institutional measures, and educational guidance, enhancing teachers' online speech quality.

References

[1]Li, N. (2022). A Study on the Ethical Misconduct of Individual Online Expression and Its Correction. [Doctoral dissertation, China University of Mining and Technology].

[2]Strelan, P. (2007). The prosocial, adaptive qualities of just world beliefs: Implications for the relationship

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

https://doi.org/10.37420/j.ssp.2024.008

between justice and forgiveness. Personality and Individual Differences, 43(4), 881-890.
[3]Yang, J. (2021). A Study on the Relationship between Just World Beliefs and Online Ethical Behavior and Its Influencing Factors. [Doctoral dissertation, Zhengzhou University].
[4]Dalbert, C. (1999). The world is more just for me than generally: About the personal belief in a just world scale's validity. Social Justice Research, 12(2), 79-98.
[5]Su, Z., Zhang, D., & Wang, X. (2012). Revision of the Just World Belief Scale and Its Reliability and Validity in the Application to College Students. Chinese Journal of Behavioral Medicine and Brain Science, 21(06), 561-563.

© 2024 by the author(s); licensee Mason Publish Group (MPG), this work for open access publication is under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)