

# Bridging the Linguistic Divide: A Sociolinguistic Study on Generational Gaps in Chinese Daily Life

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the intergenerational communication gap in daily life in Chinese society from the perspective of sociolinguistics, aiming to reveal the language and cognitive differences faced by young people in communicating with the older generation. The study uses Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) as a theoretical framework to explore how intergenerational groups growing up in different social and historical backgrounds show significant differences in media use, emotional language expression, and workplace discourse style.

This study uses a combination of qualitative interviews and literature analysis to analyze their actual experience and cognitive understanding of intergenerational communication barriers from the perspective of the younger generation. The study found that the gap in digital capabilities, differences in emotional expression, and inconsistent interaction norms in the workplace are the three key factors leading to intergenerational misunderstandings and tensions. For example, young people prefer to use emoticons and informal language in digital communication, while the older generation prefers structured, formal, and emotionally restrained expressions.

These differences not only reflect the deep construction of intergenerational identity, but also confirm the "persistent influence of social and historical background on communication behavior" emphasized by GCT. Based on this, the study puts forward three suggestions: first, carry out digital literacy training for the elderly to help them integrate into the information society; second, encourage cross-generational emotional sharing activities at the family level to enhance intergenerational emotional connections; third, promote intergenerational communication training within the organization to ease communication friction in the workplace.

**Keywords:** Generation gap, sociolinguistics, intergenerational communication, language variation, China

## INTRODUCTION

In today's China, with the rapid development of science and technology and economy, the popularization of modern education, and the changes in people's daily lives brought about by the popularization of digital information, the way people communicate in daily life has been reshaped. Language is a tool for people to communicate and a cultural symbol that can reflect the different identity changes and identity recognition, values and social dynamics of the users. These drastic changes have made the intergenerational language gap wider and wider. These generation gaps are not only reflected in the vocabulary and expressions used, but also in the communication methods and interaction patterns.

The younger generation is increasingly exposed to the internet and uses new digital slang, foreign words and a lot of emojis to integrate into daily communication. The older group, on the other hand, sticks to dialects and more traditional ways of speaking. This difference is becoming more and more obvious as young people use more and more internet products, while the elderly seem to be excluded. This difference is easily overlooked by young people in the fast-changing daily life, but it also makes the communication generation gap wider, resulting in communication barriers and misunderstandings. Understanding and studying this phenomenon has many

benefits in promoting mutual understanding, maintaining cultural heritage and reducing family conflicts. It is also very important for us.

This study aims to explore the analysis of the relationship between the use of language in daily life and the communication gap between generations in Chinese people under the research model of linguistics and propose improvement plans. Through literature research, interview surveys, discourse analysis and other methods, this paper explores the differences in language communication among people of different age groups, the social factors that cause these differences and problems, and the impact on communication between different age groups. This study aims to provide descriptive explanations and practical suggestions for bridging the language gap in society.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURES

Based on the Generational Cohort Theory (GCT), this study explores intergenerational communication from a sociolinguistic perspective. GCT holds that individuals born in the same historical period tend to share similar sociocultural experiences that shape their worldviews, values, and communication behaviors (Sessa et al., 2007). This theory provides a solid theoretical basis for studying intergenerational differences in media use, emotional language norms, and workplace discourse practices. This paper focuses on the cognitive and communication experiences of Chinese youth groups and integrates the research results of the above three key topics at the literature level.

In terms of media use, many scholars have pointed out the widening digital divide between generations. The younger generation shows higher digital proficiency and tends to use social media platforms as a tool for self-expression, interpersonal interaction, and identity display (Zhou et al., 2022; Wu, 2022). In contrast, the older generation prefers face-to-face communication and is often not good at using digital platforms, resulting in information asymmetry and being excluded from digital discourse (Han Wang, 2023). This difference is not only reflected in technical capabilities, but also in the different positions of different generations in information processing, visibility and social participation, which are precisely one of the core problems of contemporary intergenerational misunderstandings (Sandi & Surya, 2025).

At the level of emotional language, different generations show significant differences in emotional expression and pragmatic norms. Inspired by language socialization theory and identity theory, studies have shown that communicators of Generation Z often rely on informal, cross-modal emotional expression methods, such as emoticons, animated images and online slang, to convey emotions and interpersonal positions (Yeasmin, 2025; Azad et al., 2023). The older generation, on the other hand, emphasizes the clarity of language, the restraint of emotions, and tends to express emotions in formal situations. This difference in vocabulary and style in emotional language often conceals the speaker's true intentions and reduces interpersonal intimacy, especially in family or intergenerational interactions (Hakami, 2022). This divergence shows that emotional language is not only a choice of expression style, but also reflects the socio-pragmatic values deeply rooted in the generations.

Workplace discourse, as another manifestation of intergenerational tension, also reflects significant differences in style and strategy. Some scholars point out that the communication styles classified as "generational differences" are actually more determined by social construction rather than language itself. These differences reflect the individual's accumulated experience of institutional authority, technology application and organizational norms in the life course (Rudolph et al., 2020). The younger generation of professionals prefer fast, informal and multimodal expressions, and their style is often influenced by online discourse practices; while older colleagues prefer linear, formal and hierarchical communication models (Azad et al., 2023). In cross-generational cooperation scenarios, this misalignment of communication expectations can easily manifest as inefficient communication, frequent conflicts, and even be misunderstood as disrespect or lack of cooperation.

In the sociolinguistic study of intergenerational communication, in addition to the differences in emotional expression and the use of communication media, the differences in the expression of values also constitute a core issue that cannot be ignored. The so-called expression of values refers to the way individuals express and negotiate their belief systems, life priorities and worldviews through language behavior. This expression is

deeply influenced by the social historical background and cultural context, and thus forms obvious differences between different generational groups (Sebastian, 2024).

In contemporary Chinese society, young people born after 2000 are more concerned about individualism, the public expression of self-emotions, and the identity construction of digital natives. Their language practices usually reflect a higher degree of informality, creativity and self-referentiality, which is also deeply influenced by Internet culture to some extent. For example, words such as "lying flat" and "internal consumption" frequently appear in their daily communication, implying reflection and even resistance to the mainstream values of "struggle" and "obedience" (Yeasmin, 2025). This type of expression is not only a choice of language style, but also implies attitudes and positions towards the existing social order.

In contrast, the older generation, who grew up in a historical period when collectivism and hierarchical order were more prominent, tended to convey values about responsibility, tenacity, and respect for the elderly and the virtuous through formal, restrained, and more pro-social language. This language style is not only reflected in the choice of vocabulary and tone, but also in communication goals and expectations.

This difference in the expression of values between generations often leads to cognitive gaps and emotional friction when it comes to sensitive issues such as career choices, family responsibilities, and intergenerational interaction norms. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is not only a tool for information transmission, but also a carrier of culture and ideology. The inconsistency in the expression of values between generations is essentially a power negotiation and identity reconstruction at the discourse level. As emphasized by the "Generational Group Theory" (GCT), differences in language style come from common experiences and historical positioning in the process of intergenerational socialization. Therefore, taking the expression of values as a key sociolinguistic variable not only helps to reveal the deep mechanism of intergenerational communication barriers, but also provides a theoretical basis and practical path for achieving understanding and consensus between generations.

In summary, these literatures show that GCT has a high explanatory power for explaining differences in communication style and language ability between generations. This theory provides researchers with a solid analytical perspective that allows them to trace how social and historical conditions affect language preferences and discourse norms. In the context of contemporary Chinese society, rapid socio-technological transformation has further widened the gap between intergenerational experiences. Therefore, these communication differences are not only superficial understanding deviations, but also reflect deep-seated ruptures in ideology, emotional expression, and institutional culture. Inspired by this theory, this paper further explores how Chinese youth perceive and adjust these intergenerational tensions in the context of family, digital media, and workplace through empirical research.

Table 1  
Generational Communication ' Patterns

Communication	Younger Generation Preference	Older Generation Preference
Media Usage	WeChat, short videos, emoticons, bullet comments, fragmented informti-	Phone calls, face-to-face conversations, text messages radio, newspapers
Affective Language	Emoticons, online slang, ambiguous humor, informal expressions	Formal language, restrained emotions, traditional terms semantic clarity
Workplace Discourse	Fast-paced, visual elements, non-hierarchical interaction, direct feedback	Structured, formal language hierarchical awareness emphasis on respect and compliance
Value Expression	Direct communication, focus on individuality	Indirect communication, focus on family and collective responsibility

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in sociolinguistic inquiry, aiming to uncover the underlying communicative and ideological divergences across generational groups in contemporary Chinese society. The research methodology consists of two complementary approaches: literature analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

### Participant Selection and Sampling Justification

To ensure a diversified representation of generational perspectives, purposive sampling was employed. Five respondents were selected to reflect different age cohorts and sociocultural positions, aligning with the core premise of Generational Cohort Theory (GCT), which emphasizes shared experiences within generationally bounded groups. The participants include:

One postgraduate student (aged 24), representing Generation Z;

One undergraduate student (aged 17), representing late adolescents;

One young professional (aged 25), representing early-career millennials;

One middle-aged mother (aged 45), representing Generation X;

One retired male (aged 65), representing Baby Boomers.

This sample structure enables a comparative understanding across youth, parent, and grandparent generations. While five interviews do not claim statistical generalizability, the selection was guided by the principle of information-rich cases and thematic saturation, as proposed by Patton (2002).

### Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the purpose, scope, and voluntary nature of the research. Written and verbal informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, in accordance with institutional ethical research guidelines. Participants were also assured of anonymity and data confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used in all reporting. The interviews posed minimal psychological risk and were designed to ensure comfort and agency for all respondents.

### Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via audio call, depending on the participant's location and preference. The interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes and followed a flexible interview guide covering:

Preferred communication platforms and media use;

Experiences of intergenerational misunderstanding or conflict;

Emotional expression and perceived barriers in family communication;

Language variation, including dialect, internet slang, or code-mixing.

The use of open-ended questions enabled participants to elaborate on their perspectives and provide personal narratives. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### Data Analysis and Coding Framework

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. NVivo



software was partially used to assist in the coding process. An inductive-deductive hybrid approach was employed:

Deductively, the framework of Generational Cohort Theory and prior literature informed three a priori thematic categories: (1) media preference and digital divide; (2) emotional language and pragmatic norms; (3) intergenerational value expression and negotiation.

Inductively, emergent subthemes were coded directly from the interview transcripts, including patterns such as “emotional avoidance,” “technological alienation,” “lexical confusion,” and “role reversal.”

Inter-coder reliability was checked manually by cross-review among the researchers. Thematic integration was guided by the goal of aligning empirical insights with sociolinguistic and generational theory.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This interview question includes differences in language use, and understands communication barriers by asking the interviewees themselves about the differences in communication words and expressions between different age groups. Second, the interviewees' preferences for social platforms and communication methods for different age groups are used to understand the relationship between the use of smart products and intergenerational conflicts and intergenerational communication barriers in daily life. Third, we began to explore the root causes of intergenerational communication conflicts in daily life, whether young people's values and views on things and life concepts have a more direct impact on the deepening of the intergenerational communication gap, and whether they think that differences in values and life concepts are the root of all problems. Then, we touched on whether the relationship with relatives was affected by the obstruction of communication methods, and whether the lack of common topics would cause problems in the relationship or deepen the conflict, making them unwilling to communicate with their families. Finally, we also asked the interviewees whether they also thought that intergenerational communication in life has become an issue that must be paid attention to, and how to solve this problem, and whether there is a solution. We asked young people questions from many aspects to try to better understand the current situation and find the root cause of the problem.

### Samples

The first respondent is a master's student currently studying at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. His personal developmental journey reflects the psychological transformation commonly experienced by Chinese youth in the context of intergenerational communication. He observed that while digital tools such as WeChat and video calls have greatly facilitated long-distance and cross-generational interactions, the core of communication does not lie in the medium itself but in the emotional exchange and mutual understanding between individuals. Despite only video calling his maternal grandparents once a year at most, he does not feel emotionally distant from them. On the contrary, he believes that through subtle cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, and tone of voice in these limited interactions, a deeper emotional connection has been established. This suggests that emotional resonance can sometimes transcend the frequency or quantity of communication, especially in intergenerational contexts where symbolic gestures carry significant meaning. In comparison, his communication with his parents has gone through significant transformations over different life stages. During his high school years, he experienced intense confrontations and emotional clashes with his parents, driven by a strong desire for autonomy and a clash of values. As he transitioned into university, his parents began to show more flexibility, gradually accommodating his interests and choices. Now, as a postgraduate student, he has developed a strong sense of purpose and personal agency. This shift has enabled him to take a more proactive role in family communication, even leading and reshaping the direction of conversations. He attributes this evolving dynamic to what he describes as a “misalignment between the individual's needs and the resources or responses provided by parents during the growth process.” In his view, the essence of the generational gap is not merely about differences in age or language, but about cognitive dissonance, mismatched expectations, and unequal access to emotional or material resources between generations. A vivid example he shared was the conflict with his parents—both educators—when he expressed a desire to learn DJing during high school. Initially, his parents strongly opposed this idea, viewing it as non-academic and unorthodox. However, after the national college entrance examination, they surprisingly gave him their full support. He considers this experience

a critical turning point in intergenerational negotiation, where mutual compromise led to a reconfiguration of family roles and deeper mutual respect. Moreover, during his internship experience, he became increasingly aware of the need to adjust his communication style when interacting with superiors or older colleagues. He emphasized the importance of “speaking the right language to the right people,” demonstrating adaptive communication strategies that align with the norms and expectations of different social roles and professional environments. This reflects a broader understanding of linguistic accommodation and contextual sensitivity. Overall, the interviewee’s narrative suggests that intergenerational communication challenges often arise from asymmetrical information, emotional expectations, and differing life-worlds. He believes that resolving such conflicts requires long-term dialogue, perspective-taking, emotional regulation, and the continuous reconstruction of roles. Only through these efforts can dynamic equilibrium and deeper intergenerational understanding be achieved.

The second respondent, Xin born in 2007, attending a national university located in a rural area. Xin engages in social media conversations using a few jargons that were introduced to her through these platforms. Despite her familiarity with some of the jargons mentioned in the questionnaire, she does not use them fluently and feels somewhat disconnected from her peers due to this. Xin acknowledges that the use of these jargons facilitates more natural and intimate conversations within her age group, fostering a sense of unity and friendship. Xin’s communication with her grandparents is infrequent, as they reside in their hometown, and she lives primarily with her parents. Her interactions with her grandparents are mostly through phone calls, discussing basic daily matters. She finds that there is a generational gap in values that sometimes hinders effective communication with her elders. Xin’s conversations with friends are more relaxed and humorous, often revolving around gaming and leisure activities. Xin believes that her communication style with her parents falls somewhere between her interactions with friends and her grandparents. She thinks that young people’s preference for smartphones and online communication stems from the sense of freedom and lack of social pressure that these platforms offer. Xin has experienced disagreements with her elders due to differing perspectives on education, career choices, and future planning. She is more receptive to advice when it is presented in a non-judgmental and understanding manner. Xin has learned valuable life lessons and character traits from her elders, such as kindness and the importance of being hardworking and honest. She observes that the rapid development of modern society, including technologies like mobile payments and short video apps, can be less inclusive for the elderly, who may struggle to adapt to these new changes. Xin suggests that the main cause of the generation gap is the tendency of people to impose their own experiences and expectations on others. She believes that both parents and children should make an effort to understand each other’s perspectives and communicate more effectively to bridge this gap. Xin also notes that she has not felt inferior or disconnected from her generational identity due to her occasional use of jargons.

The third respondent Yao, he is a bank employee who has just worked for a year. After a busy day at work, he often goes home with only his mobile phone. In his daily life, except for holidays, he rarely has time to socialize with others. Like most people who live and work in the city, he rarely has time to spend time with his family. But he said that although he does not live with his family, he has a very good relationship with them. He believes that with the popularization of technology, more and more people are beginning to indulge in the world of the Internet and ignore the feelings of the real world. But he can also enjoy the convenience brought by technology. For example, with just two clicks on the screen, he can see his father and mother who are thousands of miles away through the Internet. He has a good relationship with his family since he was a child, and they can talk about almost everything. When asked how he views the problem that with the development of the Internet, the communication gap between young people and older people is widening and the communication barriers are deepening. He answered this question with a very positive attitude. In his opinion, the bond between people and relatives is very important, and the lack of common topics will not make family affection fade or hinder communication with relatives. He does not find it difficult to communicate with his parents because they do not understand the trend. Daily life fun can satisfy the topic of communication with family members. When discussing with him how to bridge the communication gap and how to improve the existing communication problems in real daily life, he talked about how it might be difficult for older people to learn new technologies or new electronic products. As young people, we should consider the elderly more. As long as we have love in our hearts and care about our loved ones, we can overcome all difficulties. For people who have communication barriers with their families, he believes that they should be educated and their views should be changed to completely solve this phenomenon.

The fourth respondent, a middle-aged woman in her 50s working as a freelancer, embodies a dual generational identity, acting as both a daughter to aging parents and a mother to a post-2000s youth. Her lived experiences offer unique insights into the bidirectional tensions of intergenerational communication. When reflecting on her interactions with her elderly parents, she acknowledges that communication primarily occurs through telephone calls, as they are less adept at using contemporary digital tools such as WeChat. This digital divide, as she explains, is not merely technological but cognitive: "They look at things from a totally different angle. Their thinking is not like ours." Here, the respondent identifies epistemological divergence—a hallmark of generational gaps—as the root of many misunderstandings, echoing the foundational assumptions of Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) that link communication behavior to shared sociocultural trajectories.

Despite these differences, the respondent emphasizes the effectiveness of face-to-face communication, asserting that in-person interactions allow for more open discussions and emotional resonance. She reports that emotional misalignment tends to emerge more frequently during remote communication, where nuances may be lost. Interestingly, while her description of communication with her own parents is marked by ideological friction and technological mismatch, her account of communicating with her daughter paints a more harmonious picture. She repeatedly expresses admiration for her daughter's forward-thinking ideas, describing them as "well thought out," "practical," and "very fitting for the current society." This positive evaluation suggests a generational accommodation strategy characterized by deliberate attunement to youth perspectives, which aligns with GCT's notion of adaptive identity negotiation.

Nevertheless, further probing revealed subtle tensions embedded in her mother-daughter relationship. When prompted by the interviewer and her daughter (present during the interview), the respondent admitted to occasional emotional disconnects, such as unresponsiveness or silent withdrawal during disagreements. For instance, she recalled moments where "I wanted to talk, but she just played on her phone and ignored me." These scenarios indicate the existence of latent communication breakdowns that are often masked by outward expressions of approval or avoidance of conflict. Such interactions exemplify a communicative style governed by affective politeness and indirectness, common in high-context cultures like China (Gao, 1998), where preserving relational harmony may supersede direct confrontation.

In terms of intergenerational reconciliation, the respondent advocates for empathy-based understanding rooted in shared life experiences. "I was once young too," she explains, "so I understand why they think the way they do." This reflects a retrospective alignment strategy, where personal aging is seen as a bridge to comprehend youthful perspectives. However, the success of this approach appears to rely heavily on emotional literacy and narrative construction, rather than on symmetrical communicative agency. Taken together, this interview reveals that middle-aged individuals often act as intermediaries in the generational chain, negotiating between inherited values and emerging worldviews. Their role is critical in either perpetuating or resolving intergenerational communication gaps, making them a valuable subject group for sociolinguistic inquiry.

The fifth respondent, Liu Jianguo, a 65-year-old retired man, embodies the challenges of intergenerational linguistic dissonance as a grandparent navigating communication with his digitally native granddaughter. His lived experience highlights a unidirectional comprehension gap in cross-generational dialogue. When reflecting on interactions with his 14-year-old granddaughter, he notes that communication barriers stem primarily from her hybrid linguistic style: "She constantly mixes English words and internet slang I've never heard of. It's like listening to a foreign language." Here, the respondent identifies lexical-generation alienation—a manifestation of technological-cultural disconnect—as the core friction point, aligning with Sociolinguistic Gap Theory's premise that digital-age language evolution accelerates generational segmentation.

Despite his affection for his granddaughter, Mr. Liu admits frequent communication breakdowns where exchanges devolve into mutual frustration. He observes that face-to-face interactions marginally improve comprehension through contextual cues, yet remote exchanges (via messaging platforms) often result in complete misinterpretation. Crucially, he characterizes these moments not merely as vocabulary gaps but as epistemological rifts: "Her way of seeing the world is packaged in these new terms. When she says 'I'm shook' or 'that's cringe,' I grasp the words but miss the worldview behind them." This reflects a collision between analog-era literalism and digital-native conceptual shorthand.

Notably, the granddaughter (present during part of the interview) revealed unconscious linguistic accommodation strategies. She admitted simplifying expressions when sensing his confusion yet confessed to "forgetting to switch codes" during emotional or excited states. This intermittent adaptation suggests a partial-pragmatic awareness—recognizing the need for linguistic adjustment without systemic implementation. The respondent interprets this not as defiance but as generational habitus: "It'

## FINDINGS

This section presents key findings from the five interviews, organized around three dominant themes: emotional connection beyond contact frequency, value-based intergenerational tensions, and the impact of digital divergence. Each theme is discussed in relation to Generational Cohort Theory (GCT) and relevant sociolinguistic frameworks.

### Emotional Bonding Beyond Frequency: Quality over Quantity

Although the frequency of communication between young people and their grandparents tends to be low, this does not necessarily result in relational alienation. For instance, Respondent 1 reported that a single annual video call with grandparents still fosters emotional intimacy, largely due to non-verbal cues such as eye contact and tone of voice. Similarly, Respondent 3, despite his heavy workload and limited family time, maintains a close emotional bond with his parents through digital communication.

This finding supports the notion in GCT that emotional expectations and communication practices are shaped not just by age, but also by generational socialization into media environments. For younger generations accustomed to multimodal interaction, emotional proximity can be sustained through symbolic cues, even when communication is infrequent. This aligns with Gao's (1998) framework of high-context cultural interaction, where implicit signals play a central role in relational maintenance.

### Value Conflicts and Role Negotiation

A central finding across the interviews is the persistent conflict in values and lifestyle choices between generations. Respondents 1 and 2 both recalled parental resistance toward non-traditional educational or career decisions (e.g., DJ training, future planning), which were ultimately negotiated through familial compromise. These moments illustrate the discursive tension between collectivist norms of older cohorts and the individualistic tendencies of digital-native youth.

Under GCT, this reflects a generational cohort effect: youth born into post-industrial, tech-saturated societies internalize different life priorities and communicative expectations than their parents. These tensions often manifest not merely as disagreement, but as identity performance and generational boundary-making. From a sociolinguistic lens, such conflicts signal the struggle for discursive legitimacy—each generation defends their worldview through linguistic framing and value articulation.

### Technological Divergence and the Communication Interface

The digital divide emerges as a recurring obstacle in intergenerational interactions. Respondent 4 highlighted the difficulty her elderly parents face with social media tools, preferring voice calls instead. Respondent 5 noted his confusion over his granddaughter's internet slang and code-switching patterns, describing such language as "foreign." This mismatch results in reduced mutual comprehension, particularly in remote interactions.

GCT explains this through media immersion trajectories: digital fluency is not merely about access, but about how a generation is culturally and cognitively conditioned to interpret and produce meaning through technology. Sociolinguistic Gap Theory (Hakami, 2022) further suggests that linguistic dissonance is both lexical and ideological, with younger generations' hybrid speech styles reflecting a broader epistemic shift. In such scenarios, communication breakdowns stem from a lack of shared symbolic capital, rather than unwillingness to engage.

This contrast illustrates a generational asymmetry not only in digital competence but also in linguistic accommodation strategies. While Respondent 1, a postgraduate student, actively modifies his communication



style to suit older interlocutors—what he describes as “speaking the right language to the right people”—Respondent 5 struggles to comprehend even the surface meaning of his granddaughter’s hybrid speech. This discrepancy underscores that effective intergenerational communication relies not solely on digital literacy, but also on meta-communicative awareness and willingness to adapt. The older generation’s difficulty is not merely lexical, but symbolic: they often lack access to the cultural schemas underpinning youth expressions, making accommodation nearly impossible without external scaffolding or intergenerational empathy-building interventions.

## CONCLUSION

This study, employing both literature review and qualitative interviews, has examined the sociolinguistic dimensions of generational communication gaps in contemporary China. By drawing upon Generational Cohort Theory, we identified how differences in media usage, emotional language norms, and value expression contribute to communication challenges between youth, parents, and grandparents. Our findings underscore that intergenerational misunderstanding is not merely a matter of age or vocabulary, but reflects deeper divergences in life experience, social positioning, and linguistic ideologies.

While the study offers rich insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small, with only five participants, which limits the generalizability of our conclusions. Moreover, the participants were relatively well-educated and digitally literate, which may not fully represent the experiences of less-connected or marginalized groups. The reliance on self-reported data also introduces potential bias, as participants’ reflections may not capture their real-time communication patterns. Lastly, as the study is situated in a specific Chinese sociocultural context, the applicability of its findings to other cultures may be limited.

Despite these constraints, this research provides a valuable foundation for understanding generational language divides in a rapidly evolving digital society. Future studies can build on this work by expanding sample diversity, adopting mixed-method approaches, and exploring intergenerational discourse in varied cultural settings. Bridging the linguistic divide is not only a theoretical endeavor but also a practical necessity for fostering empathy, cohesion, and communication across generations.

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