

A Study on Generation Z Students' Intention to Join Societies: A Case Study of Panzhihua University

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Abstract: College student societies are large groups of students who join together voluntarily to enhance personal development and build a campus culture. This research investigated the motivations and intentions of Generation Z college students to participate in societies at Panzhihua University. Through an examination of their preferred society types and the variation in their motivations, this research aimed to identify potential management issues that may impede the sustained development of these organizations. Based on the findings, recommendations and countermeasures were proposed to enhance student engagement and promote the long-term growth of societies at Panzhihua University.

Keyword: Generation Z college student, participation intention, motivation, societies, Panzhihua University

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I. Introduction

The *Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and the Ministry of Education on Strengthening and Improving the Work of College Students' Associations* stated that "club activities at universities are an important and effective method of quality education. They play a crucial role in building a strong campus culture, enhancing students' overall abilities, preparing students for society, fostering talent, and supporting employment. They are also a vital supplement to uniting students and conducting ideological education in the current situation."^[1] With the advancement of society and technology, new trends have emerged in the development of college student associations, including an increase in the number of network-based associations, a diversification of activity forms, and an expansion of cross-school activities. Given that post-00s college students constitute the primary force among current association members, it is imperative to understand their motivations and preferences for participation. Moreover, with their flamboyant personalities and self-expression abilities, post-00s college students also tend to exhibit characteristics such as strong impulsiveness, poor inclusiveness, and excessive pragmatism. This could lead to withdrawal and unbalanced development within the associations. Therefore, this study aims to examine the intention of post-00s college students to participate in associations, and to provide feasible suggestions for the construction and management of these organizations.

II. Introduction to Societies at Panzhihua University

The Association Federation of Panzhihua University was established in 2004 with the aim of fostering self-education, self-management, and self-service among students. It serves as an important platform for bringing together youth and enriching campus culture, as well as for cultivating and preserving the university's spirit. The Association currently oversees 102 student associations or "clubs" with diverse functions and types, including literary, academic, practical services, art and culture, sports, and other activities. Recruitment for club membership is primarily done through offline methods and online promotion. The Association of Panzhihua University is often referred to as a "non-governmental organization". It has played a significant role in enhancing campus culture, improving cultural taste, and setting cultural trends through its association activities. However, issues such as high withdrawal rates and low participation rates have been identified in the management of mass organizations at Panzhihua University. This research, which focuses on the associations at Panzhihua University, has practical value for the management and sustainable development of associations.

III. Investigative Processes

1. Respondents: The survey was conducted among undergraduate students of Panzhihua University.
2. Distribution of questionnaires: The research team designed the questionnaire by referencing previous research on student participation in community activities among Tibetan university students. The questionnaire included

both multiple-choice and single-choice questions, as well as open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questions aimed to gather information on the number and types of participating associations, the frequency of participation in activities, and any existing problems or suggestions for the development of associations. The survey was conducted from September to October 2022, where the research team distributed 200 questionnaires to undergraduate students at Panzhuhua University through online and offline channels, and recovered 192 valid questionnaires for a recovery rate of 96%. The sample consisted of 92 freshmen, 43 sophomores, 29 junior students, and 28 senior students, evenly divided between males (102) and females (90). Additionally, to provide a more comprehensive view, the research team also randomly selected management members and leaders from specific associations such as the animation agency, media center, song department, and other associations based on the size and nature of each association.

IV. Analysis of Survey Results

1. The findings from the interviews indicate that post-00s college students have a strong desire to participate in student associations. An analysis of the number of associations they participate in revealed that 83.96% of the students surveyed were willing to participate in association activities, with 78.61% having participated in at least one association. These results demonstrate that college students have a high level of enthusiasm for participating in associations. Many of the interviewees stated that they had great expectations when they joined student associations and hoped to enrich their campus life and develop their personal abilities through participation in clubs. These observations align with the research findings of Xiaojing Chen.^[2]

2. The interviewees displayed a preference for recreational student associations. As per the survey results (Figure 1), 51.35% of post-00s college students participated in recreational and sports associations, while the number of practical, social, and public welfare associations accounted for 39.91% and 35.81% of the surveyed population respectively. This finding aligns with the personality characteristics of post-00s college students as young individuals of the new era, who are outgoing, energetic and have a strong inclination towards self-expression. As a result, they willingly participate in recreational and sports club activities. Additionally, given the increasing social competition and academic demands placed on students, engaging in more entertaining club activities provides an outlet for them to relax and unwind. However, as previously reported in Yuanbo Wang's *Analysis of College Students' Intention to Participate in Societies*, the development of student societies on campus has trended towards entertainment, with a focus on dining, drinking and leisure activities, which while providing short-term enjoyment and laughter on campus, rarely prompts intellectual development and thus have limited value in the long term.^[3]

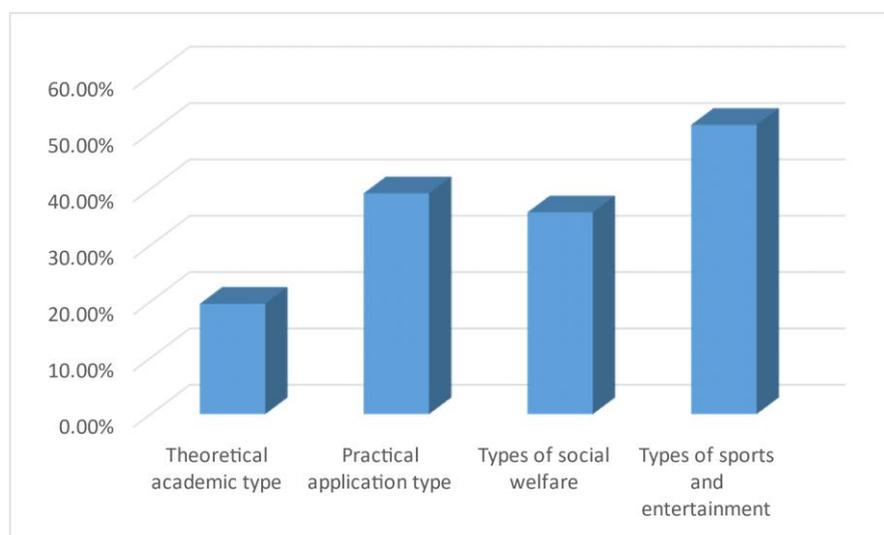


Fig.1 Investigation on the types of students' participation in associations

3. The survey results indicate that external motivations for respondents to join student associations outweigh internal motivations: 48.92% of post-00s college students participate in student associations due to their own personal interests, which aligns with the type of association involved in previous research. This highlights the strong personalities and self-centeredness of post-00s students and their proactivity in shaping their college life. Additionally, 74.19% of post-00s college students participate in associations to improve their professional skills, which indicates that students actively seek opportunities to improve themselves for their academic pursuits. Furthermore, among the respondents, 10.73% joined student associations passively, with the primary goals of improving academic performance, such as increasing comprehensive test scores and extracurricular scores,

which demonstrates a strong utilitarian mindset among students and the influence of external motivations in their decision to join student associations.

V. Problems in the Association

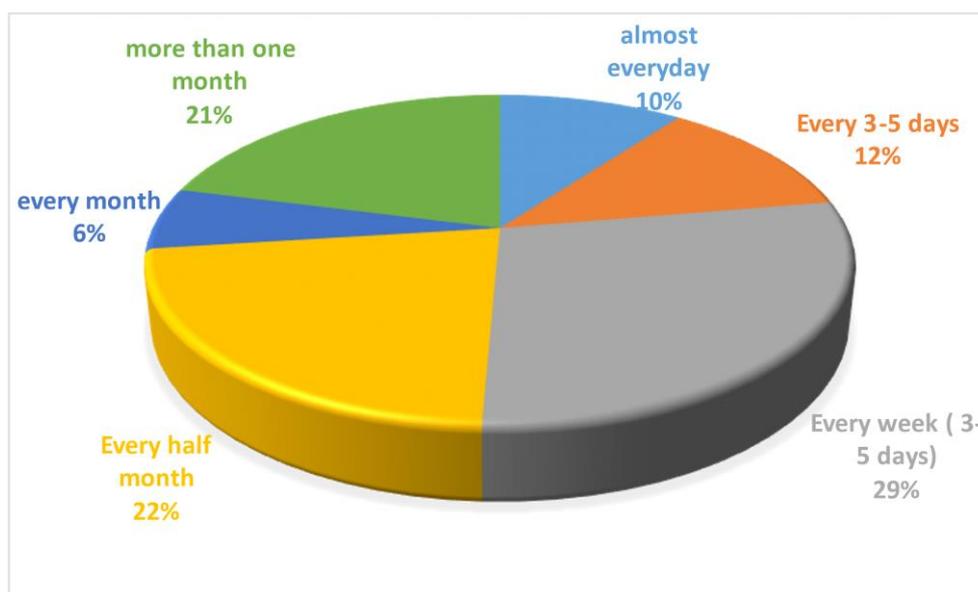


Fig.2 Frequency distribution of respondents' participation in club activities

Figure 2 illustrates that 48.25% of students participate in club activities for 1-4 hours per week, which indicates that students do not allocate a significant amount of time to club activities on a weekly basis. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as the diverse leisure activities of college students, which reduces the proportion of club activities students participate in, in their spare time. Furthermore, the research team identified issues with club management, such as late interviews, which diminishes students' motivation to participate in clubs.

1. The research findings indicate that certain issues present within the process of student association recruitment and publicity, such as exaggeration of internal benefits and unhealthy competition, can lead to a lack of student interest in participating in these organizations. According to the interviewees, in an effort to increase the size of a club, the recruitment and publicity content often does not accurately reflect the internal situation of the club, and there can also be instances of malicious slander among the clubs. These issues lead students to distrust the capabilities of a club and decrease their likelihood of participating.

2. The study revealed a lack of standardization in the management and construction of student associations, specifically in regards to unclear roles and responsibilities among members. The findings indicate that unclear division of labor within associations leads to an excessive workload for certain members and negatively impacts the participation experience of others. Additionally, the scale and nature of activities organized by associations often do not align with the needs of the community and fail to generate interest among members. Yuanbo Wang's research also points out the importance of effective management systems and modes as key determinants of the sustainability of student associations.^[3] Currently, various management approaches are employed by student associations. These include direct management by appointed leaders and unified management by teachers. This diversity in management modes can create a lack of clear understanding among members in terms of the overall direction of the community, as well as difficulties during leadership transitions. Additionally, this can lead to issues such as a lack of highly skilled members and undetermined development goals.

3. The research findings reveal that the level of support provided by the university for the development of student associations is inadequate. Specifically, the survey results indicate that there are often issues such as a shortage of funding, lack of access to venues, and complicated approval procedures. These challenges impede the scale and progress of club activities and prevent the achievement of desired outcomes.

VI. Suggestions and Feasible Measures for the Development of Associations

1. Improve the construction of community characteristic culture and strengthen the publicity of community.

Post-00s college students exhibit a preference for associations that possess a high level of cohesion, positive atmosphere, and good reputation. As such, associations should avoid the use of improper recruitment methods in order to expand their membership. Instead, they should focus on cultivating a unique culture, which can serve to attract student participation.^[2] In terms of promotion, the association can broaden its reach by utilizing various channels, such as official social media accounts, TikTok, and official microblogs associated with Panzhihua University.

2. Enrich community activities and improve community participation

Post-00s college students tend to show a preference for clubs that align with their own personal interests and hobbies. According to the survey results, there is a higher inclination among female students to participate in associations, and they tend to have a higher inclination to join humanities, social and cultural arts-related associations. Additionally, the study participants stated that modern college students tend to not be willing to join societies that are perceived as offering low returns, high risks, and high workload. Therefore, universities should provide support for the development of activities and clubs that are popular among students, and guide students to broaden their horizons.

3. Cultivate individual participation awareness and build trust among members

As student associations operate independently of strict administrative hierarchies, they enable members to act freely and express their ideas on an equal footing. As independent organizations, members often participate in collective activities to pursue their own interests. To ensure that members participate voluntarily in the development of associations while pursuing their own interests, it is important that universities establish standardized reward and punishment systems and standardize the relevant systems of associations to provide trust for members.^[5]

4. Strengthen the self-system management of associations and the future construction of associations

Due to the lack of clear division of responsibilities among members of the association, and the misalignment between the activities held by the association and the actual situation of the association, this often affects the members' experience of the association and work efficiency. Therefore, it is essential to consistently improve the division of responsibilities and organize activities that align with the association's objectives, in order to stimulate members' passion for work and increase their work efficiency. Furthermore, the association should not become complacent and should strive to learn from other successful associations. It should exchange experiences with other outstanding associations within the school and constantly improve its own systems and management shortcomings. To ensure adequate funding and access to venues, the association should strengthen its communication with the activity department and avoid related problems.^[6]

VII. Conclusion

The development of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics has brought to light the distinctive personality traits of post-00s college students and the shortcomings in the organizational forms and management methods of college associations. These traits and forms are often at odds with each other, resulting in a lack of integration. The study, which used Panzhihua University as a case study, found that post-00s college students tend to join associations based on their own interests and preferences, but that the vicious competition among college associations and their lack of attention to proper management and construction can lead to issues with membership and retention. To address this, schools should provide support and guidance for association development, and student associations should focus on innovation and the cultivation of unique cultural identities to promote their innovative growth in the current context.

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