

# Parody and Carnival: On the Phenomenon of “Academic Bottom-Tier Journals” in Cyberspace

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**Abstract:** The rise and fall of “academic bottom-tier journals” reflect the lived reality of contemporary youth as they navigate a web of academic, familial, and societal pressures. By employing subcultural modes of expression—such as the absurd, self-deprecation, and spoofing—these journals provide an outlet for repressed emotions and use parodies to symbolically satirize rigid, irrational systems. This failed social experiment offers a microcosm of the genuine plight faced by certain youth groups; the compounding of multiple pressures transformed these “academic bottom-tier journals” into one of the few available spaces for emotional release. Although the experiment ultimately failed, it raised numerous issues worthy of reflection.

**Keywords:** “Academic bottom-tier journals”; parody; carnival; subculture

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## 1. Introduction

In February 2026, the hashtag “Obsessed with Reading Academic Papers on Douyin” went viral on the mobile short-video platforms. Trending topics included “On the Lethal Effect of 152mm High-Explosive Anti-Tank Shells on Cancer Cells,” “Inflation in the Underworld: How Much Money Should East Asian Parents Burn to Ensure Their Children Don't Squander It?” and “Prolonged Toilet Time Linked to a 100% Increase in Productivity.” By March 2026—just one month after its launch—the topic had garnered over 100 million views. The source of this viral trend was the S. H. I. T. website, a mock academic journal site that billed itself as a “repository for academic trash” (S. H. I. T. Journal 2026). Its founder was a Douyin content creator known by the handle “Senior Fellow Snail Takes You to Success” (also known as “Academician Awesome”). An educational influencer, “Senior Snail,” focused on guiding students through the competitive processes of



postgraduate entrance exams and civil service recruitment. He had achieved modest online success through a sincere, down-to-earth, and “companion-style” approach to study guidance, maintaining active accounts on Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, and Douyin. He established the mock journal S. H. I. T. (an acronym for “Sciences, Humanities, Information Technology”) to console and provide a spiritual shelter for students whose submissions had been rejected by legitimate journals.

The call for papers from S. H. I. T. is remarkably broad in scope; the website imposes no restrictions and specifies no particular research directions or boundaries. It bears little resemblance to the formal calls for papers issued by academic journals—which typically require established credentials, submission guidelines, and clear timelines—and instead feels more like a casual forum discussion. The tone is conversational, free-spirited, and informal, reflecting the style of online discourse rather than the professional vocabulary and solemnity of legitimate academic publications. There are no defined research fields or thematic parameters. This initiative does not aim to solicit serious academic research; rather, it serves more as a satirical performance art. The project employs absurd terminology to mock serious topics, accompanied by exaggerated metrics and parodied data. This satirical naming convention represents both a stance and a strategy—a deconstruction of academic discourse and an act of self-deprecation regarding the work produced by researchers, banteringly labeling it as “trash.”

The website’s attention stems from the completeness of its execution. As the site itself declares, this is a social experiment—a collective creation by the academic community. In terms of format, the articles possess all the standard academic components—abstracts, introductions, hypotheses, experimental designs, and conclusions—yet these elements bear spoof titles. Articles in the humanities and social sciences often incorporate one or two core theoretical frameworks and are accompanied by a mix of genuine and fabricated references. The site’s entire absurd design serves as an observation ground for gathering data on the variables of this social experiment. Understanding this phenomenon requires considering both the real-world circumstances faced by young researchers and the broader context of media culture.

## 2. The Collusion of Subculture, Young Scholars, and Internet Space

By examining the concept of “subculture,” we can gain a fresh understanding of the deep-seated cultural logic underlying phenomena such as the S. H. I. T. website. “Subculture”—defined as the resistance of marginalized cultures and disadvantaged groups against dominant culture and power (Tao and Hu 2011: 1)—points not only to the distinctive behaviors and lifestyles of specific groups (typified by young people) but also to the complex social power relations implicit beneath these cultural manifestations. As Canadian scholar Brake observes, a subculture is “a system of meanings, modes of expression, or lifestyles developed by groups in subordinate structural positions in response to the dominant system of meaning; it signifies an attempt by subordinate groups to resolve structural contradictions arising from the broader social context” (Meng 2008: 94). S. H. I. T. represents a complex “subcultural” ecosystem spontaneously formed by young people and hosted on the internet; far from being a mere academic spoof or form of entertainment, it is a cultural practice that employs subversive subcultural strategies to deconstruct and overturn orthodox academic production systems and mainstream social discourses.

On one hand, the content featured on the S. H. I. T. website often exhibits distinct subcultural characteristics. The site’s articles span diverse fields—including interdisciplinary studies, science, engineering, medicine, agriculture, and law/social sciences—and can be broadly categorized into three types: therapeutic

content fostering a sense of belonging, extreme satire, and pure spoof-style entertainment. Notably, some articles apply an academic lens to everyday life phenomena to explore real-world issues often overlooked by mainstream discourse; characterized by intense emotion and frequent “viral quotes,” these pieces resonate deeply with readers, achieve widespread dissemination, and generate a unique “crossover” effect that extends their reach beyond the initial niche audience. For instance, in the article “Inflation in the Underworld: How Much Money Should East Asian Parents Burn to Ensure Their Children Don’t Squander It?” the author explores parent-child relationships and the associated emotional dilemmas within East Asian families. The piece posits: “When love can be quantified in monetary terms, it begins to devalue; you have already tried hard enough—now, you can rest.” By tracing the transformation of “underworld spirit money” from a symbol of love into a form of debt, the article draws an analogy to the shift from filial piety to resentment often found in these families. Written in accessible language yet carrying significant emotional impact, it has resonated strongly with a wide readership. Similarly, in “A Sea of Resentment and a Sky of Love: An Analysis of Structural Emotional Dilemmas in East Asian Families”, the author argues that while parents intend to provide love, the nature of that love is distorted. The author uses a satirical tone to reveal that the common refrain—“Mom gave all the best food to you and didn’t eat a bite herself”—is essentially the intergenerational transmission of a “distorted love.” Such emotional rhetoric exploits the concept of self-sacrificing familial affection to instill guilt in children, subsequently escalating that guilt into a perceived debt owed to their parents. This leaves the child’s feelings toward their parents a complex mix of impure love and impure resentment—an “intertwining of love and hate” that traps them in an endless cycle of conflicting emotions throughout their lives and studies.

Another category of articles satirizes reality by focusing on various forms of dysfunction within academia. For instance, articles such as “S. H. I. T. Governance Convention 1. 0: A Framework for Academic Decentralized Autonomous Organizations Based on Game Theory and Robust Statistics”—which satirizes the peer-review system and the elitist model of academic governance—and “Ownership and Potential Legal Issues Regarding Feces and Other Excreta: A Comparative Study of Civil Law and Common Law Systems”—which parodies the redundant, useless “nonsense” found in academia—skillfully employ the language, logic, and formatting of the academic system itself to critique academic dysfunction and expose misconduct. By utilizing highly exaggerated or even distorted expressions, these pieces push the typically serious and standardized academic writing style to the limits of absurdity, creating a striking tension and contrast between form and content. Furthermore, a third category of articles exists on the site: those intended purely for entertainment. These papers neither seek emotional resonance nor aim to satirize specific phenomena; their sole purpose is fun. The authors dedicate themselves to bringing joy and humor, using the academic paper format to package a series of jokes based on everyday elements like games and romance. Titles such as “A Mechanistic Study on the Correlation Between Underwear Color at Uluru and Success Rates at Tower Bridge”, “A Hierarchical Model of Emotional Capture from ‘Crush’ to ‘Ex-Husband’: A Study on Generational Differences in Gift-Giving Strategies by ‘Toxic Women’ in Intimate Relationships”, and “How to Make a Wealthy Woman See Your Potential and Value” successfully relieve reader stress, offering emotional relaxation and a cultural space for venting and finding resonance.

Beyond content-level analysis, the internal mechanisms behind the emergence of S. H. I. T. must also be understood through the dimensions of the unique internet culture and its audience. From the perspective of internet culture, S. H. I. T. represents a culmination of online parody culture and “abstract culture” (a niche form of surreal, absurd, and often ironic internet humor). So-called online parody culture is a “subculture”



phenomenon that emerged within the context of mass entertainment and postmodernism. Driven primarily by young people and motivated by a desire for amusement and humor, it adopts a playful, mocking, or satirical attitude—utilizing techniques such as parody and pastiche—to stage a symbolic rebellion against dominant culture and elite hegemony, all while spreading via online media. The founder of S. H. I. T. explicitly stated that the site “really started out just for a laugh,” a sentiment that perfectly aligns with the core ethos of parody culture: entertainment and humor. The playful, mocking, or satirical spirit of this culture is evident in the site’s use of crude terms—such as “dry latrine,” “septic tank,” and “sniffer beast”—to parody the formal academic system. Furthermore, the site employs parody and pastiche to replicate and alter elements of legitimate journals—such as calls for papers, classification systems, and metrics—filling these formal shells with absurd content. Symbolic rebellion and resistance against dominant culture and elite hegemony lie at the very heart of the site’s mission; it champions “academic decentralization” and seeks to deconstruct established systems of academic authority. Yet, as an expression of the passionate rebellion of youth in the internet age, parody culture ultimately represents little more than a carnivalesque ritual. It risks being either suppressed by the discipline of dominant ideologies or co-opted by commercial capital; both outcomes erode its original subversive and resistant significance, leaving behind nothing but a ritual of emotional catharsis (Hu Jing 2009: 57–58). Undoubtedly, the internet has granted netizens the possibility of a “second life” in virtual space, offering them an outlet for release and relaxation. In this space, individuals can connect with others facing similar circumstances—thereby alleviating crises of self-identity—and form the communities that define today’s popular “abstract culture.” S. H. I. T. serves precisely as such a virtual space for mutual solace: countless frustrated students—stymied in their academic pursuits and repeatedly rejected by journals—have found kindred spirits here and forged a collective identity. “Every individual is powerless in the face of a cruel history—whether they are wage earners in big cities struggling a lifetime to pay off loans, or students bewildered while searching for jobs. Faced with an uncertain future and an overwhelming sense of powerlessness before the tide of history, they lose hope and adopt an extreme pessimism and passivity, marked by casual mockery and hedonism. It is precisely these people who constitute a significant portion of the ‘abstract culture’ demographic” (Hu Huitong 2020: 32). This passage elucidates the social and psychological background of contributors to “academic bottom-tier journals” (such as the S. H. I. T. website). Under the pressures of a broader environment marked by the devaluation of academic credentials, intense employment competition, and the “involution” of academia, students have resignedly shifted their focus toward casual mockery and hedonism; they use the absurd format of “bottom-tier journal papers” to express their helplessness and irony regarding their real-world predicaments.

From the audience’s perspective, the community behind online parody culture is primarily composed of “grassroots” individuals. This grassroots group is “simultaneously an online community and a vast, youth-centric social demographic. They are neither the so-called ‘successful elite’ nor strictly the ‘underclass’; rather, they are young people striving in life—experiencing anxiety and frustration yet still harboring hope. Having just entered the workforce or not yet done so, and possessing limited social status and economic means, they border on the ‘underclass’; yet, because of their youth and optimism, they also possess a distinct consciousness of ‘middle-incomers’.” As ‘grassroots’ figures, they struggle as individuals in the real world and lack a significant voice; however, in today’s era of immense online influence, their collective presence online transforms them into a unique force” (Zhang 2006: 1). Students and young people with modest incomes, average educational backgrounds, and limited purchasing power are the primary creators and consumers of online parody content. Occupying a grassroots position across economic, social, and cultural dimensions, they live in an era where both

educational institutions and media outlets serve to uphold elite culture and official ideology. As subjects of social discipline, they find it difficult to secure a voice on elite-controlled discourse platforms. The thousands of submissions and viral entries on the S. H. I. T. website offer a true reflection of the grassroots community behind them. These contributors are largely young people who—often facing repeated rejections of academic papers and lacking a voice within the established scholarly system—turn to online media to express themselves and assert their individuality; S. H. I. T. serves as a unique cultural space for this expression and release. However, the very nature of this grassroots group also foreshadows the platform's limitations. While the group's rise relies on the agglomeration effects of cyberspace, its structure is loose and poorly organized, lacking the momentum and resources for sustained action. As the initial novelty fades, enthusiasm for “pulling stunts” fails to translate into consistent content production, and external attention and controversy introduce risks; consequently, this virtual space—defined by anonymity, playfulness, and decentralization—struggles to maintain its original vitality.

### 3. The “Bottom-Tier Journals” Carnival and Its Real-World Inspirations

In fact, S. H. I. T. declined rapidly after a brief surge in popularity. As of March 19, 2026, the site had ceased publishing new content. Its founder issued a statement on Douyin attributing the collapse of this “experiment” to two core reasons. The first was the inability to achieve true “decentralization.” The founder explained, “Initially, I envisioned that by handing the power of evaluation over to the community, the platform would serve merely as a neutral vessel.” However, the reality is that any internet platform inevitably bears the responsibility of maintaining order—managing public posting, ongoing interaction, and the ranking and display of content. When content spirals out of control, the platform cannot remain truly “neutral.” The second reason was the loss of control over the project's naming and identity. The founder admitted, “I used names like ‘S. H. I. T.’ and ‘Gou Shi’ [Mock-Stone] to deconstruct hollow academic formatting; while this made the project go viral overnight, it also cost me the right to define its context and meaning.” Naming conventions viewed within the community as “parody and humor” were reframed by viral marketing accounts during cross-platform dissemination, labeled as “vulgar” or “offensive.” Without a credible contextual anchor, the platform attracted “low-cost template replication” rather than profound insights. A flood of AI-generated papers and sensationalist headlines quickly drowned out the genuinely valuable, absurd reflections the project had originally fostered.

Beyond the internal design flaws identified by the founder, external forces also profoundly impacted S. H. I. T. Co-opted by commercial culture, parody was transformed into a tool for profit-making by commercial entities. Parodists had originally hoped to break free from the constraints of the established system by creating texts with subversive intent, maintaining a distance from commercial capital through self-amusement or by offering their work for free. However, lacking economic independence and facing the relentless infiltration and constant allure of commercial capital, their resolve to keep their distance wavered. Ultimately, they embraced capital, only to have their beliefs in independence and rebellion ruthlessly crushed by the capital market. Although the subculture of online parody is inevitably subject to regulation and co-optation, some argue that it will not disappear in the short term—commercial interests are precisely the driving force behind its survival. With the introduction of various internet regulations, online parody culture may well be the product of a compromise between state power and market forces. In other words, creators of parodies will likely continue to produce content based on the principle of “minimizing political risk while maximizing economic gain,” thereby achieving a dual payoff of cultural and economic utility (Hu Jing 2009: 59). The website's “Letter to Fellow SHIT-ers”—



announcing the “temporary suspension of submission portals” and the “refinement of compliance review mechanisms”—reflects a self-awareness of having been “disciplined.” The letter acknowledges that content was becoming “somewhat uncontrollable” and that “effective protective mechanisms” had to be established, noting that the parody culture had “crossed political, moral, and legal boundaries, ultimately falling under the control of the dominant ideology.” The phrase “SHIT belongs to everyone” can be interpreted as a paradoxical act of self-deconstruction, illustrating the subculture’s trajectory from resistance to co-optation.

At the same time, the viral success of S. H. I. T. aligns with another prevailing trend: the culture of “self-deprecation.” This cultural trend both fuels S. H. I. T.’s immense popularity and harbors potential risks. Individuals navigating the process of socialization use self-deprecation to lower their profile—employing humble language to criticize or downplay their own actions—thereby gaining psychological relief and facilitating smoother communication. It is a remarkably safe form of self-presentation: “If I mock myself first, others’ mockery cannot hurt me.” Through online self-deprecation—characterized by mutual sharing, validation, empathy, and encouragement—young people forge and strengthen their connections to the world within digital interactions, finding shelter in group identity and the reassuring sense of belonging to a shared camp. Terms like “wage slave” and “tool person” not only reflect a sense of resignation regarding the “involution” of work but also embody an optimistic acceptance of one’s identity. Faced with the pressures of involution, young people use self-deprecation to deconstruct their identities and resist internal conflict and anxiety, effectively creating a “pressure-release valve.” Self-deprecation offers a channel for young people to voice their opinions, allowing them to articulate demands regarding collective interests and express dissatisfaction with real life through playful, socially acceptable language. However, this practice carries risks. Prolonged self-deprecation can undermine young people’s self-confidence, eroding their sense of self-worth and belonging. Even after stepping away from potential external harm, individuals may unwittingly fall into linguistic traps and artificial environments co-constructed with others, leading to an unconscious loss of a stable sense of self. Immersion in the group identity and resonance found in online self-deprecation can foster an unhealthy reliance on the internet, potentially impairing one’s ability to engage in normal interpersonal interactions, express opinions, and regulate emotions. Furthermore, this phenomenon can lead other groups to form one-sided—or even stigmatized—views of young people. The negative sentiments embedded in popular online self-deprecating discourse run counter to mainstream narratives; these sentiments often imply sharp critiques of reality and can foster political alienation and value misalignment, ultimately weakening young people’s political identification with society (Du and Zhang 2023: 5–6). Yet, one need not view this cultural phenomenon with undue pessimism, as it also harbors positive, constructive elements. Although contributors to S. H. I. T. often use absurd language to vent frustrations regarding relationships or academics—even labeling themselves “academic trash”—they never abandon their genuine pursuit of scholarship; at its core, this self-deprecation is a protest against institutional rigidity. Nevertheless, excessive self-belittlement, coupled with prolonged internal emotional turmoil and escapism, can fundamentally distort self-deprecation, transforming it from a self-protective mechanism into a habit of self-degradation. While the self-deprecating humor of S. H. I. T. offers a temporary escape from reality, reality itself remains unchanged; self-deprecation may provide a form of healing, but it does not address the root causes of the issues.

Additionally, the context in which language is disseminated plays a crucial role in the ending of S. H. I. T. website. The use of puns and homophones requires situational awareness. In formal settings—such as classroom instruction, news media reporting, or official meetings—the misuse of such wordplay is inappropriate; it not

only fails to achieve the intended communicative goals but can actually prove counterproductive, hindering effective interaction. Moderation is key; going to extremes is as detrimental as falling short—a principle that reflects the concept of the “Golden Mean” in Chinese culture (Shang 2020: 78–83). The indiscriminate use of puns in the name S. H. I. T. caused outsiders to perceive it merely as a vulgar website, failing to grasp its underlying satirical intent. This excessive reliance on wordplay stripped the name of its original cultural context, transforming humor into offense—a significant factor contributing to the failure of S. H. I. T.

## 4. Conclusion

One underlying cause of academic disorder is that some researchers lack intrinsic interest in scientific inquiry itself; for them, publishing papers serves merely as a means to achieve utilitarian goals, such as professional promotion or earning a degree. The “academic bottom-tier journal” phenomenon—which emerged against this backdrop and is exemplified by the online “subculture” practice known as S. H. I. T.—cannot be dismissed entirely, despite the often absurd nature of its content, ranging from research design to argumentation. Take, for instance, the most widely circulated article, “Inflation in the Underworld Economy: How Much Money Should East Asian Parents Burn to Ensure Their Children Don’t Squander It?” While the “underworld economic system” constructed in the piece is purely fictional, its concluding reflection on the crushing weight of “parental benevolence” in East Asian families resonated deeply with many readers and offered genuine food for thought.

The rise and fall of S. H. I. T. reflect the lived reality of contemporary youth as they navigate a web of academic, familial, and societal pressures. Through subcultural modes of expression—such as absurdity, self-deprecation, and parody—they sought an outlet for repressed emotions and used satire to symbolically critique rigid, unreasonable institutions. This failed social experiment offers a microcosm of the actual circumstances faced by some young people; the compounding of multiple pressures turned these “academic bottom-tier journals” into one of the few available spaces for emotional release. Although the experiment ultimately failed, it raised numerous issues worthy of reflection. Even if it does not directly or significantly alter existing social structures or family dynamics, it may still exert a profound, subtle influence on the future of academia and the broader sociocultural landscape.

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