

A Study on the Mechanism of Cohort Effect on the Formation of National Identity among College Students

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ABSTRACT

The lack of subjective awareness of national identity among young people is a common phenomenon in all countries. In this paper, we investigate the role of cohort effect in the formation of national identity among college students based on the theory of cohort effect. The results of the empirical study show that at the current stage, the formation of national identity within the group of Chinese college students mainly relies on the herding mechanism, followed by the competition mechanism and then the learning mechanism.

1. Introduction

If national cohesion is insufficient, more serious consequences may occur, even leading to the division of the country. Most scholars agree that enhancing national identity can increase national cohesion. Scholars have further argued that adolescence is an important stage in the formation of national identity. However, because the worldview, life view, and values of adolescents are still in the process of formation during this period, the formation of their national identity is highly uncertain.

2. Literature Review

Scholars at home and abroad have been studying national identity for a long time and have made fruitful research results, which mainly focus on three directions. First, scholars have tried to define and analyze the concept of national identity from different perspectives. Secondly, they focus on the influence of national identity. Third,

scholars focus on the elements underlying the formation of national identity.

Scholars at home and abroad have achieved fruitful research results in the field of national identity, but there are still some shortcomings, mainly in the following aspects. First, the research method is relatively single. Secondly, the focus on group characteristics is insufficient. Third, it is trapped in the black box of research on this issue.

3. Research Hypothesis and Theoretical Model Construction

3.1 The Role of Cohort Effect on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

The study by Ferman et al. shows that people are more likely to imitate the decisions of experienced investors. University is one of the most important learning stages in life, during which college students not only learn various professional knowledge, but also develop their worldview,

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life view, values, and other concepts within their own group through learning, which also includes the formation of national identity. Therefore, we propose research hypothesis 1.

Research hypothesis 1: The cohort effect due to social learning mechanism will positively affect the formation of national identity among college students^[1].

Christakis and Fowler's research suggests that herding mechanisms can have a significant impact in many situations. Since college students are not fully mature, they may not be able to form their own independent judgment on certain matters or objects, so herding becomes the most convenient way to make decisions in a group. Based on the above theoretical deduction, we propose research hypothesis 2.

Research hypothesis 2: The herding effect caused by the herding mechanism positively affects the formation of national identity among college students.

Jane's research found that chasing after the leader in groups can occur stemming from competitive mechanisms. Competition among university students is no longer limited to academic competition, but is manifested in various aspects. In the context of the increasing importance of national identity cultivation in all countries, various thematic activities with the meaning of cultivating national identity have emerged, and college students are facing more and more competition in such activities^[2]. Based on the above scenario analysis, we propose research hypothesis 3.

Research hypothesis 3: The cohort effect caused by the competition mechanism positively affects the formation of national identity among college students.

3.2 The Role of Gender Factors on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

Research findings in psychology and behavior suggest that gender has a significant impact on decision making. The differences in interests, cognitive styles, and decision-making styles between male and female college students may affect the formation of their national identity. Therefore, we believe that gender should be used as a control variable so as to ensure the unbiased net effect of the cohort effect in the empirical study. Therefore, we propose research hypothesis 4.

Research Hypothesis 4: Gender factor has a significant effect on the formation of college students' national identity.

3.3 The Role of Age Factor on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

Scholars have found significant differences in decision making between groups based on age grouping. In order

to better observe the net effect of the cohort effect on the formation of national identity among college students, age should be used as a control variable^[3]. Based on the data characteristics of this study, and in order to ensure the operability of the empirical study, we categorized college students of different ages into lower and higher age groups, so we proposed research hypothesis 5.

Research hypothesis 5: There is a significant difference between the national identity of college students in the lower and higher age groups.

3.4 The Role of Ethnic Identity Factors on the Formation of College Students' National Identity

Scholars have found many similarities in the characteristics of natural in-group members formed on the basis of ethnicity. In the scenario of national identity formation among college students, in order to prevent ethnic characteristics from confounding our observations of the net effect of cohort effects acting on national identity formation among college students, ethnicity should be used as a control variable, so we propose research hypothesis 6.

Research Hypothesis 6: The factor of ethnic characteristics has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students^[4].

3.5 The Role of Group Size Factors on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

In the specific scenario of national identity formation among college students, there is a significant difference in the size of college student groups, and to ensure the unbiasedness of the empirical findings, group size should be used as a control variable, so we propose research hypothesis 7.

Research Hypothesis 7: The cohort size factor has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students.

3.6 The Role of the Factor of Going Abroad Experience on the Formation of National Identity of College Students

External environmental factors are one of the important factors that cannot be ignored in the study of national identity^[5]. For college students, going abroad is a major external environmental change scenario, so we use abroad experience as a proxy variable for external environmental factors and propose research hypothesis 8.

Research hypothesis 8: The factor of experience abroad has a significant effect on the formation of national identity of college students.

3.7 Theoretical Model Construction

Based on the above theoretical analysis and research hypotheses, the learning mechanism, herding mechanism and competition mechanism of cohort effect are introduced as explanatory variables in this paper, and these three variables are continuous variables, denoted by X_1 , X_2 and X_3 , respectively. In this paper, gender, grade, ethnicity, group size, and abroad experience are introduced as control variables in the model, where gender is a categorical variable, X_4 denotes the male group, and the base group is the female group. Grade is a categorical variable, X_5 denotes the higher grade group, and the baseline group is the lower grade group. Ethnicity is a categorical variable, X_6 indicates the minority group, and the baseline group is the Han group. Group size is a categorical variable, X_{71} and X_{72} denote the medium-sized group and the large-sized group, respectively, and the benchmark group is the small-sized group. The categorical variables are abroad experience, X_8 indicates the group with abroad experience, and the benchmark group is the group without abroad experience. In this paper, national identity of college students is the explanatory variable, which is a dichotomous variable with $P=1$ indicating that college students have a high sense of national identity and $P=0$ indicating that college students have a low sense of national identity^[6]. In summary, the logistic model constructed in this paper is as follows.

$$\text{Logit}(P)=\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right)=\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+\beta_2X_2+\beta_3X_3+\beta_4X_4+\beta_5X_5+\beta_6X_6+\beta_{71}X_{71}+\beta_{72}X_{72}+\beta_8X_8+\varepsilon$$

4. Data Collection

The questionnaire data for this study were collected from June to September 2021. A total of 1648 questionnaires were distributed and 1405 questionnaires were actually returned, with a return rate of 85.25%. Of the 1405 returned questionnaires, 1325 were valid, with an efficiency rate of 94.31%.

5. Empirical Analysis

5.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

In the model constructed in this paper, the explanatory variable P is a 0-1 dichotomous variable, the explanatory variables X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 are continuous variables, and the remaining control variables are all categorical variables, so the descriptive statistical analysis involves only the explanatory variable P and the explanatory variables X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 , as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistical analysis

VARIABLES	N	mean	sd	min	max
P	1,325	0.696	0.175	0.000	1.000
CONF	1,325	3.771	0.814	1.000	0.000
COMP	1,325	3.523	0.759	1.000	5.000
STUDY	1,325	3.128	0.627	1.000	5.000

5.2 Logistic Regression Analysis

Logistic regression analysis was performed and the regression results are shown in Table 2. The regression results show that the quasi-R2 is 0.4812. the results of the Wald test based on robust standard errors show that the joint test of all regression coefficients is significant at the 0.001 level of significance.

Table 2. Logistic regression analysis

	Coef. (z)
X_1	1.206**** (4.53)
X_2	1.007**** (3.69)
X_3	0.837*** (3.26)
X_4	0.324 (0.17)
X_5	0.399**** (4.17)
X_6	0.430*** (3.23)
X_{71}	-0.326**** (-6.79)
X_{72}	-0.437**** (-6.33)
X_8	0.249*** (3.28)
_cons	5.73**** (9.94)
N	1325

z statistics in parentheses

* $p<0.1$, ** $p<0.05$, *** $p<0.01$, **** $p<0.001$

Table 3 shows the results of the multicollinearity test, where all VIF values are less than 10 and less than 5, indicating that the logistic regression results in this paper are not substantially affected by the multicollinearity problem.

Table 3. Multicollinearity test

Variable	VIF
X ₁	1.45
X ₂	1.68
X ₃	1.77
X ₄	3.74
X ₅	3.09
X ₆	1.95
X ₇₁	1.94
X ₇₂	1.67
X ₈	1.59
Mean VIF	2.10

6. Model Interpretation and Research Findings

The regression coefficient of learning mechanism is 0.837 at 0.01 level of significance. College students will acquire knowledge and information about national identity for learning purposes, which will enhance their national identity^[7]. Based on the results of the t-test, the regression coefficients of the learning mechanism are significantly lower than those of the herding mechanism and the competition mechanism. This indicates that the role of this path is much lower than the role of the crowd and competition paths at this stage.

The regression coefficient of the herding mechanism is 1.206 at the 0.001 significance level, which indicates that college students obtain knowledge and information about national identity from their peers for the purpose of herding, and thus enhance their national identity. On the one hand, this shows that it is important and urgent to improve the national identity of college students at this stage, and on the other hand, it shows that an effective way to improve the national identity of college students at this stage is based on the herd behavior within the group.

The regression coefficient of the competition mechanism is 1.007 at the 0.001 significance level. On the one hand, in the various thematic activities aimed at enhancing the national identity of college students, college students compete for the satisfaction of personal achievement^[8]. On the other hand, the results of the above-mentioned thematic activities are linked to the overall ranking of college students in various forms, which also triggers the competition mechanism within the group. Therefore, competition mechanism is another effective way to enhance the sense of national identity within the college students' group.

Gender does not have a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at this stage. There is no significant difference between male and female college students' national identity because both of them do not pay enough attention to national identity subjectively. This suggests that the same level of attention

should be given to male and female college students in improving the national identity of college students.

Ethnic characteristics have a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.001 significance level. The national identity of ethnic minority college students is significantly higher than that of Han Chinese college students. We believe that this should be the result of China's various inclined support policies for ethnic minority regions.

The grade difference has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.01 level of significance. The national identity of college students in the upper grade group is higher than that of college students in the lower grade group. This should be attributed to the fact that along with the deepening of national identity-related perceptions of college students in the senior group, their sense of national identity also increased accordingly.

Group size has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.001 level of significance. In the specific scenario of national identity formation among college students, the effect of cohort effect decreases with the increase of group size. This is also consistent with the findings of the existing literature.

Abroad experience has a significant effect on the formation of national identity among college students at the 0.01 significance level^[9]. College students who had the experience of going abroad had higher national identity due to the changes in the external environment.

7. Conclusions

Enhancing young people's sense of national identity is a real and important issue^[10]. This paper explores the role of the herd effect in the formation of national identity among college students based on the herd effect theory. The results of the empirical study show that at the current stage, the formation of national identity within the group of Chinese college students mainly relies on the herding mechanism, followed by the competition mechanism, and then the learning mechanism. Unlike the existing studies, this paper adopts a quantitative research method to explore the paths of the cohort effect on the formation of national identity among college students on the basis of portraying the characteristics of college students' groups. Therefore, the findings of this paper are more relevant, valid and feasible. However, there are still shortcomings in the analysis of sample representativeness, control of college students' group characteristics, and the interaction of cohort effect paths in this paper. We hope to further improve the research based on stratified sampling, increasing the control variables of group characteristics, and interac-

tion term analysis in the follow-up work.

Research Project

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