The Impact of Chinese Emotional Reality Shows on Generation Z's Intimate Relationships

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1. Overview

In the era of digital consumption, Chinese emotional reality shows have surged in popularity, captivating Generation Z audiences with narratives that intertwine dramatized romance and real-life elements. These programs are not merely sources of entertainment but powerful mediums that mold perceptions and expectations about intimate relationships among young viewers. This research aims to investigate the nuanced impact of these shows on Generation Z in China, exploring how televised narratives influence their understanding and behavior in intimate relationships.

1.1 Research Questions

(1) How do Chinese emotional reality shows shape Generation Z's perceptions of romantic relationships?

This question seeks to uncover the extent to which these shows influence young viewers' concepts of romance and partnership, questioning the alignment or distortion of healthy relationship dynamics.

(2) How do social media discussions about emotional reality shows reflect or influence Generation Z's views and behaviors in intimate relationships?

This question aims to explore the effect of social media conversations on young viewers' perceptions and actions regarding romantic relationships, examining how these online discussions shape or modify their understanding and expectations of intimacy.

1.2 Significance

This study explores how Chinese emotional reality shows affect Generation Z's perceptions and behaviors regarding intimate relationships, making a significant addition to the existing field of media research. By thoroughly analyzing the impact of these television programs, this research will enrich discussions on how media shapes cultural identities and social norms. The findings will guide content creators and policymakers in designing media content with greater social responsibility. Moreover, it will help Generation Z understand the crucial role media content plays in shaping their notions and behaviors in romantic relationships. By providing insights into the profound effects of these reality shows, the study aims to enhance young viewers' media literacy, enabling them to more consciously analyze and assess how the content they consume molds their personal views on relationships. Additionally, this research may assist educators and psychological consultants in understanding the challenges modern youth face in interpersonal interactions and emotional expression, offering them more targeted support and guidance.

1.3 Theoretical Context

This research is grounded in media influence and social learning theories, exploring how media shapes social behaviors and norms. Specifically, it aims to reveal how media content influences audience behavior in non-Western settings, regulating and forming social behaviors through its impact.

1.4 Practical Implications

The insights provided by this study will help media producers and cultural analysts understand the actual effects of popular media on the behaviors and attitudes of youth, guiding them in creating content that more healthily and authentically reflects interpersonal dynamics. Furthermore, these insights will contribute to the development of educational programs aimed at enhancing young people's media critical skills, enabling them to more wisely evaluate and select the media content they consume.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the digital media era, emotional reality shows have rapidly risen as a new form of entertainment globally, attracting a massive audience with their

diverse themes and narrative styles. These programs cover a range of romantic journeys from singles searching for their other halves, such as in “Heart Signal (心动的信号)” and “Let’s Fall in Love(我们相爱吧),” to couples exploring marital life in travel experiences like “Viva La Romance(妻子的浪漫旅行),” and even delve into deep discussions about marital crises and emotional healing in shows like “Goodbye Lover(再见爱人).”

In China, these shows have captivated many young viewers, especially those from Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010), with their unique narrative styles and the blend of reality and dramatization. These programs provide entertainment and subtly shape viewers’ perceptions and expectations of love and marriage by depicting the formation, conflicts, and resolutions of intimate relationships. However, the influence is not unidirectional; the rise of social media platforms has further amplified the impact of these shows. Audiences discuss, analyze, and recreate content from these shows on platforms like Weibo, TikTok, and Xiaohongshu, allowing the narratives and values presented in the programs to be disseminated and reinforced within a broader social context.

Although emotional reality shows’ role in shaping perceptions of intimate relationships has garnered some attention and discussion in academia, most existing research is based in Western contexts, lacking an in-depth exploration of China’s unique cultural background. Moreover, research specifically targeting Generation Z is relatively limited. As digital natives, Generation Z’s

media consumption habits and social interactions differ significantly from previous generations, which makes their reactions to and acceptance of emotional reality shows, as well as their interpretations of their own intimate relationships, particularly distinctive. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Chinese emotional reality shows, through program content and social media interactions, shape Generation Z's cognition and behavior regarding intimate relationships.

This study seeks to answer two core questions: first, how do Chinese emotional reality shows affect Generation Z's perceptions of romantic relationships? Second, how do discussions on social media further amplify or alter this influence? By exploring these questions, this study hopes to fill the gaps in existing research and provide practical guidance for media content creators and educators, helping them better understand the impact of media on the younger generation and design media content with greater social responsibility.

This literature review will systematically organize existing research around these questions, focusing on theories of media influence, the relationship between reality shows and intimate relationships, mechanisms of audience interaction with social media, and unique phenomena within the Chinese context. Through a critical analysis of existing studies, this review will reveal research gaps and provide theoretical support and practical insights for subsequent studies.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In examining the influence of emotional reality shows on Generation Z's understanding of intimate relationships, this study draws upon three pivotal theoretical frameworks: (1) Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), (2) Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), and (3) Convergence Culture (Jenkins, 2006). These frameworks are crucial for analyzing how media content molds viewer behavior, cognition, and societal norms.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory underscores that individuals absorb social norms and values by observing and mimicking the behaviors of others. Within emotional reality shows, participants project specific ideas about love, marriage, and interpersonal relationships through their conduct and interactions. Notably, the romantic vignettes and constructive resolutions featured in these shows often serve as models for ideal relationships, prompting viewers to replicate these behaviors in their own lives.

Gerbner and Gross's (1976) Cultivation Theory highlights the long-term effects of media exposure on societal perceptions. By consistently showcasing romanticized conflicts and idealized depictions of love, these shows subtly shape audience expectations and perceptions of real-life relationships. The dramatized portrayals frequently encountered in these programs might lead viewers to erroneously perceive these scripted scenarios as typical for intimate relationships, thereby skewing their comprehension of what constitutes healthy

and positive relational dynamics.

Jenkins's (2006) Convergence Culture theory illustrates how the merging of traditional and new media transforms viewers from passive observers into active participants. Viewers engage deeply with the content through social media platforms like Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili, where they analyze, discuss, and even recreate media content dynamically. In the realm of emotional reality shows, this social media engagement magnifies the influence of the shows and may reinforce or challenge the narratives presented, further molding viewers' perceptions of intimate relationships. Discussions on social media about specific episodes can spark widespread societal dialogue and potentially alter perceptions and expectations of intimate relationships among broader audiences. This engagement enhances the emotional connection with the content and extends the influence of these media narratives beyond the screen, fostering a vibrant, multi-layered cultural exchange.

2.3 Reality Shows and Intimate Relationships

As a unique media form, reality shows have a profound impact on viewers' perceptions of intimate relationships through their combination of authenticity and dramatization. This section, drawing on the studies by Dubrofsky (2011) and Murray & Ouellette (2009), explores how reality shows shape viewers' understanding of love, marriage, and interpersonal relationships through narrative, character development, and the transmission of social norms.

Dubrofsky (2011) delves into how reality shows use narrative strategies and editing techniques to reinforce traditional romantic notions and gender stereotypes. Her analysis highlights those female participants in reality shows are often placed in a passive position of being observed and judged, which reflects a "surveillance culture" fully manifested in the production of these shows. For example, Chinese emotional reality shows often feature a dedicated observation room where guests analyze participants' behaviors and interactions in real time. This setup intensifies the scrutiny of participants, and further reinforces traditional gender roles. In shows like "The Bachelor," the appearance, behavior, and emotional expressions of female participants often become the focus of discussion, subtly conveying a specific model of intimate relationships to the audience. Long-term exposure to such content may lead viewers to mistakenly believe that these highly dramatized and gendered interactions are the norm for intimate relationships, thus affecting their correct understanding and expectations of healthy relationships.

Murray & Ouellette (2009) note that reality shows are not just entertainment products but also powerful tools for shaping social norms and values. Their research shows that reality shows, by depicting the lives of "ordinary people," convey specific social values and behavioral patterns to the audience. Romantic scenes and seemingly ideal conflict resolution methods often serve as templates for intimate relationships, influencing viewers' real-life behavior choices. However, individuals in real life have unique thought

patterns and behaviors, and there can be significant discrepancies between idealized show narratives and complex reality, potentially misleading viewers. Through dramatized narrative techniques, reality shows shape viewers' expectations of intimate relationships and also subtly influence their perceptions of love, marriage, and interpersonal relationships, causing viewers to unconsciously use the patterns seen in the shows as standards in real life, overlooking the diversity and complexity of real relationships.

In summary, the studies by Dubrofsky (2011) and Murray & Ouellette (2009) reveal how reality shows shape viewers' cognition of intimate relationships through narrative, character shaping, and the transmission of social norms. These studies demonstrate that reality shows entertain and influence viewers' understanding of love, marriage, and interpersonal relationships through their content and form. However, existing research is largely based on a Western context and lacks an in-depth discussion of the unique cultural background of Chinese emotional reality shows. Therefore, this study will combine the Chinese context to explore how emotional reality shows, through their unique content and form, shape Generation Z's cognition of intimate relationships.

2.4 Social Media and Audience Interaction

In the digital media landscape, social media platforms have emerged as pivotal channels for audience interaction with emotional reality shows,

significantly shaping viewers' perceptions of intimate relationships. Zhang & Luo (2021) highlight that discussions on platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu disseminate and reinforce romantic plots and conflict resolution methods depicted in these shows, solidifying and internalizing viewers' romantic notions. This effect magnifies the influence of the programs and shapes social concepts through user-generated content like comments and bullet screens. Marwick & boyd (2011) discuss the phenomenon of "context collapse" on social media, where users face challenges in managing their self-images across different platforms. They note that sharing views on program plots can spark broad social discussions, thereby influencing people's understanding and expectations of intimate relationships. Jenkins (2006) introduces the concept of "convergence culture," which underscores how the merging of old and new media transforms viewers from passive recipients into active participants, enhancing a program's influence and enabling viewers to either reinforce or challenge the narrative, further shaping their cognition of intimate relationships.

The commonalities among these studies include the significant amplification of the show's influence through social media, which enhances viewer engagement and transforms them from passive recipients to active participants. This shift allows for the internalization of the concepts presented in the shows and facilitates the shaping of broader social concepts through widespread dissemination. However, the studies also present differences in

their focus and implications. Zhang & Luo (2021) concentrate on the reinforcement of romantic stereotypes, Marwick & boyd (2011) examine the challenges of "context collapse," and Jenkins (2006) emphasizes the role of active audience participation in "Convergence Culture." Additionally, the impact of interactions varies, with Zhang & Luo noting that social media primarily reinforces narratives presented in the shows, Marwick & boyd suggesting that such interactions can spark broader social discussions, and Jenkins highlighting the potential for these interactions to challenge show narratives, thus giving viewers more space for interpretation and creation. The cultural contexts of these studies also differ, with Zhang & Luo and Jenkins focusing on Western contexts, while Marwick & boyd address a more general phenomenon across various social media platforms without delving into cultural specifics.

2.5 Research in the Chinese Context

In the Chinese context, the impact of emotional reality shows is shaped by a unique cultural and social background.

Sun (2009) further revealed the uniqueness of Chinese television culture, noting that TV programs shape social values through emotional and educational narratives. Sun's research indicates that Chinese television programs entertain viewers and convey specific social values through emotional storytelling. For example, emotional reality shows, by showcasing family concepts and

traditional values, further reinforce viewers' expectations of marriage and intimate relationships. This cultural backdrop results in significant differences in narrative styles and content choices between Chinese and Western shows.

Zhang (2017) focused on the emergence of the Chinese internet and new social formations, exploring the representation of fan culture on social media and its impact on social concepts. Her research shows that fan culture amplifies the impact of media content and solidifies certain social concepts through interactions on social media. For instance, fans of emotional reality shows sharing their views on platforms like Weibo and Xiaohongshu can spark broader social discussions, thereby influencing more people's understanding of intimate relationships.

2.6 Research Gaps

Although existing studies provide important references for understanding the impact of emotional reality shows on audience perceptions of intimate relationships, there are still significant research gaps. First, the existing literature is largely based on a Western context and lacks an in-depth discussion of the unique cultural background of Chinese emotional reality shows. Chinese emotional reality shows are influenced by global media formats and deeply rooted in local cultural traditions and social values, which have not been sufficiently studied.

Secondly, existing research pays little attention to Generation Z, a specific

group. As digital natives, Generation Z's media consumption habits and social interaction methods differ significantly from previous generations. The ways they interact with program content through social media platforms (such as Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Bilibili) might further amplify or alter the impact of the content, but this phenomenon has not been deeply analyzed.

Lastly, existing research often remains at the theoretical level and lacks in-depth discussion of actual impacts. For example, the applicability of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) in the Chinese context has not been adequately validated, and the long-term influence of emotional reality shows on audience behavior and values still needs further study.

3. Methodology Rationalization

3.1 Methodological Choice

My primary qualitative research method is one-on-one interviews, as this approach is particularly suited to exploring the impact of Chinese emotional reality shows on the perceptions of intimate and interpersonal relationships among audiences, especially Generation Z.

There are four main reasons for choosing this method:

(1) One-on-one interviews provide ample time to deeply explore participants' personal reactions and feelings towards emotional reality shows. This in-depth dialogue helps me understand how viewers interpret program content

and the specific impact this content has on their emotional and interpersonal relationship concepts.

(2) One-on-one interviews offer high flexibility, allowing me to adjust questions and discussion directions in real time based on the information and reactions provided by respondents. This open dialogue format is more likely to elicit genuine responses, thus obtaining more complete data and deeper insights.

(3) Compared to focus group discussions, which can be influenced by group dynamics, one-on-one interviews provide a more private space. This setting enables interviewees to express their true feelings and opinions more freely, without interference or pressure from group consensus.

(4) One-on-one interviews help to establish a trust relationship between the researcher and the participants, creating a safe environment for discussing sensitive topics such as personal emotional views. I ensure the protection of participants' privacy before the interviews, encouraging them to share their experiences and perspectives more openly, thereby enriching the data's depth and breadth.

In summary, one-on-one interviews are an ideal method for exploring the complex issue of how emotional reality shows influence audience emotional cognition. They effectively capture the nuances of individual differences and complex emotional responses, which are difficult to achieve with other qualitative methods. This approach helps to understand how individuals digest

and respond to media content, delves deeper into how these experiences shape their overall perceptions of interpersonal relationships.

3.2 Plan for Implementation

3.2.1 Sampling and Recruitment Strategy

In my research project, I have employed a recruitment strategy that utilizes personal relationships, as most of my participants are people I am familiar with. This method was specifically chosen to create a comfortable environment that encourages open and honest dialogue, which is crucial for gathering deep insights into the personal and emotional responses to reality dating shows.

This recruitment method, based on established trust relationships, enhances the comfort and openness of participants, while clear recruitment information minimizes possible misunderstandings or concerns. The personalized invitation approach strengthens my connection with participants, helping to improve the response rate and data quality of the study. If time permits, I also plan to post recruitment information on social media platforms to broaden the scope and attract more potential participants.

Using personal contacts allows me to clearly explain the study's objectives and requirements directly to potential participants, ensuring they fully understand the nature of the research and their role. This

direct interaction can immediately address any questions they may have, thereby enhancing their willingness to participate.

My target demographic is Generation Z group. This age group is active on various social media and online platforms and it's the core audience for reality dating shows. Their viewing experiences can provide unique insights, especially regarding how these programs affect their emotional and interpersonal relationships.

To ensure the collection of diverse perspectives, I recruit participants from my social network who have varied backgrounds, considering educational backgrounds, professional fields, and social circles. This method helps to gather rich and varied data, reflecting comprehensively how the Chinese Gen Z is influenced by reality dating shows in forming their views on intimate relationships.

In summary, this recruitment strategy aims to fully leverage the advantages of personal networks to build an actively participating and diverse group of participants, ensuring the collection of valuable and in-depth qualitative data for the study.

3.2.2 Research Design Tools

Interview Protocol: Before the interview, I show participants a clip from a reality dating show that explores contentious approaches to managing intimate relationships. This aims to provoke reflections on

specific scenarios, setting the stage for deeper discussions.

Video Information: The clip features a pivotal conflict between Zhang and Song, where Zhang emotionally breaks down, accusing Song and making extreme statements. Song's attempt to de-escalate the situation with responses like "It's not as serious as you think," "Nobody is blaming you," and "Let's go back, let's leave," ends up dismissing Zhang's emotions, inadvertently escalating the conflict instead of addressing the underlying emotional distress.

Core Interview Questions:

- Reality vs. Show: How does the conflict resolution method in the video, such as Song Ningfeng's rational responses, compare with your real-life experiences? What is your opinion on the social media critique that such communication styles might cause partners to feel overlooked?
- Impact Assessment: Does watching this clip change how you handle personal relationships, even if you don't often watch such shows? Have social media discussions made you rethink your communication styles in intimate relationships?
- Content Attraction Analysis: What draws you to reality dating shows? Are you attracted by the plot, character development, or their approach to emotional issues? How do these aspects meet or influence your emotional needs?

- Social Media Interaction Impact: How have social media discussions about this show's conflict scenes affected your views and feelings about the couple or the show overall? Have these discussions reshaped your expectations of ideal romantic relationships?
- Educational Value Exploration: How has the argument scene between Zhang and Song impacted your understanding of intimate relationships? How have social media discussions about this scene induced feelings of both anticipation and fear regarding romantic relationships? Please share your views on this "fear and anticipation" phenomenon in society.

Observation Guide:

The observation component of this study will be conducted across two primary settings. Online platforms such as Weibo, Douyin, and Xiaohongshu will serve as venues for observing digital interactions. Additionally, offline observations will take place in university community centers or public rest areas, where audiences naturally gather to watch and discuss shows. This dual approach allows for a broad understanding of audience engagement both in isolated and social environments.

The focus of the observations will center on the direct reactions of the audience to the portrayal of romantic relationships within the reality shows, capturing nuances such as emotional expressions, the content of comments, and body language. This includes examining themes and styles of discussions which reflect the audience's acceptance and critique of the content. Additionally, the research will look into how audiences share and discuss content, particularly focusing on expressions and sentiments shared across social media platforms.

For recording methods, field observations will involve using notebooks to meticulously document descriptive and behavioral data, noting details like reaction times, facial expressions, and the frequency of interactions. For online settings, the approach will include capturing screenshots and marking timestamps of significant interactions and discussions, thus providing a reliable basis for comprehensive analysis later.

To minimize intervention and preserve the natural flow of discussions, my role will be that of a passive observer. In online environments, I will refrain from engaging in the comments, opting instead to document observations unobtrusively. This method ensures that the data collected is as organic as possible, reflecting true audience reactions without external influence.

By integrating these observational strategies with in-depth interviews, the study aims to capture a comprehensive spectrum of audience reactions to the content of reality dating shows, offering deeper insights into how such media content influences public perceptions and constructs of intimate relationships.

3.2.3 Data Collection Strategy

In this study, data collection primarily relies on interview notes and sensory data, both derived from in-depth interviews and situational observations. Here are the detailed strategies for data collection:

Interview notes involve the transcription of recordings. After each interview, I transcribe the recordings into text, with the participant's consent for recording, ensuring the completeness and accuracy of the data. This transcription includes every statement made by the participants as well as significant non-verbal communication cues, such as prolonged silences, sighs, or laughter, which might indicate their emotional state and reactions. Additionally, during the interviews, I pay special attention to recording changes in participants' emotions when discussing specific topics. This includes variations in their tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language, which are crucial sensory data for understanding the participants' genuine feelings about the discussion topics.

Sensory data is another critical component. The clips from reality dating shows shown before the interviews serve as a vital sensory stimulus. I record participants' reactions while watching these videos, including their facial expressions, comments, and any immediate emotional responses. This information helps me understand how media content triggers specific emotional responses and how these responses influence participants' perceptions of intimate relationships. Additionally, during observations, besides focusing on participants' direct reactions, I also document other sensory information in the observation environment, such as reactions from other viewers and the overall atmosphere. This data aids in constructing a more comprehensive understanding of the context, thereby enhancing the analysis of the data.

By combining interview notes and sensory data, this research aims to delve deeply into how reality dating shows affect young viewers' perceptions of intimate relationships. These data will provide a multi-faceted perspective on the impact of reality dating shows, helping to analyze what the participants say, their non-verbal expressions, and emotional reactions, thereby offering deeper insights.

3.2.4 Ethical Consideration

In my study on the influence of Chinese reality dating shows on

Generation Z's intimate relationships, upholding ethical standards was essential. I implemented measures to tackle potential ethical issues and manage power dynamics, ensuring the integrity of the study.

My background and personal experiences as a young researcher significantly shape data interpretation. This perspective fosters trust and a deeper understanding of participants' responses. However, I am careful to ensure that my biases and emotions do not affect the analysis. I engage in regular self-reflection, documented in method memos, to assess and mitigate the influence of my biases on data interpretation.

Handling power dynamics carefully is crucial to make participants feel comfortable expressing their genuine thoughts without feeling pressured to provide 'desirable' answers. I clearly communicated the voluntary nature of the research from the beginning, stressed that all responses are valid, and created a supportive environment that encourages open and honest dialogue.

Before starting their participation, I informed participants about the research's goals, procedures, and how their data would be used, and I obtained their informed consent. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, ensuring they felt in control of their participation.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the discussions, I took strict measures to maintain confidentiality and privacy. All data were

anonymized, and participants were reassured that their information would only be used for academic purposes.

To address potential emotional discomfort or distress during discussions, I developed strategies to manage these situations sensitively. I remained alert to participants' emotional states during interviews, ready to adjust the discussion to maintain their comfort levels.

4. Alternative Methodology

4.1 Exploration of an Alternative Method

An alternative qualitative method that could be used to address my research question on the influence of Chinese emotional reality shows on Generation Z's intimate relationships is focus groups. This approach involves gathering participants from diverse backgrounds to discuss their perceptions and reactions in a group setting. Focus groups can reveal collective cultural interpretations and social dynamics that might not surface in individual interviews.

Focus groups create a dynamic environment where participants influence each other through discussion, allowing for a deeper understanding of social norms and peer influences on intimate relationships. The interaction among participants can provoke more detailed and thoughtful responses, enabling a deeper exploration of the collective impact of media. This method is

particularly beneficial for exploring how social norms and peer discussions shape individuals' perceptions and behaviors.

4.2 Comparative Analysis

However, focus groups also have limitations. The group setting might pressure individuals to conform to the dominant opinions, potentially stifling unique or dissenting views. The presence of the researcher as moderator and peers might lead to social desirability bias, with participants expressing what they think is acceptable rather than their true feelings. Additionally, managing group dynamics and ensuring equitable participation can be challenging. Dominant personalities might overshadow quieter ones, skewing the data towards the views of more vocal participants.

Compared to in-depth interviews, focus groups may not provide the same level of depth in individual experiences due to shared time and group dynamics. In-depth interviews offer a private setting where participants might be more willing to share sensitive or personal experiences and opinions without fear of judgment. These interviews allow for a deeper exploration of individual narratives, which is crucial for understanding the personal impact of media on intimate relationships.

Reflecting on previous method memo 8, while focus groups facilitated effective discussions when structured with clear goals and specific, open-ended questions, they also faced challenges in managing group dynamics and

ensuring all voices were heard. Effective moderation and well-designed questions are crucial for addressing these issues, suggesting that while focus groups could be a valuable method, they require careful planning and skilled moderation to maximize their advantages and mitigate their inherent challenges.

Moreover, the rich dialogue within focus groups can provide insights into how collective opinions are formed and shared, offering a unique perspective that complements the findings from individual interviews. This makes focus groups an attractive alternative methodology for topics where social interaction plays a key role in shaping perceptions.

In conclusion, while focus groups offer valuable insights into collective behaviors and norms, the depth and confidentiality provided by one-on-one interviews make them more suitable for my research objectives. This exploration underscores the importance of methodological flexibility and the necessity of closely aligning research strategies with the specific goals and context of the study.

5. Conclusion and Contributions

This study focuses on the impact of Chinese reality dating shows on the intimate relationship perceptions of Generation Z, a topic that is relatively underexplored in current academic research. By employing in-depth interviews, this research delves into how the younger generation constructs, reflects on, and reshapes their views on love and intimate behaviors through viewing these

programs. The findings reveal that despite criticism for portraying overly dramatized relationships, these shows actually provide a vital platform for young viewers to reflect deeply on what constitutes a healthy intimate relationship and how to implement these ideals in real life.

The choice of in-depth interviews as the research method offers unique advantages. Compared to the quantitative methods commonly used in the literature, in-depth interviews capture the emotional fluctuations and cognitive changes of individuals after watching the shows in greater detail. This method allows researchers to thoroughly explore participants' personal experiences and inner worlds, revealing the complex and subtle interactions between reality show content and the personal emotional experiences of viewers. Through this detailed qualitative analysis, the study goes beyond surface phenomena to touch on the deep psychological mechanisms and sociocultural factors that shape Generation Z's perceptions of intimate relationships.

The findings of this study have significant implications for future academic research and practical applications. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of using qualitative research methods in studies of youth-media relationships. These methods can uncover deep-seated psychological and sociocultural dynamics that quantitative research may miss, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the impact of media on youth development. Secondly, for content creators, this study suggests that by presenting more diverse and authentic models of romantic

relationships, reality dating shows can entertain audiences while also promoting the spread and practice of healthy romantic notions. Lastly, the study also offers valuable data support for policymakers, helping them better understand how youth consume media content and formulate more effective guidance policies to foster healthy development among the young.

Overall, this research not only fills a gap in existing studies but also provides new perspectives and substantial data support for understanding the impact of media content on the psychological and social development of youth. These findings are expected to spark further academic discussions about the influence of media content on youth development and provide new ideas and directions for practical research in related fields. By exploring the influence of reality dating shows on the intimate relationship perceptions of Generation Z, this study offers significant theoretical foundations and practical guidance for understanding the psychological development and socialization processes of contemporary youth under media influence.

Appendix

Contact Email

For further inquiries or additional information regarding the study, please feel free to contact:

Email: yangyh2@uw.edu

Recruitment Letter

Dear [Name],

I am currently conducting a study on the impact of reality dating shows on young people's perceptions of intimate relationships. Whether or not you have watched such programs, your insights would be highly valuable and greatly appreciated.

Our discussion will delve into how these shows influence viewers' understanding and expectations of relationships. The conversation is expected to last approximately 20-30 minutes and can be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for you. Please be assured that all information discussed will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for academic research purposes. Your identity will be safeguarded throughout the process.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this message, and I will provide you with further details. Thank you very much for considering this opportunity to contribute to this research. I look forward to your participation and valuable insights.

Warm regards,

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