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Generational Gap in Attitudes Toward Love and Marriage: A Study on the Influence of Intergenerational Love Observation Variety Shows on Young People's Love Outlook Postprint

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Abstract

In an era characterized by the increasing diversification of concepts regarding marriage and romantic relationships, intergenerational emotion-observation variety programs vividly depict generational differences in these concepts while thoroughly exploring idealized notions of love, thereby garnering widespread audience acclaim. Analysis of collected valid questionnaires reveals that such variety programs not only satisfy audiences' emotional needs but also exert a significant influence on their conceptualizations of love and marriage. Furthermore, increased viewing duration, frequency, and immersion correlate positively with greater acceptance of elder generations' perspectives on romantic relationships. These findings demonstrate that intergenerational emotion-observation variety programs play a constructive role in mitigating intergenerational value conflicts and guiding contemporary youth toward establishing healthy conceptualizations of marriage and romantic relationships.

Full Text

The Generation Gap in Attitudes Toward Love and Marriage: A Study on the Influence of Intergenerational Love Observation Variety Shows on Young People's Outlook on Love

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Abstract: In an era of gradually diversifying concepts of marriage and love, intergenerational emotion observation variety shows vividly portray differences between generations in their understanding of romantic relationships while fully exploring ideal love concepts, thereby earning recognition from large audiences. After analyzing effective questionnaires, this research found that such variety shows not only meet audiences' emotional needs but also influence their love concepts. The greater the audience's viewing duration, frequency, and immersion, the stronger their recognition of their elders' love concepts. This demonstrates that intergenerational emotion observation variety shows hold positive significance in bridging value-based opposition between different generations and guiding contemporary youth to establish healthy concepts of marriage and love.

Key words: Intergenerational love observation variety show, love view, media use

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of accelerated economic and social transformation in China, young people have demonstrated increasingly differentiated ideals regarding love and marriage, with significantly heightened attention to their own feelings. This has created a substantial “gap” in their understanding of love compared to previous generations. Fortunately, with the diversified development of online variety shows, intergenerational love observation programs—featuring young guests as observed subjects and their parents as observers—have distinguished themselves within the broader category of romance-themed variety shows. As media content capable of disseminating concepts of love and marriage, these programs spread widely through network platforms, thereby exerting subtle influences on audience perspectives regarding love and marriage. Preliminary online investigations suggest that intergenerational emotion observation variety shows have, to some extent, narrowed the generational “gap” between young people and elders concerning marriage and love.

Building upon these observations, this paper attempts to interpret the causes and mechanisms through which intergenerational love observation variety shows influence young people's concepts of marriage and love via audience surveys. It verifies the potential impact of such programs on youth love concepts and explores their value in correctly guiding young people toward healthy marriage and love perspectives.

2.1 Literature Review of Emotional Observation Programs

As an emerging program format in recent years, love observation variety shows are in the ascendant phase of development. Related research primarily focuses on program form and content, such as narrative characteristics and image construction, or treats these shows as unique online cultural phenomena to examine audience cultural consumption and program value orientation. For in-

stance, Zhang Zhiyu noted in “Narrative Research on Observed Reality Shows” that story content in reality programs exhibits performative tendencies. Li Na, through studying the cultural consumption phenomenon of love observation variety shows, pointed out that media may mislead audiences and blur boundaries between reality and virtuality by creating emotional simulacra and connecting emotions with commodity simulacra. Ji Jian, in “Research on the Value Orientation of Family Emotion Observation Variety Shows,” observed that such programs generally promote correct love concepts while communicating against vulgar love concepts. Overall, academic research on intergenerational love observation variety shows, both domestically and internationally, remains worthy of exploration from the perspective of audience influence.

2.2 Literature Review of Research Theory

In the 1960s and 1970s, scholar E. Katz mentioned the study of “uses and gratifications” in popular culture surveys and research. After entering the digital age, research and application of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in academic circles have become more in-depth both at home and abroad, with studies on media content usage and satisfaction gradually attracting scholarly attention. Wang Shaojun and Li Xiaobing believe that emotional spirit and aesthetic acceptance are key indicators attracting Generation Z to new mainstream film and television content. Zhao Zhenwu analyzed the communication effects of slow-paced variety shows on cognition, attitude, and behavior based on Uses and Gratifications Theory. However, most studies have not yet analyzed the correlation between media use and audiences’ emotions, concepts, and behaviors, and thus cannot fully demonstrate satisfaction effects.

In the 1950s and 1960s, television held the position of the most influential medium of that era, prompting numerous scholars to conduct research on mass communication effects centered on television. In 1976, American scholars George Gerbner and Larry Gross formally proposed Cultivation Analysis Theory for the first time. Their research found that the longer people immersed themselves in television media, the more their cognition of the real world tended to align with content repeatedly presented on television. In China, scholar Cai Qi pointed out the “cultural orientation” index in cultivation theory in his “Historical Thinking and Methodological Reflection on Cultivation Theory,” which helps explain that media content can not only change people’s value orientation but also alter their behavior. Xu Jiyang used cultivation theory to analyze the influence of celebrity parent-child reality shows on Shanghai college students’ educational concepts, finding that such programs had a cultivation effect on some audiences and impacted their fertility concept formation. However, in research on emotion observation reality programs, most studies focus on emotional narration and cultural consumption, with insufficient application and analysis of cultivation theory.

Therefore, this paper will employ both Uses and Gratifications Theory and Cultivation Theory to analyze why intergenerational emotion observation variety

shows can enhance discussion and identification between young people and their parents regarding love concepts. Simultaneously, this research investigates how media use affects young people's recognition of and willingness to discuss elders' love views when watching intergenerational emotion observation variety shows, as well as the impact of narrowing the intergenerational love gap on youth love concepts.

3 Research Assumptions and Methods

Based on the above considerations, this study employs audience survey methods to explore the impact of intergenerational love observation variety shows on young people's love concepts.

3.1 Research Assumptions

H1: The more one watches intergenerational love observation variety shows, the more one agrees with parents' love views.

H2: The more immersed one is in watching intergenerational emotion observation variety shows, the more one agrees with parents' love views.

H3: The more one watches intergenerational love observation variety shows, the more likely one is to discuss relevant topics with parents offline.

H4: The more immersive the viewing experience of intergenerational love observation variety shows, the more inclined one is to discuss relevant topics with parents offline.

3.2 Audience Survey Methods

This questionnaire survey measured audience immersion in watching intergenerational emotional variety shows and their degree of identification with parents' love views using a five-level Likert scale. Corresponding variables "immersion" and "parents' love view identification" were generated by summing these scale statements and included in subsequent data analysis.

3.2.1 Sample Selection Through analysis of content, structure, audience ratings, and audience characteristics of intergenerational emotion observation variety shows, the corresponding population for the research hypothesis was identified as the audience group of such programs. First, we conducted non-representative sampling and judgmental sampling for this group to ensure sampling effectiveness. This research used the Wenjuanxing platform to design and distribute questionnaires. Distribution channels included WeChat, Weibo, Baidu Post Bar, QQ Space, Zhihu, and the Wenjuanxing mutual-filling community. The questionnaire was distributed from January 18 to January 27. Respondents involved people of different ages, educational backgrounds, regions, and income levels to ensure diversity and reliability.

3.2.2 Questionnaire Design The questionnaire was created using Wenjuanxing and included single-choice, multiple-choice, and fill-in-the-blank questions, totaling 18 questions divided into three parts. Question 1 screened whether respondents had watched intergenerational emotion observation reality shows before officially entering the investigation. The first part (Questions 2-6) collected basic demographic information, including gender, age, education background, occupation, income, region, and education level. The second part (Questions 7-13), titled “Viewing Behavior,” investigated media contact, including viewing time, frequency, viewing state, viewing immersion, and familiarity with program content. The third part (Questions 14-18) surveyed feedback and evaluation after watching, including the degree of recognition of parents’ marriage views before and after watching and the degree of willingness to discuss marriage and love views with parents before and after watching.

3.2.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Questionnaire Based on Likert scale questions, this study analyzed the reliability and validity of collected questionnaire data. Analysis of questions related to viewing immersion and the younger generation’s love concepts yielded a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.913, with the standardized Cronbach’s alpha also at 0.913. Additionally, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient tests for each variable met acceptable standards: each topic measuring immersion degree had a Cronbach’s alpha greater than 0.774, while topics measuring recognition degree had Cronbach’s alpha values between 0.7-0.8. According to reliability criteria, when Cronbach’s alpha coefficient exceeds 0.7, the scale demonstrates relatively high internal consistency. Therefore, the questionnaire scale design exhibits good internal consistency.

For validity analysis of scale items, this study employed exploratory factor analysis, determining acceptability through KMO test and Bartlett’s sphericity test. The measured KMO value was 0.886, with the P-value in Bartlett’s test less than 0.001, confirming that the questionnaire validity is sufficient for further research.

4 Analysis and Discussion

This study distributed 659 questionnaires, collecting 444 valid questionnaires after eliminating invalid responses. Among these, 295 were completed by women and 149 by men. From a sample characteristics perspective, the collected questionnaires primarily came from female audiences of intergenerational emotion observation variety shows aged 26-30, with undergraduate education or above and monthly income exceeding 5,000 yuan.

4.1 Demographic Factor Analysis of Survey Audience

Statistical surveys of gender, age, education background, and region reflect preliminary diversity in sample selection. Regarding gender, there were 149 males (34.6%) and 295 females (66.4%), aligning with the primary audience positioning

of intergenerational love observation variety shows.

Regarding age, 155 respondents (35%) were aged 25-30, forming the main survey population. This was followed by 119 respondents aged 21-25 (27%) and 97 respondents aged 31-35 (22%). Finally, respondents over 35 accounted for 10%, while those under 20 accounted for 6%. The age range of 20-30 represents the peak period for young people's romantic and marital considerations, which also aligns with the motivation to use media according to personal needs.

In terms of education background, 250 respondents held undergraduate degrees (56%), 106 held junior college degrees (24%), 54 had senior high school or technical secondary school education (12%), 30 held graduate degrees (7%), and 4 had junior high school education (1%).

Regarding region, 145 respondents (33%) were from first-tier cities, 163 (37%) from second-tier cities, 89 (20%) from third-tier cities, and 47 (10%) from fourth-tier cities and below.

4.2 Correlation Analysis Between Watching Intergenerational Emotion Observation Variety Shows and Young Audience's Love Concepts

To test the influence of watching intergenerational emotion observation variety shows on young audiences' love views, these factors were converted into corresponding constants and variables for observation and analysis, yielding the following results.

1. Correlation Analysis Between Viewing Time/Frequency and Parental Love Concept Recognition Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between "viewing duration/frequency" and "parental love view recognition." The more frequently female audiences watch intergenerational emotion observation variety shows, the higher their degree of recognition of parental love views ($r = 0.534$, $P < 0.01$). Research hypothesis H1 is supported.

2. Correlation Analysis Between Viewing Immersion and Parental Love Concept Recognition Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant relationship between "viewing immersion" and "parental love view recognition." The higher female audiences' immersion in intergenerational emotion observation variety shows, the higher their recognition of parental love views ($r = 0.777$, $P < 0.01$). Research hypothesis H2 is supported.

3. Correlation Analysis Between Viewing Time/Frequency and Willingness to Discuss with Parents Analysis of the relationship between viewing frequency of intergenerational love observation variety shows and willingness to discuss related topics with parents shows that viewing frequency is significantly positively correlated with discussion willingness ($r = 0.402$, $P < 0.01$). Research hypothesis H3 is supported, indicating that higher viewing frequency

makes audiences more likely to discuss marriage and love topics with parents in real social environments.

4. Correlation Analysis Between Viewing Immersion and Willingness to Discuss Love with Parents Analysis of the relationship between immersion in watching intergenerational emotion observation variety shows and willingness to discuss related topics with parents shows that viewing immersion also demonstrates significant positive correlation with discussion willingness ($r = 0.612$, $P < 0.01$). Research hypothesis H4 is supported, indicating that higher viewing frequency and greater immersion make audiences more likely to discuss marriage and love topics with parents in real social environments.

5 Conclusion

Since 2019, the popularity of intergenerational emotion observation variety shows has continued to rise, frequently topping China's Weibo popularity rankings and triggering extensive discussion and attention from younger generations. Consequently, such variety shows have launched corresponding series, creating sustained focus on relevant topics. This research, grounded in Cultivation Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory, yields the following insights through audience survey methods.

5.1 Intergenerational Emotion Observation Variety Shows Influence Contemporary Youth's Marriage and Love Concepts

According to audience surveys in this study, young people watch corresponding intergenerational love observation variety shows based on their emotional needs regarding love and marriage, and such programs impact youth love outlooks. Cultivation Theory explains the mainstreaming process of television programs, positing that this process does not simply draw different groups closer to a middle position but moves them together in a more conservative direction. While intergenerational love observation variety shows express contemporary youth's diverse concepts of marriage and love, they also promote agreement between young people and elders on these concepts, which holds great significance for shaping positive mainstream marriage and love values.

5.2 Intergenerational Emotion Observation Variety Shows Can Guide Young People's Marriage and Love Concepts

Research confirms that viewing duration, frequency, and immersion deepen young people's recognition of elders' marriage and love concepts. However, factors influencing marriage and love concepts are complex and diverse, and establishing these concepts constitutes a dynamic social process. According to Uses and Gratifications Theory, in the current era of rapid development, actual economic conditions, media use, and social conditions comprehensively impact young people's marriage and love concepts. Therefore, in addition to bridging

generational gaps in marriage and love concepts, such variety shows should pay greater attention to preserving the personalized characteristics of young people's attitudes toward marriage and love in program design. Only in this way can they authentically reflect young people's contemplation of marriage and love concepts and gain positive recognition across generations.

Intergenerational love observation variety shows represent an emerging trend in online variety culture. In the future, they will demonstrate more noteworthy content in the process of emotional communication with audiences. Given the programs' influence, intergenerational emotion observation variety shows need to actively balance differences in marriage and love concepts between different generations and groups in future production, thereby better fulfilling their role in guiding youth group values, expanding program economic benefits, and promoting long-term program development.

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