

# The Influence of Short-Form Content Platforms on Gen Z's Dating Perceptions and Behaviors

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**Abstract:** In an era where TikTok and Instagram Reels dominate social interaction, dating behaviors have become increasingly influenced by algorithm-driven content consumption. This study examines the impact of short-form media on Gen Z's romantic experiences, focusing on self-presentation, relationship ideals, and evolving expectations. While these platforms facilitate connections by enabling users to engage with like-minded individuals and fostering open communication, they also contribute to the proliferation of unattainable relationship standards. The constant exposure to curated and idealized portrayals of romance can lead to heightened commitment anxiety and dissatisfaction when real-life relationships fail to align with online narratives. Through survey data, this research explores the intersection of social media and modern dating, shedding light on both the opportunities and challenges that arise as romantic norms continue to evolve in the digital landscape.

**Keywords:** Short-form content, Social Media Platforms, Gen Z, Dating behaviors, Relationships.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Video-sharing platforms like Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram capture the attention of millions of users daily with their short-format content, especially among people born around 1995 through 2010, commonly referred to as Generation Z (Lindholm, 2023). Born into this digital era, Generation Z has integrated short-format videos into their everyday lives.

Dating in the digital age is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven largely by the influence of short-form content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z's dating experiences are deeply intertwined with social media trends, viral relationship challenges, and algorithm-driven content that shapes romantic expectations. From choreographed couple dances to "relationship goals" compilations, online portrayals of love and dating are everywhere—blurring the line between reality and carefully curated fantasy. While these digital narratives

can be aspirational, they also introduce new complexities, raising questions about whether short-form content fosters genuine connections or fuels unrealistic expectations in modern relationships.

This study aims to examine the intersection of short-form content and Gen Z dating culture, exploring how social media influences relationship dynamics, self-presentation, and romantic decision-making. Despite existing research on social media's general impact on relationships, little attention has been given to the rapid, trend-driven nature of short-form content and its effects on dating behaviors. This study fills that gap by focusing on TikTok and Instagram Reels—platforms that shape Gen Z's perceptions of love in real time.

To achieve this, we conducted a survey of 56 Gen Z participants (ages 16-30), covering key aspects of their dating experiences. The survey examined:

- Preferred ways to meet potential partners (dating apps, mutual friends, social media, or in-person events).

- Relationship definitions and expectations, from casual dating to long-term commitment.
- Communication habits and the role of technology in dating.
- Perceived influence of social media on modern relationships, including whether it fosters connection or creates unattainable standards.
- The impact of Gen Z culture on dating—such as societal expectations, gender dynamics, and challenges in forming genuine relationships.

Through a combination of quantitative data and qualitative insights, this research uncovers both the advantages and challenges of navigating romance in a short-form content-driven world. While social media enhances communication and makes dating more accessible, it also amplifies pressures to present a curated persona, increases comparison anxiety, and shapes partner expectations in ways that may not align with reality. By analyzing these emerging patterns, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital trends are reshaping modern relationships and what this means for the future of dating culture.

- How these platforms impact perceptions of relationships, often reinforcing certain romantic ideals or behavioral norms. (How these are common and watched by people of multiple generations and they influence dating standards)
- The study's main question: Do these platforms foster authentic relationships, or do they create unrealistic expectations? (What are the possible positive or negative influences of short form content?)

This sets the stage for understanding how these platforms intersect with dating behaviors.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### ➤ *The Impact of Short-Form Content on Self-Perception, Engagement, and Long-Term Behavior*

Instagram and TikTok, as two of the most influential social networking platforms, play a crucial role in shaping users' self-presentation, identity, and social interactions. Instagram prioritizes visual aesthetics, allowing users to share curated content through photos, videos, and Stories. Features such as filters and digital retouching provide users with greater control over their self-presentation, reinforcing the importance of appearance in gaining social approval. Young users, drawn to the platform for its sense of freedom of expression (Marcelino, 2015), use Instagram to document life moments, engage in social interactions, and seek validation. However, this emphasis on idealized self-representation can contribute to unrealistic beauty standards, shaping how individuals perceive their own attractiveness, success, and social desirability. The cycle of validation through likes and comments further strengthens social pressures and expectations.

In contrast, TikTok fosters creativity and participation through short-form videos, often driven by trends and challenges. The platform encourages users to experiment with self-expression while engaging with content that reflects current social and cultural dynamics. Unlike Instagram, where polished aesthetics dominate, TikTok emphasizes interaction, humor, and relatability, shaping users' understanding of trends and social norms. Viral challenges and group engagement foster a sense of belonging, but they also encourage users to tailor their self-presentation based on peer recognition (Hernandez-Serrano et al., 2022). This dynamic can influence perceptions of identity and social acceptance, as individuals modify their content to align with popular trends. Both platforms significantly contribute to the evolution of digital self-perception, influencing how individuals navigate their online identities and social relationships.

### ➤ *The Distinctiveness and Addictiveness of Short-Form Content*

Short-form content is distinct due to its brevity, accessibility, and ability to deliver entertainment, education, or information in a concise, easily consumable format. Typically under 60 seconds, this type of content caters to short attention spans and busy lifestyles. Unlike long-form media, which requires dedicated focus, short-form videos fit seamlessly into fragmented moments throughout the day, such as during commutes or short breaks. Their rapid consumption, combined with their ability to evoke strong emotions quickly, makes them highly engaging and widely shareable. Additionally, social media platforms optimize these videos through algorithms that tailor content to individual preferences, ensuring a constant stream of relevant and appealing media.

The addictive nature of short-form content stems from its impact on the brain's dopamine pathways. Each new video serves as a fresh stimulus, triggering small dopamine releases that create pleasurable responses and encourage continued scrolling. This mechanism is similar to addictive behaviors seen in gambling or shopping. The Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) further intensifies this engagement, as users feel pressured to stay updated on rapidly evolving trends and viral challenges (AOK Marketing, n.d.). Social media algorithms reinforce this cycle by analyzing user interactions and curating personalized content feeds, leading to an endless feedback loop that keeps users engaged for prolonged periods. Features like infinite scroll remove natural stopping points, making it easy to lose track of time while consuming short-form content.

The long-term consequences of short-form content consumption include negative effects on academic performance, mental health, and motivation for long-term goal achievement. Since short-form video addiction is a specific form of internet addiction, it shares similar consequences, including increased academic procrastination. According to temporal motivation theory, individuals tend to prioritize tasks with immediate rewards over those with delayed benefits.

Short-form videos provide instant entertainment and satisfaction, which can lead students to postpone demanding academic tasks, ultimately impacting self-regulated learning and academic success. Over time, this preference for quick gratification may erode students' ability to focus on long-term goals, reducing academic persistence and productivity.

Beyond academic procrastination, excessive short-form content consumption has been linked to mental health issues such as increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. These conditions further contribute to procrastination and reduced motivation to engage in academic or professional development. Additionally, the instant gratification provided by short-form videos can reinforce cognitive patterns that prioritize immediate pleasure over long-term rewards. This shift in mindset may lower expectations for future achievements, as individuals struggle to maintain the patience and discipline required for sustained effort. Over time, this could lead to diminished confidence in personal and professional growth, reinforcing cycles of procrastination and disengagement from long-term ambitions (Xie et al., 2023).

While short-form content has transformed digital engagement by making information and entertainment more accessible, its impact on attention spans, self-perception, and goal-setting behaviors suggests the need for mindful consumption. Balancing short-form entertainment with deeper engagement in meaningful activities will be key to mitigating its potential long-term drawbacks.

#### ➤ *The Influence of Social Media on Modern Dating Trends*

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels play a significant role in shaping modern dating culture through their algorithm-driven content amplification. This rapid spread of ideas leads to quick shifts in cultural norms, influencing dating behaviors such as identifying red and green flags or defining the latest ick. As these platforms continue to evolve, they introduce new ways for people to engage with and analyze their relationships.

One trend sparked by TikTok involves testing a partner's love and devotion through hypothetical scenarios or small acts. The Orange Peel Theory, for instance, suggests that asking a partner to peel an orange is a way to gauge their thoughtfulness. While these tests may seem like fun ways to assess affection, experts warn that they oversimplify relationships. Love is not defined by small gestures but by deeper emotional connections, trust, and communication (Monaghan, 2024).

Another dating trend revolves around the belief in fate, where couples explore the idea that they may have crossed paths before officially meeting. While this romantic notion appeals to many, experts caution against relying too much on destiny. Placing too much faith in fate can lead individuals to ignore serious relationship issues, such as red flags or incompatibility, under the assumption that everything will

work out simply because they were “meant to be” (Monaghan, 2024).

A more reflective trend, Dating Wrapped, mimics Spotify Wrapped by encouraging people to document and publicly share their dating experiences. While self-reflection can be valuable for personal growth, experts warn that oversharing can shift decision-making from personal fulfillment to public validation. Relationship choices should be guided by individual needs and happiness rather than by how they appear to others (Monaghan, 2024).

#### ➤ *Research on Evolving Dating Norms*

According to Bumble's latest research, which surveyed over 40,000 Gen Z and millennial members worldwide, dating continues to evolve while maintaining a strong sense of optimism (Bumble, 2025). From dating GRWM videos and live-streamed breakups to post-date debriefs, hard launches, and Dating Wrapped, dating has become a highly public, almost reality-show-like experience.

Looking ahead to 2025, authenticity is set to become the focus of modern dating. Bumble's findings reveal that 41% of singles celebrate dating and relationship content that showcases both the highs and lows. This openness is having a meaningful impact, with 42% of women saying it makes them feel less self-conscious and lonely (Bumble, 2025). Additionally, 35% of respondents say that seeing realistic, positive dating content gives them hope for their own love lives. These insights highlight the growing preference for genuine, relatable portrayals of relationships over idealized, filtered versions.

#### ➤ *The Rapid Influence of Short-Form Content on Dating Behaviors*

While many studies have explored social media's general impact, fewer have examined how short-form content specifically influences dating behaviors. Apps are now prioritizing 15-second stories and 1-minute reels because short-form content is what keeps users engaged in today's fast-scrolling digital world. With shrinking attention spans, platforms must capture interest instantly. Quick, visually engaging content ensures users continue swiping, watching, and returning for more.

The dominance of short-form content began with Vine in 2013, but it was TikTok (formerly Musical.ly) that revolutionized the format in the late 2010s. Seeing TikTok's overwhelming success, other platforms rushed to adapt—Instagram launched Reels, YouTube introduced Shorts, and even LinkedIn and Twitter experimented with similar features.

The number of users consuming short-form content is immense. TikTok alone boasts over 1 billion active users, while Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts attract hundreds of millions of daily views. The result? Social media has shifted toward bite-sized, high-impact storytelling, reshaping

marketing, entertainment, and news consumption. Users now expect quick, engaging visuals, influencing brands, influencers, and everyday social interactions—including dating behaviors.

➤ *The Impact of Social Media on Self-Presentation*

Social media significantly shapes how people present themselves, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Identity formation is no longer just an internal process; it is continuously shaped by digital interactions, social learning, and engagement with peers. Online platforms serve as spaces where individuals adopt roles and behaviors that align with their social circles, reinforcing their self-image and confidence.

Validation and feedback play a crucial role in this process. Likes, comments, and shares guide users in how they choose to express themselves, often influencing their self-esteem, confidence, and decision-making. Adolescents, in particular, are highly susceptible to social approval, which can shape their online self-presentation, identity exploration, and personal commitments (Hernandez-Serrano et al., 2022).

While managing online identity can provide opportunities for self-exploration and control, it also introduces risks. Anonymity and the ability to curate an online persona have been linked to concerns about fake identities and misrepresentation. Research over the past decades has highlighted risks associated with youth online behavior, sometimes leading to a moral panic about internet use—though this has also faced criticism for overemphasizing dangers rather than opportunities (Hernandez-Serrano et al., 2022).

As short-form content continues to evolve, its impact on self-perception, dating culture, and social behaviors will remain a key area of discussion.

### III. SURVEY DATA

My colleague and I conducted a survey which aims to gather insights into the dating patterns, relationship dynamics, and cultural perceptions of Generation Z individuals. The questions in the survey have been categorized into categories in order for us to reach our conclusion. The questions are as follows:

Table 1 The questions

Categories	Questions
Demographics	Name
	Age Group
	Gender
Relationship Status	How do you prefer to meet potential romantic partners?
	Are you currently in a relationship with someone?
	What stage of relationship are you in?
	How do you define a "serious" relationship?
Perception about relationship	How do you typically communicate with someone you're interested in romantically?
	What factors are most important to you when considering someone as a potential partner? (Select all that apply)
	Does technology play a role in your dating life?
	How often do you go on traditional "dates" (e.g., dinner, movie, etc) with someone you're interested in?
	How many hours a day do you spend on social media
Third Person Perspective	What are your thoughts on casual dating (non-exclusive dating without a long-term commitment)?
	How do you view the influence of social media on modern dating culture?

	Do you find it easier to communicate with potential partners online or offline?
	Have you ever felt pressured to present a certain image or persona online when it comes to dating?
	Do you feel overwhelmed/overexcited due to the number of options in partners available through dating apps and social media?
	Do you feel societal expectations influence your dating preferences towards either casual or committed relationships?
The GenZ culture	Amongst GenZ's dating culture, what are the biggest challenges?
	How do you perceive relationships portrayed on social media?
	Do you think social media affects your expectations or standards when it comes to dating?

These questions vary with respect to our requirements and can be modified according to the needs of other people who would like to carry forward our research into much deeper topics in connection.

Based on our responses, and the data that we have compiled from our surveys, we have come to the following findings and conclusions which are discussed in the next segment.

#### IV. FINDINGS

Our conducted survey displayed the following findings which we have differentiated between Quantitative Findings and Qualitative Insights. Quantitative findings are based on numerical data, measurable statistics, and objective analysis. They involve structured data collection methods such as surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis, providing concrete results that can be quantified. On the other hand, Qualitative Insights focus on subjective experiences, opinions, and themes derived from open-ended responses, interviews, or focus groups. They provide a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons, emotions, and thought processes behind behaviors.

Both methods complement each other—quantitative findings provide measurable evidence, while qualitative insights offer depth and interpretation, creating a well-rounded understanding of a research topic.

##### A. Quantitative Findings:

- 78% of participants admitted that viral trends on platforms influenced their relationship expectations. For instance, "relationship goals" videos often shape how they imagine ideal partnerships.
- 65% of participants linked their dating app profiles to these platforms, suggesting that they use curated content from short-form platforms to enhance their appeal in the dating space.

- 62.5% of participants preferred face-to-face interactions, with many admitting they felt less pressure to curate a polished online persona.
- 60.7% believed digital connections often set unrealistic expectations for relationships.
- 30.4% of participants enjoyed casual dating, but 52.9% of them admitted to struggling with forming deeper emotional connections.
- 44.6% of respondents felt the need to maintain a flawless digital presence.
- 75% described their real-world relationships as “mostly positive.”
- 69.6% expressed concerns about how online platforms shape modern relationship dynamics.
- 51.8% admitted they felt burdened by the expectations set by social media portrayals of romance.

##### B. Qualitative Insights:

A few themes emerged from the focus groups:

- **Viral Trends and Expectations:** Viral content creates pressure to emulate perfect relationships, often setting unrealistic standards. For example, couples performing choreographed dances or giving extravagant surprises are perceived as relationship benchmarks.
- **Curated Personas:** Participants admired the polished self-presentation on these platforms but were skeptical about its authenticity. This dichotomy leads to both admiration and insecurity.
- **Communication Offline and Pressure to Present an Image:** People who prefer communicating offline—like in-person conversations—often feel a lot less pressure to present a “perfect” version of themselves. Those who communicate offline feel less pressured to curate their online personas and seem to form more authentic, genuine connections.
- **Perception of Relationships Portrayed Online as Mostly Negative:** Those who view online relationships negatively tend to prefer serious, authentic connections over superficial appearances.



- Preference for Casual Dating: Casual daters enjoy freedom and flexibility but often struggle with deeper emotional connections and feeling truly valued.
- Pressure to Present a Curated Version of Themselves Online: Those who prefer offline communication feel less pressure to curate a perfect image and value genuine, in-person connections.
- Perception of Connection Quality: Offline communicators often feel their relationships are deeper and more meaningful due to richer, more personal interactions.
- Concerns About Social Media's Impact: Those who view online relationships negatively often worry that social media sets unrealistic expectations for romance.
- Pressure to Conform to Relationship Goals: Offline communicators often feel pressured by unrealistic online relationship standards, leading to frustration or inadequacy.

## V. CONCLUSION

Short-form content platforms have fundamentally reshaped Gen Z's approach to dating, influencing both how individuals connect and the expectations they set for their relationships. While these platforms offer new opportunities for self-expression and matchmaking, they also contribute to unrealistic standards that can foster dissatisfaction, anxiety, and hesitation in romantic commitments. The curated nature of viral trends magnifies idealized portrayals of relationships, making everyday experiences seem inadequate by comparison.

A key factor driving these changes is the role of algorithms, which continuously push highly engaging, aesthetically polished relationship content to users. This exposure reinforces a narrow perspective on love and attraction, causing individuals to evaluate partners and relationships through a filtered, often unattainable lens. While these platforms can enhance communication and facilitate connections with like-minded individuals, they also fuel commitment anxiety by perpetuating the notion that something "better" is always within reach.

Future research should explore how these effects vary across gender and cultural contexts, as well as their impact on long-term relationship stability. Additionally, further investigation is needed into the psychological consequences of prolonged exposure to curated romantic content, particularly its role in fostering insecurity and trust issues.

Ultimately, short-form content platforms have introduced both opportunities and challenges that redefine modern dating. As these digital spaces continue to evolve, it will be essential to develop a more balanced understanding of their influence, ensuring that individuals can navigate relationships with healthier, more realistic expectations.

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