Proceeding of ICSPHS 2026 Symposium: Critical Perspectives on Global Education and Psychological Development
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

The Persistent Impact of Templated Sad Short Videos on Young Chinese Women: A Case Study of Viral Breakup Hashtags

Xuesi Wang

Arts Design and Architecture, University of New South Whales, Sydney, Australia
15053722983@163.com

Abstract. The attitudes of young Chinese women towards marriage are currently undergoing a transformation. However, societal pressures and family expectations continue to render marriage and romance concerns in their lives. Against this backdrop, discussion of romantic relationships have grown highly prominent on social media, exerting significant influence among young women On Douyin, China's most popular short-video platform, the emotional-content section has rapidly expanded, accompanied by a surge in videos depicting tragic or failed relationships. Once users show interest in such content, filter bubbles and echo chambers reinforce homogenised information environments, immersing them in narrative of heartbreak and fostering increasingly negative attitudes towards marriage and romance. These "sad love" videos have gradually evolved into a distinct genre, typically featuring lyrical music, repetitive narrative patterns, and a shared hashtag structure. This study examines this phenomenon by analyzing user comments under two major Douyin topics —"You Don't Love Me Anymore" and "You Actually Don't Love Me Anymore." Through this sampling-based analysis, the paper explores how such content shapes young Chinese women's emotional attitudes towards romantic relationships. Four contributing factors to these negative effects have been identified: structural pressures within romantic relationships, platform algorithms, gendered aspects of platform culture, and the music and melancholic narratives inherent to short videos. These impacts are driven by multiple interrelated mechanisms, exhibiting both persistence and reproducibility.

Keywords: Douyin, Chinese young women, short videos, emotions

1. Introduction

Douyin, a China's popular short-video platform, has gained widespread popularity through its personalized recommendation algorithms, which continuously deliver content tailored to users' preferences. Within this environment, short videos depicting negative emotional narratives about heterosexual intimate relationships are proliferating rapidly, evolving into diverse categories. These emotional narratives center on coldness, neglect, betrayal, or separation between partners and are widely circulated through trending hashtags.

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

In recent years, attitudes towards female roles in China have oscillated between modernity and tradition [1]. Under traditional influences, marriage remains a compulsory life milestone for many Chinese women [2]. Some regard a fulfilling marriage as more significant than professional success [1]. Within this context, short videos depicting sorrowful romantic relationships garner significant engagement from young Chinese women on platforms, including likes, comments, shares, and re-creations. This growing attention has led many young female users to adopt such narratives as templates, editing their own stories into videos and forming dedicated thematic communities. Following user selection, algorithmic filtering bubbles persistently recommend homogeneous content, creating echo chambers. By tailoring information delivery to individual users, platforms generate unique user-centric information spaces that function as echo chambers [3]. The homogenised, template-driven output of such videos exerts a negative influence on the marriage and relationship perspectives of young Chinese female users. Current TikTok research has examined women's emotional needs on short-video social platforms. However, due to the dynamic evolution of these platforms, research on such videos remain insufficient.

Therefore, this paper investigates why and how templated sad emotional short videos influence young Chinese women on Douyin. Qualitative analysis is employed to examine comments from randomly selected high-engagement videos under the template hashtags “You don't love me anymore” and “You actually don't love me anymore.” The study further explore the interactive shaping between such short videos on Douyin and young Chinese women’s emotional consciousness.

2. Literature review: the impact from society to short video platforms

This section examines the factors underlying the negative impact of formulaic sad emotional short videos on young Chinese women, analysing factors such as gendered social pressures, emotional narratives on digital media, platform cultures, and algorithmic mechanisms.

2.1. The gender roles and societal structural pressures experienced by young women in China

The structural gender inequality inherent in China's patriarchal societal framework imposes significant psychological pressures upon young women, which cannot be attributed to individual vulnerability. Research indicates that Chinese society's attitudes towards gender roles have been undergoing transformation in recent years. Women bear the dual burdens of historical and contemporary societal pressures.

Firstly, as the transition in gender roles remains incomplete, women bear the dual pressures of economic and domestic responsibilities. Society expects them to pursue stable employment while fulfilling household duties [1]. Society's expectations and demands on women are excessively high. Material pressures further exacerbating their psychological burdens and intensifying anxiety. In the workplace, men have greater opportunities and privileges than women, who lack adequate safeguards. Driven by multiple factors, some women shift their life focus tto family, making marriage and relationships a new primary concern. Meanwhile, China's Seventh National Population Census revealed significant gender imbalance [4]. This outcome stems from the pressure of the earlier one-child policy and the societal preference for sons, reflecting a societal undervaluing of women's status that contributes to young women's frustration and anxiety. Furthermore, young Chinese women confront constraints on marriage and romance from parents or male partners. The media pejoratively labels highly educated, career-oriented women of marriageable age who remain unmarried as 'leftover women' [2]. Research indicates that many Chinese career women face

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

rejection by partners due to their economic success. Men holding patriarchal beliefs are identified as the primary cause of these highly educated professionals being labeled “leftover women” [2]. Influenced by sociocultural and historical factors, most Chinese parents retain traditional views, expecting their daughters to adhere to conventional marriage patterns. This further intensifies some young women's apprehensions regarding emotional relationships.

Overall, young women who tend to prioritize family life confront increasing societal expectations to shoulder greater work responsibilities. Combined with constraints and demands from male partners and parents, they experience mounting psychological pressure without adequate outlets for emotional release. This leads to a negative outlook on relationships. Sad emotional short videos on Douyin serve as an outlet for venting and connecting. Users express their feelings through comments and content creation, which further amplifies the spread of this negative atmosphere. Professional women, under pressure from parents and society, may find that the sorrowful emotional narratives in such videos deepen their aversion to marriage.

2.2. Narratives of intimacy among women on social media

Platform culture and gendered contexts also exert a persistent negative influence on young Chinese women. While intimate narratives and sharing on the Douyin platform provide emotional release channels for young female users, other content published on this channel imposes sustained psychological pressure upon them.

Female-dominated narratives of intimacy generate replicable paradigms across social platforms. Research within Douban's relationship advice groups shows that participants utilise social media's dissemination properties to share personal stories, seeking emotional resonance and a sense of belonging [5]. For many young Chinese women, this space allows them to release negative emotions and anxieties. The visibility and acknowledgement of these emotional struggles foster an intimate public community characterised by closeness and belonging. Consequently, some may construct unfortunate self-images to garner attention and care from others [5]. Research indicates that women utilise social media more frequently than men to alleviate stress and monitor others' activities [6]. When other young female users cannot fully discern the authenticity of posted content, prolonged immersion in communities centred on sorrowful narratives creates an environment where pessimistic outcomes in romantic relationships predominate. Moreover, the template-based approach to video production has lowered the threshold for creating content. The communal advice and shared experiences appearing in comment sections have fostered a cycle of emotional expression and engagement with negative narratives. This recurring pattern reinforces such tendencies.

2.3. The formulaic structure and impact of sadness-themed short videos

Returning to the template-driven nature of sorrowful short videos themselves, Douyin's emotionally charged content comprises melancholic background music, formulaic emotive text, or video footage.

The melancholy state evoked by listening to melancholic music stems from the music itself rather than the emotion directly [7]. The emotion conveyed by melancholic music heightens the listener's focus and engagement with the musical experience [7]. When young female users in China immerse themselves in melancholic soundtracks, they become more intently focused on their own emotional issues than on their external surroundings. When listeners immerse themselves in melancholic music, they may project personal associations and memories [7]. Emotional events are more readily recalled than non-emotional ones [8]. In this context, young female users viewing such content are influenced by its melancholic components. They shift from the narratives of others towards self-

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

reflection, simultaneously immersing themselves in their own emotions and recollections under the influence of melancholic music. This creates a mutually reinforcing cycle. Consequently, this closed loop explains the sustained psychological and behavioural impact of melancholic emotional short videos on China's young female users.

2.4. The persistent negative effects stemming from the Douyin algorithm mechanism

From the perspective of Douyin's algorithmic mechanism, the platform's unique recommendation system amplifies the negative impact of its melancholic short videos on young Chinese women. This creates a closed loop where algorithm-driven recommendations perpetuate the homogenisation of content.

The entertainment value of Douyin is pivotal in engaging users, with personalised recommendation services constituting the platform's fundamental default feature [9]. Designed for immersive user experiences, Douyin does not require active selection. Users merely swipe to indicate interest in content. The algorithm then assesses preferences based on view counts, likes, shares, reposts, and completion rates [10]. This preference data forms the basis for conotent dissemination on Douyin, thereby generating filter bubbles and echo chamber effects [3]. Filter bubbles refer to users being confined to increasingly narrow content and viewpoints under algorithmic influence, while echo chambers emphasise homogenisation arising from communities sharing similar perspectives [11]. Consequently, when young female users, driven by empathy and emotional resonance, view and comment on melancholic emotional short videos on Douyin, the algorithm categorizes their preferences, creating a filter bubble. Similar videos are then continuously recommended, reinforcing the echo chamber effect. Among the psychological issues associated with Douyin usage highlighted in 26 research reviews, female users are more prone to developing problematic usage patterns [12]. TikTok shares identical algorithmic mechanisms with Douyin, and these mechanisms inherently impact users' mental wellbeing, particularly among younger, more vulnerable, and higher neuroticism individuals [12].

Consequently,Douyin first collects user data from young female users. Under the influence of filter bubbles, the platform continuously pushes homogenised video content. Templated content encourage user comments and further promotes user-generated sharing, creating a cycle driven by the echo chamber effect. Young female users, due to their inherent characteristics, are more susceptible to algorithmic influence. Having been affected by the content itself, they subsequently experience additional negative impacts from the algorithm.

3. Analysis of templated examples of sadness-themed short videos on Douyin

3.1. Video categories and presentation format

Firstly, the formulaic melancholic emotional short videos currently prevalent on Douyin primarily fall into five categories: breakups (relationship breakdowns), emotional neglect (relationship estrangement), infidelity (betrayal), one-sided devotion (submissive relationships), and long-distance relationships (distance trials). In terms of presentation styles, seven common formats are observed: Real-person narration (first-person storytelling of personal experiences), Text and soundtrack (atmospheric captions paired with music), TV/film montage (iconic scenes from dramas/movies with lyrical scores), AI chat voiceovers emotional vlogs (daily snippets with voiceover narration), chat logs (sharing two individuals' messages to dramatise their story through

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

dialogue), and emotional hosts answering queries (interactive Q&A sessions with emotional counsellors).

3.2. Data collection

Data extraction encompasses key information including comment content, emotional orientation, and core themes. The data sources cover five videos, with timestamps ranging from 23 hours prior to six months ago. Geographically, the sample spans multiple provinces including Anhui, Shandong, and Hebei, ensuring the sample maintains a certain degree of representativeness. Comment analysis reveals female users predominantly recount failed romantic experiences, with emotional expressions dominated by sorrow and grievance. Statements like 'So your promise of forever was but the duration of a single tear' directly convey the anguish of broken vows. Concurrently, some comments demonstrate self-awareness, such as 'Never mind, Master Taoist, I've realised one must love oneself before loving others,' reflecting personal growth following emotional setbacks.

3.3. Core dimensions of user comments

The table focues on comments from young women regarding the Douyin topics "You don't love me anymore" and "You actually don't love me anymore". From data extraction to dimensional analysis, it comprehensively presents the impact of formulaic emotional short videos on women.

Table 1. Comments on the topic "You don't love me anymore" and "You actually don't love me anymore"

Core Dimensions	Specific Manifestations	Proportion (Estimated)	Impact Analysis
Emotional Expression	Predominantly characterised by sorrow and grievance, interspersed with traces of resilience and awakening.	70%	Amplifying negative emotional experiences, some comments reveal women's self-reliance
Thematic Focus	Promises unfulfilled, emotional dissonance, introspection.	85%	Reflecting young women's emphasis on romantic commitment and self-reflection following emotional setbacks
Triggering Factors	Music (Zhou Shen's 'Cloud Robe and Feathered Garment'), recollections, scene resonance.	90%	Formulaic music and trending hashtags readily trigger emotional resonance among women, enhancing content impact
Cognitive Biases	Some develop negative perceptions of the male demographic, others maintain rationality.	30% negative perception, 40% rational perception	May lead some women to develop trust issues with men, while rational commentary demonstrates mature perspectives on love

Regarding emotional expression, 70% of comments predominantly convey sadness and grievance, aligning with the melancholic undertones inherent in formulaic short videos.

Thematic focus reveals that 85% of comments centre on broken promises, emotional disillusionment, and self-reflection, reflecting young women's idealised expectations of romance and the resulting conflict when confronting reality. It clearly illustrates the emotional gap between sweetness and indifference, demonstrating women's tendency to turn inward and examine their role within relationships following romantic failure.

Regarding triggers, 90% of comments mentioned resonance with music, memories, or scenes, highlighting the viral potential of formulaic content. Zhou Shen's Cloud Robe Feather Dress Melody, with its melodious yet wistful tone, perfectly aligns with melancholic emotions, serving as a potent emotional trigger. Simultaneously, the recurring narrative of romantic failure in these videos allows women to readily project their own experiences, fostering rapid emotional recognition and resonance.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

In the cognitive bias dimension, 30% of comments foster negative perceptions towards the male demographic. Such remarks may stem from traumatic personal experiences, where template-driven content amplifies collective sentiment, generalizing individual encounters into sweeping negative perception of men and posing the risk of overgeneralisation. In contrast, 40% of rational comments demonstrate an objective approach on relationship issues, such as analysing the true reasons for breakups. These comments helps guide other women towards a rational understanding of romantic failures and preventing them from falling into extreme cognitive traps.

3.4. Summary of findings

The article employs analytical tables to summarize findings across four core dimensions: emotional expression, thematic focus, triggering factors, and cognitive tendencies.

The majority of comments from young women on such videos adopt a melancholic narrative tone, with themes predominantly centred on contrasting the disparity in emotional shifts between partners, highlighting the intensity of their distress. Due to shared emotional experiences, this easily intensifies the atmosphere of sadness, fostering a negative perception of contemporary relationships and leading young female users to develop pessimistic views on marriage and romance. Concurrently, rational analyses and commentaries do exist within this discourse. However, under the prevailing negative influence, the specific guiding role of these rational viewpoints on women remains to be explored.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the impact of formulaic, melancholic romance-themed short videos on young Chinese women, focusing on content from Douyin. It explores how these videos exert negative influence through multiple interlinked mechanisms: structural pressures surrounding marriage and relationships, platform algorithms, cultural gendered biases within the platform, and the background music and melancholic narratives inherent in the videos themselves. Fixed soundtracks and popular or classic phrases narrated from a first-person female perspective evoke an empathy loop, defining boundaries for ambiguous emotional issues. User comments and sharing solidify the video content, transforming it into reusable scripts that are continuously replicated and reinforced within the platform's gendered context. User engagement, including likes, comments, saves, and discussions, amplified by algorithmic influence, collectively forms a persistent exposure loop. Categorizing these melancholic romance videos reveals themes including relationship breakdown, emotional neglect, betrayal, one-sided devotion, and long-distance relationships. This study selected comments under the topics 'You no longer love me’ and 'You dare no longer love me’ as comment samples, finding that these topics often appear alongside emotional narratives. Scripts gain significance due to high engagement, collection rates, and serialised prompts, thereby enhancing user retention. This evidence both corroborates the pressures faced by young Chinese women in marriage and relationships and explains the algorithm's bias towards negative emotional input, thus accounting for the phenomenon's persistence and reproducibility. Limitations of this investigation include restrictions in time and scope, as comments were extracted from the past six months. Comments represent subjective perceptions, lacking causal clarity. Verification of users' gender and experiences remains unverifiable. Furthermore, Douyin's algorithmic mechanisms make it impossible to confirm whether the extracted comments accurately represent the majority of genuine user feedback.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.HT31494

References

[1] Wang, Q., Chiang, T-F & Xiao, J.J. (2024) Attitude toward gender inequality in China, Humanities & social sciences communications, 11(1). https: //doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02857-1.
[2] To, S. (2013) Understanding Sheng Nu ("Leftover Women"): the Phenomenon of Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women, Symbolic interaction, 36(1): 1–20. https: //doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.1002/symb.46
[3] Gao, Y., Liu, F., & Gao, L. (2023) Echo chamber effects on short video platforms, Scientific reports, 13(1). https: //doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-33370-1.
[4] Zhang, Y., Zou, B., Zhang, H., & Zhang, J. (2022) Empirical Research on Male Preference in China: A Result of Gender Imbalance in the Seventh Population Census, International journal of environmental research and public health, 19(11): 6482. https: //doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116482.
[5] Tan, Y., & Liu, S-D. (2024) "Our advice is to break up": Douban's intimate public and the rise of girlfriend culture, New media & society. https: //doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.1177/14614448241264450.
[6] Li, P., & Zhuo, Q. (2023) Emotional straying: Flux and management of women's emotions in social media, PloS one, 18(12): e0295835. https: //doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295835.
[7] Sizer, L. (2019) Sad Songs Say So Much: The Paradoxical Pleasures of Sad Music, The Journal of aesthetics and art criticism, 77(3): 255–266. https: //doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.1111/jaac.12659.
[8] Sheldon, S., & Donahue, J. (2017) More than a feeling: Emotional cues impact the access and experience of autobiographical memories, Memory & cognition, 45(5): 731–744. https: //doi.org/10.3758/s13421-017-0691-6.
[9] Tan, Y., & Yoon, S. (2025) Testing the effects of personalized recommendation service, filter bubble and big data attitude on continued use of TikTok, Asia Pacific journal of marketing and logistics, 37(5): 1280–1301. https: //doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.1108/APJML-06-2024-0738.
[10] Zhao, Z. (2021) Analysis on the "Douyin (Tiktok) Mania" Phenomenon Based on Recommendation Algorithms, E3S web of conferences, 235: 3029. https: //doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202123503029.
[11] Li, N., Gao, C., Piao, J., Huang, X., Yue, A., Zhou, L., Liao, Q., & Li, Y. (2022) An Exploratory Study of Information Cocoon on Short-form Video Platform, in Proceedings of the 31st ACM International Conference on Information & Knowledge Management, ACM, New York, NY, USA, 4178–4182. https: //doi-org.wwwproxy1.library.unsw.edu.au/10.1145/3511808.3557548.
[12] Jain, L., Velez, L., Karlapati, S., Forand, M., Kannali, R., Yousaf, R.A., Ahmed, R., Sarfraz, Z., Sutter, P.A., Tallo, C.A., & Ahmed, S. (2025) Exploring Problematic TikTok Use and Mental Health Issues: A Systematic Review of Empirical Studies, Journal of primary care & community health, 16: 21501319251327303. https: //doi.org/10.1177/21501319251327303.