

A Study on the Influence and Countermeasures of Online Media on Post-00s College Students' Views on Marriage and Childbearing from the Perspective of Media Dependence Theory —Based on H University

He Li

Student Affairs Office, Hangzhou Dianzi University, Hangzhou 310018, Zhejiang, China

Abstract: *The post-00s generation is a generation that grew up with the Internet, and the Internet is their main way to obtain information. College students born after 2000 are in an important period of learning and growth, and have a strong demand for all kinds of knowledge and information. However, with the development of big data and artificial intelligence technology, it has also brought phenomena such as pan-entertainment and information cocooning, which have had an impact on the information acquisition methods, making friends, behavioral decision-making and other aspects of post-00 college students, and in turn also affected their post-00s generation. Views on marriage and childbearing have a certain impact. This article will take online media as an example to explain the characteristics of online media. At the same time, based on in-depth interviews with 20 college students, it summarizes how the media affects the post-2000s' views on marriage and childbearing, and explains the resulting phenomena, such as: the emergence of online virtual partners, cloud love, fear of marriage and childbirth, the impact of different media platforms, and the impact of the prevalence of sub-culture, etc. Finally, it was proposed that we should strengthen the supervision of online media, introduce safeguard policies, build a positive cultural environment for marriage and childbirth, improve media literacy education for college students, and create a good family atmosphere to help post-00s college students establish a correct view of marriage and childbirth, and then contribute to building a harmonious society. Stable families and societies are important.*

Keywords: Post-00s college students, Marriage and childbirth, Media dependence, Online media.

1. The Impact of Online Media on College Students from the Perspective of Media Dependency Theory

The Media Dependency Theory, proposed by American scholars Melvin Lawrence DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach in 1976, views media as an integral part of the "audience-media-society" system. Its core idea is that audiences rely on the information provided by media to satisfy their needs and achieve their goals. The greater the degree of dependency, the more significant the impact of mass media on individuals. From this theoretical perspective, online media exerts the following influences on post-2000s college students:

1.1 Transformation of Information Acquisition Methods

According to the China Internet Audiovisual Development Research Report (2024) released by the China Network Audio-visual Program Service Association on March 27th, the number of Chinese internet users surpassed 1.092 billion by December 2023. The immediacy, vastness, interactivity, and diversity of online media have enabled audiences to access information anytime, anywhere, breaking the constraints of traditional media in terms of time and space. Post-2000s college students can now obtain relevant information through various channels such as Weibo, WeChat, forums, blogs, Zhihu, Bilibili, online courses, and live streaming. This change has disrupted the single traditional mode of information acquisition, fostering an extreme dependence on online media and challenging the authority of

"parental experience."

1.2 Expansion of Interactive Social Methods

The interactivity of online media offers audiences more opportunities for interaction. They can not only maintain connections with friends and family through social networking platforms but also engage with anyone to express opinions, share lives, and emotionally interact. This mode of interaction enhances the audience's sense of participation and initiative, fostering deep and intimate online relationships that are difficult to sever. The rapid iteration of social platforms has significantly altered the way college students approach romance. They now use online social platforms for dating, enjoying instant feedback and embracing virtual love rather than the slow-paced courtship of the past [1].

1.3 Reshaping of Traditional Cognitive Frameworks

As a crucial channel for information dissemination, online media influences audiences' cognitive frameworks. While audiences interpret information based on their own perceptions, online media also exhibits a degree of directionality and guidance, which can lead to deviations or rigidification in cognitive frameworks, creating "information cocoons" that challenge traditional beliefs. Moreover, internet celebrities, key opinion leaders (KOLs), and reality dating shows disseminate their views on marriage, childbearing, and family values through social media and short videos, directly impacting college students. Many students may be subtly influenced by their admiration for celebrities and KOLs,

fostering group effects. At the same time, the openness of online media allows individuals to share their own experiences and opinions on marriage and dating, participating in discussions initiated by others, thereby influencing college students' views on marriage and childbearing [2].

1.4 Deepening of Media Dependency

The rapid development of online media has fostered a strong dependency among post-2000s college students, profoundly transforming their social attributes and patterns. This dependency extends beyond daily life and may impact mental health. In the online world, people are more susceptible to negative information, leading to anxiety, depression, and other emotional issues. Excessive reliance on the internet may also erode real-life social skills, fostering loneliness and social withdrawal. Some young people become so engrossed in online games and virtual socializing that they neglect connections with the real world, even resorting to social retreat strategies like "social death," opting out of socializing and dating [3].

1.5 Conflict and Fusion of Diverse Values

The global reach of online media brings together information and cultures, exposing post-2000s college students to different values and cultural concepts while accessing information. Under the influence of various social thoughts, independent thinking, gender equality, and diverse values have become increasingly popular among young generations [4]. Meanwhile, online media enhances college students' understanding of the physiological and psychological aspects of reproduction but also introduces concepts like "late marriage and late childbirth" and "DINKs" (Double Income, No Kids), which challenge their fertility beliefs. These ideas undoubtedly exert a profound impact on youth.

2. Qualitative Analysis of the Influence of Online Media on College Students' Views on Marriage and Childbirth

2.1 Research Methods and Data Sources

The empirical materials for this study were derived from in-depth interviews with post-00s college students at University H. The interviews focused on the theme of "The Influence of Online Media on Views on Marriage and Love," with durations ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. A total of 20 interviews were conducted, all of which were administered offline. During these interviews, students engaged in both structured and unstructured discussions regarding the impact of online media developments on their personal views on marriage and childbirth. It is worth noting that all students were born after 2000, with a gender ratio of 1:1, spanning from freshmen to third-year graduate students. Most of the students hailed from the province where University H is located, but some also came from other provinces. Pseudonyms have been used for all interviewees in this document. The reasons for selecting students from University H as interviewees are fourfold: Firstly, located in an economically prosperous region, University H boasts a high level of internet usage and acceptance, rendering it a significant site for research. Secondly, as an institution specializing in electronics and information technology, University H attracts students with relatively high levels of academic achievement, cognitive abilities, and ideological sophistication, thus offering immense research value. Thirdly, the selected interviewees, with their representative ages and backgrounds, can reflect the prevailing views and perspectives of post-00s individuals. Lastly, the diversity of grades and majors among these students facilitates the emergence of diverse perspectives and sparks insightful discussions.

Table 1: Summary of Basic Information of Interviewees

Serial Number	Name	Gender	Age	Major	Hukou Registration Location	Average Time Spent Online (Hours)
1	LSH	Female	18	Accounting	Jinhua, Zhejiang	3
2	ZWB	Male	18	Computer Science	Hangzhou, Zhejiang	2.5
3	ZZC	Male	20	Product Design	Taizhou, Zhejiang	4
4	ZH	Female	19	Management	Ningbo, Zhejiang	5
5	LZX	Male	21	Automation	Jinhua, Zhejiang	2
6	WXY	Male	22	Marxism	Quzhou, Zhejiang	3.5
7	WPY	Male	24	MBA	Wenzhou, Zhejiang	4
8	ZXM	Male	23	Communication Studies	Wenzhou, Zhejiang	5
9	LXL	Female	17	Digital Media Art	Ningbo, Zhejiang	4
10	XZH	Female	18	Experimental Class for Economics and Management	Daqing, Heilongjiang	4
11	QHZ	Female	19	Artificial Intelligence	Liuzhou, Guangxi	3
12	BM	Female	20	German	Nanjing, Jiangsu	3.5
13	LSH	Male	19	Mathematics	Haikou, Hainan	2
14	CYS	Female	18	Network Security	Wuhan, Hubei	3
15	ZYT	Female	18	Materials Chemistry	Hefei, Anhui	1
16	DJP	Male	19	Communication Engineering	Shenyang, Liaoning	4
17	DCC	Female	19	Accounting	Guiyang, Guizhou	3.5
18	LRZ	Female	19	Economics	Shanghai	2.5
19	QX	Male	20	Mechanical Engineering	Chongqing	1.5
20	MKB	Male	21	Information Engineering	Taiyuan, Shanxi	5

2.2 Data Analysis and Results Presentation

2.2.1 Emergence of Virtual Companions Online

With the development and continuous evolution of the

internet, particularly the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, coupled with the limitations of traditional social interaction in terms of space and time, an increasing number of college students are turning to virtual companions or virtual

idols such as Hatsune Miku, Luo Tianyi, Kizuna Ai, NINICO (Nini from the voice actress Kugimiya Rie), among others, to fulfill their emotional needs. These two-dimensional virtual idols not only provide emotional support but also offer personalized interactive experiences tailored to users' preferences. This revolutionary new form of social interaction enables users to better satisfy their individual needs, experiencing, interacting, and receiving feedback anytime, anywhere, thereby filling the gaps in their real-world lives. Furthermore, the popularity of otome games has made romantic relationships with fictional characters a new form of interaction. Through virtual games, individuals receive emotional support and learn about dating, thereby replacing traditional forms of social engagement. Traditionally, college students' attitudes towards love were heavily influenced by family education; however, in today's mediated society, they are shaped by the characters portrayed on social media, forming a "mediated love formula." Excessively standardized and idealized pursuits of marriage and romantic partners can now be achieved through the creation of virtual companions. This formula may significantly reflect college students' requirements and ideal standards for romantic relationships, prompting them to seek and experience love in the virtual world [5].

"The cost of dating nowadays is too high. Besides money, it also requires a lot of time to maintain the relationship. Especially during the pandemic years, I've become more socially anxious and enjoy spending time alone. Sometimes, scrolling through TikTok and watching videos is quite satisfying. At least it gives me instant gratification, allowing me to watch and do what I want." (16-DJP-20240320)

"A few days ago, I went to Guangzhou to see Hatsune Miku's concert. She's my favorite idol, and I love her songs like 'World's Greatest Princess' and 'Leek Spin.' We usually interact on virtual platforms, and she's the kind of sweet and cute girl I really like." (19-QX-20240404)

"I dislike arranged marriages. Recently, the 'Fat Cat Incident' made me scared of love, especially considering the high cost and complexities of dating, marriage ethics, and PUA tactics. It's too much trouble. I'd rather spend time alone." (15-ZYT-20240415)

2.2.2 Prevalence of Cloud Dating

The proliferation of the internet and technological advancements have made it possible for college students to embark on romantic relationships swiftly through various platforms with just a few clicks. Cloud dating, a novel dating mode that emerged alongside the development of the internet, allows couples to communicate and interact via technology, social media, instant messaging apps, and other means without the need for face-to-face contact. The rise of cloud dating among college students stems from heavy academic pressures, geographical distances, and obstacles to in-person interactions. Some engage in cloud dating out of necessity, while others choose it voluntarily. Many post-00s college students often refer to themselves as "introverted individuals," using this as a shield for their various social interactions, including dating. The prevalence of cloud dating enables couples in different locations to maintain virtual relationships,

but it also challenges traditional definitions of romantic and marital relationships, potentially causing emotional communication barriers. It is a double-edged sword. Additionally, the emergence and development of cloud dating have cast doubts among post-00s college students regarding the definition and continuation of romantic, familial, and marital relationships. From cloud pet adoption to cloud dating, this breakthrough in romantic relationships may also introduce new constraints.

"We only see each other a few times a year. We met in high school but didn't attend the same university. Our relationship started after entering college because we were close friends in high school and confessed our feelings. We only get to see each other during winter and summer breaks. We usually chat and video call since we're both busy—he with competitions, and I with club activities. Although our relationship differs from other couples, we've found our own way, like a tree hole where we share everything with each other." (1-LSH-20240402)

2.2.3 The severe social phenomenon of fear of marriage and childbirth

On the one hand, the excessive media exposure of negative news about marriage and childbirth has a significant impact on college students. For instance, many TV dramas excessively depict women sacrificing their work and lives to take care of their families after marriage, being burdened with household chores, and facing issues like their husbands' infidelity. Furthermore, numerous divorce news stories involving celebrities and key opinion leaders (KOLs) are sensationalized by media outlets vying for attention, particularly those seeking clicks and eyeballs. This media frenzy exponentially spreads negative views on marriage and love, significantly diminishing college students' expectations and aspirations for a fulfilling marriage, thereby fostering fear and hesitation towards it. On the other hand, the open media environment has made more diverse perspectives on marriage and childbirth visible. Both men and women are free to choose and are independent individuals with the right to personal development, unbound by familial constraints. This clash of diverse values upends many college students' perceptions, affording them more space to explore, more avenues to realize their aspirations, and different perspectives to experience life compared to traditional societies [6].

"I'm okay with dating, but I haven't considered what we should do after graduation. Especially when I think about marriage, it feels like a hassle. I'm afraid of having children and even more afraid to have them because of the immense pressure of life – buying a house, earning money for diapers, and losing time for us to be alone together. Plus, I have many personal goals I want to achieve." (6-WXY-20240411)

"I recently watched 'Dear Kids,' where the male lead's attitude towards the female lead changed drastically after she gave birth, making me increasingly afraid of childbirth. Also, I came across a short video a few days ago about a seemingly perfect man who was actually a marriage fraudster, deceiving women for money and sex. These all make me fearful of marriage and childbirth." (11-QHZ-20240405)

"I saw a video about sky-high dowry demands recently, and my parents have mentioned it before. I feel my family's financial condition is quite average, so I'm not considering marriage for now. I'll focus on getting my career settled first. Marriage feels too stressful." (13-LSH-20240401)

2.2.4 Different media platforms have varying impacts on college students' willingness to marry and have children

Due to their unique positioning and content orientations, different media platforms exert distinct influences on college students' marital and fertility intentions, with some showing positive correlations and others negative. The survey found that students who frequently use Weibo tend to have weaker marital and fertility intentions because negative news often trends first on Weibo, exposing them to stories like celebrity infidelity and domestic violence. Women who use Xiaohongshu are more inclined towards marriage and childbirth, as the platform caters to sophisticated females, sharing aspirational and positive lifestyles that inspire a desire for marriage. Men who engage more with Hupu forums tend to have stronger fertility intentions due to the platform's focus on practical needs and clearer self-awareness, crucial for making concrete plans. Women who watch more variety shows, often centered on romantic relationships, may develop stronger marital aspirations as the sweet interactions and romantic stories portrayed enhance their longing for love and marriage.

"I often see wedding photos, parenting tips, and home renovation ideas shared on Xiaohongshu, which makes me feel wonderful and somewhat envious of those who lead such fulfilling marital lives with beautiful babies." (18-LRZ-20240406)

"Discussions about marriage and parenthood on Hupu, though sometimes harsh, help me clarify what I truly want." (5-LZX-20240406)

2.2.5 The prevalence of buddy culture

The proliferation and development of social media have provided a platform for the rise of buddy culture, enabling college students to quickly find like-minded individuals with shared interests and needs through platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and Douyin, anytime and anywhere. This facilitates the formation of buddy relationships among individuals with similar interests, unlike traditional marriages, which are more enduring. Buddy relationships can start and end quickly, unencumbered by many constraints, leading more college students to prefer this new social model over traditional romantic relationships. The emergence of buddy culture caters to the needs of contemporary college students, gradually diluting traditional marital and romantic relationships. Similarly, the rise of buddy culture has prompted more people to opt for relationships that can begin and end at will, leading to shifts in marital attitudes and a significant decline in college students' fertility intentions [7-8].

"Through social media platforms, I've found many like-minded partners. For instance, I joined the school's evening running group and met several people who enjoy

jogging at night. After evening classes, we make appointments to run together. During breaks, we often participate in marathons and various endurance walks, encouraging each other." (20-MKB-20240406)

"I found several partners for my postgraduate entrance exam via social media platforms. We study and discuss questions together. We can communicate and share ideas anytime, anywhere, which has improved our study efficiency. Meanwhile, we often meet offline and participate in team-building activities, greatly expanding my social circle." (10-XZH-20240407)

3. Countermeasures and Suggestions for the Influence of Online Media on College Students' Views on Marriage and Childbirth

3.1 Strengthen the Supervision of Online Media

Firstly, in response to the negative and false information related to marriage and childbirth disseminated on various media platforms on the internet, government departments should strengthen supervision, improve corresponding laws and regulations, standardize information dissemination, and avoid the spread of misleading information. At the same time, the "Golden N-Hour" principle should be adhered to in addressing improper issues and topics that are hotly debated online, ensuring timely responses and handling. Secondly, media platforms should be encouraged to conduct self-discipline and self-examination, formulate industry norms, and improve the quality of information dissemination. Thirdly, efforts should be made to actively convey positive views on marriage and childbirth, encourage college students to establish correct values regarding marriage and love, and create a favorable online ecosystem for marriage and childbirth. Positive examples of marriage and childbirth, such as happy families, harmonious couple relationships, and congenial parent-child relationships, should be promoted to provide college students with positive role models and demonstrations, thereby fostering harmonious family traditions.

3.2 Introduce Safeguard Policies

The primary reasons for college students' feedback regarding excessive pressure related to childbirth are the severe employment situation, rising child-rearing costs, and the inability to meet rigid demands such as housing. In response to these issues, government departments should firstly strengthen career guidance for college students. More comprehensive and precise career guidance services should be provided, especially starting from the first year of college, to guide students in reasonably planning their careers. Ideally, one-on-one career mentors within and outside the industry could be assigned to help students make reasonable plans and enhance their employability. Additionally, entrepreneurship support for college students should be increased through entrepreneurship training, financial support, and the establishment of corresponding entrepreneurship funds or low-interest loans. Enterprises can also create more flexible job positions to address the rigid demands of young people. Secondly, supporting measures for childbirth should be improved to ensure that all college student couples can enjoy

maternity insurance, and the scope of coverage could be considered expanding, such as assisted reproduction, which has already been implemented in many provinces. Thirdly, a high-quality childcare service system should be established and improved, with scientific and rational planning, balanced advantages, and concerted efforts to strengthen standardized and normalized management of childcare services.

3.3 Construct a Positive Cultural Environment for Marriage and Childbirth

On the one hand, relevant courses should be offered to strengthen guidance on love and marriage. Additionally, incorporating education related to views on marriage and love, family, and childbirth into ideological and political courses can be considered to strengthen guidance and help students establish correct views on marriage, love, and childbirth. Regular lectures or salons related to marriage and childbirth should be held, inviting experts in marriage, love, or family education to share their insights, thereby enhancing college students' education on marriage and childbirth and addressing common practical issues [9]. On the other hand, campus activities related to the theme of marriage and childbirth can be organized to create a favorable atmosphere. For instance, activities such as "Marriage and Childbirth Knowledge Competitions," "Happy Family Sharing Sessions," and "Collective Weddings for Teachers" can be held in conjunction with relevant festivals, allowing college students to immersively experience and understand knowledge related to marriage and childbirth, thereby forming correct views on these topics. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on strengthening support and service guidance for marriage and childbirth. Teacher or counselor studios should be established to conduct emotional education for college students, and specialized emotional or marriage and childbirth consultation services should be provided to offer students consultation on marriage, family, childbirth, and other related issues, helping them solve practical problems.

3.4 Enhancing Media Literacy Education for College Students

Firstly, it is crucial to strengthen critical thinking education. With the overwhelming influx of information on the internet, most post-00s college students struggle to reasonably discern between facts and rumors, often blindly following trends. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate their rational analytical and judgmental abilities towards media information, enhance their subjective intention and accuracy in identifying authentic information, and teach them to discern false or misleading information, especially concerning topics such as marriage, love, family, etc. Secondly, emphasis should be placed on civilized internet usage. College students must be equipped with heightened information security awareness, learn to protect their personal information on social platforms to prevent tracking, monitoring, and privacy breaches; they must engage in rational thinking and speech, recognizing that the internet is not a lawless zone. They should hold themselves to high standards, refrain from becoming "keyboard warriors," and only express opinions based on factual evidence.

3.5 Fostering a Positive Family Atmosphere

The family is the primary environment for individual growth, and family education along with a conducive atmosphere contributes to shaping college students' positive outlook on life, marriage, and childbearing. As a vital force in society, college students' decisions regarding marriage and childbearing significantly impact societal development and population balance. Numerous domestic studies reveal a notable correlation between college students' fertility attitudes and their family backgrounds, including parents' educational levels, which can influence their fertility intentions. Parents' views on marriage and childbearing also exhibit intergenerational transmission effects. Consequently, fostering a positive family atmosphere across society plays a pivotal role in boosting college students' marriage and childbearing rates. This not only fosters personal family and social responsibility but also contributes to the long-term stability and development of society [10].

4. Conclusion and Outlook

In summary, unlike previous generations, post-00s college students have grown up alongside the internet, which has influenced their perspectives on marriage and childbearing, as well as their behavioral patterns. The increasing presence of virtual companions, cloud-based relationships, and fears surrounding marriage and childbearing poses challenges to traditional views. To address these issues, we must integrate concern for their practical and psychological needs, leveraging government efforts in strengthening internet media regulation, introducing safeguard policies, fostering a supportive culture for marriage and childbearing, enhancing media literacy education for college students, and nurturing a positive family atmosphere throughout society. By collaborating in these areas, we can continuously cultivate positive and healthy attitudes towards marriage and childbearing among college students, thereby promoting social harmony, stability, and development.

Fund Project

2024 Research Project on Youth and Youth Work in Zhejiang Province "Research on the Current Situation and Countermeasures of College Students' Marriage and Childbirth Concept from the Perspective of Balanced Population Development" (Project No.: ZQ2024081).

References

- [1] JINHUI Z L L. A Study of Long-distance Relationship among University Students in the Social Media Era [J]. *Media Observer*, 2020, (09): 36-44.
- [2] BOWEI L J W. The dangers and opportunities of ideological and political education in the era of short videos [J]. *Ideological & Theoretical Education*, 2020, (06): 76-80.
- [3] YUPING Z. A study on the psychological education of college students' love stress under the background of the Internet [J]. *Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunications*, 2017, (02): 64.
- [4] BO L X-F J. Mode of Integrated Media Communication Innovative Path of Network Ideological and Political Education in Universities under the [J]. *Theory and Practice of Education*, 2022, 42(06): 36-9.

- [5] Servaty L, Weber K, The Relationship between Gender and Attitudes towards Marriage[J], UW-Stout Journal of Student Research,2011.
- [6] Thornton, A., Freedman, D.. Changing attitudes toward marriage and single life[J]. Family Planning Perspectives, 1982, 14(6), 297- 303.
- [7] Li T, Zheng Y, Yan Y. Have marriage and fertility been de-institutionalized in China? Findings from a Survey on Marriage and Fertility Intentions among College Students[J]. Journal of Chinese Women's Studies, 2022, 3: 85-102.
- [8] FEI W. Analysis of contemporary youth's views on marriage and love and their influencing factors: Based on a survey of youth aged 17 to 34 [J]. China Youth Research [J]. China Youth Study, 2015, (07): 73-6+81.
- [9] JIAXIN B. Cultivation of Youth Responsibility Awareness Based on the College Students' Current View on Marriage and Love [J]. Journal of Western, 2024, (05): 125-8.
- [10] YA-NAN Y. Family Atmosphere, Cultivation Mode and Children's Marriage View [J]. Journal of Shanxi University of Finance and Economics, 2021, 43(S1): 73-7.