

# How Using Social Media Affects the Way Gen Z Thinks About Dating Today in Cities

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explores how social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snap chat, and What Sapp are reshaping the dating expectations and experiences of Generation Z. As digital natives, Gen Z individuals engage with online spaces where dating norms, trends, and expressions of affection are constantly being created and consumed. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels have emerged as powerful influencers, shaping perceptions of what ideal relationships should look like through curated short-form videos, couple challenges, and viral trends. However, these portrayals often promote unrealistic standards, leading to heightened emotional expectations and pressures around romantic relationships. At the same time, social media has changed the practical side of dating. Many young people now prefer group or double dates, viewing them as safer and more comfortable social experiences. Despite being highly connected online, there is also evidence of a "romance recession," where a growing number of Gen Z individuals are stepping back from dating altogether due to financial stress, emotional fatigue, or disinterest in traditional relationship dynamics. This study seeks to understand how these shifts—fuelled by digital culture—are influencing what Gen Z expects emotionally and practically from romantic relationships. By examining social media's role in both promoting and discouraging dating behaviours, this research aims to reveal how virtual spaces are redefining the meaning of love, intimacy, and connection in the modern age.*

## KEYWORDS

*Social Media, Generation Z, Dating Culture, Relationship Expectations, Digital Influence*

## I. INTRODUCTION

I am conducting this study because social media has become an inseparable part of how people in my age group think about dating, relationships, and love in general. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snap chat, and even what Sapp are not just tools for communication anymore—they have become spaces where entire "dating cultures" are created, shared, and reshaped every single day. For Generation Z, the line between online and offline dating has become increasingly blurred. We see love stories unfold in short-form videos, participate in viral couple challenges, and even express emotions through memes and digital trends. These platforms don't just reflect relationships; they actively shape how we imagine and experience them. Recent studies, including one from 2025, have shown that TikTok and Instagram Reels are especially influential in defining what relationships should look like for Gen Z. These short, visually appealing videos often set unrealistic expectations by portraying idealized versions of romance—perfect dates, flawless communication, and constant

affection. While they can be fun and entertaining, such portrayals can also create pressure or insecurity among young people who feel their relationships don't match up to these "couple goals." The curated, picture-perfect moments that dominate social media can make real-life relationships seem less exciting or less successful in comparison. This constant exposure may be changing what Gen Z expects emotionally from their partners—seeking not only love and understanding but also digital validation and aesthetic appeal. At the same time, social media is also influencing how dating happens in more practical ways. For example, many Gen Z individuals now prefer group or double dates instead of traditional one-on-one outings. This shift often stems from a sense of safety and comfort—meeting with others feels less risky and more relaxed, especially when first connecting with someone known primarily through online platforms. Dating apps, filters, and social media interactions have made meeting people easier, but they have also increased the uncertainty of who we are truly talking to. Hence, shared social settings help reduce anxiety and make the experience more enjoyable and authentic.

However, an interesting contrast has also emerged: despite being the most digitally connected generation, many Gen Zers are not dating much at all. There is what researchers are calling a "romance recession." A growing number of young adults say they are simply tired of dating or cannot afford to go out often due to financial stress. Surveys indicate that more than half of Gen Z respondents spend absolutely nothing on dating in a typical month. Between academic pressure, economic challenges, and social fatigue, many are choosing to prioritize self-growth or friendships over romantic relationships. These changing patterns make me deeply curious about the emotional and practical expectations Gen Z now has regarding dating. How does constant exposure to digital romance affect how we think about love, intimacy, and commitment? Are we becoming more idealistic because of what we see online, or more cautious and detached because of the realities of modern life? This study aims to explore these questions and better understand how social media continues to redefine the meaning of dating for Generation Z.

## **II. RESEARCH GAP**

Although extensive research has been conducted on social media and its impact on interpersonal communication, relatively few studies have focused specifically on how social media platforms influence dating behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, especially within the context of young adults in the digital age. Most existing literature centers on online dating applications such as Tinder or Bumble, often overlooking the broader role of mainstream social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook in shaping romantic expectations and relational dynamics. This creates a significant gap in understanding the indirect and subtle ways in which every day online interactions contribute to the formation of modern romantic relationships.

Furthermore, prior research has largely been concentrated in Western contexts, with limited attention given to cultural variations in dating behaviors influenced by social media use. There is also a scarcity of studies examining how demographic factors—such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status—moderate these influences, especially in developing or transitional societies where social media adoption patterns differ significantly. Another gap lies in the methodological approach. Much of the current research relies on qualitative narratives or small-scale surveys without integrating statistical techniques to validate relationships

among variables. This study attempts to bridge part of that gap through quantitative analysis using SPSS, but further longitudinal and mixed-method studies are needed to explore causal relationships and evolving digital behaviors. Hence, this research contributes to filling an important void by examining the complex, multidimensional relationship between social media use and dating perceptions among young adults.

### **III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To find out which social media platforms Gen Z uses most when it comes to dating.
2. To understand how social media posts/influences affect Gen Z's ideas of what a relationship should look like.
3. To explore if Gen Z prefers double dates and why. 4. To discover whether money stress and dating trends on social media make Gen Z less likely to date at all

### **IV. LITERATURE REVIEW**

I found a few recent studies that support these ideas: Short-form platforms like TikTok and Reels are influencing dating expectations among Gen Z: the "relationship goal" trends push people toward curated, idealized romantic behaviour that might not feel real-life enough. Double-dates are emerging in India as a new Gen Z dating norm, letting young people feel emotionally safer and more socially comfortable while exploring romantic options. Many GenZareopting out of dating altogether some due to financial limitations ("romance recession") and others because of mental/emotional exhaustion from modern dating practices. These show that social media isn't just a tool it's actually reshaping how Gen Z thinks about romance.

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A. Hypothesis

1. AGE - Frequent use of social media/dating apps for dating
2. AGE - Frequency of encountering dating-related content online
3. AGE - Feeling pressured by 'relationship goals' or romantic trends on social media
4. AGE - Influence of short-videos (Reels/TikTok) on relationship expectations
5. AGE - Preference for double-dates over solo dates
6. AGE - Perception of monthly spending on dating as reasonable
7. AGE - Positive feelings about dating online (excited, safe, comfortable)
8. AGE - Social media making one less inclined to date in person
9. AGE - Social media making dating easier

Table 1: Validation of Questionnaire

Statements
I frequently use social media/dating apps (Instagram, TikTok, Snap chat, What Sapp, etc.) for dating purposes.
I often come across dating-related content online.
I feel pressured by 'relationship goals' or romantic trends on social media.
Short-videos (Reels/TikTok) influence my expectations about relationships.
I prefer double-dates over solo dates.
I find my monthly spending on dating to be reasonable.
Dating online makes me feel positive (excited, safe, comfortable).
Social media has made me less inclined to date in person.
Overall, social media has made dating easier for me.

B. Research Methodology

<b>Research Design</b>	Descriptive
<b>Sample Method</b>	Non-Probability - Convenient Sampling method
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Primary method
<b>Data Collection Method</b>	Structured Questionnaire
<b>Type of Questions</b>	Close ended
<b>Data Collection mode</b>	Online through Google Form

<b>Data Analysis methods</b>	Tables
<b>Data Analysis Tools</b>	SPSS and Excel
<b>Sampling Size</b>	196
<b>Survey Area</b>	Ahmedabad
<b>Sampling Unit</b>	Students, Private and government Job employees, Businessmen, Home maker, Professionals like CA, Doctor etc.

*C. Demographic Summary*

The demographic profile of the sample consisted of 196 participants, with a majority being male (59.2%) compared to females (40.8%). The age distribution showed that most participants were between 18 and 25 years old (84.7%), followed by smaller proportions in the 25-32 (11.2%) and 32-40 (4.1%) age groups. Regarding occupation, students represented the largest group at 67.9%, while others were professionals (2.6%), employed in jobs (23.0%), or involved in business (6.6%).

*D. Cronbach Alpha*

The reliability analysis for the scale yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.691 across 9 items. This value suggests a moderate level of internal consistency, indicating that the items are reasonably correlated and measure the same underlying construct. While the alpha is slightly below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, it may still be considered acceptable depending on the context and purpose of the research.

Table 3: Results of Hypothesis Testing

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Alternate Hypothesis</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>p &lt;/&gt; 0.05</b>	<b>Decision</b>	<b>R Value</b>	<b>Relationship Interpretation</b>
1	AGE * Frequent use of social media/dating apps for dating	0.000	< 0.05	Reject Null	- 0.166	Significant weak negative correlation
2	AGE * Frequency of encountering dating-related content online	0.002	< 0.05	Reject Null	- 0.013	Significant but negligible correlation
3	AGE * Feeling pressured by 'relationship goals' or romantic trends on social media	0.302	> 0.05	Accept Null	- 0.129	Not significant
4	AGE * Influence of short-videos (Reels/TikTok) on	0.064	> 0.05	Accept Null	- 0.130	Not significant (trend only)

	relationship expectations					
5	AGE * Preference for double-dates over solo dates	0.002	< 0.05	Reject Null	0.096	Significant weak positive correlation
6	AGE * Perception of monthly spending on dating as reasonable	0.534	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.014	Not significant
7	AGE * Positive feelings about dating online (excited, safe, comfortable)	0.274	> 0.05	Accept Null	- 0.091	Not significant
8	AGE * Social media making one less inclined to date in person	0.966	> 0.05	Accept Null	0.001	Not significant
9	AGE * Social media making dating easier	0.139 (Chi-square) / 0.041 (Pearson's R)	Mixed	Mixed: Reject Null (Pearson's R) / Accept Null (Chi-square)	0.146	Weak positive linear correlation (Pearson's R significant)

## VI. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine how social media influences dating attitudes and behaviors among different age groups. The findings derived from the frequency, reliability, and crosstab analyses provide meaningful insights into the patterns of online dating behavior and perceptions regarding social media's impact on relationships. The demographic distribution revealed that the majority of respondents were aged 18–25 years (84.7%), with students forming the largest occupational group (67.9%). This composition indicates that younger individuals, particularly students, are more engaged with or affected by social media and dating applications compared to older adults. The income data showed that most participants fell within the lower income bracket (₹10,000–₹25,000), reflecting a predominantly youth-oriented sample that is still pursuing education or early in their careers. In terms of usage behavior, about 32.1% of participants strongly disagreed that they frequently use social media for dating purposes, while 15.3% strongly agreed. This suggests that although dating apps are present in young people's lives, active engagement for romantic purposes remains moderate. Similarly, exposure to dating-related content online was common, with a cumulative 46.5% reporting that they "occasionally" to "very frequently" encounter such content, indicating the pervasive nature of romantic themes in online spaces.

Emotional and social pressures also emerged as relevant factors. Around 45.9% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they feel pressured by “relationship goals” portrayed on social media, while 24.5% remained neutral. This indicates that although social media may shape expectations, many users consciously resist these pressures. Moreover, short videos like Instagram Reels and TikTok clips influenced relationship expectations for a notable proportion of respondents (31.6%), supporting earlier findings that visual and short-form content significantly affects perceptions of romance and idealized relationships. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.691, suggesting an acceptable level of internal consistency among the nine items measuring perceptions of social media and dating behavior. This reliability level implies that the scale is consistent enough to capture the underlying construct without redundancy. Chi-square analyses revealed several significant relationships between age and dating-related behaviors. Notably, age was significantly associated with the use of social media for dating purposes ( $p = .000$ ), suggesting that younger participants were more likely to use such platforms. Similarly, age had a significant relationship with exposure to dating-related content online ( $p = .002$ ) and preference for double dates ( $p = .002$ ). These findings reinforce the notion that digital dating behaviors and social preferences vary across age groups, with younger individuals being more open and responsive to online dating dynamics. Conversely, variables such as feelings of pressure from relationship trends, perceptions of spending on dating, and emotional responses to online dating did not show significant associations with age ( $p > .05$ ). This indicates that emotional reactions and perceived financial aspects of dating may be relatively uniform across different age groups. Interestingly, the statement “Overall, social media has made dating easier for me” displayed a marginally significant association with age ( $p = .041$ ), suggesting that younger users may find digital tools more accessible for initiating and managing romantic interactions.

In summary, the study highlights that social media plays a significant but nuanced role in shaping dating behaviors. While younger individuals engage more actively with dating apps and online romantic content, emotional and attitudinal responses toward dating remain complex and not entirely age-dependent. These findings underscore the need for a balanced understanding of how digital platforms influence interpersonal relationships, particularly among youth navigating romantic experiences in an increasingly online world.

#### A. *Theoretical Implications*

The findings of this study contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding of how social media influences dating behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes among young adults. Drawing on theories of social learning, uses and gratifications, and cultivation theory, the results provide empirical support for the idea that digital platforms have become central to the way individuals form, evaluate, and sustain romantic relationships. From the perspective of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), the results demonstrate that exposure to relationship-related content on social media can shape users’ expectations and attitudes toward dating. The data revealed that a considerable proportion of respondents—particularly within the 18–25 age group—reported being influenced by short videos (Reels, TikTok) and online romantic trends. This suggests that individuals may model their relationship ideals and behaviours based on what they observe in digital spaces. The online environment, therefore, serves as a socializing agent where users learn norms, behaviours, and expectations related to modern dating. This finding reinforces the idea that the digital context is a key site of observational learning, especially for younger generations who spend a substantial amount of time online.

The uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Bulmer & Gurevitch, 1973) also provides a valuable lens for interpreting these results. Participants' reported use of social media for dating purposes aligns with the notion that individuals actively seek out media to fulfil specific psychological and social needs—such as companionship, validation, or excitement. The findings indicate that while not all participants use dating apps frequently, those who do tend to perceive them as tools that make dating more accessible and manageable. This reflects the gratifications sought in terms of convenience, social interaction, and self-expression. The theory is further supported by Cronbach's alpha result (.691), indicating a consistent pattern in how respondents perceive social media's influence across various dimensions of dating behaviour.

Furthermore, the study contributes to cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1976), which posits that prolonged exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. The frequency analysis revealed that many participants often encounter romantic content online, which may subtly influence their beliefs about ideal relationships or dating norms. However, the data also showed that a significant number of respondents did not feel overtly pressured by online "relationship goals," suggesting that while media exposure contributes to expectation formation, users are not passive recipients. Instead, they interpret and negotiate meanings based on personal and cultural contexts, supporting the idea of selective cultivation rather than uniform influence. The age-based differences identified through chi-square tests further underscore the dynamic nature of media influence. Younger respondents were more likely to use social media for dating and perceive it as making dating easier, indicating that age moderates the relationship between media exposure and behavioural outcomes. This extends the theoretical discourse by emphasizing generational variance within digital relationship practices—a dimension less explored in earlier media theories.

Overall, the findings suggest an evolving media landscape where social, psychological, and technological factors interact to shape romantic engagement. Theoretically, this study enriches existing frameworks by showing that digital dating behaviour is not merely a product of exposure, but also of active interpretation and self-presentation within mediated spaces. Hence, social media should be viewed as both a structural platform and a psychological environment that redefines the formation of intimacy and modern relationship culture.

#### *B. Practical Implications*

The results of this study carry several important practical implications for individuals, educators, policymakers, and organizations involved in digital media and relationship counseling. The findings highlight how social media platforms and dating applications are shaping the way young people perceive, initiate, and maintain romantic relationships. Understanding these patterns can help stakeholders create healthier, more informed, and more responsible digital relationship environments.

Firstly, the results show that younger individuals (18–25 years) are the most active users of social media for dating purposes and are also the most exposed to romantic or dating-related content online. This has practical implications for digital literacy and relationship education. Educational institutions can incorporate programs that teach students about the psychological effects of social media exposure, particularly regarding relationship ideals and emotional well-being. By developing awareness of how online portrayals of romance may

distort real-world expectations, such initiatives can help young adults cultivate realistic and healthy approaches to dating.

Secondly, given that short-form video content (such as Instagram Reels and TikTok) significantly influences perceptions of relationships, social media companies have a role to play in promoting balanced narratives. Platform algorithms often amplify idealized portrayals of relationships, which can lead to comparison anxiety and unrealistic standards. Developers and content moderators could design campaigns or content guidelines that encourage authenticity, diversity, and mental well-being in relationship-related content. Collaborations with psychologists and educators could lead to features that promote responsible engagement, such as prompts encouraging users to reflect on emotional impact before posting or consuming sensitive content. The finding that many respondents remain neutral or disagree that social media makes them feel pressured by relationship goals indicates an opportunity for relationship counselors and therapists to use social media as a positive communication tool rather than viewing it solely as a source of conflict. Counselors can integrate discussions about digital behaviors and online dating patterns into therapy sessions, helping clients recognize how online experiences affect their emotional responses and interpersonal expectations. This could particularly benefit young adults navigating early relationship experiences shaped by online norms. From a marketing and business perspective, the findings offer insight for dating app developers and advertisers. Since most respondents find their dating expenditures reasonable and perceive online dating as accessible, companies can tailor their services to emphasize emotional safety, transparency, and authenticity rather than mere convenience or appearance-based matching. This approach aligns with users' desire for meaningful connections and may enhance long-term user satisfaction and brand credibility. At a broader level, the results have implications for policy and regulation. Policymakers should consider creating guidelines that address privacy, consent, and emotional well-being within digital dating spaces. Campaigns promoting safe online interactions, prevention of harassment, and awareness about data privacy can mitigate potential harms associated with digital dating culture.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of intergenerational understanding of social media use. Since younger people are more adaptive to digital dating than older age groups, there is a need for open communication between parents, educators, and youth about responsible digital intimacy. Encouraging dialogue about online dating can help reduce stigma and enhance mutual understanding of evolving relationship dynamics in a digital society. In summary, these findings suggest that social media's impact on dating extends beyond individual behavior—it influences cultural norms, education, mental health, and public policy. By addressing these implications through informed interventions, society can harness the benefits of digital connectivity while minimizing its potential negative effects on modern relationships.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

This study set out to examine the influence of social media on dating behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions among individuals of varying age groups, with a particular focus on young adults. The results derived from descriptive, reliability, and chi-square analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media and online platforms have redefined modern romantic relationships. By analyzing patterns in social media usage, emotional responses, and relationship perceptions, the study underscores both the transformative and complex nature of digital interaction in the context of dating. The demographic data indicated that the majority of respondents were young, predominantly students aged 18–

25 years, with relatively lower income levels. This demographic composition reflects the digital-native generation, which is highly engaged with online spaces for communication, entertainment, and social connection. The results revealed that while many respondents are exposed to dating-related content on social media, only a moderate proportion actively use these platforms for dating purposes. This suggests that social media serves as both an informational and observational space for learning about relationships, even for those not directly participating in online dating.

The findings also highlighted the psychological and emotional dimensions of social media influence. Although many respondents acknowledged the pervasive presence of romantic content online, a large proportion reported feeling neutral or unpressured by such portrayals. This outcome indicates a degree of media literacy and emotional resilience among users, who may selectively engage with content rather than internalizing it. However, the influence of short-form videos, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, on relationship expectations demonstrates the subtle yet powerful effect of visual media in shaping users' ideals and aspirations. From a relational standpoint, the chi-square analyses identified significant associations between age and several key variables, including the use of social media for dating, exposure to romantic content, and preference for double dates. Younger individuals were more likely to perceive social media as a tool that makes dating easier and more accessible. These findings align with existing literature that positions social media as an enabler of social connection and self-expression among digital natives. However, other aspects, such as feelings of pressure, spending on dating, or emotional satisfaction, showed no significant age-related differences, implying that certain attitudes toward dating transcend generational boundaries. The study's reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha = .691) confirms that the items used to measure social media influence on dating were internally consistent and valid for capturing the underlying construct. The integration of theoretical frameworks—such as social learning theory, uses and gratifications theory, and cultivation theory—further enriches the interpretation of the results, positioning social media as both a learning environment and a gratification medium that influences relational thinking and behavior.

Overall, this research concludes that social media has become an integral part of the modern dating experience. It functions as a double-edged tool: fostering connectivity, self-expression, and accessibility while simultaneously introducing new pressures and expectations. For younger users, particularly students, social media acts as a space for experimentation, exploration, and social learning about romance. However, the need for digital awareness, emotional intelligence, and healthy boundary-setting remains crucial. In essence, the study highlights that while technology continues to reshape romantic interaction, human values—such as authenticity, communication, and emotional understanding—remain at the core of successful relationships. As society becomes increasingly digitized, balancing online engagement with genuine interpersonal connection will be key to sustaining meaningful romantic relationships in the future.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH/ FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

While this study provides valuable insights into the influence of social media on dating behaviours and perceptions, it also opens several avenues for further research. The dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of digital communication means that patterns of online

interaction and dating practices are continuously changing. Therefore, future research must explore these shifts more comprehensively, employing both broader and deeper approaches to fully capture the complexities of digital relationships in contemporary society.

Firstly, future studies should consider expanding the sample size and diversity of participants. The present research was limited primarily to young adults, most of whom were students aged 18–25 years. While this group represents a significant portion of social media users, including other age cohorts—such as older adults, working professionals, or married individuals—would provide a more holistic understanding of how digital platforms influence different stages of romantic life. Comparative analyses between various demographic groups could reveal how age, education, occupation, and cultural context shape attitudes toward online dating and social media use.

Secondly, future researchers could employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how prolonged exposure to social media influences changes in dating attitudes and relationship outcomes over time. The current study's cross-sectional design offers a snapshot of perceptions but does not account for evolving behaviours or long-term effects. Longitudinal studies could track shifts in users' expectations, satisfaction, and commitment levels, providing stronger causal insights into the relationship between media exposure and romantic development. Another area of potential exploration lies in the psychological and emotional dimensions of digital dating. While the present study identified general trends and correlations, it did not deeply analyse constructs such as attachment styles, self-esteem, or social comparison tendencies. Future research could integrate psychological scales to measure how individual differences moderate the impact of social media on relationship satisfaction, trust, and emotional well-being. Such work could bridge the gap between media psychology and relationship science.

Additionally, the role of specific social media platforms warrants deeper investigation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Snap chat, and dating apps like Tinder or Bumble operate with different affordances, algorithms, and cultures of use. Future studies could conduct comparative analyses to determine which platforms exert the most influence on dating norms, expectations, and behaviours. Qualitative methods—such as interviews or focus groups—could also uncover nuanced insights about users' motivations, emotions, and perceptions that quantitative methods alone might overlook. From a cultural perspective, future researchers could explore cross-cultural comparisons to examine how social media affects dating in societies with different values, traditions, and norms surrounding relationships. Since dating and intimacy are deeply rooted in cultural context, studying global variations would enhance the theoretical generalizability of findings and reveal how digital platforms mediate local traditions and modern trends.

Finally, future studies should focus on ethical and policy-related dimensions of digital dating. Issues such as privacy, data security, consent, and online harassment continue to shape users' experiences. Researchers could collaborate with policymakers and tech developers to design safer, more inclusive digital spaces that encourage authentic interaction while minimizing risks. In summary, the future scope of this study extends across multiple domains—demographic, psychological, cultural, and technological. By embracing interdisciplinary approaches and diverse methodologies, future research can deepen understanding of how social media continues to redefine intimacy, communication, and emotional connection in an increasingly digital world.

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