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# Discrete Emotions Shape Gender Role Attitudes: Exploring the Impact of Gender-Stereotyped Douyin Urban Romantic Short Dramas on Chinese Youth

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**Abstract**

This research investigates how gender stereotypes in Douyin urban romance short dramas influence Chinese youth's gender role attitudes through discrete emotions. Drawing on cultivation theory and the feelings-as-information theory, the study employed a pretest-posttest control group experimental design with 320 college students (160 males, 160 females). Findings revealed that male stereotypes primarily evoked joy and sadness emotions, strengthening identification with traditional male roles; female stereotypes mainly triggered negative emotions, particularly disgust and fear, which promoted acceptance of traditional female roles. Notably, sadness emotions did not prompt males to critically reflect on gender stereotypes, nor did fear guide females to question social gender roles. Short videos construct cognitive imbalance through differentiated emotional induction: placing males in positive emotional atmospheres and females in negative emotional environments, forming an emotional fixation phenomenon that reinforces gender bias. The research also found that young males were more easily assimilated by this content. This gender-based emotional polarization mechanism provides a new explanatory perspective for understanding the increasing gender antagonism and communication barriers in contemporary Chinese social media environments, offering important implications for platform content regulation and youth media literacy education.

**Keywords:** gender stereotypes, discrete emotions, gender role, douyin, social media

## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of mobile technologies and internet access, short videos have become a primary medium through which young people acquire information and emotional resonance (Meng & Leung, 2021). Douyin, China's most extensively utilized short-form video platform, demonstrates a nearly balanced gender distribution, with approximately half of its user base aged 18-24 years (Larissa, 2024). Given these demographic characteristics, this study targets young Chinese users as the target research population. Among diverse content categories, urban romantic short dramas (URSDs) have gained considerable popularity due to their emotionally intensive narratives and rapidly paced, conflict-driven storylines (Jimu News, 2024). These dramas often rely on stereotypical gender roles—portraying men as rational and dominant and women as emotionally dependent and submissive—to intensify dramatic tension (Eagly, 2016; Paziliya, 2025). Under patriarchal influence, such portrayals are often romanticized and normalized through narrative conventions (Drake et al., 2018).

Research by Wang (2021) suggests that short videos now significantly shape users' psychological experiences and social cognition. Media content can elicit immediate emotional responses, which in turn influence attitudes and judgments (López et al., 2024). According to the feelings-as-information theory, individuals often rely on emotional states rather than external facts when making social judgments (Schwarz & Clore, 1996). Discrete emotion theory further proposes that specific emotions serve distinct social functions: joy, anger, and disgust tend to reinforce existing cognitive structures, whereas fear and sadness are more likely to promote attitude change (Plutchik & Kellerman, 1980; Lazarus, 1991; Fridkin & Gershon, 2021; Lee, 2022).

While previous gender studies have primarily focused on sex-based emotional differences and the reproduction of female stereotypes in media, few have examined how both male and female gender stereotypes in short videos influence discrete

emotional responses and mediate gender role attitudes (Wester et al., 2002; Ward & Grower, 2020; Lou et al., 2024). This study explores whether emotional responses differ based on character gender in Douyin URSDs and examines the mediating mechanisms of these emotions. Theoretically, it extends the role of emotion as a mediating variable and offers a new framework for understanding gender stereotype transmission in short video contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Gender Stereotypes in Media and Gender Role Attitudes*

Media significantly shape public perceptions of gender roles (Ward & Grower, 2020). Gender stereotypes are cognitive schemas that reflect societal expectations about how men and women should behave (Lippmann, 1997; Best & Luvender, 2015). Typically, Masculinity is often associated with dominance and rationality, while femininity is linked to emotionality and care, resulting in implicit frameworks that shape gender perceptions in subtle ways (Smiler, 2006; Zhang et al., 2009). Social role theory posits that such expectations become normative through repeated social exposure, and individuals internalize them unconsciously over time (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). This process aligns with cultivation theory, which suggests that repeated media exposure shapes audiences' perceptions, making mediated portrayals appear increasingly realistic (Gerbner et al., 2020). As a result, young people are particularly susceptible to internalizing these normative cues into their cognitive frameworks, which in turn influence their social judgments (Ward & Grower, 2020).

On Douyin, urban romantic short dramas (URSDs) often rely on such gendered frameworks to structure their content (Zhang, 2024). These dramas frequently depict men as economic providers and women as emotional caregivers, reinforcing complementary gender roles through formulaic narratives (The Paper, 2023). The dramatization of male dominance and female dependence is frequently romanticized, contributing to a normalized view of gender inequality (Mouafo et al., 2021; Jimu News, 2024). As noted by Kahalon et al. (2018), such portrayals obscure the underlying gender power imbalance and reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

In the Chinese context, gender culture has gradually shifted from inequality toward greater equality, although progress remains uneven across regions and social classes (Lv et al., 2009; Lv, 2010; Yin & Sun, 2021). Although digital media platforms offer space for feminist expression, they also reproduce inequality through emotionally charged and commercialized content (Huang, 2016; Nelson, 2024).

Based on this theoretical framework, the study hypothesizes that popular gender-stereotyped URSDs use emotionally conflicted plots and addictive narrative structures to sustain young people's attention, reinforcing gender role norms and shaping their attitudes.

> **H1:** Watching URSDs containing male gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward male gender role.
>
> **H2:** Watching URSDs containing female gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward female gender role.

### *2.2 Emotional Effects on Gender Role Attitudes*

The feelings-as-information theory suggests that individuals often rely on current emotional states as heuristic cues in social judgment rather than engaging in systematic processing (Schwarz & Clore, 1996, 1983). Discrete emotion theory further elaborates that specific emotions associate with distinct cognitive patterns and value judgments (Plutchik, 1980; Lazarus, 1991). Anger and disgust motivate rejection of norm-deviating behaviors, reinforcing existing structures, while joy affirms existing beliefs; fear and sadness often prompt deeper reflection, potentially enabling attitude change (Fridkin & Gershon, 2021; Rozin et al., 1999; Schwarz, 2012).

Heterosexual romantic narratives often follow the logic of the Cinderella story by portraying women's emotional dependence on men as a pathway to happiness, a portrayal which in turn embeds gender stereotypes within the storyline (Xu et al., 2019). This narrative structure is particularly evident in Douyin's URSDs where male characters are consistently depicted as dominant and rational, whereas female characters are portrayed as emotionally dependent and self-sacrificing (Zhang, 2024). The prevalence of this gendered framing extends beyond fictional narratives into real-world attitudes. For instance, during economic downturns Chinese male internet users tend to position themselves as victims while depicting women as beneficiaries of monetary relationships (Wu & Zhang, 2025). Saturated with normalized gender stereotypes, these narratives are intensified by URSDs' fast-paced editing and emotional plotlines, making them likely to trigger immediate emotional and attitudinal responses without deeper cognitive processing (Cao, 2024). This form of content dissemination not only reinforces deeply entrenched gender stereotypes but also intensifies social tension and contributes to cognitive dissonance between gender roles (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

In the context of gender representation in media, particularly within short video environments, it remains unclear whether

discrete emotions elicited by gender-stereotyped content consistently fulfill specific social functions. Although previous research has highlighted the distinct roles of discrete emotions in shaping social judgment, their effects on attitudes toward gender roles in media contexts have not been sufficiently examined. Compared to the extensive application of discrete emotion theory in political and health communication, empirical research exploring how discrete emotions influence gender role attitudes in the Chinese media landscape remains scarce. To address this gap, the present study classifies discrete emotions into positive (joy) and negative (anger, disgust, fear, and sadness) categories and compares their differential effects on attitudes toward traditional gender roles. Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H3a:** Discrete positive emotions elicited by watching URSDs containing male gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward male gender role.

**H3b:** Discrete negative emotions elicited by watching URSDs containing male gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward male gender role.

**H4a:** Discrete positive emotions elicited by watching URSDs containing female gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward female gender role.

**H4b:** Discrete negative emotions elicited by watching URSDs containing female gender stereotypes will significantly enhance young people's attitudes toward female gender role.

## 3. Method

This study employs a pretest-posttest control group design to assess how gender-stereotyped URSDs impact emotions and gender attitudes among young Douyin users. This quasi-experimental approach evaluates effects by comparing measures before and after intervention (Stratton, 2019), allowing exploration of causal relationships between gender-stereotyped content and emotional-cognitive responses.

### *3.1 Experimental Stimuli*

Six URSDs depicting traditional gender stereotypes in heterosexual conflicts were selected based on popularity (high view counts), interactivity (>50,000 likes, >5,000 comments), and clear stereotype representation. Short videos were identified through Douyin keyword searches, with stereotypical features emerging organically from viewer-favored content. For balanced representation, three URSDs featured male protagonists demonstrating economic dominance, emotional tolerance, and rational problem-solving in domestic contexts, while three featured female protagonists portrayed as emotionally unstable, financially dependent, and irrational in their decision-making processes. All URSDs averaged under 90 seconds in length and received high engagement.

An eight-member expert panel used Ward et al.'s (2005) procedure to evaluate content on a 7-point scale. The six selected videos received high stereotype ratings: Female Dramas (M=5.6, M=5.4) and Male Dramas (M=6.4, M=6.6), confirming strong stereotypical content.

### *3.2 Research Participants*

Based on the demographic profile of Douyin users identified in the introduction, participants were recruited to align with the platform's core user characteristics. The study recruited 320 undergraduate students (ages 18–24) from Anhui Polytechnic University in China. Participants received course credit for participation and were randomly assigned to either the experimental group (n = 161; 81 males, 80 females) or the control group (n = 159; 79 males, 80 females), ensuring a balanced gender distribution. Most participants were undergraduate students (96.3%), with 35.9% from rural areas, 76.6% identifying as single, and 92.8% reporting that they lived in two-parent households.

In terms of social media engagement, participants demonstrated high levels of Douyin usage. Specifically, 52.2% reported logging into Douyin more than four times per day; 35.9% spent 1–2 hours per day on the platform, 22.2% spent 3–4 hours, and 17.8% reported using Douyin for more than 4 hours daily. All participants completed the questionnaire in full, with no missing data. The experiment was conducted on March 10, 2025.

### *3.3 Experimental Procedure*

Participants arrived with personal phones and headphones. Researchers explained the study examined how Douyin heterosexual videos affect emotions and gender attitudes. Communication during the experiment was prohibited. Participants received A or B codes (distinguishing experimental/control groups) and were directed to separate classrooms. All participants completed pretest questionnaires measuring emotional responses and gender attitudes with phones turned off.

The experimental group then watched six short videos (10 minutes total) via Baidu Netdisk, with interface simulating Douyin. Participants used headphones and watched without pausing or skipping. The control group followed the same timeline but watched no content. Both groups completed identical posttest questionnaires.

### *3.4 Measurement Instruments*

#### 3.4.1 Discrete Emotion Response Measurement

This study measures five discrete emotions based on Plutchik's (1980) model: joy (positive) and fear, anger, sadness, and disgust (negative). Each emotion was measured separately to examine distinct psychological pathways affecting gender attitudes. Following Beaudoin & Hong (2021) research, to measure five discrete emotions: one positive emotion (joy) and four negative emotions (fear, anger, sadness, and disgust). Considering different emotions may have different psychological pathway effects on gender role attitudes, each emotion is measured separately rather than combined into composite indicators.

Following Beaudoin & Hong (2021) and Fridkin & Gershon (2021),single-item measures assessed emotion intensity—an approach widely used in emotional communication research (Plutchik & Kellerman, 2013). Participants completed identical emotion questionnaires in pretest and posttest phases, using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) to rate emotional experience intensity toward male and female characters separately based on overall video impressions.

#### 3.4.2 Gender Stereotype Attitude Measurement

This study developed a 10-item scale to assess gender stereotype attitudes, based on established instruments such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS), the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI), the Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI), and the Gender Role Beliefs Scale (GRBS) (Bem, 1974; Kerr & Holden, 1996; Levant et al., 2020; Parent & Moradi, 2010; Spence et al., 1973).The scale was adapted to the Chinese sociocultural context and includes 5 items assessing male gender role stereotypes (e.g., Men should be the main economic pillar in the family) and 5 items assessing female gender role stereotypes (e.g., Women are naturally suited to family care). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of traditional gender roles.

Reliability analysis showed acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .60 across all groups and time points. Specifically, alpha coefficients ranged from .62 to .70 for male and female role attitudes in both pretest and posttest phases, meeting criteria for exploratory research. Pretest equivalence was confirmed using non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests (after Shapiro-Wilk tests showed non-normality, $p<.001$). These tests compared experimental and control groups' gender role attitudes scores and showed no significant differences (ps > .05), confirming baseline consistency and providing foundation for intervention effect analysis

## 4. Results

This study employs a multi-step analysis strategy to examine how gender stereotypical content in Douyin urban romantic short dramas influences viewers' traditional gender role identification through discrete emotions. First, we conducted experimental group pretest-posttest comparisons and experimental group versus control group comparisons to verify intervention effects; subsequently, mediation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro to examine the mediating role of discrete emotions between video watching and gender roles attitude.

### *4.1 Intervention Effect Verification*

#### 4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

To evaluate the impact of gender-stereotyped romantic short dramas, we analyzed data from experimental ($n$ = 161) and control ($n$ = 159) groups (see Table 1). Control group emotional measures remained stable between testing phases, while the experimental group showed notable changes.

For male characters, the experimental group's joy increased (M = 2.36 to 2.69) and sadness rose slightly (M = 2.04 to 2.19). Female character responses showed stronger shifts: anger increased (M = 1.89 to 3.09), disgust rose dramatically (M = 1.95 to 4.00), fear increased (M = 1.65 to 1.87), while joy decreased (M = 2.63 to 2.15). Gender role identification strengthened for both male (M = 2.56 to 3.51) and female roles (M = 2.85 to 3.94), suggesting substantial intervention effects on viewers' emotions and attitudes.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Discrete Emotions and Gender Role Attitudes in Experimental and Control Groups (N = 320)

| Discrete Emotions | Experimental Group(N = 161) | | | | Control Group(N = 159) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-test | | Post-test | | Pre-test | | Post-test | |
| Responses | *M (SD)* | *Mdn* | *M (SD)* | *Mdn* | *M (SD)* | *Mdn* | *M (SD)* | *Mdn* |
| Male Characters | | | | | | | | |
| Anger | 2.04 (0.97) | 2 | 1.80 (0.93) | 2 | 1.80 (0.93) | 2 | 1.79 (0.92) | 2 |
| Fear | 1.64 (0.98) | 1 | 1.45 (0.88) | 1 | 1.45 (0.88) | 1 | 1.47 (0.88) | 1 |
| Disgust | 2.30 (1.14) | 2 | 2.22 (1.02) | 2 | 2.22 (1.02) | 2 | 2.23 (1.01) | 2 |
| Joy | 2.36 (1.05) | 2 | 2.69 (1.04) | 3 | 2.69 (1.04) | 3 | 2.71 (1.03) | 3 |
| Sadness | 2.04 (1.07) | 2 | 2.19 (0.96) | 2 | 2.19 (0.96) | 2 | 2.18 (0.95) | 2 |
| Female Characters | | | | | | | | |
| Anger | 1.89 (1.01) | 2 | 3.09 (0.92) | 3 | 1.96 (0.92) | 2 | 1.95 (0.92) | 2 |
| Fear | 1.65 (0.98) | 1 | 1.87 (0.93) | 2 | 1.57 (0.93) | 1 | 1.58 (0.93) | 1 |
| Disgust | 1.95 (0.99) | 2 | 4.00 (0.97) | 4 | 2.02 (0.97) | 2 | 2.05 (0.97) | 2 |
| Joy | 2.63 (1.23) | 3 | 2.15 (1.09) | 2 | 2.58 (1.09) | 2 | 2.61 (1.08) | 3 |
| Sadness | 2.04 (1.13) | 2 | 2.74 (1.01) | 2 | 1.75 (1.01) | 1 | 1.75 (1.01) | 1 |
| Gender Roles Attitude | | | | | | | | |
| MGR | 2.56 (0.68) | 2.60 | 3.51 (0.76) | 3.80 | 2.71 (0.69) | 2.60 | 2.71 (0.69) | 2.60 |
| FGR | 2.85 (0.55) | 2.80 | 3.94 (0.58) | 4.00 | 2.92 (0.50) | 2.80 | 2.94 (0.50) | 2.80 |

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; Mdn = Median; MGR = Male Gender Role; FGR = Female Gender Role.

4.1.2 Experimental Group Pretest-Posttest Comparison

To determine significance of observed changes, we conducted Mann-Whitney U tests on experimental group ($n$ = 161) data (see Table 2). This comparison examined changes before and after intervention, establishing internal causal relationships. After viewing gender-stereotyped URSDs, participants showed significant changes in emotional responses. Toward male characters, joy ($Z = 8.52$, $p < .001$) and sadness ($Z = 7.27$, $p < .001$) increased significantly. For female characters, anger ($Z = 8.17$, $p < .001$), fear ($Z = 2.38$, $p = .003$), disgust ($Z = 12.23$, $p < .001$), and sadness ($Z = 3.98$, $p < .001$) increased, while joy decreased ($Z = -3.47$, $p < .001$). Gender role identification significantly strengthened for both female ($Z = 12.75$, $p < .001$) and male ($Z = 10.26$, $p < .001$) roles after intervention.

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U-Test for Changes in Discrete Emotions and Gender Role Attitudes Between Pre-test and Post-test in Experimental Group (n = 161)

| Variables | Discrete Emotions | Times | Mean rank | *Z* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male Characters | Anger | pre-test | 168.61 | -1.46 | 0.15 |
| | | post-test | 154.39 | | |
| | Fear | pre-test | 159.26 | 0.49 | 0.63 |
| | | post-test | 163.74 | | |
| | Disgust | pre-test | 160.74 | 0.15 | 0.88 |
| | | post-test | 162.26 | | |
| | Joy | pre-test | 118.51 | 8.52 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 204.49 | | |
| | Sadness | pre-test | 124.80 | 7.27 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 198.20 | | |
| Female Characters | Anger | pre-test | 120.32 | 8.17 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 202.68 | | |
| | Fear | pre-test | 150.30 | 2.38 | 0.003 |
| | | post-test | 172.70 | | |
| | Disgust | pre-test | 99.43 | 12.23 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 223.57 | | |
| | Joy | pre-test | 178.92 | -3.47 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 144.08 | | |
| | Sadness | pre-test | 141.58 | 3.98 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 181.42 | | |
| Gender Role Attitudes | MGR | pre-test | 108.39 | 10.26 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 214.61 | | |
| | FGR | pre-test | 95.54 | 12.75 | <0.001 |
| | | post-test | 227.46 | | |

Note. MGR = Male Gender Role; FGR = Female Gender Role

4.1.3 Experimental Group and Control Group Posttest Comparison

To exclude confounding factors and verify intervention effects, we conducted post-test independent samples Mann-Whitney U tests between groups (see Table 3). Results showed significant differences in discrete emotions. For male characters, the experimental group scored significantly higher on joy ($Z = 6.76$, $p < .001$) and sadness ($Z = 6.75$, $p < .001$), indicating more complex emotional responses; fear scores were significantly lower ($Z = 2.37$, $p < .05$), reflecting decreased threat perception from male stereotypes. For female characters, the experimental group scored significantly higher on negative emotions: anger ($Z = 7.92$, $p < .001$), fear ($Z = 2.93$, $p = .003$), disgust ($Z = 12.10$, $p < .001$), and sadness ($Z = 6.10$, $p < .001$); joy scores were significantly lower ($Z = -3.47$, $p < .001$). This emotional contrast pattern confirms changes were caused by video intervention.

Regarding gender role cognition, the experimental group scored significantly higher on both male ($Z = 9.07$, $p < .001$) and female ($Z = 12.47$, $p < .001$) gender roles dimensions, indicating short video intervention significantly enhanced traditional gender role identification.

Table 3. Post-test Comparison of Discrete Emotions and Gender Role Attitudes Between Experimental and Control Groups (N = 320)

| Variable | Group | Mean Rank | *Z* | *p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Discrete Emotional Responses to Male Characters | | | | |
| Anger | Experimental | 165.36 | 1.02 | 0.31 |
| | Control | 155.58 | | |
| Fear | Experimental | 170.93 | 2.37 | 0.02 |
| | Control | 149.94 | | |
| Disgust | Experimental | 158.96 | 0.31 | 0.76 |
| | Control | 162.02 | | |
| Joy | Experimental | 126.37 | 6.76 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 194.2 | | |
| Sadness | Experimental | 194.34 | 6.75 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 126.24 | | |
| Discrete Emotional Responses to Female Characters | | | | |
| Anger | Experimental | 200.07 | 7.92 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 120.43 | | |
| Fear | Experimental | 174.03 | 2.93 | 0.003 |
| | Control | 146.80 | | |
| Disgust | Experimental | 221.43 | 12.10 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 98.81 | | |
| Joy | Experimental | 141.95 | -3.47 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 179.28 | | |
| Sadness | Experimental | 190.37 | 6.10 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 130.25 | | |
| Gender Role Attitudes | | | | |
| MGR | Experimental | 207.00 | 9.07 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 113.42 | | |
| FGR | Experimental | 224.37 | 12.47 | <0.001 |
| | Control | 95.83 | | |

Note. MGR = Male Gender Role; FGR = Female Gender Role

In summary, this study established intervention effects through longitudinal comparison and excluded non-intervention factors through horizontal comparison, providing rigorous evidence. Analysis revealed gender-stereotyped videos significantly impacted youth: (1) positive emotions and sadness toward male stereotypes increased; (2) negative emotions toward female stereotypes increased while positive emotions decreased; (3) identification with both gender roles strengthened. This suggests Douyin URSDs may reinforce gender role identification through specific emotional responses. Accordingly, this study proceeds with discrete emotions mediation effect analysis to explore how these emotions influence young people's perceptions of different gender social roles.

*4.2 Mediation Analysis Results*

To explore how gender stereotypical content in Douyin URSDs influences gender role attitudes through emotions, this study employed PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes, 2022). Using experimental/control groups as independent variable, five discrete emotions (Anger, Fear, Disgust, Joy, Sadness) as mediators, we constructed separate mediation models for male gender role (MGR) and female gender role (FGR) attitudes. Age, gender, education level, region, emotional status, family structure, and Douyin usage patterns were controlled to ensure robust results.

4.2.1 Male Gender Role Attitudes Models

The impact of discrete emotions on male gender role (MGR) attitudes was examined between groups. As shown in Table 4, anger and fear models showed low explanatory power ($R^2 = .02$) with no significant effects on MGR. Disgust had a significant negative effect on MGR ($\beta = –.12$, $t = –2.64$, $p < .01$). In contrast, Model 4M showed that group assignment significantly increased joy ($\beta = 0.72$, $t = 6.78$, $p < .001$), and joy was a strong positive predictor of MGR ($\beta = .22$, $t = 4.38$, $p < .001$). Sadness Model 5M also exhibited a significant group effect ($\beta = .78$, $t = 7.75$, $p < .001$) and significant negative association with MGR ($\beta = –.12$, $t = –2.64$, $p < .01$). Across models, gender consistently showed significant negative effect on MGR ($\beta$ range = –. 22 to –. 24, $p < .001$), indicating male participants more strongly endorsed traditional male role attitudes. These findings suggest joy and sadness may be key emotional mediators connecting gender-stereotyped portrayals to male gender role identification.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients for Discrete Emotions as Mediating Variables Between Groups and Male Gender Role Attitudes (N = 320)

| Outcome Variable | Predictor Variables | $R^2$ | F | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1M | | | | | |
| Anger | Group | 0.02 | 0.67 | 0.15 | 1.32 |
| | Age | | | -0.08 | -1.30 |
| | Gender | | | 0.01 | 0.20 |
| | Education | | | 0.00 | 0.07 |
| | Place of Growth | | | -0.01 | -0.12 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.01 | 0.16 |
| | Family | | | -0.03 | -0.52 |
| | Daily Login | | | -0.01 | -0.08 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.08 | 0.93 |
| MGR | Group | 0.32 | 14.59*** | 0.99 | 10.35*** |
| | Anger | | | -0.03 | -0.55 |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.23 |
| | Gender | | | -0.24 | -4.97*** |
| | Education | | | 0.04 | 0.66 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.10 | 1.97 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.02 | 0.45 |
| | Family | | | -0.05 | -0.93 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.11 | 1.63 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.02 | -0.31 |
| Model 2M | | | | | |
| Fear | Group | 0.02 | 0.64 | 0.20 | 1.75 |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.16 |
| | Gender | | | 0.07 | 1.17 |
| | Education | | | 0.00 | -0.01 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.00 | 0.05 |
| | Relation | | | -0.01 | -0.18 |
| | Family | | | -0.04 | -0.65 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.05 | 0.66 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.01 | 0.11 |
| MGR | Group | 0.32 | 14.61*** | 0.99 | 10.35*** |
| | Fear | | | -0.03 | -0.65 |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.20 |
| | Gender | | | -0.24 | -4.92*** |
| | Education | | | 0.04 | 0.66 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.10 | 1.98 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.02 | 0.43 |
| | Family | | | -0.05 | -0.94 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.11 | 1.66 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.02 | -0.33 |
| Model 3M | | | | | |
| Disgust | Group | 0.04 | 0.67 | 0.14 | 1.24 |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.24 |
| | Gender | | | 0.14 | 2.50* |
| | Education | | | -0.01 | -0.18 |
| | Place of Growth | | | -0.07 | -1.17 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 0.79 |
| | Family | | | -0.07 | -1.19 |
| | Daily Login | | | -0.03 | -0.40 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.04 | -0.53 |

Note. $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, $p < .001$***. Standardized β coefficients reported. M denotes Male Character Models to distinguish from Female Character Models. MGR = Male Gender Role.

Table 4 (Continued). Regression Coefficients for Discrete Emotions as Mediating Variables Between Groups and Male Gender Role Attitudes (N = 320)

| Outcome Variable | Predictor Variables | $R^2$ | F | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 3M | | | | | |
| MGR | Group | 0.34 | 15.57*** | 1.00 | 10.60*** |
| | Disgust | | | -0.12 | -2.64** |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.23 |
| | Gender | | | -0.22 | -4.61*** |
| | Education | | | 0.03 | 0.64 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.09 | 1.82 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.03 | 0.56 |
| | Family | | | -0.05 | -1.10 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.11 | 1.59 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.03 | -0.42 |
| Model 4M | | | | | |
| Joy | Group | 0.15 | 5.99*** | 0.72 | 6.78*** |
| | Age | | | 0.07 | 1.27 |
| | Gender | | | -0.03 | -0.51 |
| | Education | | | -0.01 | -0.08 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.08 | 1.56 |
| | Relation | | | -0.06 | -1.09 |
| | Family | | | -0.01 | -0.16 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.04 | 0.48 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.06 | 0.76 |
| MGR | Group | 0.36 | 17.37*** | 0.83 | 8.36*** |
| | Joy | | | 0.22 | 4.38*** |
| | Age | | | -0.03 | -0.51 |
| | Gender | | | -0.24 | -4.99*** |
| | Education | | | 0.04 | 0.70 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.08 | 1.64 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.04 | 0.72 |
| | Family | | | -0.04 | -0.90 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.10 | 1.57 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.03 | -0.53 |
| Model 5M | | | | | |
| Sadness | Group | 0.23 | 10.37*** | 0.78 | 7.75*** |
| | Age | | | 0.10 | 1.81 |
| | Gender | | | -0.26 | -5.00*** |
| | Education | | | -0.02 | -0.38 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.02 | 0.39 |
| | Relationship | | | -0.03 | -0.65 |
| | Family | | | 0.00 | -0.04 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.08 | 1.17 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.03 | -0.48 |
| MGR | Group | 0.34 | 15.57*** | 1.00 | 10.60*** |
| | Sadness | | | -0.12 | -2.64** |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.23 |
| | Gender | | | -0.22 | -4.61*** |
| | Education | | | 0.03 | 0.64 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.09 | 1.82 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.03 | 0.56 |
| | Family | | | -0.05 | -1.10 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.11 | 1.59 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.03 | -0.42 |

Note. $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, $p < .001$***. Standardized β coefficients reported. M denotes Male Character Models to distinguish from Female Character Models. MGR = Male Gender Role.

Based on regression analysis, we examined the mediating effects of discrete emotions between group and male gender role (MGR). Results showed significant mediating roles for Joy (β = .16, 95% CI [0.07, 0.20], 16% of total effect) and Sadness (β = .10, 95% CI [0.04, 0.18], 12% of total effect). Anger, Fear, and Disgust showed no significant indirect effects (confidence intervals contained 0). This indicates both positive emotions (joy) and negative emotions (sadness) play important regulatory roles in gender attitude transformation. Table 5 and Figure 1 provides detailed mediation test results.

Table 5. Mediating Effects of Discrete Emotions Between Viewing Male-Stereotyped URSDs and Male Gender Role Attitudes

| Pathway | Effect | *SE* | 95% LLCI | 95% ULCI | Proportion Effect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1M: Anger | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 0.81 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.82 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | 101% |
| Group →Anger →MGR | -0.004 | 0.01 | -0.03 | 0.01 | -1% |
| Model 2M: Fear | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 0.81 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.82 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | 101% |
| Group →Fear →MGR | -0.01 | 0.01 | -0.04 | 0.01 | -1% |
| Model 3M: Disgust | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 0.81 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.83 | 0.08 | 0.67 | 0.98 | 102% |
| Group →Disgust →MGR | -0.02 | 0.02 | -0.06 | 0.01 | -2% |
| Model 4M: Joy | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 0.81 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.68 | 0.08 | 0.52 | 0.85 | 84% |
| Group →Joy →MGR | 0.16 | 0.03 | 0.07 | 0.20 | 16% |
| Model 5M: Sadness | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 0.81 | 0.08 | 0.66 | 0.97 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.71 | 0.08 | 0.54 | 0.88 | 88% |
| Group →Sadness →MGR | 0.10 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.18 | 12% |

*Note.* Results based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. *SE* = standard error; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit ;CI = confidence interval; MGR = Male Gender Role. M denotes Male Character Models.

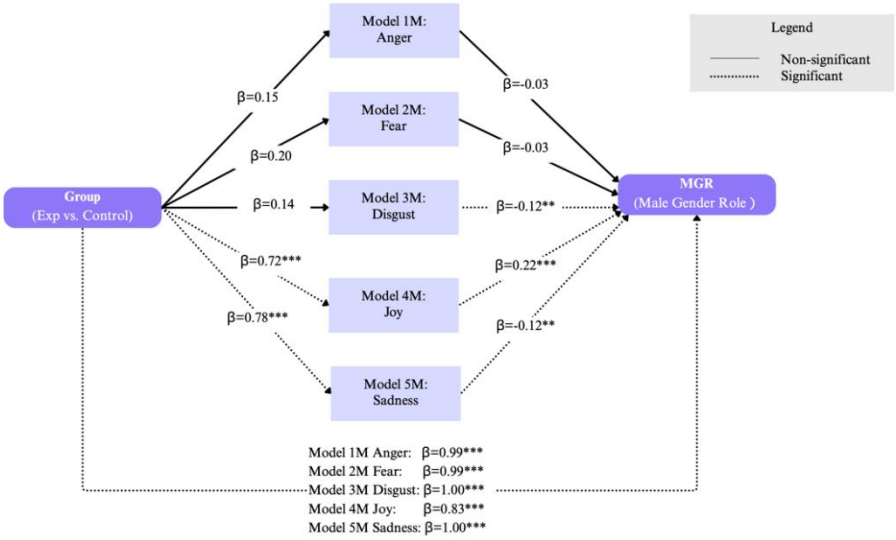


Figure 1. Mediation Model for Male Gender Role Attitudes.

Note. $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, $p < .001$***. Significant Mediation Effects: Joy: β=0.16[0.07, 0.20], 16% of total effect; Sadness:β=0.10 [0.04, 0.18], 12% of total effect, M denotes Male Character Models.

4.2.2 Female Gender Role Attitudes Models

Next, we examined discrete emotions' influence on female gender role (FGR) attitude between groups. Table 6 shows regression coefficients for the FGR model. In the female model, emotions exhibited different patterns. Fear showed significant group effect (β = .29, t = 2.54, p < .05) and predictive effect on FGR (β =.09, t = 2.17, p < .05). Disgust was strongly influenced by group (β = 1.32, t = 16.15, p < .001) with significant positive effect on FGR (β = .11, t = 2.02, p < .05). While anger (β = .93, t = 9.51, p < .001), joy (β = -.38, t = -3.47, p < .001), and sadness (β = .72, t = 7.46, p < .001) were significantly influenced by group, none affected FGR.

Across all models in FGR, gender consistently showed significant negative predictive effects (β range: -.15 to -.19, p

< .001), indicating male participants more readily identified with female gender roles than females did. Age showed significant positive effects in some models, suggesting older participants were more inclined to identify with traditional female gender roles.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients for Discrete Emotions as Mediators Between Group and Female Gender Role Attitudes (N = 320)

| Outcome Variable | Predictor Variables | $R^2$ | $F$ | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1F | | | | | |
| Anger | Group | 0.27 | 13.02*** | 0.93 | 9.51*** |
| | Age | | | -0.04 | -0.70 |
| | Gender | | | -0.22 | -4.32*** |
| | Education | | | -0.04 | -0.73 |
| | Place of Growth | | | -0.07 | -1.48 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.06 | 1.12 |
| | Family | | | -0.07 | -1.39 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.07 | 1.03 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.07 | -0.97 |
| FGR | Group | 0.51 | 32.06*** | 1.34 | 14.62*** |
| | Anger | | | 0.02 | 0.41 |
| | Age | | | 0.10 | 2.00 |
| | Gender | | | -0.16 | -3.83*** |
| | Education | | | -0.08 | -1.63 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.07 | 1.63 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.17 |
| | Family | | | 0.02 | 0.53 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.03 | 0.52 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.03 | 0.54 |
| Model 2F | | | | | |
| Fear | Group | 0.04 | 1.28 | 0.29 | 2.54* |
| | Age | | | -0.02 | -0.40 |
| | Gender | | | 0.05 | 0.82 |
| | Education | | | 0.05 | 0.80 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.10 | 1.68 |
| | Relation | | | -0.01 | -0.10 |
| | Family | | | 0.01 | 0.10 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.00 | 0.03 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.06 | 0.75 |
| FGR | Group | 0.52 | 32.99*** | 1.33 | 16.48*** |
| | Fear | | | 0.09 | 2.17* |
| | Age | | | 0.09 | 2.05* |
| | Gender | | | -0.17 | -4.17*** |
| | Education | | | -0.08 | -1.76 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.06 | 1.40 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.22 |
| | Family | | | 0.02 | 0.49 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.03 | 0.54 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.03 | 0.43 |
| Model 3F | | | | | |
| Disgust | Group | 0.49 | 33.7*** | 1.32 | 16.15*** |
| | Age | | | 0.08 | 1.69 |
| | Gender | | | -0.14 | -3.39*** |
| | Education | | | 0.06 | 1.27 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.09 | 2.11* |
| | Relationship | | | -0.03 | -0.65 |
| | Family | | | 0.06 | 1.33 |
| | Daily Login | | | -0.01 | -0.10 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.04 | 0.63 |

Note. p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***. β represents standardized regression coefficients. F denotes Female Character Models to distinguish from Male Character Models. FGR = Female Gender Role.

Table 6 (continued). Regression Coefficients for Discrete Emotions as Mediators Between Group and Female Gender Role Attitudes (N = 320)

| Outcome Variable | Predictor Variables | $R^2$ | $F$ | β | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 3F | | | | | |
| FGR | Group | 0.52 | 32.87*** | 1.21 | 11.12*** |
| | Disgust | | | 0.11 | 2.02* |
| | Age | | | 0.08 | 1.80 |
| | Gender | | | -0.15 | -3.62*** |
| | Education | | | -0.08 | -1.80 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.06 | 1.36 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.28 |
| | Family | | | 0.01 | 0.35 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.03 | 0.56 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.03 | 0.45 |
| Model 4F | | | | | |
| Joy | Group | 0.08 | 3.15** | -0.38 | -3.47*** |
| | Age | | | -0.01 | -0.19 |
| | Gender | | | -0.11 | -2.01* |
| | Education | | | 0.02 | 0.30 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.06 | 1.03 |
| | Relation | | | -0.13 | -2.28* |
| | Family | | | -0.07 | -1.20 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.00 | 0.01 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.04 | 0.51 |
| FGR | Group | 0.52 | 32.99*** | 1.35 | 16.36*** |
| | Joy | | | -0.04 | -0.91 |
| | Age | | | 0.09 | 1.98* |
| | Gender | | | -0.17 | -4.13*** |
| | Education | | | -0.08 | -1.63 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.07 | 1.66 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.07 |
| | Family | | | 0.02 | 0.44 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.03 | 0.54 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.03 | 0.55 |
| Model 5F | | | | | |
| Sadness | Group | 0.29 | 14.17*** | 0.72 | 7.46*** |
| | Age | | | -0.02 | -0.34 |
| | Gender | | | 0.36 | 7.28*** |
| | Education | | | 0.01 | 0.21 |
| | Place of Growth | | | -0.11 | -2.30* |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.03 |
| | Family | | | -0.03 | -0.62 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.04 | 0.62 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | -0.03 | -0.48 |
| FGR | Group | 0.51 | 32.51*** | 1.31 | 14.96*** |
| | Sadness | | | 0.07 | 1.54 |
| | Age | | | 0.09 | 2.02* |
| | Gender | | | -0.19 | -4.34*** |
| | Education | | | -0.08 | -1.67 |
| | Place of Growth | | | 0.07 | 1.80 |
| | Relationship | | | 0.05 | 1.11 |
| | Family | | | 0.02 | 0.56 |
| | Daily Login | | | 0.03 | 0.49 |
| | Time Spent on Douyin / day | | | 0.03 | 0.56 |

Note. $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, $p < .001$***. $\beta$ represents standardized regression coefficients. F denotes Female Character Models to distinguish from Male Character Models. FGR = Female Gender Role.

Based on regression analysis, we further examined mediating effects between group and female gender role (FGR). Fear demonstrated a marginally significant mediating effect (β = .02, 95% CI [0.00, 0.04]), accounting for approximately 2% of the total effect, making it the only significant or nearly significant emotional variable across female pathways.

Disgust constituted 11% of total impact (β = .11, 95% CI [0.00, .23]). Table 7 and Figure 2 provide detailed mediation test results.

Table 7. Mediating Effects of Discrete Emotions Between Viewing Female-Stereotyped URSDs and Female Gender Role Attitudes (N=320)

| Pathway | Effect | *SE* | 95% LLCI | 95% ULCI | Proportion Effect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model 1F: Anger | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 1.01 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 1.13 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.99 | 0.07 | 0.86 | 1.13 | 98% |
| Group →Anger →FGR | 0.02 | 0.04 | -0.07 | 0.11 | 2% |
| Model 2F: Fear | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 1.01 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 1.13 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.99 | 0.06 | 0.87 | 1.11 | 98% |
| Group →Fear →FGR | 0.02 | 0.01 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 2% |
| Model 3F: Disgust | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 1.01 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 1.13 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.90 | 0.08 | 0.74 | 1.06 | 89% |
| Group →Disgust →FGR | 0.11 | 0.06 | 0.00 | 0.23 | 11% |
| Model 4F: Joy | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 1.01 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 1.13 | |
| Direct Effect | 1.00 | 0.06 | 0.88 | 1.12 | 99% |
| Group →Joy→FGR | 0.01 | 0.01 | -0.01 | 0.04 | 1% |
| Model 5F: Sadness | | | | | |
| Total Effect | 1.01 | 0.06 | 0.89 | 1.13 | |
| Direct Effect | 0.97 | 0.06 | 0.84 | 1.10 | 96% |
| Group →Sadness →FGR | 0.04 | 0.03 | -0.01 | 0.09 | 4% |

*Note.* Results based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. *SE* = standard error; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; CI = confidence interval; FGR = Female Gender Role. F denotes Female Character Models to distinguish from Male Character Models. Mediation effects are significant when confidence intervals do not contain zero

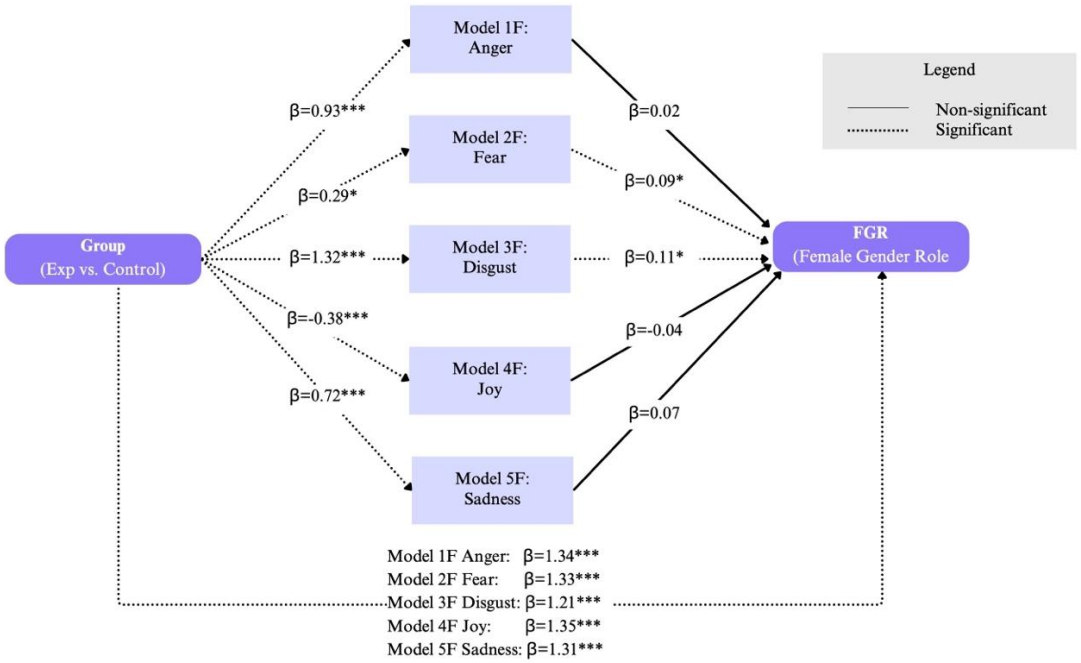


Figure 2. Mediation Model for Female Gender Role Attitudes.

Note. $p < .05$*, $p < .01$**, $p < .001$***.Significant Mediation Effects: Fear: β=0.02[0.00, 0.04], 2% of total Effect; Disgust:β=0.11[0.00, 0.23],11% of total Effect, F denotes Female Character Models.

## 5. Discussion

The present study investigates how gender stereotypes in Douyin urban romance short dramas influence young audiences' gender role identification through discrete emotions. The results further clarify the complex mechanisms through which media consumption shapes the internalization of gender stereotypes among young Chinese adults through emotional mediating pathways. The following analysis will integrate cultivation theory, feelings-as-information theory, discrete emotion theory, and social gender role theory to analyze the main research findings and emphasize the mediating role of emotions in the formation of gender attitudes.

### *5.1 Direct Influence of Gender Stereotypes on Gender Role Attitudes*

This study supports H1 and H2, demonstrating that urban romantic short videos containing gender stereotypes enhance acceptance of traditional gender roles. This can be attributed to the fast pace and intense sensory stimulation of short videos enable viewers to quickly activate and reinforce gender role schemas (Gerbner et al., 2020).

The research validates Smiler's (2006) view on the critical function of social gender roles, revealing how these short videos normalize gender stereotypes by reinforcing different social expectations, aligning with cultivation theory's core proposition (Eagly & Wood, 1991). At the interpersonal relationship level, Vogel et al. (2003) found that individuals often rely on traditional gender scripts to reduce conflict and maintain relationship stability when managing intimate relationships, which may be a significant factor contributing to how urban romance short videos strengthen gender role perceptions among young people.

In conclusion, this study extends cultivation theory to short video platforms, revealing how new media present traditional gender norms and provide stability in social cognition, deepening Chinese youth's identification with traditional gender roles, promoting these concepts in intimate relationships, and maintaining existing gender orders and social structures.

### *5.2 Discrete Emotions as Mediating Variables*

The core finding of this study identifies discrete emotions as mediating pathways between media exposure and gender attitudes in gender contexts. Based on feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz & Clore, 2003) and discrete emotion theory (Plutchik, 1980), this study further distinguishes the mediating effects of positive emotions (joy) and negative emotions (anger, disgust, fear, and sadness) in different responses to male and female gender stereotypes, revealing the differential functions of emotions in cognitive pathways for different gender roles.

#### 5.2.1 Mediating Effects of Discrete Emotions on the Attitude of Male Gender Roles

Results support Hypothesis H3a and partially support H3b, showing both joy (positive emotion) and sadness (negative emotion) elicited by male gender stereotypes in URSDs significantly enhance young viewers' identification with male gender roles. The reinforcing effect of joy aligns with Fridkin & Gershon (2021) argument that joy consolidates pre-existing cognitive frameworks.

Contrary to previous studies suggesting sadness encourages deeper processing and weakens stereotype reliance (e.g., Lerner et al., 2003), our findings revealed sadness strengthened identification with traditional male gender roles. In gender contexts, sadness appears to enhance emotional connection rather than stimulate critical reflection. This unique pattern is theoretically supported by Fiske et al. (2007) and Banet-Weiser & Miltner (2016). When traditional male roles demonstrate sacrifice, viewer empathy strengthens affirmation of these roles rather than prompting critical thinking. This reveals emotional processing mechanisms for gender issues may differ fundamentally from other domains.

Control variable analysis showed Chinese males exhibited stronger reinforcement of traditional male role identification when experiencing sadness compared to females. As revealed by Wu & Zhang (2025), when processing gender-related media content, emotional resonance in males and females may operate through fundamentally different psychological mechanisms and cognitive pathways, leading to differentiated attitude changes in response to identical content.

#### 5.2.2 Mediating Effects of Discrete Emotions on the Attitude of Female Gender Roles

This study's findings do not support H4a, as reduced joy from female stereotypical portrayals did not significantly affect female gender role attitudes. However, the research partially supports H4b: discrete negative emotions (disgust and fear) evoked by female stereotypes significantly enhanced female gender role attitudes.

Simultaneously, the study found that young male participants developed significantly more disgust emotions toward female stereotypes than female participants did, which aligns with Wu & Zhang's (2025) mention of Chinese males exhibiting misogynistic tendencies in social media. This also corresponds with males experiencing more sadness than females when confronting male gender stereotypes in urban romance dramas, creating an internal conflict with the sense of honor derived from being the family economic pillar or having higher social status, which deepens misogynistic tendencies (Gul & Uskul, 2019).

In China's gender cultural context, this research reveals significant emotional asymmetry in gender portrayal responses: male characters promote identification through positive emotions (joy) and sympathy-inducing sadness, while female characters deepen negative identification through disgust and fear. This emotional framework (positive for males, negative for females) creates a systematic cognitive bias associating female stereotypes with negative emotional experiences, subtly shaping differentiated responses and exacerbating gender cognition polarization.

## 6. Conclusion

This research reveals how Douyin's urban romance short dramas influence youth's gender attitudes through discrete emotions. Gender-stereotypical content reinforces attitudes both directly and through emotional pathways with clear asymmetry: male stereotypes evoke identification through positive emotions while female stereotypes are internalized through negative emotions like disgust and fear. This creates a cognitive imbalance positioning men positively and women negatively, making gender prejudice resistant to change (Leone et al., 2005).

Challenging mainstream emotion theory, we found specific negative emotions function differently in gender contexts: sadness creates sympathetic acceptance of male stereotypes, while disgust and fear reinforce traditional female gender roles rather than promoting critical thinking. Male viewers showed significantly more disgust toward female stereotypes, aligning with rising misogynistic online phenomena.

The gender-emotion-attitude media model established in this research explains accelerating gender polarization in digital spaces. Content creators should reduce negative emotional portrayals of female characters, while platforms should reconsider algorithmic preferences for formulaic gender conflict content. This study has limitations, including short-term exposure measurement and student-only sampling. Future research would benefit from examining long-term exposure effects through mixed methods, particularly incorporating qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews and discourse analysis to better understand the nuanced lived experiences and perception formation processes.

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## Authors contributions

Dr. Shijun Lou was responsible for the study design, data collection, and manuscript writing. Prof. Nor Azura Adzharuddin and Dr. Sharifah Sofiah Syed Zainudin contributed to the methodological design, data analysis, and manuscript revision. Prof. Siti Zobidah Omar contributed to the discussion and conclusion sections. Dr. Shijun Lou finalized the revised manuscript. All authors contributed equally to the study and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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The journal’s policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

## Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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