

Research on the Formation Mechanism of Youth Marital Suspension in the Digital-Intelligent Era - an Analysis Based on Digital Economy and Gender Perceptions

Guan Yiwei

School of Politics and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan, Shandong, China

Abstract:The continuous decline in the marriage and child-rearing rate of young people has become a prominent population problem facing Chinese society. Among many influencing factors, the rapid development of the digital economy, the change of gender role concepts, and the socialization of marriage and child-rearing anxiety are intertwined and influenced by each other, jointly shaping the marriage and love decision-making environment of contemporary youth. Taking the digital economy as the starting point, this article systematically analyzes how it can change young people's expectations and attitudes towards marriage by improving women's economic independence, restructuring the family division of labor model, and giving rise to new risk awareness. The digital economy has broken the time and space foundation of the traditional gender division of labor, and the enhancement of women's economic independence has reduced the necessity of marriage. At the same time, the repeated exaggeration of the cost of childbirth and the risk of marriage on the Internet has been solidified into universal marriage anxiety through the media catalytic mechanism, which eventually leads to a large number of young people falling into a state of marriage suspension. This article believes that understanding the intrinsic relationship between digital economy and gender concept and marital anxiety is the key to explaining the marriage dilemma of contemporary youth.

Keywords: Digital Economy; Gender Perceptions; Marriage and Childbearing Anxiety; Marital Suspension; Youth

1. Research Background and Problem Statement

In recent years, the discussion about young people "why they don't get married" and "why

they don't fall in love" has almost become a fixed program in public opinion, frequently appearing on major social platforms. The continuous decline in the number of marriage registrations among young people, the repeatedly postponement of the age of first marriage, and the decline in the fertility rate have caused anxiety in all walks of life. In April 2026, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and other 15 departments jointly issued the Opinions on Deepening the Construction of Youth Development-oriented Cities and Helping to Build Modern People's Cities, which clearly proposed that "urban services should benefit young people, improve inclusive and standardized friendship services, and strengthen the guidance of marriage and love". The 15th Five-Year Plan Outline also made an important deployment, requiring young people to help solve the practical difficulties of "marriage, love and childbirth". The "Recommendations" of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China included "Advocating the Active Concept of Marriage and Childbearing" into the national development program for the next five years for the first time, clearly requiring the optimization of fertility support policies and incentives, and effectively reducing the cost of family fertility and nurturing. The intensive signals released at the policy level show that the problem of youth marriage and love has become a prominent population problem facing Chinese society. Among many influencing factors, the rapid popularity and application of artificial intelligence is becoming a new variable for understanding the marriage and love decision-making of contemporary young people. Artificial intelligence is developing from a simple information matching tool to a tool that provides emotional analysis, communication advice and decision-making assistance, and is gradually embedded in the interaction process of marriage and love among

young people. Existing research mainly focuses on the macro impact of digital media on marriage and love, such as platform matching mechanism, online interaction mode, etc. However, compared with the focus on platforms and virtual forms, it is still worth studying how artificial intelligence embeds intimate relationship interactions at the micro level, participates in specific decision-making and acts on psychological mechanisms. This article focuses on how artificial intelligence participates in the formation process of young people's marriage and child-rearing anxiety, and how it affects young people's marriage and love decision-making and the perception and judgment of the risk of marriage and childbearing. How does this influence lead to the formation and solidification of anxiety? From the perspective of social characterization theory, this article understands marriage and child-rearing anxiety as a social and psychological phenomenon that is aroused, strengthened and further solidified into collective consensus in a specific numerical environment, and systematically thinks about the catalytic mechanism of artificial intelligence in it.

1.1 Core Traits of Traditional Romantic and Marital Values

Academic research on traditional marital attitudes among Chinese youth can be traced back to the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, before the internet achieved mass penetration. Back then, young people mostly met potential partners through family introductions, workplace encounters, or matchmakers arranged by relatives. Traditional marital outlooks featured three defining characteristics: First, familism as the core principle. In agrarian societies, marriage signified not merely the union of two individuals but an alliance between two families, functioning essentially as an economic cooperation contract. Parents wielded substantial influence over their children's mate selection, and the ancient customs of parental arrangement and matchmaker mediation, though weakened in modern times, have never fully vanished. A prevalent social reality persists: even young people in free romantic relationships often face parental approval as a decisive prerequisite for marriage [1]. Second, instrumental rationality in marriage. Marriage historically fulfilled instrumental functions including lineage

continuity, mutual economic support, and elderly care. Past generations entered wedlock not solely out of affection, but also to satisfy these practical, utilitarian demands. Third, a standardized linear life trajectory. Traditional social norms dictated a fixed life sequence: complete education, secure employment, marry, then raise children. Young adults who remained unmarried past socially expected ages faced intense pressure from family and society, often labeled "leftover men and women." This external pressure pushed many to settle for unsatisfactory partners [2]. Naturally, these norms varied significantly across regions and social strata. Urban youth held more open attitudes toward marriage than rural peers, and highly educated young adults prioritized emotional compatibility above all else. Even so, prior to the large-scale integration of digital-intelligent technology into romantic spheres, familism, instrumental orientations, and rigid life sequencing constituted the dominant framework shaping marital perceptions [1].

1.2 Modern Shifts in Romantic and Marital Values

With the rapid development of the economy, the improvement of education, the acceleration of urbanization and the rise of women's employment, the traditional concept of marriage and love has also begun to change significantly. The theory of the second population change is the core analytical framework in this field. The theory is used to explain the phenomenon of delayed marriage age, the increase in the unmarried population, the increase in divorce rate and the decline in fertility in Western society after World War II. The fundamental driving force of these changes is not economic factors, but the change of values. The core driving force for the change of marriage and love is secularization, individualization and the pursuit of self-realization [3]. Drawing on this theoretical framework and combining local practical experience, Chinese scholars point out that with the rapid development of society, economy and population, the size, function, resources and ability of Chinese families have undergone profound changes [4]. The contemporary Chinese concept of marriage and love is undergoing a transformation from family-oriented to individual-oriented. The motivation of love has changed from marriage to emotion, and the criteria for choosing a mate have changed from instrumental to expressive.

Young people no longer regard marriage as a must in life, but more as a personal choice from the bottom of their hearts. They are not only to complete the task of heiring, but also hope to get emotional satisfaction and self-realization in marriage.

This change is also clearly reflected in the data. In recent years, the number of marriage registrations has continued to decline, and the age of first marriage has been delayed. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the number of marriage registrations nationwide in 2022 was 6.833 million, a decrease of nearly half compared with 13.469 million in 2013. In addition to structural factors such as gender structural imbalance, the popularization of individual values is also an important reason for the formation of this trend [10]. The complexity of marriage and love is that it not only involves material conditions, but also is closely related to the change of ideas of young people. In recent years, topics such as non-marriage, late marriage, and fear of marriage have frequently appeared on the hot list on social media. The plots related to divorce and infertility in some literary works also have a negative impact on advocating the active concept of marriage and education. It is against this background that the technological change in the era of digital intelligence has been deeply intertwined with the change of the concept of marriage and love.

2. Empirical Findings on Artificial Intelligence's Intervention in Youth Marital Decision-Making

2.1 Algorithmic Matching: Platform Logic's Intervention in Mate Selection

At present, although artificial intelligence has not become the mainstream way for young people to make marriage and love decisions, its influence is gradually increasing. The most direct path for artificial intelligence to intervene in youth marriage and love decision-making is to enter the algorithm-driven blind date platform. Zhou Lujun and Tong Xinxin put forward the concept of "algorithm sinking", which is used to describe the diffusion process of artificial intelligence algorithms from the central city to the county and from the elite group to the general public group. According to existing research, most cloud blind dating platforms on the market use artificial intelligence algorithms,

which not only provides technical support for young people to find partners, but also unconsciously affects their concept of choosing a partner. This means that the intervention of algorithms is not only the improvement of efficiency at the technical level, but also involves the shaping of the conceptual level. What's more noteworthy is that when the algorithm masters the technology of "who can meet whom", the choice of mate is no longer initiated by the individual, but completed in the rules set by the platform. Which characteristics are included in the matching indicators and what proportion they account for, which has formed an invisible standard framework for mate selection. In the process of using it, platform users unconsciously accept this framework and gradually internalize it into their own judgment standards. In addition to the matching function, artificial intelligence is also used by young people as a cognitive auxiliary tool for marriage and love decision-making. Intelligent chatbots with highly anthropomorphic and unconditional positive response characteristics are reshaping the form of intimate relationships among teenagers. The use of artificial intelligence often occurs in specific scenarios. For example, when encountering conflicts in love relationships or needing emotional expression, young people tend to seek advice and support from artificial intelligence. Young people also have an obvious sense of boundaries. In the process of use, artificial intelligence plays the role of a staff rather than a decision-maker. It provides advice and analysis, but the final judgment and action still need to be decided by the young people themselves. This boundary shows that young people do not passively accept the domination of technical logic when using artificial intelligence, but maintain control of their own emotional judgment.

Another way for artificial intelligence to intervene in youth marriage and love decision-making is to directly provide virtual partners as an alternative option to show intimate relationships. The research of Pu Qingping and Longing focuses on the specific technical form of AI virtual boyfriend. The study found that AI virtual boyfriends profoundly influence and shape the view of mate selection and marriage of young female players. In terms of the criteria for choosing a mate, players require both men to be rich and obedient to women, but on the other hand, they can lie flat. It can be seen that

human-computer interaction may give rise to a one-way and unequal expectation of choosing a mate. Young people choose an AI partner not purely out of technical curiosity, but a response to the dilemma of real interpersonal relationships. However, the functions and limits of human-computer intimacy are also worthy of attention. Digital intimacy has not achieved a unique emotional resonance, because intimate relationships are essentially neither a consumer relationship nor a control relationship, but a process of self-reshaping in the process of getting along. When young people get used to living with an AI partner who is "always right and always obedient", young people may become more and more uncomfortable with the uncertainty and frictional compromises in real relationships in the real world.

In summary, the ways in which artificial intelligence intervenes in youth marriage and love decision-making can be roughly divided into two categories. One is as a cognitive auxiliary tool and decision-making tool, providing information analysis and language expression support for young people in specific situations; the other is as a substitute for relationships, it meets the needs of young people for intimate relationships in the form of virtual partners. The two forms are not mutually exclusive. They often alternate in different usage situations of the same youth.

2.2 Modernized Gender Role Perceptions and the Individualization of Marriage

The theory of the second population transformation regards the individualization of values as the fundamental driving force for changes in marriage and child-rearing behavior [15]. Individualization means that people are increasingly inclined to arrange their lives according to their own will, rather than obeying external norms and expectations. In the field of marriage and love, the direct manifestation of individualization is that marriage is no longer a necessary option for young people's lives. Diversified lifestyles such as singleness, cohabitation, and non-wedlock childbirth have gained increasing social acceptance. The research of Chinese scholars confirms this trend. The concept of marriage and love among contemporary young people is undergoing a transformation from family-oriented to individual-oriented [7], and the motivation of love has also changed from the purpose of

marriage to the emotional purpose, and the criteria for choosing a mate has changed from instrumental to expressive. Young people no longer get married just for the sake of family generation or financial mutual assistance. They hope to get emotional satisfaction and self-realization in marriage. This transformation itself has positive progressive significance, but it also brings new dilemmas. When the expectations of marriage are increased, the actual conditions are difficult to meet. Postponing or even giving up marriage has become a rational individual choice.

Digital intelligence technology plays a dual role in the dissemination of gender concepts. On the one hand, the popularity of the Internet has spread the concepts of gender equality and women's independence at an unprecedented speed and breadth, accelerating the collapse of the traditional gender division of labor. On the other hand, the large discussion on the risk of marriage and the cost of childbirth on social media has also invisibly strengthened the resistance of some groups to marriage [3]. This dual role puts contemporary women in a contradictory situation. While they are encouraged to pursue independence, they are told that marriage is a trap everywhere. They have been infiltrated in this information environment for a long time, and a defensive marriage and love strategy has gradually formed. Young women are required to be both independent and avoid danger, so marriage has become an option that needs to be weighed repeatedly and difficult to land.

2.3 Media Catalytic Mechanisms Generating Marriage and Childbearing Anxiety

Marriage anxiety is gradually evoked and strengthened in a specific information environment, and finally forms the product of the general recognition of the public. This formation process can be roughly divided into three interconnected links: awakening, expression and solidarity [6]. The wake-up link usually begins with a user sharing various difficulties encountered in the process of marriage and childbearing on social platforms. This kind of personal experience has its own strong emotional color, which is easy to attract a large number of browsing discussions in a short time. When the platform algorithm identifies the popularity of this content, it will continue to push more short videos and pictures with similar

themes to users who have followed similar content. The expression link shows that other users with similar experiences follow, post, like, and participate in the discussion. With more and more people participating, the youth association formed an illusion that everyone was like this. The negative experiences that were originally scattered and accidental are constantly confirmed and amplified in the interaction of social platforms, gradually presenting an illusion of universality. The solidarity link means that these scattered individual experiences are integrated into a collective narrative. The core of this narrative is usually a highly simplified assertion such as childbirth is painful and misfortune in marriage. Those voices that have a smooth birth and enjoy the status of a mother are systematically marginalized because of their lack of drama, which is difficult to get the same attention and dissemination. Therefore, a highly selective risk narrative has gained a foothold on the social platform.

This medium catalytic mechanism brings far-reaching social consequences. The birth experience, which originally varies from person to person, has been simplified into a single negative template. When more and more people begin to believe that fertility is a painful and dangerous thing through media transmission, this view itself constitutes a social fact. It is not only people's subjective feelings, but also an objective collective mentality, which in turn will further strengthen people's fear. Therefore, the self-reinforcement cycle of marriage and child-rearing anxiety began to form. The more we discussed, the more anxious we became. The more anxious we discussed, the more anxiety itself became the reason for anxiety.

2.4 The Emergence of Marital Suspension

Based on the above discussion, this article believes that the concept of marriage and love suspension can be used to summarize the general mentality of contemporary youth on marriage and love. Marriage and love suspension refers to young people who not only actively use various digital tools to find partners and pursue high-quality intimate relationships, but also find it difficult to make marriage commitments under the influence of social and cultural inertia and economic constraints [4]. It's not that they don't want to get married, but they are looking forward to a perfect relationship that meets their personal imagination, but the actual conditions

and technical environment make this expectation more and more difficult to achieve, so they would rather hang over. The formation of marriage suspension can be explained by the triple mechanism. First, the technical mechanism, including the selection overload of algorithm platforms and the idealized presentation of social media. The second is the economic mechanism, which is manifested in the fact that the digital economy has improved women's economic independence, resulting in the shaking of the economic foundation of traditional marriage. At the same time, structural pressures such as high house prices and high childcare costs make marriage decision-making particularly cautious. The third is the cultural mechanism, which means that the trend of individualization is amplified by technology in the era of digital intelligence, but the traditional inertial thinking of building a family and a career still exists. The pull of the two forces makes young people in a state of neither being able to do it step by step nor give up completely. Therefore, understanding this triple mechanism is the prerequisite for designing effective interventions.

3. The Digital Economy and the Collapse of Marriage's Traditional Economic Foundations

The rise of platform-based employment model is one of the core features of the digital economy. Takeaway delivery riders, online car-hailing drivers, online education, e-commerce management and other work carried out by relying on the Internet platform have the characteristics of low entry threshold and flexible working hours, providing workers with income channels without fixed office space. For women, this change is of special significance. In the traditional workplace environment, women often face double dilemmas. On the one hand, the family responsibility of giving birth to children makes it difficult for them to work full-time for a long time; on the other hand, gender discrimination in the workplace also restricts women's career development. Platform employment has alleviated these contradictions to a certain extent. Through platform employment, women can balance family and work, use fragmented time to undertake online orders, and independently arrange working hours and locations. More importantly, platform employment allows women to have an economic

source independent of their partners and families. This economic independence is the material basis for the independent choice of marriage and love, so that women have the economic confidence to choose marriage and love relationships independently. But at the same time, the rise of platform employment has also given rise to new unfair problems. The income of gigs is unstable and there is a lack of perfect social security. In the platform labor market, women tend to focus on areas with low skill requirements and unstable income. Therefore, although the digital economy helps women gain independent income, it is not equivalent to the real realization of equal pay for men and women for equal work. It can only be regarded as another way out of the existing employment system. What it provides is more an alternative plan. Increased economic independence makes women more confident when they get married, and also makes them more sensitive to the risks of marriage. In traditional society, once women choose to divorce, they often suffer a heavy blow at the economic level, and the passive situation at the survival level forces them to tolerate various problems encountered in marriage. But when women have their own source of income, marriage has changed from a necessity to an option [8]. From the perspective of economics, the benefits of marriage include scale effects, emotional support, social capital accumulation, and the convenience of giving birth and raising children. The risks of marriage include the breakdown of relationships caused by the spouse's infidelity, domestic violence and personality mismatch, as well as the division of property and life turmoil brought about by divorce. When economic benefits decline relatively due to women's independence and risk perception is amplified by media transmission, people's perception of marriage and love risks continues to deepen. Late marriage or even not marriage has become a realistic decision in the eyes of many young people. In addition to the digital economy reshaping the public's perception of marriage and love, the objective structural pressure is also strengthening the state of marriage suspension. High house prices are a prominent problem facing Chinese youth. In the inherent perception of the public, owning real estate is often the rigid standard for starting a family. The cost of childcare is also intimidating. With the continuous development of society, the money required to raise children has long been

higher than before. In addition, a lot of time and opportunity costs are also spent in the process of parenting. For working women, childbirth often means career interruption and delayed promotion. This kind of hidden formation is difficult to calculate with specific values, but it is a real concern for women when making fertility decisions. Job instability has become a factor that cannot be ignored. All kinds of structural pressures interact with the trend of economic independence in the digital age, jointly pushing up the psychological threshold for young people to be willing to enter marriage.

4. Mediated Dissemination of Gender Norms and the Entrenchment of Marriage-Childbearing Anxiety

The impact of the digital intelligence era on marriage is not only reflected at the economic level, but also subtly changes the public's inherent understanding of marriage and fertility. A significant change is that discussions about fertility risks can be seen everywhere on the Internet. In traditional society, childbirth is regarded as a natural stage in women's lives. Although there are risks, everyone accepts it by default. Nowadays, the progress of medical technology has greatly improved the safety of childbirth, and the safety and security of the production process is more perfect than ever, but people's perception of the risk of childbirth has become stronger, and the Internet has further amplified this concern. There are endless discussions on various social platforms about postpartum depression, childbirth complications, long-term physical damage and workplace discrimination after childbirth. This kind of content is often presented in the first-person narrative, which gives people a strong sense of immersion and emotional impact. Marriage and child-rearing anxiety is the result of being aroused, strengthened and finally solidified into a collective consensus in a specific network information environment for a long time. The whole development process can be divided into three stages of connection. The first stage is emotional awakening, and individual users first disclose their painful experiences in the process of childbirth on social platforms. This kind of content has gained a lot of attention and browsing due to the strong emotional impact. After the algorithm recommendation mechanism captures the popularity of the content, it will quickly push it to more users. The second stage

is collective expression. Netizens with similar experiences leave messages to share their stories one after another, which gives people the illusion that everyone has the same troubles. The negative feelings of individuals who were originally scattered are constantly confirmed and amplified in the interaction. The third stage is unity. These scattered individual experiences are integrated into a highly unified collective narrative. The core point is that the reproductive process is often full of pain. Those voices that give birth smoothly and enjoy the status of a mother are difficult to get the support of traffic due to the lack of drama, and the scope of dissemination is far less than the negative content. The social consequences of this medium catalytic mechanism are quite far-reaching. The feeling of fertility, which originally varies from person to person, has been forcibly simplified into a single negative template. When more and more people begin to believe that fertility is a painful and dangerous thing, this universal perception will slowly become a social inherent view, which in turn further solidifies people's fear and forms an unbreakable closed loop. This is the self-reinforcing cycle of fertility anxiety. The more you discuss, the more anxious you are. The more anxious you are, the more you discuss. Anxiety itself becomes the reason for the persistence of anxiety.

However, the impact of the Internet on gender roles is twofold. On the positive side, it has greatly accelerated the spread of the concept of gender equality. Views such as women's independence, marriage autonomy and opposition to the objectification of women have gained wide recognition through social platforms. At present, young women can frequently access the relevant content about the growth of women in the workplace and high-quality single life through mobile phones. In the long run, the influence of the traditional male protagonist and the female protagonist continues to weaken. From a negative point of view, the Internet is also constantly copying and solidifying traditional gender impressions. The platform continues to push content about emotional skills and self-improvement to female users. The implicit logic behind it is that women can only gain an advantage in marriage and love competition by constantly improving themselves. Most of the content pushed to male users revolves around the importance of how to pursue the opposite sex and economic strength. The

idea conveyed is that men's competitiveness in the marriage market comes from the material resources they can provide. This kind of content differentiation is not deliberately done by the platform, but the result of the algorithm learning from the user's actual behavior data and then amplifying it. It traps both men and women in the information cocoon [11], and the gap between them is deepening. The result of the double impact of the Internet on gender roles is that the anxiety of marriage and childbearing is further solidified. As a result, women are placed in a contradictory position. While being encouraged to pursue independence, they repeatedly accept the negative impact of marriage through Internet propaganda. When the two goals of independence and risk avoidance are pushed to the extreme at the same time, postponing marriage becomes the most rational personal choice.

The concept of invisible housework can help us understand the important reasons for the conflicts between men and women in contemporary families. The so-called invisible housework refers to those domestic labor that is not easy to detect and quantify. It is mainly divided into emotional labor, cognitive labor and digital housework. In reality, most of these labors are borne by women, and men either do not realize the existence of such labor at all, or even if they do, they tend to regard it as trivial things that are worth mentioning. Women take care of these invisible family jobs alone day after day. In the eyes of men, they are just a family doing their own duties. But from the perspective of women, they are the only ones who care about all the details and complicated things from beginning to end. This perceptual rift is constantly amplified in the discussion on the Internet. Expressions such as widowed parenting and invisible housework are widely spread through social media, becoming a collective discourse for women to express dissatisfaction and seek recognition. Many young women have become aware of the prevalence of this inequality through social media before they get married, resulting in an expected resistance to marriage [9].

5. Formation Mechanisms and Social Consequences of Marital Suspension

Marriage suspension is not a psychological state formed in the short term, but a situation formed by the long-term accumulation of multiple real

factors. From the individual level, the formation of this state can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage shows that young people's expectations for intimate relationships are rising. Young people have been accepting all kinds of content output by online platforms for a long time, gradually raising their standards for intimate relationships. The traditional partner-style marriage model can no longer meet its requirements. They value spiritual compatibility and emotional resonance between partners more. There is nothing wrong with this expectation itself. The key is that the actual conditions cannot support the realization of this expectation. The second stage is the enhancement of risk awareness. The Internet is full of huge sharings about marriage failure cases and the cost of childbirth. Although there is a deviation in the sample selection of this information, the negative emotions conveyed by text and video are very contagious, which makes young people subconsciously want to avoid various risks brought about by marriage and love. The third stage is the postponement of the decision-making process. When the individual's expectation of marriage and perception of risk increase at the same time, temporary wait-and-see becomes the safest choice for most people. Watching and postponing does not mean giving up marriage, but just delaying the plan of marriage, hoping that there will be a more suitable time or a more ideal partner in the future. When a large number of young people choose to adopt a wait-and-see attitude, this personal hesitation mentality evolves into a collective psychology, which is called marriage suspension.

Marriage suspension involves mechanisms at the three levels of technology, economy and culture. These three mechanisms do not operate independently, but intertwine and influence each other. The technical mechanism provides instrumental conditions for the suspension state. Algorithm platforms can expose people to a large number of potential partners, and over time, it is easy for people to have the psychology that the best candidate is always in the next one. At the same time, the excessive amplification of friction and contradictions in real intimate relationships. The economic mechanism provides a material basis for the suspended state. The improvement of women's economic independence makes marriage no longer a necessity for survival. At the same time,

structural pressures such as high house prices and high childcare costs make young people worried when considering marriage. The cultural mechanism shapes the ideological environment for the suspended state. Individualized values have transformed marriage from a must-have item in life into a freely selectable matter. Marriage is no longer a task that everyone must complete in life, and the residual concept of the traditional concept of building a family and a career makes the complete abandonment of marriage understood as a failure in life. The joint effect of these triple mechanisms eventually leads to young people's inability to reproduce the life trajectory of their fathers to enter marriage step by step, nor to completely let go of the yearning for intimate relationships like staunch celibates. Young people are in a dilemma and fall into a state of marriage suspension.

The most direct data of marriage suspension is the decreasing marriage rate year by year. If most young people are in a wait-and-see attitude for a long time, the number of marriage registrations will naturally decrease [5]. In the past decade, the number of marriage registrations in China has experienced a sharp decline. This trend is not only the reason for the change in population structure, but also closely related to the increasing prevalence of marriage suspension. The postponement of marriage is not only a change in the marriage rate, but also affects the rhythm of the whole family. When young people reach the age of marriage, they still face pressure from their parents and society. However, the young man in a suspended state does not want to get married, but has higher expectations for marriage, and also perceives the risks from marriage. The superposition of the two makes it particularly difficult for young people to take a step. Another consequence is the further decline in the fertility rate. In China, in the mainstream life course model of marriage first and then childbearing, marriage is a prerequisite for childbirth. The postponement of marriage and the decrease in the total number of marriages directly lead to the fertility crisis. A young man who has been suspended for a long time is not only delayed by his marriage, but also delayed or even abandoned. When this situation occurs on a large scale in the group, the decline in the overall fertility rate is inevitable, which further deepens the aging of China's population. After the aggravation of aging, the social maintenance ratio will rise, and the

pressure on young people will be greater, which in turn will strengthen the suspension mentality. This is an interlocking chain.

The suspension state itself also has the characteristics of self-reinforcing. After more and more people choose to marry late or be single, this lifestyle is gradually normalized in social networks. When young people who have a wait-and-see attitude towards marriage observe that most people around them are in a similar state, they lack the motivation to break the status quo. In addition, social media continues to push relevant content, and anxiety about marriage and love continues to spread in the group. Originally, it was just an individual's hesitation and entanglement, which gradually evolved into the general mentality of the group, and further influenced more people's choices, forming a stable circular strengthening effect. Once this cycle is formed, it is difficult to break it by the transformation of other people's ideas alone. It requires the intervention of external forces, such as improving the conditions for marriage and child-rearing support, reducing the burden of housing and childcare, and allowing young people to establish a more comprehensive and peaceful understanding of marriage through education and public opinion guidance. Otherwise, the suspended state may continue for a long time, which will have a profound impact on the demographic structure and social vitality.

6. Conclusions and Policy & Practical Implications

Set against the backdrop of the digital-intelligent era, this paper systematically analyzes the interactive dynamics linking the digital economy, gender perceptions, and marriage-childbearing anxiety, which jointly shape contemporary young people's romantic judgments and choices. Core research findings are summarized as follows: Platform-based flexible labor enabled by the digital economy expands women's independent income streams and elevates female financial autonomy, substantially eroding marriage's traditional economic necessity. While this shift represents meaningful social progress, it generates new relational challenges: once marriage transforms from a survival requirement to an optional lifestyle choice, young adults grow far more attuned to the hidden risks of formal family formation. Pervasive online narratives detailing childbearing risks propagate through media catalytic mechanisms,

consolidating universal marriage and childbearing anxiety. Isolated personal grievances progress through emotional arousal, collective expression, and group normalization to form a unified collective emotional structure that suppresses young people's willingness to marry and have children. Online discourse surrounding gendered household labor and gender identity carries contradictory dual effects. While accelerating the spread of gender equality values, digital media simultaneously reproduces rigid traditional gender scripts, reinforced by algorithmic recommendation systems that segregate users within polarized information cocoons. The overlapping technological, economic, and cultural mechanisms outlined above converge to push young people into a state of marital suspension, defined by a self-perpetuating cycle of inflated relational expectations, amplified risk perceptions, and indefinitely deferred marital commitments. Its tangible societal consequences include falling marriage rates, sustained low fertility, and the self-reinforcing normalization of suspended marital decision-making.

This analysis delivers multi-layered implications for social policy design and social work practice. In the face of the structural problem of marriage suspension, it is difficult to alleviate the root cause by relying on routine publicity and education alone. Policymakers need to realize that young people's hesitation about marriage is neither a moral slippage nor simply attributed to individual slackness, but a rational choice under the background of changes in the digital economy and the media environment. Therefore, in order to effectively guide young people's willingness to marry and love, relevant support policies need to be based on the actual pain points of marriage and childbearing life, such as reducing housing costs, providing inclusive childcare services and improving the maternity insurance system. Social workers can also find their own positioning and cultivate digital media literacy and other related contents. Help young people objectively view online marriage and love information, identify the selectivity and bias of platform content, and alleviate unnecessary anxiety about marriage and childbearing. This work is not to tell young people how to fall in love, but to help them acquire the cognitive ability to maintain clear judgment in a mathematical environment. Psychological support services for marriage pending groups

should be carried out in a non-judgmental manner. Young people in a suspended state are usually under double pressure from inside and outside. They yearn for an intimate relationship and dare not make promises. They yearn for the warmth of their family and are afraid of losing themselves. Social workers need to assist young people to distinguish between the social expectations imposed by the outside world and their own true inner demands, and alleviate the anxiety of young people when making decisions under the premise of respecting independent choices. Policy advocacy at the macro level is also crucial. Promote the transparency and supervision of marriage and love platform algorithms, participate in the standard setting of the matchmaking service industry, and reduce the harm caused by new marriage and love fraud to the emotional and mental health of young people. Although these jobs have a long cycle of effect, once they are successful, their benefits are much greater than any individualized direct services.

The analysis of this article mainly relies on the combing and integration of the existing relevant literature, and lacks first-hand survey data as direct support. This article still discusses the differentiation of different youth groups, such as what are the specific differences in the concept of marriage and love between young people with different academic qualifications, different income classes and different regions. In addition, emerging technological forms such as artificial intelligence partners are developing rapidly, and this article fails to carry out a systematic analysis of their potential impact on the concept of marriage and love. The above limitations need to be improved through empirical investigation in the follow-up study. Despite the above shortcomings, the relationship framework between digital economy, gender concept, marriage anxiety and marriage suspension proposed in this article can still be used as an analytical tool to further deepen the research on marriage and love in the digital era.

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