

A Study on the Presentation and Acceptance of Love Values in Domineering CEO Short Dramas

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Abstract. With the development of mobile internet and short video platform, Domineering CEO short dramas have taken off as a highly stylized form of micro-dramas. Their condensed emotional conflicts and formulaic narratives drew in a large audience, and offered a window for observing how love values are shifting in contemporary popular culture. This study systematically examines how love values are presented in these dramas and how audiences accept them. We combined textual analysis with in-depth interviews, interpreting Domineering CEO short dramas and interviewing experienced viewers. The textual analysis reveal that a modern shift in love values is taking shape, marked by three features: an "illusion of egalitarian power relations", a "return to the slow-burn relationship model" and a growing priority on "individual value". Moreover, the narrative strategy builds something that could be described as "cloaked in independence but still fundamentally dependent". This is achieved through flat character portrayals, a strengthened female perspective, and rhythmic control. On the side of audience, the study uncovered several layers of complexity, showing a "separation between ideal and reality", a "tug-of-war between admiration for the powerful and the desire for independence" and signs of what we call the "emergence of reflective audiences". Viewers cognitively endorse modern love values, but emotionally they still enjoy the fantasy of being "rescued by the powerful", resulting in "sober immersion". The findings suggest that the short drama serve both as a compensatory outlet for contemporary emotional anxieties and as a reflection of women's real struggles between independent consciousness and traditional dependence.

Keywords: Domineering CEO short dramas, love values, audience acceptance, pseudo-egalitarian narrative, qualitative research

1. Introduction

The short drama has become a major form of audiovisual consumption with the rapid development of mobile internet and short video platform. Among them, Domineering CEO short dramas attract large audiences, particularly young female viewers, through highly stylized narratives, condensed emotional conflicts, and distinct character archetypes. These works typically revolve around the power and emotional dynamics between a dominant male protagonist and an ordinary female protagonist. The love values embedded within them, including protection and control, romance and objectification, independence and dependence, not only mirror certain aspects of contemporary

social emotions but may also shape viewers' perceptions and value systems. Therefore, exploring the presentation of love values in such short dramas and their audience acceptance holds significant practical and academic importance, serving as a window for observing changes in love concepts in contemporary popular culture.

Current research has largely focused on traditional film and television, and has also examined narrative traits of short dramas. But a systematic and empirical gap remains—No study has combined the content of Domineering CEO dramas with audience acceptance of their love values. How do viewers perceive, interpret, and even negotiate these values? Their psychological and social motivations are still underexplored.

Theoretically, this study situates love values in the emerging short drama context. Media theory and audience analysis can be extended from this perspective. It also advances our understanding of media influence. The influence occurs in fragmented, emotionally intense content. Practically, the findings may provide reflections for content creators, offer references for media literacy education, and contribute to public discussions on healthy and egalitarian views of love.

This study aims to address the following research questions: 1) What love values are presented in contemporary Domineering CEO short dramas, and what tensions and interactions exist between these values and contemporary gender concepts? 2) How do audiences accept and interpret these values, and what factors influence their acceptance? Through textual analysis and in-depth interviews, the study delineates the landscape of love values in this genre and empirically investigates the degree and mechanisms of audience acceptance, revealing the complex relationships among media content, audience interpretation and social concepts.

2. Literature review and conceptual clarification

2.1. Multidimensional perspective of love values in current film and television

Love, as an eternal theme in film and television works, has consistently attracted academic attention regarding its value expressions. Current research reveals a shift from traditional "pure love" and "true love above all" narratives to diverse realistic expressions [1-3], incorporating modern consciousness such as equality and female subjectivity [4, 5]. But contemporary individuals still face tensions between individual freedom and ethical constraints [6], struggling with self-positioning after breaking free from traditional gender paradigms.

2.2. Unique presentation of love values in short dramas

As short dramas have emerged as a new media form, researchers are increasingly examining how love values are uniquely expressed in this medium. Their work concentrates on narrative characteristics, gender perspectives, and social impact.

In terms of narrative characteristics, short drama narratives are highly condensed, using montage to omit romantic development and directly present high-sweetness core plots [7]. Multi-line narrative structures enable rapid emotional accumulation and release [8]. Short dramas exhibit emotional compression, extracting and intensifying elements such as "sweet pet" "Domineering CEO" and "anguished love" to meet users' need for quick psychological comfort in fragmented time.

For gender perspectives, studies on female image construction show that popular short dramas use first-person perspectives and inner monologues to shape diverse images such as underdog heroine and independent heroine, yet there is a double standard in visual presentation and gender identity, showing a "downward construction" trend. Audience identification research reveals that

these works greatly enhance young female viewers' sense of identification. Contemporary young women's identity presents new characteristics of selectivity and fluidity [9].

Regarding social impact, some short dramas critique "love-brain" attitudes, encourage female independence, and guide audiences to reflect on traditional dependent love relationships [3]. However, other studies question cultivation theory, suggesting that exposure to romance-themed online micro-dramas has limited impact on audiences' romantic beliefs, indicating that media contact does not necessarily produce substantial changes in beliefs [10].

2.3. Communication effects and audience acceptance of film and television works

A review of the literature reveals that research on audience acceptance of film and television has formed a pattern of diverse methods and variables, focusing on quantitative [11, 12] and qualitative approaches [13], as well as audience individual characteristics, technological features, and social/environmental variables.

2.4. Research gaps and innovations of this study

Existing research has accumulated rich findings on love values in short drama, laying a solid foundation for this study. But several gaps also remain.

Most existing research discusses Domineering CEO short dramas inside the general short drama category. A systematic focus on this specific subgenre is lacking. As one of the most market-influential types in the short drama field, Domineering CEO short dramas have formed a highly stylized narrative paradigm and relatively stable value expressions. Its uniqueness warrants deeper investigation.

Additionally, existing research either focuses on textual analysis to reveal value expressions in short dramas or on audience research to explore factors influencing acceptance. There is a gap in empirical research comparing "values advocated by the text" with "values actually decoded by the audience". We need integrated research designs to answer these questions: Whether the value orientations revealed by textual analysis are accurately received by audiences and whether meaning shifts occur during audience interpretation.

Based on these gaps, this study takes Domineering CEO short dramas as its research object, using a combination of textual analysis and in-depth interviews to systematically examine the presentation of love values in this type of drama, and to explore the degree and interpretive mechanisms of audience acceptance.

2.5. Conceptual clarification of Domineering CEO short dramas

Three core concepts are defined in this study. "Short drama" is a broad term referring to drama series with significantly shorter episode lengths than traditional TV dramas. "Micro-drama" (or online micro-drama) is the specific mainstream form of short drama in the mobile internet era. According to the definition by the National Radio and Television Administration of China, it refers to online audiovisual works with "episode lengths ranging from tens of seconds to about 15 minutes", featuring continuous and complete plots, primarily broadcast on new media platforms. Domineering CEO short drama is a highly popular thematic subgenre of micro-dramas, with its core narrative revolving around emotionally charged, power-imbalanced relationships between a Domineering CEO and an ordinary female protagonist.

3. Research design

3.1. Sample selection

Faced with the vast amount of online micro-drama content, a systematic sampling method is necessary for effective content analysis. This study aims to deeply analyze the presentation of love values in Domineering CEO short dramas. The real-time public ranking list of the leading domestic short drama platform "Hongguo Short Drama" was selected as the sampling frame. Hongguo Short Drama, leveraging ByteDance's ecosystem resources, has rapidly risen through a "free + advertising" model, promoting user retention through content aggregation [14].

As of January 14, 2026, 37 short dramas, with a popularity value above 46 million under the "CEO" tag on the Hongguo Short Drama platform. Representative works include *Wedding Night*, *Burning Away/After Prison*, *She Became the Apple of Mr. Feng's Eye/Summer Rose*. Due to page limits, the full list of 37 dramas is omitted here. The samples cover subgenres from traditional urban business, workplace narratives, rebirth and counterattack, and fantasy crossovers.

3.2. Interview design

For the question of audience acceptance of love values, this study used semi-structured interviews to study contemporary audiences' acceptance of love values in this genre, psychological projection, and real-life impact. The research aim is stated as follows: Audiences' views on gender relationship patterns in short dramas were analyzed, the study also analyzed how fictional plots influence real-life mate selection views, and influence on dating behavior was examined as well.

18 valid respondents (coded A1-A18) were selected, including 10 females and 8 males. Their ages range from 18 to 35, with most holding undergraduate or master's degrees. Their relationship statuses encompass unmarried singles, those in relationships, and married individuals, providing demographic diversity. The average effective interview duration was approximately 20 minutes, with a total text of 52,507 words, averaging over 2,900 words per respondent. These data fully demonstrated the effectiveness of the interviews.

4. Presentation of love values in Domineering CEO short drama content

Through in-depth textual analysis of the high-popularity dramas, it can be found that the presentation of love values in Domineering CEO short dramas has formed a complex and organic narrative system.

4.1. Modern reconstruction of love values

Contemporary high-popularity Domineering CEO short dramas do not remain at the traditional level. Their love values have undergone a profound modern reconstruction through interrelated core dimensions.

Illusion of egalitarian power relations: Traditional Domineering CEO stories often unfolded through a binary relationship of "Domineering CEO + Cinderella", and built on stark socioeconomic disparities [15]. In current new narratives, this structure appears to be reconstructed. *In Summer Rose*, CEO Zhou Sheng'an actively restrains his dominance, appearing as an equal, respectful suitor. However, upon deeper analysis, this reconstruction is essentially an illusion of equality. It is a "bestowed equality" model. The equality here is a gift from the strong to the weak, a choice by the

power holder to temporarily set aside his power. When women's ability displays still require male "appreciation" to confirm value, the balance of power is not truly equal.

Return of the "Slow-Burn Relationship" model: In traditional short drama narratives, love often relied on external strong settings such as "contractual binding". Current popular dramas, however, turn inward and return to daily life. The core tension comes precisely from how emotions spontaneously grow beyond these cold "contracts" through day-to-day genuine interaction, reflecting contemporary people's longing for stable, deep relationships.

"Individual Value" gradually replacing "Love Above All": The most significant value evolution is the absolute affirmation of individual value. Plots of "sacrificing everything for love" are fading, replaced by the pursuit of becoming a better self. *In Chaoyang Like Me, Ruan Chaoyang's career goal of becoming a top consultant runs parallel to and mutually reinforces her romantic storyline. Love becomes part of her complete life, not the entirety of it.*

4.2. Narrative presentation strategies of love values

Depiction and use of flat characters: Unlike traditional long-form dramas that emphasize "round characters", Domineering CEO short dramas generally use "flat characters" with distinct traits and simple motivations. *In Falling Deep into Love, Huo Jinshen is mainly characterized as "intelligent" and "deeply affectionate".* These characters complete their personality establishment instantly, allowing audiences to enter an emotional following state without guessing true intentions. Notably, the portrayal of excellent flat characters is not crude typification. The technique of "filling types with details" gives flat characters perceptible emotional warmth while maintaining high recognizability, thereby enhancing the "sense of reality" of the safe haven.

Strengthened female perspective within the omniscient framework: The sample dramas present an "omniscient perspective as foundation, female perspective as highlight". Visual presentation significantly tilts toward male body features, organizing the logic of the camera around the female viewing gaze. The male protagonist's clearly defined jawline, faintly visible abdominal muscles, slender and powerful fingers, slightly furrowed brow when focused—all become deliberate objects of the camera's lingering attention. Female bodies yield to the aesthetic display of male images.

Harmonious unity of "Fast" and "Slow": The "short" nature determines that fast rhythm is their basic attribute ("a conflict every three seconds") [7]. However, a number of short dramas daring to "slow down" have emerged. "Slow rhythm" is not meant sluggish plotting, but the courage to pause and leave blank space at key plot points for emotional resonance. *For instance, Wedding Night, Burning Away dares to use over ten seconds of footage merely showing the female protagonist's profile, accompanied by gentle music to advance emotional intensification. This "blank space" not only fails to cause audience loss but, due to its rare breathing room, triggers repeated viewing and in-depth discussion.* This "slow rhythm" is a complement and sublimation of the "fast". In fast-paced daily life, audiences equally long for moments to pause and slowly feel emotions.

5. Audience acceptance of love values in Domineering CEO short drama content

5.1. Separation between ideal and reality

According to the interview content, viewers highly identify with the modern love values presented in today's dramas at the conceptual level, which indicates that viewers are highly consistent with feminist thought in value judgment. But they explicitly exclude short drama content from their real-

life expectations [16]. When asked "whether they would expect a similar romantic relationship in reality," almost all respondents explicitly said "no". *A16 (male, 35) stated directly: "No, not at all, it's too idealized."* Other respondents (e.g., *A5, A9*) echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that the intense pressures of real-world work and rent leave no room for such romanticized interactions, asserting a clear boundary between media consumption and real-life expectations. This separation stems from viewers' sober awareness of the fictional nature of short dramas. They regard short dramas purely as entertainment tools, not real-life references.

5.2. Ambivalence toward the "admiration for the powerful" narrative

Domineering CEO short dramas often reflect an "admiration for the powerful" psychology. Respondents generally rejected this at the discourse level, emphasizing independence. However, in open-ended responses, respondents did not hide their emotional investment in the plot of "the male protagonist solving crises". *A14 confessed: "The Domineering CEO uses his wealth and power to solve problems... which alleviates my anxiety."* This phenomenon reflects the subtle distinction between "identity-based admiration" (complete dependence on the powerful person's identity) and "instrumental admiration" (using the powerful person's strength to achieve one's own goals)—viewers reject the state of losing oneself in dependency, but long for the security and problem-solving ability provided by the powerful. This is a "sophisticated pragmatism" formed by contemporary young women under the dual discourses of consumerism and feminism.

5.3. Emergence of "reflective audiences"

The interview materials present a "reflective" mode of viewing. A large number of respondents switch between "pleasure experience" and "pathological analysis", using multidisciplinary knowledge to deeply dissect short drama texts. *A5 approached from the perspective of family of origin, analyzing that "the male and female protagonists were abused or treated unfairly as children, leading to problematic love values," and further reflecting on educational methods.* *A8 used sociological thinking to point out that the female protagonist's "comeback often depends on a more powerful man behind her", criticizing the core logic.* *A17 offered a cautionary reflection, viewing short dramas as a cultural product to be wary of, stating they can "mistake control for love".* This active reflection also reveals a psychology of "sober anesthesia". By clearly defining short dramas as an object of critique, audiences carve out a safe zone for emotional consumption. It does not mean that viewers have become immune to the value influence of short dramas. On the contrary, this mechanism of "sober anesthesia" may make emotional consumption more hidden and long-lasting. Viewers gain intellectual superiority and moral security from "pathological analysis", thus indulging in "pleasure experience" with greater peace of mind, while the "pleasure experience" continues to satisfy those unspoken emotional needs under the label of "fictitious". The two frameworks support and reinforce each other, jointly maintaining the complex relationship between viewers and short dramas—simultaneously intimate and distant.

6. Discussion

Through textual analysis, this study reveals a significant shift in the expression of love values in contemporary Domineering CEO short dramas, constructing a new narrative model that superficially conforms to feminist calls for independence, equality, and respect, but does not fundamentally shake the core pleasure mechanism of "the Domineering CEO saves the day". The tension between surface

independence and deep dependence in the connection between text and audience is precisely the finding of this study worth exploring in depth. The popularity of Domineering CEO short dramas plays a positive function as an "emotional stabilizer". However, through mechanisms such as the "illusion of equality" and "sober anesthesia", short dramas may delay genuine gender awakening. When viewers are satisfied with "bestowed equality", it becomes difficult for them to question structural power injustices. Even more worrisome is that, although "instrumental admiration" superficially preserves women's subjectivity, it may become an excuse for dependency relationships—when "borrowing the powerful person's strength" becomes the norm, and when "being rescued by the powerful" becomes an emotional necessity, women's insistence on independence and autonomy may be eroded without their realization. The "sober anesthesia" mechanism, in turn, allows viewers, in their self-perceived state of sobriety, to indulge in emotional compensation even more comfortably.

Therefore, for Domineering CEO short drama, a balanced view is needed. One should not completely deny their emotional compensation value. One should also not overlook the potential "awakening illusion" they may create. Real progress in gender equality would change things. Women would no longer face a painful choice between "independence" and "security". Society would provide enough emotional security and institutional support for the younger generation. Only then will these "old wine in new bottles" truly withdraw from the historical stage. Until that day comes, these dramas will continue to serve as a mirror, where we see the struggles and progress of gender concepts. We also see the compromises and longings of this era.

7. Conclusion

This study systematically examined the presentation of love values in Domineering CEO short dramas and their audience acceptance. The textual analysis found that current high-popularity short dramas exhibit modern shifts in love values, characterized by an "illusion of egalitarian power relations", a "return to the slow-burn relationship model", and a prioritization of "individual value". The study on audience acceptance revealed complex reception features, including a "separation between ideal and reality", a "tug-of-war between admiration for the powerful and the desire for independence" and the "emergence of reflective audiences". The research shows that these short dramas serve both as a compensatory outlet for contemporary emotional anxieties and as a reflection of women's real struggles between independent consciousness and traditional dependence.

This study has certain limitations at the same time. First, although the sample selection was based on platform popularity rankings, it only focused on a single platform and had a limited time span, failing to cover Domineering CEO short drama texts from different platforms and periods, which may affect the generalizability of the conclusions. Second, the study mainly focused on the presentation of textual values and the state of audience acceptance, without fully exploring the specific influencing factors and long-term effects between the two.

As for the development of the short drama field, the findings of this study also have practical implications. The popularity of Domineering CEO short dramas is not accidental, they precisely capture and respond to the real struggles of contemporary youth, especially women, between independent consciousness and traditional dependence. Their social function as an "emotional stabilizer" deserves recognition. However, if such works remain stuck in the narrative formula of "old wine in new bottles", replacing genuine structural reflection with an "illusion of equality", they may delay the true outlet for relieving real-life pressures through the mechanism of "sober anesthesia". Future short drama creation, while retaining the function of emotional compensation, could further explore more authentic, diverse, and equal portrayals of intimate relationships. For

example, presenting the emotional wisdom of ordinary people, showing mutual support between genders in daily life, and depicting the real paths of women's independent growth. In this way, such short dramas could meet audiences' emotional needs while providing more constructive cultural resources for cultivating healthy love values. Only when content production respects audiences' emotional needs and also dares to take responsibility for value guidance can the emerging medium of short dramas truly achieve the transition from traffic business to cultural creation.

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