Why Do Romantic Relationships Start Early and End Quickly? Examining the Pattern of Unstable Relationships Among Generation Z

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the paragraph discussing generational shifts in relational norms, the claim that Gen Z exhibits "shorter courtship periods" is compelling, but the manuscript would benefit from explicitly distinguishing between courtship duration and emotional acceleration, as these may represent conceptually distinct processes with different implications for instability.

The discussion of social media and dating platforms is well integrated; however, the sentence "These platforms not only accelerate partner selection but also normalize rapid emotional disclosure" would be strengthened by specifying whether this disclosure is self-reported, performative, or algorithmically encouraged, as each mechanism implies different intervention pathways.

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The paragraph on emotional intelligence and attachment is theoretically sound, yet the transition from emotional awareness to dysregulation could be clarified. Consider explicitly stating whether the study conceptualizes dysregulation as a mediator, moderator, or parallel predictor of instability.

The term "High" and "Moderate" under relative importance lacks quantitative specificity. Consider reporting normalized importance scores or SHAP value ranges to enhance interpretability.

The cluster labels are theoretically meaningful; however, the manuscript should clarify how cluster stability was assessed (e.g., silhouette scores, repeated runs) to support the robustness of the typology.

Figure 1 is conceptually useful, but the caption would benefit from explicitly stating whether the pathways are empirically derived from model outputs or represent a theory-driven synthesis of findings.

The interpretation of non-linear model superiority is persuasive. However, the authors should caution against equating predictive accuracy with explanatory completeness, particularly given the cross-sectional design.

Authors revised and uploaded the document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The discussion of cultural narratives (music and popular media) is insightful, but it remains largely theoretical. The manuscript would benefit from a brief justification of how these symbolic frameworks are indirectly captured or proxied in the present empirical design.

The stated aim is clear and well aligned with the preceding literature. However, given the emphasis on machine learning, the authors may consider explicitly stating that the study seeks to identify non-linear and profile-based predictors, which would further differentiate it from prior work.

The composite index of relationship instability is central to the study, yet its construction is only briefly described. The authors should clarify weighting decisions and whether the index was empirically validated (e.g., via factor analysis).

Table 1 is informative, but the manuscript would benefit from a brief narrative comparison to existing Gen Z samples to contextualize whether the reported relationship durations are unusually short or consistent with prior findings.

The superior performance of the gradient boosting model is clearly demonstrated. However, the manuscript should report whether statistical comparisons between models (e.g., DeLong test for AUCs) were conducted to support claims of superiority.

Authors revised and uploaded the document.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.
Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.