

# *New Forms of Media-Mediated Marriage: Exploring the Underlying Logic and Potential Risks of the "Fictosexuality" Phenomenon*

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**Keywords:** Media-Mediated, Fictosexuality, Emotional Communication, Spiritual Interaction, Intimate Relationships

**Abstract:** The in-depth development and comprehensive application of intelligent technology have driven the diversified integration of communication forms, achieving a leap from "all media are the medium" to "media integrating all things," profoundly reshaping information content and social ecology. Consequently, people's emotional logic and behavioral patterns in marriage and love have also changed. The continuous innovation of mass media and internet media tools has further expanded the field of "fictosexuality," enriching individual emotional experiences. This phenomenon not only brings a brand new cyber love experience to people but also meets the emotional needs of the solitary groups in the trend of a single society. At the same time, it also exposes potential risks of negative impacts on normal marital love due to improper use of technology, leading some people to indulge in the "simulated reality" constructed by the media. Therefore, we need to dialectically view this phenomenon, explore how to make the media better meet the social and marital needs of contemporary people, and promote technology to return to the track that benefits humanity.

## 1. Introduction

"Mediatization" is a critical concept for analyzing interactions, involving changes in media, communication, culture, and society, and fostering interactions between opposites (Couldry & Hepp, 2013)<sup>[1]</sup>. In the digital age, the transformation of new media has evolved the way mass communication is conducted, with media deeply integrating into everyday life, altering people's behaviors and thought processes. Within a mediatized society, generative artificial intelligence and media convergence have expanded human interaction to include virtual entities, with media capital using intelligent technology for emotional communication, thereby meeting users' needs for spiritual interaction and emotional identification to a certain extent. An increasing number of young people are placing their emotional reliance on virtual characters, making views on marriage and love more diverse and inclusive. In the current landscape where online interactions, digital intimacy, and human-machine communication are becoming increasingly common, the question of how to

express oneself through media and achieve spiritual satisfaction without affecting healthy relationships in real life has become an important issue.

"Fictosexuality," known in Japanese as "two-dimensional taboo syndrome" or "two-dimensional complex," typically refers to a person's romantic fantasies about virtual two-dimensional characters in ACGN works, which stand for Animation, Comic, Game, and Novel (also known as "paper people"). As a form of emotional sustenance, "fictosexuality" allows individuals to find spiritual resonance and solace in the virtual world, offering a temporary escape from the pressures and constraints of reality. It is not a phenomenon unique to modern society but rather stems from humanity's deep-seated need for spiritual interaction.

## **2. Spiritual Interaction: The Social Attributes of "Fictosexuality"**

"Fictosexuality" is not merely an individual act but also a product of social interaction and connection. Within "fictosexuality," the interaction between the individual and virtual characters is essentially a process of socialization, enhancing the individual's understanding of their relationship with society and enriching their spiritual world. Spiritual interaction, as a component of human existence, is always in a state of dynamic change and infinite development. This is also the continuous revelation and expansion of human life, constituting the subject's life existence that constantly perceives the external world, achieving a sensuous unity of people creating each other both physically and spiritually (Marx & Engels, 1960)<sup>[2]</sup>. The historical process of human spiritual interaction itself is a record of human evolution, transformation, and development, documenting the forms of spiritual interaction at different historical stages of humanity (Zhao, 2018)<sup>[3]</sup>. The new forms of social and marital interactions influenced by mediatization, "fictosexuality," record the state of spiritual interaction in the digital media era. Spiritual interaction is a product of social connections and social practice, a way to achieve human unity. Individuals in interactive social relationships continuously absorb new content into their spiritual world, maintaining a sense of novelty towards society, enhancing their understanding of the relationship between the self and society, and expressing the essence of the self more fully and harmoniously (Zhou & Jing, 2021)<sup>[4]</sup>.

## **3. Emotional Communication: The Driving Mechanism of "Fictosexuality"**

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the "need for love and belonging" is one of the fundamental human requirements. "Fictosexuality" offers individuals a way to fulfill this need, especially when social and emotional relationships in real life fail to meet personal demands. The wandering body drives the youth group's pursuit of stable emotions, and the de-physicalized one-dimensional emotional relationship in "fictosexuality" is gradually becoming a new type of media practice that the youth devote to the internet (Jin, 2024)<sup>[5]</sup>. Virtual characters can provide an idealized emotional connection, making individuals feel understood and accepted. Our cognitive system has two competing levels—belief and instinctive cognition. Instinctive cognition (alief) allows the brain to temporarily set aside our beliefs, leading us to exhibit emotions or behaviors that seem inconsistent with our beliefs (Gendler, 2008)<sup>[6]</sup>.

The symbolic and sensory existence of objects lacks objective constraints on the cognition of emotional subjects, thus greatly promoting the imaginative elements of human perceptual cognition (Sun & Zhou, 2005)<sup>[7]</sup>. Virtual characters are often created according to people's needs and imaginations, thus they usually possess idealized traits and appearances. This allows individuals to find partners in the virtual world that match their perfectionist imaginations, thereby satisfying the longing for an ideal mate.

Romantic relationships in real life may come with various pressures and complexities, such as differences in personality, economic status, family background, etc. "Fictosexuality," as a one-way

emotional investment that discards physical reliance, allows individuals to experience love without the constraints of reality, providing a way to escape the pressures of real life.

The new type of "digital intimacy" relationship that has emerged in the digital age has two dimensions: one refers to the frequent, continuous, and deep connection between people and the internet, a connection that makes it difficult for us to detach from the internet and its related technologies and platforms in our daily lives. The other specifically refers to "intimacy that has been digitized," that is, intimate relationships between people mediated by internet technology (Elliott & Urry, 2010)<sup>[8]</sup>. In "fictosexuality," people are no longer limited by the constraints of physical space and meet and get to know paper people through media. Some individuals may be unable to establish stable interpersonal relationships in real life due to factors such as introverted personality, poor social skills, or inferiority. "Fictosexuality" provides these individuals with a relatively safe and controllable environment to seek emotional satisfaction without facing the uncertainties and challenges of real social interactions. Users can establish emotional connections through virtual avatars, which also changes the logic of traditional intimate relationships organized by real relationships. Users can build new types of relationships that better meet their own needs, are closer to their interest communities, and can better collide with the soul and touch the soul (Xing & Chen, 2024)<sup>[9]</sup>. The virtual avatar, that is, the paper person, has become the representative of people in the digital world. Through text, images, audio, and even virtual reality and other technical means, people can express their emotions and ideas more freely.

With the development of technology, the virtual world has become increasingly accessible and interactive. Virtual entertainment forms such as novels, comics, animations, and games provide individuals with a rich platform for emotional experiences. The convenience and diversity of these platforms have promoted the spread and popularization of the "fictosexuality" phenomenon.

#### **4. Self-Identification: The Humanistic Value of "Fictosexuality"**

Self-identification originates from the human motive to understand oneself and refers to the self that is formed based on personal experiences as a reflective understanding (Giddens, 2016)<sup>[10]</sup>. It primarily addresses questions of "who I am," "how I should exist," and "how to realize my own value," which are the issues of "me being me" (Wei, 2013)<sup>[11]</sup>.

Self-identification is a concept of self that is created and maintained through individual reflective activities, emphasizing attention to and feelings for the authentic inner self. Individuals continuously explore and reflect on their identity, value, and the meaning of existence. However, due to the socialization process of individuals in real life, they face various challenges and pressures, leading to the neglect or suppression of the authentic self. This neglect and suppression may trigger feelings of self-difference and self-alienation, making it difficult for individuals to find a true sense of belonging to the self. In this context, "fictosexuality," as a special way of emotional experience, provides individuals with a unique way to explore and express the self. Through interaction and identification with fictional characters, individuals can to some extent break free from the constraints and pressures of real life, reconnect with and pay attention to their authentic inner self.

Comics, animations, games, and other related "fictosexuality" content are all created by humans. When creators shape paper people, they cater to the needs of the audience. However, the audience's acceptance of "fictosexuality" culture is different from the "hypodermic needle" theory; instead, it emphasizes interaction and self, with the audience's consciousness gradually being replaced by the user's consciousness, showing anti-addiction characteristics. The personality cultivated by the audience in a parasocial environment is mapped into reality, and they continuously strive to improve themselves in reality to meet the "virtual social needs" proposed by the parasocial environment.

In "fictosexuality," individuals can freely express their emotions, needs, and values without worrying about the judgment and restrictions of real society. This process of free expression helps individuals to more clearly recognize their true appearance and inner needs, thereby forming a more authentic and stable self-identification. "Fictosexuality" can also help individuals find emotional support and a sense of belonging in the virtual world. Although this sense of belonging is based on fictional characters and plots, it is real and profound for individuals. It can meet individuals' desires for love, care, and understanding, reduce feelings of self-alienation, and enhance a sense of self-worth.

"Fictosexuality," as a modern social phenomenon, reflects complex psychological motives and emotional experiences. It is regarded as an escapist freedom of love and a negative sexual liberation, allowing individuals to establish emotional connections with virtual characters as they wish without being bound by the complexities of real-life morals and social interactions. Paper people become a spiritual sustenance, providing emotional value for fictosexuals and helping them avoid conflicts in real love. At the same time, "fictosexuality" also affects individuals' views on choosing partners and values, and may inspire individuals to engage in related professions through interaction with paper people. From a psychological perspective, "fictosexuality" may stem from individuals' unmet emotional needs in real life and the existence of social barriers, leading individuals to seek emotional sustenance in the virtual world. In general, "fictosexuality" is not only a way for individuals to seek emotional satisfaction and self-identification but also reflects the complexity and diversity of modern social interactions.

## **5. The Blurry Line Between Reality and Fiction: The Pitfalls and Reflections of "Fictosexuality"**

With the advancement of technology, the boundaries between reality and the virtual world are increasingly blurred. The disorder of information dissemination and the increase of entropy make it more difficult to discern truth from falsehood and to balance the relationship between the real and virtual worlds.

### **1). Commercialization of Emotion**

Under the guise of nurturing emotions, the emotions and time of users are transformed into commodities (Ding, 2023)<sup>[12]</sup>. This commercialization is not only reflected in product mechanisms but also includes various forms such as advertising and brand collaborations, which have expanded its influence and greatly promoted its market value. For media participants, this emotional commercialization model provides a platform for emotional release and romantic experience. They can find characters in games who resonate with their souls and enjoy a deep emotional connection with these characters. This emotional experience plays an important role in improving the players' happiness and satisfaction. However, excessive emotional investment and the cost of indulgence may lead to an escape mentality in real life, affecting their social interactions and relationships. Some unscrupulous game operators also exploit players' emotional vulnerabilities for fraud and false propaganda, damaging players' interests.

### **2). Escaping Reality**

In the simulated environment constructed by media, "fictosexuals" are prone to becoming trapped in their self-built information cocoons. When they search for information related to "fictosexuality" online, big data algorithms continuously push a large amount of related content, and on platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu, they can easily find many like-minded people. Although in reality, "fictosexuals" may face questioning and misunderstanding, the discordant voices are filtered out online, and they find a strong sense of group belonging on the internet.

With the continuous advancement of technology, people have gradually developed an "emotional

inertia." This inertia is manifested in that although individuals have become overly dependent on and compliant with technology, their emotions have not truly integrated with technology. Instead, they are completely immersed in the virtual narrative space created by technology, maintaining a relative independence. In the interaction with paper people, what people see is carefully beautified, with less friction between each other, and the plot often develops according to people's ideals. The interaction between the protagonist and the user is programmed, and the story and ending are predetermined, leading to a reduction in emotional labor and the emergence of emotional exploitation.

### 3). Human Alienation

Fragmented scenes become the networked context for personalized media connections, allowing people to immerse themselves in personalized media content "immersive information flow feeding" and social contexts constructed by media anytime, anywhere. In daily practice, the experience of "post-emotion" (Lin & He, 2022)<sup>[13]</sup> becomes more pronounced. With the rapid development of technology, people increasingly rely on media for marital communication. Due to anonymity, one can "speak freely" online without too many constraints, and without seeing each other's facial expressions and body language, people often overestimate their interpersonal communication abilities based on personal experience. Coupled with the asymmetry of online language, people use emoticons and other modifications. As a result, people feel that the online dating experience is better than actual dating, making them more inclined to choose electronic lovers. This dependence leads to a gradual weakening of individuals' interpersonal communication abilities in real life. They may be better at expressing themselves in the virtual world but appear clumsy and uneasy in face-to-face communication.

The continuous advancement of media technology and people's self-awareness has created a false sense of freedom, and the alienation and control of people by media are not based on the relationship between individuals and media groups but on the shaping of the entire social and media environment and the control of mainstream cognition. Emotional dependence itself is a normal psychological phenomenon, but the emotional dependence of "fictosexuals" is on the virtual, which has sparked discussions on the rationality of emotional dependence. On the one hand, virtual characters cannot provide real emotional responses, and this one-way emotional investment may lead to individuals not being satisfied emotionally. On the other hand, excessive dependence on virtual characters may weaken individuals' ability to establish stable interpersonal relationships in the real world.

### 4). Ethical Dilemmas

In "fictosexuality," people establish deep emotional connections with virtual characters, but these connections are often based on fictional worldviews and character settings. This may lead to confusion between reality and the virtual world, further affecting their interpersonal interactions and emotional experiences in real life.

"Fictosexuality" may cause individuals to rely too much on virtual characters and neglect interpersonal relationships in real life, even causing a sense of alienation from real-life partners or friends. This situation may have a negative impact on individuals' social skills and interpersonal relationships. "Fictosexuality" may also raise moral and ethical controversies. For example, some people may question whether this emotional connection with virtual characters is healthy and whether it violates traditional moral concepts. In addition, if individuals invest too much in "fictosexuality," they may develop an escape mentality towards real life, affecting their normal life and work.

In the face of these ethical dilemmas, we need to treat the phenomenon of "fictosexuality" with an open but cautious attitude. On the one hand, we should respect individuals' emotional choices and modes of expression; on the other hand, we should also pay attention to the potential negative

impacts and actively seek strategies to deal with them. For example, we can help individuals better balance the relationship between the virtual and the real by strengthening mental health education and providing social support in real life, to avoid excessive dependence on virtual emotions.

## 6. Conclusion

The environment created by media has not only reshaped our patterns of existence and development but has also profoundly altered the way we interact with the outside world. Krotz, with a unique perspective, interprets mediatization as a "meta-process" of media transformation, a process based on cultural change that continuously influences the development of human society and culture over the long term. In the media age, "fictosexuality" has emerged as a new form of marriage and love against the backdrop of mediatized relationships. It has not only injected new vitality into people's patterns of marriage and love but has also reinforced the social attributes of spiritual interaction, thereby meeting the spiritual pursuits of modern people. However, this new form of marriage and love has also blurred the boundaries between reality and the virtual, leading to a series of issues, such as the commercialization of emotions, escapism, and ethical dilemmas. Although interaction with paper people can provide individuals with a certain degree of spiritual comfort, we should recognize that actively participating in real-life social interactions and maintaining a passion and commitment to real life are key to maintaining a balance between the virtual and the real. This is also the necessary path to regulate the influence of media technology and ensure that it serves the well-being of humanity.

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