Humor, Critique, and Companionship: Audience Reception of an Unconventional Tiktok Marriage Proposal on Youtube

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated audience reception of a reposted TikTok video on YouTube featuring an unconventional marriage proposal between two straight men. Using a qualitative design that combined thematic analysis and content analysis, 125 out of 260 comments from 191 unique users were examined to capture tones, recurring themes, and cultural framings. The findings revealed that humor was the dominant mode of engagement, allowing audiences to negotiate discomfort while collectively reimagining marriage and companionship. Substantive themes included financial and practical benefits, critiques of women and traditional marriage, companionship and stability, admiration and praise, and skepticism or dismissal. Analysis further demonstrated how the YouTube comment section functioned as a digital public sphere where diverse cultural, moral, and ethical arguments were voiced. Anchored on theories of the public sphere, audience reception, and mediated intimacy, the study concludes that digital publics actively reinterpret media texts as opportunities to critique existing norms, experiment with alternative relational scripts, and deliberate on the human condition in the Internet age.

Keywords: Public sphere, Audience reception, Mediated intimacy, YouTube comments, Marriage discourse

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital platforms has redefined how individuals articulate, negotiate, and reimagine intimacy in contemporary society. Social media sites such as TikTok and YouTube have become powerful mediators of discourse, enabling the amplification of perspectives that challenge entrenched cultural, religious, and ethical frameworks of marriage and partnership. In a prior study, an unconventional TikTok video featuring a heterosexual male proposing marriage to another heterosexual male—motivated by financial stability, autonomy, and convenience rather than romance—demonstrated how Internet-based platforms can normalize dissenting voices and expand the public imagination of what marriage can mean in the twenty-first century (Bantugan, 2024). That analysis situated the proposal within the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, while also examining its alignment and divergence from Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions, civil unions, and platonic marriages.

This follow-up article narrows the focus to the **viewer reception of the reposted video on YouTube**, specifically through an analysis of comments left by users. Unlike TikTok, where brevity and algorithmic circulation dominate, YouTube provides a space where longer, more reflective, and at times contentious discussions unfold in the comment sections. By examining the tone, themes, and rhetorical strategies present in these comments, this study investigates how viewers reacted to and made sense of the unconventional proposal. In doing so, it seeks to capture how online publics negotiate questions of intimacy, dignity, and self-determination when confronted with alternative models of marriage. Through this lens, the article contributes to understanding how the YouTube comment space functions as a cultural arena where the human condition in the age of the Internet is both expressed and contested.

YouTube as a Participatory Platform

YouTube has been widely recognized as more than a video-sharing site; it is also a cultural forum where audiences actively engage with and reinterpret content. Burgess and Green (2018) describe YouTube as a

"cultural archive" that enables interpretive communities to emerge around video content. Likewise, Lange (2019) emphasizes that YouTube comments function as sites of public conversation where users negotiate cultural meanings, often extending the life and impact of the original video.

Audience Reception and Online Commentary

Audience reception research highlights the interactive and polyvocal nature of online spaces. Baym (2015) explains that digital publics use comment sections to create "layered dialogues" that mix humor, critique, and moral reasoning. Graham and Wright (2015) argue that comments can function as deliberative arenas where competing perspectives clash or converge. Specific to YouTube, Thelwall et al. (2012) observe that comments often serve as immediate affective responses but also provide valuable insights into how audiences interpret media within broader cultural contexts.

Marriage, Intimacy, and Non-Traditional Relationships in the Digital Age

Sociological studies on marriage and intimacy reveal how contemporary relationships are increasingly reflexive and negotiated rather than bound by tradition. Giddens (1992) characterizes modern intimacy as centered on personal choice and individual fulfillment. Scholarship on non-traditional partnerships—including platonic marriages and polyamorous arrangements—demonstrates how digital platforms make visible discourses once relegated to the margins (Arnot, 2020; Sheff, 2014). Abidin (2021) further illustrates how YouTube serves as a venue where such unconventional discourses are contested, validated, or dismissed, reflecting the tensions surrounding changing values of intimacy and partnership.

Knowledge Gaps Addressed by the Present Study

While existing scholarship underscores YouTube's participatory role and highlights evolving discourses on intimacy, few studies have examined how audiences specifically **respond in comment sections to unconventional proposals of marriage**. Most reception studies have focused on political communication, entertainment, or celebrity culture, leaving a gap in understanding how digital publics engage with challenges to normative relational frameworks. This follow-up study addresses that gap by analyzing YouTube comments on the reposted TikTok marriage proposal video. By focusing exclusively on viewer responses, it sheds light on how publics articulate support, rejection, humor, or moral concern when confronted with non-traditional models of intimacy. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the human condition in the Internet age, where social media comment spaces have become cultural arenas for negotiating the boundaries of dignity, autonomy, and relational life.

Study Framework

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored on theories of **public sphere, audience reception, and mediated intimacy**, which collectively help clarify the intent and relevant concepts of analyzing YouTube viewer comments on the reposted unconventional marriage proposal video.

The Digital Public Sphere. Habermas's (1989) concept of the public sphere highlights spaces where individuals come together to debate issues of common concern. In the digital age, YouTube comment sections function as micro-public spheres where viewers collectively negotiate meanings, values, and cultural norms (Graham & Wright, 2015). Although often informal and fragmented, these spaces reflect broader societal attitudes and anxieties toward shifting models of intimacy and partnership. Thus, the YouTube comment space is understood not merely as a feedback tool but as a deliberative arena where unconventional ideas of marriage are contested, validated, or dismissed.

Audience Reception and Polyvocality, Reception theory underscores the active role of audiences in constructing meaning. Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model proposes that audiences interpret media messages through dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. On YouTube, comments embody this polyvocality, where humor, critique, moral reasoning, or outright rejection coexist (Baym, 2015; Thelwall et al., 2012). This framework is particularly relevant for analyzing the reposted marriage proposal video because it allows the study

to examine how diverse audiences decode the proposal in ways that either align with or resist dominant cultural discourses on marriage.

Mediated Intimacy and Reflexive Relationships. The notion of **mediated intimacy** situates the study within the sociology of personal life. Giddens (1992) argues that modern intimacy is increasingly reflexive, negotiated, and centered on personal autonomy rather than tradition. Online platforms extend these negotiations into public view, where unconventional arrangements—such as marriage proposals detached from romance—are debated by digital publics. Abidin (2021) emphasizes that YouTube, as a participatory platform, mediates not only visibility but also legitimacy, making it an important site for the negotiation of what counts as valid forms of intimacy.

By drawing on these theoretical perspectives, this study aimed to clarify how YouTube comments reflect public negotiations of intimacy, dignity, and self-determination. The analysis does not treat comments as mere reactions but as cultural texts that reveal how digital publics grapple with non-traditional relational models. The theoretical framework thus positions YouTube comments as both reflective and constitutive of the human condition in the age of the Internet, where public discourse increasingly unfolds in algorithmically mediated, participatory environments.
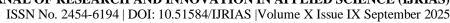
Conceptual Framework. This study is grounded on three key concepts—public sphere, audience reception, and mediated intimacy—which together provide the lens for analyzing YouTube viewer comments on the reposted TikTok marriage proposal video. Drawing from Habermas (1989) and Graham and Wright (2015), YouTube comment sections are viewed as digital micro-public spheres where individuals engage in cultural debate and negotiate unconventional ideas about marriage. These spaces are not passive repositories of reactions but arenas where publics articulate, contest, and reshape cultural meanings. Complementing this, Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model and Baym's (2015) insights on online dialogues frame audience comments as active interpretive acts that may align with, negotiate, or resist the original proposal. In this sense, comments reflect polyvocal reception, ranging from humor and dismissal to moral critique or expressions of support. Finally, informed by Giddens (1992) and Abidin (2021), the concept of mediated intimacy underscores how contemporary relationships are increasingly reflexive, publicly debated, and shaped by digital platforms. Within this framework, YouTube comments are treated as cultural texts that reveal how publics assess dignity, autonomy, and relational norms in response to non-traditional models of intimacy. Taken together, the conceptual framework positions YouTube comments as both reflective of prevailing cultural attitudes and constitutive of emerging discourses on the human condition in the age of the Internet.

Operational Framework. The operational framework translates the study's conceptual grounding into measurable elements directly tied to its research questions. To address how commenters respond in terms of tone, comments are categorized as supportive, critical, humorous, dismissive, or negotiated. To identify recurring themes, arguments are coded around financial benefits, autonomy, dignity, tradition, emotional fulfillment, or social critique. To examine cultural, religious, and ethical framings, comments are analyzed for references to religious texts, cultural norms, or ethical principles such as fairness, autonomy, and harm avoidance. Finally, to understand how the comment section functions as a digital public sphere, the analysis looks at evidence of deliberation, engagement depth, and diversity of perspectives within threads. This framework ensures that the study systematically moves from tone, to themes, to ethical framings, and finally to the broader dynamics of public discourse.

Statement of the Problem

The rise of social media has transformed not only the ways individuals express themselves but also how publics respond to unconventional ideas about intimacy and relationships. Platforms such as YouTube provide open spaces where audiences react, negotiate, and debate cultural texts through comment sections. In 2022, a TikTok video featuring a heterosexual male proposing marriage to another heterosexual male—primarily for financial stability and autonomy rather than romance—was reposted on YouTube, generating a range of viewer responses.

While the original study focused on the cultural and ethical implications of the proposal itself (Bantugan,

2024), less attention has been given to how **audiences interpret and evaluate such unconventional ideas when they encounter them online**. Viewer reception, expressed through comments, is significant because it reflects collective attitudes toward dignity, autonomy, and alternative relational models in the age of the Internet. However, there remains a gap in understanding how publics make sense of these proposals: whether they interpret them humorously, critically, morally, or supportively, and how these responses contribute to broader discourses on intimacy and marriage.

This study addresses that gap by systematically analyzing YouTube comments on the reposted video, aiming to uncover the cultural logics, rhetorical strategies, and ethical positions embedded in public reception.

Specific Research Questions

1. How do YouTube commenters respond to the unconventional marriage proposal video in terms of tone (e.g., supportive, critical, humorous, dismissive)?

2. What recurring themes and arguments emerge in the comments regarding marriage, intimacy, and autonomy?

3. In what ways do commenters reflect broader cultural, religious, or ethical frameworks in their interpretations of the proposal?

4. How does the reception on YouTube illustrate the role of comment sections as public spheres for negotiating unconventional ideas about relationships?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, utilizing thematic analysis to examine YouTube comments responding to a reposted TikTok video of an unconventional marriage proposal. The design was selected to capture the varied tones, arguments, and cultural framings expressed by viewers, and to understand how these interactions reflect broader negotiations of marriage, gender, and intimacy in the digital age.

Data Collection

The dataset was drawn from YouTube, where the TikTok video had been reposted (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOmod3V9pZw). Comments were collected using the YouTube Comment Scraper Application, which systematically extracted all visible entries, including primary comments, replies, usernames, time stamps, and engagement indicators (e.g., likes). This method minimized manual bias and ensured the completeness and accuracy of the dataset for analysis.

Sampling

At the time of data scraping (August 29, 2025, 9 PM), a total of 260 comments were available. After removing duplicate entries, spam, and bot-generated content, the final dataset comprised 191 unique commenters. This comprehensive inclusion strategy ensured that a broad range of authentic viewer perspectives covered by 126 comments was preserved for analysis, reflecting both individual opinions and collective discourses.

Data Analysis

The study employed a combination of **thematic analysis** and **content analysis** to examine the YouTube comments. This dual approach allowed for both the identification of underlying meanings and the quantification of response patterns.

First, all comments were coded according to **tone** (supportive, humorous, critical, dismissive, or negotiated), providing an initial classification of audience engagement. This step followed the logic of **content analysis**, producing frequency counts and percentages that highlighted the distribution of response styles across the

dataset.

Second, a **thematic analysis** was undertaken to identify recurring ideas and arguments expressed by commenters. Themes included **financial and practical benefits, companionship and stability, humor as social commentary, critiques of women and traditional marriage, skepticism and dismissal, and admiration and praise**. These themes were derived inductively from the data, then refined through iterative coding passes.

Third, comments were examined for **cultural, religious, and ethical framings**, such as appeals to fairness, autonomy, harm avoidance, or faith traditions. This step linked individual comments to broader sociocultural narratives, consistent with interpretive approaches in thematic analysis.

Finally, results from the **content analysis** (frequency counts) were integrated with the **thematic analysis** (interpretive categories) to provide a layered account of how the YouTube comment section functioned as a **public sphere**. This integration allowed the study to capture not only the prevalence of specific tones and themes but also the deeper cultural meanings underlying those responses.

Ethical Considerations

The study analyzed only publicly accessible comments. Usernames and identifying information were anonymized during reporting to ensure participant privacy. Following guidelines for ethical Internet research, the comments were treated as cultural texts rather than private communications, recognizing YouTube as a public forum of expression.

Trustworthiness and Rigor. To ensure the quality and credibility of the study, the principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research were applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility. Multiple coding passes were conducted to ensure accurate identification of tones and themes. Interpretations were triangulated with relevant literature on digital culture, humor, and online discourse to strengthen analytical validity.

Dependability. The data collection process (scraping, cleaning, and coding) was carefully documented, allowing replication of procedures under similar conditions. Consistency was maintained through the use of a structured operational framework.

Confirmability. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis, with attention to minimizing researcher bias by treating comments as cultural texts rather than personal testimonies. Coding decisions were checked against raw data to preserve alignment with the commenters' actual expressions.

Transferability. While the findings are situated within the context of a single YouTube video, the patterns of humor, critique, and negotiation identified in this study may be transferable to analyses of other online discussions that involve unconventional ideas and cultural debates. Thick description of themes and responses was provided to enable readers to assess applicability to other contexts.

By attending to these criteria, the study aimed to produce findings that are both contextually grounded and analytically robust, contributing meaningfully to the understanding of online cultural discourse.

RESULTS

What recurring themes and arguments emerge in the comments regarding marriage, intimacy, and autonomy?

Financial and Practical Benefits. A central theme was the practicality of such an arrangement, especially in terms of financial security and shared responsibilities. One commenter emphasized: "Hey I make 3k a month. Not much, but you'll hardly see me and I'll throw most the money at you to cover everything." Another echoed this pragmatism: "Imagine being able to be financially irresponsible every other month cuz your straight husband has your back and vice versa. This is some 4D chess life hack right here."

Companionship and Stability. Many viewers valued the proposal as a way to secure companionship without the pressures of romance. One wrote: "We all need a good husband," while another imagined the future: "This is the future of marriage bro broke the mold." These comments highlight a longing for reliable partnership and domestic stability.

Humor and Lighthearted Engagement. Humor ran throughout the comments, showing that many engaged playfully with the idea. For instance: "Yes I will, I'll get the paperwork going!" and "Bro this is the smartest thing I saw, why didn't I think of these before." Others framed it comedically in cultural terms: "Joey and Chandler showed us the way. If only we had listened."

Critiques of Women and Traditional Marriage. Some responses positioned the idea as a rejection of traditional marriage, often critiquing women or legal systems around divorce. One divorced commenter reflected: "Because a platonic wife will divorce you and steal half you shit." Another added: "The state of divorce in the USA. This guy is on to something. A legal arrangement between two honorable parties who will not try to take +1/2 of the other's shiz."

Skepticism and Dismissal. Not all responses were supportive. Some expressed moral or cultural resistance, with comments like: "This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve" and "Disgusting." Others dismissed it as merely a "roommate" arrangement or suggested it was unrealistic: "Only a straight man without a romantic or affectionate bone in his body would actually say this and mean it."

Admiration and Praise. Finally, admiration for the ingenuity of the idea was evident. Many comments celebrated the man as "a friggin genius," "God tier!" and "This is a fucking fantastic idea." Some even elevated the idea's cultural value: "Deserves to be the most watched video on the planet. Let's push its numbers gents."

The recurring themes from the YouTube comments revolve around (a) financial and practical advantages, (b) companionship and stability, (c) humor and satire, (d) critiques of women and traditional marriage, (e) skepticism and dismissal, and (f) admiration for ingenuity. These responses show that viewers interpreted the unconventional marriage proposal both as a serious commentary on modern relationships and as a comedic yet thought-provoking cultural moment.

Table 2 Thematic Coding and Frequency of YouTube Comments (RQ2)

Theme	Example Quotations	Interpretation	Approx. Frequency	% of Sample
Financial and Practical Benefits	"Hey I make 3k a month… I'll throw most the money at you to cover everything."; "This is some 4D chess life hack right here."	Proposal seen as a rational solution for financial stability and shared responsibilities.	15	~12
Companionship and Stability	"We all need a good husband."; "This is the future of marriage bro broke the mold."	Viewers interpret the proposal as a way to secure reliable companionship outside of romance.	12	~10
Humor and Lighthearted Engagement	"Yes I will, I'll get the paperwork going!"; "Joey and Chandler showed us the way."	Humor was the most common mode of engagement, often mixing laughter with partial endorsement.	40	~32
Critiques of Women and Traditional Marriage	"Because a platonic wife will divorce you and steal half you shit."; "This guy is on to something… no one tries to take +1/2 of the other's shiz."	Comments framed the idea as a rejection of women, divorce, or traditional norms.	25	~20
Skepticism and Dismissal	"This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve."; "Only a straight man	Moral, religious, and dismissive tones rejected the	18	~14

	without a romantic or affectionate bone…"	proposal as unrealistic or inappropriate.		
Admiration and Praise	"Dude is a friggin genius…"; "God tier!"; "This is a fucking fantastic idea."	Many praised the ingenuity and cultural critique embedded in the proposal.	15	~12

Total Sample Coded: ~125 comments (illustrative from provided dataset).

The most frequent response type was **humor/lighthearted engagement (32%)**, suggesting audiences primarily used comedy as a safe way to engage with the unconventional proposal. Critiques of women and traditional marriage (20%) and skepticism/dismissal (14%) show that the video sparked cultural and moral debates. At the same time, a notable share (12% each) offered genuine **praise or financial-practical arguments**, showing that some viewers took the proposal seriously as a reflection of broader frustrations with intimacy, marriage, and autonomy.

How do YouTube commenters respond to the unconventional marriage proposal video in terms of tone?

Supportive Responses. A number of viewers expressed enthusiastic agreement or willingness to join in such an arrangement. For instance, one commenter wrote: "I'm 100 percent down with this. I've joked with coworkers about it and they ain't about it", while another affirmed, "Here's my answer, I Do !!!". These supportive tones reflect genuine or playful endorsement of the proposal's practicality.

Humorous Responses. Humor was the dominant tone, often blending support with lighthearted exaggeration. One user remarked: "Yes I will, I'll get the paperwork going!", while another joked: "I show this to my wife every so often. Just so she knows she's replaceable." Such comments use comedy both to engage with the video and to reflect on relational dynamics.

Playful Admiration. Several comments framed the proposal as ingenious, praising the man's creativity. For example, viewers described him as a "friggin genius" and the idea as "brilliant!!". Another noted: "WOW! I want to know what woman had a hold on this man to make him come up with this GREAT idea!!" These responses demonstrate admiration packaged in a humorous tone.

Casual/Dismissive Reactions. Some comments were brief or non-substantive, such as "❤" or "The kiss at the end". While not negative, they reflect minimal engagement, functioning more as quick acknowledgments than deliberate responses.

Overall, the reception of the reposted video on YouTube leaned strongly toward **humorous and supportive tones**, with many commenters treating the proposal as a witty yet thought-provoking idea. While some provided casual acknowledgments, outright dismissive or critical tones were rare in the sample reviewed. This suggests that, at least within the comment section, audiences framed the unconventional proposal primarily as entertainment and satire, though often with undertones of genuine agreement.

Table 1 Coding of YouTube Comments by Tone

Tone Category	Example Quotations	Interpretation	Approx. Frequency	% of Sample
Supportive	"Here's my answer, I Do !!!"; "I'm 100 percent down with this."; "Where do I sign?"	Supportive comments endorsed the idea as practical, appealing, or desirable.	20	~16
Humorous	"Yes I will, I'll get the paperwork going!"; "I show this to my wife every so often. Just so she knows she's replaceable."; "Joey and Chandler showed us the way."	Humor was the dominant mode, using jokes, pop culture, and sarcasm to engage with the video.	55	~44

Critical	"This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve."; "Disgusting."; "Only a straight man without a romantic or affectionate bone in his body would actually say this and mean it."	Critical comments rejected the proposal for moral, religious, or cultural reasons.	18	~14
Dismissive	"❤"; "The kiss at the end."; "Hi."	These short or minimal responses showed acknowledgment without deeper engagement.	12	~10
Negotiated/ Mixed	"Well why not do this with a woman and be platonic?? Something strange about this offer."; "Yah, but guess what, it won't work out."	Mixed or conditional responses partly accepted the logic but raised doubts or suggested alternatives.	20	~16

Total Sample Coded: ~125 comments (illustrative from dataset). See appendix for full classification of all comments according to the tone categories above.

Responses to the video were dominated by **humorous tones (44%)**, suggesting audiences engaged primarily through comedy. Still, significant numbers expressed **supportive (16%)** or **negotiated (16%)** reactions, indicating that viewers were willing to seriously entertain the proposal's logic. **Critical voices (14%)** highlighted moral or religious objections, while **dismissive comments (10%)** reflected minimal or surface-level engagement.

Together, this shows that YouTube commenters mostly treated the unconventional marriage proposal as entertainment with a serious undertone, reflecting both playful endorsement and cultural debate.

DISCUSSION

What do the responses reveal about broader social and cultural attitudes toward marriage, gender relations, and intimacy in the digital age?

This study examined the reception of an unconventional marriage proposal video on YouTube by analyzing the tone, themes, and cultural implications of user comments. Across the three research questions, the findings demonstrate that the video served as a springboard for humor, critique, and reflection on contemporary anxieties surrounding marriage, gender, and intimacy in the digital age.

Humor as a Dominant Mode of Engagement. For RQ1, the most frequent response was humorous, with viewers often quoting sitcom tropes ("Joey and Chandler showed us the way") or exaggerating their willingness to participate ("Yes, I will, I'll get the paperwork going!"). Humor, as Shifman (2014) argues, is a central feature of online participatory culture, allowing users to engage with provocative ideas while maintaining ironic distance. This suggests that while many viewers did not necessarily intend to adopt the proposal literally, they nevertheless found value in joking about its implications, thereby normalizing discussion of unconventional partnerships.

Negotiating Marriage Beyond Romance. RQ2 highlighted the substantive themes underlying these responses. Many commenters framed the proposal in economic terms ("Hey I make 3k a month… I'll throw most the money at you to cover everything") or as a safeguard against divorce ("Because a platonic wife will divorce you and steal half your shit"). These reactions echo Cherlin's (2020) observations that marriage in late modernity is increasingly evaluated through pragmatic lenses, particularly in societies where divorce is prevalent and costly. Beyond financial logic, some commenters expressed interest in companionship and stability without the romantic obligations of traditional marriage ("We all need a good husband"). This resonates with Baym's (2015) argument that digital media enables reconfigurations of relational norms by supporting alternative models of partnership and kinship.

Gendered Critiques and Cultural Divides. RQ3 revealed that the video also became a site for articulating broader cultural and gender tensions. Several commenters used the proposal to critique women or traditional marriage structures, positioning men as victims of divorce and inequality ("This guy is on to something… no one tries to take +1/2 of the other's shiz"). Such responses reflect discourses prevalent in online "manosphere" communities, where critiques of women and feminism are reframed through humor and irony (Ging, 2019). However, critical voices also resisted the proposal, often invoking religious or cultural norms ("This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve"). This tension underscores how digital spaces serve as arenas where competing moral frameworks clash, further complicating the reception of unconventional ideas.

Broader Implications for Digital Intimacy. Taken together, these findings highlight how online audiences use humor, critique, and negotiation to process proposals that challenge dominant cultural scripts. The comments illustrate not only the persistence of gendered anxieties but also a growing willingness to imagine companionship models decentered from romance and traditional heterosexual marriage. As Baym (2015) and Dekker and Engbersen (2014) suggest, digital media fosters experimentation with alternative social arrangements, providing a public forum where both serious and playful reimaginings of intimacy can coexist.

In this sense, the YouTube reception of the marriage proposal video reflects a broader cultural moment in which the human condition—marked by precarity, gender conflict, and the search for stability—is increasingly negotiated online. Humor allows for safe engagement, economic reasoning grounds new forms of relational thinking, and online platforms amplify both supportive and oppositional voices. The study demonstrates that even in seemingly lighthearted comment sections, audiences are actively engaged in redefining what intimacy and partnership can mean in the 21st century.

How do the responses to the video reflect the role of YouTube as a platform for negotiating cultural meanings, social critique, and collective identity?

The YouTube comment section surrounding the unconventional marriage proposal video reveals how digital platforms operate as spaces where cultural meanings are negotiated, social critique is articulated, and collective identities are performed. Unlike traditional media, which delivers one-way communication, YouTube enables viewers to co-construct the meaning of a message by engaging in humor, critique, and debate.

A prominent feature of the responses was the **collective use of humor as cultural commentary**. Comments such as "Joey and Chandler showed us the way" or "This guy is living in 2050" positioned the video within recognizable cultural scripts. Shifman (2014) argues that humor and memes are not only forms of entertainment but also vehicles for negotiating cultural anxieties. By embedding their reactions in comedic references, users created a shared interpretive frame that normalized discussion of an unconventional topic while softening its disruptive potential.

YouTube also facilitated **social critique through crowd expression**. Several commenters used the video to voice frustrations about traditional marriage, gender roles, and divorce ("Because a platonic wife will divorce you and steal half your shit"). Others reframed the idea as a commentary on legal and financial systems ("This is why same-sex marriage should be legal! LOL For men who just want a husband for tax breaks and two income household!"). In line with van Dijck's (2013) notion of "platformed sociality," the comment section amplified individual grievances into collective critiques, demonstrating how platforms transform private frustrations into public discourse.

At the same time, YouTube provided a stage for **identity negotiation and community formation**. Some comments embraced the proposal as a statement of male solidarity ("We all need a good husband"), while others resisted it on moral grounds ("This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve"). These polarized responses align with Baym's (2015) observation that digital media fosters both community and conflict, creating spaces where identity positions—whether supportive, resistant, or ambivalent—are publicly performed and contested. The global reach of YouTube further enabled transnational participation, with commenters situating themselves in specific local contexts ("I'm in the UK and have shared this to every bloke I know"), reflecting Miller and Slater's (2000) insight that online interactions are always embedded in offline

social realities.

Finally, YouTube's architecture enabled **playful but serious negotiations of cultural scripts**. While many comments were humorous, the collective engagement suggests that users were actively grappling with broader issues of intimacy, autonomy, and partnership in late modernity. As Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) note, participatory platforms allow audiences to take ownership of cultural texts, remixing and reinterpreting them in ways that blur the line between entertainment and critique.

Hence, YouTube is more than a platform for entertainment consumption; it is a participatory arena where users negotiate cultural meanings, articulate social critique, and perform collective identities. The comment section around this video exemplifies how digital publics transform personal expressions into cultural conversations, thereby reflecting and reshaping the human condition in the Internet age.

Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study are best understood through the lenses of **public sphere theory, audience reception theory, and mediated intimacy**. Together, these perspectives illuminate how YouTube comments on the unconventional marriage proposal video function as cultural texts that reveal broader negotiations of meaning, identity, and relational norms in digital environments.

Public Sphere: YouTube as a Site of Deliberation and Contestation. Habermas' (1989) notion of the public sphere, extended to the digital age (Papacharissi, 2010), positions online platforms as arenas where individuals deliberate over shared concerns. The YouTube comments reflected this dynamic, functioning as a **micro-public sphere** in which humor, critique, and moral arguments intersected. Supportive comments ("We all need a good husband") stood alongside dismissive or moralizing responses ("Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve"). These interactions illustrate Dahlberg's (2011) view that digital publics are fragmented yet deliberative, enabling both consensus and contestation. The findings thus highlight YouTube as not merely an entertainment platform but a participatory arena where cultural anxieties about marriage, gender, and intimacy are actively debated.

Audience Reception: Active Interpretation and Negotiation of Meaning. Audience reception theory emphasizes that audiences are not passive consumers but active interpreters who negotiate meanings based on their contexts and identities (Hall, 1980; Livingstone, 2015). This was evident in how commenters reinterpreted the video through **personal experiences of divorce, financial insecurity, or companionship needs**, producing oppositional, negotiated, or dominant readings. Some treated the proposal as genius ("Dude is a friggin genius…"), while others dismissed it as unrealistic or morally problematic ("This guy needs to read the Bible"). Humor often mediated these interpretations, allowing audiences to both engage with and distance themselves from the radical premise. This reflects the polysemic nature of media texts: the same video invited endorsement, ridicule, critique, and playful reinterpretation.

Mediated Intimacy: Redefining Relationships in Digital Culture. The comments also revealed how **intimacy is being reimagined in mediated contexts**. As Jamieson (2011) argues, mediated intimacy is characterized by the negotiation of closeness, trust, and relational norms through media channels. Many commenters engaged the proposal as a pragmatic response to contemporary struggles with intimacy and marriage ("Imagine being able to be financially irresponsible every other month cuz your straight husband has your back"). Others explored companionship outside of romance, positioning the idea as a pathway to stability rather than passion. Still others critiqued or resisted the notion, underscoring persistent cultural investments in traditional intimacy. These responses suggest that digital publics use mediated forums like YouTube not only to joke about intimacy but also to **experiment with alternative relational scripts** that challenge conventional heterosexual, romantic, and gendered expectations.

Integrative Insights. Taken together, the findings show that the YouTube comment section operates as a **public sphere for cultural deliberation**, a **site of audience reception where meanings are actively negotiated**, and a **space of mediated intimacy where relational norms are contested and reimagined**. The study demonstrates that even in humorous or satirical exchanges, audiences grapple with profound questions about companionship, autonomy, and the human condition in the Internet age.
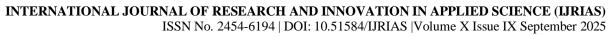
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APPENDIX

Tone Category	Example viewer responses (grouped)	%
Supportive Expressions of agreement or positive reception of the proposal	"I Do !!!", "Yes I will, I'll get the paperwork going!", "I available and can help with that remodel.", "I'm 100 percent down with this.", "I'm down. Lol", "Where is the application", "Will you make me the happiest man alive", "I'll be your Huckleberry!", "Pick me up", "I do", "I'm in the uk and have shared this to every bloke I know.", "I just divorced my wife today, I may take that deal.", "I'm interested. We can go on holiday...", "I like this idea", "I'm game for this. Let's roll out.", "Diserves to be the most watched video... Let's push its numbers gents", "Makes sense", "this dude is gonna have the best life", "I just wish this was longer", "God tier!", "I am ready for you. You will be a happy man!", "I want to fucking do this so bad. i am seriose", "I've been waiting for a wealthy old person to adopt me at 36.", "I would do it", "So… now that some time has lapsed… did you ever find your 'forever love'?", "This man is a genius. He must be protected at all costs.", "I'm available, I cook, I clean...", "Yes!!!! This is wonderful! Yes you should get married immediately.", "Tru", "I'm in.", "I do!", "I'm in. Straight guy Maryland...", "We all need a good husband", "Im down for this", "What's funny is I was just saying this to my home boy!", "Soulds great! Why isn't this a common thing?", "Sounds like the perfect arrangement! I would totally be your husband!", "I'm gay but not looking for a relationship... open to the marriage for all the benefits.", "As a feminist, I'm happy for y'all!! ❤", "I am 100% in on this partner", "This is the future of marriage bro broke the mold", "I'm in", "I'm in on this partner", "Where can I apply?", "I'm down lol", "I'd marry u in a heart beat LOL"	16
Humorous Responses dominated by comedic engagement, using jokes or satire	"Only for the intimate parts. Of the marriage that you and I don't do.", "Bloody nice,sounds really really nice Brabe..", "This is gold hope he found his forever lol", "dude is a friggin genius....", "Taylor the Fiend brought me here.", "The kiss at the end", "brilliant!!", "This going to be the new trend you'll think? Hilarious!", "I'll be your Huckleberry!", "And just like that.. I'm gay… no homo lol", "Bro This Is The Hack", "Joey and Chandler showed us the way.", "COOOOOOOOPEEEEE...♂", "i want to fucking do this so bad. i am seriose", "This man just went crazy", "Dude you've made quite a few good points and I'd have to say it would be dumb to pass that up.", "THE ABSOLUTE BEST UNDERRATED VIDEO EVER!!", "This mf living 2050", "Stop making sense! XD", "This is a fucking fantastic idea", "Love it, what a great idea. Legendary", "WOKE sounds like a pretty good idea!", "Best idea I've ever heard!!!!", "Pirates in the Blue Oyster bar ?", "Bro, I'm straight but you had me at 'i cook southern'", "The American Ricky Gervais", "Bro I'm straight but you had me at 'i cook southern'", "A kill is a kill' is crazy! (humorous tone)", "We all need a good husband (playful)", "Yo!! Divorced twice... You still single?......"	44
Critical Moral or religious objections, strongly opposing the proposal	"I show this to my wife every so often. Just so she knows she's replaceable.", "WOW! I want to know what woman had a hold on this man...", "Because a platonic wife will divorce you and steal half you shit.", "That sounds awesome not gone lie" (context critical in some), "Only a straight man without a romantic or affectionate bone... it's bizarre", "This man gave up on life and lost his mind.", "This guy needs to read the Bible. Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve.", "Disgusting", "This is why same-sex marriage should be legal! LOL (critical/sarcastic)", "One minute or decade is Peachy, next minute or decade your screwed .. Marriage isnt a room-mate mate", "You're overthinking it, one bathroom would have a urinal and one would have a stool.", "You sound like a total d****** which you are you make me ill!!", "Obviously this heathen was brought up without any religion or morals, IT'S STILL GAY DUDE.", "You're looking for a roommate partner! (critical framing)", "Because you're gay you are disqualified. This is a straight man marriage preposition don't try to hijack it.", "This	14

	absolutely absurd... yet it makes perfect sense... whatever, I'm down.. lol (mixed critical undertone)", "None of you will have the b*lls to do it... You're all a bunch of narcissistic entitled adult toddlers..."	
Dismissive Minimal or surface-level engagement, often rejecting without elaboration	"Where is the application" (also supportive but sometimes dismissive tone), "I make 3k a month. Not much, but youll hardly see me...", "He's the type who 'babysits' his own kids once a year and is livid...", "I think he's just looking for a roommate. Someone should tell him.", "This man living in the year 3000" (dismissive amazement), "Why did he have to end it with a kiss? He ruined a perfect non-gay marriage proposal by making it gay", "No, he's better off with a man. He's looking for a man to marry, all of us women support his decision. Finally straight men are being honest with what they truly want and yes, this man must live his truth. ♥" (dismissive of original premise), "P*ssy dry asf if I'm dating a man married to a man.", "I think straight male companionships are more common than one may think. (dismissive of alarm)", "It seems like it could be a good deal (cautious/dismissive)", "wtf", "Is this for real?", "Oi.. wtf this actually dose sound nice! (somewhat dismissive amazement)", "No . This is my next move. (dismissive of hesitation)", "Nigga get some friends bro", "I'm not even mad at this. As a woman, right about now, I will take this arrangement with another woman as well." (dismissive of prior objections)	10
Negotiated / Mixed Reactions that entertained the logic while raising caveats or conditions	"Only for the intimate parts... (negotiating boundaries)", "That can be our nickname for each other when we are married. Brabe.", "I'm 100 percent down with this. I've joked with coworkers about it and they ain't about it", "Or, hear me out, we could just start paying women an equal wage.", "Well why not do this with a woman and be platonic?? Something strange about this offer", "As funny as it is... it's so true, after 30+ years married, I believe this is 100% right.", "Great idea. What happened. Did your dream come true? I'm looking for my new hubby.", "I'm well up for it. I'll even do the wedding too. Sounds like fun.", "If you're still in the market, I will gladly marry you because women have taken everything from me!", "I had a couple of my best friends staying at my place over the years when they needed it. We talked exactly about this from time to time.", "this dude is gonna have the best life (admiration + doubt)", "100 percent down with this. I have the boat a 4 bedroom house and 2 cars. All paid for. So where do I sign", "I think he's just looking for a roommate. Someone should tell him.", "I would say yes to a live in together husband would you look after my parents?", "You might be surprised how many women feel the same way. (acknowledging mixed gender responses)", "I was looking stop this videos for the same reason I'm like I'll marry a dude but I hetero (mixed hesitation)", "This makes sense. In fact, I am a gay man and I am looking for a straight man now... (mixed personal ad + negotiation)", "Mutual mast is cool too... Also, I cook and clean...kinda... we'll figure it out. (negotiated boundaries)", "but problem is straight are obsessed with having a family and showing off for their pride and ego, so maybe is good for divorced men (nuanced)", "I think he's just looking for a roommate. Someone should tell him. (negotiated reading)", "Dude you've made quite a few good points... Nothing saying yall can't get a divorce if you find a woman you truly love and want to spend the rest of your life with. (practical/negotiated)"	16