

Chapter 36

Online Dating / Dating Apps

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ABSTRACT

The use of communication technologies for romantic rendezvous is not new; for example, Dutton and Aron found that the use of computers for mediated-personal advertisement through visual and textual information for romantic assessment heightened the perception of attraction without significant differences between genders. In addition to the commencement of computer dating during the 1970s and 1980s, video-recording devices were also used to initiate trysts, but never became as popular as online dating is presently. Subsequently, a paramount question arises for CMC research: Why did computer dating and video dating not become as popular as online dating which is presently spreading worldwide? Future research should look at how closely online and offline courtship behaviors overlap each other, and research should also investigate the communication behaviors that individuals use on online apps compared to face-to-face interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, online dating services are increasingly becoming popular venues for finding romantic relationships. In 2012, Match.com reported that one in six marriages started online (Ramirez, Sumner, Fleuriet & Cole, 2015). In 2013, the online mating services brought \$2.1 billion (Ginsberg, 2015) whereas compared to ten years ago, in 2004, the dating industry revenue was only \$473 million. Nowadays, there are many online dating sites such as Match.com, eHarmony, and PerfectMatch.com, with over 50 million users combined (Consumer Rankings., 2012), and the online dating business keeps growing (Visual Economics Credit Loan blog, 2015). Online dating refers to web sites and apps that facilitate romantic relationships' initiation by offering users (1) access to the profiles of potential romantic candidates, (2) a communication channel to initiate contact, and (3) a romantic compatibility matching-algorithm to be paired for potential romantic initiation (see Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). Indeed, most online dating platforms are similarly structured (Rosen, Cheever, Cummings & Felt,

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2008), in general: users post a photograph and answer questions in regards to personal information and other relevant demographics; however, there is considerable variance among online dating forums with regard to users' level of involvement, interaction, and self-disclosure.

Despite the array of online dating sites and apps, a new online dating app entered to the online dating market, and it is taking over the entire online love business: Tinder. The new app just entered to the market in 2012, and, two years later, it reached approximately 30 million users, almost a third of the total online dating population (e.g., 96 million users) (Forbes, November 2014). Thus, the popularity of the app has rapidly grown. Tinder app innovates the usual online dating service explained above, by providing users a seemingly endless selection of photos of potential mates without the need to answer questionnaires or forms (Bertoni, 2014a); then, the algorithm of the app links users' contacts from Facebook profiles to provide photographs of potential romantic candidates. After solely looking at photos of potential mates, users swipe right if they like a person and, by the contrary, swipe left if not (Bertoni, 2014a); finally, if both parties like each other, the platform provides a parallel interface to send messages to each other to decide whether or not to meet in person and exchange personal contact information.

Besides the successfulness of online dating market, the online dating service has always been severely criticized for its 'overemphasis' on physical appearance. However, disregarding the communication context (i.e., Face-to-Face and Online), physical appearance is the initiator for communication behaviors in most of the cases. The online dating success trend has been widely explained by the new media pervasiveness argument or the idea that this service is prosperous 'only' or 'mostly' because the access to personal computers and smartphone is wide spread, then focusing only on related phenomena such as self-presentation, self-disclosure, and/or social anxiety. If new media pervasiveness explains this new social trend, why did commercial video-dating not become so popular during the 90s when the access to video cameras was also pervasive in the U.S.? Little attention has been directed to how online dating mirrors human perception of first impression while forming interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, the present chapter understand the role of human perception of physical appearance during first impression formation which may better tune with Tinder' interface; in other words, Tinder feels more natural to users compared to other dating apps, swipe to left or to the right feels better than 'browsing' profiles; in addition to the pervasiveness argument of new media and apps, this chapter explains Tinder' increasing popularity seems to match to interface architecture as well. Consequently, the concept of technological affordance tuning will be discussed to explain the success on online dating in addition to new media pervasiveness argument; however, the idea of affordance tuning is not widely discussed in the CMC research on online dating, and this concept is the main contribution from this chapter.

BACKGROUND

The online dating technology has been around since 1970, but the rapid rate of development of cheap, fast, reliable, and user personal computers with Internet made online dating technology to evolve from being just an online interface for personal romantic advertisement (see Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970), then to become an algorithm-based matching system (i.e., e-Harmony.com or Match.com) to finally a combination of both; with the inclusion of smartphone-based dating applications and GPS technology (i.e. Blendr or Skout), the new version of this CMC technology also became into satellite dating (Quiroz 2013). Nowadays, online dating users cannot only browse romantic candidate profiles, but also know where they are given information to decide whether or not meet them in person. But, if online dating

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