Chapter 14

How E-Daters Behave Online:
Theory and Empirical Observations

Celia Romm Livermore
Wayne State University, USA

Toni Somers
Wayne State University, USA

Kristina Setzekorn
Smith Barney, Inc., USA

Ashley Lynn-Grace King
Wayne State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Following a review of the literature on e-dating, this chapter introduces the e-dating development model and discusses a number of hypotheses that can be derived from it. Also presented in the chapter are some findings from a preliminary empirical research that explored the hypotheses. The findings supported all the hypotheses, indicating that: (1) male and female e-daters follow different stages in their e-dating evolvement; (2) the behaviors that males and females exhibit as e-daters are different; and (3) the feedback that male and female e-daters receive from the environment is different too. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the implications from this research to e-dating theory development and empirical research.

INTRODUCTION

We define e-dating as a process that takes place online and that results in the establishment of a personal relationship between two individuals. E-dating can be enabled by an e-dating service, for example, an online company that matches individuals to each other (such as Match.com, YahooPersonals, eHarmony, etc.) or it can take place in other online environments, such as chatrooms, newsgroups, and so forth.

As for the goal of the relationship, we prefer not to use terms such as "romance," "flirting," or "courtship" because we acknowledge that the range of relationships that can be categorized as

e-dating is wide and can encompass anything between cybersex and marriage.

The focus of this chapter is on the "e-dating career" which we define as the sum-total of all the behaviors and experiences that e-daters undergo while being e-daters. Just like a vocational career, the e-dating career may involve not just the behaviors initiated by the e-dater but also the responses that the e-dater receives from the environment. These may include positive, negative or no responses at all.

We prefer to use the term "career" to describe the e-dating process because this term denotes a long-term experience that can last months and even years. It also implies a series of discrete experiences (just like "jobs") that the individual can consider in retrospect as parts of the whole experience. The term "career" also implies overcoming hurdles, adjusting goals, and modifying strategies to fit new realities, for example, it implies, change, growth, and the development of new perceptions about the self—all of which we consider to be part and parcel of the e-dating experience.

Even though our emphasis in this chapter is on the subjective aspects of e-dating, it is important to consider some of the objective realities of this burgeoning new industry.

Online dating has been around for over two decades. It began in the early 1980s and has exploded into an extremely lucrative form of consumer-to-consumer sector of e-commerce. According to a study conducted by the Online Publishers Association (OPA) and comScore Networks, "U.S. residents spent $469.5 million on online dating and personals in 2004, the largest segment of 'paid content' on the web" (Consumer Search, 2005).

The e-dating industry is dominated by several large companies including Match.com, Yahoo Personals, and American Singles. They are followed by a multitude of other sites offering services for all aspects and preferences for dating, for example,

JDate.com (which advertises itself as "the larges Jewish singles network"), ChristianSingles.com, BlackSinglesConnection.com, Gay.com., and so forth. According to TrueDating.com (TrueDating, 2006), Match.com is the world's leading online dating Web site, while Yahoo Personals is a close second, both boasting over 9 million members. The main factors contributing to the success of this industry include the relatively low start-up costs associated with running an online dating service and people's willingness to buy love online.

Even though e-dating is a dominant sector in e-commerce, very limited empirical research is available about it in the scientific literature. Our goal in this chapter is to propose a theory of e-dating development and to present the results of an empirical investigation that explored our theory.

The underlying assumption of our e-dating theory is that e-dating is a stage process in which individuals move through a number of steps or stages. Each stage is characterized by a different set of behaviors, with individuals moving from one stage to another as their e-dating "career" unfolds.

While the steps in the e-dating theory are assumed to be essentially the same for males and females, the two genders are assumed to follow a different sequence of these stages. Thus, the model assumes that because of cultural and environmental reasons, males tend to initiate contact earlier in the e-dating process than females do. Also, the theory assumes that relative to females, males are more active in behaviors that are associated with establishment and maintenance of contact.

In the following sections, we discuss the major theories and empirical research that relate to e-dating and how our theory fits in with the existing research. We proceed to present the e-dating theory, the hypotheses that we developed, and the empirical research that we conducted to explore the hypotheses. We conclude with a discussion of the implications from this research for future exploration of the theory and practice of e-dating.

19 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/daters-behave-online/55353

Related Content

Social Media: It Can Play a Positive Role in Education
Matthew Reeves (2016). *Gender Considerations in Online Consumption Behavior and Internet Use (pp. 82-95).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media/148833

Community and Gender in the Virtual Classroom
Alfred P. Rovaiand Jason D. Baker (2006). *Encyclopedia of Gender and Information Technology (pp. 103-108).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/community-gender-virtual-classroom/12722

Education as Social Institution: Understanding Her-Story
Mary Kirk (2009). *Gender and Information Technology: Moving Beyond Access to Co-Create Global Partnership (pp. 143-163).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/education-social-institution/18808

Structural Context
(2019). *Gender Inequality and the Potential for Change in Technology Fields (pp. 176-228).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/structural-context/218464

Final Thoughts and Concluding Comments
(2014). *Gender Divide and the Computer Game Industry (pp. 216-239).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/final-thoughts-and-concluding-comments/95708