

# Chapter XIV

## Segmentation Practices of e-Dating

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter investigates the current practices and strategies used by marketers of electronic dating services. This chapter does not develop or test a model, but rather is centered round an analysis of secondary data sources. Specific focus is placed on documenting the various demographic and psychographic segmentation basis and niche targeting strategies utilized by providers. An enormous ground swell is occurring of consumers participating in meeting a “significant other” through e-dating Web sites. People are increasingly relying on such services to meet people via the Internet: older, younger, black, white, pet lovers, religious, spiritual, and gay or straight individuals seeking partners for fun, companionship, commitment or conversation. This trend continues to grow. This chapter will cite a variety of networks that have blossomed over the years indicative of the interest and ideas related to this phenomenon. It also provides details of the nuances in the marketing and consumption of electronic-based personal relationships.*

### MARKETING EXCHANGES FOCUSING ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Marketing is prospering in the personal relationship service industry. Many strategies are being

implemented to bring people together ranging from individual matchmakers to personal ads in newspapers, magazines, and video interviews where clients view each other’s tapes. One of the latest trends that is growing in popularity and marketing success is electronic-based dating, made possible by the prevalence of technology.

Numerous Internet e-dating service start-ups have cropped up over the last 20 years. Of note also is the increase in people turning to e-personal relating services since September 11, 2001. The Internet now offers customers a convenient, affordable, and practical alternative to the past more traditional ways of dating and matchmaking. “E-personal relating” encompasses all forms of personal relating behavior involving individuals seeking friendship, love, and short- or long-term mates. This chapter identifies a wide variety of segmentation strategies used by e-dating marketers in an effort to differentiate and customize appeals in this highly competitive industry, as evidenced by the number of firms and approaches out there.

## BACKGROUND

The notion of marketing as exchange has proven to be conceptually robust since its introduction in the mid 1970s. The marketing exchange concept was incorporated formally in the definition of marketing developed by the American Marketing Association (Brown, 1985). The concept of a marketing exchange involving a person as the product is not novel. Hirschman (1987) examined male- and female-placed personal ads as complex and heterogeneous marketing exchange.

Marketing exchanges may assume both a traditional (e.g., money in exchange for goods and services) and nontraditional nature (e.g., a vote and volunteered time in exchange for a candidate’s promise to promote a particular ideology). Heterogeneous resources are exchanged and the primary research focus has been on the pattern of cross-category resource exchange. Diverse resources are being offered, in return for other resources, which are being sought by parties in the exchange. Foa (1976) proposes a social interaction theory to address multiple, heterogeneous resource exchanges. Foa describes social interaction in terms largely analogous to marketers’ conceptions of exchange.

“Social experiences are interpersonal encounters in which resources are given and/or taken away . . . Whether or not an exchange will take place depends on [two types of] conditions . . . One pertains to the motivational state of the potential exchangers, their need to receive and capacity to give; the other set refers to the appropriateness of the environment for an exchange of a particular type” (Foa & Foa, 1974).

Foa’s theory uses six categories of heterogeneous resources exchanged in a social interaction: goods, services, love, status, information, and money. They are defined as follows (Donnenworth & Foa, 1974, p. 786).

1. Love: An expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort
2. Status: An evaluative judgment conveying high or low prestige, regard, or esteem
3. Information: Any advice, opinions or instructions
3. Money: Any coin or token that has some standard of exchange value
4. Goods: Any products or objects
5. Services: Activities on the body or belonging to the individual

The perceived similarity/proximity of resource categories in terms of particularism and concreteness do not necessarily translate into greater *likelihood of exchange* among nearby resources. Foa speculates that a complex set of social norms and customs exists that encourages exchange across certain resource categories (as being “socially appropriate”) and discourage exchange across other resource categories (as being “socially inappropriate”). Because of social norms, some resources are more acceptable/unacceptable in exchange for other resources (Brinberg & Wood, 1983).

Among the most important status characteristics and resources possessed by men and women are physical attractiveness, intelligence, education, occupational prestige, and income. These features constitute resources in both the Foa

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