

Impact of Online Dating Apps on Young Adults Dating Anxiety and Loneliness

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ABSTRACT

In today's era where there is an extensive usage of Internet and social media, even dating has also become a part of it. The most interesting development of modern world is the invention of online dating apps wherein finding a potential partner for a romantic relationship is just a matter of swiping right and left. Dating apps are becoming more and more popular amongst young adults as it is more convenient to search for a potential partner through online dating apps. Despite its easy way of communicating with people to find a partner for dating, it somewhere lacks an element of social interaction or expression which is an essential part of any kind of relationship which might lead to social anxiety when it comes to interacting with that person on a face-to-face basis. Loneliness and boredom can also lead to rise in usage of dating apps. The current study aims to find the motivation behind using the online dating apps and its impact on young adults dating anxiety and loneliness. The study was conducted on 66 young adults (33 males and 33 females). Standardized scales of motivation behind using online dating apps, dating anxiety and loneliness were administered on participants. The results found no gender difference in males and females. Although it was believed that males are more active on online dating apps than females but the results found were contradicting, indicating no gender difference in males and females. Dating apps are considered favorable by young adults because of its easy access, anonymity and lesser emotional exhaustion.

Keywords: *Online Dating App, Social/Dating Anxiety, Loneliness*

Dating apps has evolved into an industry leading with multiple customers, from the introduction of the first digital matchmaking website in 1995 to the advent of new instant messaging dating websites in 2007 (PBS, 2013). Dating apps are now becoming an easy-to-use process for finding a potential mate (Graff, 2018). In this modern era of social networking sites even dating and romantic relationships have become a part of it. The thought of someone using a device or some gadget to get a potential mate five decades ago could not have been imagined (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). But now it is just a matter of swiping right or left wherein swiping right implies "interested" and swiping left implies "lack of interest". And when both of them shows interest in each other profiles, it notifies them as a "match". It differs from conventional

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method of dating as conventional type of dating requires face-to-face interaction whereas in virtual dating people have the liberty of choosing from various potential options which might help them getting comfortable with that person on an early note. People with a significant level of social anxiety tend to use the internet to develop new bonds, connect with someone, and relieve loneliness (Ebeling-Witte, Frank & Lester, 2007). People who are stunted on dating anxiety will preferably date online more than people with inflated levels of dating anxiety (Vaulkenburg & Peter, 2007). According to Sumter et al, 2017; Timmermanns & De Caluwe, 2017, “Tinder (a popular online dating app)” is highly associated with motivating factors like affection, open relationships, self-esteem and enjoyment, even though studies have indicated that finding love is the biggest motivating factor to go there (Sumter et al, 2017; Timmermanns & De Caluwe, 2017). Numerous different motivational factors associated with the use of the online dating apps are: searching a partner, relieve from boredom, enjoyment, and socializing (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008; Carpenter & McEwan, 2016). Research has also shown that men are more active on dating apps than women (Vaulkenburg & Peter, 2007). The reason for this distinction is that women’s usage of dating apps is more driven by social factors whereas in case of men it was hookups (Clemens, Atkin & Krishnan, 2015; Sumter et al., 2017). Donn and Sherman established that 7.7% of young adults and 19.7% of undergraduates have used the internet to search for a future love interest.

Dating Anxiety

Barlow (2000) defines anxiety as “a future-oriented mood state in which one is not ready or prepared to attempt to cope with upcoming negative events. “According to Hallam (1992) “anxiety is a word used in everyday conversation and refers to a complex relationship between a person and his situation.”

Social anxiety is defined as the fear of negative evaluations by others in social situations, while dating anxiety is defined as apprehension and discomfort in interactions with a potential romantic partner (APA, 2000; Hope & Heimberg, 1990).

People with higher levels of shyness were more interested in avoiding displaying deep feelings and to seek problem avoidance (Davila & Beck, 2002). And individuals who were single had significant level of social anxiety than people who were dating (La Greca & Harrison, 2005). Given their willingness to socialize and form friendly or romantic bonds, socially insecure people are often not able to do so because they are afraid of being viewed negatively by everyone else (Stevens & Morris, 2007).

Loneliness

Affective and cognitive discomfort or uneasiness from being or perceiving oneself to be alone or otherwise solitary (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2020).

Loneliness is described by Martin (1999) as a “discrepancy between their desired and achieved level of social interaction, support, and intimacy”. According to Dahlberg and McKee (2014), social loneliness refers to “absence of an acceptable social network, that is, a wider circle of friends and acquaintances that can provide a sense of belonging, of companionship and of being a member of a community”. Emotional loneliness, in turn, refers to “the absence of an attachment figure in one's life and someone to turn to”. Loneliness has been linked to psychological distress, anxiety, and drug addiction in the past (Booth, 2000). In fact, 40% of sample population said they often or usually believe their partnerships aren't valuable due to which they feel lonely (Novotney, 2019). Lonely people's

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social activity was steadily improved digitally, and they were more probable to create online friends and higher satisfaction with their internet friends. The isolated were more likely to use social Media to control their unpleasant emotion and to complain that their Online media use was affecting their everyday lives (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

Purpose

The purpose is to study impact of online dating on young adult's social anxiety and loneliness.

Hypothesis

- There will be no gender difference in dating app use motivation, dating anxiety and loneliness.
- There will no significant correlation in dating app use motivation, dating anxiety and loneliness

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The study was conducted on 66 participants (33 males and 33 females) from Jaipur. The sample lied in the age group of 18-25 years.

Measures

The following standardized tests were used:

- **Dating App Use Motivation Scale:** It is an adapted version of "Tinder use motivation scale". It is a 16-item questionnaire for measuring the motivation behind using dating apps. It was developed by Tóth-Király, Bóthe, Tóth-Fáber, Hága & Orosz, (2017). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (not true to me at all) to 7 (absolutely true to me).
- **Dating Anxiety Scale:** DAS is a 26-item questionnaire for measuring anxiety in dating situations. It was developed by Glickman & Greca(2004). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me).
- **De Jong Gierveld Scale:** It is a 11-item questionnaire for measuring social and emotional loneliness among people. It was developed by Gierveld & Tilburg (2006). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point rating scale with anchors None of the time, Rarely, Some of the time, Often and All of the time.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research & the questionnaires were filled through Google forms. The participants were thanked for their participation and help. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

RESULTS

Table 1 showing mean and standard deviation.

	Love	Self esteem	Sex	Boredom	Fear of negative evaluation	social distress dating	social distress group	emotional loneliness	social loneliness
N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
Mean	15.9	6.32	8.03	6.47	23.0	16.7	7.73	14.9	16.0
Standard deviation	7.94	3.90	4.45	4.09	8.85	6.66	3.93	5.12	4.92

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Table 2 showing correlation.

	Love	Self esteem	Sex	Boredom	Fear of negative evaluation	social distress dating	social distress group	emotional loneliness	social loneliness
Love	—								
Self esteem	0.606***	—							
Sex	0.658***	0.651***	—						
Boredom	0.530***	0.499***	0.575***	—					
Fear of negative evaluation	0.081	0.124	0.186	0.157	—				
social distress dating	-0.054	-0.006	0.112	0.111	0.829***	—			
social distress group	0.053	0.356**	0.317**	0.128	0.526***	0.524***	—		
emotional loneliness	0.256*	0.236	0.181	0.061	0.313*	0.189	0.154	—	
social loneliness	0.103	0.095	0.148	0.244*	0.185	0.319***	0.152	-0.125	—

Table 3 showing T values

	Group	N	Mean	SD	T-value Statistics
Love	F	33	15.70	8.49	-0.231
	M	33	16.15	7.47	
Self esteem	F	33	6.52	4.40	0.408
	M	33	6.12	3.38	
Sex	F	33	7.06	3.69	-1.801
	M	33	9.00	4.96	
Boredom	F	33	6.82	4.52	0.689
	M	33	6.12	3.66	
Fear of negative evaluation	F	33	21.73	8.90	-1.214
	M	33	24.36	8.74	
social distress dating	F	33	16.64	7.21	-0.110
	M	33	16.82	6.17	
social distress group	F	33	7.94	4.32	0.436
	M	33	7.52	3.55	
emotional loneliness	F	33	14.18	4.43	-1.107
	M	33	15.58	5.72	
social loneliness	F	33	16.70	5.15	1.102
	M	33	15.36	4.67	

DISCUSSION

The results found no gender difference in dating app use motivation, dating anxiety and loneliness. The results found out there was a positive significant correlation between self-esteem and love ($r=0.606$, $p<.001$). The results also found out that sex is positively correlated with love ($r= 0.658$, $p<.001$) and self-esteem ($r=0.651$, $p<.001$). There was positive significant correlation between social distress dating and fear of negative evaluation ($r=0.829$, $p<.001$). Further it was found that social distress group is positively correlated with self-esteem ($r=0.356$, $p<.01$), sex ($r= 0.317$, $p<.01$), fear of negative evaluation ($r=0.526$, $p<.001$) and social distress dating ($r=0.524$, $p<.01$). Emotional loneliness was positively correlated with love ($r= 0.256$, $p<.05$) and fear of negative evaluation ($r= 0.313$, $p<.05$). Social loneliness was positively correlated with boredom ($r= 0.244$, $p<.05$) and social distress dating ($r= 0.319$, $p<.01$).

People who suffer from social/dating anxiety can experience greater isolation in their everyday life (Stevens, 2006). Social behavior has a beneficial impact on the use of online dating apps; users are more interested in social interactions than non-users (Aretz et al., 2010). Kim et al. (2009) proposed that outgoing people see intimate relationships as a means for self, while people with poor self-esteem are more willing to create new friends with unknown people.

CONCLUSION

The research study assessed the impact of online dating apps on young adults dating anxiety and loneliness. The results found no gender difference in males and females indicating that both males and females are equally active on online dating apps. Individuals with higher self-esteem will be more engaged in looking for a romantic relationship or partner. Loneliness and boredom could be a reason for using online dating apps. Online dating apps can be a good source of finding a romantic partner as people have the liberty of choosing from so many options according to their preference. This research was conducted on a very small sample of 66 (33 males and 33 females) but future researches on a larger sample can give us a more in-depth insight.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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