EVOLUTION OF A NEW NORMAL IN DATING CULTURE: ANALYSING DIGITAL DEPENDENCY OF MODERN RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH DATING APPS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the evolution of contemporary dating culture, focusing on the influence of dating apps and their role in shaping a new normal in relationship dynamics. Employing a qualitative methodology centred on in-depth interviews, the study explores user experiences, perceptions, and the socio-cultural impact of digital dependency within modern relationships facilitated by dating apps.

Through thematic analysis of interview data, the research seeks to uncover patterns of behaviour, communication dynamics, and societal norms that characterize the intersection of technology and intimate connections. The qualitative approach provides a nuanced understanding of how dating apps reshape traditional rituals and expectations, shedding light on the complexities of modern romance.

The study also delves into the psychological aspects of digital dependency, examining its effects on self-esteem, trust, and emotional well-being among individuals engaged in online dating. By focusing exclusively on qualitative insights, the research aims to capture the rich narratives and diverse perspectives that emerge from in-depth interviews, offering a more profound understanding of the human experience within the digital dating landscape.

In summary, this qualitative study provides an in-depth exploration of the evolving nature of dating culture in the digital age, emphasizing the role of dating apps in shaping a new normal for modern relationships. By focusing on interviews, the research offers a rich and nuanced understanding of digital dependency's impact on interpersonal connections, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology, human psyche and romance.

Keywords: digital dependency, dating apps, modern romance, dating culture, relationships, dating.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study:

There has been just too much evidence to refute the notion that people can fall in love online and have significant emotional experiences as a result of their cyber-romance. However, it is frequently questioned whether real romantic connections can be found online. If participants are only available to one another via computer-mediated messaging, how can one maintain a close, intimate relationship? The first half of this paper makes the case that cyber-romance ought to be taken seriously as a sociopsychological study issue rather than being dismissed as a rare occurrence. The most significant strategies for gathering data used to study cyber-romance are covered in the second part.

Statement of problem

In the rapidly modernizing nation of India, there has been a noticeable increase in the use of dating apps among young people (18–30 years old), indicating a clear move away from traditional ways of finding a companion. This study aims to determine the fundamental causes of this phenomena and evaluate its applicability to modern youth culture. The ubiquitous encroachment of technology into the romantic sphere appears to eclipse the conventional methods for finding a mate. This study attempts to clarify the reasons behind the widespread reliance on dating apps, exploring whether the main motivation is solely romantic or encompasses a variety of factors such developing platonic relationships, pursuing intimacy, reducing feelings of loneliness, and more.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research aims to comprehensively explore the motivations, dynamics, and cultural implications of the significant surge in dating app usage among the youth aged 18-30 in India, including an analysis of diverse motives, the shift from traditional methods, and providing insights for dating app developers, dating app users and industry stakeholders.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary motivations driving the substantial increase in dating app usage among the youth aged 18-30 in India, and how do these motivations extend beyond assumed romantic intentions?

2. What experiences keep the users hooked on to using dating apps as their primary method of finding a companion?

3. Are dating apps the new normal way to find companionship in modern dating context?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

THEMES TO OBSERVE

1. Dating Apps Market

The Indian dating market has 10 main firms and numerous smaller ones, making it exceedingly fragmented. As a result, it is one of the most popular industries in terms of user growth. The number of users signing up on these sites has climbed 1.5X over the last three years and is expected to increase by more than 1.5X by 2027.("EVOLUTION OF ONLINE DATING: ANALYSIS OF DATING PREFERENCES, USER PSYCHOLOGY AND PAIN POINTS IN CONTEXT TO INDIAN MARKET," 2022)

Around 67% of the 31 million users of these apps are men, which indicates a heavy male predominance. Online dating has altered initial impressions in addition to removing distance and time restrictions. The rising adult population is one of the main market growth factors. Additionally, millennials tend to stay single since they are career-driven, which implies that a large percentage of adults are unmarried for an extended period of time, which is quite advantageous for online dating. Other drivers of growth include shifting dating attitudes,

growing internet and mobile usage, the desire for more socialization after divorce, an increase in unsuccessful partnerships, etc. ("EVOLUTION OF ONLINE DATING: ANALYSIS OF DATING PREFERENCES, USER PSYCHOLOGY AND PAIN POINTS IN CONTEXT TO INDIAN MARKET," 2022)

2. Dating Apps User Behaviour

An individual's wellbeing is significantly impacted by developing connections with others and participating in meaningful interactions with them. New methods of finding a spouse have been developed with the addition of online dating services to offline dating, and these methods may have an effect on the users' health and wellbeing. (Langert, n.d.-b) The evolution of technology has significantly altered romantic relationship dynamics as well as communication patterns. Through their numerous applications, smartphones' rapid adoption and technological advancements have altered how we interact with the outside world.

2.1 Psychological Impact

Making connections with others and engaging in meaningful interactions with them have a big impact on a person's wellbeing. According to the sociometer theory of Leary (2012), which is part of the evolutionary psychological perspective, people gauge their level of self-esteem based on how highly others regard them in their relationships and how socially accepted they are. (Liu & Zhang, 2016) As a result, having high levels of acceptance from others leads to high levels of self-esteem, whilst having low levels of acceptance from others will result in low levels of self-esteem.(Leary & Baumeister, 2000)("EVOLUTION OF ONLINE DATING: ANALYSIS OF DATING PREFERENCES, USER PSYCHOLOGY AND PAIN POINTS IN CONTEXT TO INDIAN MARKET," 2022)

Currently, the majority of online dating sites are set up so that customers may access all available partners that fit their search criteria (i.e., matches). To the best of our knowledge, all online dating services also enable usersto reverse their selections—that is, to switch out possible partners as often as they like. The choice architecture of online dating refers to the design elements that control how many matches online daters are connected to and whether they can supplant them. (D'Angelo & Toma, 2017)

2.2 Various Uses of Dating Apps

Various uses of dating app make sure to understand the companionship terminology in broader term where people Indulge not only in romantic relationships but also friendship via this app. On the other hand, there are a number of disadvantages to internet dating, including lies, incompatibility, etc.("EVOLUTION OF ONLINE DATING: ANALYSIS OF DATING PREFERENCES, USER PSYCHOLOGY AND PAIN POINTS IN CONTEXT TO INDIAN MARKET," 2022)

4. Possible reasons for the rise

The evolution of technology has significantly altered romantic relationship dynamics as well as communication patterns. (Roy & Rai, 2020) Connections and relationship formation have undergone a fundamental change with the advent of the Internet, online networking, and other advances. This is especially true when it comes to finding emotive or attached accomplices. Despite conventional dating, online dating platforms have established themselves as commonplace methods of meeting people. Web-based dating sites and adaptable dating apps are both parts of digital dating. Internet dating sites provide detailed profiles, find and evaluate lots of potential matches, and give users the option to search for specific requirements. (Chakraborty, 2019)
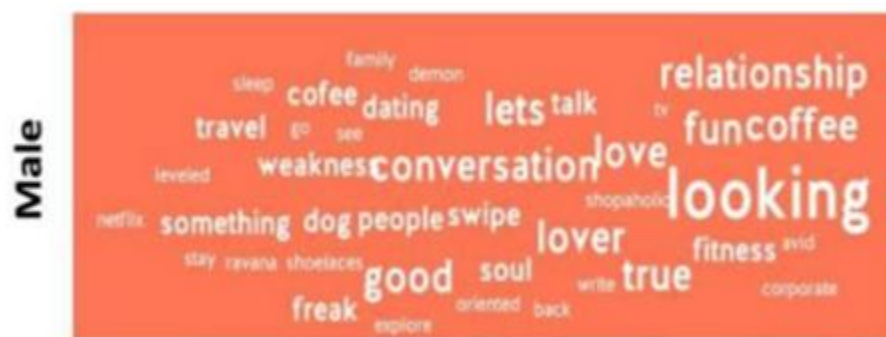
5. Understanding the digital romance

Online dating is not just a risky endeavour as well as an experiential setting. To genuinely meet someone online dating takes some time to discover the date. This lengthened interval between the process of decision-making should be clear to daters that the act of "consumption" (Loewenstein, 1987) In light of the psychological value of romance, we anticipate that they will use this time to processing in the mind. (D'Angelo & Toma, 2017) Online daters' optimistic assumptions of compatibility matching predicted better first dates regardless of how well the algorithms really functioned, according to Sharabi (2021) (Sharabi&Caughlin, 2019)

Similar results from OkCupid's user testing indicate that developers' attempts to design a trustworthy matching system may be hampered by placebo AI. Rudder (2014) reported a series of experiments in a blog post for Ok Trends in which good matches were misled into thinking they were compatible and bad matches were informed they were not (i.e., 30% matches were elevated to 90% and 90% matches were decreased to 30%). There were indications that OkCupid's algorithm worked, but it also worked to simply propose a compatible match. (Sharabi, 2022) Online dating has become convenient in today's busy world and provides a wider range of potential companions. A user of the dating app can establish a profile with images and a self-description.

6. Gender based behaviour difference

Men and women frequently have different expectations and perceptions of communicative signs making dating initiation a difficult stage in the growth of heterosexual love relationships. (DelGreco& Denes, 2020)

Younger adult men appear to be the most frequent users of online dating services in terms of usage. Men are more likely than women to use online dating as a result of sexual attraction. High sociability and high rejection sensitivity seem to be psychological traits that are linked to increased use of online dating services.

The above-mentioned comparative word cloud is a representation of the most common words used in profiles of based behaviour. (Chandra, n.d.)

An observation of difference between the male and female experience on the dating apps is the reactions. We believe that the anonymous nature of online dating sites also tends to make it easier for women to engage in heterosexual casual relationships given the significant social control exerted on female sexuality and the potentially transgressive nature of sexual relations for women outside of the context of a stable relationship. The men subscribed to the physical attractiveness stereotype, which said that more gregarious, poised, witty, and socially skilled women were expected to be more attractive than less attractive women. Those who believed they were speaking with an attractive lady on the phone tended to be friendlier and more outgoing than men who thought they were speaking with an unattractive woman. (Brandet al., 2012a) The women subsequently behaved in a manner that was similar to that of the men, behaving kinder and more sociably than the women in the "unattractive" condition. So, men made the presumption that attractive women would act in a socially acceptable manner and were friendlier to them as a result, which caused the women to react favourably and support the stereotype. (Brand et al., 2012b)

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study delves into the transition of urban Indian youth (18–30) in cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Pune from conventional to online dating apps. Through in-person or telephone interviews, the exploratory nature of the research aligns with the qualitative approach. A combination of stratified random sampling and snowball sampling is employed. Thematic analysis of gathered data aims to unveil patterns and codes, offering valuable insights into the driving forces behind this cultural shift.

ANALYSIS

Analysis of six qualitative interviews on the shift towards online dating in modern romance reveals eight key themes shaping digital connections.

1. **Influence of Peer Pressure:** Participants, like Aadhya and Sabah, were motivated by friends who shared positive experiences with dating apps, emphasizing the impact of peer recommendations on personal choices.

2. **Varied Experiences:** Online dating experiences ranged from negative to positive, highlighting the diverse nature of interactions influenced by factors such as app choice, specific interactions, and personal circumstances.

3. **Online Dating as a Safety Net:** The perception of online dating as a safety net, providing security and comfort, emerged in interviews, reflecting the evolving dynamics of dating in a world where in-person interactions carry uncertainties.

4. **Validation and Self-Esteem** – Psychological Impact: Validation and self-esteem played a significant role, with users like Saby deriving an ego boost from matches. The theme underscores the psychological aspects of dating apps and their impact on self-worth.

5. **Casual vs. Serious Intentions**- Relationship Status: Participants expressed varied intentions, from seeking serious relationships to casual dating or platonic connections, showcasing the flexibility of dating apps to cater to diverse user preferences.

6. **Abundance of Choices**- Reason for the Spike in Dating App Usage: The paradox of choice on dating apps was highlighted, where users may feel overwhelmed by numerous options, emphasizing the need for a balance between variety and user-friendly navigation.

7. **Digital Dependency**- Result of the Spike in Dating App Usage: The theme of digital dependency emerged, indicating a growing reliance on digital platforms for fulfilling social and emotional needs. Balance and mindfulness in app usage were stressed to foster healthy social lives.

8. **Online Dating as the New Normal**- Outcome of the Spike in Dating App Usage: The interviews suggested that online dating has become the "new normal," especially among younger generations, reflecting a societal shift towards accepting digital platforms as legitimate spaces for meeting potential partners.

CONCLUSION

The themes derived from the analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of the surge in dating app usage among young people in India. These findings delve into the intricacies of various aspects, enriching our comprehension of the contemporary digital dating scene.

Answering Research Questions

Motivations Driving Dating App Usage:

The study reveals motivations extending beyond romantic intentions, encompassing peer pressure, safety concerns, validation, and the paradox of choice. Dating apps serve as multipurpose platforms, intertwined with social dynamics and personal autonomy, reflecting a societal shift where they are seen as essential for various aspects of life.

User Experiences Influencing Retention:

Users' experiences vary widely, impacting their continued use of dating apps. Negative encounters, contrasted with positive ones fueled by fulfilling matches, demonstrate the complexity of factors influencing app usage. The abundance of options, safety features, and validation systems enhance user retention, emphasizing the intricate nature of variables affecting sustained app usage.

Dating Apps as the New Normal:

The analysis points to dating apps being accepted as the "new normal" in contemporary dating. Particularly among younger generations, these platforms have replaced traditional dating methods, becoming integral to modern dating practices. This signifies a paradigm shift, altering societal perceptions and expectations regarding how individuals seek relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consider Cultural Variations

Future studies should explore cultural differences in dating app acceptance and usage. Understanding how cultural contexts influence motives, behaviours, and perceptions can provide a more nuanced understanding of digital dating trends.

Indulge in Longitudinal Research

Conducting longitudinal research is essential to monitor how attitudes and behaviours evolve over time. This approach can offer insights into the sustainability of identified themes and how they adapt to changes in cultural standards, technology, and dating app features.

Emphasis on Features and App Design

Future research should focus on how specific app designs and functionalities impact user experiences. This can aid app developers in creating platforms that cater to diverse user goals, enhancing overall interaction quality while minimizing unfavourable experiences.

Incorporate User Satisfaction Measures

Incorporating quantitative measures to monitor user satisfaction and success rates is crucial. Variables such as the number of successful matches, user satisfaction surveys, and the durability of relationships formed via dating apps can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of these platforms.

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