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Abstract

This exam paper will research the relationship between online dating services and its users self-esteem and mental health. It will explain the impact online dating services have on its users mental health, and will mainly focus on the users of the modern day dating apps. With the researched material, the data will be used to produce a relevant research strategy to gather data from participants, aiming to get a deeper understanding of the research problem.

Introduction

This report will explain the chosen research topic, the planned steps to gather information and data, the research strategy to complete this task and why I choose this strategy, and in the end, a critical evaluation of why I chose this approach and its potential limitations and benefits.

Part I: Developing the research problem, aim and objective

“To pursue an unattainable goal is madness, but it is also what keeps us human”
- Akira Kurosawa *“Throne of Blood”* (1957)

In this part of the assignment I will present the chosen research topic, its intention and purpose, as well as the background of the topic.

Research problem

Humans are pack animals. Even the lone wolves. Either in a family, a group of friends or in a sexual relationship, we have the need to be with someone. A pack through genetics and heritage, or a tribe of our own choosing. We need to feel secure and safe. But what happens when the ship of relationship starts going aft? Do we change course or do we change shipmates? In modern day dating apps, on the digital dancefloor for courtship and the reproduction of our species, has there emerged a disposable culture of courtship and interaction? Do we treat our potential life partners as temporary sparring partners, and what is this doing to our mental health? The way dating apps work is that they don't want you to find love, but to stay on their apps, forever swiping and forever on the hunt for “that potential somebody”. To be exposed to more advertisements. To buy that premium membership. Has dating apps, with the promises of love and a potential soulmate, turned into online casinos, with its users' mental health as the currency? Are its users, as the American country singer Johnny Lee sang, *“looking for love in all the wrong places”*? The research problem that will be explored and explained, is as following:
(J.Lee, 1980, *“Lookin’ for Love”*)

How does the current online dating services affect its users' self-esteem and mental health?

This assignment will give a point of view for developers in the future, in order to make their product better, preserving the product's integrity and usage areas, as well as give the users a better understanding of the product and its experience. Companies and developers have understood that there is an enormous market for dating apps. And with a generation that keeps climbing on the statistical charts for single adults and involuntary childless people, this is a gold mine. How much has the capitalization of online dating made its mark on our view of love and how we interact with each other and ourselves? And is there an endpoint to this? The research in this assignment will be conducted to gain an understanding of how online dating has affected us, and what might help for users that are affected.

The aim and objective

Dating apps have been the subject of numerous studies regarding the psychological aspect the services provide, as well as the financial aspect. The key challenges will be to sift through the literary resources, in order to get an understanding of the problem and to gather the correct data, that will later be used in my research strategy.

The objective is to help developers of dating applications make a product that takes the mental health aspect of their users as a prioritisation, when creating these services. This research will also benefit the users, with data that will show the users of these services to be critical of the prolonged use, and complete reliability, on the services to find a potential romantic partner.

Physical feeling - digital handshake

The importance of this study is not only for people that are struggling to physically meet other people, due to speech impediments or various social anxieties, but also for people who are feeling more alone than before, and are not sure how to approach dating in the digital age. Online dating removes these obstacles and makes it easier to initialise the first digital handshake. Users of these online services have reported an increase in self-esteem confidence after being able to choose whom they would like to meet, and how to present themselves in their individual profile. They also reported an increase in overcoming the initial fear of how to start a conversation, when all physical objects were removed. Besides the mentioned pros, people also now are able to connect with like-minded people, who share the same belief and perception of the current dating market and its difficulties. But what about the rest who are struggling?
(Hotdatingxx, 2023)

Part II: Discovering and applying existing knowledge

"Without data, you're just another person with an opinion"
- W. Edwards Deming

The first match is lit

Online dating started with Match.com in 1995, and resulted in what might be described as a romantic revolution in how humans interact with each other, and connect with strangers. In the USA, they registered an increase in interracial couples, along with an enormous increase in couples of the same sex.

The Match.com logo, featuring the word "match" in a dark blue serif font, followed by a small heart symbol.

After Match.com, there was the LGBTQ-focused app, Grindr, that made its entrance with the introduction of the iPhone 3G. Where Match introduced dating across the internet, Grindr was the first of



its kind that also used geolocation for its users, making a potential date not so far away.

MySpace, followed by FaceBook and Instagram, in the early 2000's became popular, before the titan of the online dating world landed on the market in 2012: Tinder. With 75 million users, in 190 countries, Tinder made online dating available to anyone with a smartphone, and solidified its position as ruling monarch in online dating services.

(Kayla Kuefler, 2024)



New and existing knowledge - the plan

The plan to complete the research problem will be to produce a survey, followed by a questionnaire. To be able to produce a relevant questionnaire that will cover all the necessary points in the research problem, I will gather information and resources from the internet. I will use news articles and research-/medical articles that span both the pros and cons of online dating, in order to get a proper understanding of what questions need to be asked. All the sources will be critically reviewed. This is to establish the validity and credibility of the article. I.E, if an article doesn't appear to have an author or valid source, the article will not be used for gathering data. All articles will be checked for publication date, to validate that they are updated on the technical aspects, and the usage, of the apps and online services. The result will be shown in a table below, with its author, year of publication, focus, method and relevance to the research problem. At the end of this part, there will be a summary, where I will summarize what I have learned from the revised material.

Keywords and strategy

I will outline keywords that I will base my research around, and with these keywords I will be able to narrow down the research material down to the core of what I want to base my research strategy on. The keywords will be displayed below, with concepts that correlate to the research problem, shown in a label.

(Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.86)

I will use boolean operators for the conductive search, and show screenshots taken from my device, to display the given result to the query.

Keywords	Concept	Concept	Concept
Self-esteem	Online self-esteem	Social media platforms	Impact on self-esteem
Online dating	User experience in dating apps	Profile presentation	Matching algorithm

For the online databases, I will use JSTOR and Google Scholar, both respected for their validity and large amounts of data. These databases both contain large repositories, as well as a good search engine, if I was to dive deeper into the research material.

Google Scholar search results for "online dating and self esteem". The search bar shows the query and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it indicates "Artikler" and "Omtrent 230 000 resultater (0,11 sek)". The first result is titled "The Relationship between Online Dating, Self-Esteem and Body Image" by E. Malz, dated 2020, from essay.utwente.nl. The snippet mentions "online dating" usage, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and self-esteem levels. Links for "Lagre", "Referanse", "Siter av 2", "Beslektede artikler", and "Alle 2 versjoner" are provided.

(Figure 1. Google Scholar)

JSTOR search results for "online dating and self-esteem". The JSTOR logo is on the left. The search bar shows the query and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it indicates "All Content" and "Images" tabs. The search results section shows "4 704 results" and a "Refine Results" button.

(Figure 2. JSTOR)

IEEE Xplore search results for "online dating and self esteem". The IEEE Xplore logo is at the top. The search bar shows the query and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, it indicates "Showing 1 of 1 result for online dating and self esteem". A checkbox for "Conferences (1)" is visible.

(Figure 3. IEEE Xplore)

As shown in the images above, the chosen database provides more resources for the given research topic, than IEEE, which only contains one (1) article regarding the topic. This is due to IEEE being a more technical database, with largely focus on the programming/code literature of IS (Information Systems). Google Scholar and JSTOR are large repositories that are both technical and humanistic in their content, allowing a much broader horizon to scale in search for information.

To further gather research material, I will use boolean operators (*AND, OR and NOT if necessary*) to narrow down the research material available. This is due to the aspect of saving time with needless browsing and filtration through the potential research material.

Example	Outcome
Online dating	Results contain words such as apps, self presentation, mate selection, casual sex
Online dating AND self esteem	Best results contain both keywords, and single keyword
Online dating OR offline dating	Results contain both words in nearly all the material
Matching algorithm NOT online dating	Results contain both words, but with much less material

As shown in the table above, the best outcome for searching the topic is by using the boolean operator AND for the search parameter “*Online dating AND self esteem*”.

Initial Result

Title	Author(s)	Year	Relevance	Notes
How to Use Dating Apps Without Hurting Your Mental Health, According to Experts	Jamie Ducharme, <i>Time Magazine</i>	2018	Yes	Discusses both the positive and negative sides of using dating apps
Dating app: could your self-esteem be at risk?	Millar, H., & Yabsley C., <i>HCF</i>	Upd. 2023	No	Minimal relevance, except three statistical facts
The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating, page 2	Anderson, M., Vogels, E.A., & Turner, E., <i>Pew Research Center</i>	Feb 6, 2020	Yes	Good coverage of aspects of online dating and it's users
How dating apps fuel low-self esteem	Noel Bell, <i>Counselling Directory</i>	July 21, 2021	Partly	Mostly focused on getting help and counselling
Dating Apps and Their Sociodemographic and Psychosocial Correlates	Ángel Castro and Juan Ramón Barrada, <i>PubMed Central</i>	Sept 7, 2020	Yes	Extensive article on users on dating apps, with several research results
Satisfaction with online dating app depends on what you're looking for	Nina Bai, <i>Stanford Medicine</i>	July 3, 2023	Yes	Result in both online, and offline, dating

Literary review - the summary

After reviewing the literature related to the research problem, there is clear evidence of the symbiotic relationship between online dating (especially the modern day apps) and the self-esteem and mental health of its users. Most of the dating services have become gamified, making it more of a casino app, than a dating service. Some of the data gathered were both negative and positive. The common denominator for positive experiences with the usage of dating apps, were related to people with social anxiety, speech impediments or other obstacles rendering them unable to approach people in real life. With the dating apps, these people could connect more easily with people that share interests or hobbies.

With its main purpose of helping humans find a partner, the company that manages the apps and services are not strangers to the fact that they don't make their money on people in relationships, unless the couple are looking for a third person to include in their arrangement (kink/fetish or polyamorous relationships).

In one of the articles, there was an increase in positive reactions from users who had tried offline dating (social activities, mutual friends, spontaneous meetings), compared to users who used online dating services.

(Nina Bai, 2023)

What the data showed that was equal for both and female/male, was

- The matching algorithm was important for how the user experienced the dating apps
- Prolonged use of dating apps could cause a strain on the users real-time face to face relationships
- The users were often on more than one dating app
- Pressure to be a "perfect" version of oneself
- Lack of matches, and messages from matches, contributed negatively to the user
- User that had underlying mental health issues are more prone to be affected negatively by the use of dating apps (anxiety, trust issues, self-esteem, depression)
- Users are more at risk of experiencing a negative effect, with apps that are designed with an evaluating behaviour for its users (likes, matches etc)
- Daily users are even more at risk to experience symptoms of distress or depression
- First dates could be disappointment

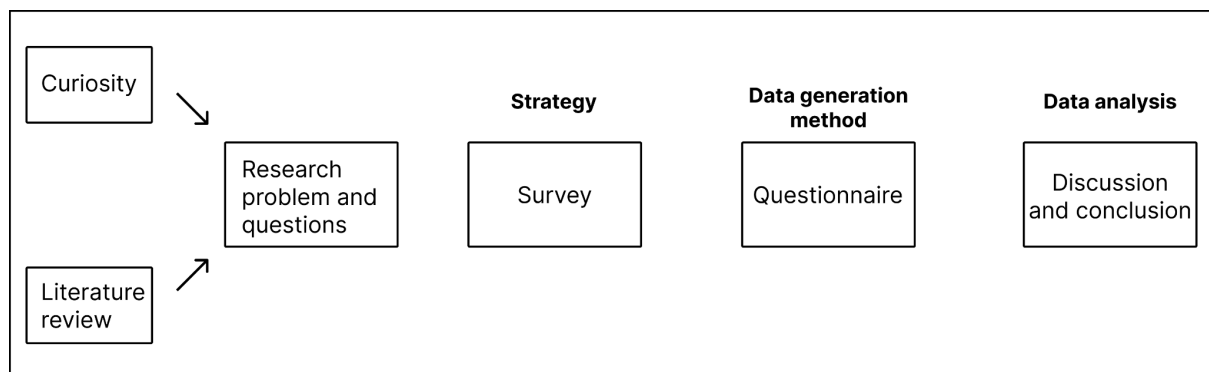
Most of the users reported having mostly positive experience with the platforms, but also having felt more frustrated than hopeful.

Part III: Constructing your research strategy

"You will find only what you bring in"

- Yoda, *"Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back"* (1980)

For the gathering of data for the research topic, I have chosen to use a questionnaire as the method for gathering data. Having experienced good results with this method of gathering data on previous exams, this seemed like the best strategy to also reach people in online groups and abroad. Below is the research model I have chosen to follow, and the steps I will have to take, in order to gather the proper data.



(Illustration 1. Inspired by the research model from Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.34)

The first three points (*curiosity, literature review and research problem and questions*) are the initial steps in the data gathering process. My own curiosity made me want to research this problem, based on friends and colleagues that are struggling to find a romantic partner on the dating apps. The second step is to *review the literature*, to review what is valid in terms of necessity to form questions for the questionnaire. The goal of reviewing the literature is to enable the complete understanding of the problem, with critical evaluation to fully make use of the data needed to be gathered from the questionnaire.

Survey

The survey will be performed with an online questionnaire, by using Microsoft Forms as the template. Microsoft Forms offer a variety of designs and layout, along with different ways for participants to answer the survey (comments, polls, scales). The reason for selecting survey as a research strategy is due to its ability to reach a large group of people at a relatively low cost of both time and resources. The survey will mostly generate quantitative data, due to the potential large amounts of answers being provided, and a small amount of qualitative data, with in-depth questions regarding some subjects (mental health). All the questions in the questionnaire will have direct relation to the topic and the research literature. The data collection will be focused on topics related to the material gathered from the literary review to get a comprehensive understanding of the generated data. (Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.99)

The questionnaire

The questionnaire will be self-administered, meaning the participants will not be observed while filling out the form, and they can fill it out when they feel they have the time and place to do so. The questionnaire will be available for seven (7) days, giving the participants enough time to complete it at their own time and pace. By the beginning of the questionnaire, there will be a brief introduction of the topic for the questions, and the estimated time duration for the completion of the survey, along with information about the participants anonymity with regards to their answers and personal information. With a web based survey, the participants anonymity is intact due to the fact that they don't need to enter either a username or an e-mail address to gain access to the survey. The questions will start with factual data (gender, age, demographic) and a variety of both closed- and open questions, giving the participants both the possibility to give extensive comments, and select from a pre-given set of answers.

(Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.227)

The questions will be

- **Brief** - in order to avoid confusion regarding the question and its context. This is also to avoid the participants becoming bored of long, explanatory questions.
- **Specific** - so that the participants know what they are answering
- **Objective** - to keep the question clear from distractions, with no non-leading or double meaning questions
- **Relevant** - all questions are shaped in the aspect of the research topic

Some of the questions included will be:

- Age and sex
- Demographic
- Relationship status
- Number of dating apps or online dating services you are using
- Self esteem before and after using service
- Level of anxiousness when using service
- Rate positive feeling after using services
- Rate negative feeling after using services
- Has online dating services affected your self esteem?
- Has online dating services changed your view on dating?
- Does the matching algorithm affect how you view the app?
- What would make you feel better when using online dating services?

The participants


I will use social media to locate the individuals that want to participate in the questionnaire. On LinkedIn I will create a post that will shortly explain that this is in the context of an examination assignment, and I would gladly appreciate the help. This will mostly focus on my professional and occupational network and connections.



The next SoMe-platform I will use to gather data is FaceBook. On this platform there are several groups, dedicated to single people, that span the entire globe.




With groups that include several thousands members, this could be a possible good place to gather a massive amount of data. I also believe that most of the users on SoMe have knowledge about dating apps and its uses, or atleast its existence. Below are groups that could include potential participants.



Single People Searching
 Private · 25K members

Join




ONLINE DATING INTERNATIONAL FOR SINGLE
 Private · 274K members · 5 posts a day

Join

Reddit is an online community where users can share hobbies, stories or interests. I managed to find their group dedicated to online dating, with 150 thousand members. This is an open community, unlike the FaceBook groups for which you have to apply to get in. The online group seemed to be a very strict and coordinated group, with strict rules and guidelines for the members.





r/OnlineDating

+ Create Post

Join

Hot ▾

Community highlights

RULES Update...Read before posting or commenting!
 39 votes · 54 comments

Online Dating
 Everything about online dating - your amusing stores, advice, and encouragement when you need it.
 Created Dec 3, 2008
 Public
150K Members
46 Online

Testing

Before I send out the survey, I will need to test it, to look for potential errors I might have overlooked. This is also a very good opportunity to evaluate if the participants find it difficult to understand the survey's purpose, and where they find it difficult. Does the pre-defined answers properly cover the potential response? Is the questionnaire too big, does it take too much time, and do the participants get bored while completing the survey?

(Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.236)

The first draft of the questionnaire will be sent out to friends that are familiar with my research problem, and fellow students, who are also working on their own research topic.

Questionnaire draft

A draft of the questionnaire consisting of twelve (12) questions is available in the appendix. All the images used for questions are AI-generated.

Part IV: Critically evaluating your approach

"There are no facts, only interpretations"
- Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

This approach aims to demonstrate that the chosen research strategy will showcase the key points that validate the research problem. Starting with a thorough and critically literary review, followed by a survey and a questionnaire aimed at the correct platforms, with testing to check for flaws or errors in the questionnaire, this approach will generate data that will conclude in the completion of this project and its research problem.

The limitations of the chosen strategy are related to its participants. Since this project is aimed at the online dating services, and the consequences it has on its users, the project will only highlight the data being provided, and not go deeper into what will potentially help each individual. For that to be completed, there would need to be a separate research strategy, mainly focused on generating qualitative data with an experiment and in-depth interviews of its participants.

The ethics of this project will be explained to the participants at the beginning of the survey. A precise description of the research topic will be explained, as well as the purpose of the research topic. They will be informed that this is an anonymous survey, their personal data will not be published on the internet for others to see, and that they are free to withdraw, if they should change their mind during the process. This is of the utmost importance, for the establishment of transparency and trust, between the involved parties.

(Oates, B. J., Griffiths, M., & McLean, R. p.68)

The results shown in this project can help not only developers of online service apps, but also its users, to be cautious when using these platforms, and to be observant of the potential toll it takes on its users' mental health. With the results produced, it would prompt the developers to make the finished online service more valuable to its users. This ensures that not only are the users romantic interests considered, but also their mental health, well being, and the app's and its developers integrity.

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Illustrations

Illustration 1

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