



The Role of Dating Apps in Shaping Relationship Dynamics Among Young Adults: A Comparative Study of Trust, Communication, and Emotional Intimacy

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Abstract: In the contemporary digital age, romantic relationships are increasingly influenced by virtual platforms, with dating applications emerging as a primary means of interpersonal connection among young adults. Given that emotional intimacy, trust, and communication are fundamental components of romantic relationships, it is essential to examine the impact of digital platforms on these dynamics. This research aimed to examine trust, communication, and emotional closeness levels between young adult users and non-users of dating apps. A total of 154 participants, comprising 77 users and 77 non-users, were selected using purposive sampling. This research utilised a quantitative, comparative design, with data analysed by independent samples t-tests. Data gathering utilised standardised instruments: the Trust Scale (Rempel et al., 1985), the Communication Patterns Questionnaire – Short Form (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984), and the Intimacy Scale of the Emotional Dimension (ISOTED) (Euckie I, 2022). The findings indicated no statistically significant disparities in trust, communication, or emotional intimacy between users of dating applications and non-users. The findings indicate that the quality of romantic relationships may be more affected by personal and relational variables than by the platform used to meet partners.

Keywords: *Dating Applications, Trust, Communication, Emotional Intimacy, Young*

*Adults, Romantic Relationships***1. Introduction**

Dating applications, often referred to as “dating apps,” serve as mobile or web-based platforms aimed at fostering romantic, sexual, or emotional connections among individuals.

These applications employ algorithmic matching, utilise location services, and incorporate user-input preferences to identify potential partners. Platforms such as Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and OkCupid have transformed the methods by which individuals begin and participate in romantic relationships, particularly among the younger demographic.

Dating apps have become a global phenomenon, attracting millions of users due to their ease of use, availability, and game-like interaction design. These apps often rely on limited information, such as images or shared interests, to create connections, facilitating rapid decision-making but also encouraging cursory evaluations. However, the high volume of potential matches can lead to "choice overload," as users engage in ongoing comparisons, enhancing opportunities but diminishing satisfaction. Individuals approach dating apps with varying objectives, such as seeking enduring relationships or fleeting interactions, resulting in a lack of clarity regarding intentions.

Dating apps offer inclusivity for marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals, who often struggle to find partners in traditional social environments. They transform dating apps into platforms for exploring identity and fostering social connections. However, research suggests that these apps may foster transient connections, weaken emotional investment, and raise concerns about emotional safety and authenticity. In India, dating apps represent a cultural transformation as young individuals balance traditional expectations with contemporary ideals of independence and affection. They serve as arenas for negotiating cultural values alongside personal freedom.

Trust in Relationship

Trust represents a psychological condition where an individual is prepared to expose themselves to potential risk, grounded in optimistic beliefs regarding the intentions or actions of another (Rousseau et al., 1998). In romantic relationships, trust serves as a fundamental element that nurtures emotional security, alleviates relational anxiety, and establishes a sense of predictability. This allows individuals to exchange personal experiences, establish long-term commitments, and manage conflicts without the apprehension of betrayal or emotional damage.

In dating scenarios, particularly those that begin online, trust emerges as a multifaceted element. The digital medium introduces a level of separation and uncertainty that may hinder or alter the establishment of trust. Establishing trust in online environments frequently necessitates the implementation of compensatory strategies such as regular messaging, video conferencing, or behaviours aimed at seeking validation.

1.2 *Communication in Relationship*

Communication involves the sharing of both verbal and non-verbal information among individuals. The process encompasses the exchange of thoughts and emotions, the management of conflicts, the expression of affection, and the articulation of needs. In digital dating environments, communication predominantly relies on text or asynchronous methods, frequently missing elements such as body language, vocal tone, or facial expressions. This may result in misunderstandings, emotional disconnection, or excessively crafted identities. Furthermore, dating applications facilitate swift and concurrent interactions, allowing users to engage with several individuals at once — thereby diminishing the focus and depth of relationships. In spite of these limitations, digital communication provides a space for emotional safety and practice — individuals can thoughtfully construct their messages, alleviate anxiety, and progressively reveal themselves

1.3 *Emotional Intimacy in Relationships*

Emotional intimacy pertains to the degree of emotional connection, mutual understanding, and psychological closeness experienced between partners. This process encompasses the sharing of personal experiences, the expression of vulnerability, and the engagement in profound emotional exchanges. High emotional intimacy correlates with enhanced attachment bonds, greater trust, and enduring relational commitment (Laurenceau et al., 2005). Traditional methods of building relationships typically depend on in-person interactions to foster intimacy; however, digital environments necessitate different approaches to achieve closeness.

Trust is crucial in romantic relationships, providing psychological safety and emotional openness. Young adults explore their identity, seek independence, and adapt to changing expectations. Trust-building begins in early life and evolves in young adulthood, with factors like attachment style, past experiences, self-esteem, and mental well-being influencing it. The digital era introduces complexities to trust-building.

Effective communication is crucial in romantic relationships, involving tone, body language, and empathy. Young adults navigate these complexities, developing interpersonal skills. Emotional intimacy is essential for psychological closeness and understanding, but

presents challenges like emotional literacy, vulnerability apprehension, attachment insecurities, and inadequate relational frameworks.

2. Review of Literature

Finkel et al. (2012) aim was to examine the impact of online dating systems on the outcomes and processes of romantic relationships. The investigation employed a thorough meta-analysis and review methodology, concentrating on empirical data sourced from established dating platforms. The authors discovered that while dating apps enhanced the availability of potential partners, they frequently compromised the quality of long-term relationships because of choice overload and superficial self-presentation. The study highlighted that although technological advancements have altered the process of mate selection, the importance of psychological and emotional compatibility continues to be fundamental.

Hobbs, Owen, and Gerber's (2017) aim were to investigate if the utilization of digital dating and hook-up applications signifies a wider evolution in intimacy, as posited by Zygmunt Bauman in *Liquid Love*. Utilizing Bauman's assertion that individualization and technology advancements have "liquefied" conventional partnerships, the authors examined how dating applications influence users' experiences and alter their perceptions of monogamy, long-term relationships, and sexual behaviors. The study revealed, via qualitative inquiry, that dating apps serve as intermediates of networked intimacy, enabling users to participate in strategic self-presentation and design encounters that correspond with their romantic or sexual objectives. Some users regarded app culture as superficial or commodified, while others considered it a beneficial transformation that provided increased agency and diversity in the pursuit of intimacy. The authors challenge excessively negative perceptions regarding dating apps, proposing that "networked intimacy" fosters novel types of significant connection instead of diminishing conventional romance.

Chan's (2017) objective was to explore the impact of online trust, sensation-seeking behaviour, and smartphone usage on the intention to utilise dating apps for romantic and sexual engagements, grounded in the Integrative Model of Behavioural Prediction. Data from a survey involving 257 heterosexual men and women were gathered and subjected to analysis through structural equation modelling. The results indicated that, in the pursuit of romance, attitudes and perceived norms were significant predictors of intent, while the connections between personal traits (trust, sensation-seeking, smartphone use) and intent were completely mediated. In the pursuit of casual sexual encounters, attitudes and self-efficacy were found to

be significant predictors of intent, while smartphone usage exhibited both direct and indirect influences. The relationship between sensation-seeking and smartphone usage was found to be directly linked to intentions in both romantic and sexual scenarios. The investigation highlights the theoretical value of behavioural prediction models in the realm of digital dating and provides actionable suggestions for app developers and public health initiatives.

Timmermans and Courtois's (2018) aim was to investigate the influence of Tinder's platform mechanics—such as swiping, matching, and initiating conversations—on users' offline sexual and romantic engagements. The research examined 1,038 Belgian Tinder users to assess usage habits and their relational consequences. Research indicated that the frequency of swiping did not inherently result in an increased number of matches; women garnered more matches, although men predominantly began conversations. Fewer than fifty percent of the participants had shifted to in-person meetings; yet, of those who did, over one-third resulted in casual sexual encounters, while more than a quarter culminated in serious partnerships. These findings contest the prevailing notion that Tinder is solely a "hookup app," indicating that hookups may facilitate the transition to serious relationships in a culture where dating frequently initiates with casual encounters. The study emphasises Tinder as a multifaceted relational environment, including both short-term and long-term romantic prospects influenced by digital interaction conventions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to assess the differences in levels of trust, communication and emotional intimacy between dating app users and non-users.

3.2 Research Objectives

- a) To assess the differences in levels of trust between users and non-users of dating applications.
- b) To evaluate the differences in communication patterns between dating app users and non-users.
- c) To examine the variation in emotional intimacy among dating app users and non-users.

3.3 Hypothesis

- 1) There will be a significant difference in the levels of trust, communication and emotional intimacy between dating app users and non-users in young adult

relationship.

- 2) There will be a significant difference in trust levels between dating app users and non-users.
- 3) There will be a significant difference in communication levels between dating app users and non-users.
- 4) There will be a significant difference in emotional intimacy between dating app users and non-users.

3.4 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional, comparative quantitative methodology. The primary objective was to examine and compare the levels of trust, communication, and emotional closeness in romantic relationships among young adults who are users and non-users of dating applications.

3.5 Sample

In the present study, the population comprises young adults within the age range of 18-30 years, either in or having past romantic relationships. A total sample of 154 participants (77 users and 77 non-users) was selected using a purposive sampling method. The study employs quantitative data collection.

3.6 Measures

Trust Scale (Rempel & Holmes, 1986): The Trust Scale, created by Rempel and Holmes (1986), is a recognised tool for assessing trust in intimate interpersonal interactions, especially in romantic engagements. This scale defines trust as a multifaceted construct, including predictability, dependability, and confidence in one's partner. The Trust Scale comprises 18 items evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale, from strong disagreement to strong agreement. Elevated scores indicate increased trust in the partner and the relationship. The scale is extensively utilised in social and relationship psychology research because of its robust psychometric attributes, featuring good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha between 0.80 and 0.90) and construct validity. This study employed the measure to compare trust levels in romantic relationships between dating app users and non-users.

Communication Pattern Questionnaire- Short Form: Christensen and Sullaway developed the Communication Patterns Questionnaire – Short Form (CPQ-SF), a tool designed to evaluate couples' communication patterns in their relationships. The CPQ-SF, consisting of 11 items scored on a 9-point Likert scale, focuses on communication dynamics such as constructive communication, demand-withdraw patterns, and avoidance. This instrument is crucial in studying romantic relationships, as communication significantly impacts happiness, trust, and closeness. The

CPQ-SF has shown strong internal consistency and reliability, making it an ideal tool for evaluating communication patterns among young people.

Intimacy Scale of the Emotional Dimension: The Intimacy Scale of the Emotional Dimension (ISO-ED) is a tool used to assess emotional intimacy in interpersonal interactions, particularly in romantic contexts. It consists of 14 items evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, assessing an individual's perceived emotional intimacy and receptiveness to their partner. The ISO-ED is reliable and valid for research and therapeutic applications due to its strong psychometric qualities. This study used the ISO-ED to compare emotional intimacy between dating program users and non-users, providing insights into the depth of emotional connections in romantic relationships.

4. Results

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
User and Non- Users	154	1	2	1.50	.502
Communication Pattern	154	9	81	42.78	10.620
Trust Scale	154	45	120	79.84	14.945
Intimacy Scale	154	18	70	52.92	9.522

Table 2: *Independent Sample t-Test for Trust*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Users	77	77.92	14.61	-1.599	152	0.112
Non- users	77	81.75	15.12			

Table 2 indicates no significant difference was found in trust levels between users and non- users of dating application. The p-value (.112) is greater than the threshold of 0.05, indicating that dating app usage does not significantly affect trust in romantic relationships.

Table 3: *Independent Sample t-Test for Communication*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Users	77	43.00	12.54	0.257	152	0.797
Non- users	77	42.56	8.34			

Table 3 reveals no significant difference in communication scores between users and

non- users. The high p-value (.797) suggests that communication patterns in romantic relationships are not meaningfully influenced by dating app usage.

Table 4: *Independent Sample t-Test for Emotional Intimacy*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value
Users	77	51.70	10.34	-1.599	152	0.112
Non- users	77	54.14	8.51			

The table shows no significant difference was in found in emotional intimacy levels between users and non-users. Although non-users scored slightly higher, the p-value (.112) indicates that this difference is not statistically significant.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the influence of dating program usage on the quality of romantic relationships among young adults, specifically examining trust, communication, and emotional intimacy. The primary hypothesis posited a substantial disparity in all three relational characteristics between users and non-users of dating applications. Furthermore, three distinct hypotheses were established to evaluate the variations in each variable separately. The statistical analysis employing independent samples t-tests indicated no significant differences in any of the studied variables, thus failing to support any of the offered hypotheses.

The initial hypothesis proposed a substantial disparity in trust levels between users of dating applications and non-users. The findings indicated that non-users ($M = 81.75$, $SD = 15.12$) exhibited marginally higher mean trust scores than users ($M = 77.92$, $SD = 14.61$); however, this discrepancy was not statistically significant ($t(152) = -1.599$, $p = .112$). This indicates that the use of dating apps does not intrinsically improve or reduce trust in romantic relationships. These findings contest prior beliefs, including those posited by Finkel et al. (2012), who proposed that the anonymity and plethora of options on dating applications would hinder the establishment of trust. The statistics indicate that trust is mostly influenced by relational consistency, partner response, and prior experiences rather than the platform that initiated the interaction.

The second hypothesis stated that communication patterns would considerably differ between users of dating apps and non-users. The study revealed no significant difference between users ($M = 43.00$, $SD = 12.54$) and non-users ($M = 42.56$, $SD = 8.34$), with $t(152)$

$= 0.257$ and $p = .797$. This discovery suggests that the method of relationship initiation does not significantly influence pair communication. Despite the initiation of relationships using dating apps, the study findings indicate that these digital contacts do not result in significant variations in offline communication within established relationships. The findings correspond with the perspectives of Hall et al. (2010), who highlighted the impact of individual and dyadic factors—such as emotional intelligence, personality, and interpersonal values—on technology media in determining communication behaviors.

The third hypothesis investigated disparities in emotional intimacy between the two groups. Non-users ($M = 54.14$, $SD = 8.51$) had somewhat higher scores than users ($M = 51.70$, $SD = 10.34$), although the difference lacked statistical significance ($t(152) = -1.599$, $p = .112$). This indicates that the use of dating apps neither substantially improves nor detracts from emotional intimacy in romantic relationships. Although prior literature (e.g., Hobbs et al., 2017) indicates that digital platforms might enhance emotional expression and self-disclosure during the initial phases of dating, the results of this study do not demonstrate that these dynamics endure or lead to markedly different levels of long-term intimacy.

Ultimately, the overarching hypothesis—that users of dating applications would markedly vary from non-users in terms of trust, communication, and emotional intimacy—was not substantiated. No statistically significant differences were seen across all three dimensions. The results indicate that although dating apps provide a contemporary means for mate introduction, they may not significantly impact the fundamental attributes of romantic partnerships. This indicates that the quality of romantic relationships is more profoundly influenced by interpersonal, emotional, and contextual aspects than by the media via which couples are introduced.

This study concluded that the use of dating applications does not substantially affect young adults' experiences of trust, communication, or emotional intimacy in their romantic relationships. These findings highlight the necessity of examining the relational dynamics that emerge post-relationship formation, rather than merely the method of partner introduction.

6. Conclusion

The study examined the impact of dating applications on relationship dynamics among young adults, focusing on trust, communication, and emotional closeness. Contrary to initial hypotheses, no significant changes were found in trust, communication, or emotional intimacy between users and non-users. The findings suggest that interpersonal factors, such as individual values, emotional intelligence, communication skills, and previous relational

experiences, significantly influence relationship quality more than the medium through which partners connect. The findings have implications for clinical practice and relationship education, emphasizing the need to focus on relational dynamics and emotional competencies in successful relationships.

6.1 Limitations

- a) Sample size: the study had 154 participants; a larger and more diverse sample could improve generalizability.
- b) Self-Report Bias: The data relied on self-report measures, which are prone to social desirability or response bias.
- c) Cross-Sectional Design: The study design only captured data at one point in time, limiting casual inferences.
- d) Limited Demographics: The study didn't control for factors like gender, relationship.

6.2 Future Recommendations

Longitudinal studies should evaluate trust and intimacy in digital vs. traditional relationships, using qualitative interviews to understand quantitative scores. Comparative studies can examine specific apps or distinguish casual and serious users. Future studies may analyze variables like attachment style, relationship duration, and gender identity, and cultural or regional diversity to understand family values and social norms.

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