Original Article

Self-presentation of males and females in an online dating application: A profile analysis from north India

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Abstract

This study was aimed to explore how males and females self-present themselves in an online dating mobile application. We selected consecutive 50 males and 50 female heterosexual profiles from an online dating application in west Delhi (India). A descriptive data analysis was done for socio-demographic details, profile picture and self-description. Males present themselves with details about their work, and they tend to show costly items/body muscles/outing/sports pictures in their profile. Notably taller males mentioned about their height. Males also mentioned about the alcohol/smoking status and favourite music. Females usually kept a selfie in a western outfit with fewer details in self-description. Both the sexes were equally descriptive and used similar words in their self-description. The purpose mentioned by both the sexes was to look for a lover in the dating application. These findings of this study can help in understanding the differences between males and females in their self-presentation on an online dating platform.

Introduction

Love is one of the needs of a human, as often said that human is a social animal (Maslow, 1943). Finding a potential life partner is a big task, which completes the circle of life. With

the advent of the internet and mobile, searching for a partner through online dating or matrimony websites/applications has become prevalent (Finkel et al., 2012). Websites are the web pages accessed through a web browser in laptop/mobile. An application is a software or program accessed by installation in the mobiles/tablets for regular use. Matrimony applications/sites are for people to search for a life partner for marriage. While dating applications/sites are for people to date each other for a romantic

or sexual relationship, which may or may not lead to an off-line relationship (either romantic or non-romantic). Some ties may lead to long term relationship or friendship and may or may not result in marriage.

The use of dating applications among young adults is wide spread mainly in western countries and now becoming more popular in countries like India. The widespread information, communication technology coupled with the emergence of business websites for computer dating, paved the way and offered a new avenue for exploring and establishing new romantic relationships. The purpose of dating application may range from both casual and serious romantic relationships (Lykens et al., 2019) or for lonely adults to use it for meeting new people (Berk & Myers, 2016). In today's busy life, online dating has become convenient, and it offers an expanded pool of partners to choose from. The dating application allows a user to create his/her profile with pictures and self-description. These applications use artificial intelligence/algorithm to display the user with their potential mates. The user decides to show his/her interest based on the profile picture and the self-description of the individual. When both the users show interest in each other, then only interaction can take place among them(Levy et al., 2019). As said 'the first impression is the last impression', a user has to create a socially desirable profile in which a large number of potential partners shows interest. Males and females have certain biological and social differences, which are reflected in their behaviour and preferences (Halpern et al., 2007). While choosing a mate, personal preferences and numerous factors play a vital role (Buss, 1989). Males and females have a distinct way to charm the opposite sex. Limited studies have captured the differences among sexes in an online dating application. This study was aimed to explore how males and females self-present themselves in a dating application in northern India.

Methodology

This was a descriptive study done in West Delhi (North India). In this study, we analysed the dating profiles from a dating application. We chose an application based on popularity. We included consecutive 50 males and 50 female heterosexual profiles. We did not exclude any profile. In the search setting; the age range was 18 to 55+ years, and the maximum distance was 20 km nearby. The data were extracted on 15th September 2019 under the following variables - age, job, description, number of pictures, details of the photograph, self-description. Each profile was de-identified by giving a code to it, and the confidentiality of the data was maintained. No picture was saved or captured. Data were directly entered in a data extraction sheet (in MS Excel) from the profile, and data analysis was done using STATA 13. Descriptive analysis was done for male and female profiles under the headings of socio-demographic details, profile pictureand self-description of profile. Chi-square test was used for the test of significance. Differences with a p-value <0.05 were considered statistically significant. For word counting and word cloud formation, we used the 'word counter' for the analysis (Data Basic, n.d.).

Results
Socio-demographic details

We analysed fifty male and fifty female profiles. Age was mentioned by 88% of males and 100% of females. The median age (IQR) for males and females was 25.5yrs (IQR 24 - 27.5) and 24.5yrs (IQR 19 - 26), respectively. Compared to females, a higher number of males provided the link/ ID of their social media accounts (40%) like Instagram ID or Snapchat ID, mentioned their affiliated college/company (60%) and mentioned their occupation(66%) (Table1). Most of the dating profiles were of students (61.7%).

Table 1- Socio-demographic details of the dating profiles

Socio-demographic Profile	Male (n=50)	Female(n=50)
Mentioned age	44 (88%)	50 (100%)
Median age (IQR)	24.5yrs (IQR 19 – 26)	25.5yrs (IQR 24 – 27.5)
Provided link/ID of another social account	20(40%)	15 (30%)
Mentioned the name of their affiliated college or company	30 (60%)	21 (42%)
Mentioned occupation	33 (66%)	27 (54%)
Student	14 (42.4%)	23 (85.1%)
Doctor	1	0
Lawyer	2	0
Charted accounted	1	0
Analyst	5	0
Manager	5	2
Engineer	1	1
Teacher	0	1
Pilot	1	0
Actor/ Model	1	0
Builder	1	0
Interior designer	1	0

Table 2- Details of display pictures of profiles

Display Pictures of Profiles	Male (n=50)	Female (n=50)
Display profile was available	50 (100%)	49 (98%)
Number of photos posted/displayed [Median (IQR)]	6 (IQR 4 – 7)	4 (IQR 2 – 5)
Used someone else's picture or displayed a quote (misrepresentation)	1	1
Selfie*	9 (18%)	23 (46.9%)
Showing iPhone in pictures*	8 (16%)	0 (0%)
Showing car/bike in pictures*	10 (20%)	0 (0%)
Flaunting biceps or abdomen muscles/bare chest*	11 (22%)	0 (0%)
Picture clicked inside the gym*	4 (8%)	0 (0%)
Picture with a dog	1 (2%)	3 (6.1%)
Picture from a trip or outing or travel*	23 (46%)	8 (16.3%)
Picture of playing sports* (swimming, water sports, tennis, quad biking)	6 (12%)	0 (0%)
Picture with food or drink	3 (6%)	4 (8.2%)
Picture while shopping	0 (0%)	2 (4.1%)

* P-value<0.05

Profile picture analysis

The display pictures were available for all the males and 49 females(Table 2). The median (IQR) number of display pictures available for males and females was 6 (IQR 4 - 7) and 4 (IQR 2 - 5), respectively. Five male and four female profiles uploaded a group picture. A significantly higher number of females (46.9%) uploaded picture in the form of a selfie. Males showed valuable items in the pictures like the iPhone (16%), car/bike (20%). Males displayed the pictures clicked inside the gym (8%), flaunting their biceps or abdomen muscles (abs)/bare chest (22%) or playing sports (12%). Also, a significantly higher number of males uploaded their picture from a trip/outing/travel. Most of the male profiles had formal dress (like coat/blazers, shirt, pant) in their profile pictures. Western outfit (jeans, miniskirt, shorts, t-shirt) was ubiquitous among female profiles (Table 3). The dress was not visible in 18 male profiles, and 11 female profiles as most of the pictures were limited to face and few pictures of males were shirtless.

Self-description analysis

Self-description was available for only 60% (n=30) of male profiles and 42% (n=21) of female profiles. Most of the self-descriptionswere very short and crisp like *"leveled up lawyer, anime lover, TV tellytubby, drive demon, meme master, gridlock gamer, badminton baddie, crème brulee is my true weakness"*. The total word count for male and female self-description was 348 (average-11.6) and 233 (average-11.6), respectively. The most common five words (number of times)used by male profiles were - looking (n=5), lover (n=3), fun (n=3), love (n=3), true (n=3). The most common five words used by female profiles were - lover (n=4), looking (n=4), smart (n=3), friendship (n=2), new (n=2). The word cloud showed the use of similar and most common words(the predominant word is more prominent in size) by both the sex (Figure 1).
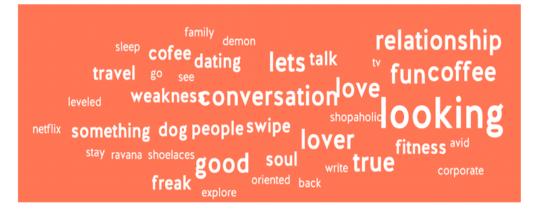
Eleven male profiles (36.7%) mentioned that they were looking for a relationship or love, meaningful/good conversation, friend, fun in their description. Nine female profiles (42.9%) mentioned they were looking for a relationship, friend. Seven of the male profiles mentioned their height, which ranged from 5'10" to 6'3". Two male profiles asked for a coffee date in their description (Table 4). Only one profile (female) mentioned personal dislike, i.e. fake person. Both the sex (male and female) presented themselves as foodie, music lover and party

Table 3 – Type of dress in the profile picture

Sex	Type of dress in the picture	Number of profiles
Male (n=50)	Formals predominant	15 (30%)
	Causals predominant	14 (28%)
	Both	3 (6%)
	Dress not visible	18 (36%)
Female (n=50)	Ethnic	5 (10%)
	Partywear	3 (6%)
	Western outfit	19 (38%)
	Mixed	5 (10%)
	Not able to classify	7 (14%)
	Dress not visible	11 (22%)

Figure 1- Word cloud showing twenty most common content words used I

lover. A higher number of males mentioned about their favourite music (26.7%) and alcohol/smoking status (16.7%).

Discussion

We found that a higher number of males mentioned more about their occupation and affiliation (work), which was similar to the findings of Davis et al. (Davis & Finger man, 2016). Usually, it is anticipated that females may post more photos understanding the importance given to physical attractiveness; however, in the present sample, it was males who posted more pictures to convince potential partners. The purpose of these pictures might be to display their physical strength (showing gym pics,sports, portraying biceps) and also to indicate their wealth or affordability (picture with iPhone, car/bike; travel pictures) which may attract

the women. Our results are in line with evolutionary theory (Buss, 1988), which was also tested among 37 cultures and showed that females value financial capacity/resource acquisition, ambition-industriousness of potential mates compared to males (Buss, 1989). Our finding of males focusing on their financial and occupational success was also similar to studies done by Mc Williams et al. and Alterovitzet al.(Alterovitz & Mendelsohn, 2011; Mc Williams & Barrett, 2014).

We found that a low number of females provided their self-description and provided a smaller number of profile pictures compared to males, which could be due to safety reasons. The average word count and the words used in self-description among males and females were almost similar. We did not find anyone reporting the reason/

Table 4 – Result of description analysis of profiles

Profile Description	Number of male profiles	Number of female profiles
Description was provided	30 (60%)	21 (42%)
Described their what they looking for in dating app (e.g. looking for looking for a relationship , love, meaningful/good conversation, friend, fun)	11 (36.7%)	9 (42.9%)
Mentioned 'not for hookups'	1 (3.3%)	3 (14.3%)
Described themselves as a dog lover	2 (6.7%)	0 (0%)
Described themselves as foodie or food lover	4 (13.3%)	6 (28.6%)
Described themselves as fitness freak or sports lover	4 (13.3%)	1 (4.8%)
Mentioned their zodiac sign	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Showing to be multilinguistic	2 (6.7%)	0 (0%)
Music lover	5 (16.7%)	3 (14.3%)
Traveller	9 (30%)	3 (14.3%)
Mentioned height*	7 (23.3%)	0 (0%)
Knows how to cook and do laundry	3 (10%)	0 (0%)
Loves to party	2 (6.7%)	2 (9.5%)
Mentioned themselves as 'shopaholic'	1 (3.3%)	1 (4.7%)
Loves to dance	0 (0%)	2 (9.5%)
Mentioned about alcohol drink/use(beer, whisky, wine) or smoke (pot, cigar) use*	5 (16.7%)	0 (0%)
Mentioned tea or coffee	3 (10%)	2 (9.5%)
Mentioned their favourite music*	8 (26.7%)	2 (9.5%)

*p-value <0.05

purpose for using the dating application as for casual sex/hook up on contrast to a study done in the United States, which found that 17.9% of women and 33.1% of men reported using dating platforms of hookup (Lykens et al., 2019). Two reasons can explain this. First, profiles did not mention it because of social desirability in expressing intentions of casual sex. A spremarital sex is against the existing social norms in India (Chakraborty & Thakurata, 2013; Mahajan et al., 2013); but a survey shows that more than a quarter of youngsters are involved in premarital sex in North India (Sharma, 2001). Second, it is possible that the sampled profiles were genuinely looking for a life partner/ lover. We found that to attract the opposite sex, males mention about their height (notably taller males), present themselves as a traveller, and muscular. Males mentioned

about cooking and laundry skills in the self-description and presented themselves to be a multilingual, dog lover, and a fitness freak might be the new dimensions for a desirable dating profile. These findings may not be statistically significant, but can not be ignored as they reflect the changing presentation of the current young generation.

To the best of our knowledge, this was the first study from India for analysis of online dating profiles. We had a small sample size from one dating platform, limited to younger adults, and the probability of mis representation or a fake profile can not be ruled out. Therefore, findings from this study cannot be generalised. Further studies with larger sample size and participant interviews are required to generate more evidence. However, the study could not provide an in-depth understanding of the concept of online dating in the Indian context. Also, how marketing/business strategies are contributing to the increase in online dating may be explored further.

Conclusion

Most of the college students used these dating applications. Males posted a higher number of pictures and displayed pictures with valuable items, physical strength and presented themselves travellers, gym/sports lover compared to the females. The purpose mentioned by both the sexes was to look for a lover on the dating application. These findings can help in understanding the differences between males and females in their self-presentation on an online dating platform.

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