

Online dating: curiosities, strategies and social impact

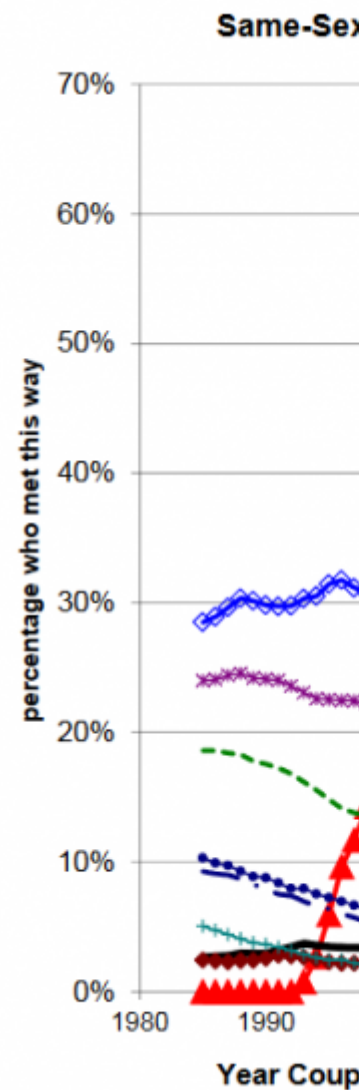
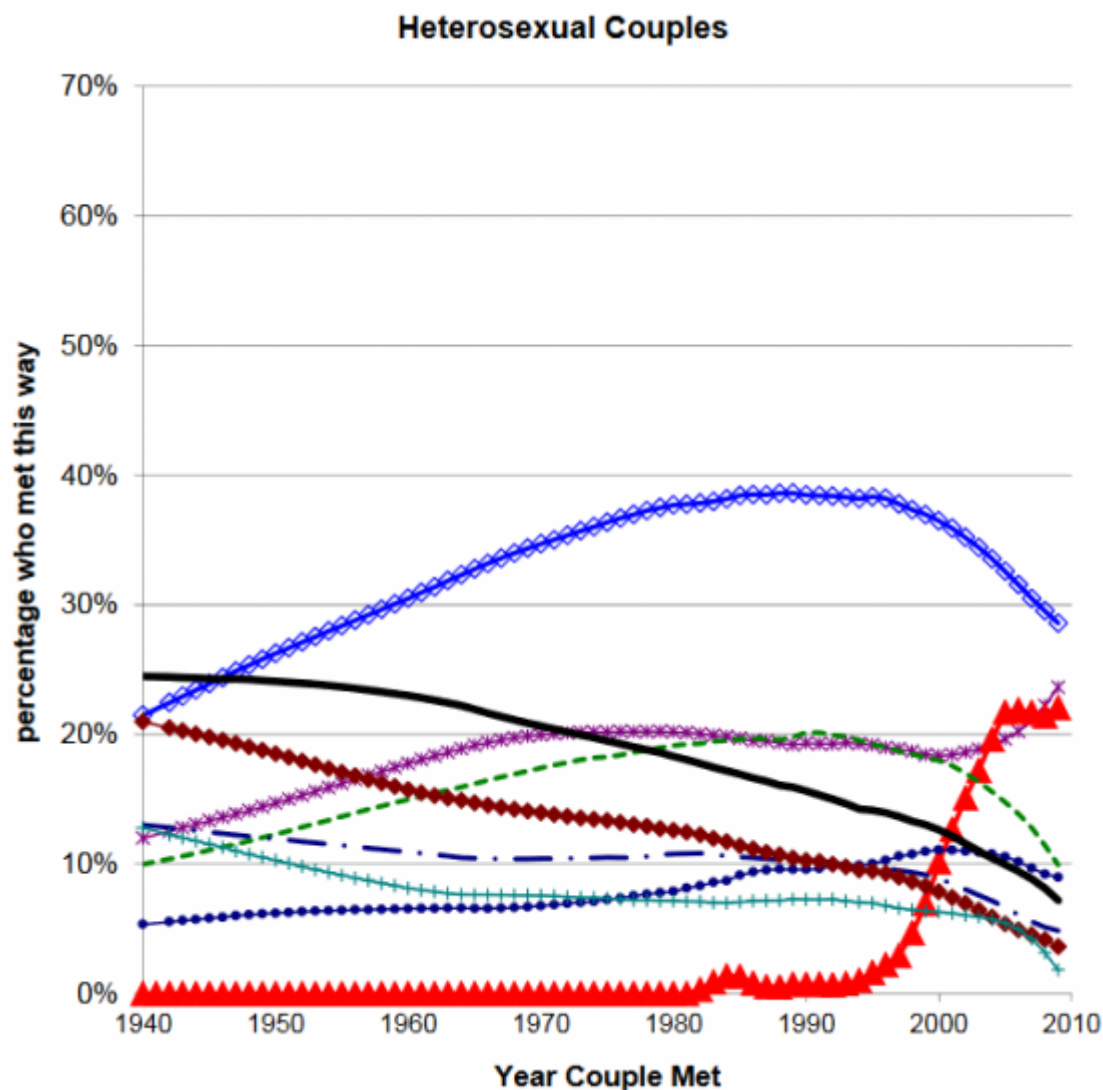
February 13, 2019

Some think that online dating is not just a starting point to meet new people but mark the end of relationships and love. Data in hand, how much have we changed?

This year we mark 50 years from the first moon landing, recounted by Tito Stagno on July 20, 1969, by a human being, or rather two: Neil Armstrong, commander of the Apollo 11 mission, and Buzz Aldrin, while their partner Michael Collins was in command of the Columbia module. That year, with much less clamour, the first ARPANET (acronym for “Advanced Research Projects Agency NETwork”) connection between 4 US universities was set up. This is the embryonic form, so to speak, from which the Internet was born in 1983. Three years later, on April 30, 1986, Italy connected to the Internet for the first time, an epoch-making event that even newspapers missed, and, in April 1993, CERN allowed the use of the World Wide Web to anyone, without need to pay rights, causing a proliferation in its use: just think that while in January 1993 there were 50 web servers in the world, in October there were already more than 500.

Since then, among other aspects of our life, the web has progressively changed the way we meet our potential partners. In fact, Match.com, now popular in 25 countries in 8 languages, was created in 1995. Thus, in recent years it has been possible to start analyzing the many data collected to obtain indications on the social impact that these online dating services have had on our society. As often happens, what emerges from the “crunching” of data may not be so intuitive.

Who would have thought, for example, that couples who met online would tend to be more “solid” than “traditional” ones? These were the findings of the 2017’s study entitled “[The Strength of Absent Ties: Social Integration via Online Dating](#)”, by professors of economics Josue Ortega (University of Essex) and Philipp Hergovich (University of Vienna). Analyzing over twenty years of data, they realized that **one-third of today’s relationships start online. And the figure rises to 70% when the field is restricted to homosexual couples. But there’s more. Scholars argue that dating apps have helped increase relationships between people of different ethnic and social backgrounds and that they have a positive effect on the duration of the relationships.**



It is still early to say that online dating is perfect. If anything, as Italians, say “if they are roses they will bloom”. **Online dating also presents some pitfalls.** Some consider the psychological effects and warn about the risk of “trading off love for convenience” with the aim of easily meeting, with the help of an algorithm, a vital need. [The Ugly Truth About Online Dating](#) highlights the centrality of the lie and the fragility of relationships that in actuality aim in many cases to find a pragmatic solution to the need for sex. Online dating distorts relationships because it leads people to demand and judge. There are also risks, more connected to the means than to the end, regarding privacy and the awareness of users who **are often not as anonymous as they think they are.** In fact, when a user connects their accounts to more than one social networking services too casually (for example, Tinder and Instagram) it is really easy to identify them.

New studies are being conducted on the market aspects, given that the industry is moving staggering amounts of money. Turnover in the online dating segment amounts to US\$ 1,221 million in 2019. Revenue should show an annual growth rate of 4.3%, resulting in an increase in market volume up to US\$ 1,447 million by 2023. [SOURCE: Statista [“Online Dating – worldwide”](#)]

What is being explored is the **behaviors and strategies adopted by users** on these services; it turns out that “on average, people follow partners who are about 25% more desirable than them.”

Implicitly, a hierarchy is formed between users, all of whom are largely aware of and based on which they adapt their behaviour to compete with competitors perceived as more desirable than them. [SOURCE: [Aspirational pursuit of mates in online dating markets](#)]

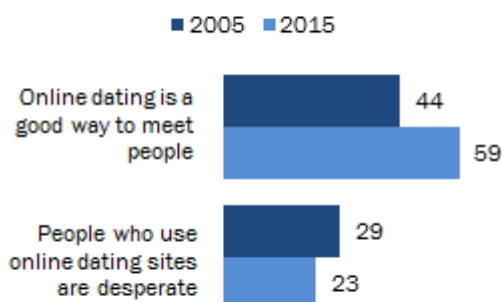
It is interesting to read how these cultural attitudes are catching on among younger people and to follow closely the developments of current trends.

The PEW Research Center has dedicated in-depth analysis of this topic and has found that:

1. **Online dating has lost a lot of its stigma and most Americans now say that online dating is a good way to meet people.**
2. **Online dating has increased among adults under 25 and those between 50 and 60 years.**
3. One-third of people who have used online dating have never dated someone they met on these sites.
4. One in five online daters has asked someone else to help them with their profile
5. 5% of Americans who are married or in a long term relationship say they have met their significant other online.[SOURCE: [5 facts about online dating](#)]

Attitudes toward online dating grow more positive

% of U.S. adults who agree with the following statements



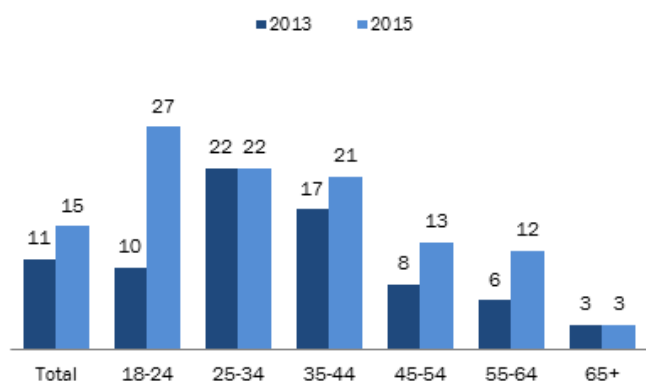
Source: Survey conducted June 10-July 12, 2015. Trend data from previous Pew Research Center survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Changing attitudes

Use of online dating sites or mobile apps by young adults has nearly tripled since 2013

% in each age group who have ever used an online dating site and/or mobile dating app



Source: Survey conducted June 10-July 12, 2015.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Age groups

Already in 2015, the above research centre suggested a detailed analysis of teenagers' behaviours: from Instagram heart emojis to "end of story" text. Technology plays a relevant role in the way teens look for, keep and end relationships. In a series of focus groups conducted online and in a number of cities across the US, over 100 teenagers shared their personal experiences with social media and romantic relationships. [SOURCE: [Online romance](#)]



MEETING ONLINE



SHOWING INTEREST



COMMUNICATING



**DISPLAYING
RELATIONSHIP
STATUS**



**ENDING
RELATIONSHIPS**

Finally, the radical change in the horizon it ensues can only put a strain on traditional stereotypes and myths.

In [Modern Romance](#), Aziz Ansari combines his irreverent humour with cutting edge social sciences to guide us on **an unforgettable tour of our new “romantic” world**.

Cover photo: “[Mobile lovers by #Banksy](#)”

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RELATED MEDIA

- Searching for a Mate: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012):
http://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Rosenfeld_How_Couples_Meet_Working_Paper.pdf
- How the internet has changed dating (The Economist):
<http://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/08/18/how-the-internet-has-changed-dating>
- Big data seeks online love infographic (Berkeley) : <https://www.visualistan.com/2014/06/big-data-seeks-online-love-infographic.html>

AUTHORS

- Giancarlo Sciascia