

Building personal branding from the reality of University students using dating apps

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ABSTRACT

Background: Dating applications are becoming increasingly popular among young people, especially Generation Z students. **Purpose:** This study investigates the current usage of dating applications among students, specifically those majoring in social sciences and humanities. **Methods:** The study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data are collected through a literature review to establish the theoretical framework. Quantitative data are collected through surveys and analyzed using specialized statistical software. **Results:** The findings indicate that social media is an effective tool for connecting student communities and plays a role in introducing and promoting dating applications. The trend of using dating applications among students is widespread, reflecting a growing demand among Generation Z for establishing romantic relationships through online platforms rather than traditional face-to-face meetings. **Conclusion:** Social media plays a significant and indispensable role in the mental life of students. Through social networks, students learn about and can access dating applications. Online dating is a new and modern trend compared to traditional dating methods, offering opportunities and risks due to its novelty. **Implications:** The study sheds light on the usage patterns of dating applications among students and reveals diverse motivations behind their usage, ranging from seeking romantic relationships to fulfilling social connection and entertainment needs.

Keywords: Social media; dating apps; online; dating behavior; students

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, accompanied by the development of information technology, a series of dating applications have been launched to promptly meet the current social relationship-building needs. Social networks are divided into groups based on their users and purposes, significantly impacting human behaviour and social relationships. In particular, online dating applications have become a popular trend and have significantly influenced the psychology and sexual behaviour of students. However, before becoming popular, the online dating industry had come a long way from its humble beginnings in 1959. At this time, two Stanford students matched 49 pairs of men and women using a punch card questionnaire processed by an IBM 650 mainframe computer. This became the first-ever recorded computer-aided matchmaking (Andre, 2023). With the increasing demand for establishing relationships, online dating networks are widely used and gradually become a phenomenon. According to Hardey, online dating platforms create a virtual space for connection, allowing users to meet potential partners online and potentially turn these connections into real-life relationships (Hardey, 2002). Many people use dating apps not only with the desire to establish

relationships at various levels but also to meet sexual needs. According to Thu Nga, users of these applications are divided into two main groups. First, this group of users often seeks serious, long-term relationships (Nga, 2022). However, this group accounts for a relatively low proportion. Secondly, the group was looking for new friends, which accounts for a relatively high proportion. These online dating network users are quite open to the issue of casual one-night stands.

According to statistics from We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2024, social media users reached 5.04 billion at the beginning of January 2024, equivalent to 62.3% of the world's population. In Vietnam, there are 72.57 million social media users, accounting for 73.3% of the total population, with the average time spent by users in Vietnam on social media is 2 hours and 25 minutes per day (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2024). These figures reflect that social media in Vietnam has become a useful tool for establishing social relationships at various levels (AppROI App Marketing Agency, 2022).

Understanding the psychology of young people, a series of online dating and hookup apps have been launched to meet the current social relationship needs. According to a survey published by Decision Lab in February 2022, 65% of the 1.012 Vietnamese surveyed were using at least one dating or hookup app

(Decision Lab, 2022). This indicates that dating and hookup apps are becoming the top trend in connecting and meeting new people. The proliferation of online dating and hookup apps profoundly influences young people, especially those in the current Gen Z age group.

The development of information technology is one of the major reasons driving the current trend among young people to live more independently. They have more time and personal space to explore and develop themselves. Online dating is a form that suits this lifestyle, as it helps them save time and effort. It allows people to get to know and converse with suitable partners without spending time commuting or meeting in person. Online dating also provides young people with more options. They can seek friends and romantic partners, regardless of gender, age, or interests, due to the diversity of dating and hookup apps. Moreover, the perception of online dating among young people is becoming more open-minded. They no longer see it as a casual or experimental form of dating. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for connection and meeting new people online has become more prevalent among young people, leading to the use of dating and hookup apps as a tool to find potential partners quickly. The emergence and popularization of dating apps have changed the way people meet and interact with potential

romantic and sexual partners (Castro & Barrada, 2020).

Society, psychology, and human behaviour are the most fundamental factors that profoundly influence sexual safety when using online dating and hookup apps. Alongside the positive aspects, online dating also harbours certain risks. Without proper management and knowledge of sexual safety, it can lead to unimaginable consequences for adolescents.

Finding a dating companion is more accessible for young people. We no longer need to start with traditional methods like introductions from acquaintances or friends; instead, we can freely choose the ideal person for ourselves through the algorithms of dating platforms. Users just need to describe the type of person they are looking for, and the app will take care of the rest.

In the context of the increasing popularity of dating apps, understanding their impact on university students has become important. Numerous studies have shown that using these apps affects how students build personal relationships and profoundly impacts their self-awareness and social behaviour. Lawson and Leck examined the world of Internet dating, exploring the motivations of daters, their styles of courtship, and how they negotiated problems of trust and deception (Lawson & Leck, 2006). The study by Fox & Warber clarifies the changes

in how students use dating apps to build and maintain personal relationships within the academic environment (Fox & Warber, 2014). Using dating apps can also lead to challenges, such as unrealistic expectations and concerns about self-confidence and body image (Toma et al., 2008). A study by Zhou focused on the impact of dating app use on university students, showing that using these apps can influence how students build and maintain relationships (Zhou, 2023). Another study by Ayeni et al. found that frequent exposure to dating platforms can increase anxiety and social comparison among students (Ayeni et al., 2022).

Dating apps are almost universally regarded as “apps used only for dating.” According to PC Magazine, online dating apps are “an application that allows people to meet for dating and may lead to a long-term relationship” (PC Magazine, 2024). However, users’ motivations are broader, including both regular sexual encounters and simply passing the time (Timmermans & Caluwé, 2017).

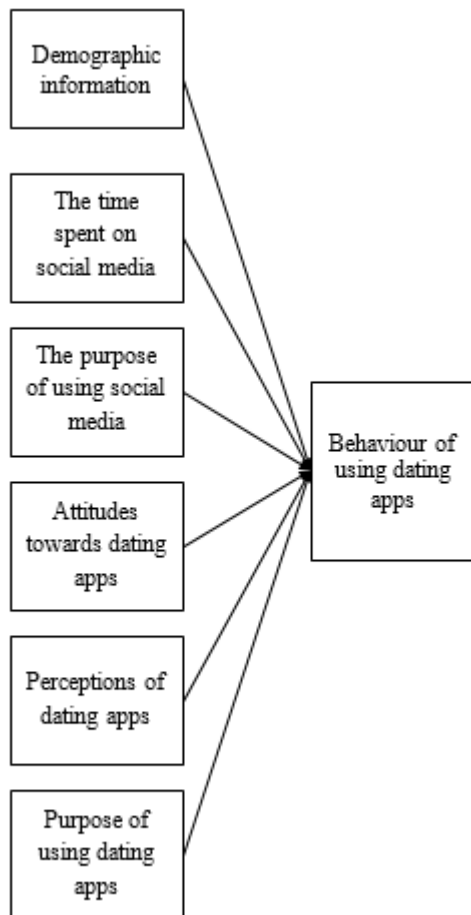
In summary, online dating apps assist users in searching, selecting, getting to know, and chatting with individuals they deem suitable for long-term relationships. This compatibility is assessed based on factors such as age, interests, lifestyle preferences, and professions. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand why online dating is becoming increasingly popular

among young people.

Our dating trends are constantly evolving, especially after the COVID-19 period. Although a survey by the Pew Research Center in 2022 showed that dating for singles became more challenging after the pandemic, the desire to find a partner remains unchanged (Pew Research Center, 2023). Online dating platforms such as Tinder, Hinge, and Match.com have become significantly more popular for those unable to meet in person, facilitating profile creation and connections. The global popularity of online dating apps has increased dramatically since 2016, reaching 366 million users in 2022, up from 240.9 million in 2016, according to data provided by Cloudwards on the rapid growth of online dating platforms. The popular online dating apps worldwide are Tinder, Hinge, Bumble, Badoo, and OkCupid (Cloudwards, 2024).

The research team decided to include five factors influencing the use of dating apps among students of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM in their research model, namely: (1) time spent on social media, (2) purpose of using social media, (3) perception of dating apps, (4) awareness of dating apps, and (5) purpose of using dating apps (See Figure 1).

Additionally, we observe that the use of



Source: Research team, 2024

Figure 1 Model of dating app usage behaviour research

dating apps also reflects a part of the awareness of personal branding among students on online dating platforms. However, the information users post on dating apps is only sometimes truthful. Sometimes, the awareness of building a personal brand does not come from the students, i.e., the app users, but is encouraged by the dating apps themselves through options like purchasing a VIP or Gold account to enjoy more frequent visibility on the platform and other exclusive features for exploring the

dating app. This issue aligns with the findings of Sergey Gorbatov in their study “Personal Branding: Interdisciplinary Systematic Review and Research Agenda” (Gorbatov et al., 2018). In this study, the authors consider personal branding nearly synonymous with concepts such as human branding, impression management, self-promotion, image, reputation, fame, and employee branding, ultimately concluding that “Personal branding is a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery” (Gorbatov et al., 2018). In another study, author Đao Le Hoa An pointed out that personal branding on Facebook, in particular and on social networks, in general, stems from students’ self-image. “The structure of the self-image (SI) via the personal Facebook accounts has seven aspects: Sociality-SI, Emotion-SI, Future-SI, Power-SI, Personality-SI and Enjoyment-Experience-SI” (Đao Le Hoa An, 2018). Similarly, a study by Loan indicated that most students participating in the research were conscious of building their personal brand (Loan et al., 2022). According to the study, “the factors influencing the personal branding of students at the surveyed schools are divided into two groups: (1) Subjective factors, including

self-awareness; learning objectives; future job plans; (2) Objective factors, including personal relationships; job requirements; training programs of the schools” (Loan et al., 2022).

According to a study published in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, managing online impressions is an essential strategy for dating app users to achieve their goal of finding romantic partners (Ellison et al., 2006). Furthermore, an article in the *Journal of Communication* pointed out that creating a personal brand, including using avatars on online dating platforms, can affect how users perceive and interact online and offline (Hancock & Toma, 2009). According to another study in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, dating apps’ personalization features and recommendation algorithms have created an ideal environment for users to express their individuality and preferences, playing an essential role in building and managing personal images (Manning, 2014).

Thus, the study’s main objective is to better understand the usage patterns of social media and dating apps among students. The research emphasizes the role of social media and dating apps in influencing students’ behaviour and mindset. This reveals a part of the awareness of personal branding through students’ public profiles on dating apps.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study is a mixed-method research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative research focuses on collecting data for the study’s outcomes, while qualitative research provides literature and other online resources to establish the theoretical framework for the study. The research design combines qualitative and quantitative studies, providing rich data and research document foundation, aiming for the highest objectivity possible based on the survey results of the research sample.

The study was conducted from October 2023 to April 2024 at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University—Ho Chi Minh City. It included an overview of the literature on debates related to the concept and experimental surveys on the nature of relationships established through online dating applications.

The author group will employ a survey method using questionnaires to gain specific insights into the usage characteristics of online dating and hookup apps (ODHA) among the surveyed subjects. The survey will be conducted using the Google Forms platform.

The study sample includes undergraduate students from the first to the fourth year enrolled in the regular Multimedia Communication

and Standard, High-Quality, and International Linked Journalism programs at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM. The formula for estimating proportions will be applied to estimate the sample size for the descriptive study.

In which:

n : Sample size needed for the study

N : Estimated total number of students in the Journalism and Communication Department, University of Social Sciences and Humanities

e : Acceptable margin of error ($e=0.05$)

According to the 2023 Transparency Report of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, $N=1462$. Substituting these values into the formula, n can be calculated as 314.

Since there might be significant differences in the proportions of students among the academic years within the Journalism and Communication Department, accessing a large number of fourth-year students is challenging due to various objective and subjective factors. The primary reason is that most fourth-year students have completed seven semesters. Therefore, most of them may not be attending classes at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM during the research period. Consequently, the research team has decided to employ a non-probability sampling method, specifically convenience sampling, to easily access the research subjects.

As a result, the research team collected 485 survey responses. Among these, 140 survey responses were deemed ineligible as the respondents had never used online dating apps, leaving 345 survey responses that met the criteria of having used at least one online dating app. Therefore, this study will analyze based on the 345 eligible responses.

To determine the demographic information of the study sample, the questionnaire included some survey questions with response options (with a response rate of 100% out of the 345 responses submitted via Google Forms).

The survey investigating online dating apps by students of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication has received 345 responses. However, upon closer examination of the gender composition, a significant disparity is evident. The survey results show that the number of female students participating is significantly higher than that of male students. This means the ratio of female and male students participating in the survey is over 3 to 1.

In the question "Status of your relationship," the results show that the proportion of students who have been or are currently in romantic relationships is approximately equal, accounting for over 70% of the total responses. This indicates that students are interested in building and maintaining romantic relationships. The results also indicate that nearly 30% of students

have never had a romantic partner. Through the survey results, these figures provide insights into the trends in students' romantic relationships, serving as a foundation for the research team to analyze the usage patterns of dating apps.

To delve deeper into demographic information, the survey team included additional questions about the District you live in, covering all 24 districts across Ho Chi Minh City. The results obtained show that students reside scattered throughout the proposed districts. The survey also gathered some opinions about the areas where students live outside of Ho Chi Minh City, including students residing in Binh Duong and Dong Nai provinces.

Eighty-six students currently live in Thu Duc City, accounting for 24.93% of the total students participating in the survey. This area is the economic, cultural, and social centre of both the East and the university, with the main campus and dormitories in the National University Urban Area in Ho Chi Minh City. This is also why most students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, live in Thu Duc City and participate in this survey.

With these questions, the author team collected basic demographic information about the surveyed group to understand the motivations behind students' relationships and provide deep insights into social behaviours and preferences for discussions within modern

dating apps.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Influence of Social Media on the Usage Behavior of Dating Apps Among College Students. We surveyed four issues to Understand the Influence of Social Media on College Students' Usage Behavior of Dating Apps. In this survey, the authors posed four questions to understand the frequency and intention of social media usage and the impact of media on the usage of dating apps among students majoring in Journalism and Communication.

According to the survey results, most students spend the most time on social media, which falls into the "Over 6 hours" category with 136 votes (39.42%). Coming in second, with just a one-vote difference, is the "From 4 to 6 hours" category, accounting for 39.13%. Lastly, only 74 surveyed students spend "Less than 4 hours" on social media per day (21.44%). This indicates that students from the Faculty of Journalism and Communication have used social media for a considerable amount of time. There are several reasons for this, with one of the major ones being the nature of the journalism and communication field, which requires students to frequently update themselves on the latest trends and information on social media.

Bonsaksen emphasises a significant correlation between spending much time

Table 1 Purposes of social media usage among students.

Question: “What do you use social media for?”	The number of responses	
Making acquaintances, establishing new relationships	170	49.42%
Socializing and connecting with family, friends, colleagues	236	68.41%
Sharing information, photos	207	60%
Creating contents	170	49.42%
Entertaining	4	1.16%
Updating information, trends	3	0.87%
Reading news	3	0.87%
Working	1	0.29%

Source: Data of the research group, 2024

on social media and increased loneliness, especially for those who use social platforms to maintain relationships (Bonsaksen et al., 2023). During the study, two groups were examined, with one group adhering to controlled usage of under 30 minutes per day, while the other group had no time restrictions on social media usage. The results showed that the group with unrestricted social media usage reported feeling lonelier after three weeks. This suggests that using social media for more than 30 minutes per day may lead to psychological susceptibility influenced by factors such as social media.

Social media usage and its influence on students is relatively high. The survey results indicate four main reasons for students' social media usage: “Socializing and connecting with family, friends, and colleagues,” “Sharing information and images,” “Making new acquaintances, establishing new relationships,”

and “Creating content.”

The most common purpose of using social media is “Socializing and connecting with family, friends, and colleagues,” (see Table 1) with 236 votes (68.41%), the highest proportion among the purposes. This indicates that social media is a platform that helps students easily connect and converse with relatives, friends, and colleagues. In other words, social media plays an important role in helping students maintain and expand their social relationships, not only within the school community but also outside of it. Next is “Sharing information, images”, with 207 votes (60%), also favoured by many students. The data shows that students use social media as a platform to share and convey their personal information, images, and memories, helping them connect and communicate easily and quickly. And finally, “Making new acquaintances, establishing new

relationships” and “Creating content” both received 170 votes (49.42%) from the 345 student participants in the survey. Social media allows students to expand their relationships and connect with new people, helping them broaden their horizons and shape themselves in a larger social environment. Furthermore, the collected data shows that social media is a place to consume content and a platform for students to express creativity, share ideas, and create new content, contributing to shaping their culture and perspectives.

In addition, four votes (1.16%) were given for “Entertainment.” This purpose indicates that some students use social media for entertainment, such as watching videos, listening to music, participating in online games, or following other entertainment content on social media platforms. Although the proportion is low, it still shows that social media plays a role as an additional entertainment channel in students’ daily lives. Some students, precisely three votes, chose to use social media to “Update information, trends” (0.87%). This demonstrates that social media is an information channel, helping students stay updated and knowledgeable about new developments in society and the world. Similarly to the purpose above, there are also three votes (0.87%) for using social media to “Read the news.” Despite the availability of many applications and websites that provide

news, social media remains an essential source of information that students use to access news quickly and conveniently. Lastly, “Work-related purposes” received only one vote (0.28%). This purpose is the least among the listed purposes. It can be explained that students use social media for work-related purposes, including activities such as sharing projects, seeking information, or connecting with work partners.

Although socializing, connecting, and sharing information dominate the use of social media, it serves various other purposes, such as entertainment, updating information, reading news, and even work-related tasks. The lower proportions for these purposes compared to the four main purposes still demonstrate the diverse and rich role of social media in students’ lives and studies.

Compared to a survey by Dixon on the most popular reasons for users in the United States to use online dating websites or apps as of May 2021, the purposes of Vietnamese users in our survey are similar to those of users in the U.S. survey (Dixon, 2022).

The research results are consistent with previous researchers’ observations. For instance, according to Putnam, social networks and their relationships hold value (social capital) that can be leveraged to bring various benefits, including informational support, emotional support, and access to resources (Putnam,

2000). Additionally, social networks provide a platform for individuals to build and maintain social connections, thereby contributing to the accumulation of social capital.

On the other hand, in the *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Austin acknowledges that individuals' self-awareness stems from their membership in social groups. Social networks allow users to express their identities, affiliations, and interests through profile information, interactions, and shared content (Austin & Worchel, 1986). These platforms facilitate the formation and strengthening of group identities, leading to a sense of belonging and social validation.

According to Granovetter, weak ties connections with acquaintances or individuals outside one's immediate social circle can be valuable for accessing diverse information and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). Social networks facilitate the maintenance of weak ties by enabling accessible communication and interaction with a wide range of individuals, thereby expanding users' networks and access to resources.

With the question "I have seen advertising campaigns for dating apps through social media," the survey team received 100% responses (345 votes out of 345 students) for the answer "True." There were no votes for the option "False," indicating the significant role of social media in

becoming a key factor influencing students' use of dating apps. This demonstrates that social media considerably influences students' use of dating apps. Based on the survey results, the prevalence of dating app advertising on social media and the effectiveness of advertising campaigns, especially those related to dating apps. The fact that all surveyed students have seen ads indicates that dating apps effectively use social media to reach their target audience, specifically students, particularly those in the Journalism and Communication Department, as they are frequent social media users and can easily access advertising information on these platforms.

After understanding the purpose and impact of social media on students, the research team surveyed to determine the influence of social media on students' dating app usage behaviour based on four levels. For the statement, "I feel that social media influences my dating app usage behaviour," the research team received all 345 responses, and the difference between the levels of agreement and disagreement was quite significant. Over 162 students chose "Agree" with the statement, accounting for nearly half of the responses, precisely 46.95%. Additionally, 103 students chose "Strongly agree," accounting for 29.85% of the total 345 students. This result shows that social media influences students' dating app usage behaviour.

Table 2 Students' Understanding of Dating Apps.

Question	The number of responses	
“In your opinion, what does it mean by “dating apps”?”		
An app connecting friends, establishing sustainable relationships	209	60.58%
An app for seeking sexual relationships	175	50.72%
An app with many negative aspects	182	52.75%
An app for entertaining	1	0.29%
An app for finding people of the same interests and passions to establish relationships with them	1	0.29%

Source: Data of the research group, 2024

On the contrary, only 80 students chose “Disagree” and “Strongly disagree,” accounting for much less than the proportion of students who agree, at only 23.18%. Based on the average value of 2.98, we conclude that students agree with the statement that “Social media influences dating app usage behaviour of students,” indicating that social media has a positive influence on students’ dating app usage and is also the main reason leading to the usage of dating apps by students majoring in Journalism and Communication of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM. Social media plays an important role in shaping students’ choices and usage of dating apps and supporting them in seeking information, comparing, evaluating, and connecting with others on online platforms.

Students’ awareness of dating apps. To assess students’ understanding of dating apps, the author team constructed a set of questions consisting of two survey questions regarding the

level of agreement and three survey questions regarding the selection rate of answers.

This survey aims to assess students’ understanding of dating apps and better understand their needs and preferences for using them (Table 2). This approach aims to obtain a comprehensive view of these students’ awareness of the benefits and risks of dating apps and how these platforms serve or impact their specific requirements and experiences.

It can be seen that nowadays dating apps are becoming increasingly popular and trending in modern society, especially among young people. Therefore, understanding them is crucial for students. With the question “What do you think a dating app is?” up to 209 out of 345 votes chose it as “An app to connect with friends and establish stable relationships”. This shows that most students see dating apps as a way to connect and establish normal relationships, not only based on romantic feelings but also based on connections between friends of the same age.

With the option “Apps that have many negative aspects” receiving 182 votes, this data indicates that some students still have negative views about dating apps. The reasons may stem from the deep perception of the surveyed students towards dating apps such as negative user reviews, abuse, or privacy and safety issues that users often encounter. Additionally, there were more than 175 votes considering it as “An app to search for sexual relationships”. This also indicates that the majority of students see dating apps as a tool to seek sexual relationships.

Personal views on sex and relationships in the modern lives of students are significant factors influencing their choice of answers at a relatively high rate. “Entertainment apps” and “Apps to search for people with similar interests, and passions”, each receiving 1 vote, indicate that only a small portion of students see dating apps as a means of entertainment or to find people with similar interests and passions. Through the survey results, we can see that each student has different perspectives and perceptions of dating apps. While some students see it as a way to connect with friends and establish normal relationships, others perceive it from a negative perspective or as a means to seek sexual relationships. This marks a diversity of views and opinions among students regarding dating apps in modern society, especially among the 345 students participating in the survey. These

results are quite similar to the study by Garcia & Reiber which states that Hookup behavior consists of sexual activity between uncommitted individuals (Garcia & Reiber, 2008). ‘Hooking up’ has become pervasive among young adults, particularly on college campuses in the United States, despite inherent emotional, physical, social and health risks. Similarly, a study by Goedel & Duncan, on men who have sex with men (MSM) also mentions, these mobile dating apps employ global positioning system technology to facilitate connections with other users based on their current location. These new technologies have generated quicker and easier modes for men who have sex with men to meet potential partners based on attraction and physical proximity (Goedel & Duncan, 2015).

Based on the data, the research team explored students’ perceptions of the convenience of online dating apps. While a significant portion (49.28%, n=170) acknowledged the benefits associated with online dating apps, a closer look reveals a more nuanced picture. Within the group acknowledging benefits, only a small fraction (3.48%, n=12) expressed complete agreement. This indicates a nuanced recognition of the potential advantages of online dating apps among a subset of students. However, the data also show dissenting voices. A total of 9.28% (n=32) of those surveyed either completely disagreed or disagreed with the

notion of the convenience of online dating apps. This suggests that a portion of students find this concept inconvenient or unrealistic.

The research team explored the negative perceptions of using online dating apps among the student population. More than half (51.30%, n=177) of those surveyed agreed that online dating apps pose negative risks. Delving deeper, a significant portion (7.82%, n=27) expressed full agreement, emphasizing considerable concern about the negative impact of online dating apps on surveyed students. This apprehension is further substantiated by 4.63% (n=16) completely disagreeing with the negative aspects of online dating apps, indicating that some students perceive no cause for concern. Interestingly, the data also reveals a group (7.24%, n=25) completely disagreeing with the notion that online dating entails many risks.

By calculating the average value of 2.5 for the perceived convenience level of online dating through dating apps among students, we find that the value falls in the middle of the average scale ranging from 1 to 4, implying that overall, students do not agree with the notion that online dating brings significant benefits. Moreover, notably, the average of 3.2 for the question about the risks of online dating implies agreement with the idea that users acknowledge the risks of online dating. This indicates a discrepancy in

students' perceptions when using dating apps.

Next, the survey team proceeded to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions regarding the benefits and risks of using dating apps to reinforce both positive and negative perceptions of these applications among students.

Based on the survey results, it can be seen that students perceive many benefits when using online dating apps. Flexibility in time is a highly valued advantage by many students (209 votes). Thanks to online dating apps, students can actively seek and connect with others anytime, anywhere, not limited by time and location like traditional dating methods. Additionally, other benefits such as "Free and efficient," "Exchange of useful information and knowledge," or "Choosing suitable partners" were also prioritized by students, with 190, 184, and 171 votes respectively. This indicates that students have a clear understanding of the benefits of online dating, such as saving costs and time compared to traditional dating methods. Furthermore, using online dating apps helps students expand relationships, make friends, and learn from others, enhancing their ability to find suitable partners based on their criteria and interests. In summary, the survey results reflect the students' need for a convenient, efficient, and modern dating method.

This is based on the actual perception

of young people. From the survey results, three top dangers can be seen: fake profiles, emotional manipulation, and personal information exploitation. Specifically, over 221 out of 345 votes were for “Untrustworthy user profiles,” 208 votes were for “Emotional manipulation, psychological harm,” and 201 students believed that online dating could lead to “Sensitive information exploitation.” These voting numbers are very significant, indicating the inherent flaws of dating apps, especially regarding issues of privacy and user identity verification. The survey results demonstrate the legitimate concerns of young people about the risks of online dating, while also showing that university students have a good awareness of the potential dangers of online dating.

From a research perspective, the authoring team observes that, based on observation and real-life experiences, students generally evaluate different perspectives on the impact of dating apps on both overall mental well-being and sexual life in particular. According to Finkel and colleagues, this study provides a comprehensive overview, synthesizing the results of various studies focused on online dating within a broader context (Finkel et al., 2012). It emphasizes the existence of both positive and negative impacts on the motivation to establish romantic relationships initiated through online platforms. The success or

outcome of such relationships depends on various factors, including the desired type of relationship and individual characteristics.

The usage behavior of dating apps among students. Through this survey, the aim is not only to assess students’ understanding of dating apps but also to gain a deeper understanding of their needs and preferences in the usage process. This approach is intended to provide a comprehensive view of these students’ understanding of dating apps and how these platforms serve or impact their specific requirements and experiences.

From the survey question results: “How did you learn about dating apps?” it’s evident that “Social media” is the most common channel for accessing dating apps, with 299 out of 345 votes. This indicates that social media is an effective channel for promoting dating apps to young people. Additionally, students tend to trust and use dating apps introduced by “Friends,” as evidenced by 183 votes indicating they learned about dating apps through friends, which is quite reasonable. Lastly, there were 131 votes for “Advertising” as a source. This result underscores the significant role of social media in bringing dating apps closer to the student community (Table 3).

Out of the total 345 responses regarding the survey on students’ usage status of dating apps, the findings indicate that dating apps are becoming increasingly prevalent as a significant

Table 3 Awareness of dating apps through media channels.

Question “How do you know about dating apps?”	The number of responses	
Friends	183	53.04%
Advertisements	131	37.97%
Social media	299	86.67%

Source: Data of the research group, 2024

portion of students are using or have used dating apps. Delving into the data, the research team found that over half (54.20%, n=187) reported having used dating apps in the past. This demonstrates the widespread adoption of dating apps among young consumers. Interestingly, 158 students, accounting for 45.80%, indicated that they are currently using dating apps, showcasing a noteworthy level of engagement with dating apps in meeting the needs of the student community.

In the question about “Dating apps you have used and are currently using,” Tinder is the most popular dating app among students (193/345 votes), accounting for 55.94%. Bumble and Facebook Dating are also widely used apps with 186 and 163 votes, respectively. In fourth place is Heesay, a dating app for the gay community, with 127 votes. Falo and Her are less commonly used with only 1 vote each out of the total. This shows that students have increasingly more choices of dating apps. Consequently, the research results help the

authors identify the trends in the youth’s use of dating apps.

A recent study conducted by researchers from Stanford Medicine and colleagues has identified a similarity in the realm of dating apps. While Tinder holds a prominent position as the most popular dating app, boasting an impressive estimate of 75 million active users per month, the study suggests an interesting observation - a significant portion of these users may not be interested in using the app for its primary purpose. This indicates that while Tinder maintains widespread usage, it may not necessarily hold the top position as the most preferred dating platform among surveyed individuals. This discrepancy highlights the difference between widespread popularity and personal preferences in the realm of dating apps (Table 4).

The demand for dating app usage among students. Through the following two questions, the research team aims to understand the motives for using dating apps on a 4-point scale and the frequency of students engaging in direct dating with others through dating apps on a 5-point scale.

The motivations behind using dating apps vary among young people depending on the context. According to Griffin and colleagues, the primary motivation for using dating apps is identified as seeking excitement and desire

Table 4 Survey of students' preferences when using dating apps

Question	Average	Standard Deviation
“What do you hope for when using dating apps?”		
I want to spend some spare time	2.84	1.02
I want to keep up with the latest dating trends	2.50	1.00
I am popular with many people	2.47	1.05
I expand my social relationships	2.60	1.02
I’m looking for a partner	2.64	1.06
I am looking for a friend with benefits (FWB/ONS) to satisfy my physical needs.	2.30	1.12

Source: Data of the research group, 2024

to meet new people (Griffin et al., 2018). Conversely, alternative studies have indicated that the main motivation revolves around establishing romantic and sexual relationships.

The research team conducted inquiries about the driving motivations behind students' use of dating apps. The results indicated primarily consensus among students, reflected through a mean value of 2.84, related to using the apps to pass idle time. Additionally, students expressed agreement in using dating apps as a means to explore romantic relationships and foster social connections. Notably, most students disagreed with using dating apps to garner affection from a wider range of individuals, “follow” the latest dating trends and engage in promiscuous sexual behaviors. This observation led the authors to recognize that dating apps offer diverse functionalities beyond their primary purpose, providing users with features that extend beyond the realm of dating.

Here, we see that the use of dating apps does not directly reflect the personal branding efforts of students, but personal branding emerges as a necessary activity stemming from the needs associated with using dating apps. To create an eye-catching personal profile on online dating platforms, students also need to invest in their image, information, and content that presents themselves in an almost exclusive manner. If they do not utilize the privileged services of dating apps, then actively promoting their own online dating profiles becomes a form of personal branding, which students may not always consciously realize they are doing.

In the modern context, building a personal brand extends beyond professional realms to encompass various social aspects, including the use of dating apps. For students, this need becomes increasingly crucial as they step into diverse academic environments and social interactions. According to research by Leary

and Allen, personal branding is the expression of individual characteristics and values through media channels, aiding in creating a positive and trustworthy image in the eyes of others (Leary & Allen, 2011). When using dating apps, students are not only seeking romantic relationships but also aiming to present themselves in the best light to attract suitable matches. Smith and Anderson have highlighted that building a personal brand on digital platforms, including dating apps, helps users establish and maintain higher-quality social relationships (Smith & Anderson, 2016). Moreover, authentically showcasing oneself through personal profiles also assists students in enhancing self-confidence and self-worth perceptions, thus laying the groundwork for holistic personal development.

Beyond creating a positive image, personal branding also helps students enhance networking opportunities and expand their social networks. According to research by Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, authentic and strategic self-presentation on dating apps not only attracts potential partners but also fosters more sustainable relationships (Ellison et al., 2006). Particularly for students, these relationships can open up numerous opportunities in academics, careers, and personal growth.

Additionally, building a personal brand on dating apps reflects individuals' ability to manage their image and reputation. McNely

emphasizes that managing personal image on digital platforms is a crucial skill in the digital age, where every online interaction contributes to shaping one's personal image (McNely, 2012). For students, this skill is valuable not only in dating but also in long-term career and life endeavors.

Furthermore, according to a report by the Pew Research Center (Duggan & Smith, 2013), dating apps are becoming increasingly popular and widely accepted, especially among young people. This creates a pressing need for students to showcase themselves uniquely and attractively to stand out among a large pool of users. Thus, building a personal brand not only boosts their confidence in communication but also strengthens their self-assessment and overall self-development.

From the survey results, within the segment comprising students who selected levels 1, 2, and 3, researchers infer that these individuals belong to the group of those who rarely date offline through dating apps. The most significant proportion, at level 1, includes 90 students, accounting for 26.09%, who have never arranged face-to-face meetings to find partners from dating apps. At level 2, representing 17.39%, 60 students have met at least once but very rarely. There are 82 out of 345 students who occasionally meet partners, falling into level 3, accounting for 23.77%.

Table 5 Frequency of Students' Direct Dating Encounters with Individuals via Dating Apps

Question: “I often go on direct dates with matches through dating apps.”	The number of responses		Average	Standard Deviation
Never	90	26.09%	2.77	1.38
Rarely	60	17.39%		
Sometimes	82	23.76%		
Often	67	19.42%		
Always	46	13.33%		

Source: Data of the research group, 2024

Based on these findings, the authors infer that the majority of students using dating apps are not seeking romantic encounters outside of real-life meetings. Observably, students at these levels have experienced face-to-face meetings, but the lack of attraction or connection in these encounters has not led them to pursue more frequent interactions.

Furthermore, the authors emphasize that levels 4 and 5 represent stages where students often arrange offline dates through dating apps. The research results indicate that at level 4 (67 votes, 19.42%) and level 5 (46 students, 13.33%), students tend to engage in frequent face-to-face meetings through dating app platforms (Table 5).

Based on the average value of 2.77, the majority of students occasionally spend time searching for dates but are not deeply immersed in it. From a research perspective, the authors observe that most respondents go online to

seek daily dates that they can use to socialize, entertain, or satisfy various psychological needs. Although some students use dating apps regularly or occasionally for direct dating, the majority still do not or rarely do so. This indicates the diversity in students’ experiences and approaches when using dating apps.

CONCLUSION

By demonstrating the development and impact of online dating apps on young people, the study delved into understanding the current situation, including students’ knowledge, needs, and attitudes towards online dating platforms. This trend is increasingly widespread in the digital media environment, providing flexibility and diversity in accessing relationships for young people.

Online dating apps not only save time and effort for users but also provide opportunities

to find compatible partners based on various factors. However, this also poses new challenges, especially in terms of safety and awareness of behaviour, particularly concerning emerging sexual behaviours.

Students generally agree that social media influences their use of dating apps. Understanding this influence can provide insights into students' decisions to use dating apps and provide a basis for interventions or educational strategies to optimize technology use in personal relationship settings. However, further research is needed to understand better the mechanisms and specific impacts of social media on students' use of dating apps and to develop appropriate solutions to manage and maximize the potential of this technology.

Meanwhile, evaluations of the advantages and disadvantages of using online dating apps also reflect the multidimensionality of students' perspectives. While some students acknowledge benefits such as flexibility in scheduling and the ability to find compatible partners, others express concerns about risks such as emotional manipulation or exploitation of personal information.

Social media has proven to be the most popular channel for accessing dating apps, while exposure through friends also plays a significant role. The fact that over half of the students have used dating apps before and a significant

portion continue to use them demonstrates the popularity and adaptability of these apps within the student community.

Specifically, Tinder, Bumble, and Facebook Dating are the most popular apps, but there is also diversity in students' choices. Importantly, the study has clarified that students' motives for using dating apps are not limited to seeking romantic relationships but also include entertainment and expanding social connections.

However, although some students occasionally or regularly engage in face-to-face meetings through dating apps, the majority still do not or rarely do so. This diversity in approach and experience among students when using dating apps suggests that these apps play a role beyond just being a tool for seeking relationships but also serve as part of their social life and entertainment.

Building a personal brand on online dating apps is about creating a strong first impression, expressing oneself, and maintaining authenticity. Students can leverage features such as profile descriptions, images, and interaction styles to communicate their values and a true sense of self. However, it is most crucial to do this sincerely and naturally, without imitation or deceit. By doing so, they can attract individuals with similar interests and values, forming meaningful and lasting relationships in today's digital world.

The analysis of the results from the combined qualitative and quantitative research methods has provided a multifaceted view of the impact of dating apps on students, thereby providing a basis for developing appropriate policies and support programs in education and society. This study has clarified the important role of social media and dating apps in shaping the behaviour and mindset of young people while also opening up new research directions and emphasizing the need to build a safe and positive online environment.

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