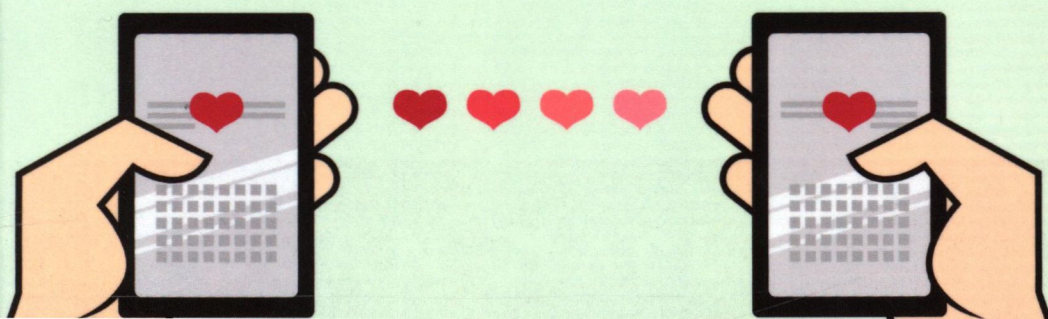


THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MODERN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Edited by
Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter
and Jason S. Wrench



"From personal ads to ghosting, this edited volume of empirical and review articles from communication experts throughout the United States provides insight into the changes in romantic communication that have occurred over the last decade as technology has become a ubiquitous medium for social interaction. This is a great resource for any student or scholar who wants a cohesive and current overview of the ways in which technology is affecting how we communicate with romantic partners."

—**Michelle Drouin**, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne

The Impact of Social Media in Modern Romantic Relationships is the communication field's most comprehensive volume of the study of social media and romantic relationship development. It provides an overview of romantic development that includes all types of social media, such as Tinder and Facebook. This book features several major communication and media scholars who have researched social media and romantic relationship development.

Contributors

V. Santiago Arias, Megan Bassick, Jennifer L. Bevan, Kate G. Blackburn, Derek R. Blackwell, Eryn Bostwick, Nicholas Brody, John P. Caughlin, Gina Masullo Chen, Jonathan D. D'Angelo, Jayson L. Dibble, Jesse Fox, Jessica Frampton, Jennifer Huemmer, Amy Janan Johnson, Brianna L. Lane, Leah E. LeFebvre, Hinda Mandell, Terri Manley, Paromita Pain, Cameron W. Piercy, Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, Nathian Shae Rodriguez, Liesel Sharabi, Hua Su, Catalina L. Toma, Jason S. Wrench

Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter is associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies and assistant dean of international affairs at Texas Tech University.

Jason S. Wrench is associate professor and chair of the Department of Communication at the State University of New York at New Paltz.



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Punyant-Carter
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The Impact of Social Media in Modern Romantic Relationships

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ONE

From the Front Porch to Swiping Right

The Impact of Technology on Modern Dating

Jason S. Wrench and Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter

In 1989, Beth Bailey published her book, *From the Front Porch to the Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*. In her book, Bailey examines how courtship in the United States evolved over the years, from the earliest instances of courtship, when men went “calling” on potential mates with their calling cards. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the upper middle class engaged in strict rules related to calling upon someone at their house. If an individual was going to see a friend or relative, he would ring the doorbell, a servant would appear holding a silver tray, the caller would place his card on the tray, and the servant would deliver the card to the head of the household. For dating purposes, a gentleman caller would engage in the same behavior, but he would hand the servant his card and then leave, hoping that the woman who caught his eye would send her own card in return. These courtship behaviors were very public and strictly overseen by the female’s family. Over the course of the twentieth century, dating changed from the calling card and meeting in one’s parlor, to public places like dance halls, movie theaters, restaurants, bars, etc. As Bailey noted, “[I]t removed couples from the implied supervision of the private sphere—from the watchful eyes of family and local community—to the anonymity of the public sphere. Courtship among strangers offered couples new freedom” (24).

When Bailey published her book in 1989, she had no way of envisioning how courtship would continue to radically change as we entered into

the twenty-first century. In the same year when Bailey published her book, a software engineer working for Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN) named Tim Berners-Lee was inventing the World Wide Web. Although the Internet had been around since 1969, the invention of the World Wide Web increased usability and created a common language for the creation of Internet content, HyperText Markup Language (html) (Berners-Lee 1999). The purpose of the current book is to examine how technology has changed dating and mating in the twenty-first century. To start us on this journey of discovery, we will first examine the history of online dating and how it has evolved over time.

ONLINE DATING—A BRIEF HISTORY

Although not an exact precursor to modern online dating, to many people, the 1700s and the creation of newspaper personal advertisements as the logical first step in our brief history (Cocks 2009). The first known personal advertisement occurred in 1692 in the agony column of the *Athenian Mercury*. For hundreds of years, the modern dating industry took many circuitous routes, from newspapers to their own brand of magazine. Of course, the popularity of newspaper personals varied with time. By the nineteenth century, personal ads proliferated in the Western world. In the United States, *The Wedding Bells*, *The Correspondent*, and *The Matrimonial News* are three examples of papers that were exclusively devoted to the publication of personal ads. Although personal ads were popular, the *New York Times* stopped publishing them by the 1870s (Schafer 2003). The interest in personal ads definitely changed with the decades. The 1930s to the 1950s represented fairly lean years for personal ads, but with the 1960s there was once again a resurgence in their popularity.¹ Personal ads remained an integral part of the dating landscape through the end of the twentieth century. The *New York Times* would actually bring back personal ads in the early twenty-first century as the paper started to look for new advertising streams (Kilgannon 2001). However, as Kilgannon (2001) reported, all proposed personal ads would be sent to the “advertising acceptability department, which will accept only ads ‘in line with the integrity of the rest of our classified advertising section,’ Ms. Park said. ‘Any language or phrasing that is suggestive or in questionable taste in the opinion of *The Times* will be declined’” (para. 7). As of the writing of this chapter, personal ads are still alive and well at the *New York Times* (see <http://www.nytimes.com/classifieds/personals/>).

After personal ads, there was not a major leap in the change of dating patterns until the telephone. Admittedly, there are documented cases of people dating using the telegraph or radio, but these occurrences did not have the wide popularity or accessibility that personal ads had in the past (Standage, 1998). In 1981, we see the development of the telephony-based

chat line. Individuals would call a 1-900 (or 976) number and could talk to psychics, or just to get the time and temperature. By 1985, there were a number of chat lines specifically devoted to helping men and women date, along with specific outlets for gay men. By 1999, some of these chat lines even started integrated web-cameras.

Also during the 1980s and into the 1990s came the proliferation of companies that helped match couples through video dating. Men would record video personals in which they would attempt to sell themselves to potential mates, who would then watch the videos and determine whom they would like to go on a possible date with in the future (Mulshine 2015). The notion of matchmaking was hardly a new one, but the incorporation of technology into these services took on a new life with the invention of VHS. Of course, video dating sites quickly grew more and more passé as the 1990s started to usher in new technology.

Although the Internet had been invented in 1969, access and utility was generally focused on the military and academic researchers. Even as computer technology became a more normalized household item during the 1980s and the early 1990s, most people did not own a modem because computers did not come with them. During this same time period, the U.S. Federal Government started a process that would give the general public access to the Internet. As modems became standard parts of a personal computer, people started using them to connect with Bulletin Board Services and eventually Internet service providers like America Online (AOL), Prodigy, and CompuServe in the early 1990s. However, these early experiences connecting online were quite expensive, because online access was charged by the hour. During these early years, those who had access to Internet relay chat (IRC) would often use chatrooms as a way of meeting people locally and globally. Then, as people accessed companies like AOL, Prodigy, and CompuServe, people moved to chatrooms and eventually instant messaging. In 1998, the idea of meeting people anonymously online became so ingrained in the American psyche that Hollywood released a movie based on *Parfumerie* by Hungarian playwright Miklós László. In *Parfumerie*, a man and a woman who have a negative working relationship find out that the person they have been falling in love with via an anonymous romantic letter service is really their coworker. The modern retelling, *You've Got Mail*, is named for the sound that AOL makes when you first log in to their service and there is e-mail waiting to be read.

The real change to online access came in 1996, when AOL changed its business model from a charge-by-the-hour system to a flat monthly fee of \$19.95. This simple change lowered the cost of Internet access for the first time, allowing a broader base of people to become connected. Before the switch to a flat fee, many people would meet in chatrooms online that were arranged by interests, similarities, or geographic location.

Not surprisingly, over the last five years of the twentieth century, the proliferation of Internet dating occurred within the general public. In 1995, Match.com was founded, making it the first major player in the online dating world. At first, Internet dating was considered taboo and was marginalized, but over time Internet dating became normalized. In the decade following the founding of Match.com, Internet dating became very normalized and a number of different services were created. Table 1.1 shows a brief history of online dating and many of the key early websites are shown.

The next major technological change that really changed how the world dates was the release of the iPhone in 2007. Although smartphones and Palm Pilots had previously existed, the rich application infrastructure created by the iPhone would go on to revolutionize how people connected. Most of the major online dating players (e.g., Match.com, eHarmony, JDate, PlentyofFish, OkCupid, etc.) embraced the new cell-phone technology, creating applications that took their web-based experiences to a mobile-based experience. In addition to the creation of the iPhone in 2007, Skout became the first software that enabled users to meet others based on a cell phone's global positioning services. Although Proximating had tried doing this through Bluetooth technology, Skout really was the first major player in the GPS based mobile dating game. In 2009, the gay dating application Grindr took the idea of GPS dating and formalized it into an iPhone application that changed modern dating practices for gay men. Instead of going online to meet other gay men, gay men could look at their iPhones and see all of the other gay men connected in their geographic area.

In 2012, a new dating application, Tinder, added a new touch to the dating world. Instead of just seeing all of the available people around someone geographically, people would be presented with the images and profiles of potential dating partners. If someone was not interested in an individual, he or she could swipe her or his finger left across the screen of the phone. If someone was interested in another individual, he or she could swipe the person's image right across the phone. If Person A swiped right on Person B and if Person B also swiped right on Person A, the two individuals would be matched and could then message one another.

Over the past few pages, we have attempted to create a succinct history of the changes of hundreds of years of dating practices into a few short paragraphs. We know we have left out many details along the way in order to create a short narrative history. This history clearly demonstrates how humans have always adapted technology, from the newspaper in the 1600s to the smartphone of the twenty-first century, to find romantic love.

WIRING COMMUNICATION AND DATING

For our purposes, computers and computer technology ranging from earliest incarnations to the most recent revolution in cell phone technology is a clear case of mediatization. Jansson (2013) coined the concept of mediatization or “how other social processes in a broad variety of domains and at different levels become inseparable from and dependent on technological processes and resources of mediation” (289). For the purposes of this book, we are interested in how this technology has been used to impact dating in modern romantic relationships.

In 1993, Rose and Frieze proposed a simple script that most first dates follow. In their research, the authors found that first dates included the following: dress, be nervous, pick up (date), leave (meeting place), confirm plans, get to know, evaluate, talk, laugh, eat, attempt to make out and accept or reject, take (date) home, kiss, and go home. Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) further noted that dating scripts differed only slightly between heterosexual and gay (discussed plans, was nervous, groomed/dressed, picked up date [or was picked up]/met at a prearranged location, left one location for another, evaluated date, talked/laughed/joked, talked to other friends, went to movie/show/etc., had a meal, drank alcohol/used drugs, initiated physical contact, made out, had sex, stayed over, made plans for another date, and went home) and lesbian (discussed plans, was nervous, groomed/dressed, prepared for date, picked up date [or was picked up], evaluated date, talked/laughed/joked, went to movie/show/etc., had a meal, experienced positive feelings, drank alcohol/used drugs, initiated physical contact, kissed/hugged goodnight, took date home, and went home) couples. When looking at either the heterosexual or gay and lesbian scripts of the early 1990s, it's easy to see where parts of this script are not always in play with the mediated relationship. For example, where exactly does “stalking someone on Facebook to find out all of their likes and dislikes” fit into this script? Of course, as researchers Rauch, Strobel, Bella, Odachowski, and Bloom (2014) found, Facebook stalking before a first date is probably not a very good idea, because it actually increases arousal in individuals with high levels of social anxiety. The script from 1993 to the present has clearly evolved as a result of the technology.

While dating relationships have clearly changed over the course of the last thirty years, so has our understanding of the relationship between communication and technology. In 1989, Chesebro and Bonsall published *Computer-Mediated Communication: Human Relationships in a Computerized World*, which was the first real project to examine the intricate relationship between humans and computers from a communication perspective. In it, they wrote, “When a computer is used only to convey messages, human beings dominate the computer system. The computer does not directly manipulate the content of the user's message. . . . For all practical

Table 1.1. A Brief History of Online Dating

1959	Jim Harvey and Phil Fialer, students at Stanford University, conducted a computerized matchmaking project using punch cards and an IBM 650 Mainframe.
1965	Jeff Tarr and Vaughan Morrill, students at Harvard University, conducted a study attempting to match people based on similarities using an IBM 1401.
Early 1970s	James Schur creates the first computerized dating company called Phase II.
1984	Jon Boede and Scott Smith created the Matchmaker Electronic Pen-Pal Network, which allowed users to meet using bulletin boards (BBS). Members of CompuServe's CB Simulator meet face-to-face, noting the first real gathering of people who met in a virtual environment.
1986	Gregory Scott Smith releases a BBS that allows individuals to find others in their geographic location. This is ultimately the precursor that becomes MatchMaker.com, which is the longest running online dating service.
Early 1990s	The United States sees a proliferation of online service providers like America Online (AOL), CompuServe, and Prodigy, among others.
1994	Kiss.com is registered by Terrence "Lee" Zehrer and becomes the first picture personals dating site to have 1 million users.
1995	Gary Kremen starts Match.com.
1996	In an unprecedented move, AOL switches its pay-per-hour model to a flat monthly rate of \$19.95. This pricing change opens the Internet to the general public in a way unlike ever before.
1997	JDate is launched aimed at Jewish singles.
1998	The Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan movie <i>You've Got Mail</i> is released, demonstrating the potential of online portals like AOL for dating to a broader audience.
1999	Craig Newmark incorporates Craigslist.org, which he originally started working on in 1995, and allows people to publish free personals.
2000	eHarmony is founded by psychologist and relationship author Neil Clark Warren and his son-in-law Greg Forgatch. James Hong and Jim Young create a popular website called Hot or Not, where users can upload their images and then be rated by other members.
2002	Ashley Madison, a site designed for married individuals seeking extramarital affairs, is launched by Darren Morgenstern.
2003	Plentyoffish (POF) is founded by Markus Frind, becoming one of the first free dating sites. Proximating is launched, allowing users to match and connect with other users nearby using Bluetooth technology. IAC/InterActiveCorp acquires Kiss.com, which is merged with their other major dating website, Match.com.

- 2004 OKCupid is launched by Chris Coyne, Christian Rudder, Sam Yagan, and Max Krohn, who were also the people behind TheSpark and Spark Notes.
Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes, launch Facebook.
- 2005 Three employees of PayPal, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, set out to create a video dating website, but scrapped that idea and eventually created YouTube instead.
- 2006 MatchMaker.com is bought by Avalanche, LLC.
- 2007 Skout is launched by Christian Wiklund and Niklas Lindstrom as the first SNS that uses a cell phone's global positioning system to help members find others around them within their geographic location.
Apple releases the first iPhone, ushering in a new generation of smartphone technology.
- 2009 Grindr is launched by Joel Simkhai and his company Nearby Buddy Finder, which enables gay and bisexual men to use GPS to locate other men.
- 2011 OkCupid is acquired by IAC/InterActiveCorp, the same company that owns Match.com.
- 2012 Tinder is founded by Sean Rad, Jonathan Badeen, Justin Mateen, Joe Munoz, Dinesh Moorjani, Chris Gylczynski, and Whitney Wolfe as a method for individuals to see potential matches in their geographic area and make decisions to swipe right (for interested) or swipe left (for not interested). The title of this chapter takes its name from this swiping action.
- 2015 Ashley Madison's website is hacked and twenty-five gigabytes of data is released, including customer information.

Table created by Punyanunt-Carter and Wrench.

purposes, the human being controls the computer's functions, and the computer is merely a kind of elaborate typewriter and delivery system" (97). In 1989, it was hard to imagine how computers would eventually impact how we communicate. In fact, most of the interpersonal communication discussed by Chesebro and Bonsall (1989) stemmed from earlier work by Chesebro (1985), in which he examined interpersonal interactions on bulletin boards, which found that 30 percent of messages on the bulletin boards were interpersonal in nature. At the time, Chesebro did argue five major distinguishing characteristics between online and face-to-face (FtF) friendships developed in bulletin boards. First, Chesebro noted that computer-mediated communicative (CMC) interactions were completely verbal, whereas FtF interactions contained both verbal and nonverbal behavior. Second, Chesebro argued that the differences in discursive differences in verbal communication were also important. CMC interactions were completely dependent upon text, so issues related to grammar, spelling, and typing ability would impact people's perceptions, whereas FtF interaction perceptions are often based on the intermixing of both verbal codes and nonverbal messages simultaneously.

Third, CMC interactions were usually asynchronous, whereas FtF interactions were always synchronous. Fourth, the social roles of participants differed. In CMC interactions, people had the ability to exert control over what sociological factors they told others (e.g., ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status etc.), whereas in FtF interactions people had less control over sociological factors because others looked at them and used a range of information to make these judgments (rightly or wrongly). Lastly, Chesebro (1985) pointed out the difference in the use of time. Bulletin boards were inherently text-based, and people logged in and interacted with each other at all times of the day. As such, people could spend more time thinking about the messages they would send prior to sending them. People could also post messages that would get read at a later point by others. FtF interactions, on the other hand, were very much governed by time. As Chesebro (1985) wrote, "The moment at which a verbal utterance is made, it is conveyed to another. Likewise, the moment at which a nonverbal signal is initiated, it is received by another. Time itself cannot be manipulated in a face-to-face exchange. When something occurs, it is automatically transmitted to others" (210).

Of course, Chesebro's (1985) differences play less (or no) role in modern CMC interactions. First, today people have the option of engaging in interactions online that contain both verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., Skype or Facetime). Second, discursive differences still play a role in a text-only interaction, but again, these are now optional and not necessarily the only way people interact. Third, although FtF interactions are still synchronous, we can now choose between asynchronous and synchronous CMC interactions. For online daters, this ability to create a first message asynchronously and then turn those messages into synchronous forms of communication is why many people desire online dating. Fourth, people can still hide behind the anonymity of the Internet, but some have argued that privacy and the ability to stay private in the digital age is increasingly more difficult (Mills 2008). As such, we have started seeing a blurring of public and private in a dating context. People tweet or text about their dates while they're on them, or they post pictures to Facebook or Instagram. Finally, modern CMC has opened the issue of time more broadly. Sure, people can swipe right at 3:00 a.m. and then receive a message that they're a match the next day (or even many days later), but people also have the ability to go on computer-mediated dates. The documentaries *Life 2.0* and *Second Skin* show couples meeting and dating in virtual worlds like *Second Life*, *Ever Quest*, and *World of Warcraft*. If anything, technology has opened up the possibilities of dating in ways not possible or imaginable even a decade ago.