

Dating methods and goals of Russian students

Theoretical basis of the study

When analyzing the dating sphere as a separate aspect of demographic behavior, researchers primarily focus on the dating methods.

Recently, the dating landscape has undergone significant transformation. Online dating has emerged as a social phenomenon in the 21st century and is increasingly regarded by society as a socially acceptable and convenient way to find a long-term partner [Smith, Anderson, 2016]. Survey data indicates that between 15% and 50% of students use online dating services in their search for romantic relationships [Shapiro et al., 2017; Timmermans, De Caluwe, 2017; Sawyer et al., 2018; Sumter, Vandenbosch, 2019; Castro et al., 2020].

Research suggests that men are more likely to use online dating services [Castro, 2020]. In contrast, women use services more selectively, resulting in fewer interactions with potential partners [Timmermans, Courtois, 2018; Sumter, Vandenbosch, 2019]. The propensity to use online dating services is influenced by several factors, including higher educational attainment [Shapiro et al., 2017], urban residency [Sautter et al., 2010], and elevated income levels [Sautter et al., 2010].

Dating is of particular interest to researchers because it helps to improve the prediction of marriage and birth rates among the population. The goals of dating constitute most important determinant of a person's subsequent behavior in romantic relationships. It is important to understand the purposes for which people meet (both consciously and unconsciously).

Researchers distinguish between short-term and long-term relationship goals. Short-term goals typically include goals with intimate or sexual connotations [Grøntvedt et al., 2020; Schwarz et al., 2020]. Long-term relationships may involve goals related to finding a future spouse, establishing a family, and raising children [Potarca et al., 2015; Schwarz et al., 2020]. Nevertheless, there are no studies in the scientific literature that would create an evidence base for the categorization of dating goals into these respective groups.

Individual studies conducted in various countries have already focused on the socio-demographic determinants of dating goals. For instance, men are more frequently motivated by short-term relationship objectives [Ranzini, Lutz, 2017]. Women tend to adopt a more passive role in initiating contact and are often more willing to invest their resources in long-term relationships [Tolman et al., 2003].

In Russia, the domain of dating receives minimal scholarly attention. There is a noticeable absence of scientific methodologies for examining the dating landscape. Furthermore, there is a lack of statistical data regarding the utilization of dating methods within the country and across various social groups. Particularly, it is worth noting absence collection of big data on Russian online dating, because of the withdrawal of foreign online dating services from the Russian market.

This study aims to identify the main methods and objectives of meeting and selection a partner and to analyze the influence of the socio-demographic characteristics of Russian students on these dimensions.

Data and first results

The empirical part of this research is based on data obtained from the author's online survey assessing the main aspects of dating among Russian university students. The survey targeted students across different educational levels (bachelor's, master's, doctoral, etc.) and diverse fields of study (socio-economic, engineering, medical, etc.). The final sample consisted of 3,838 students from 164 universities within the Russian Federation.

The identification of dating methods and goals was conducted through a content analysis of the scientific literature on the topic of dating (528 publications in the period 2010–2022, English-language articles). The findings from this content analysis are detailed in the author's work [Klimenko, 2024].

The survey results indicate that the most popular methods of dating among Russian students include educational settings (87.4% of all respondents reported this experience), interactions with friends (80.6%), and social networks (73.5%). On average, approximately one-third of respondents used online dating services, categorizing this method as one of the less favored approaches to dating.

In terms of dating objectives, the most reported goals are long-term relationships (62.2%), shared leisure activities (62.0%), online communication (58.0%), and love (52.8%). Only one-sixth of respondents identified sex as a dating goal (8.8% of women versus 33.2% of men). Additionally, marriage was considered as a goal by 10% of students, while the aspiration of having and raising children was the least prevalent goal, reported by only 5.4% of the respondents.

Research methodology

In the initial stage of modeling, the following types of probit models were constructed:

$MG_{ilk} = f(\alpha_0 + \beta_0 Age_i + \delta_0 Sex_i + \gamma X_{ilk} + \varepsilon_{ilk})$, where:

MG_{ilk} represents the dependent variable indicating dating of the (i)-th respondent ($i = 1, 2, \dots, 3838$) through the (l)-th method of dating ($l=1, 2, \dots, 8$) in pursuit of the (k)-th dating goal ($k=1, 2, \dots, 8$). Given that the questionnaire was designed to elicit a binary response (yes/no), probit models were deemed appropriate for this analysis.

In addition to the independent variables of the student's age and gender (Age_i , Sex_i), a number of control variables (X_{ilk}) were incorporated into the models: the geographical location of the student's university (Moscow/St. Petersburg or other regions), marital status, romantic involvement, employment status, personal income, and overall financial situation.

The results of the modeling are presented in Appendix 1.

At the next stage, conducted to consolidate the list of methods and goals associated with dating (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the factor analysis of the grouping of methods and purposes of dating among Russian students

Dating methods	Dating goals
1. <i>Online methods of meeting people</i> (social networks and online dating services).	1. <i>Family</i> (marriage and having/raising children)
2. <i>Traditional (offline) methods of meeting people</i> (friends, school, parents, work, hobbies and partially public places).	2. <i>Long-term relationships</i> (love and long-term relationships)
	3. <i>Search friends</i> (online communication and spending leisure time)
	4. <i>Dating for personal gain</i> (short-term relationships and material goods).

The findings of the factor analysis enabled the identification of groups of dating methods, which confirms with the initial hypotheses based on previous studies. However, the analysis conducted based on dating goals highlighted four distinct groups, rather than the hypothesized two (short-term and long-term goals). This finding deviates from the initial assumptions.

In the final stage, OLS models were constructed using the newly derived variables as dependent variables. The same set of independent and control variables employed in the first stage of modeling was retained.

The results of the adjusted OLS models are presented in Appendix 2.

Simulation results

The following results were obtained:

- Female students have a higher propensity to use online dating methods compared to male students (the likelihood of using online dating services increases by 11.9%). Additionally, the likelihood of female students using friends and place of work as dating methods increases by 24.8% and 9.7%, respectively.
- As students' age increases, they are more likely to engage with online dating services, while the likelihood of using social networks and traditional dating methods decreases.
- Male students are more inclined to find dating for both short-term (86.2% more likely, holding all other factors constant) and long-term relationships (10.5%). Conversely, female respondents are more likely to engage in dating when seeking friendships, particularly through online communication (24.9%) and shared leisure activities (14.1%).
- With advancing age, students are more likely to search dating for both long-term (notably, marriage) and short-term dating goals.

Future research may consider expanding the scope of the study on students:

- An analysis of the main aspects of the following stages, particularly the attitudes of young individuals toward cohabitation, marriage, childbearing, and other related aspects.
- Conducting a longitudinal study of Russian students to examine temporal changes in their dating behavior and attitudes.

The unique methodology of this study is promising for application in other countries. In particular, the review of scientific literature provides a comprehensive overview of the global landscape pertaining to the topic of online dating. The collected survey data offers a unique cross-sectional snapshot of Russian students' attitudes and behaviors regarding dating, particularly considering the significant changes that have occurred within Russia's dating market.

Literature mentioned in the extended abstract

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Results of probit models of the influence of socio-economic characteristics of students on dating methods and goals

<i>Dating methods</i>	Online services (1)	Social sites (2)	Friends (3)	Parents (4)	Public places (5)	Place of study (6)	Place of work (7)	Hobbies (8)
Age	0.346*** (0.05)	-0.125*** (0.047)	-0.171*** (0.05)	-0.191*** (0.049)	-0.187*** (0.055)	-0.07 (0.054)	0.025 (0.047)	-0.172*** (0.0456)
Sex	0.119** (0.05)	0.082 (0.05)	0.248*** (0.053)	0.083 (0.053)	0.012 (0.048)	-0.023 (0.061)	0.097** (0.05)	-0.039 (0.047)
LR stat	200.951	125.46	78.634	35.7287	97.328	39.656	263.169	35.855
Prob(LR stat)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
McFadden R-squared	0.041	0.028	0.021	0.009	0.019	0.014	0.056	0.007
<i>Dating goals</i>	Online communication (9)	Long-term relationships (10)	Short-term relationships (11)	Marriage (12)	Material wealth (13)	Children (14)	Leisure time (15)	Love (16)
Age	-0.008 (0.046)	0.195*** (0.048)	0.301*** (0.068)	0.182*** (0.054)	0.309 (0.239)	0.083 (0.061)	0.016 (0.045)	0.124*** (0.047)
Sex	0.249*** (0.047)	-0.105** (0.049)	-0.862*** (0.055)	0.02 (0.065)	0.65*** (0.099)	-0.094 (0.077)	0.141*** (0.048)	0.057 (0.048)
LR stat	87.6976	217.4909	421.4801	118.6623	73.2942	44.6488	44.6482	170.5965
Prob(LR stat)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
McFadden R-squared	0.017	0.043	0.128	0.048	0.041	0.029	0.009	0.032
Observations	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838

Note: Significance at 10%*, 5%** , 1%***. Standard error data are given in brackets. Other modeling variables mentioned in the text are not shown in the table.

Appendix 2. Results of OLS-models of the influence of socio-economic characteristics of students on dating methods and goals

	Dating methods		Dating goals			
	Offline (17)	Online (18)	Family (19)	Long-term relationships (20)	Search friends (21)	Personal gain (22)
Age	-0.211*** (0.036)	0.128*** (0.035)	0.015 (0.036)	0.166*** (0.035)	-0.042 (0.035)	0.078** (0.036)
Sex	0.051 (0.037)	0.097*** (0.036)	0.12*** (0.037)	-0.184*** (0.036)	0.385*** (0.037)	-0.199*** (0.037)
F stat	8.883	21.461	8.775	35.548	19.839	8.73
Prob(F stat)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
R-squared	0.02	0.048	0.02	0.077	0.045	0.02
Observations	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838	3838

Note: Significance at 10%*, 5%** , 1%***. Standard error data are given in brackets. Other modeling variables mentioned in the text are not shown in the table.