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# The Inherent Risks Users Have To Manage In The Pursuit Of Love

## Abstract

As the number of people who use dating sites grows, so does the frequency of reported scams. In regards to privacy and trust, this paper presents the inherent risks users have to manage in the pursuit of love. To assess compatibility, users are encouraged to provide private and sensitive information, which compromises their privacy. To build trust and meaningful connections, some users went overboard with the data they share to demonstrate their sincerity. This makes it so easy for scammers to lure naive users and steal their private information and money. By discussing the consequences that manifest from privacy-related risks, we hope readers would take ownership of the information they share online and realize that their current profiles may be sabotaging their safety. We then study the possible methods that users can adopt to stay secure and protect their privacy when dating online.

## Introduction

Searching for true love is hard and the process of looking for someone compatible can be frustrating, lonely and overwhelming. By digitalizing love, technology has made the process as convenient and efficient as possible, reducing the uncertainty an individual may face. Who knows, your next swipe might be your soulmate.

Living in this digital age, dating now serve as a means for people to connect and build relationships. Millions of relationship seekers are using popular dating apps such as Tinder, CoffeeMeetsBagel and OkCupid to find love. To enjoy the app features, these platforms require users to complete their profiles and share pictures of themselves. You are doomed to fail with an empty inbox if your profile depicts a mysterious John Doe.

Kaspersky Lab, a global cybersecurity company revealed that 13% of online daters disclosed that they share private data to their matches within minutes of conversing (2017). From a user's perspective, sharing personal details is a harmless way to make a connection and help potential matches to assess compatibility. However, users failed to recognize that their transparency can make them vulnerable to cyberthreats and security breaches.

Love letter, blind dates and arranged marriages may be things of the past, but are the apps that have replaced them any better?

## Objective

In this paper, we explore how privacy can be compromised in the online dating world, how individuals build trust on dating platforms, the consequences of oversharing and the safety strategies that individuals can adopt while using dating apps.

## Privacy in Online Dating

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Any kind of social media account entails a certain degree of privacy risks, but online dating is different as users are encouraged to share sensitive information publicly with people who are practically strangers.

Dating apps are leveraging on a fundamental phenomenon - we cannot feel the clouds of invisible data that is constantly surrounding us. "You are lured into giving away all this information," says Luke Stark, a digital technology sociologist at Dartmouth University (Duportail, 2017).

To establish meaningful relations, many users get carried away with disclosing private information such as their current locations, sexual preferences, jobs, interests, religious beliefs, family and more, revealing too much about themselves to potential partners that they have never met in real life. Kaspersky Lab remarked that 15% of the respondents shared information they deemed to be "embarrassing" and 14% of them have sent nude photos to their matches (2017).

To maintain a certain level of privacy, users who were more wary of the dangers of online dating have strived to erect a barrier between their real identities and dating profiles. Such attempts were futile as photo recognition services like Google Image Search has made it effortless to re-identify photos, which can easily expose an individual's identity (Culey, 2017).

At OkCupid, profiles are public by default and indexed by Google. If users were unaware of such settings, a casual search could bring random visitors, possibly even their managers and colleagues to their dating profiles, jeopardizing their privacy.

## **Building Trust in Online Dating**

Slight misrepresentations on dating app are prevalent as the users desired to make a good first impression. However, online daters do realized that they could only manipulate their image to a certain extent as blatant falsification will be exposed immediately once they take the relationship offline (Tidwell & Walther, 2002).

Research has illustrated that when we converse online, the power of anonymity and control we have over our online interactions facilitate the genuine expression of "our authentic self" (Krotoski, 2012). With authenticity, it helps online daters to gain the trust of their matches.

A universal skepticism people have about online dating is whether their potential love interest actually exists. To build trust and convince the other party that they are indeed a real person with genuine intentions, users are highly motivated to disclose intimate information to reduce uncertainty and verify their credibility.

## **Consequences**

What will happen if the wealth of data that online daters have provided gets hacked or acquired by another organization?

Oversharing could put online daters at risk of having their private data endangered by creeps, scammers and other cybercriminals. Personal Information could be used for blackmailing

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purposes, demanding money from victims in exchange for keeping their data or raunchy pictures private.

With online dating, users put themselves at risk of being lied to or catfished as well. Nearly 60% of the dating app interviewees were dishonest about their physical appearances by enhancing their looks through image editing. (Toma et al., 2008). Innocent online daters might fall into romance traps set by cat phishers who capitalize on emotional triggers to get users to send them money or gifts.

Billy, a 25-year-old technician was involved in a romance-related scam. Within minutes of conversing with a beautiful model, their messages became sexual, and the model saved screenshots of their cyber-sex session. The model demanded Billy for \$800 to keep the pictures under wrap.

The sad reality is that similar incidents are happening globally. In USA, the Federal Trade Commission reported more than 21,000 online love scams, an alarming increase from 8,500 cases in 2015. These victims had a shared loss of \$143 million in 2018. (Paul, 2019).