

The Art of Swiping Right: A Discussion of Dating in the Digital Era

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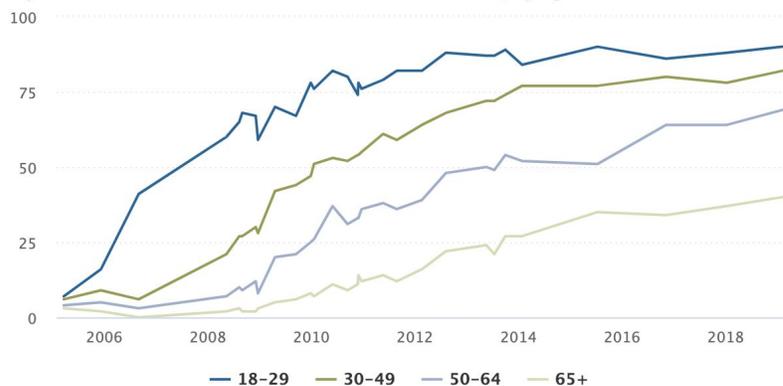
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Introduction

There is no doubt that the integration of digital media has impacted a majority of people living within developed nations.

% of U.S. adults who use at least one social media site, by age

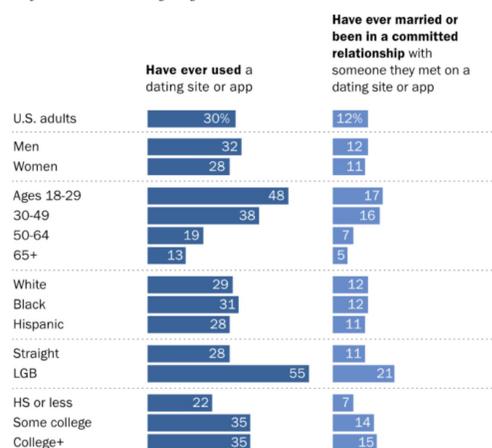


According to the Pew Research Center, since 2005, the amount of adults in the United States using social media has increased from 5% to 72% by 2019. Social media is not only used by young adults but now people of all ages, Pew Research Center also provides evidence that 69% of adults between the ages of 50-64 have

at least one form of social media.

The purposes of social media span from group communication to professional networking, and even dating. Dating, in particular, has been dramatically impacted by the increased use of social media.

% of U.S. adults who say they ...



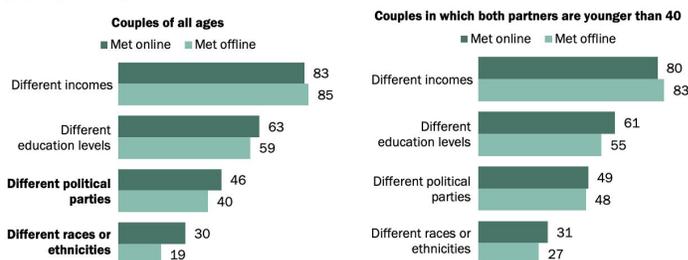
Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. LGB indicates those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Those who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Oct. 16-28, 2019.
 "The Virtues and Downsides of Online Dating"

According to the Pew Research Center, an average of one in three Americans have at least tried dating websites. However, this varies greatly depending on age, gender, and sexual orientation. Where dating has traditionally been perceived as a personal and private matter, the digitalization of meeting and getting to know people has masked its intimacy. Not only is it easier to meet and connect with people, it can also be easier to disconnect from people. The creation of terms such as "catfishing" and "ghosting" provide insight into the more negative ways that social media has influenced dating.

Online dating's popularity inevitably changed the way people interact and meet each other. Despite being perceived as shallow or insincere at times, the digitalization of dating has evidently made it more diverse.

Couples who meet online are more likely to be of different races or ethnicities and political parties, but these differences disappear among young couples

% of U.S. adults who have ever been in a relationship and met their current or most recent partner online/offline saying they and their partner have ...



Note: Bold labels indicate that the difference between those who met online and offline is significant for those items.
Source: How Couples Meet and Stay Together 2017 survey (fresh sample), conducted by Stanford University July 13-Aug. 1, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

According to the Pew Research Center 30% of couples who met online are different races or ethnicities, while only 19% of couples who met offline are different races. Higher amounts of couples with different education levels, and political parties were also reported from couples who met online. However, the significant different drops as younger couples are analyzed. This may be due to diverse couples being more accepted in society today, both

online and offline.

Additionally, dating has clearly worked for couples, which is why people are still open to trying it. Online dating has expanded interactions beyond physical distance and different ideologies and backgrounds. Beyond having a relationship become successful, online dating is an opportunity to create connections and friendship, just like other social media platforms.

Online dating is overall perceived differently by the general public, as some are reluctant to accept the nontraditional practice, while others are open and willing to take advantage of these platforms. Online dating has introduced new culture and communities surrounding certain websites or apps. However, the online aspect has allowed for lying and false information to be more prevalent, thus posing a threat to personal security. Still, people view the ability to present themselves in whichever way they intend to be a part of their freedom and right as an internet user. As online dating becomes more mainstream, more and more people will be able to find a specially catered website or app that suits their own interests, beliefs, and ideologies. In the future, online dating may mold into a normal, practical, and effective method of meeting potential spouses for people of all ages.

Framing Questions

1. How has social media changed the perspective on dating?
2. How has the language of dating changed from face-to-face interaction to screen-to-screen?
3. What are the implications of never having to see a significant other in person?
4. Should Tinder advertise itself as a hookup app, and Match.com as a relationship app? Or is it up to the users to clarify what they are looking for in their bios and messaging?
5. Where do the LGBTQ+ community go to explore relationships? Grindr has a social stigma for hookups, not long-term commitment. Is there equity here?
6. There is no recourse or accountability in creating a false persona. Should there be? Should there be background checks? Or does each person have the liberty to explore new avenues in whatever way they choose?

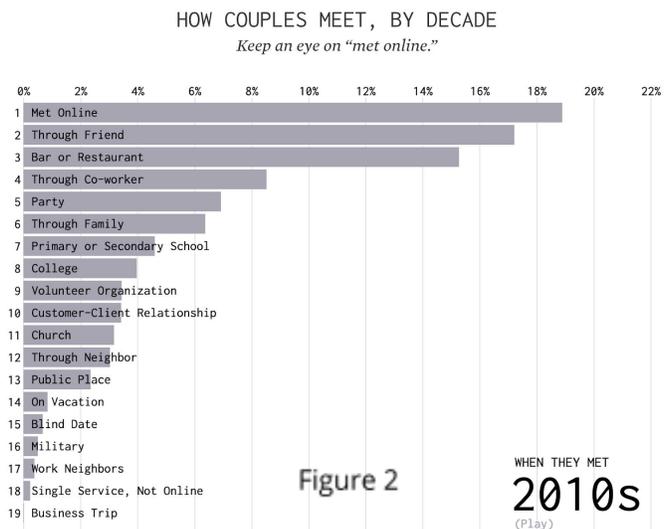
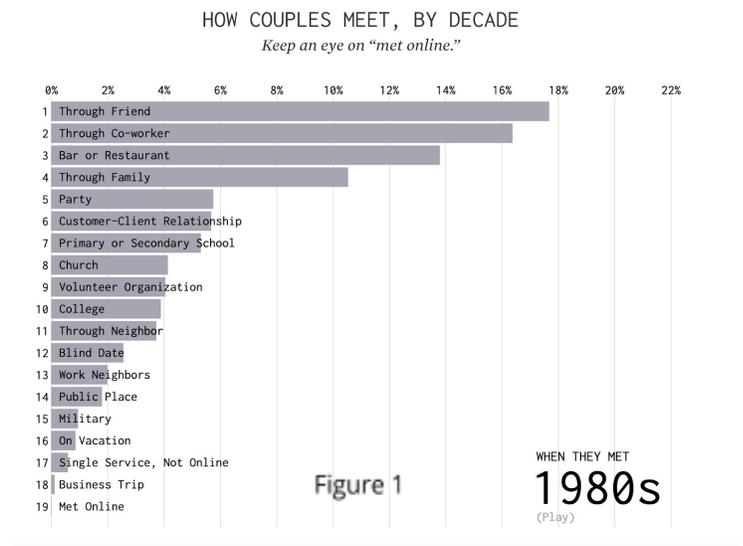
Approach 1: A Changing Culture

Summary

This particular approach focuses on the effect social media has had on the culture of dating. With more people actively participating in social media dating apps, there has been a drastic change in the dynamic of the start of a relationship.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, people did not have as much freedom to choose their romantic partners compared to today. Parents were responsible for hand-picking partners they approved of for their child/children to marry. A way to get around this did exist though, through the “personal advertisements” section of newspapers. This was essentially equivalent to dating sites and apps in their own time, but it was not nearly as socially acceptable as these dating apps are for us today. Over the course of the next century, people became more accepting of these “personal advertisements”, and this shift in perspective eventually became the foundation for the dating culture we know and experience.

One perk of the rise of social media usage is that it has been able to connect people around the world and even within their own communities who would have never otherwise met each other. Before the rise of dating sites, the main method of meeting was simply by forming connections with those in your present surroundings (Yau). As seen in figure 1, twenty years ago, the top 14 ways that couples met were all by means of their rather immediate surroundings. Through a friend, at a party, in school, and all of these other ways cause the couples that meet to have a much higher chance of being similar in religion, race, social-class, or ethnicity. However, as seen in figure 2, the top method of meeting has transitioned to online (Yau). People are no longer meeting just those similar to them. Instead, horizons have expanded and couples that are of different race, religion, ethnicity, and social-class are now able to meet.



To put this into even more perspective, there has been rapid growth in the amount of intermarried couples since the rise of dating apps. In the 1970s, only 3% of couples were intermarried, while now, more than 1-in-6 married couples are of different race or ethnicity (Livingston). Dating websites and apps have obviously given a larger platform for those of different races, religions, and backgrounds to meet and develop a relationship. Before these dating sites, most met from the community they were from, which greatly narrowed the pool of possible candidates.

While dating apps have increased connectivity of people not only within their communities but also around the world, the use of social media as a form of communication has resulted in a steady depersonalization of relationships. As the commonality of using dating apps has increased, so have specific approaches in a relationship and even the definition of relationships changes. “Ghosting,” where two people are steadily talking over social media and one person abruptly cuts all forms of communication, has emerged as a rather common occurrence especially over dating apps that match a person with many partners (Govberg). Ease of access to other potential relationships has, in the eyes of some dating app users, decreased the willingness of people to “settle down” and commit to a relationship (Lenhart “Chapter 4”). Even if in one third of marriages today the couples met online, so many more plausible connections were formed and broken due to the culture of dating apps that the real success rate of these apps is rather low (Fetters).

However, even if dating apps lead to a decrease in the value of relationships, studies show that people are more willing to divulge sensitive, personal information over social media than they are in person (Lenhart “Chapter 3”). The screens provide a masquerade for boldness and confidence that people do not necessarily feel in everyday life, allowing them to be able to display the image of themselves they want other people to see.

Overall, the introduction of dating apps has created a shift in the way relationships are established and even the core definition of a relationship. While broadening horizons for people to meet and connecting people who may otherwise have stayed strangers, there has also been an increased lack of value placed on the relationships created there, illustrated by a steady depersonalization due to lack of face-to-face contact between participants.

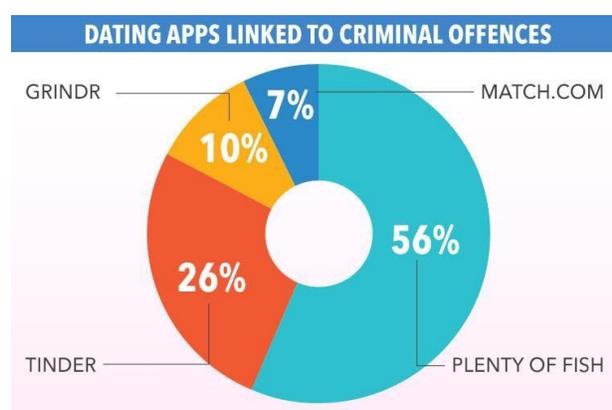
Benefits	Trade-offs
Connects people around the world	Depersonalization of relationships
Diversifies relationships	Lack of face-to-face interaction
More open form of communication	Less value placed on relationships

Values: Culture and Community

Approach 2: Behind the Screen

Summary

This second approach will focus on the personal security and liberty of dating app users and the dangers that have become more prominent as the online dating culture has popularized. Not everyone who goes onto dating apps like Tinder, Grindr, or Bumble has good intentions and as these apps have developed, so have “sugar daddies,” and people simply looking for a hookup. With more people picking roommates on Facebook or getting



into Snapchat or Oovoo relationships without meeting in person, issues of who people are communicating with come into play. Other more significant dangers include hacked accounts, compromised personal information, leaked nude photos, and sophisticated online predators. These problems are exacerbated by the minimal regulations on dating apps and lack of recourse for lying or portraying themselves in a certain way.

One of the most concerning problems with dating apps is how easy it is for people

to create different personas to make other people believe they are someone they're not, also known as catfishing. This not only allows regular people to deceive others, but also gives predators easier access to a wide variety of people. With the rise of screen to screen communication and the subsequent decline in face to face communication, users are no longer able to truly know who they are talking to. Recently, lawsuits have reached the courts regarding women being sexually harassed, assaulted, and raped by men they met on an online dating site. Some have felony sexual assault charges against them, bringing into the question whether or not background checks need to be conducted (Shammas). Figure 1 demonstrates the dating apps that are linked to criminal offences (Shammas). As of right now, there are very few regulations with dating websites and most site's terms of use “waive the websites liability for any damages arising from the conduct of the users or anyone else in connection with using the service” (O'Day, 333). If companies were to start requiring background checks, then this policy would be void and the dating site would be held responsible if someone who has felonies or outstanding warrants slipped through the check. It would open up the companies to more lawsuits and could cost them millions of dollars. The benefits of having background checks would

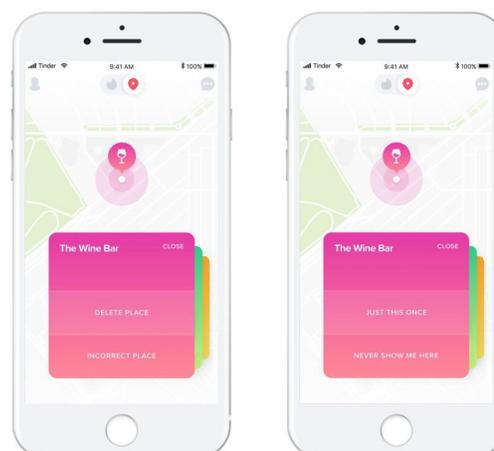


Figure 2

ensure the safety of the users by lowering the number of users with sexual assault charges.

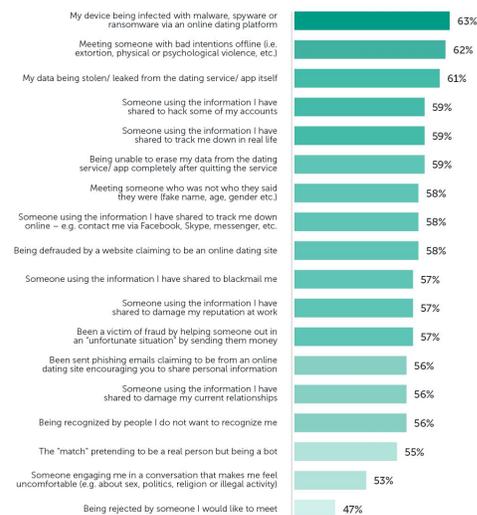
Additionally, because all information for dating apps is stored online, it is more likely that personal accounts could be hacked and compromised, as well as user data being used with poor intentions. Tinder Places, for example, is a feature that attempts to use the user's locations to find matches who attend the same places. Figure 2 shows this new feature, which prompts users about sharing their location or not. The idea of "match first, speak later" allows for the world to avoid in-person communication or sharing raw information- which could potentially lead to stalking or worse (Tang). Tang argues that this may promote more civility or establish common ground in initial chats, or it may perpetuate an unsafe culture, crossing the line between private and public life.

In a study conducted by Kaspersky Lab in August 2017, of the 21,081 online dating users across 32 countries, the top five concerns among them were who uses dating sites. Three of these five concerns were regarding personal data. The top concern listed in Figure 3 is the infection of one's device with malware/spyware/ransomware through the dating platform, cited by 63% of respondents. The second top concern also dealt with personal security, which is meeting with someone who has questionable intentions, cited by 62% of respondents. The rest of the concerns, respectively, are stolen data-related: information being used to hack that person and data being used to track that person offline are real possibilities (Kaspersky Labs).

Overall, personal safety is a top concern among people who use dating apps. Understandably, being a digital platform, dating apps are susceptible to being hacked and exploited. But while this is a risk for nearly any online service, another one that is unique to online dating platforms is the vulnerability people open themselves to when they meet others in real life, which can be a consequence of little to no regulation. Dating apps, while offering innumerable opportunities to people, can also unintentionally bring danger and misuse.

Figure 3

People's concerns while they are dating online



Benefits	Trade-offs
Transparency	Company Liability
Personal Safety	Evaluation Period
Comfortable Exchange	Financial Responsibility

Values: Liberty and Personal Security

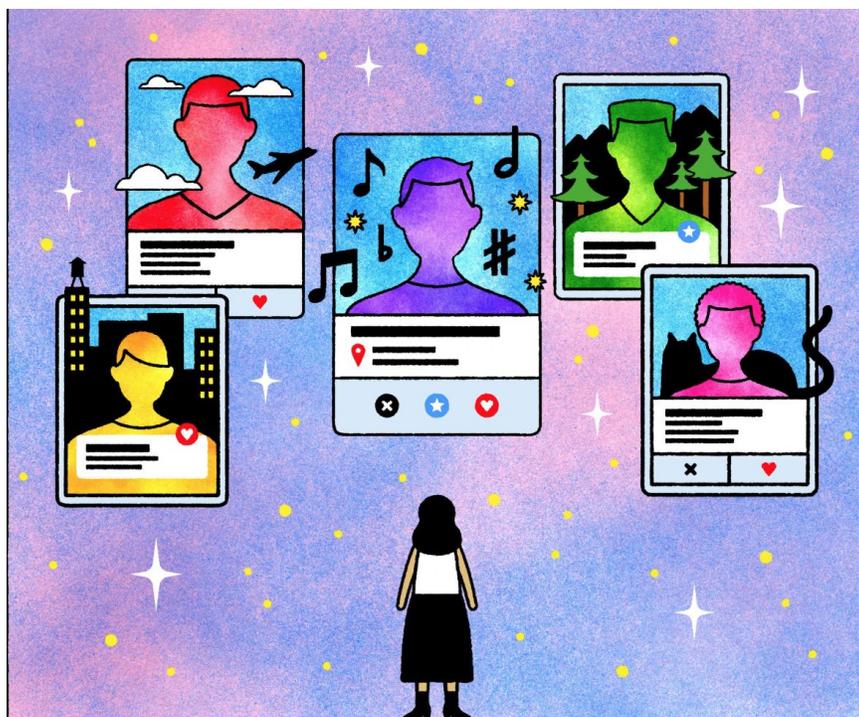
Approach 3: The Financial Advantage

Summary

This last approach addresses the ways in which specific dating services cater to differing demographics and the ways in which subscriptions and in-app purchases impact the perceived equity of such services. As online dating has become more of a commonplace in current society, different dating services have been designed to target specific audiences. This way, not everyone is stuck to only one specific app, where they may not find anyone that shares their same interests, beliefs, or ideologies. The wide variety of different dating services that have become available have allowed people interested in using this medium to meet a significant other to find a place that best suits them and feel safe in. On one hand, this aspect has encouraged the usage of dating apps, while on the other, it has also unintentionally fostered the creation of an inevitable socioeconomic divide.

Dating services catering to different social and economic groups increases chances of meeting like-minded individuals. Specific apps generally have one main focus on the kind of experience the user is supposed to get. For instance, according to Consumer Rankings, the best five dating apps to use in 2020 and their specialty is as follows:

- ❖ Zoosk – Best Dating Experience
- ❖ Elite Singles – Best for Chemistry that Lasts
- ❖ SilverSingles – Best for Singles Over 50
- ❖ eHarmony – Best for Compatible Matches
- ❖ Our Time – Best for Mature Dating
- ❖ Honorable Mention:
Match.com – Best for Serious Relationships



As it can be noted from the list, each dating website has a distinct dating experience. This allows the user to find what they are looking for, whether it is a serious relationship, a deep connection, or simply a hookup. In many ways, this benefits those that participate in the online dating world by allowing them to meet others outside their social circle yet with the same interests.

Nevertheless, this aspect has also made dating apps become very niche, with some intentionally only catering to certain demographics, whereas others such as Grindr, Tinder, and Bumble all have fostered unique subcultures. Those new to digital dating may be unaware of the discrepancy between the practical use of such apps and the advertised use, leading them to waste time and energy interacting with people with whom they are not compatible. Dating apps having such specialties may limit the possibility of exploration and experimentation without judgement, as people will be expected to only join a service if they already know what they want. Is it up to the companies to advertise Tinder as a hookup app, Match.com for relationships, etc., or should it be left to individuals to specify what they are looking for and their intentions in their bios or messages? If the freedom is left to the individual how does that protect against the threat of catfishing and predators?

On the economic side of things, many so-called “higher end” services or add-on subscriptions also have added features such as background checks or personality tests. It is natural that some cost would be associated with the increased security and privileges, potentially leading to exclusivity or inequity as those willing to pay for additional benefits become more visible, have more control, or higher chances of success on a platform than the average user. It then becomes difficult to draw a line between free and paid services, because the money factor may make users think they are better off if they invest on it.

Interestingly enough, several studies have been conducted to determine whether or not paid sites are actually better than free ones. According to the 2016 Consumer Reports Online Dating Survey, out of 9600 participants, about half said they had joined a paid service whereas the other half had joined a free one. In terms of overall satisfaction, paid dating sites actually ended up scoring lower than free ones, which only comes to show that deciding on which service is better solely depends on the users' preference (Meltzer).

PREMIUM Light	PREMIUM <i>Classic</i>	PREMIUM Comfort*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 months Premium Membership Unlimited communication Intelligent matchmaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 months Premium Membership Unlimited communication Intelligent matchmaking View all member photos See all profile visitors Read receipts for messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 months Premium Membership Unlimited communication Intelligent matchmaking View all member photos See all profile visitors Read receipts for messages
\$32.95 <small>p/m</small>	-22%* \$34.95 <small>p/m</small>	\$22.95 <small>p/m</small>
Continue >	Continue >	Continue >

However, such divisions in equality naturally make people divide into different social and economic groups essentially encouraging economic segregation. For instance, a person who is willing to pay an Elite Singles subscription is probably not going to want to use Tinder. These subcultures can also encourage the ideology that people can be put into certain categories that not everyone may actually be comfortable with. It may also create a less tolerant society as a whole as people stop being exposed to different beliefs and sexualities. Nevertheless in the end it is up to the discretion of the users to determine what their priorities are and whether the financial sacrifice is worth it for the services the apps provide them.

Benefits	Trade-offs
Meet like-minded individuals	Social segregation and exclusivity
Saves time and energy	Limited possibility of exploration
Better perceived quality	Socioeconomic divide

Value: Equity

Conclusion

Overall, social media and the internet have certainly changed perspectives on dating. From changing the way people communicate and interact, to paving a way for a more diverse dating pool, the culture of dating has been impacted by the rise of the internet in the past two decades. On one hand, there is the possibility of meeting and communicating with people from all over the world, but on the other hand, communicating solely online can depersonalize dating, making it easier to cut someone off without explanation.

Another possible drawback of online dating is the lack of security. Currently, there is no way to be completely sure that the person you are talking to is who they say they are. The question of requiring background checks brings up possible limitations for the amount of users on an app, and may negatively impact a company, but it could also keep users more safe.

One way to receive these benefits is to pay a premium for them, and some people are willing to, as the success of apps like Elite Singles have shown. However, since not everyone has the privilege to be able to pay for these services, some have wondered whether online dating is truly equitable. In addition, as the dating app marketplace becomes increasingly crowded, apps look to find niches for subcommunities. This can give smaller groups a way to find a match that may be more difficult on a general dating site, but it also enforces divisions that not everyone is comfortable with.

In both positive and negative ways, the internet has dramatically changed the dating landscape. From the culture of dating to safety, freedom, and equity, the way people meet a partner in 2020 is radically different from the way people met 50 or even 20 years ago. Hopefully, this deliberation experience helped introduce different perspectives on the topic and allowed for a fruitful discussion of the relationship between the internet and dating.

Summary Survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/RY5S9G2>



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