



# Swipe, Connect, Disconnect: The Pandemic's Digital Influence on Offline Intimacy

Thomas SG\*

Department of Psychology, CHRIST University, India

\*Corresponding author: Suman Grigary Thomas, Assistant Professor, School of Psychological Sciences, CHRIST University, YPR, Bengaluru, India, Tel: 09961302273; Email: sumangrigary@gmail.com

Received Date: October 29, 2024; Published Date: November 08, 2024

## Abstract

Relationship dynamics were altered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with online dating emerging as the main way to connect when socially separated. The psychological and social effects of online dating are examined in this article, with particular attention paid to concerns about emotional intimacy, privacy, and trust. Although virtual relationships offered ways to cope with loneliness, problems like risks of infidelity, unclear commitment, and privacy issues surfaced.

**Keywords:** Online Dating; COVID-19; Pandemic; Virtual Relationships

## Introduction

Almost every aspect of life has been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including how people establish and preserve relationships. Many resorted to online dating sites in order to satisfy their romantic and social needs as physical distance and seclusion became necessary. This article highlights the pandemic's effects on relationship formation, emotional intimacy, and the wider ramifications for mental and sexual health as it explores the particular difficulties and changing dynamics of online dating in the digital age.

### The Growth of Digital Relationships and Online Dating

Because traditional dating methods were restricted during the pandemic, digital platforms became essential for sustaining interpersonal relationships. By participating in virtual relationships, people were able to get around the restrictions of quarantine thanks to the shift towards online dating [1]. User activity on sites like Tinder and Bumble increased significantly, and features like video calls gained

popularity. For example, during this time, video chatting on dating apps increased by 25% and Netflix usage increased by 70%, suggesting that virtual interactions bridged a sizable social gap [2]. Additionally, by adding new features to promote connection, like virtual dates, movie nights, and interactive features, online dating apps have evolved to meet the demands of a physically distant world [3].

### Digital Relationships' Effects on the Mind and Society

The increase in virtual relationships has affected users' psychological health in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, online dating helped people cope with the stress and loneliness brought on by the pandemic by offering a necessary coping mechanism. However, problems like insecurity about partner fidelity, emotional detachment, and privacy concerns emerged as common difficulties. As partners negotiate the thin line between intimacy and personal space online, Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) illuminates these dynamics by highlighting the conflict between connectedness and individuality in digital relationships [4]. Furthermore,

studies show that the increased stress levels caused by the pandemic caused many people to seek emotional ties with former partners, which complicated already-existing relationships [5].

### The Changing Face of Relationship Fidelity and Virtual Intimacy

Given how simple it is to make several connections at once, online dating has sparked concerns about faithfulness. Emotional dissatisfaction and the perceived freedom of secrecy provided by virtual interactions are frequently associated with infidelity in digital relationships [6]. Examples of “obliga-swiping” (swiping on profiles for attention rather than connection) and “breadcrumbing” (sending flirtatious messages without intending to meet) have increased, highlighting new dating practices that could make true intimacy more difficult [7]. Others saw online relationships as short-term outlets, which frequently resulted in misconceptions about commitment levels, while some people maintained virtual fidelity.

### Issues with Trust and Privacy in Online Relationships

Due in large part to the possibility of coming across phoney profiles, users’ privacy and trust concerns increase when they use online dating. Since almost 57% of users on dating platforms lie about personal information, many people present idealised versions of themselves online. This phenomenon, referred to as “diffused intimacy,” undermines trust and authenticity in relationships, making it more difficult for people looking for real connections to make decisions [8]. Furthermore, because users are frequently compelled to trust virtual profiles without in-person verification, the unpredictable nature of digital relationships poses a distinct set of risks that could expose them to dishonest practices.

**Relationship Expectations: Online versus Offline Interactions**  
Convenience and accessibility are two benefits of virtual relationships, but they frequently lack the emotional depth of in-person relationships. According to Pitcho-Prelorntzos S, et al. [9], online dating has helped people overcome their social anxiety because it allows for controlled, gradual interactions. Additionally, studies show that people with introverted or shy tendencies can connect meaningfully through virtual relationships, which allow them to set their own pace without the pressures of in-person dating [10]. Many people wonder if online dating can completely replace offline experiences or if it can only supplement them because digital interactions can occasionally fall short of satisfying the emotional needs that are typically connected to in-person relationships.

**Digital Relationships’ Impact on Sexual and Mental Health**  
Concerns regarding the effects of digital relationships on sexual and mental health were also raised during the pandemic. For example, prolonged screen time increased users’ anxiety and caused emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, as people looked for different ways to satiate their romantic needs, a study by Lehmilller JJ, et al. [11] noted a decline in physical intimacy and an increase in sexual diversity in interactions. Unquestionably, digital relationships have helped people overcome social isolation, but the effects on mental health are still complicated; some users report feeling more anxious, while others find solace in virtual connections [1].

### Conclusion

A new era of digital relationships has been ushered in by the pandemic, which has permanently changed the dating scene. Online dating offers special difficulties like privacy concerns, emotional ambiguity, and the possibility of dishonest behaviour, even though it has been a lifeline for intimacy and social connection during times of loneliness. The increasing prevalence of digital relationships in today’s world indicates that responsible regulation and user education are necessary to maximise online dating as a secure and fulfilling experience. As people continue to adjust to new dating conventions in a technologically advanced world, the need for connection endures despite the risks.

### References

1. Lodha P (2022) The Challenges of Online Dating and Digital Relationships during COVID-19. *Global Bioethics Enquiry* 10(2): 80-86.
2. Kurz P (2020) Broadband Usage Spiked 47% in Q1, Says OpenVault. *TV Technology*.
3. Handley L (2020) The New Rules for Finding Love in a Pandemic. *CNBC*.
4. Baxter LA, Braithwaite DO (2008) Relational dialectics theory. In: Baxter LA, et al. (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives*, Sage Publications, pp: 349-361.
5. Gordon KC, Mitchell EA (2020) Infidelity in the Time of COVID-19. *Family Process* 59(3): 956-966.
6. Merkle ER, Richardson RA (2000) Digital Dating and Virtual Relating: Conceptualizing Computer Mediated Romantic Relationships. *Family Relations* 49(2): 187-192.

7. Basu T (2020) How Coronavirus is Transforming Online Dating and Sex. MIT Technology Review.
8. Aimeur E, Sahnoune Z (2020) Privacy, Trust, and Manipulation in Online Relationships. Journal of Technology in Human Services 38(2): 159-183.
9. Pitcho-Prelorentzos S, Heckel C, Ring L (2020) Predictors of social anxiety among online dating users. Computers in Human Behavior 110: 106381.
10. Kraft C (2020) How to Keep Your Relationships Healthy during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Johns Hopkins Medicine.
11. Lehmilller JJ, Garcia JR, Gesselman AN, Mark KP (2020) Less Sex, but More Sexual Diversity: Changes in Sexual Behavior during the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic. Leisure Sciences 43(1-2): 295-304.