Research Question:

How do Internet dating services contribute to or detract from the development of romantic relationships?


Considering the growing acceptance and money-making potential for online dating, Kotlyar and Ariely suggest that existing online dating services have three major components; access to profiles, algorithms for matching, and communication channels, and that communication channels make a big difference. Because the quality of communication plays an important role in the development of successful romantic relationships the authors test different methods of communication to determine the influence each has on the quality of communication. The authors test four different online communication methods. The simplest is standard text chatting and the most complex is the use of avatars that provide non-verbal clues through head nods, eye contact, and romantic gestures. Results indicate that the avatars provide non-verbal cues that increase indicators of communication quality (such as more information exchange), but the extent varies between genders. Male and female participants responded positively to different levels of non-verbal clues.

Both authors are on the faculty of university business schools, and Ariely has established a reputation for his research in behavioral economics. The literature review provides a useful framework that helps me to analyze online dating services. The study itself points to an area in which online dating services detract from relationship development because of poor quality communication. This study explores a relatively new area of online communication so it has not been widely validated. Although it does not explain the causes for some of the gender differences, the discussion of communication quality makes an important contribution to my analysis of the value of online dating.