

Online Romantic Relationships: How They Meet and Communicate?

Çevrimiçi Romantik İlişkiler: Nasıl Tanıştılar, Nasıl İletişim Kuruyorlar?

ABSTRACT

As life becomes increasingly integrated with technology, romantic relationships have been transformed, with online relationships emerging as a contemporary reality. Dating applications and social media now play a decisive role in how individuals meet and interact with potential partners. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role and predictive power of communication method, meeting method, gender, and age in determining the likelihood of university students forming online romantic relationships. The study sample consisted of 318 university students, including 253 women and 65 men. The research data were analyzed using logistic regression analysis. Findings indicate that the mode of online communication is the strongest predictor of engaging in an online romantic relationship, followed by the online meeting method and age. The gender variable, however, was found to have no significant effect. While individuals who prefer online communication and meeting methods are more likely to establish an online romantic relationship, this likelihood decreases with increasing age.

Keywords: Online romantic relationship, online partner, online communication.

ÖZET

Yaşam teknoloji ile bütünleştikçe, romantik ilişkiler de değişime uğramış ve çevrimiçi ilişkiler yeni gerçeklerden biri olmuştur. Bireylerin potansiyel partnerleriyle tanışma ve etkileşim kurma süreçlerinde flört/arkadaşlık uygulamaları ve sosyal medya, belirleyici rol üstlenmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı; üniversite öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi romantik ilişki kurmalarını yordamada, iletişim kurma biçimi, tanışma biçimi, cinsiyet ve yaş değişkenlerinin rolünü ve yordayıcı gücünü incelemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 253 kadın ve 65 erkek, toplam 318 üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Araştırma verilerinin çözümlenmesi, lojistik regresyon analizi yöntemi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, romantik ilişkilerde çevrimiçi romantik ilişki deneyimini en güçlü yordayan değişkenin çevrimiçi iletişim biçimi olduğunu; bunu çevrimiçi tanışma ve yaş değişkeninin izlediğini; cinsiyet değişkeninin ise çevrimiçi romantik ilişki deneyimi üzerinde anlamlı bir etkisi olmadığını göstermektedir. Çevrimiçi iletişim ve tanışma biçimlerini tercih eden bireylerin çevrimiçi bir romantik ilişki kurma olasılığı daha yüksek iken, yaş arttıkça bu olasılığın azaldığı görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevrimiçi romantik ilişki, çevrimiçi partner, çevrimiçi iletişim.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional face-to-face courtship processes have been severely diminished by the rise of their online counterparts, where platforms and social media have become the new avenues for relationships to be more accessible across different cities and countries. Besides that, online relations break the communication barrier even for those who are close to each other but have not met yet. Moreover, in the virtual world, lovers can come together, talk through the exchange of messages, video calls, and most importantly, establish a certain emotional bond (Finkel et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2022; Wen, 2024). The trend of online romantic relationships is intensifying among young adults and university students (Anderson et al., 2020; Davey, 2024; Rosenfeld et al., 2019; Sprecher, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). It is mainly underlined that romance and friendship (Kalkan, 2021; Orosz et al., 2015; Ranzini & Lutz, 2017) and social networks (Fox & Warber, 2013; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016) are a significant factor in the beginning of romantic relationships. Nowadays internet applications effectively help the people to spread the circle of their acquaintances, to meet and let talk people they do not know, to maintain or break the relations (Fox et al., 2013; Mccown et al., 2001; Persch, 2007). This change in relationship has positive and negative impacts on romantic relationship dynamics. The formerly negative perception of online dating

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methods has gradually diminished due to the influence of digitalization and increased social acceptance (Hancock et al., 2016). Actually, there are individuals who see social media as a place for communication which is less risky as compared to face-to-face communications (Kujath, 2011).

In one of the pioneering investigations regarding internet love, Nice and Katzev (1998) discovered that users, with prior experience of online love, rated those relationships equal if not better than the face-to-face ones, according to the criteria of control, satisfaction, and communication ease. A review of the benefits that online romantic relationships offer shows that they are able to surmount fences of distance, tap a wider social circle, and provide secrecy and selectiveness in talking (Finkel et al., 2012). Since the anonymous character is not available in the face-to-face interaction, online platforms are preventing individuals from fear of social judgment and rejection. A secondary advantage arising from this is the ability for users to select and even actively modify their physical and personality profiles (Vandeweerd et al., 2016). Moreover, there are findings that the online way of communication can bring people closer (Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). Compared to relationships established face-to-face, online romantic relationships have a scope to be more practical when it comes to connections' initiations or terminations, with the individuals having fewer obligations and rapid feedback possible (Coduto & Fox, 2024; Goldberg et al., 2022; Jiang & Hancock, 2013; LeFebvre, 2018). Moreover, it is also confirmed that online relationships are of a more adaptable design that can adjust to different types of people (Stafford & Merolla, 2007). Nevertheless, while online environments make it easier to form relationships, they also come with certain risks like misrepresentation, mistrust, and over-idealization (Walther, 1996; Ellison et al., 2006). Indeed, Valkenburg and Peter (2007) consider that the non-verbal signs, which are an inherent feature of face-to-face, but are missing in the online world, are the cause of most misunderstandings. In the same manner, Heino et al. (2010) refer to online relationships as shallow. Additionally, according to Sharabi and Dorrance-Hall (2024), couples who have had online meetings experience are less satisfied with their marriages than those couples who met in person. The results of research by Kowal et al. (2025), involving a large number of participants from 50 different countries, also indicate that the satisfaction of the relationship and commitment are at more levels in face-to-face relationships. Despite the array of positive aspects presented in the literature on online romantic relationships, the authors concede that such relationships are riddled with issues that cut across the dimensions of intimacy, trust, and relationship satisfaction when compared with face-to-face ones. Hence, this research is directed primarily towards those variables that could actually predict the chances of having a romantic online relationship.

The use of digital devices in everyday life is a major factor in the transition of love relationships to the internet and has generated a rising interest in them. As a result, a lot of studies have been done on how often online romantic relationships are formed. The research recognized as the pioneer one in this field has come out with the data that 76 of approximately 1,000 students had the experience of online love relations (Nice & Katzev, 1998). The assertion is supported by different studies, which indicate that nearly 47% of youngsters between 18 and 24 use social networking sites to flirt with others. (Fox & Warber, 2013; Smith & Duggan, 2013; Van Ouytsel et al., 2016). Besides, it is evident that the inclination of online flirting and meeting among university students is also increasing (Nice & Katzev, 1998; Sprecher, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). A few studies in the USA and Australia prove that a bigger proportion of people have started romantic relationships through the help of online applications. (Rosenfeld et al., 2019; Davey, 2024). According to the research done by Cacioppo et al. (2013), the majority of the couples who got married in the US between 2005 and 2012, their marriages were online starts, and these unions were general more satisfying and stayed longer than the ones that were only face-to-face meetings. The reason for this is taken to be the capacity of online algorithms to put people together who are more likely to be compatible. Over time, contacts which are made via online applications can become face-to-face visits, and it is these visits that most affect the impressions of the individuals (Finkel et al., 2012). This revelation implies that a direct personal contact still holds the key to the survival of relationships established from online applications. Judging from this, it could be stated that even if the past opinion about love relationships initiated by dating/friendship apps was negative, those means are now the most commonly used and the least stigmatized by users of digital products, furthermore their popularity has increased lately. The mention of young adults and university students as the groups most affected by the internet, especially the behaviors of starting, managing, and ending online relationships is intensively (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Consequently, university students get more involved in relationships due to the different communication channels and online dating apps that come with the digital world.

In the communication conducted via online applications, the view that the filtering of body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues present in face-to-face communication can cause the interaction to become less personal and more generalized is a very common one (Kiesler et al., 1984). One of the initial and significant studies in the area of online communication revealed that individuals communicating online showed more verbal aggression and non-conforming behaviors than those communicating face-to-face (Dubrovsky et al., 1991). This happens because the lack of body language, tone of voice, and immediate emotional reactions in online

communication limits empathic feedback mechanisms, which consequently makes people prone to psychological issues like loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Seabrook et al., 2016). However, Kujath (2011) conveys that certain persons may consider social media as a protected zone to communicate with others where it is much easier and safer than face-to-face interaction. Apart from that, geographical barriers can be overcome through online platforms which offer the possibility of selecting partners from a larger pool and managing the timing of emotional expression. Though these advantages expedite the relationship forming process, they also introduce negative elements like misrepresentation, trust issues, and over-idealization (Walther, 1996; Ellison et al., 2006). Besides all these risks, the rapid and seamless communication via online platforms acts as the foundation for the faster formation of emotional bonds in relationships. Consequently, university students are thus turning to online applications not only for meeting but also for the communication processes in romantic relationships.

In the formation, maintenance, and communication styles of online romantic relationships, whether differences exist between men and women has been the focus of several studies. One such study discovered that females tend to develop higher levels of emotional closeness in the online world, while males are more inclined towards information gathering and observation (Fox & Warber, 2013). Besides, regarding gender differences in partner selection and relationship initiation, it is noted that men are mostly attracted to physical features, while women focus more on the economic condition and the abilities of their partners; additionally, women are thought to be more careful and selective than men (Abramova et al., 2016; McWilliams & Barrett, 2014; Timmermans & De Caluwe, 2017; Whitty, 2008). Further, in online conversations, men are likely to demonstrate anger-driven reactions whereas females to seek emotional sympathy and understanding while trying to resolve disputes more gently (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). On the other hand, Biolcati et al. (2021) show that females are more likely to display these behaviors than males such as the complete termination of communication or the giving of silence as a punishment. The aspects causing the break-up of a relationship on the internet, the means, and the emotions of those involved, are also different depending on the gender. The findings of the research done by Andrighetto et al. (2019) signify that guys turned down in an online dating scenario become angrier and more aggressive than girls.

Engaging in an online romantic relationship will still be basically dependent on how proficient an individual is in the use of technology even though it is solely related to one's access to technological resources. According to studies, young people utilize the internet, social media, and dating/friendship applications to a larger extent than individuals in other age groups (Barrada et al., 2021; Ceyhan & İsmail, 2017; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Sumter et al., 2017). Davis and Fingerman (2016) state that the age factor is one of the most fundamental determinants of the reasons for the online romantic relationships initiation and maintenance. The same applies to the findings of Jozefacka et al. (2023) who show that the satisfaction of online romantic relationships depends on age. It is commonly known that young individuals perceive the online environment as a means of social exploration and relationship initiation, whereas the online relationship-seeking behaviors of older age groups are mostly influenced by factors such as loneliness, social connection, and searching for another chance (McWilliams & Barrett, 2014). From an examination of the published works, it is clear that age is represented as both a predictive and relational variable in the case of online romantic relationship-seeking behavior. During adolescence and young adulthood, the preference for online media is generally regarded as a sign of identity development and the quest for social belonging; at the stage of matured adults, life experiences have implications for different needs in online romantic relationships (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). These differences between age groups have different impacts on relationship expectations and dynamics. The issue is that while young adults are more likely to engage in shorter-term, pleasure-oriented relationships, middle-aged people most often look for goal-oriented, long-term relationships. The differences between the types of relationships also show that the reasons for going online for different age groups to form relationships are different as well. There is also a claim that the lower social media addiction levels among middle-aged and older persons compared to those of young adults may be a factor in the prevention of virtual infidelity (Abbasi, 2019). Another distinction in online relationship dynamics that is age-related is "ghosting" behavior. The young adults are said to be mostly involved in this behavior of suddenly cutting off the communication without giving any reasons, and it is less common for the middle-aged and older people to do so (LeFebvre et al., 2019). At this point, age can be recognized as the chief variable in finding out the motivations of people for the formation of online relationships, their choice of partners, and the way they maintain relationships.

Although the rate of university students forming online romantic relationships is observed to be increasing today, there is limited research on the variables that effectively predict the likelihood of doing so. Accordingly, the primary research question to be addressed in this study is as follows: Among university students, do gender, age, method of meeting a partner, and mode of online communication significantly predict the likelihood of forming an online romantic relationship?

METHOD

Research Design

This research was done using a predictive correlational research design. To analyze the data, the researchers made use of logistic regression analysis. As per Tabachnick & Fidell (2013), logistic regression is a method of statistical analysis to determine the influence of one or more independent variables on a categorical dependent variable.

Participants

The sample for this research is comprised of students from higher education institutions in Turkey, which were chosen by a convenience sampling method. The research was carried out with 431 students in total. Yet, 108 students without romantic relationship experience and 5 non-university students were removed from the study. As a result, the research was carried out on 318 voluntary persons, whose ages ranged from 17 to 27 ($M = 21.06$) and consisted of 253 women (79.6%) and 65 men (20.4%). Table 1 contains the descriptions of the participants.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	253	79.6
Male	65	20.4
Level of Education		
Associate Degree	20	6.3
Bachelor's Degree	267	84
Graduate	31	9.7
Type of Romantic Relationship		
Online	228	71.7
Face-to-Face	90	28.3
Method of Meeting		
Online	99	31.1
Face-to-Face	219	68.9
Mode of Communication		
Online	114	35.8
Face-to-Face	204	64.2

Table 1 presents that 28.3% of the participants indicated that they had a completely face-to-face relationship with their partner, whereas 71.7% said that they had an online relationship (or a mixed relationship with both online and face-to-face components). The "how they met" question revealed that 31.1% of the participants met through online platforms (social media, apps, etc.), and 68.9% met face-to-face. As for the communication mode, 64.2% of the participants chose face-to-face communication as their preferred method, and 35.8% stated that they mainly used online platforms to interact.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedure

Online Romantic Relationships Information Form, a questionnaire designed by the researchers, was used to collect data for this research. The questionnaire was designed to gather information from the respondents regarding their demographic characteristics (age, gender, level of education), the kinds of their romantic relationships, and their partners' meeting and communication methods. Ethical approval was necessary for the research and it was obtained from a state university in Turkey. To collect data online, a researcher-made questionnaire was distributed to respondents on the Google Forms platform for completion and the link was sent to them via their social media platforms. The survey was an online only (Google Forms) study, and to ensure the reliability of the responses, each participant was allowed to complete the form only once. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and all participants were informed about the research's objective.

Data Analysis

For the multivariate models, which contain a nominally scaled dependent variable, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) method is regarded as an inefficient analysis technique. In such situations, if the dependent variable is categorical, a logistic regression analysis is turned out to be a better choice as an alternative to the OLS method (Kalaycı, 2009). So, to investigate those variables, which forecast the relationship types of people, binary logistic regression was utilized.

There were no missing values in the dataset. Before the logistic regression analysis, the VIF and Tolerance values were checked by establishing a linear regression model among the independent variables—despite the dependent variable being discrete—to locate the occurrence of multicollinearity. The Tolerance values for all variables were above 0.90, and the VIF values were below 1.10. This shows that there is no problem of multicollinearity between

the independent variables. (Field, 2018). Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) state that the odds ratio indicates the variation in the odds of a specified category that the case falls into, for every one-unit increase in a predictor variable. In this case, the constant term in the first model was determined to have a significant and strong association ($p < .001$). SPSS 27.0.1 software was used to carry out the data analysis. The level of significance was .05 in the analyses, and the assessments were made at a 95% confidence interval.

FINDINGS

The study investigated the types of individuals' romantic relationships as the dependent variable. The dependent variable consists of two categories: exclusively face-to-face romantic relationships and online-established relationships. The analyses were performed with the use of the online platform as the reference point for the presence of individuals' romantic relationships. The variable indicating the use of an online romantic relationship was represented by (1), and the variable indicating the non-use of an online romantic relationship was represented by (0). When conducting logistic regression, one of the main things to understand is which category of the dependent variable is being referred to in relation to the independent variables. Following this, the target category of the dependent variable was assigned the value 1 for the ease of interpretation by the author (Field, 2018).

Logistic Regression Model

Based on Logistic Regression Analysis (LRA) results, the initial classification that gives first-hand information about the model's correct classification rate if all participants were assigned to a single group was checked (Çokluk et al., 2021). LRA first model, assuming that an online component was present in participants' romantic relationships, was able to correctly classify 228 individuals, with a correct classification rate of 71.7% in total, thus, the performance of the model was at first glance satisfactory. The Pseudo R^2 statistics were checked to assess the appropriateness of the model. The results showed that the model's -2 Log Likelihood value is 323.247. Besides, the Cox & Snell R^2 value was found to be .161 and the Nagelkerke R^2 value .231. These numbers show that the independent variables in the created model can explain about 23% of the variance in the dependent variable, the type of romantic relationship. The overall significance of the logistic model was evaluated with the chi-square test. The presence of a significant chi-square value in the Omnibus test distinguishes a statistically significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Can, 2019). The chi-square value for the model at Step 1, Block 1, and the overall model was calculated together at 55.670 with 4 degrees of freedom (df) and a significance level of $p = .001$. These results show that the independent variables used in the study significantly affect the model as a whole ($\chi^2 = 55.670$; $p < .001$). Moreover, it can be seen that the proposed model is different from the initial model. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test was used to assess the overall goodness-of-fit values of the model. When a non-significant result is obtained from the Hosmer and Lemeshow test, it means that the data are well fitted by the model and it is at an acceptable level (Pallant, 2020). The Hosmer-Lemeshow test yielded a chi-square value of 15.378 with 8 degrees of freedom (df) and a significance level of $p = .052$. The results here reflect that the model shows a good fit with the data ($p = 0.052 > 0.001$).

The logistic regression model that was established predicted the type of the face-to-face relationship with an accuracy of 25.6% and the type of the online relationship with an accuracy of 94.7%. Such a distribution of the results provides an indication of the model's correct classification rate (Pallant, 2020). Calculation of the overall classification accuracy of the model was done and the result was 75.2%. According to the analyses, out of 90 individuals who were in a romantic relationship without the involvement of the online component, only 23 were correctly classified, while 67 were incorrectly classified. Hence, in this instance, 25.6% of these individuals were correctly classified. Contrarily, out of 228 individuals who were in a romantic relationship with the online component, 216 were correctly classified and 12 were incorrectly classified. A correct classification rate of 94.7% was thus obtained in this case. The correct classification rate of the model in the LRA is 75.2%.

Table 2 presents the table of variables from the initial model and some of their values. This table shows the values based on the constant variable before any independent variables were included in the analysis. The values denoted as EXP(B) in the table indicate the range within which the odds ratio can vary at a 95% confidence level (Pallant, 2020).

Table 2: Logistic Regression Analysis Results

Variables	β	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Exp (B)	%95 GA OI
Constant	4.161	1.037	16.096	1	.001	64.141	
Gender	.326	.319	1.047	1	.306	1.386	0.74 - 2.59
Age	-.124	.046	7.163	1	.007	.883	0.80 - 0.96

Method of Meeting	.919	.341	7.249	1	.007	2.506	1.28 - 4.89
Mode of Communication	1.716	.371	7.249	1	.001	5.561	2.68 - 11.5

An analysis of Table 2 shows that mode of communication means ($B=1.716$, $SE=0.371$, $Wald=21.408$, $p=0.001$, $Exp(B)=5.561$), method of meeting ($B=0.919$, $SE=0.341$, $Wald=7.249$, $p=0.007$, $Exp(B)=2.506$) and age ($B=-0.124$, $SE=0.046$, $Wald=7.163$, $p=0.007$, $Exp(B)=0.883$) have statistically significant impacts on the dependent variable. At the same time, the authors didn't find gender to have a statistically significant effect ($B=0.326$, $p=0.306$). The mode of communication is the most influential variable with a significant effect on the model ($B=1.716$, $p<.001$). The odds ratio ($Exp(B)$) for this predictor is 5.561. When all other variables in the model are held constant, individuals who prefer online modes of communication in their romantic relationships are approximately 5.5 times more likely to have a romantic relationship with an online component (either fully online or mixed) compared to those who do not prefer online communication ($OR=5.50$). Moreover, those who are willing to meet using online applications are approximately 2.5 times to be in a romantic relationship with an online component compared to the people who prefer meeting methods that are not involved in the online application ($OR=2.50$). The odds ratio of the age variable was .883. Based on the significant negative association between age and the dependent variable, every one-year increment in a participant's age reduces the probability of having the romantic relationship with an online component by around 11%.

DISCUSSION

This research revolves around the effects of fast changes in the technological world of today on romantic relationships, and it considers the influence of a communication method, a meeting method, gender and age on the prediction of the probability of university students' forming romantic relationships online. The goal is to indicate the leading effect of experiences in online romantic relationships on this probability. The literature underscores that online experiences are instrumental in fulfilling the personal and social needs of individuals (Mantell, 2018). In this regard, love technology, among others, holds the following functions: the process of intimacy (Scott et al., 2006), the process of trust (Anderson & Emmers-Sommer, 2006), and the processes of starting and keeping relationships (Parsakia & Rostami, 2023; Tong et al., 2016).

Communication methods of university students were found to be a significant predictor of the likelihood of online romantic relationships as per the research findings. The research showed that people who like online communication are approximately 5.5 times more likely to connect to the online romantic world than those who desire face-to-face communication. The current study results support the previous studies that show the importance of computer-mediated communication for the development and holding of romantic partnerships (Goldberg et al., 2022; Macapagal et al., 2016; Wang & Chang, 2010). Besides that, the accessibility, instant feedback, and the possibility of a wide audience given by online platforms are some reasons for the strong effect online communication has (Fox & Warber, 2013). Though, some views on communication through online apps show that it can be superficial and thus may weaken emotional bonds as compared to face-to-face communication (Sbarra et al., 2019; Tong et al., 2008). It can be explained as being due to the difficulty in the establishment of physical signs and emotional closeness through online communication that is provided by face-to-face interaction. A. Differing from other studies on the subject, a research report by Anderson et al. (2020) reveals Americans' perceptions of online dating applications. Only online dating is mentioned in the report, declaring that it gives users the possibility of choosing from a large pool of matches and the opportunity to meet people they will never come across in real life, but the report also draws a line with some challenges, such as cheating in profiles, fraud, and security concerns, that are the most important factors causing the negativity of the whole matter. In addition, McKenna and Bargh (2000) argue that lovers whose relationship starts online are more likely to show their true side and do so without filters. Zhang (2017), on the contrary, claims that the self-disclosure of emotions and thoughts to a partner is a source of tension relief in online relationships. On top of that, it is also known that in relationships that originate face-to-face, trust and communication satisfaction are the main predictors of relationship satisfaction, whereas in relationships starting online, physical attraction and communication satisfaction are the main factors driving this process (Zmyslinski, 2011). Within this context, it is possible to say that while online communication is a major factor in the process of dating, it is not the only one when it comes to the quality, satisfaction, and continuation of the relationship as different dynamics are involved.

The empirical data from the current research further reveals that the method of meeting has a profound influence on the probability of the potential formation of a romantic relationship in the virtual world. As a consequence, persons inclined to net encounters are about 2.5 times more likely to have a romantic relationship in the virtual world as compared to those who meet face-to-face. Such a conclusion suggests that the Internet has gone a long way in erasing the boundaries of the functional domain from mere communication to becoming an emotional intimacy and

romantic relationship establishment ground. Finkel et al. (2012) argued that online dating would be a more customized and successful alternative to the conventional ways. Moreover, they added that just like in the traditional setting, the young people are also gradually taking up online dating methods and they are increasingly getting in love and experiencing the satisfaction of their relationships. As a result, they are more satisfied with their relationships than those partners who met face-to-face. Rosenfeld et al. (2019) also point out that the use of technology to meet new people plays an essential role in the process of romantic relationship formation. Novel mask-ups in communication brought about by the unrelenting boom of digital meeting methods and online dating applications and catalyzed by the pandemic have, among other, led to the reformatting of social interaction (Gibson, 2021; Paduraru et al., 2022; Wanzer, 2022; Williams et al., 2021). On the contrary, research results obtained by Cöbek (2023) indicate that in the Turkish context, there exist societal gender roles and cultural perceptions that have a significant impact on the online flirting experiences. More exactly, the fact that women experience more negative incidents in cyberspace than men results in a change of the perception of online and face-to-face dating. This change of perception may be regarded as one of the causes of face-to-face subpopulations more positive-oriented beliefs about romantic relationships. Apart from that, social and cultural aspects can be acknowledged as main determinants of individuals' attitudes towards online dating.

Finkel et al. (2012), think that the numerous alternative choices, which are one of the benefits of the online platforms, may become a threat to the partner's commitment. On the other hand, Bonebrake (2002) points out that a greater focus on typical features and less effort for the parties are required in the case of online relationships compared to the face-to-face communication. In the research done by Clark-Gordon et al. (2019), it was stressed that individuals being online and hence anonymous are more daring in their communication than in the face-to-face interaction, and this anonymity is positively linked to self-disclosure. Besides this, Blackhart et al. (2014) reveal that people with a high degree of rejection sensitivity among them seek online dating to find a romantic partner. Moreover, it is mentioned that people who find their partners online have different benefits during the relationship formation and maintenance stages, for instance, they are not constrained by the size of their social circle (Kalpidou et al., 2011) and can communicate more easily than in face-to-face situations (McKenna et al., 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996). In another research, McKenna and Bargh (2000) suggest that individuals who are not able to open up can use online relationships as a way of social compensation. Therefore, the trend of romantic relationships originating from online platforms is an indication that digital platforms have turned into a convenient tool for relationship initiation; nevertheless, enough quality, satisfaction, and sustainability information of such relationships is still lacking.

One more milestone in the study is that the "age" variable has been recognized as a statistically significant factor with a negative effect on a person's chance to start a romantic relationship through the internet. That is the reason why the researchers say that the likelihood of starting an online romantic relationship falls progressively as the subjects become older. This implies that young adults turn to online platforms in order to establish contacts and communicate with potential partners. Although romantic relationships are one of the main elements in every life period, they are in particular very important for the lives of young adults. Such a period is when the individuals get most of their emotional needs from the partner and also find themselves and develop the basic social skills through the romantic relationships (Collins et al., 2009; Furman & Shaffer, 2003). Among a number of the reasons that have caused the young adults to prefer online dating, the high technological self-efficacy (McCoy, 2010; Üstündağ et al., 2017) and the increased interest in digital platforms can be considered as the two main ones. Nevertheless, findings indicating that the elderly may become more disposed to forming relationships on online platforms and that they may have diverse experiences depending on their age suggest that age may have a variable and situational effect on the phenomenon of online romantic relationships (Stephure et al., 2009).

Through a review of literature, a fact is exposed that the age is what determines the nature of an online romantic relationship experience. In the same line, findings are presented that the youth is more prone to look for relationships and to communicate through online means (Davis & Fingerman, 2016; Goldberg & Tienda, 2017), while on the other hand, Menkin et al. (2015) say that the expectations of online dating users change and depend on the age of the individual. Moreover, middle-aged and older people are more inclined to use traditional ways of relationships. Abbasi (2019) highlights that the older people are, the less addicted to social media applications they become and, accordingly, youngsters are characterized by higher levels of addiction to social media and owning a larger number of social media accounts. The study conducted by Gülaydın (2021) showed that 23.1% of the 18-21 age group participants encountered a virtual relationship that met their expectations, and this figure fell to 20% for those over 21. Meanwhile, Donn and Sherman (2002) discovered that doctoral students were more likely to find their partners through the internet than undergraduate students. According to Stephure et al. (2009), the experiences of the online romantic relationship to age increase rather than decrease, stating that the dissatisfaction of the elderly with traditional methods is the reason behind it. Generally speaking, after going through the papers, it can be

inferred that there is a negative relationship between age and the chance of forming an online romantic relationship, and that most of the time young people are the ones who have romantic interactions on online platforms.

The research has also found that gender is a factor that has little or no impact on the chance of forming relationships online. Based on that, it can be claimed that the male and female university students share the same kind of experiences while using online platforms for romantic relationships. Maintaining these first findings, the result aligns with the studies claiming that the differences between the genders become less pronounced as the use of digital communication tools increases, and both genders have learned the required digital communication skills (Smith & Duggan, 2013; Fox et al., 2013). The growing usage of digital platforms is having an influence on people's decision to establish romantic relationships in a totally different manner than before; hence, people are gradually adapting similar communication strategies regardless of the traditional gender roles (Fox et al., 2013). On the other hand, there is some research evidence that men are more likely to develop online romantic relationships than women (Gülaydın, 2021). Parks and Floyd (1996) are of the opinion that women are more likely than men to get involved in online romantic relationships. Griffiths (2001) backs this statement by saying that women are more attracted to online romantic relationships as they find it a safer and more secure place to be in control. Valkenburg and Peter (2007) showed that men are more driven to have online relationships, however, women are more cautious and careful in their approach. Further, Hitsch et al. (2010) voiced that men's preference is significantly driven by visual aspects during partner selection, while women take factors such as education and income into account. The research by Balcı and Gölcü (2020) revealed that the degree of women's self-disclosure on social media is considerably more than that of men. These findings indicate that gender is a major factor in digital romantic relationships, is not a linear concept, and individuals experience different emotions when they are in the digital space.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering all the research outcomes together, one may conclude that the use of online communication and meeting methods enhances greatly the chances of university students to start romantic relationships online. It was especially revealed that those who communicate in an online mode are roughly 5.5 times more likely to initiate an online romantic relationship than those who prefer face-to-face communication, additionally, individuals who are inclined towards online meeting methods are approximately 2.5 times more than others to have such a situation. In contrast, the variable of age was found to have a negative effect on the likelihood of forming an online romantic relationship, thus, younger people are more likely to have romantic relationships on online platforms, and this inclination diminishes with age. Moreover, the study concluded that the gender variable did not have a significant impact on the experience of an online romantic relationship which means that the male and female participants demonstrated a great deal of similarity in their digital communication skills and inclination to form relationships online. In a nutshell, the range of the study underscores the crucial role of online communication and meeting methods as a practical means of relationship initiation that different variables such as age, personality, and attachment styles need to be accounted for in order to comprehend the quality, satisfaction, and sustainability of the relationship.

The research findings show that online communication is a key factor in the start of romantic relationships, and at the same time, they signal to consider various variables for a better understanding of those dimensions in the relationship quality, duration, and satisfaction. In this sense, it is really important for such future investigations to be planned as longitudinal studies intending to unravel the multifaceted and long-term effects of online communication methods on emotional intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and sustainability, among other aspects. Of course, the fact that young adults are so keen on digital platforms and so confident with technology is a big factor in the popularity of online romantic relationship experiences. Nevertheless, a study comparing the motivations and experiences of individuals from different age groups will shed more light on this field. Moreover, since the impact of gender roles on love relationships in the digital world is a complicated and multidimensional issue, it would be great if more studies dealing with it were available in the literature.

While this study has made valuable contributions to the literature, it is accepted that some limitations remain. Since the sample for the study is only made up of university students, the findings cannot be applied to different age and sociocultural groups. As a result, it is suggested that future studies take a larger and more diverse sample. Besides that, the data for this particular study have been gathered through the participants' self-report and online surveys; therefore, the findings should be given with caution, as subjective evaluations based on participants' perceptions may have an impact on the result. A sample with an equal number of males and females would allow for a more comprehensive study of the differences between genders. In this regard, combining qualitative research methods or conducting in-depth interviews with quantitative data could provide a better understanding of the individuals' online relationship formation processes.

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