

Abstract

In the past decade, online dating has been displacing other ways of meeting partners. In the US, online dating has surpassed meeting through friends and family around the 2013 for heterosexual couples. Despite the widespread popularity of online dating, relatively little is known about its prevalence, user perceptions, and behavioral dynamics in online dating platforms within the context of Czechia. This dissertation aims to fill this gap in empirical insights into Czech online dating market by utilizing two main data sources: 1) a survey of adult Czech internet users, 2) digital trace data from a Czech mobile dating app.

The study starts with the historical overview of matchmaking, transitioning from newspaper ads in the 19th and early 20th centuries to the flourishing of online platforms in the modern era, reflecting societal norms and demands of different eras.

The survey of Czech internet users reveals that online dating is a prevalent mode of finding romantic partners among surveyed Czechs, resonating with trends observed in the US and other Western countries.

The fast emergence and widespread popularity of online dating begs the question of how it is related to one of the most persistent patterns in the research on partnerships and families – homogamy. The remainder of the thesis therefore focuses on homogamy on two factors: age and desirability.

The analysis of online dating data reveals a variance in messaging trends between genders. Women, particularly younger ones, receive notably more attention, placing them in a 'chooser' position on dating market. Despite the prevalence of older men reaching out to younger women, the data supports a tendency for homogamous matches where successful connections are primarily formed between individuals of similar ages. This is especially true for women as they exhibit a propensity to reciprocate interest from men closer to their own age, while dismissing pursuits from significantly older counterparts. Furthermore, both men and women display a shift in preference towards younger partners with increasing age; however, women tend to initiate contact with significantly younger men later in life compared to men. Moreover, the results also underscore a men's pervasive avoidance to initiate contact with older women, suggesting that actual dating interactions do not necessarily align with professed openness towards older partners declared in surveys.

The last chapter reveals that while initial pursuits are aspirational, i.e., users reaching out to more desirable counterparts, homophily predominantly results from rejections, resulting in matches between individuals with similar levels of desirability.

Keywords: online dating, homophily, homogamy, partner selection, digital trace data, computational social science, age preferences, desirability