

Harmony in Connection: The Transformation of Online Dating between South Korea and European Spaces

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Хармония във връзката: Трансформацията на онлайн запознанствата между Южна Корея и европейските пространства

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The author has no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Авторката няма известен конфликт на интереси, който да разкрива.

Кореспонденцията относно тази статия трябва да бъде адресирана до Алина-Александра Ницою, Букурещки университет, Факултет по социология и социална работа, Докторско училище по социология, Румъния. Имейл: alinanitoiu52@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines how online dating is discussed in public Reddit conversations that refer to South Korea and to European spaces. The study is qualitative and exploratory. It uses thematic analysis of selected comments from three Reddit threads concerned with Korean dating norms, dating experiences in South Korea, and perceptions of dating in European contexts. The interpretation draws mainly on Erving Goffman's notion of impression management and Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid love. Hofstede, Giddens, and recent studies on technology-mediated intimacy are used only as supporting references, not as fixed explanatory models. The analysis shows that users do not describe online dating only as a technical way of meeting partners. They present it as a social situation in which attraction, trust, authenticity, cultural difference, and commitment have to be read and negotiated. In the comments about South Korea, dating applications are often connected with ambivalence, suspicion, respectability, and the need to confirm intentions through face-to-face meetings. The comments about Europe are less unified. They refer to country, city, language, gender, social capital, and local interactional codes. The article therefore argues that dating platforms create a shared digital format for encounter, but they do not remove cultural difference. Instead, they make cultural expectations visible in new and sometimes contradictory ways.

Keywords: online dating, South Korea, Europe, impression management, liquid love, intercultural relationships, Reddit

Резюме

Тази статия разглежда как онлайн запознанствата се обсъждат в публични разговори в Reddit, които се отнасят до Южна Корея и европейските пространства. Изследването е качествено и изследователско. То използва тематичен анализ на избрани коментари от три теми в Reddit, свързани с корейските норми за запознанства, опита от запознанства в Южна Корея и възприятията за запознанствата в европейски контекст. Интерпретацията се основава главно на идеята на Ървинг Гофман за управление на впечатлението и концепцията на Зигмунт Бауман за течна любов. Хофстеде, Гидънс и скорошни изследвания върху технологично медираната интимност се използват само като подкрепящи справки, а не като фиксирани обяснителни модели. Анализът показва, че потребителите не описват онлайн запознанствата само като технически начин за среща с партньори. Те ги представят като социална ситуация, в която привличането, доверието, автентичността, културните различия и обвързаността трябва да бъдат тълкувани и

договаряни. В коментарите за Южна Корея заявленията за запознанства често са свързани с амбивалентност, подозрение, респектабилност и необходимостта от потвърждаване на намеренията чрез срещи лице в лице. Коментарите за Европа са по-малко унифицирани. Те се отнасят до държава, град, език, пол, социален капитал и местни интеракционни кодове. Следователно в статията се твърди, че платформите за запознанства създават споделен дигитален формат за срещи, но не премахват културните различия. Вместо това, те правят културните очаквания видими по нови и понякога противоречиви начини.

Ключови думи: онлайн запознанства, Южна Корея, Европа, управление на впечатленията, течна любов, межкултурни взаимоотношения, Reddit

ARTICLE INFO:**Original Article****Received: 15, 06.2026****Revised: 30, 06.2026****Accepted: 10, 07.2026**

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Introduction

This paper focuses on exploring how the global trend of online dating has influenced connection and the construction of romantic relationships. Online dating has become an increasingly widespread aspect of modern relationships, and South Korea is no exception to this global trend. In a society deeply rooted in traditional social values and norms, the emergence of online dating platforms has brought significant changes to the way individuals come to form relationships.

As a technologically advanced country, South Korea has readily accepted the idea of online dating, seeing it as a viable way to meet potential partners. The accessibility of these platforms has overcome geographical barriers, allowing people to connect with others beyond their immediate social circles. This shift in dating dynamics is particularly remarkable in a culture where arranged marriages were once the social norm. All of this reflects the dominant values and norms of contemporary society, such as individualism, efficiency, and consumerism, thus becoming a true 'social laboratory' for analyzing how technology redefines intimacy and human connection. Through universal mechanisms such as swipe algorithms or matchmaking, these platforms have globalized the process of romantic encounters, standardizing affective experiences and practices on a large scale.

Within this globalized context of online dating, a comparative analysis between South Korea and Europe is relevant, as these are two distinct cultural spaces in terms of social norms, family values, and attitudes toward intimacy. While in South Korea online dating coexists with social expectations strongly influenced by family, conformity, and pressures related to social status, in many European societies online dating is associated more with individualism, personal autonomy, and relational flexibility. Although digital platforms use similar mechanisms, such as matching algorithms or swipe-based interactions, the meanings attributed to romantic relationships and their social acceptability differ considerably depending on the cultural context. The comparison between South Korea and Europe makes it possible to highlight how the same technologies are locally reinterpreted and differently integrated into social life, reflecting the tensions between globalization and cultural specificity.

Thus, online dating has become a noteworthy phenomenon worldwide, challenging

traditional norms of romantic relationships and offering a platform through which individuals can connect in a rapidly evolving society. While the shift toward digital romance is clearly noticeable, cultural and social influences, combined with meticulous impression management, continue to shape the way people approach online dating.

Relationships in the Digital Era: Perspectives on Online Dating between South Korea and Europe

In the dynamic context of contemporary South Korean society, the convergence of technology and dating norms has created a new phenomenon, namely 'online encounters.' As technology becomes ubiquitous and traditional social conventions change, individuals in South Korea and Europe increasingly turn to digital platforms to establish connections and explore romantic relationships. Exploring the complexities of online dating involves examining how it shapes relationship dynamics, since one can observe the influence of cultural expectations and a balancing of long-standing traditions with the flow of modern life.

Dating applications have practically become 'modern cupids' that facilitate connections in a fast-paced society (Lee, 2016, p.1124), but the cultural context plays a significant role in shaping relationship dynamics. A fundamental difference can be observed between countries with a high level of individualism and those with a high level of collectivism; this difference lies in the dominant orientation of social values.

The former are centered on 'I,' while the latter are centered on 'we.' Individualistic societies emphasize personal satisfaction, freedom, and independence, whereas collectivist societies value interdependence and the interconnectedness of individuals within the community (Hofstede, 1980). Confucian values, which emphasize family and social harmony, continue to influence relational norms. As a result, individuals often take into account the opinions of family and friends when interacting with this online dating environment, making the process more complex than a simple personal choice. By contrast, Europe represents a distinct cultural space, shaped by historical transformations that have promoted personal independence, the separation of the religious sphere from the social sphere, and gender balance.

Digital dating platforms, such as Tinder or KakaoTalk (a messaging application widely used in South Korea), offer individuals an expanded space for initiating and exploring romantic relationships, including intercultural ones. These platforms provide a wide range of connection options, facilitating interactions that cross national and cultural borders. The way profiles are

visually structured encourages users to construct a form of self-presentation that combines sincerity with performativity, adding an additional layer of complexity to the search for authenticity in the digital environment.

The motivations for intercultural dating are multiple and dynamic. Studies conducted on Korean Tinder users show that they may pursue varied goals, such as companionship, sexual exploration, expanding social networks, or entertainment - motivations that may change over time and are often left implicit in profile descriptions. Research on intercultural virtual interactions also highlights cultural curiosity and the desire for intercultural exchange as relevant factors in establishing contacts with foreign partners, including Europeans (Kim et al., 2024). These interactions provide opportunities to experiment with different communication styles and to negotiate identities in a transnational context.

Within this framework, the phenomenon of individualization becomes essential for understanding online dating. Users do not limit themselves to presenting objective traits; instead, they actively process their identities, selecting certain aspects of the self to expose to the digital public. Through attractive profiles, individuals try to find a balance between authenticity and performance, a process that influences the way relationships initiated online are perceived. Thus, the use of technology in the formation of romantic relationships is associated with specific outcomes, such as relationship satisfaction, perceived partner quality, and the evaluation of the partner's authenticity (Kwok, 2020).

Online dating stands out as one of the most widespread methods of connecting with potential partners who align with one's own criteria for an ideal relationship. However, when it comes to love, the foundations of online relationships may seem implausible. Thus, the initial concept of meeting on the internet aimed to encourage connections based on understanding someone beyond physical appearance, emphasizing the creation of chemistry without being influenced by looks. In addition, these technologies provide couples with opportunities to connect, share affection, and maintain relationships (Murray, 2015; Hertlein, 2014). Although digital technologies aim to facilitate romantic connections beyond physical appearances, the meanings attributed to them vary considerably, especially when we place South Korea and Europe in context.

While online dating introduces new opportunities, it is not without challenges. Users face the transition from digital interactions to face-to-face meetings, managing expectations and

addressing possible pitfalls. A multitude of opportunities are offered for diverse connections, crossing geographical and cultural boundaries (Sanri, 2014). Online relationships between users from South Korea and Europe face a series of linguistic, cultural, and structural barriers. Differences in paralinguistic conventions, such as the use of emoticons, punctuation, or typographic cues, can generate misunderstandings in online communication, affecting the interpretation of tone and intentions. As the relationship evolves, these differences can gradually transfer into everyday offline communication, such as the expression of emotions and verbal or nonverbal language, and may generate discomfort or erroneous interpretations.

In the context of online relationships, people create a certain profile on dating platforms, which is also a form of interpreting individual agency. As mentioned by Giddens, the term agency refers to the self-established capacity, freedom, or power of individual or collective social actors to think, act, and determine the course of an action; it refers to the active, reflexive character of human behavior (Giddens, 2002). More precisely, users engage in a continuous process of interpreting the profiles they observe in order to decipher possible matches in their search for a partner. This interpretation of agency, shaped by one's own perspectives, desires, and values, becomes a force in the selection and negotiation of relationships. At the same time, the act of selecting a profile and the manifestation of agency combine with the interpretation of visual and textual cues in a manner that resonates with the expectations and values of South Korean society.

Users move quickly from one profile to another, adapting very easily to all the results displayed and to changes in this online dating environment. Online dating applications encourage this superficial approach, in which rapid profile viewing and visual impressions are prioritized. Observing profiles and evaluating them quickly are characteristics of this environment. In this way, the initial opinion of a profile plays a crucial role in determining future romantic connections. This approach to online dating reflects the concept of 'liquid love' introduced by Bauman, which refers to the fact that these connections are formed and dissolved easily, thereby reducing the prospect of building authentic and lasting bonds (Bauman, 2003).

The concept of liquid love aligns with the way online dating allows people to experiment with different identities and self-presentations. Users can create digital personalities, adapting them according to the image they wish to project and intentionally leaving other aspects ambiguous. This fluidity also brings challenges. New possibilities are always available, which

can contribute to a sense of instability in online relationships. Commitment becomes a complex negotiation, reflecting the evolving nature of liquid love in the digital environment.

These platforms offer a wide range of options for connecting with potential partners, and relationships can begin and change rapidly, thus reflecting the 'liquid' nature of love. Users can navigate between multiple connections and interactions, experiencing the diversity of relationships in an environment where change becomes the norm. Social pressures and cultural expectations in South Korea and Europe may influence how individuals approach relationships.

The concept can be reflected in the way young adults in South Korea face constraints related to career, social status, and institutional pressures, such as intense competition in the labor market and family expectations. In this context, romantic relationships can become fluid and adaptable, with the potential to transform rapidly depending on changes in the individual's personal and professional life. Similarly, young adults in many European societies experience forms of relational uncertainty, but these are often associated with the flexibility of individual choices, geographical mobility, and the prioritization of personal development. Unlike the South Korean context, where external pressures can influence the pace and stability of relationships, in Europe this fluidity is more often interpreted as an expression of individual autonomy and the freedom to renegotiate romantic commitments throughout the life course (Lee, 2009).

In addition, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical perspective introduces the concept of 'impression management.' In this context, individuals engage in impression management in order to present themselves in ways that align with group expectations. This may involve the strategic construction of identities in social interactions in order to maintain harmony and cohesion within the collective (Goffman, 2004). Moreover, impression management becomes an important aspect, especially in South Korea. Society itself places increased value on appearance and social position, and individuals carefully create an online profile precisely in order to make a favorable impression. Creating an attractive online profile, presenting achievements, and adhering to societal expectations become integral parts of the online dating experience, reflecting the broader cultural importance of face and the maintenance of social image.

Methodology

The research uses a qualitative approach, based on thematic analysis of public comments, and drafting the interpretation.

The on Reddit. Thematic analysis is appropriate because it allows the identification of

patterns of meaning in discourses, without assuming that they are representative of the entire population. The paper follows, in an adapted manner, the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, initial coding, grouping codes into themes, reviewing themes, defining them. The textual material analyzed consists of selected comments from three Reddit threads: «Korean online dating norms? » on r/AskAKorean, «Dating in Korea» on r/WaygookOrg and «Is Europe a dating paradise for Asian men? » on r/AsianMasculinity. The threads were chosen because they include discussions about dating norms in South Korea, experiences of foreigners in Korea and perceptions of intercultural dating in different European contexts. Several comments were selected, but only those that were directly quoted in the analysis are the most representative.

The selection criteria were, direct relevance to online or intercultural dating, reference to South Korea, Europe or relationships between people in these spaces, the presence of observations about social norms, communication, seriousness, authenticity or stereotypes. Very short comments, jokes without analytical content, personal attacks and responses that did not discuss romantic relationships or intercultural interactions were excluded.

The analysis has important limitations. First, three Reddit threads represent a small corpus for a broad comparison between South Korea and Europe. Second, the subreddits analyzed have specific profiles: r/AskAKorean favors questions addressed to the Korean community, r/WaygookOrg includes mostly experiences of foreigners in Korea, and r/AsianMasculinity has an explicit orientation towards the experiences of Asian men. Third, Europe appears in the data as a set of fragmented references, not as a unitary category. Therefore, the conclusions should be read as exploratory interpretations of online discourses, not as general statements about entire societies. During the writing process, AI (ChatGPT) was used to improve the clarity of the English.

Operationalizing concepts in Reddit comment analysis

In order to directly correlate the theory with the empirical analysis, the main concepts will be operationalized through codes applied to Reddit comments. Impression management will be identified in comments referring to photo selection, profile description formulation, presentation of social or professional status, avoidance of information considered disadvantageous, adaptation of messages to the expectations of others, suspicions regarding first impressions, and the tension between authenticity and constructed image. In these cases, the

central analytical question is: how do users try to control the way they are perceived?

Liquid love will be identified in comments that describe rapid switching between profiles, multiple simultaneous conversations, difficulty making a commitment, perception of partners as replaceable, ambiguity of intentions, sudden interruption of communication, or instability of relationships initiated online. In these cases, the central analytical question is: what types of connections become possible or likely in an environment characterized by multiple options and reduced consequences of withdrawal?

Secondary contributions will be used for context codes. Hofstede will support the interpretation of comments about family pressure, autonomy, group orientation or individual decision. Giddens will be used for comments in which users talk about partner choice as a reflection on the self. Empirical studies on technology, motivations and cross-cultural relations will be used to contextualize language barriers, cultural differences, maintaining contact and assessing authenticity. Thus, the theoretical framework will not function as an enumeration of authors, but as a tool for moving from concepts to data, Goffman explains self-presentation strategies, Bauman interprets the fragility of connections, and complementary authors clarify cultural differences and the digital environment in which these practices occur (Table 1).

Table 1

Operationalization of theoretical concepts

Concept	Author	Codes tracked in comments	Empirical indicators
Impression management	Goffman	self-presentation, profile, status, attractiveness, authenticity, suspicion	stories about photos, profile texts, conversational "scripts", impressions produced by rapid affective expressions
Liquid love	Bauman	fluidity, casual relationships, instability, multiple options, online-offline transition	descriptions of quick connections, mistrust, difficulty building commitment, and abandoning interactions
Point cultural differences	Hofstede / Giddens	individualism, collectivism, autonomy, social validation, reflexivity	references to family, friends, status, freedom of choice, compatibility and personal project

Table 2*Summary of themes resulting from the analysis*

Theme	Description	Examples from the data	Legătură teoretică
The differential normalization of online dating	Online dating is described as more common in some European contexts and more ambiguous or suspicious in accounts of South Korea.	European user who says online dating is normalized in Sweden; Korean user who claims that apps can be perceived as "weird"	Specific cultural differences; social validation
Self-presentation and authenticity	Users look for signs of authenticity and interpret profiles, messages, and conversation pace as clues about intentions.	References to "same script", quick confessions, attractive profiles, sexual or serious intentions	Goffman: impression management
Fluidity of engagement	Connections can emerge quickly, but are perceived as fragile, negotiable, and easily broken.	Concerns about casual relationships, difficulty transitioning to face-to-face meetings, multiple options	Bauman: liquid love
Europe as a diverse space	The comments do not describe Europe as a unitary whole, but differentiate between countries, regions and urban contexts.	References to Paris, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, local language and social skills	Limiting the comparison; contextualization

Generative artificial intelligence was used only as a support tool in the linguistic processing of the manuscript, particularly for translating the text from Romanian into English and for improving clarity, grammar, readability, and academic style. The use of AI-assisted technologies did not replace the research process, the selection of data, the interpretation of the Reddit comments, or the formulation of the sociological arguments. All methodological decisions, analytical interpretations, and final revisions were carried out by the author, who assumes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

Online Dating: Analysis of Reddit Comments

In the comments analyzed from the Reddit thread 'Korean online dating norms?', users indicate significant cultural differences in the way online dating is approached in South Korea compared with Europe. Some responses suggest that online dating in Korea may be perceived as

more oriented toward casual interactions or even as an unusual social manifestation, while the rapid expression of feelings is interpreted differently from European norms of online relationships.

One of the comments indicates that online dating is often viewed with skepticism in South Korea, being perceived as an inferior alternative to traditional forms of initiating relationships. The user also emphasizes the importance of meeting face to face as a criterion for validating the seriousness of a potential partner, suggesting that relationships that may have begun exclusively online are not considered sufficiently stable, especially when speaking about long-distance relationships. One of the people in the comments states that they are from Sweden and that online dating is a normalized practice in the European context, while also emphasizing a contrast between their relational expectations and the experiences they had on applications used in the context of dating Asians: 'in Sweden online dating is the norm but I'm more into Asians so downloaded Tantan.. but everyone seems to be following the same script.. where do I find authentic Asians haha? Looking to get to know someone for real.. slowburn.. soulmate level love. Not.. crazy love confessions or hookups' (Reddit comment, European user, r/AskAKorean, 2026). Clearly, there is also concern about safety and the real intentions of people met through dating applications, which are sometimes associated with problematic behavior or relationships strictly oriented toward sexual satisfaction.

Comments by European users describe online dating as a widely normalized practice, integrated into everyday life and associated with the autonomous exploration of compatibility and relational authenticity. Differences appear not only in the evaluation of dating applications, but also in the pace of relationships, the meaning of emotional expression, and the norms of online and offline communication. In contrast with online dating, the culture of arranged meetings through social networks or acquaintances is presented as a central practice regarding South Koreans' relationships, and the inability to initiate relationships through these channels may be interpreted as a warning sign.

One comment states: 'I'm a Korean and I know what you're talking about, but his behavior is not just because of that. Yes, we do like to put labels on relationships faster than they do in western countries. But if he's trying to do that only after a few days of chatting, that's very abnormal and there are high chances that he just wants to sleep with you. Also, online dating is not wide-spread in Korea and even considered kinda weird... So when you're using dating app,

you need to keep in mind that people you're talking with are probably not seeking serious relationships (no matter what they tell you)' (Reddit comment, Korean user, r/AskAKorean, 2026). Thus, this comment highlights cultural particularities of romantic relationships in South Korea, such as the rapid pace of emotional involvement and the different meaning attributed to the expression 'I love you,' which indicates affection rather than deep commitment. In this context, the rapid officialization of relationships is frequent, also influenced by social norms that treat sexuality as acceptable mainly within an acknowledged relationship.

A relevant example regarding the evolution of dating experiences in South Korea is offered by a comment in which a user describes their relational path after arriving in the country, mentioning dates with people at different stages of adulthood (20s and 30s). According to this user, dating experiences became more positive and more stable as they interacted with partners who had clearer expectations and more serious relational orientations, a context in which they managed to establish a lasting relationship. This comment suggests that, in some cases, individual maturity and the alignment of expectations play a central role in relational success, reflecting the persistence of traditional relational norms that value stability and commitment. Such situations indicate that dating experiences in South Korea are not always as happy as they are presented to the public through Korean series or films, but can evolve positively or negatively depending on the stage of life and the compatibility between partners' intentions.

In one of the posts, a commenter observes that, although it may be too exaggerated to call Europe a 'dating paradise,' there is a higher degree of openness and receptiveness from European women toward Asian men compared with other contexts, which could be linked to differences in cultural stereotypes and expectations regarding masculinity. 'Europe isn't a paradise but there's a unique alignment between Asian masculinity and European cultural ideals' (Reddit comment, r/AsianMasculinity, 2025).

The comments highlight the fact that the dating experience in Europe varies considerably from one country to another. For example, it is suggested that in some parts of Central and Eastern Europe it is easier for Asian men to create romantic connections, possibly due to more conservative social values or reduced exposure to Western stereotypes. In Western Europe (such as the UK, France, or Germany), dating may be more difficult because of competition and stereotypes that are still present, but there are places where experiences can be pleasant: 'I am only 5'6 but killing it in Paris (Although I do have a really pretty face similar to K-POP standard

and great fashion sense), I have no problem getting beautiful girl and one of my ex is a famous model' (Reddit comment, Korean user, r/AsianMasculinity, 2025). Commenters also emphasize that language and local culture can influence success in dating, suggesting that speaking the local language or adapting to European social styles can be an advantage in building romantic connections, with emphasis also falling on social skills that transcend the purely digital context of applications.

These perspectives from people's everyday lives suggest that in online discussions about intercultural dating, Europe is perceived as a diverse environment in which the local context and social skills play a central role in forming relationships. Online dating appears as a space for negotiating identity and cultural norms, in which the same technological platforms are locally reinterpreted, reflecting tensions between individualism and collectivism, autonomy and social validation. In this sense, these Reddit comments offer a valuable perspective on how technology mediates intimacy without standardizing romantic experiences at the global level.

Discussion

The results of the analysis indicate that online dating cannot be understood simply as a simple transfer of romantic encounters to the digital environment. The analyzed comments show that dating platforms function as spaces in which users interpret social norms, test forms of self-presentation and constantly assess the seriousness of others. In this sense, technology does not replace cultural norms, but makes them visible in a new form. Choosing a profile, responding to a message, the pace of the conversation and the decision to move from online to offline become practices through which users negotiate what romantic interest, authenticity and commitment mean.

A first important observation concerns the difference between the common infrastructure of the platforms and the different social meanings that users attribute to these platforms. The applications may use similar mechanisms, such as profiles, photos, messages or matching algorithms, but the experience of online dating is not identical in all contexts. In discussions about South Korea, the applications are more frequently associated with the idea of ambivalence, suspicion and the need for validation through face-to-face encounters. In accounts of Europe, online dating sometimes appears as an already normalized practice, but not without uncertainties. The difference should not be formulated as a simple opposition between tradition and modernity, but as a difference between modes of social integration of the same technology.

The dating profile can be read as a space for controlled self-presentation. Users choose which photos to include, what information to display in the description, what aspects of their lives to highlight, and what elements to leave out of the profile. This selection should not automatically be interpreted as a lack of sincerity. Rather, it shows that online romantic interaction involves a work of organizing one's personal image. The user does not present themselves in their entirety, but constructs a version of themselves that is considered relevant, attractive, and understandable to the anticipated audience.

The tension between authenticity and performativity constantly appears in the analyzed comments. Users are looking for partners perceived as sincere, but interact in an environment that favors short formulas, selective profiles and repeatable messages. This results in the feeling that some conversations follow a familiar script or that certain affective expressions appear too quickly to be considered credible. In this situation, impression management is not only an individual strategy, but also a source of distrust. The more users become aware that others are constructing their image, the more cautious the interpretation of signals becomes.

In the South Korean context, impression management seems to be linked to dimensions such as respectability, status, and compatibility with social expectations. Comments about quickly formalizing a relationship, the need for a face-to-face meeting, or suspicion of sexual intentions indicate that online interaction is evaluated by criteria that go beyond individual attraction. Seriousness is not just declared, but must be demonstrated through socially recognized behaviors. In this context, the online profile and the initial conversation become signals of reputation, intentions, and the ability to respect certain relational norms.

In the observations about Europe, self-presentation is more often described in terms of autonomy, personal compatibility, and freedom of choice. However, the data do not support the image of a Europe that is uniformly or completely individualistic. The observations differentiate between regions, cities, languages, and social contexts. This examination is important because it limits interpretation based solely on the distinction between individualism and collectivism. Hofstede may help to articulate a general distinction between cultural orientations, but the observations show that dating experiences are also shaped by more concrete factors, namely, linguistic competence, social capital, gender, ethnic stereotypes, conversational style, and familiarity with local norms.

Relational fluidity occurs especially in the transition from online conversation to offline

meeting. For some users, exchanging messages is not enough to confirm interest or trust. The face-to-face meeting functions as a test of authenticity. That is, it verifies whether the person corresponds to the image constructed online, whether the declared intentions are maintained, and whether there is compatibility outside the application. Without this transition, the relationship remains suspended in an ambiguous space, where closeness can be intense at the conversational level, but fragile at the level of commitment.

In South Korea, where relationships may be more strongly assessed by norms of respectability, status, and social recognition, the transition to a clear form of relationship may be burdened with additional expectations. In many European contexts, fluidity may be interpreted more as part of personal autonomy, identity exploration, and the freedom to renegotiate relationships. However, in both cases the same central issue arises, namely, how can a digital connection be transformed into a credible and stable relationship?

The intercultural dimension adds an additional layer to this reflexivity. When users interact with people from other cultural spaces, they interpret not only individual profiles, but also implicit norms about communication, gender, seriousness and intimacy. Differences in language, humor, politeness, pace of responses or the use of paralinguistic cues can produce misunderstandings. At the same time, these differences can be valued as resources for curiosity and intercultural exploration. Thus, intercultural dating is not only a romantic experience, but also one of social and symbolic translation.

The comments on Europe in particular show the importance of local context. Europe does not appear as a unitary space, but as a set of situated experiences. Some accounts present Western cities as spaces where dating is more accessible to Asian men, while others insist on the importance of language, personal style and social skills. This diversity shows that dating success depends not only on national or regional affiliation, but also on how well users manage to adapt to local codes of interaction. Therefore, the comparison between South Korea and Europe should be understood as a comparison of online representations and contextualized experiences, not as a comparison between two cultural spaces with the same norm and values.

Another implication of the analysis is that digital platforms standardize certain forms of interaction, but do not completely standardize romantic meanings. The profile, the initial message, and the selection mechanisms create a common language of online dating. However, the meaning of these practices remains dependent on the social norms of the users. A gesture

interpreted as normal in one context may be read as too fast, too cold, or too ambiguous in another. This difference explains why the same platform can be perceived simultaneously as an opportunity, a risk, a space for exploration, or a source of distrust.

In large part, the analysis supports the idea that online dating produces a double movement. On the one hand, it facilitates the connection between people who would not have come into contact through traditional social networks. On the other hand, it amplifies the need for interpretation, as users must quickly evaluate profiles, messages, and intentions in an environment with limited information. This is where Goffman and Bauman meet, because the former explains how users build and read impressions, and the latter explains why the relationships that start from these impressions can remain fragile. Together, the two perspectives show that online dating is both a stage for self-presentation and a space for unstable connections. From a methodological point of view, the results should be interpreted as an analysis of public discourses, not as a single and general description of romantic behaviors. Reddit provides access to accounts of people's everyday lives, details about personal experiences and interpretations, but these materials are produced by users who choose to participate in certain online communities. Some comments may overgeneralize, reproduce stereotypes, or reflect very particular experiences.

It is more appropriate to say that platforms create a common framework of interaction, and users occupy it differently depending on their resources, norms and expectations. In the case analyzed, South Korea is more frequently associated with tensions between digital innovation and social validation of the relationship, while European spaces emerge through a diversity of practices and interpretations. Both contexts show, however, that digital intimacy remains dependent on trust, recognition and the ability to transform the initial impression into a meaningful and lasting relationship.

Conclusions

The paper demonstrates that online dating represents a space for negotiating identity, intimacy, and cultural differences, in which the same technological platforms are locally reinterpreted, reflecting tensions between globalization and cultural specificity. The Reddit comments analyzed provide a relevant perspective on these processes, highlighting how technology mediates romantic relationships without eliminating the influence of social and cultural norms.

Empirically, the research shows that Reddit discussions can be useful for capturing social representations of online dating. The comments do not provide a complete picture of the societies analyzed, but they allow observing the way in which users formulate problems, explain experiences and negotiate meanings. In these discussions, themes such as the differential normalization of online dating, suspicion of authenticity, the fluidity of commitment, the importance of offline meeting and the diversity of European experiences emerge. The results should be related to the type of material analyzed. The analysis consists of three Reddit threads, and the selected comments reflect particular experiences and positions. Subreddits have specific audiences, and some accounts may contain generalizations, stereotypes or subjective interpretations. For this reason, the research does not formulate general statements about all users in South Korea or Europe, but proposes an exploratory reading of the way in which certain online communities discuss dating, cultural differences and intercultural relations.

Looking at how online dating affects people, it is clear that it not only changes the way they meet, but also plays a role in shaping what is normal when it comes to close relationships. Online dating has become a global form of social interaction that transforms intimate relationships and the way people connect. In both South Korea and Europe, technology is a means of social exploration, but the cultural context gives different depths to the experience. The digital environment does not standardize love; rather, it reshapes it, turning intimacy into a terrain for negotiating globalization.

Connections between Koreans and Europeans through dating applications illustrate how intimacy is transformed into a space for intercultural dialogue. Technology practically becomes a bridge between two different worlds, facilitating closeness but also the confrontation of distinct values and expectations. For Koreans, these relationships signify an escape from traditional social constraints and an opening toward spontaneity and freedom, while for Europeans, Korean partners offer an experience perceived as newer. Online dating appears as a symbol of society's adaptability, with users ready to embrace change in the search for meaningful connections different from those available locally. Relationships born in the digital environment become true cultural mechanisms of globalization, where young people learn to translate and negotiate the emotional language of the other.

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As South Korea and Europe both embrace their traditions and adapt to technology, online dating is a sign of how flexible and prepared for change society can be in the search for new connections. These emerging technologies have managed to connect people, but they cannot destroy the limits established by real life itself. In order to truly fall in love with someone, it is very important for both people to be in physical contact and not only through the beautiful images and messages that most people see and receive on dating platforms.

Declaration on Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that during the preparation of this manuscript, ChatGPT by OpenAI was used for translation from Romanian into English, as well as for linguistic refinement, improvement of readability, clarity, grammar, academic style, and consistency of terminology. After using this tool, the author reviewed, verified, and edited the content, taking full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

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