

***Interracial Online Partner Shopping Experiences:
Application of Bauman's Theory on Liquid Love***

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Abstract

The research examines the dynamics of marital relationships of heterosexual unions among Asian-American and Asian-European couples. These couples have united through digital dating platforms, prompting the researchers to reevaluate gender-specific preferences in seeking lifetime partners online. The study aims to shed light on whether online dating applications have reshaped traditional marriage conventions. Employing a qualitative approach rooted in the phenomenological method, the research delves deeply into the experiences of the participants. Guiding this exploration is Zygmunt Bauman's "Liquid Love" theory, serving as the framework for comprehensive analysis. The study's cohort comprises purposively selected 17 male and female participants. The findings of the study reveal an escalating trend of Asian women forming unions with Western men through online dating channels, attributable to cultural distinctiveness and gender preferences. In the contemporary online marriage market, various factors exert divergent appeals to different genders. These findings carry significance for students of sociology and anthropology, as well as the academic community at large, particularly those engaging with Zygmunt Bauman's theoretical paradigms. The implications of this research stretch beyond conventional boundaries, broadening the horizons of students and presenting society with innovative and scholarly insights in this growing field.

Keywords: Online Dating, Interracial Marriage, Liquid Love, Zygmunt Bauman

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Introduction

In recent years, the emergence of online dating platforms has revolutionized how people find romantic connections (Hobbs et al., 2017)¹. This shift has enabled individuals from diverse cultures to engage and establish relationships in unprecedented ways. The focus on cross-cultural and interracial couples, who navigate this digital realm, provides a compelling lens to examine the dynamics of contemporary relationships using Bauman's theory of Liquid Love. The dating arena is now primarily divided into online dating apps and traditional face-to-face interactions (LeFebvre, 2018)². Despite the growing attention on online romantic relationships, no comprehensive exploration has investigated the stability of these connections, particularly among cross-cultural and interracial couples. Though some western countries had some social media apps about the interracial shopping, few studies have been conducted in China analyzing couple's relationship who met online by looking through the lens of Liquid love as introduced by Zygmunt Bauman (Rosenfeld and Thomas, 2012)³. Few research has been conducted on interracial marriage analyzing through the lens of liquid love by Zygmunt Bauman. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the experiences of married couples who met online, utilizing Bauman's Liquid Love theory as a conceptual framework. Our research objectives include elucidating the shift from traditional to online dating, analyzing gender-specific factors influencing online attraction, and examining participants' experiences of love and commitment during the online dating phase.

Bauman's concept of "liquid love" encapsulates the transition of romantic relationships from stable, enduring bonds to fluid, transient connections (Bauman, 2013)⁴. As societal structures shift towards individualization and fragmentation, romantic relationships have mirrored this change, evolving from the traditional ideals of stability to the uncertainties of the postmodern era. In the context of online dating, Bauman (2013)⁵ contends that the reliability and security associated with lifelong partnerships have been "liquefied" by technological advances.

Contrary to Bauman's assertion, this research posits that online relationships have the potential for long-term stability and genuine love. The study of "liquid love" is essential as online relationships, often short-lived and accessible through social media platforms, challenge the notion of enduring connections (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021)⁶.

Methodology

Appropriate research design is one of the essential elements for addressing research question in sufficient way (Cresswell, 2009)⁷. The goal of this study is to comprehensively analyze Asian – American and Asian - European couples who met in the form of online dating using

¹ Hobbs, M., Owen, S., & Gerber, L. (2017). Liquid love? Dating apps, sex, relationships and the digital transformation of intimacy. *Journal of Sociology*, 53(2), 271-284.

² LeFebvre, L. E. (2018). Swiping me off my feet: Explicating relationship initiation on Tinder. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 35(9), 1205-1229.

³ Rosenfeld, M. J., Thomas, R. J., & Hausen, S. (2019). Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(36), 17753–17758. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908630116>

⁴ Bauman, Z. (2013). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁵ Bauman, Z. (2013). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁶ Cocola-Gant, A., & Gago, A. (2021). Airbnb, buy-to-let investment and tourism-driven displacement: A case study in Lisbon. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 53(7), 1671-1688.

⁷ Cresswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.

Zygmunt Bauman's Liquid love theory (Bauman, 2013)⁸. The theory further elaborates on the link between gender and exploring romantic dating candidates interracially online. Besides, it compares the preferences of genders in the online and traditional marriage market. Specifically, this study has the following research questions and objectives. To address these questions, a qualitative-exploratory approach was employed, with data collected through case studies. The research instrument consisted of a researcher-designed questionnaire and scheduled interviews via Facebook messenger to understand deeper the phenomena. Participants were carefully selected based on specific criteria, including being Asian/American or Asian/European, meeting online, and being married for at least two years. The study comprised 17 participants, including 5 males and 12 females, representing diverse geographical backgrounds.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. As this was a phenomenological research, a significant amount of data, including interview notes, jottings, and recordings, was generated. The researchers reviewed unstructured notes, interview transcripts, and personal texts, identifying and extracting key themes from each specific context.

The study encounters certain challenges due to the limited usage of online dating apps or websites, which are uncommon and not widely adopted in China (Xia, Tu, Ribeiro, et al., 2014)⁹. Additionally, a portion of Chinese individuals hold traditional beliefs and are hesitant towards the research topic and interview inquiries, deeming them overly personal. Furthermore, some people within the Chinese culture may struggle to embrace interracial relationships, particularly in the context of online interactions.

Complicating matters further, interracial relationships during an epidemic can be intricate, potentially leading to geographical separation between partners. It remains uncertain whether sustained online communication and dating might lead to marital infidelity or other relational issues, and the extent to which these conflicts might impact the emotional bond.

It was evident that ethical concerns held a paramount position in this study, with researchers consistently upholding this principle throughout the entire research process. The researchers explained the study's purpose to each participant, ensuring that all responses from questionnaires were handled with clarity and proper ethical consideration. Prior to proceeding with the research, participants granted their consent for the questionnaire. Anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were rigorously maintained, concurrently respecting the perspectives and ideas put forth by the participants.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study underscore a pronounced shift from traditional to online dating platforms, reflecting the accelerated pace of technological integration in the realm of romance. Users find online interactions convenient, allowing virtual connections from the comfort of their own spaces. Moreover, participant experiences attest to the potential for online platforms to foster true love and enduring marriages, thereby challenging the transient nature often attributed to online relationships. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further

⁸ Bauman, Z. (2013). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. John Wiley & Sons.

⁹ Xia, P., Tu, K., Ribeiro, B., Jiang, H., Wang, X., Chen, C., Liu, B., & Towsley, D. (2014). Characterization of User Online Dating Behavior and Preference on a Large Online Dating Site. *Social Network Analysis - Community Detection and Evolution* (pp.193-217). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12188-8_9

expedited the adoption of online dating, as social restrictions prompt individuals to explore virtual avenues for connection. This shift aligns with the broader trend of integrating technology into various facets of life, including romantic pursuits (Zheng et al, 2022)¹⁰.

However, it is vital to recognize that online dating presents its own set of challenges. Participants express concerns about authenticity and misrepresentation, highlighting the need for transparent and genuine interactions. The absence of physical cues in online interactions can hinder the development of deep emotional connections. As a result, online dating coexists with traditional methods, revealing a complex interplay between the two approaches. Some of the shared experiences of the participants below:

Participant #1: In the interview conducted via a video call on Facebook Messenger, the participant shared their experiences: "At first, I was talking to several men, having frequent conversations with them. However, I realized that not all of them were genuinely interested in a serious relationship."

Participant #2: During the video call interview using Facebook Messenger, the participant recounted their story: "I developed feelings for this guy while we communicated online. However, it wasn't until he visited me in the Philippines that my feelings for him became stronger. Meeting him in person made a significant difference in our connection." Despite these challenges, the study reveals that virtual interactions can lead to profound emotional bonds. The extended online conversations and shared experiences enable participants to establish connections that transcend the digital realm. While commitment in the online sphere is multifaceted and influenced by factors such as trust and authenticity, the study dispels the notion that online relationships are inherently transient, showcasing their potential for long-lasting emotional connections.

Traditional Matchmakers and Online Dating Market

In the current landscape, there is a sense of anticipation and careful scrutiny as people closely monitor the trajectory of internet dating services, speculating on their potential to supplant traditional matchmakers in the future. While individuals remain intrigued by the possibilities offered by online platforms, the prevailing sentiment suggests that the traditional matchmaker market still holds a stronger position. The study conducted by Cacioppo et al. (2013)¹¹ sheds light on this dynamic, indicating that despite the rise of online dating, traditional matchmakers continue to wield significant influence and maintain a robust foothold in the realm of matchmaking. The interplay between these two approaches to finding romantic partners sparks an intriguing discussion about the future of modern relationships.

According to Madden and Lenhart (2006)¹², most people who have actually used online dating applications believe that it is a very effective way to meet and find a romantic partner

¹⁰ Zheng, L., Dong, Y., Chen, J., Li, Y., Li, W., & Su, M. (2022). Impact of Crisis on Sustainable Business Model Innovation—The Role of Technology Innovation.

¹¹ Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Gonzaga, G. C., Ogburn, E. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2013). Marital satisfaction and break-ups differ across on-line and off-line meeting venues. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(25), 10135-10140.

¹² Madden, M., & Lenhart, A. (2006, March 5). *Part 4. public attitudes toward online dating*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2006/03/05/part-4-public-attitudes->

idea, firmly believing that online dating is the future of romantic matchmaking. Conversely, only 5.88% of individuals disagree with this idea, holding onto the belief that traditional methods of meeting partners will continue to endure. In conclusion, the survey's findings underscore the diverse perspectives and attitudes within society regarding the potential replacement of the traditional marriage market by the online dating landscape. While a considerable number remain neutral or undecided, there is a notable segment that believes in the transformative potential of online platforms.

At the same time, a small group is resolute in their support of this idea, while another equally small faction remains steadfast in their preference for traditional means of finding romantic partners. As the dynamics of romance continue to evolve in this digital age, understanding and respecting these varied viewpoints is essential to navigating the ever-changing landscape of partner-seeking endeavors.

In recent times, the trend of seeking romantic partners online has surged, becoming increasingly popular. More and more people are using the internet as a means to find potential partners, especially among younger demographics (Trozenski, 2022)¹⁵. The convenience of online platforms, offering diverse options and overcoming geographical barriers, has contributed to the widespread adoption of online dating across various age groups and backgrounds (Cacioppo, 2013)¹⁶.

There are lots of reasons that influencing the using rate of online dating applications and people's intention of using online platforms. One of the primary factors influencing people's choice of using online dating applications is their preferred dating approach. A significant majority still leans toward face-to-face dating (about 70.59%) but is open to using online platforms to connect with potential partners and then transition to offline dating. The second crucial factor centers around people's feelings about using online dating apps or markets. The majority of participants expressed positive sentiments, reporting good experiences with online dating. The convenience offered by virtual dating is a notable aspect of its real-world impact. Online platforms allow for more efficient communication and quicker selection of suitable partners, making the process smoother and more accessible.

It is also essential to acknowledge that the reality factor also plays a role in shaping attitudes towards online dating, 64.71% of the respondents believe that convenience leads them to use online dating applications. Cacioppo (2013)¹⁷ analyzed the correlation between the places where the respondents met their romantic spouses offline and different degrees of marital satisfaction and came to the conclusion that those who met through the internet have higher satisfaction. However, those who were introduced by friends offline had the lowest satisfaction. According to the questionnaire data, 11.76% of respondents thought the decline in the traditional marriage market for their shift to online dating applications. Moreover, 35.29% of respondents believe they can find a more ideal partner in the online dating market. A survey in April 2020 found that 31% of millennial dating applications users in the US were

¹⁵ Trozenski, A. (2022, March 2). *The changing spaces of dating apps since COVID-19*. Vanderbilt University. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/digitalhumanities/the-changing-spaces-of-dating-apps-since-covid-19/>

¹⁶ Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Gonzaga, G. C., Ogburn, E. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2013). Marital satisfaction and break-ups differ across on-line and off-line meeting venues. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(25), 10135-10140.

¹⁷ Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., Gonzaga, G. C., Ogburn, E. L., & VanderWeele, T. J. (2013). Marital satisfaction and break-ups differ across on-line and off-line meeting venues. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(25), 10135-10140.

using online dating services more often than before the pandemic, which can also be illustrated in the questionnaire data that about 29.41% people turned to choose online dating applications (Trozenski, 2022)¹⁸. However, the potential danger is the main reason that prevents people from using online dating applications. Many people worry that there are some scams behind the internet. For example, some fraud or physical incompatibility. Some participants expressed concerns about the potential dangers associated with virtual interactions. This perceived limitation highlights the need for increased safety measures and vigilance to ensure a secure and trustworthy online dating experience. By addressing these concerns and capitalizing on the strengths of online dating platforms, the continued growth and widespread adoption of online dating are expected to shape the future of modern relationship-building. In that case, the accessibility of the online dating market and the positive online dating experiences support the growth of the online dating business (Rosenfeld et al., 2019)¹⁹. Moreover, the expansion of the online dating market is somewhat constrained by the possible risk and opacity of the sector.

Gender Disparities in the Online Dating Market

Key Factors in Partner Selection

Attraction in the realm of online dating is a multifaceted phenomenon, with distinct considerations shaping the preferences of individuals seeking potential partners. Through thorough investigation, notable disparities emerge in the factors that men and women prioritize when navigating online dating platforms.

For male participants, the preeminent quality is physical appearance, followed by personality traits and shared interests. Conversely, female participants accord a lower significance to physical appearance, elevating personality traits as their foremost concern. Moreover, gender-based variances are evident in the perceived importance of occupation and educational level. Women regard occupation and educational level as second and third in significance, a perspective divergent from men, who consider these aspects less crucial. This finding underscores the higher attention men allocate to physical appearance, corroborating findings by Su and Hu (2019)²⁰ that women place greater emphasis on potential partners' socioeconomic status, affecting their enthusiasm for interaction.

¹⁸ Trozenski, A. (2022, March 2). *The changing spaces of dating apps since COVID-19*. Vanderbilt University. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/digitalhumanities/the-changing-spaces-of-dating-apps-since-covid-19/>

¹⁹ Rosenfeld, M. J., Thomas, R. J., & Hausen, S. (2019). Disintermediating your friends: How online dating in the United States displaces other ways of meeting. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(36), 17753–17758. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908630116>

²⁰ Su, X., & Hu, H. (2019). Gender-specific preference in online dating. *EPJ Data Science*, 8(1), 12.

Table 1: Preferred Qualities by Men

Rank	Quality
1	Physical Appearance
2	Personality Traits
3	Shared Interests
4	Occupation
5	Educational Level

Table 2: Preferred Qualities by Women

Rank	Quality
1	Personality Traits
2	Occupation
3	Educational Level
4	Shared Interests
5	Physical Appearance

Preferred Online Dating Platforms

Integral to the online dating landscape are the diverse platforms available, encompassing apps and websites that facilitate connections. While a plethora of options exist globally, preferences diverge among male and female users.

Among male participants, 40% favor Tinder, with the remainder opting for WeChat, Tantan, QQ, and udate.com. Conversely, only 16.67% of female participants lean towards Tinder, with Facebook, WhatsApp, International Cupid, and the Christian Dating app gaining prominence. Evidently, both genders favor chat-based apps, implying that platforms such as Instagram and Twitter are not the primary choices for potential partner exploration. This underscores a shared demand for specialized dating software, as both men and women seek more specialized apps and websites to enhance their quest for compatible partners.

Figure 2: Men's Preferred Online Dating Platforms

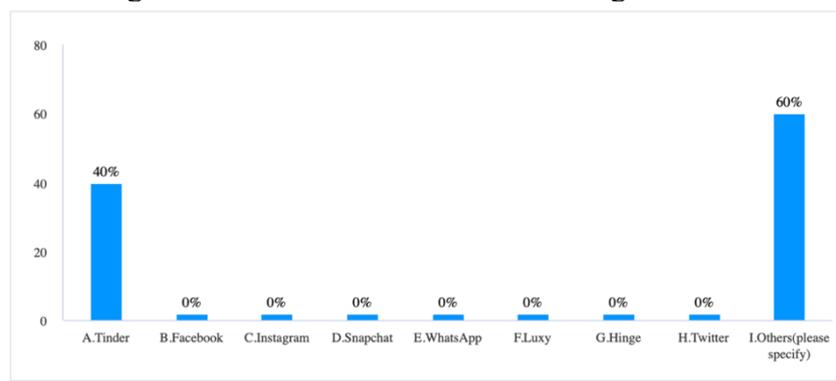
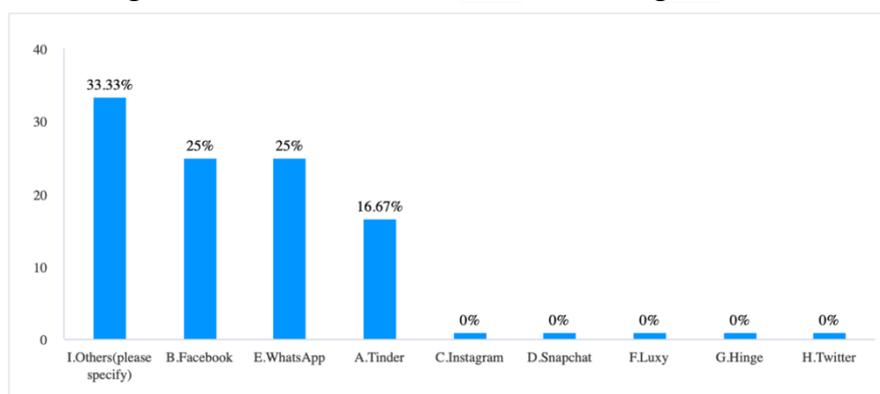


Figure 3: Women's Preferred Online Dating Platforms



Perspectives on Physical Distance

A fundamental aspect engendered by online dating is the influence of physical proximity. Given the study's focus on interracial individuals who often live apart, it is important to note that online communication may lack the nuance of physical presence, potentially leading to misinterpretations.

The perceptions of participants regarding the role of physical distance are pivotal in shaping their relationships. Generally, both genders assign varying degrees of importance to physical proximity. Around 60% of males emphasize its significance, while 40% regard it as somewhat important. Among females, over 75% consider physical distance to be of great importance, yet 25% of women attribute comparatively less value to it. This trend parallels findings by Xia et al. (2014)²¹, revealing that men's likelihood of replying online diminishes with distance, while women may experience increased communication despite geographical separation.

²¹ Xia, P., Tu, K., Ribeiro, B., Jiang, H., Wang, X., Chen, C., Liu, B., & Towsley, D. (2014). Characterization of User Online Dating Behavior and Preference on a Large Online Dating Site. *Social Network Analysis - Community Detection and Evolution* (pp.193-217).https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12188-8_9

Figure 4: Men's Perspectives on Physical Distance

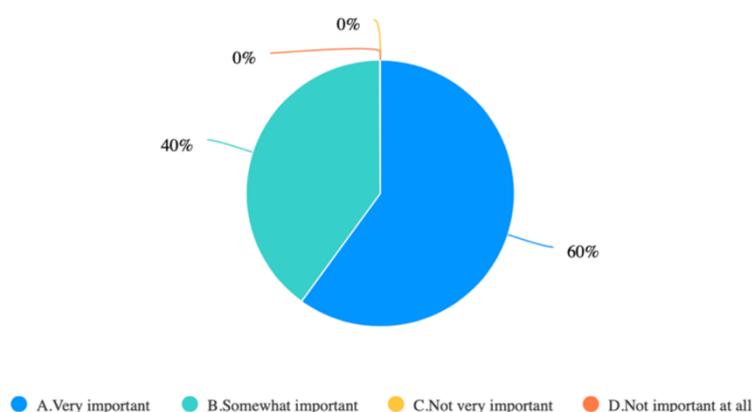
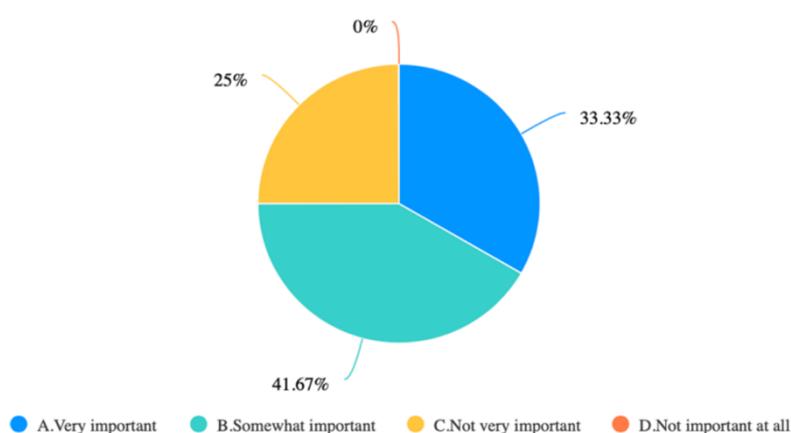


Figure 5: Women's Perspectives on Physical Distance



Significance of Communication Style

Given that online communication is paramount for forging connections and resolving conflicts, the chosen communication style bears substantial weight. Absent physical cues, effective communication is pivotal in online interactions, thereby making communication style a defining factor.

Approximately 80% of male participants' view communication style as highly important, with the remaining 20% considering it somewhat significant. A similar pattern emerges among female participants, where over 90% perceive it as crucial. This shared emphasis underscores the integral role communication style plays in assessing potential partners. Moreover, communication style can offer insights into an individual's personality traits. For instance, prompt communication may signify emotional stability, while delayed responses could suggest empathy deficiencies.

Figure 6: Men’s Views on Communication Style

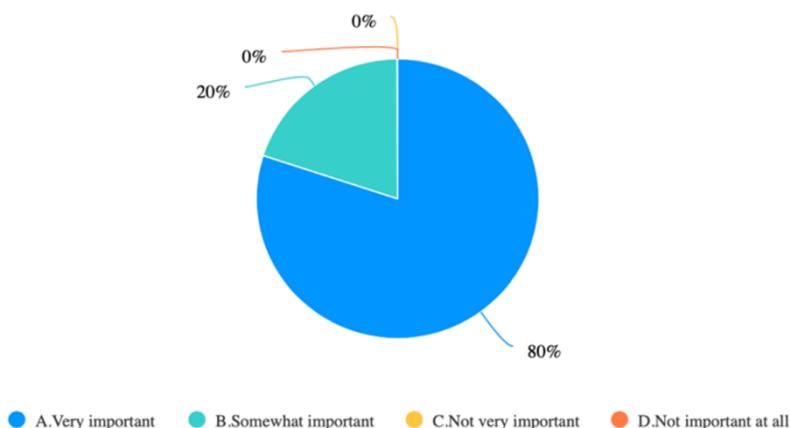
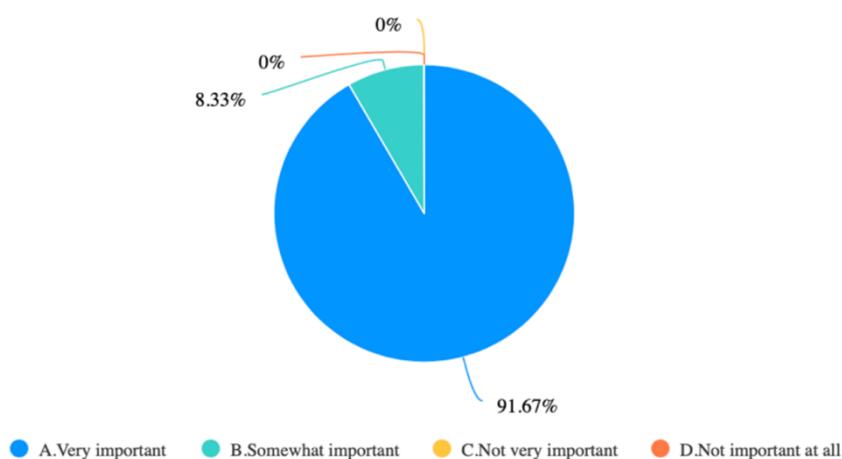


Figure 7: Women’s Views on Communication Style



Conclusion

As online dating continues to shape modern relationships, further research is warranted to delve into the long-term outcomes and implications of these evolving trends. Majority of participants expressed positive sentiments, reporting good experiences with online dating. The convenience offered by virtual dating is a notable aspect of its real-world impact. The intricate interplay between online and traditional dating methods warrants continued exploration, offering insights into the dynamics of love, commitment, and enduring connections in the digital age.

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