

Perceptions of Non-Users of Dating Applications: Attitudes, Stigma and Digital Intimacy in Croatia

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Abstract

This study examined how young adults in Croatia who did not use dating applications understood and evaluated these platforms, and what their non-use revealed about contemporary transformations of intimacy. The analysis was grounded in sociological interpretations of late modernity, drawing on Giddens' concept of the "pure relationship" and reflexive identity formation, Bauman's thesis of "liquid love" and relational insecurity, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's theory of individualization, and Illouz's critique of the commodification and rationalization of romantic choice within digital capitalism. Within this framework, dating applications were conceptualized as algorithmically structured environments that reorganized partner selection through logics of visibility, comparison, and replaceability. The empirical basis of the study consisted of a quantitative CAWI survey conducted in 2025 on a nationally structured mixed-gender sample of 1,000 participants aged 18-35 in Croatia. The analysis focused exclusively on non-users of dating applications (N=398), examining their perceptions, concerns, and motivations for non-use. The findings indicated that non-users frequently perceived dating applications as fostering superficial interactions, emotional uncertainty, and increased risks of misrepresentation and social judgment. At the same time, abstention was commonly associated with a preference for face-to-face encounters, perceived authenticity, and adherence to more traditional dating scripts. The study contributed to broader debates on digital intimacy by illuminating forms of skepticism and symbolic resistance toward platform-mediated relationships within a post-transitional cultural context.

Keywords: Algorithmization; Individualization; Late Modernity; Partner Choice; Social Norms