

FRAMING AND THE LURE OF DATING AMONG LEANESE ADULTS

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In Partial  
Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the  
Degree

MA in Media  
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Advertising

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by

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Mai, 2019

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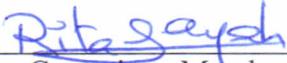
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The Abstract Page**

**FRAMING AND THE LURE OF DATING AMONG LEBANESE ADULTS**

**Rana Badine**

**Abstract**

Online dating services replaced traditional matchmaking tools. The internet gave individuals the opportunity to be their own matchmakers and experience new online identities leaving room for different methods in the presentation of self. There are many studies done on the topic of online dating services however, none of them has discussed it in terms of identity, framing and its role in Lebanon. Using the uses and gratification and the framing theories this thesis examined how Lebanese adults frame themselves on online dating websites and applications and the gratifications they get from their use; it also investigated the influence of the internet as a matchmaking tool. Results showed that online dating websites and application are used as a way to achieve self – satisfaction and the feeling of being attractive. This study proved that physical attractiveness and photos are the strongest factor in online dating profile.

**Keywords:** Online dating – Uses and gratification – Framing – Online identity – Lebanese.

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# **Framing and the Lure of Dating among Lebanese Adults**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Love may be universal, but not dating or the ways of dating. Dating varies in term of age, culture and the understanding of the concept of dating. Dating is the pre – marital, romantic stage that get individuals to meet others in order to achieve an intimate relationship that might lead to marriage.

With the rise of the internet, individuals are adopting new ways to get the attention of the opposite or same sex. Many use online dating sites and applications. These individuals frame themselves by posting attractive characteristics and pictures to achieve the goal of dating and attracting others.

The internet has helped connect people from around the world exposing them to a diversity of cultures and lifestyles. Many have been exposed at least once to online dating applications and websites. Research conducted by Pew (2016) and online dating sites such as eHarmony and Match.com showed that millennials aged between 18 and 24 years old make use of online media tools more than their parents and their grand – parents.

In her paper, *German Matchmaking*, Riitta (2001) mentioned that the internet has replaced not only magazines, newspaper ads and other matchmaking traditional methods, but it became the main medium of the matchmaking process.

The internet introduced a new way to the dating and mating process, with Facebook for instance, it is easier to communicate and get in touch with different people, of different genders, races, and religions. Individuals can meet new people without putting in much effort into searching.

With the internet and social media, people are more independent, and have more or less taken the action of dating into their own hands (Shah, 2016). Through online dating applications and websites people are able to pick and match with a certain user of their choice basically they are their own decision makers.

Online dating has become a trend and a vast number of studies have been conducted on the subject matter (Epsten, 2007; Hearst, Taylor and Mendelsohn (2008); Davis, Fingerman (2015); Ligtenberg (2015) and Price (2016)). But none of these studies tackled online dating in Lebanon and the issue of identity and its online framing.

### **1.1 Thesis Statement**

Through the lens of the uses and gratification and framing theories, this thesis investigates how Lebanese adults frame themselves on online dating sites and the gratifications they get from using these websites or applications. It seeks to examine the influence of the internet on the concept of dating by specifically looking at how and why people use the internet as a matchmaker tool. While investigating how individuals on online dating websites frame themselves through their profile, the thesis also examines the gratifications that these individuals get from using such sites.

### **1.2 Thesis Overview**

Due to the rise of the internet and social media, dating experienced a fast moving development, especially after online dating websites and applications became a trend.

This thesis is divided into five chapters:

In the first chapter of the thesis, the topic is introduced in addition to the thesis statement, where it discusses how individuals are using new ways to meet their partners through the internet and more specifically through online dating applications and sites.

The second chapter of the thesis deals with the literature review and is divided into several sections that discuss the history of dating in terms of matchmaking and arranged marriage in addition to, online dating in relation to technological developments such as websites and applications, physical attractiveness, text, profile pictures, age, false appearances and finally sexuality.

The third chapter deals with the three theoretical frameworks used for the study. The frameworks are the uses and gratification, framing and online identity.

The fourth chapter explains the quantitative methodology used for the thesis. The fifth chapter relates the findings of the survey that was done and compares those findings to what had been uncovered in the literature review and theoretical framework chapters.

The conclusion brings the entire thesis together and reveals the main contributions that the thesis made.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter investigates the academic literature of online dating. First, the chapter introduces the history of dating and defines the concept of online dating, then it looks at the relation of the online dating concept with different variables such as physical attractiveness, age, appearances and the evolution of online dating websites and applications.

### **2.1 History of Dating**

Nowadays dating or going out with someone seems like the normal thing to do for many, yet that was not always the case. Dating has developed and changed over the years but its main purpose remains to find love. People have always wanted to find love, dreaming of a bright future with loved ones and children, and living a happy life. To find love, people historically relied on matchmakers and arranged marriages. Although there are no current studies that state when the concept of arranged marriages and matchmaking first appeared, it is assumed that this concept existed mainly in the 18th century when kings and queens married each other to fund their nation and expand their kingdom (Arranged Marriage, n.d). According to Santana (2000), arranged marriages were popular in the Indian Culture in the fourth century. Usually matchmakers used to be the elders of the village, who knew almost everyone in the village and who could see a future for certain young partners together.

A matchmaker is a person who arranges marriages specially by bringing two unmarried individuals together in order to promote love (Merriam – Webster's, 1859). A matchmaker is a public relations person, who tries to find potential partners to unmarried individuals so they may share their lives together. These potential partners are chosen based on a number of factors such as personality, characteristics as well as physical attractiveness.

Arranged marriages are an extended version of matchmaking. They entail the idea of having someone decide who you should share your life with. Arranged marriages are defined by Merriam – Webster Dictionary (n.d.) as a commitment between two unmarried individuals chosen by parents, matchmakers, religious institutions. An arranged marriage is usually done for economic, societal or political benefits rather than love. Rumors state that this economic liaison includes an offering such as money or property or even a bride price (Anderson, 2007).

Research conducted by Walker (2013) on the concept and history of matchmakers mentioned that Ireland is known for its matchmaking tradition and till now in a far village in Ireland Willie Daly was the third generation matchmaker. The high season of matchmaking is during festivities where people from all around the world meet. It was when Daly was spotted holding a 150 – year – old book where all the successful marriage profiles are assembled (Walker, 2013).

The Eastern as well as Middle Eastern worlds are still attached to their roots, culture, traditions and values, where the opinions of authority figures, such as parents, religious figures or elders, are the most important part of the decision making (Kennedy, n.d.). According to Ghosn (2009), Lebanon is known for its loyalty to members of the family as well as its attachment to religion and kinship that is valued and honored, the opinion of others still matters to Lebanese citizens when it comes to dating. It is important to keep in mind the values and characteristics that Lebanese citizens are known for since this paper seeks not only to examine the concept of online dating in general but it investigates online dating according to Lebanon.

The studies show then that, matchmaking still exists, even in communities that are no longer traditional. But do arranged marriages and matchmaking still exist especially with the rise of the internet and social media? Do people still rely on the matchmakers or are they independent

and able to decide on their own? Matchmaking and arranged marriages are still used to find love, but the process is no longer limited to the matchmakers, parents, and religious institutions, it is also done through social media.

## **2.2 Online Dating: Definition**

Online dating also known as internet dating is the new form of arranged relationship or match making. The internet and the social media overall are the easiest way to connect, communicate and meet people from around the world. In other words, one's potential partner might be a click or a swipe away. A high percentage of individuals, nowadays, are more independent, and are able to make a decision concerning the choice of their partner without any intermediary interference. Through the internet, people now get to select potential dating prospects based on their character, age, and physical attractiveness among others.

Individuals can develop a personal and romantic relationship and arrange dates, meetings, or gatherings. The internet provides people with the opportunity to communicate through WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and other social media platforms.

Internet dating started with online dating sites, and with the evolution of smart phones. These online dating sites followed people to their mobile phones and created their own applications that are downloaded with zero fees. Online dating applications, as well, took advantage of the smart phones features such as, the front camera for taking instant selfies and the location feature in order to reunite people with potential partners based on their demographics.

(DeMers, 2013)

## **2.3 Online Dating Websites and Applications**

After many discussions with online daters and after he got immersed in online dating world, Liamputtong (2005) claimed that people who chat together before meeting for the first

time will have a more successful first date than those who do not chat beforehand. One common way of communicating is through instant messaging, which is very popular amongst online daters.

Some of the prominent applications or websites for online dating include OKCupid, Tinder, and Plenty of Fish:

- \_ OKCupid was launched in 2004. It is an American - based international online dating, free of charge service where users are matched through algorithms, after answering a series of questions. This service draws a younger age demographic. One of the main functions of OKCupid is the ability to rate another users profile based on two separate scales, those of looks and personality (Morrell, 2016)
- \_ Tinder, launched in 2012, is a free of charge application that can be linked either through Facebook or Spotify profiles. Tinder is a social search mobile application that facilitates the communication between mutually interested users, allowing matched users to chat and get to know each other. This application was mostly used as a dating service but today it has branched out and started providing more services making it more of a social media kind of application (Tinder, 2017). By 2014, Tinder was registering around one million swipes per day. It is among the first swiping applications, where users exercise the swiping motion to decide if they are interested or not. For example, swiping left - is when you are not interested in the person and you want to move to the next one, whereas swiping right means it can be a potential match.
- \_ Plenty of Fish, also known as POF, is a free of charge dating application, with around 90 million registered users who are searching for someone to partner up with. It was founded in 2003 by Markus Frind who was able to attract 10 million users when the application was first launched. POF is characterized by its variety of languages, and 55000 new users register in POF every day. When the individuals first sign up for POF, they have to provide basic information as well as undergo a character and personality test. From the answers the application matches the

individual with potential partners who have the same characteristics and might as well have a spark.

The online dating services chain is not limited to these three applications, although they are the most used and popular applications many other exist in the online market such as Badoo, Hinge, Grindr, the League and Her. Each application has its own features but their purpose is to match users together in order to meet and possibly start a new journey with the match.

## **2.4 Physical Attractiveness and Text**

Research on online dating sites explored the relationship between physical appearances and texting done on online dating sites and application. Brand, D'Orazio and DeShong (2012) conducted a study to find out whether looks matter in online dating. The study contained a survey that was distributed randomly to 83 men that were online dating users in order to rate 84 women's profiles based on photos and text independently from one another. The purpose of this study was to determine if those who were perceived as physically attractive also wrote more attractive text. Results showed that physical and text attractiveness are highly related to one another.

Physical attractiveness and text attractiveness are then, highly linked to one another. Brand, et al. (2012) determined the function of online dating as being the leveling of the playing field of those who were deemed unattractive in face to face encounters. According to Levine (2000), online dating would give those who do not fit a stereotypical model of human beauty, an equal opportunity to feel desirable (p.525). To investigate this statement, Levine conducted a study where he asked 50 women to rate men according to the profile and display photo (Display photo goes by the acronym DP was used in the early days of online messaging and was changed to profile picture or PP as a new term by Facebook, it is a small photo that appears beside the

name as a representation of oneself so that people can know who they are chatting with) independently from one another.

Brand, D'Orazio and DeShong (2011) opposed Levine and claimed that those who were deemed attractive would also have a more attractive profile, and therefore actually have more positive attributes than less attractive men. It was also found that attractive individuals also wrote intelligent, creative and confident texts: "Individuals who were rated as attractive, wrote texts that conveyed confidence, and it was perhaps this confidence which signaled higher quality to women" (Brand, et al., 2012, p.169). How looks matter or questioning physical attractiveness is a common question asked by many researchers. According to Levine (2000), "the beauty of the virtual medium is that it is based on words, charm, and seduction rather than on physical attraction cues" (p.525).

Fiore, Lindsay, Mendelsohn and Hearst (2008) contradicted Levine's statement and claimed that a profile photo, meaning physical attractiveness, was the strongest factor, and that free - text component also played an important role in determining the overall attractiveness (p.797). This study was conducted on five men and five women between the ages of 20 and 30 years old from different U.S. cities such as Atlanta, San Diego, Seattle and St. Louis, from university communities such as staff and students. They asked participants to rate the profile and profile components through Likert type scale (from 0 - not at all - t 4 - very much) on the following dimensions: attractiveness trustworthiness, masculinity - femininity, warmth and kindness, self - esteem, self – centered. The results showed that online users with attractive profile pictures were considered to be more attractive in overall features, characteristics, both physically and in terms of personality.

There are a number of common characteristics that attract most people who use online dating websites. These characteristics do not only have to do with physical appearances but with personality traits such as, trustworthiness, honesty, and most importantly confidence. Those characteristics attract both sexes, especially when they are looking for long-term relationships. Studies show that women looking for a long-term relationship look for profiles that convey confidence and warmth, but those who are looking for a short-term relationship almost always select men based on their physical attractiveness.

Even before the booming of the internet and online dating, Feingold (1992) conducted a meta – analysis study where he retrieved 212 experiments and found that attractive people were more popular and socially adept than unattractive people. Using the meta-analysis Feingold also found that attractive people are typically perceived as being more efficient and intelligent than those perceived as unattractive. This meta – analytic study of the physical attractiveness research shed a new light on a belief that states what is beautiful is good.

In 2015, Suzanne Meijer reached similar conclusions. Meijer (2015) investigated the role of photos and language errors in text in assessing interpersonal attraction in online dating. To do so, a survey was filled in by 234 respondents who evaluated online dating profiles based on physical, social, romantic attraction as well as reliability, intelligence and intention to date the profile owner. The respondents were between 18 and 34 years old and the study was through online survey distributed via social media. The results found, showed that attractiveness of a photo had a positive effect on all three attractions or the physical, social and romantic levels. The absence of a photo had only negative effects on physical attraction and finally the text and its errors determined if the individual was worth meeting in the first place.

## **2.5 Online Dating and Profile Pictures**

Long before social media, internet and online dating sites, psychologists were interested in knowing how people got involved in a romantic relationship. It was perceived that the most important factor was the presentation of self (Kanters, S. 2012). In the era of the internet and social media, the presentation of self still exists, but through profile pictures and the profile elements. Online users usually feel more comfortable approaching someone with a profile picture since it gives them the impression of trustworthiness and reliability. After all, with the presence of the picture, people can at least see the person first and imagine how she or he might look like.

Yet in the online world, people might present themselves more positively than they may actually be (Caspi, 2006).

According to Ramirez, Summer, Fleuriet, and Cole (2012), dating profiles or one of the forms of self are designed to promote positive attributes. Users may take advantage of the technical means in self – presentation to filter or omit negative traits to attract potential partners. In the case of online dating services, self – representation is mostly portrayed by attractive profile pictures.

According to Kanters (2012), Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn and Hearst investigated the relationship of the information component of the profile and the attractiveness of the profile, and concluded that a photo is the strongest factor of the whole profile attractiveness. In 2008, Fiore, Taylor, Mendelsohn and Hearst, conducted a study to examine how users perceive attractiveness in online dating sites which provides their first exposure to a potential partner. In this study, researchers selected fifty online dating profiles from Yahoo web site; the profiles, were distributed to five men and five women between 20 and 30 years old from five different states in

the U.S, namely, Atlanta, Boston, San Diego, Seattle and St. Louis. The profiles chosen had profile pictures and belonged to users that had recently logged in. The researchers recruited participants from the university community, staff and students who were paid in order to participate. The sample consisted of 41 women, 23 men and one who preferred not to give his gender, all between 19 and 25 years' old. The results found that there was a high correlation between attractiveness and self – confidence which attracts other users when they were first exposed to the profile

Whitty and Carr (2006) conducted a study, that claimed that 85% of online dating users would not contact someone without a profile photo, hence, illustrations are the strongest predictor of the world of online dating. In online dating profiles, gender differences are noticeable, for example, women mostly use the first – person singular pronoun as well as they maintain family ties (Brown & DeRyche, 2010).

The studies discussed show that online dating is more successful with the presence of a profile picture. The level of the picture's attractiveness is also a factor in the success of the online dating process.

## **2.6 Online Dating and Age**

With the evolution of media and the internet, online dating became a trend not only among teenagers but other ages as well. Pew research, conducted in the years of 2013 and 2015, showed that people of all ages use online dating sites and applications. 10% of those between the ages of 18 and 24, were using online dating in 2013; this increased to 27% in 2015, while 22% adults between the ages of 25 and 34 used online dating in both 2013 and 2015. For people between the ages of 45 and 54, 8% used online dating in 2013 that number increased to 13% in 2015. And the surprising percentage is the percentage of people who were from 55 to 64 years'

old that were 6% in 2013 and became 12% in 2015. This shows the increase in the number of people using online dating applications and their increasing importance in bringing people together.

The millennials or those whose ages are between 18 to 24 years remain the ones that are mostly making use of the online dating services. This is understandable because they are younger and are still unsettled when it comes to relationships and they are more used to the idea of online dating than their parents or their grandparents.

A study conducted by Davis and Fingerman (2015) found that people's use of online dating applications differs with age. Each age group has their own distinct approach. Adults and older adults, for instance, almost always, mention their financial status and their achievements, in order to attract each other, while younger adults like to mention their goals, careers and hobbies, by focusing on self-relevant goals such as the acceptance of the responsibility of one's self (Davis and Fingerman, 2015)

## **2.7 Online Dating and Possibly False Appearances**

The internet has become a common tool to seek friends, romantic and sexual partners (Baker, 2005; Cooper, Mansson, Daneback, Tikkanen, & Ross, 2003; Daneback, Mansson, & Ross, 2007; Davis, Hart, Bolding, Sherr, & Elford, 2006a, 2006b; Hardey, 2004; Whitty & Carr, 2006). Yet the internet remains a form of distanced communication that can be done without actual physical presence. This leaves room for the manipulation of images, profiles, and traits.

On social media platforms, texts and images are filtered and profiles are being played with. The profile then may not be completely truthful. A lot of online users abuse online dating sites by only showing their most positive attributes and omitting information or characteristic

traits that they believe can be repulsive when meeting someone. In this case, individuals somewhat fake their own identities, and deceive potential partners they may date.

According to Davis et al. (2006), identity including appearances, personality, sexual tastes, preferences and risks management constitute parts of the integration of online profiles, and this acts as the basis of filtering.

Most online users nowadays do not approach anyone who does not have a profile picture, which is a sign that appearances are one of the strongest tool in finding a potential partner. Online daters attempt to be creative in the presentation of self, on online dating sites, although for some, this can be restrictive (Whitty, 2007) because it can be deceiving once they meet someone.

Hancock, Toma and Ellison (2007) conducted a study that measured the level of lying and deception in online dating sites and application they chose four popular online dating sites in the United States where people creates profiles and started contacting other users; the sites were different than the applications that pairs users together such as eHarmony and Tinder. Those sites are Yahoo personals, American singles, Match.com and Web date. The sample consisted of 80 participants 45 of which were Match.com users, 29 Yahoo personals, 4 American singles and 2 Web dates users. They were asked to rate their own profiles in terms of accuracy, defined as the extent that the answers reflect the truth about them at that time, 1 being least accurate and 5 being most accurate.

After collecting the information, the participants were asked to remove their shoes in order to measure their weight and height, whereas their age was retrieved from their drivers' license. Finally, the participants were paid 30 dollars as a thank you. The results showed that inaccuracy in profile exists and the users were fully aware of it. It is also found that deception

and lying regularly were detected; around 81% of the respondents lied on at least one of the variable such as weight, height and age. Weight was the most lied about attribute. This shows that online dating can be deceptive and may rely on falsely perceived appearances leading to the conclusion that self – deception was most likely intentional.

## **2.8 Online Dating and Sexuality**

In 2006, Hamilton and Bowers conducted a study using the snowball sample to investigate how and why people use online dating applications. Through interviews, researchers came to a conclusion regarding the reasons behind the use of these services: see soul mates, seeking sex, looking for fun, relaxation, ease of boredom and an easy way to meet people. Most respondents focused on the sexual gratification behind using these online dating applications. In this survey, men were highly comfortable to describe what they like and dislike sexually:

"I have a very high libido; I like to f\*\*\*\* a lot-every night if I can find some willing! And with the right girl, I like it dirty Too-C\*\*\*ing in mouth, on face, anal, spanking, stuff like that" (p. 275).

While others were really uncomfortable when asked about their sexual need whilst talking about online dating, quoting a woman from the survey mentioned earlier:

If sex was safe both physically and emotionally it would be an everyday thing. Involve the risk of unwanted pregnancy, STD and emotional loss then the risk is greater and the tragi-comedic elements are heightened . . . The danger is what makes it fascinating . . . Too safe and its just as Marcus Aurelius the Stoic put it: as friction stimulating ejaculation enabling procreation, an animal aspect of humans (a stoic philosopher and Caesar as well).

A study was conducted in Hong Kong by Hang – Choi, Wong, Ming – Lo, Wong, W., Man – Choi and Tak Fong (2016) to examine the association of online dating applications with risky sexual behaviors. Participants from four different university campuses in Hong Kong were recruited, under one condition that the participant should be able to speak English, Cantonese and Mandarin, since the questionnaire distributed was in Chinese or English. The questionnaire asked about the usage of dating application, sexual behaviors, and sociodemographic information such as age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, income, smoking and or drinking habits. Results showed that the usage of online dating applications was highly related with having more sexual intercourse and sexual partners.

To sum up the literature review, it can be said that dating is a normal thing to do for many but its process was not always the same. At first, it was limited to matchmakers and arranged marriages, which required the authorization of a third party, either parents, matchmakers, or religious institution that advised the individual on whom they should date or marry. With the rise of social media and the internet, the new concept of online or internet dating originated; it is the new form of matchmaking. Individuals are now able to make their own decision on who they want to meet, connect and communicate with in a click or swipe. These applications have moved to users' personal smart phones and took the advantage of their features such as location, camera, and voice recordings. Some examples of the most popular application that are used are Tinder, OkCupid, Plenty of Fish, while other application also exist in the market but are not as popular as the ones mentioned such as Badoo, Hinge, Grindr and The League.

Online dating is related to age, physical attractiveness, text, profile picture and sexuality. Studies reviewed in the literature review showed that millennials aged between 18 and 24 years old used online dating services the most, but they also showed that people of older ages are

becoming more engaged in these platforms. Physical attractiveness and appearance were factors that online daters look at since individuals behind their smart phones screen post pictures and act at their best, although that might be deceptive at times. In addition, pictures were considered to be the strongest factor in an online dating profile because they gave an idea about the person's identity. Finally, a lot of users used these types of profiles in order to satisfy their sexual desire without being rejected by anyone.

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter discusses the three theories used for this thesis. The uses and gratification, the framing as well as the online identity theories will be used to investigate and better understand the criteria that people who use online dating websites use to frame themselves and the gratification they get from the use of online dating.

### **3.1 Uses and Gratifications**

Uses and gratifications theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in the 1970's. It first started when Katz came up with the belief that people use media to their own benefits. Katz with the help of his two colleagues Blumler and Gurevitch continued to expand this theory. The theory opposed the idea that audience was considered to be passive and proposed that the audience actively seek out specific media content that actually meets their benefits, needs, and desires. (Rossi, E. 2002)

The uses and gratifications theory deals with how and why people adopt a specific medium to satisfy their needs. Uses and gratification answers the question "What do people do with media?" rather than "what do media do to people?" as it was questioned and researched in the past. Uses and Gratification is related to psychology as well as sociology especially because it sprang out from the functionalist paradigm, meaning that this theory presents the use of the media in terms of the gratification of social and psychological needs of the individual (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

Theorists Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) divided the needs of the theory into five categories that are directly related to the five groups of the human needs:

- \_ The cognitive need that is related to the knowledge, understanding and curiosity of oneself, in which they claimed that an individual tend to be interested in understanding and gaining new information that follows the drastically change of environment.
- \_ The affective need in which an individual is able to express his or her feelings such as pleasure and desire towards someone or something.
- \_ The personal identity need that discusses one's self – respect, confidence, stability, credibility as well as personal status.
- \_ The integration and social interaction need, which is the feeling of belonging into a group, family, religious institution or even social class, it is also considered to be the need for affiliation and connectivity with others.
- \_ Finally, tension release also known as escapism, where individuals alter their attention from something or someone that they believe to be unpleasant to something else that release that tension and stress.

According to Communicationtheory.org (2009), there are a lot of types of needs an individual seeks out by using mass communication, such as the cognitive, affective, entertainment and sexual needs:

The cognitive needs involve gaining information and knowledge about certain events. Cognitive concerns the act and process of knowing and conceiving it is related to the brain and the fact of learning. Cognitive needs and learning and gaining knowledge enhances the educational level. The cognitive need plays an important role in the intellectual development of the individual. When it comes to online dating, individuals seek out this need and portray it through curiosity and the interest of knowing what this application or site is all about. This knowledge gained by online dating platforms leads users to get

closer and more intimate with people of different age groups, cultures, mentalities and lifestyles which enhances their perspectives and increase their awareness.

The affective needs meaning the emotional release such as stress and boredom as well as the feeling of excitement and happiness when meeting new people. Internet and social media brings people closer, by giving people the chance to meet and communicate with each other. In the case of online dating, and with applications such as Facebook, tinder, OkCupid, and Plenty of Fish people can chat via messenger and get to know each other even before meeting one another. Furthermore, Internet dating users usually check the picture of the other person in order to decide whether to talk to the person or not. Studies have shown that profiles without a picture are not likely to be approached which is highly related to the affective needs since a picture will be more comforting to be approached than a discrete profile. In addition, the affective needs for this theory revolves around all kinds of emotions such as the feeling of pleasure, satisfaction, happiness to be able to communicate and meet new people. This affective need can be reached through sites and applications that brings people closer to one another.

The entertainment needs and enjoyment of social media applications: the entertainment needs include passing time, and having fun when meeting new people over those social media applications. People want to change their mood and tend to spend time on social media by communicating and meeting new people from all around the world. According to Shao (2009), his research revealed that people actually use social networking sites for multiple entertainment needs such as: relaxation, enjoyment, passing time, escaping from problems, seeking emotional release and excitement.

The sexual need was not spoken about by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch but it is highly relevant in the case of online dating. A lot of stories were communicated concerning sexual media content over Facebook, tinder, OKCupid, and eHarmony. For example, Tinder, first started as a dating application, but was later called the sex- app (Ligtenberg, 2015) people may use Tinder with the intention to find someone to have casual sex with or to seek the universal value of love and soulmate.

### **3.2 Framing Theory**

Framing theory was first introduced in 1974 by Ervin Goffman, in his book "*The Frame Analysis*" which describes the individual's perception of society. The concept of framing took him 60 years to develop.

According to Goffman (1994), the main idea behind the concept of framing, is to focus on a certain event and give a particular meaning to it. He also claimed that the basis of the framing theory is to focus on certain events and then place them within a field of meanings.

Another definition for framing concerns that of the individual's attitude and how one perceives the message. In communication, a frame organizes everyday life and reality. As reported by Entman in 2004, this theory first identifies a certain issue or event, and how this issue differs in time. For example, when online dating first appeared everyone was against it but with time and attitude change people started accepting this idea and experience it more and more. The media do not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about that issue (Scheufele, 1999).

How news or events or issues are framed is culturally conditioned and differs with time. Scharrer, Weidman, and Bissell (2003), pointed out that in the event, when someone throws up the "V" sign it was often considered as a victory sign. However, due to the influence of popular

culture people nowadays consider it as a "gang sign". It all depends on the audiences' background and how the message was given (Weiwen, 2012)

According to Scheufele (1999), there are two different types of frames, media frames and individual frames. The difference between media frames and individual frames, is that media frames is how the media as in social and mass media deliver the message to the audience, whereas the individual frames is how the audience receive the message and understand it based on the age and culture and educational background. Media frames are conceptually defined as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an up folding strip of events... the frame suggest what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1984, p.143)

The second type of the frame, and the one that will be focused on for this paper is the individual frames; these are defined as the "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing information" (Entman 1993, p.53), thus individual frames are based on the person's culture, background and how the message will be understood according to those factors. Kanter and Sander (1990), also defined individual frames as being the internal structure of the mind, and how people think. As for online dating sites and application, there are some criteria that would attract other users to contact the individual, and that by the way he or she represent their profiles – photograph, camera angles etc. – often users post more than one picture where others can flip through them in order to have a better look. As mentioned earlier, the picture is the strongest factor in the whole profile, individuals frame themselves according to this statement.

### **3.3 Online Identity Theory**

Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, even online dating sites and applications are tools for information sharing, entertainment and communication. Social media have grown to become an integral part of our everyday life. To open an account a user should have a profile which is also known as internet identity or online identity. This identity opens a wide range of options and choices in experimenting new identities that is not recognized by different bodies such as schools, government. Usually, individuals play different roles in society, but with the rise of the Internet and social media users started playing different identities, and persona.

The identity theory was first discussed by Goffman in 1959. Goffman mentioned that people in general play roles in society, performing as if in a theatrical act. Goffman studied this theory from a sociological perspective and discussed the impact on communication and identity in relation to the performance of roles. Years later, Sherry Turkle (1995) expanded this theory and moved it to the online world by conducting studies that argued the effect of social media and its opportunities that were open for individuals to try out different personalities and identities.

According to Uğur Gündüz (2017) “social media enables identity expression, exploration, and experimentation; something natural for the human experience.” WhatsApp, Facebook, and Messenger... are interactive tools where people can share stories, news, and communicate easily with one another. This can help people escape the reality they know to a virtual reality by trying out different types of identity on different levels and situations. While using social media applications, users share information, stories, opinions etc. in an interactive way that makes them more involved with fake names, and profile thus the increase of level of deception on the internet.

Thomas (2000) conducted a study on a site called Palace. The study targeted kids between 8 and 16 years' old. This site allows users to use avatars thereby giving them the chance to change among other things, their identity, body shape, size, and gender from one chat room to another. In this site, users experienced the identities of a teacher, learner and authority figure. The children who volunteered to be part of the study believed that each avatar they chose would be a representation of who they were, or who they wanted to be. Because of this site, children began to question their identity.

In her study Turkle (1997) realized that the idea of an identity being forged has changed today to the idea of an identity being altered and played with. People are taking advantages of the internet by changing who they really are and hiding behind screens rather than using it for innocent interaction, communication and information sharing. Turkle (1997) claimed that the online identity theory is derived from two fields: psychology and the field of computer science more specifically artificial intelligence.

The three theoretical frameworks are used, in this thesis, to investigate the why and how people use online dating sites as well as the gratification they get from using it. Uses and gratification is used to understand how and why people spend time on specific media tools to satisfy their needs. These needs are divided into four categories. First cognitive need that deals with gaining information and knowledge about certain event or news, in the case of online dating users portray this need as curiosity to know more about the medium. Second, affective need which is related to the feelings and emotions people get from using the medium, knowing that the internet brings people closer to one another through communication making people experience the feelings of being attractive, happy, excited and satisfied. The third category is the entertainment needs which is related to the enjoyment and amusement behind the

use of these websites or applications such as escaping problems, relaxation, release of boredom etc. The final category is the sexual need which, was suggested by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch but it is important to discuss when it comes to online dating.

Framing is another theory that was discussed. There are two types of framing, the media frame which is relate to how the platform delivers the message to the audience however the individual frame is how the audience receive and understand the message based on age education and cultural background. In the case on online dating an individual frame is defined through a series of factors such as picture and the way of posting them.

Finally, the online identity theory that was first introduced by Goffman in 1959, and later on expanded by Sherry Turkle in 1999. Social media requires a profile that is considered to be an online or internet identity. Individuals play different roles in society and different identity on social media platform. The concept of identity has changed from being forged to being altered.

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

From the literature review and the three theoretical frameworks used for this thesis, the following research questions and hypotheses were derived:

### **Research Questions:**

RQ1: Why and how do people use online dating websites and/or applications?

RQ2: How do people frame themselves on online dating profiles?

RQ3: Do people, using online dating sites and applications, form online profiles that are loyal to their actual offline identity?

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Online profile of a potential partner is related to how a user would frame his or her online dating profile.

H2: Those who change their identities will take more time framing themselves than those who don't change their identities.

H3: Younger individuals are more exposed to framing themselves than older ones.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

This chapter explains, the methodology to be used in order to complete this research. It will first discuss the research method that will be used for this thesis. Then it will discuss the research sample and explain the reasoning behind this sample. The chapter will also detail the research procedure, the variables of the study and the data analysis.

### **4.1 Research Method**

To accomplish the objective of the research and get accurate as well as credible results, the research adopted the quantitative research method. Quantitative research is the research in which problems are quantified in a numerical data (Monfared & Derakhshan 2015). It uses measurable data to formulate facts, opinions, and uncover patterns of the research. A quantitative research focuses on counting and classifying results into categories, which makes it clear for the researcher to have a conclusive insight on the topic (Wimmer, Dominick, 2011).

Since the main aim is to check how and why people use these online dating applications to find potential partners, this study will use an online questionnaire as a research tool. The questionnaire was hosted by Google Forms.

After collecting the results sent by the respondents, Google Forms retrieves these results into a spreadsheet. The final option that the site offers is that of the analysis, in either a summary of the results, a graph and even quick calculation using formulas. The data was retrieved in formats suitable for inputs into SPSS (acronym for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences – a software for editing and analyzing different types of data) The questionnaire used for this thesis is found in Appendix A.

## **4.2 Research Sample**

As mentioned in the literature review, most people who use to online dating are between 18 and 24 years old (Pew Research 2013). But this thesis will be targeting all ages above 18 years old, since research has found that people between 30 and 60 years old also use online dating websites and applications.

The study used a non - probability sample which is a sampling technique that does not give all individual an equal chance of being selected, but rather it is a process where all participants are selected based on the personal judgement or convenience. A non - probability method was more applicable in this thesis since non - probability sampling is used mainly when the research does not aim to create generalization as well as when the study has a time limitation (Stephanie, 2015). The snowball sampling was the most applicable for this thesis, since it connects with individuals who are hard to reach especially when it comes to online dating users in Lebanon. For this thesis, the survey was first sent out to university students; it was sent online and the link to the survey was shared on online dating websites and applications to reach out to more participants through friends and family. With snowball sampling participants refer the survey to other potential participants who in turn can refer the survey yet other potential participants (Dominick, J.R & Wimmer, R.D, 2011). The questionnaire was posted on Google Forms; it was open access for any participant who was available at the time. In order to guarantee that people were exposed to the questionnaire, the link provided by the site was sent through WhatsApp application to all the researchers' contacts.

## **4.3 Research Tool**

The research tool used for this thesis was the survey. The survey was distributed through Google Forms an online research site; the form was published on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 and was

accessible online for one month; from which statistical analysis of all the participants' responses could be retrieved. In order to get a number of respondents the survey's link was shared through the WhatsApp application.

The survey was divided into eight sections in order to measure all the research variables. The introduction to the survey reveals the purpose of the study and assures all participants that they would remain anonymous and their answers confidential besides the fact that their participation is fully voluntary and could be ended whenever they wished. A screening question that allowed the researcher to filter participants from the research with the question "Have you ever used online dating?" Participants who answered with a yes, continued the survey while those who answer with a no, exited their survey and indicated why they do not use online dating. The second section asked about the demographics to know more about the participants, their gender, age and relationship status. The third section was about social media and internet activity, where participants respond to question related to how often they use social media and what application they use. The fourth section was related to online dating as users were given the opportunity to answer questions that were related to how often they used online dating applications and the purpose behind using them including options such as making new friends, release of stress and boredom, or meeting their life partner. The survey contained more questions related to the use of online dating sites and applications in the fifth section, these questions specified which online dating application or site the participants engaged in and how they used it in terms of posting and checking other users' profiles in addition to their level of agreement about what online dating was all about and what was considered to be attractive or important in a profile. The sixth section was connected to their personal use of online dating, in relation to what

participants were likely to do on their profiles as well as their behavior on these platforms when talking about omitting and deceiving their matches.

The two final parts of the survey were related to the participants' experience and belief about those sites and applications and whether they would recommend online dating to their friends.

#### **4.4 Procedure**

An online questionnaire was sent out through WhatsApp application to all the contacts; the survey could be accessed through Google Forms' link, and since it was online the questionnaire could be accessed by anyone who wished to participate. One single question determined whether the participant could continue the survey "Have you ever used online dating services?" – if yes, the participant will be able to open other questions if not he or she will be thanked for their participation and the survey would be terminated. This screening question, would limit the errors of the respondents.

In order to get accurate and credible results, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is one of the most user friendly and powerful statistical software that is used for research in psychology, sociology and other behavioral sciences.

For this research Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used as the main tool for deducting precise statistical results and obtaining a credible conclusion as to why people use online dating application and if they do frame themselves in order to appeal to others.

#### **4.5 Variables**

The thesis used the uses and gratification, the framing and the online identity theories. Based on the hypotheses and research questions mentioned above, the following the independent

variables and the dependent variables were used. Below is a listing of the variables and their conceptual and operational definitions.

### **Independent Variables:**

#### **Use of Online Dating Sites and Applications**

The usage of online dating sites and applications is the practice of online dating sites or applications or the fact of downloading the application and signing into an account. In order to measure the usage of these applications and websites, participants were asked to give in the name of the application or website they used, and their knowledge about them. In addition, participants were asked to specify when they first downloaded the application or signed in into an account and how many times they used it on average in a day.

#### **Framing**

Framing is a concept of giving out information about ones' self to convince people about who you are; the literature review showed that in certain cases framing may include omitting certain parts of the truth. In order to measure this variable, respondents were asked with total anonymity and confidentiality to answer questions related to lying and omitting information about one's self. For example, they were asked to answer the following question, "while using online dating sites and application have you ever lied about: your height, weight, eye color..." In addition, they were asked about the way they posted their pictures such as the angle, the background and so on that will clarify how strong a picture is framing ones' self and attracting others.

#### **Online Identity**

When talking about online identity questions were asked with regards to who people were or wanted to be. An online identity is the information provided by an individual to other

users such as age, gender, interest or any additional information about ones' self. Identity was measured by asking questions about who a person is such as age, gender, nationality, interests, hobbies, race, and the answers given were compared to their online profile. As well as asking about how likely was their real world self – image to match with the online world image.

### **Dependent Variables:**

#### **Affective Functions**

The feeling or emotion is a bodily reaction to events or things a person can be exposed to on a daily basis. A person can experience a number of feelings such as happiness, sadness, excitement, boredom, and hunger. In order to measure the kinds and level of emotions, people might feel when exposed to online dating sites and applications participants were asked to rank a range of emotions using a likert - type scale (1 being strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree) or they can be asked to agree or disagree with a set of six emotions that would describe a feeling or a thought when using online dating sites or applications. Those answer options include happiness, appealing, attractive ( $\alpha= 0.818$ ,  $M=3.0055$ ,  $SD= 0.62258$ ).

#### **Attractiveness**

Attractiveness is the quality of being pleasing or appealing to the senses. In order, to measure this variable the questionnaire included a table where numerous option of the type of photo posted by the users were ranked using a likert - type scale (1= extremely unattractive to 5 = extremely attractive). Those options were a picture with a bathing suit, formal suit, selfie and many more ( $\alpha= 0.833$ ,  $M=3.7526$ ,  $SD=0.62733$ ).

## **Age**

Participants were asked to identify their age. Also, the survey included questions such as “when did you first subscribed to an online dating site or application” and answers responses were a series of age range.

## **Entertainment**

Entertainment is the action of providing or being provided with amusement, enjoyment and pleasure. In order to measure this variable, the survey contained a question that gives the opportunity for participants to rate the level of agreement to a series of statements that answers to “why did you use online dating”, using a likert - type scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree) some of those statements are: have fun, socializing, release of boredom etc.

## **Passing Time**

Passing time is the act of having an individual spend time doing an activity that provides a person with release from boredom – and at times produces desired. In order to measure this variable, the survey contained a question asking participants to rate the level of agreement to a sequence of statements using a likert - type scale type of question (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). Some examples about this rating level, “Online dating sites and applications are a way to” – find a date, release stress, pass time etc.

## **4.6 Data Analysis**

In order to measure the variables stated above, an online questionnaire was formed and hosted on Google Forms. After collecting the answers of the participants, the results were entered on Statistical Package for the Social Sciences also known as SPSS where a set of tests were conducted such as correlation test to measure the relationship between the variables. The survey provided a questions that participants were able to answer, for instances, in order to

measure the usage of social media and online dating the survey provided asked how and when people use online dating sites and application and how many hours they spend on these platforms. To understand how users, perceive the concept of online dating, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a series of statements that were related to how people define online dating sites and application such as a way to gain knowledge about different cultures or an attempt to find a partner or to release stress, etc. Another question that was asked to measure the variable of attractiveness was on a series of photo users post on their profiles from a selfie to a formal attire and travel shots, as well as the first thing they looked at when scrolling through profiles age, profile picture, status. To measure the variable of framing, participants were asked to rate what they were likely to do on their online profiles like Photoshop their profile picture, mention their achievements, religion, different languages they could speak in and type of profile picture they might post full body, face. The study was also interested in knowing the post meeting experience in order to examine how truthful and trustworthy were the users of online dating applications and sites by asking the matches how their meeting went and if it was as expected. Moreover, the survey provided a question to check whether users would recommend online dating to their friends.

Hypothesis one, “online profile of a potential partner is related to how a user frames his or her online dating profile” was measured using the Pearson’s correlation test to examine the relation between attraction and framing. Hypothesis two claimed that those who change their identity will take more time framing themselves than those who don’t change their identities, and was studied using an independent t-test in order to investigate the significant statistical difference between both online identities change and framing. Finally, hypothesis three, discussed the

relation between age and framing on online dating websites or application using an independent t-test in order to measure the significant relation between age and framing.

## **Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis**

This chapter deals with the findings of the study and their analysis. It reports the results of the survey and then relates those results to the literature review and the theoretical framework.

### **5.1 Participants**

The study was conducted with 190 respondents who voluntarily participated in the online survey hosted through Google Forms website and shared via WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter social media platforms. After filtering the responses, the population sample decreased from 190 participants to 183 respondents as the outliers were accounted for and removed from the survey results.

### **5.2 Profiles**

The 183 participants were divided into two categories, those who have used online dating websites or applications and those who have not logged in at least once,  $N = 145$  meaning 145 individuals with 62 respondents who are female (42.8%) and 83 male participants (57.2%) admitted to having used online dating websites and applications. They constituted 79.2% of the whole sample, while the other 38 participants (20.8%) of the sample had not used online dating services and were left out of the study since the thesis only investigates those who have already used or who have been exposed at least once to such websites and applications. However, those who had not used online dating services were asked about the reasons behind not using them and provided interesting feedback. Out of the 38 participants who had never used online dating websites and applications, 81.5% of the participants provided their explanations while the rest did not. 6.4% of those participants preferred using other social media platforms such as Facebook or Instagram to meet people; while 35.4% of the participants felt that online dating did not provide honest communication especially since they believe that people tended to lie in order

to find someone; online dating was seen as an application for people who were desperate. In addition, around 12.9% of the participants mentioned having trust issues when it came to meeting people through a screen.

The age range of the participants was from 18 to 42 years old (figure 1), thereby leading to an average age of those who voluntarily participated in the survey of 24 years old ( $M = 24.87$ ,  $SD = 4.890$ ). 32.4% of the participants mentioned that they were single and looking for a casual friendship and relationships. 20% were also single but looking for a serious relationship and love, while 8.3% used the online dating to satisfy their sexual desires. In addition, 15.9% of the participants claimed that they were dating but still used online dating services. (figure 2)

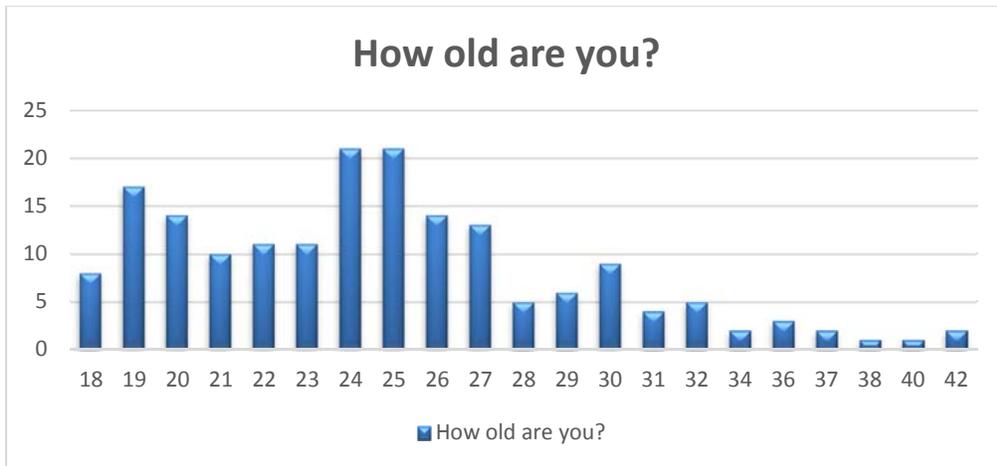


Figure 1 – Age Range

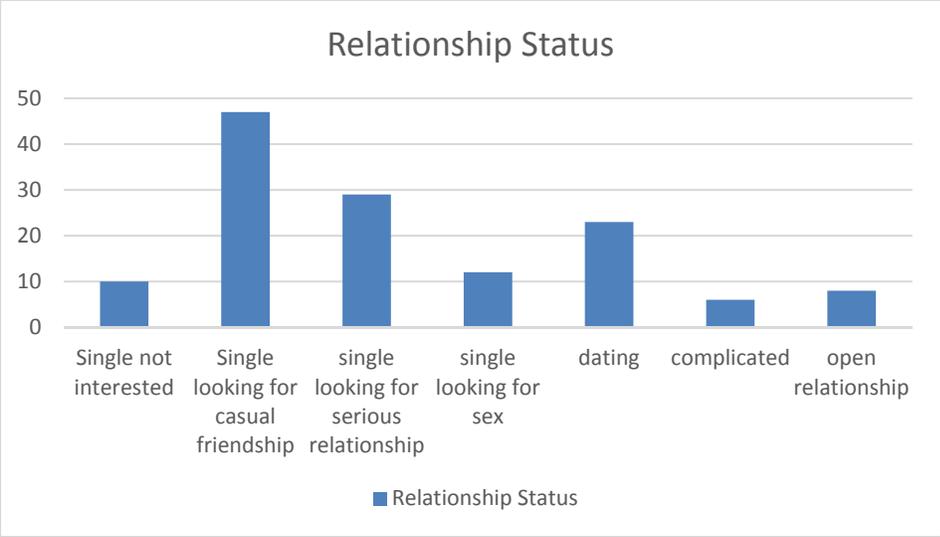


Figure 2 – Relationship status

### 5.3 Using Online Dating Websites and Applications

This section answers research question one which asks how and why people use online dating websites and applications.

Dating has become a trend and a normal thing to do, but it has not been always the same. The concept of dating has changed and evolved over the years, as well as the way of getting to meet potential partners. Through the internet and social media, individuals have been adopting new ways to meet people all around the world, online dating websites have created their own applications in order to follow their users to their mobile smart phones while using its features such as front camera, chatting, calling and even the location option.

The uses and gratifications of using online dating websites were investigated through the survey. At first the participants were asked a series of questions to try and understand their use of social media platforms as well as online dating applications. A multiple choice question, for instance, asked about the types of social media platforms the participants used. The participants could even select all that apply or even add their own options if it did not exist in the suggested ones. This gave the research good insight as to whether the participants were used to chatting to

people through social media platforms. The platforms suggested were WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. WhatsApp was the leading social media platform used (30%) followed by Facebook (24%). Interestingly, 30% chose to add their own platforms to the question under the category of Others. As previously reported, most participants mentioned using Facebook as a tool of online dating. 16.6% of the participants mentioned using LinkedIn as a tool of dating service, while 23.3% used snapchat as a way to meet communicate and date other users. In order to better understand how people, used online platforms, the survey investigated how much time participants spent on social media platforms or online dating platforms. Results showed that 89.7% of the respondents were active on social media and 91.7% use it on daily basis. The majority of the population (N=145) used their preferred social media platform from one to two hours while 70.3% use online dating for less than an hour.

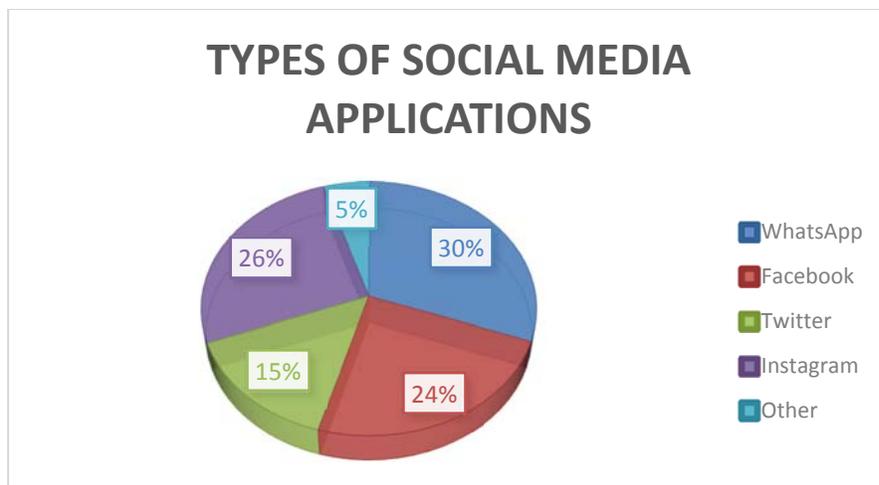


Figure 3 – Types of Social Media Platforms used

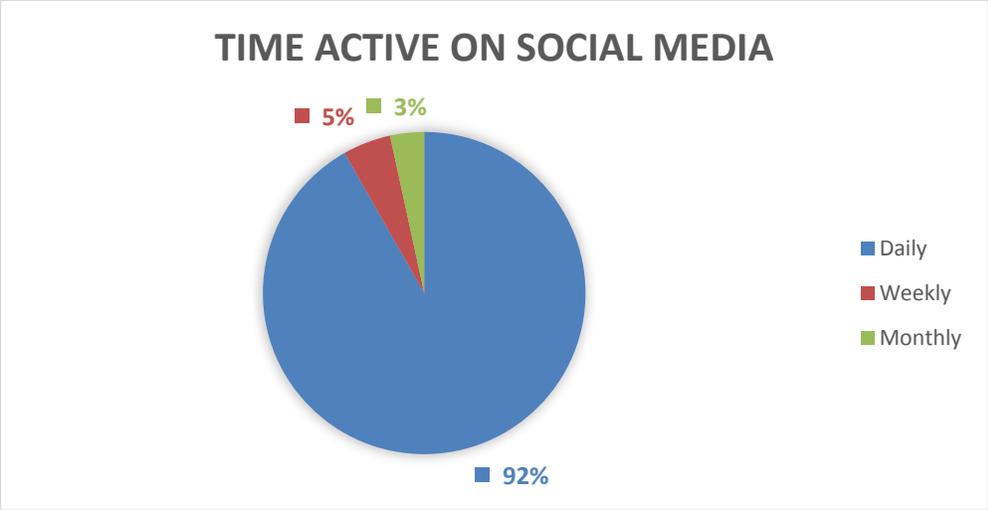


Figure 4 – How often are users active on social media?

Lebanese online users seem to be using the social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp for online dating. This is probably due to the stigma that online dating holds in a somewhat traditionally minded society like Lebanon. Social media platforms help people connect easily and without the worry or possible negative social implications of being on a dating site. According to a study conducted in Northwest University in Qatar (2016), adults between 18 and 24 years old make use of social media platforms more than those of 45 and plus years of age. WhatsApp was considered to be the leading application used by the Lebanese citizens in 2015 with 97% using this application followed by Facebook with 81% of citizens checking in on daily basis. The study, similar to the findings of this thesis, found that Facebook and WhatsApp were used as a way to connect with friends and meet new individuals. Results of this thesis revealed the new findings that they were being as online dating tools and were preferred over other online dating service such as eHarmony, Match.com, Tinder and many more were websites that followed their users on their mobile phones under the forms of applications to take advantage of the smartphones features.

A multiple – choice question, asked about the types of online dating applications and websites used by 79.2% of the participants who had been exposed to such services; the answer options included Tinder, Match.com, eHarmony, Hot or Not, OKCupid and a category under the name of Others that gave participants the opportunity to mention their own applications. Results showed that Tinder was the leading application when it came to online dating application with 72.4% of participants. Followed by 8.2% of the participants who had used Match.com as a tool for dating while 8.2% of the participants preferred reporting other application that were not mentioned in the survey such as Badoo that was used by 4.2% of participants while 4.1% of participants preferred using the traditional social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram as tool for dating.

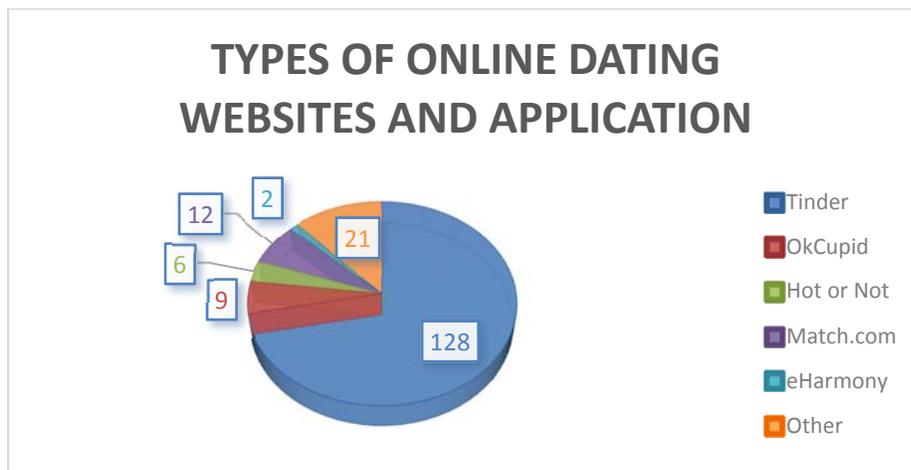


Figure 5 – Types of online dating websites and applications

The uses and gratification also investigated why people used online dating and the gratifications that they received from it. The survey adopted a likert – type scale response set that examined the level of agreement to a series of seven statements to figure out how the participants used online dating websites and applications. The series of statements included seven items such as “gaining knowledge by meeting individuals from different cultures, release of boredom,

sexual relationships and so on” ( $\alpha = 0.722$ ,  $M = 3.6128$ ,  $SD = 0.58972$ ). As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the uses and gratification theory examines the how and why people use a certain product, brand, or service as well as the satisfaction that comes with its usage. The feeling behind the use of a certain product, brand or service is divided into needs such as cognitive, affective, entertainment and sexual needs which were examined in the following results.

The results showed that the majority of participants agreed with the statements that were suggested regarding the usage of the online dating websites and applications. 66 participants (45.5%) mentioned that online dating sites and applications were used as a way to gain knowledge about individuals from different cultures. As for the entertainment need, three questions were asked in relation to that need and 83 respondents meaning 57.2% mentioned using online dating platforms as a way to release boredom whereas 8 of the respondents (5.5%) disagreed with such statement; in addition to 55.2% which is equal to 80 participants saw online dating platform as being a means to having fun and 36.6% saw it as a means to waste time. As for the sexual needs, 17.2% of the participants strongly agreed that they used online dating services to satisfy their sexual desire, thereby bringing the number of those who use online dating platforms for sexual desire to around 49% or almost half of the survey participants.

The affective functions of the uses and gratification theory were measured using a likert – type scale question of eight items that were tested to understand how people felt when using online dating applications and websites ( $\alpha = 0.818$ ,  $M = 3.1698$ ,  $SD = 0.62460$ ). A table was included in the survey with which respondents answered on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree to a series of adjectives related to their feelings for instance, happiness, self – satisfaction, attractiveness, and others. The results showed 35.2% of the participants were more

inclined to attractiveness than any other. While 29.7% of participants found themselves to be appealing to others when being matched with others, and 28.3% of participants experienced self – satisfaction behind the use of online dating. This proves that attractiveness is one of the most important factors when it comes to online dating profiles.

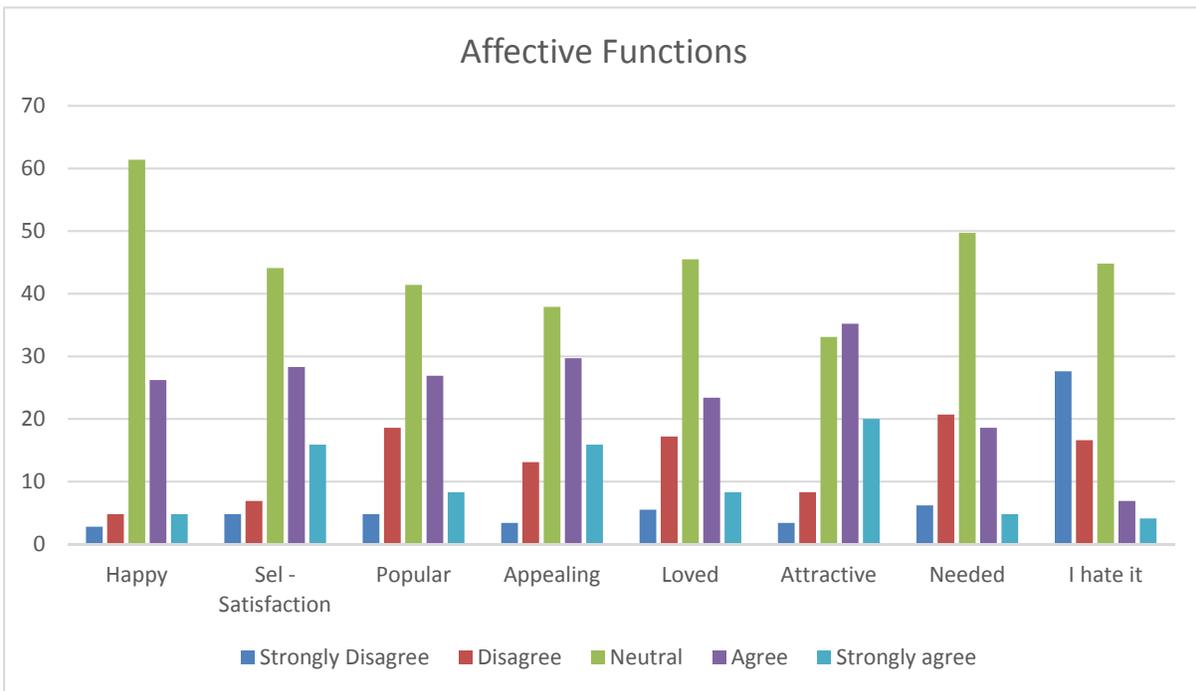


Figure 6 - Affective Functions

The attitude and behavior of online users behind the use of online dating services was examined through a likert–type scale question from strongly disagree to strongly agree with six items such as “a way to make new friends”, “a way to find a date”, “a way to release stress”. The survey showed that participants usually go online to network and create connections with 62 participants (42.8%) subscribing in order to make new friends. But the main purpose of online dating being the ability to find love and a potential partner to date still held true since 41.4% of the participants used online dating applications as a means to find a date and the chance of meeting a potential partner, while 34.5% of the participants mentioned being on online dating platforms to satisfy their sexual needs. Passing time and stress release were also considered to be

a reason as to why individuals were active on online dating sites especially on tinder with 72% of all the users preferring online dating service. In addition, 4.1% of the participants who have used online dating mentioned that they never used online dating websites and applications but rather used traditional social media platforms as a way to find a date.

To conclude online dating was used by participants on daily basis for less than an hour a day and was used mainly to find a potential partner as well as making new connections with people all around the world.

#### **5.4 Framing Dating Profiles**

This section answers the second research question which asked about how people frame themselves through their profiles. According to Kinder and Sanders (1990), the framing theory points out that individual frames are based on the person's culture, background, the internal structure of the mind and how people think (p.74). But with social media and online dating profiles the individual frames are shown more through the photo angle, and what their profiles contains in terms of text and descriptions. According to Hancock, Toma and Ellison (2007), framing may be related to deception and lying which can be combined with online identity, especially since the profile – picture, text, and information shared within it – are considered the first impression as to who the person behind the screen is. Giving a certain frame or a specific structure for a profile through filtered information and choice of pictures that are considered to contain best features as well as modified representation of self were considered to be deceptive once the screen was off and face to face meeting occurred.

In order to investigate how people framed themselves, the survey examined first what users look at in a profile that would attract them to either match or not with the others. Most of the participants more specifically 71% of the participants checked the profile pictures first; this

proves Whitty and Carr's (2006) claim which states that pictures are mainly what attracts others when it comes to online dating. 13.8% of the participants mentioned the importance of online users writing on their profile. The statements written on someone's profile might be a way to start a conversation with the match and can bring two online users closer together since they share similar interests. The literature review reported the claim of Brand, D'Orazio and DeShong in 2011 which showed that people who wrote confident texts conveyed intelligence and wisdom were seen as attractive. Yet, the survey results for this thesis showed that the written text or status is the least feature a user might look at in a profile with 4.8% of participants choosing to look at the status as a way to decide whether the match is compatible.

The survey results showed that framing on online dating profile was related to the angles and theme of picture posted on the online dating service. In fact, results revealed that 103 respondents (71%) were more attracted to profile pictures than they were to the written text and/or the intelligence level. Moreover, 36.6% of the users were more inclined to post picture with their best features and in which they considered themselves to be sexy. This converges with the findings in the literature review as Fiore, Lindsay, Mendelsohn and Hearst (2008) reported on the strength of photo and the power of physical attractiveness when it came to online dating and meeting new people. Respondents considered that their profiles framing was enhanced through a number of other variables such the different languages they know and their achievements.

### **5.5 Online Profile of a Potential Partner**

Hypothesis 1 which is about framing and attraction "online profile of a potential partner is related to how a user would frame his or her online dating profile" was supported. Pearson's correlation indicated that there was a positive relationship between attraction and framing ( $r =$

0.235,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, that relationship was weak. According to the Person's correlation, physical appearances and personality traits of the match were significant while the education status, hobbies and interests were not significantly related to framing with  $p > 0.05$ . This proves that physical appearance reflected in the profile picture is the strongest factor when it came to online dating and personality traits are important since they reveal a person's trustworthiness and confidence. However, the results of the survey showed that 49% of the participants considered education of the match to be an important factor in online dating and 40% of the participants believed that the interests were essential in online dating profiles. Along the same line, 19% of participants considered hobbies to be important. Conversely, the Pearson's correlation test showed that education, hobbies and interest are not significant compared to physical appearances and personality traits. It can be noticed from the results of the survey, that, as reported in the above section, that Lebanese people who use online dating applications did not pay as much attention to the written text on the profile as much as they paid attention to the picture. Add to that education, hobbies and interests were not as important as appearance. This shows that the participants look for appearances first above everything. This could be attributed to the current Lebanese culture which places much value on appearances – or what a person looks like, how they dress and what they own, any observer of the Lebanese culture is able to detect the importance that the culture places on appearances. (there are no reference for this we added it based on what we observed on Lebanese culture).

In order to better understand the behavior of the participants, a multiple choice question of five items was asked where they were able to specify the number of times they check what other online daters posted on their profiles, such as “most of the time”, “some of the time”, and “always”. The results showed that 35.9% of the participants spend their times checking others

profile, which is a considerable amount of time. Yet interestingly 42.8% of the participants barely post anything on theirs.

In addition, a question about themes of profile pictures that attracted online dating users was asked using a likert-type scale with seven items rated from extremely unattractive to extremely attractive. Results showed that a profile picture in a formal attire was the leading theme of attraction. 47.6% of the participants found that a picture in a formal attire was attractive followed by a selfie and a travel shot to be equally attractive with 37.9% agreeing to the attraction of both themes. However, 30.3% of participants claimed that a picture in a bathing suit to be eye – catching. Moreover, 23.4% of participants found that a picture that exposes a certain body part to be attractive and finally themes of picture that consist of an activity shot such as football and basketball as well as group pictures were the least attractive with 11% of the participants agreeing to it. 2.7% of the participants had perceived a profile as attractive if the user was a dog lover, had a great smile or posted picture that was rather natural than filtered or photoshoped. The survey results revealed that 35.9% of users usually checked what others posted in order to enhance their own profile.

Users tended to be attracted to how others display their profile such as posting pictures in bathing suits or formal attire as well as travel pictures. Often, users are impacted by what others post. This is caused by how often users tended to check what others have posted rather than what they personally post on their own profile.

## **5.6 Framing and Identity Manipulation**

According to the results of the survey, hypothesis 2 which discusses framing and identity manipulation “those who change their identity will take more time framing themselves than those who don’t change their identities” was supported. An independent t – test indicated that

there was a significant statistical difference between online identity change ( $\alpha$  score= 0.913, M= 2.1133, SD= 0.96096) and framing ( $\alpha$  score= 0.708, M= 3.0055, SD= 0.62258), such that those who were more likely to change their identity (M=4.1, SD= 0.84143) did more effort to frame themselves than those who were not likely to change their identity (M= 2.6980, SD=0.54981) ( $t(5.535) = -3.979, p<0.05$ ).

Framing here is the way the respondents projected themselves in the online dating world through both their pictures and their texts showing through both their best features and interests. As shown in the results 70% of the participants were likely to change their identity while spending much time and effort into framing themselves through what they posted on their profile. A likert-type scale question was interpreted with ten items rating from very unlikely to very likely when it comes to what an online dating user might include in his profile in order to attract others. Answer options include the way a person might show themselves in their profile pictures such as photoshopping his or her profile picture, mentioning their religion or achievements and the angle they take their picture with, and whether they choose to show their whole body, face or best features. Results showed that 33.8% of participants were very likely to indicate their achievements on their profile. 25.5% of participants stated the languages they knew. Moreover, 40% of the participants cared about their physical appearance as they mentioned that were likely to spend time to post pictures with their best features to convey a certain image. In addition, 36.6% of participants' claim being more inclined to posting pictures in which they find themselves to be sexy; this confirms Whitty's (2007) claim that people use creativity in self – presentation; this might lead to deception since profile pictures give a sense of identification of who the person behind the screen is. This might lead to trust issues post meeting face-to-face. Yet, 20% of the participants considered that fixing their profile picture was a waste

of their time. Likewise, online daters were likely to post picture of their face only rather than their whole body especially with 31% for posting pictures with only their face and 25.5% of their whole body. 13.1% of participants find it wrong to post picture where they do not show their best features. This shows how important and strong the influence of pictures and physical appearance is to the participants. Results revealed that around 6.9% of participants stated that mentioning their religion is important in online dating services especially in Lebanon where politics and religion play an important role in society. Finally, 14.5% believed that posting a Photoshoped or doctored picture of themselves might be a way to attract others. The literature review stated that those who were deemed to be attractive would also have a more attractive profile and in turn have more positive attributes, which proves that online users tended to post and write attractive content with their best features such as physical features, achievements and languages they know to get the attention of others. In addition, according to Brand, D'Orazio and DeShong (2012), text attractiveness and physical attractiveness are highly related since text conveys intelligence and wisdom which falls in the category of personality and education. Ramirez, Summer, Fleuriet, and Cole (2012), stated that users take advantage of filtering and omitting negative traits in order to attract others, meaning users tended to Photoshop their own profile picture as a way of filtering to promote their best features which might lead to deception at the end. Online dating is also related to age, according to Davis and Fingerman (2015), adults and older adults tend to mention their financial status and achievement as a way to gain more attention while younger adults tend to mention their goals, dreams, career and hobbies. The survey findings then agree with the literature as participants stated their achievements, the languages they knew and provided the best picture of themselves to attract the other. Taking into consideration the findings so far, it can be concluded that a good profile picture as well as

achievements were deemed to be more important than a written text put in a profile. It seems that participants preferred to know tidbits of information rather than longer pieces of information about the person they were attracted to, provided that person had a profile picture that interested them.

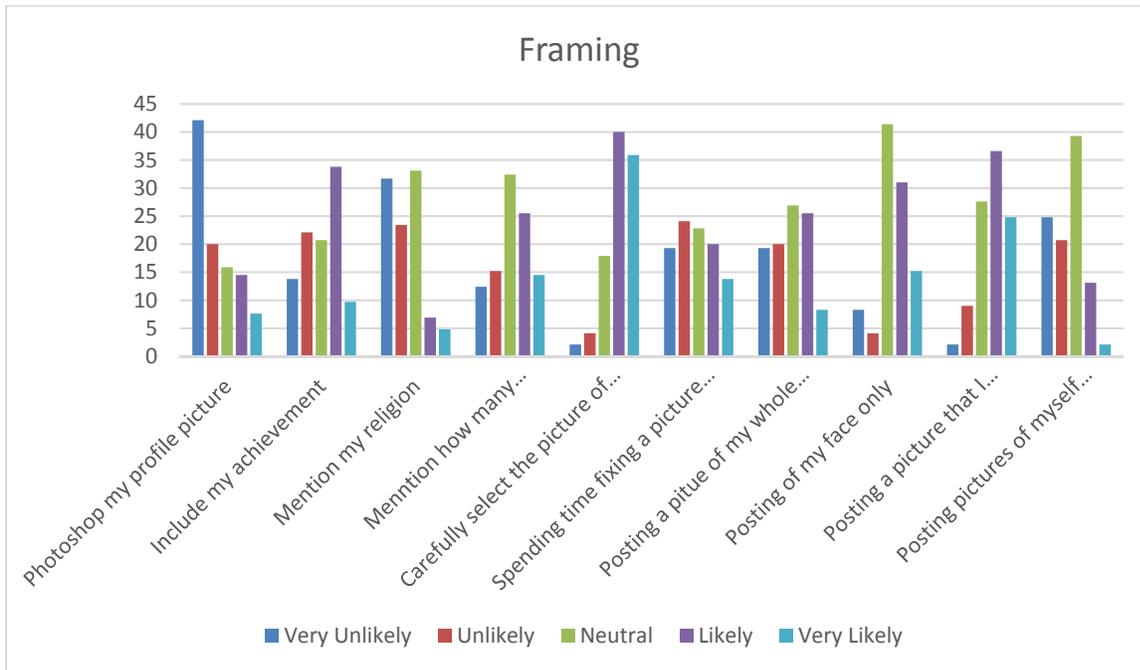


Figure 7 – Framing through online dating services

To sum it up, most users of online dating services tend to change their identity mainly through manipulation of their profile picture, by taking it from a certain angle or through the About Me or information section where they provide an idea about themselves.

### 5.7 Younger Individuals and Framing

Hypothesis 3 asked about the relation between age and framing on online dating services “younger individuals are more exposed to framing themselves than older ones” was not supported. An independent t-test indicates that there was no significant relation between age and whether individuals are exposed to framing themselves, such as younger individuals ( $M= 2.9850$ ,  $SD= 0.53489$ ) are of similar exposure to framing as older age range ( $M= 3.0090$ ,  $SD= 0.66486$ )

( $t(116.286) = 0.802, p > 0.05$ ). This shows that people that use online dating website work on framing their pictures and their profiles regardless of age. However, in relation to gender, both female and male cared about their physical appearance and tended to Photoshop their profile pictures in order to feel attractive and attract other with 10.3% of female participants and 8.2% of male participants who were likely to Photoshop and filter their online dating profile.

### **5.8 Online Profile and Offline Identity**

The rise of the internet and social media have created a new opportunity for people and users to experience a different way to show and change their identities and persona. In psychology, identity is defined in terms of quality, beliefs, values, personality, character, expression and even looks.

Using the online identity theory, this paper examined how people experienced identity change when using social media platforms and more specifically online dating sites. The theoretical framework, discussed the importance of the picture as being the strongest predictor in an online dating profile since it gave an idea of who was behind the phone or computer screen. Uğur Gündüz (2017) claimed that “social media enables identity expression, exploration and experimentation, something natural for the human being” (p.1).

In addition to that the framing theory points out that individual frames were based on the person’s culture, background, the internal structure of the mind and how people thought. But with social media and online dating profiles the individual frames were shown more through the photo angle, and what their profiles contained in terms of text and descriptions.

A likert-type scale question was posed with seven items that questioned what a person might be willing to lie about on online dating services the answer options included, for example, personality, age, and looks. Results showed that people were unlikely to lie about those things

but they were willing to omit information about themselves which they found to be negative. A multiple-choice question was asked in order to understand if users might omit certain information. It was revealed that 44 participants (30.3%) omit information especially when it comes to bad habits, out of those 30.3% of participants were likely to omit certain characteristic that they believed might be repulsive to the other; 75% of participants considered that moodiness can be omitted, while 4.5% of the participant did not mention the fact that they smoke.

Online dating users believed that this service was a way to explore, express, and experiment with their identity. With regards to the post-dating questions, 71% of participants who actually went out on a date with the person they met through the online dating mentioned that the match was different in terms of age, looks, expectations, and appearance even in the personality such as being arrogant, rude, and so on.

Trust was considered to be an issue when it came to online dating services; a likert-type scale of six items rated from very not trustworthy to very trustworthy showed that participants find the people on online dating services to be somewhat trustworthy and this trust was established mainly post face-to-face encounter, since people were identified as being trustworthy or not. 46.2% of participants who were exposed to online dating responded to the question that gave them an opportunity to reflect whether they found online users as trustworthy, 13.4% of participants believed that trustworthiness was reflected post – meeting through the matches looks, behavior and body language, whereas 19.4% of participants considered that trustworthiness was in comparing the way a person chats behind a screen and their behavior live. That proves Liamputtong's claim in 2005, that states that people who chat together before meeting for the first time will have a more successful first date than those who do not chat beforehand.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This thesis offers new and interesting information about how Lebanese participants use online dating services in terms of how and why they use it. Moreover, it reflected what users believe to be attractive, trustworthy and deceptive. This section of the thesis discusses some of the limitations faced as well as the recommendations and it provides the concluding remarks on the thesis.

### **6.1 Limitations**

The study faced some limitations, for instances, time was a serious issue, especially when it came to collecting data. Moreover, gathering information about the topic of online dating in Lebanon was challenging since there are no previous studies on the subject. This made it difficult to relate the study to the Lebanese lifestyle, mentalities, and culture.

In addition, in Lebanon online dating services have a negative connotation, and people are afraid to be negatively viewed, therefore they tend to avoid those websites or application but rather use other social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram for the same purpose as online dating. In case they use online dating websites, they are very reserved about discussing the issue and this limited the number of the respondents willing to take the survey. This leads to another possible important limitation which is the degree of honesty in answering the survey questions since respondents may be reserved about their answers – considering the cultural implications of using online dating websites.

### **6.2 Recommendations**

The online dating world is a vast field that has never been studied in relation to the Lebanese culture and its people, doing further research and understanding Lebanese mentality and opinion about the subject will be very helpful.

In addition, executing of a qualitative research study and conducting face – to – face interviews for this type of topic in Lebanon is necessary to have a deeper look into the Lebanese culture and mentality towards online dating services.

Moreover, change of the sample used in the study in order to get a better look into the Lebanese citizens and attempt to generalize it, especially since this thesis has limited the sample since it adopted a snowball sampling.

Finally, taking religion into consideration since it is an important factor that might influence a person's decision, especially in Lebanon since the country is driven by religion.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

This thesis investigated the way Lebanese adults framed themselves on online dating services and the gratifications they received from using these applications and websites. Using the framing, online identity as well as the uses and gratifications theories, the paper examined how the internet impacts and affects the concept of dating by understanding how the internet is becoming a matchmaker too. To the researcher's knowledge, this is the first paper that tackles online dating in terms of online identity, framing and uses and gratifications of Lebanese participants.

Results showed that dating has gradually become a trend for most individuals, and the changing environment and evolution of the internet has created a new reality for dating. The internet and social media have opened a wide opportunity for active users to meet a diversity of people from around the world. Their main purpose whether traditional dating or online dating remains to find love. This thesis examined Lebanese people's online dating behavior and gratification when using online applications and websites. The survey was executed online through Google Forms. The survey was sent out to adult females and males with an age range of

18 and 42 years' old who use online dating services. Using the three theories, uses and gratifications, framing and online identity results showed that participants usually used WhatsApp and Facebook to meet and communicate with other individuals rather than online dating services such as Tinder, Plenty of Fish and OKCupid, as they had trust issues when it came to using online dating websites.

Like the literature review, the survey results for this thesis showed that pictures were the strongest factor influencing online dating. The results also showed that participants felt more comfortable of meeting the potential partner after chatting.

Participants were more inclined to match with profile with the best picture thereby highlighting the importance of attractiveness and appearance in choosing a potential date from the online dating websites or even other platforms. Moreover, participants tended to frame themselves and create their own profile according to what they believed would be attractive the opposite sex or even same gender. The online identity theory was examined through their behavior on these platforms and the role they played by omitting certain negative traits or changing some of their features, interest and hobbies in order to gain the attention of the potential match. Online daters who participated in this study tended to explore, experiment and experience different identities through online services. Participants were more inclined to include their achievement and dreams on these platforms as well as photos where they highlight their best features rather than photoshopping and fixing their own picture, while omitting certain information which they believed might form a negative idea about them, including for instance, negative traits like smoking. Users mainly checked what others had posted on their own profiles and acted according to what they saw as being attractive; some of them checked for qualities such as dog lovers and natural picture to communicate with a potential partner. In addition,

online daters were more inclined to check the profile picture rather the age, text, or interest in order for them to take the decision to match with the owner of the profile.

All in all, the data showed that online dating services are somewhat not trustworthy therefore people tend to use them more as a means for entertainment rather than for its original purpose which is finding love and romance. Although the internet, social media and online dating services brought people closer together but the different online identities as well as identity framing that may be employed on such websites has created an ambiance of deception and trust issues when it comes to meeting a match online, yet they partake in it and spend time fixing their profiles as a way to satisfy themselves and their needs. Online dating was considered a taboo at first but eventually became an important tool to connect and communicate with people from around the world.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

This survey is part of a graduate thesis. Its aim is to find out the reason behind people's use of online dating websites and the ways in which they project themselves on these websites. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. All answers will be anonymous and kept with the strictest confidentiality. Pressing next indicate that you are voluntarily consenting to participate. And thank you for agreeing to take part in my survey.

### Page Break

#### Screening Question:

Have you ever used Online Dating?

- Yes
- No

If no, please indicate why

-----

If no thank you for your participation!

Page break

#### I. Demographics:

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. How old are you?

-----

3. What is your current relationship status?

- Single, not interested

- Single looking for a casual relationship / friendship
- Single looking for serious relationship
- Single looking for sex
- Dating
- Complicated
- Open relationship

For number 3, if you have any “other” please specify:

-----

## **II. Social media:**

1. Are you active on social media?
  - Yes
  - No
2. How often are you on social media sites or applications?
  - Daily
  - Weekly
  - Monthly
3. If you visit social media websites on daily basis, how long do you stay on these sites?
  - Less than an hour
  - 1 – 2 hours
  - 3 – 4 hours
  - 5 and more hours
4. What types of Social Media Application do you have? (select all that apply)
  - WhatsApp

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Other

For number 4, if you have any “Other” please specify:

-----

5. How much time do you spend on a preferred social media application on average per day?
- Less than an hour
  - 1 to 2 hours
  - 3 to 4 hours
  - More than 5 hours

**Page Break**

**III. Online Dating**

1. How often do you use online dating applications or sites?
- Less than an hour
  - 1 – 2 hours
  - 3 – 4 hours
  - 5 and more hours

2. Please rate the level of agreement with the following statements in relation to:

Online dating sites and applications are

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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A way to make new friends					
A way to find a date					
A way to release stress					
A way to pass time					
A way to increase the chance of meeting the one					
A way to release stress desire					

For number 2, if you have any “Other” please specify:

-----

**IV. Use of Online dating**

1. What Online dating applications and/or sites do you use? (select all that apply)

- Tinder
- OKCupid
- Hot or Not
- Match.com
- eHarmony
- Others

For number 1, if you have any “Other” please specify:

-----

2. How much time do you spend on a preferred social networking dating sites on average per day?

- Less than an hour

- 1 to 2 hours
- 3 to 4 hours
- More than 5 hours

3. When on online dating sites and applications, about how much of your time do you spend posting things about yourself?

- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Always
- I barely post anything
- I don't post anything

4. When on online dating sites and applications, how much of your time do you spend checking what others have posted?

- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Always
- I barely check
- I never check what they have posted

5. How often did your friendships start online? (such as Facebook, Instagram or online dating sites and applications etc.)

- Always
- Most of the time
- Once in a while
- Rarely

- Never

**Page break**

6. Please rate the level of agreement with the following statements in relation to why did you use online dating applications?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gaining knowledge by meeting individual from different cultures					
Release of boredom					
Sexual relationship					
To meet potential partner					
Have fun					
Socializing					
Wasting time					

7. When using online dating applications

- The first thing I look for in a profile is
  - Profile picture
  - Status
  - Age
  - Interests
  - Others

For number 7, if you have any “Other” please specify:

-----

8. When using online dating applications, what are the theme of the profile picture that you would find attractive (kindly rate the following according to your preferences)

	Extremely Unattractive	Unattractive	Neutral	Attractive	Extremely attractive
In a bathing suit					
In a formal attire (dress, suit...)					
A selfie					
Travel Shot					
Posing in a group					
Activity shot (basketball, soccer...)					
Exposing a certain body shot					

9. What do you feel when using online dating sites and applications (Please select if you agree or disagree with the following adjectives)?

Feelings	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Happy					
Self - Satisfaction					
Popular					
Appealing					
Loved					
Attractive					

Needed					
I hate it!					

10. How important are the following for you?

	Extremely unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Extremely important
The physical appearance of my online profile					
The physical appearance of my match					
The personality trait of my match					
The education status of my match					
The hobbies of my match					
The interests of my match					
The economic status of my match					
Attracting my match					

**V. Personal use of Online dating**

1. Sometimes I feel it is okay to lie on my online dating profile. How likely or unlikely are you to change the following:

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very Likely
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Personality					
Age					
Looks					
Weight					
Height					
Hobbies					
Interests					

For number 1, if you have any “Other” please specify:

-----

2. Have you ever omitted information that you thought were negative about yourself?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give some examples:

-----

3. Rate how likely are you to do the following:

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely	Very likely
Photoshop my profile picture					
Post my picture as it is					
Include my achievements (Certificates)					
Share my other social media accounts					

Mention my religion					
Mention how many language I can speak					
Carefully select the picture of me that has my best features to post					
Spend time fixing a picture to portray the image I want to show others					
Posting a picture of my whole body					
Posting a picture of only my face					
Posting s picture that I consider myself sexy in					
Posting pictures of myself that don't always show my best features					

**Page break**

**VI. After meeting an online partner**

1. Have you ever gone out on an actual date with your online match?

- Yes
- No

2. Was the date as you expected it to be?

- Yes
- No

If no, specify why?

-----

3. In you experience, how trustworthy did you find the people that you met online?

- Very trustworthy
- Trustworthy
- Somewhat trustworthy
- Somewhat not trustworthy
- Not trustworthy
- Very not trustworthy

4. Based on what do you find them as trustworthy or not?

-----

**VII. Conclusion**

Online profiles on dating applications are

- Real
- Fake
- Partly real

Would you recommend using online dating to your friends?

- Yes
- No
- Rate the level of agreement in relation to – online dating allow identity:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Experimentation					
Exploration					
Expression					