

Looking for Love

Jane Boyd Thomas, Ph.D.
Professor of Marketing, Winthrop University

Online dating

- Last year 17% of couples who married met in an online dating site (Match.com, 2010).
- In 2009 Craigslist earned about \$122 million in revenue with \$99 million in profit (Craigslist Revenue Report, 2010).
- Purpose: To examine the self marketing occurring among heterosexual men and women on Craigslist.

Self Marketing or Personal Branding?

- Tom Peters' article "The brand called you" (*Fastcompany* 1997).
- Our culture is full of examples of self marketing or personal branding.
- Reality television
- As communication and personal interactions move to more online formats, individuals are focusing on their online identity (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons, 2002).



Self-Disclosure

- CME individuals reveal personal information in a process known as self-disclosure.
- Self-disclosure is easier in CME because there is less fear of being socially undesirable (Moon, 2002).
- Individuals carefully construct online identities using words and pictures.



Netnography

- Six different US regions
- Selected the two largest cities from each region
- Selected data from nine categories in the Craigslist personal section.
- Extracted the first 50 posts in each section for each city.
- 4,800 posts
- Self-marketing among heterosexuals (1,200 posts)



Answers

- CE- Casual encounters
- FUD- Fear uncertainty doubt
- ISO- In search of
- LTR- Long term relationship
- M4M- Men for men
- MC- Missed connections
- NSA- No strings attached
- WYSIWYG-What you see is what you get

Categories used in personal ads

- Men seeking women*
- Women seeking men *
- Men seeking men
- Women seeking women
- Casual encounters
- Miscellaneous romance
- Strictly platonic
- Missed connections

How are they marketing themselves?





What I'm looking for:

First let me say I am looking for friends right now, and then we will see. I am 5'9 so I need a guy at least 6'0. I prefer them to be between 23 and 26 but will consider others up to 30. I am attracted to many different races but do prefer lighter color guys. Blue eyes are a major bonus! He has to be non-smoking but occasional drinker. I would like a guy who has some imperfections because nobody is perfect. PERSONALITY MEANS EVERYTHING!!! If you cant make me laugh forget it. I'm looking for an educated guy with his head screwed on right.



Four Themes

- Types of interaction
- Criteria for partner
- Self disclosure
- Tone

Types of Interaction

- “This distinguished fifty-six year old executive seeks the exclusive company of one highly intelligent, sexy, very attractive _____ for an exclusive intimate relationship based on a mutually beneficial arrangement.”

Who wrote this post? Male or Female?

Criteria for Partner

- “I am looking for a 24 to 43, fit, non-smoker, not yet spoiled, able to have fun and be happy no matter what the event is, educated with employable skills. You should like: music (including hard rock), kids, cats, good conversation, motorcycles, going out for dinner and drinks, concerts. Live in, near, or North of Houston, closer to Spring is better.”



Criteria for Partner

- I'm fairly new to town and after settling in I've realized that I'm kind of lonely here...I'm tired of coming home to an empty apartment and an empty bed. I'm looking for someone to spend my time with, maybe someone who would be willing to help me discover what this city has to offer.” (Houston, TX WSM)

Self Disclosure

- “More about me- Height/Weight proportionate, 5’3, 110 lbs., blue eyes, brown hair, I’m spiritual but not religious. I enjoy reading, watching movies, hanging out, dining out, drinking, live music, dance clubbing, communing with nature, going on impulsive adventures, and just walking the beach can be a work out.”

Tone

- Honesty or “keeping it real”
- “I really do want to hear from, talk to and ultimately meet you, if it seems right. To that end, as is usual, I will only respond to replies with a clear photo attached. It's a reasonable request, one which I'll gladly reciprocate.”



So what..

- Do men and women use different language?
- How should the advertising message be constructed and communicated?
- What are possible implications?