

SELLING LOVE TO THE SILVER CONSUMER

**A study of targeting and reaching the 50-plus audience
for Dutch online dating websites**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to research the characteristics of the Dutch 50-plus market and their position towards online dating and to combine this information in order to be able to offer advice to online dating websites on how to effectively target and reach the 50-plus niche market within the Netherlands.

This study anticipates the demographic development of the greying of the population, and combines it with other societal developments like the increasing amount of singles and of course the popularity of internet dating.

Data for this research was gathered by means of intensive literary research on the 50-plus market in general, as well as through an online survey amongst a sample of aging consumers, exploring their attitudes, beliefs and values with regard to online dating. Results from the survey were analyzed by means of descriptive statistics and combining theory with research results led to an answer to the main research question, from which the following advice could be formed:

1. Create the product

- Adapt the entire product to the 50-plus.
- Either build upon an existing brand or create a brand specifically for the target audience

2. Identify the target audience

- Anticipate physical impairments.

3. Determine the communication objectives

- Create brand awareness and improve category and brand attitude
- Implement a low-involvement transformational brand attitude strategy with informational elements.
- Attempt to expand the time horizon view of the audience

4. Design the message

- Put emphasis on product benefit as opposed to age appropriateness
- Highlight positive associations and present a two-sided argument to counter argue negative associations
- Ensure excellent customer support
- Leverage quality labels
- Make the message clear and understandable, authentic and realistic

5. Select channels of communication

- Use traditional media like TV and radio
- Put effort in word-of-mouth marketing
- Do not underestimate new media

6. Select the message source

- Show real 50-plus people in recognizable situations
- Use environments corresponding with interests of the 50-plus

By successfully implementing this advice and putting it through in every step of the process, from product to communications, online dating sites can successfully target and reach the aging consumer and secure their share from the growing pool of 50-plus consumers.

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in online dating originates from my mom's success story. A couple of years ago, my parents got a divorce and it made sense that they would start looking for a new spouse. However, when my mom told me where she had met her new boyfriend, whom I had met a couple of times and who seemed to be great, I was surprised to say the least. Until then, online dating had been a fairly foreign subject to me, something that I knew existed but I do not think I had ever really been able to grasp the real meaning of it. When my mom told me her story however, the concept of internet dating finally became a tangible concept for me and I started to realize that this was not something weird and awkward but rather something great and very interesting. It was like the Bader-Meinhof Phenomenon (Bellows, 2006): as soon as I encountered the online dating world, I started to see it everywhere. In advertising, names of websites, new apps like Tinder and above all the scope of internet daters. My mom was doing it, my boyfriends mom was doing it, my dad's girlfriends sister was doing it. It is therefore not surprising that this new discovered interest has found its way into my graduation thesis.

This entire graduation assignment has been an extensive learning experience with many, many opportunities for personal growth. I feel like the graduation assignment may have taught me more than any of the other assignments I have worked on throughout the ICM course. Every step has provided me with useful insights and I believe that I can call myself somewhat more of a professional researcher now.

I would have been nowhere without the help and support of so many people who deserve mention within this report.

First of all, I want to thank Evelyn Bekooij-Westerhoudt for coaching, supporting and guiding me through the process of my thesis. Moreover, thanks goes out to Ad Franzen, for his time and patience. Lastly, I want to thank Stef, my amazing and loving boyfriend, who has somehow managed to keep put with me through every moment of seemingly irrational thesis-despair. Thank you for supporting me and believing in me. I needed it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	I
Preface & Acknowledgements	III
Table of contents	V
List of tables	Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.
List of figures	Fout! Bladwijzer niet gedefinieerd.
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction to the problem.....	1
1.2 Justification	2
1.3 Problem definition and research questions	2
1.3.1 Policy question.....	2
1.3.2 Main research question	2
1.3.3 Sub-questions.....	2
1.4 Research goals and objectives.....	3
1.5 Demarcation and limitations	3
1.5.1 Definition of dating websites.....	4
1.5.2 Definition of the '50-plus market'	5
1.5.3 Definition of 'communicating' and 'targeting/reaching'	5
1.5.4 General restrictions and limitations	6
1.6 Structure	6
Chapter 2 – Introduction to online dating	7
2.1 The online dating market.....	7
2.1.1 Types of dating websites	7
2.1.2 Paid vs. Free.....	8
2.1.3 Niche dating websites.....	8
2.2 Conclusions introduction to the market	8
Chapter 3 – Methodology	9
3.1 Preliminary research.....	9
3.2 Theoretical Framework.....	9
3.3 Main research	9
3.3.1 Mixed methods approach	9
3.3.2 Research approach matrix	10
3.3.3 Desk research.....	10
3.3.4 Online survey.....	11
3.3.5 Considerations.....	12

Chapter 4 - Theoretical framework	13
4.1 Literature review	13
4.1.1 Online dating and relationships – Pew Research Center	13
4.1.2 Online Dating in Middle and Later Life: Gendered Expectations and Experiences - Summer McWilliams and Anne E. Barrett	13
4.1.3 50-plus market research – Bindinc. Kenniscentrum	13
4.2 Theoretical framework implementation matrix	14
4.3 The 50-plus niche dating site market	15
4.4 Consumer behaviour theories	16
4.4.1 Heightened appreciation model	16
4.4.2 Socioemotional selectivity theory	17
4.4.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Needs vs. Wants theory	17
4.4.4 Conclusions consumer behaviour theory	18
4.5 Marketing communication theories	18
4.5.1 Steps in Developing Effective Marketing Communication	18
4.5.2 Communication Objectives	20
4.5.3 Brand Attitude Strategy	22
4.5.4 Changing attitudes	22
4.5.5 Emotionally effective communication	23
4.5.6 Conclusions marketing communication theory	24
Chapter 5 – Results desk research	25
5.1 50-plus target audience characteristics	25
5.1.1 Physical influences	25
5.1.2 The identity of the 50-plus; main beliefs and values	25
5.1.3 Leisure time and activities	27
5.1.4 Media usage	27
5.1.5 Buying behaviour	30
5.1.6 Advertising to the 50-plus	31
5.2 Conclusions literary research	33
Chapter 6 – Results online survey	35
6.1 Selection questions	35
6.2 Results – general questions	37
6.2.1 General characteristics	37
6.2.2 Media usage	37
6.2.3 The 50-plus and dating	37
6.2.4 Online dating associations	37
6.2.5 Knowledge of dating websites	39

6.2.6	Attitudes.....	39
6.3	Results – Respondents that have experience with online dating.....	40
6.3.1	Dating site usage.....	40
6.3.2	Motivations for online dating.....	40
6.3.3	Online dating preferences.....	42
6.4	Results – Respondents that have no experience with online dating.....	43
6.4.1	Reasons for not trying online dating.....	43
6.4.2	Online dating preferences.....	44
6.5	Cross tables.....	45
6.5.1	Answer to statements from respondents with experience.....	45
6.5.2	Answers to statements from respondents with no experience.....	45
6.6	Conclusions survey results.....	46
	Chapter 7 – Conclusion.....	47
	Chapter 8 - Critical discussion.....	53
	Chapter 9 – Recommendations & advice.....	55
9.1	Recommendations.....	55
9.1.1	Create the product.....	55
9.1.2	Identify the target audience.....	55
9.1.3	Determine the communication objectives.....	56
9.1.4	Design the message.....	56
9.1.5	Select channels of communication.....	57
9.1.6	Select the message source.....	58
9.2	Suggestions for further research.....	58
	Reference list.....	61
	Appendices.....	66
	Appendix 1 – Search strategy.....	67
	Appendix 2 – Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	68
	Appendix 3 – Online survey.....	69
	Appendix 4 – Survey results.....	78

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Research approach matrix.....	10
Table 2. Theoretical framework implementation matrix.....	14
Table 3. Relationships linking emotion to motivation in advertising	24
Table 4. Most read magazines 50-plus audience.....	28
Table 5. Internet usage per medium and age group.....	30
Table 6. Basic conditions for a company's communications to be age-friendly	33
Table 7. Number of valid respondents	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Steps in developing effective marketing communication.	19
Figure 2: Brand attitude strategies	22
Figure 3. Elements of happiness	26
Figure 4. Relationship status	35
Figure 5. Dating site use yes/no	36
Figure 6. Positive associations with internet dating.....	38
Figure 7. Negative associations with internet dating	38
Figure 8. Answers to statements.....	39
Figure 9. Dating websites used. Multiple answers possible.....	40
Figure 10. Motivations for internet dating. Multiple answers possible.....	41
Figure 11. Sharing dating activities	41
Figure 12. Threshold and recommending	42
Figure 13. Type of dating website	42
Figure 14. Dating site elements 1	42
Figure 15. Considering internet dating	43
Figure 16. Threshold to start with internet dating	43
Figure 17. Factors influencing internet dating behavior	44
Figure 18. Dating site elements 2.	44
Figure 19. Cross-table: Answers to statements from respondents with experience	45
Figure 20. Cross-table: Answers to statements from respondents with no experience	45

**“INTERNET DATING HAS
HELPED PEOPLE OF ALL AGES
REALIZE THAT THERE’S NO
NEED TO SETTLE FOR A
MEDIocre RELATIONSHIP.”**

- DAN SLATER

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the problem

Nowadays, millions of users log on to online dating sites, each with their own motivation and goal. The concept of online dating, or internet dating¹, has been around for years, but seems to have become a mainstream activity in our current society. The number of singles in The Netherlands is steadily growing and it is expected that over 3 million inhabitants will be single by 2015 (de Graaf, 2006). Of those singles, 20 percent visits an online dating site every now and then (Haakman, 2006). Not only the number of singles, but also the amount of 50-plus people in The Netherlands is increasing. Expectations are that in 2020, 40 percent of the entire Dutch population will be 50 or older (Indora, N/A). The demographic developments that are at the heart of this study have been predictable for a very long time. However, marketers, as well as the entire society, have hugely delayed acting upon this phenomenon (Stroud & Walker, 2013).

The aging of the population is not just a local development, but can be regarded as a worldwide phenomenon (Drolet, Lau-Gesk, Williams, & Jeong, 2010). Numerous articles and books have been written on this matter, containing information ranging from facts and figures to advices for businesses and marketers (Stroud & Walker, 2013; Bindinc Kenniscentrum, 2013; Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2011). However, not a lot of research is available for internet dating amongst this age group specifically within The Netherlands. Pew Research Center has conducted a widespread study on internet dating in the United States, of which the outcomes are applicable to the Dutch market as well, considering Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). These numbers show that only 8 percent of all American adults in age group 45 to 54 have used online dating websites or apps. In older age groups, this percentage is even lower. Combined with information from the Dutch CBS which concludes that the number of singles in the more matured audiences is considerably high, I am left wondering why there are so many singles in this age group yet so few have tried online dating (de Graaf, 2006).

It seems that above mentioned facts provide sufficient ground for arguing that the 50-plus target audience is where the opportunity lies for the big Dutch dating websites. Yet, extensive research has also shown that the 50-plus demographic needs a specialized communication approach. This poses the very important and interesting question for internet dating organizations of how they can anticipate aforementioned facts and secure their share in the growing popularity of online dating amongst the 50-plus by means of specialized communications. The purpose of this research paper will be to obtain a broad spectrum of information on the 50-plus market and internet dating, from the perspectives of both the market and the consumer. More specific objectives will be discussed in section 1.6.

¹ Within this report, the concepts 'online dating' and 'internet dating' will be used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon

1.2 Justification

This study aims to formulate clear communication objectives and strategies for online dating websites in The Netherlands in order to reach the 50-plus market. This study has value most of all because of its relevance and novelty and is relevant now more than ever, due to the steady increase of the matured audience. It will contribute to the understanding of what the specific needs and expectations of this group are in relation to internet dating, how they want to be communicated with, and where they can be reached. Combining these insights will allow for formulating an advice for online dating companies on how to get the most out of their company by targeting the fastest growing group in The Netherlands. Please refer to Appendix 1 for an outline of the search plan which has been used for preliminary research and which supports previously made claim about the lack of research on this matter and thus serves as a justification for this study.

1.3 Problem definition and research questions

The subject of this study is not so much a problem, but rather an opportunity. The premise of this study is that in the growing amount of aging consumers, the growth in online dating popularity and the growing amount of (50-plus) singles, lies an untapped and valuable target audience for online dating websites. There is a need to research what the wants and needs of this audience are, specifically with regard to online dating websites. After having defined the problem, the following policy question can be formulated:

1.3.1 Policy question

How can Dutch online dating websites communicate effectively to target and reach the 50-plus market?

In order to guide the research in the right directions, the following research questions and sub-questions have been formulated:

1.3.2 Main research question

What are characteristics of the Dutch 50-plus market and what is the position of this target audience towards online dating?

1.3.3 Sub-questions

The following sub-questions have been formulated in order to arrive at an answer to the main research question. These sub-questions look at the matter from different angles and together aid in providing an answer that is specific and complete.

SQ1. What are the characteristics of the 50-plus market?

Sub-question 1 (SQ1) was formulated to cover perspectives both from the 50-plus audience itself as well as from a 50-plus marketing perspective. Its aim was to discover how the 50-plus are characterized with regard to basic characteristics, main beliefs and values, occupations and activities, and media usage. Moreover, revealing general communication directives formulated in previous research was covered by this question.

RQ2. What are the attitudes, beliefs and values of the 50-plus with regard to online dating?

Sub-question 2 (SQ2) was formulated to find out information about how the 50-plus thinks and feels about online dating. More specifically, aims of this question were to research their familiarity with internet dating, associations with the phenomenon, their position towards internet dating and possible motivations for or against the practice. In addition, the objective was to discover which elements concerned with internet dating were valued most by this audience.

1.4 Research goals and objectives

The main objective of this research is to provide insights into and offer advice on how dating websites can target and reach the 50-plus internet dating niche. The research is beneficial for online dating websites as it bridges the gap between their existing organization and the growing pool of 50-plus singles, as well as for those singles themselves, who will benefit from a better and more specialized approach.

The purpose of this research is to execute extensive desk research on marketing to the 50-plus consumer and combine that information with a survey about internet dating beliefs, values and attitudes. More specific goals and objectives include:

- Determine and define the characteristics of the 50-plus audience.
- Identify motivations and expectations of the 50-plus with regard to online dating.
- Provide useful and valuable recommendations for internet dating websites on how to communicate effectively with the 50-plus market in order to attract those audiences to the website.

1.5 Demarcation and limitations

In order to be able for any reader to properly understand this research paper, there is a need to provide a series of definitions of important terms used within this study. The following chapter will provide an overview of definitions that will simultaneously provide explanation of terms themselves as well as a demarcation of the research topic. The first three sub-chapters will cover three specific topics and the last sub-chapter will contain an outline of general but important limitations that are part of this research.

1.5.1 Definition of dating websites

The next chapter will elaborate on online dating more, and it will then become clear that the Dutch online dating market is a very full one with dating sites catering to almost everyone's wishes and needs. Since a lot of these dating websites are very different in their target groups and business models, it is impossible to formulate recommendations that are applicable to each and every one of those organizations, or at least with the time and resources available for the dissertation assignment. Therefore, this research will focus on a smaller segment of the online dating market which was selected based on certain characteristics. These mostly fall within the first group as described by Van Basten (2012), the self-search internet dating websites.

First of all, it is important to note that within this research paper, whenever mention is made of 'dating websites', this means dating websites that meet the characteristics which are defined below. These characteristics have been chosen because they match three existing dating websites, but any other websites that would meet these will fall under the term 'dating website.' This definition applies to the policy- and research questions and any other chapters, with exception of the introduction, in which the term is still used to describe the entire market.

The characteristics that have been defined for the term 'dating website' within this paper are as follows:

- Prominent/successful (Dating Insider, 2014)
- Broad target audience
- Primarily based on self-search
- Price category of approximately €10 a month
- Considerable advertising budget
- Focussed on fairly serious dating
- Dating websites, not applications

Examples of dating websites that fall under this definition include Lexa.nl, Pepper and Relatieplanet.nl².

² During the course of this research, TMG announced their plans for selling Relatieplanet.nl. It is unclear up until this point what will happen to Relatieplanet.nl (Dating Insider, 2014).

1.5.2 Definition of the '50-plus market'

In theory, the term 50-plus encompasses any individual that is aged either 50 or older. Most of these individuals currently fall within the Baby Boom generation. For the sake of demarcating the research topic, a selection has been made within this age group. The results and conclusions following from the research done in this paper apply to an audience specifically of 50 to 75 years old. The boundary of 75 was not drawn randomly, but came to existence mostly because of literature used in desk research. The most important inspiration for this audience was an article by McWilliams and Barrett (2014) which for its qualitative research made use of participants roughly between the ages of 50 and 75. In addition, preliminary research had indicated that the internet usage of individuals over 75 is thus far at a rate low enough to not consider them a logical audience for dating website's marketing efforts. Within this report, this audience will interchangeably be referred to mostly as 'the 50-plus' and 'the aging consumer'.

In previous research done on 50-plus marketing and communicating with the 50-plus demographic, a distinction is often made between different types of 50-plus individuals (with/without children, employed/unemployed). It would be incorrect to regard the 50-plus audience as one homogeneous group since, also within this group, many factors like employment and personal taste, play a role in determining consumer behaviour (Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2011; Familie Kenniscentrum, 2013). However, considering the scope of this research, it will not be possible to distinguish that specifically between these different groups due to a lack of time and resources and everyone in the age of 50 and up will thus be regarded as one and the same group.

1.5.3 Definition of 'communicating' and 'targeting/reaching'

Communication efforts by companies are often far stretching and it is important to define on which of these many levels of communication this research will focus. For the personal desire not to focus on just one single type of communication, this research will look on a more general level into multiple types of communication. These include, among other things, what channels are most suitable to reach the aging consumer, how they want to be addressed, what kind of advertising approach is most suitable depending on their attitude towards online dating and other marketing related facts.

Recapitulating, communicating and targeting and reaching as mentioned within this study means formulating a more broad, but superficial advice to dating websites on how to communicate with the 50-plus audience.

1.5.4 General restrictions and limitations

The following paragraphs will each discuss a phenomenon that is expected to influence the scope of this research and will consequently influence its outcomes.

Since there is no research available on the specific issue this study looks at, most of the conclusions will be drawn from my own research. My inexperience in the research field may or may not influence the quality of this research, but it must be noted that no effort will be spared to work as professionally and meticulously as possible.

Even though the internet dating phenomenon seems to have moved itself out of the shadows, there is still a considerable level of stigma surrounding it. This might pose a risk of not being able to find enough people willing to fill out the questionnaire, as well as the risk of dishonest response. The fact that this study is limited to internet daters (or potential internet daters) of 50 years and up only increases aforementioned risks.

1.6 Structure

This research paper has started with an introduction, to clarify the research problems, its definition, restrictions, justification and purpose. In the next chapter, the methodology used to carry out this research will be discussed. After that, the theoretical framework follows, which will be an outline of theories used in combination with findings from other research, as well as theories that on their own provide an answer or a partial answer to the sub-question presented previously. The next two chapters will include the results of respectively desk research and an online survey. From the results of the theoretical framework, literary research and the questionnaire, a conclusion will be drawn in the next chapter accompanied by a critical discussion. The chapter after that will comprise all recommendations to internet dating sites that follow from these conclusions and which together provide an answer to the policy question. Each chapter will end with a short conclusion, summarizing the most important aspects of that particular chapter. These partial conclusions will together add up to the conclusion in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2 – INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE DATING

2.1 The online dating market

Online dating is anything but a new concept. Arguably, the practices of finding love online go back much further than the rise of the first official online dating website in 1997. However, this timeline largely depends on the definition given to internet dating. As defined earlier, this study looks at online dating as the effort of looking for a love interest through established internet dating websites. The rise of Web 2.0 with technologies like dynamic web pages and social media have allowed online dating websites to gain prominence (Hogan, Li, & Dutton, 2014). The year 2002 marked a real outburst in online dating activity (van Basten, 2012). Since then, this popularity has largely increased and today the online dating market is a flourishing one with dating websites targeted to almost anyone (Brooks, 2011).

2.1.1 Types of dating websites

The Dutch dating market is saturated with a large variety of dating websites in every kind of category. Internet dating websites can broadly be categorized into three groups (van Basten, 2012):

1. Self-search internet dating websites
2. Internet dating sites with psychological mediation
3. Adult dating websites

The first group encompasses a type of dating website that lets users create a profile on which they can fill in their personal characteristics, list their interests and share their values and beliefs, while on the other hand allows them to look for a potential match by entering search criteria like age, level of education and region. The prevalence of Lexa.nl and Relatieplanet.nl, whom for the past years have been competing for the title of number one dating website, is an indicator of the success and prevalence of these kind of dating websites within The Netherlands.

The second group describes a type of dating websites that works with a more psychological method. Dating site Parship for instance, requires users to fill in a long personality test in which 32 personality characteristics are identified. Based on the outcome of the test, Parship then presents users with an overview of personalized matches.

A more stigmatized group of dating websites, are those with adult purposes, which are again subdivided into many niche websites each with their own adult 'fantasy'. The biggest player in the Dutch market is without question SecondLove, centered entirely around cheating.

Recently it appears as though a new group of online dating services has emerged. The immense popularity of location-based services like Tinder and Grindr have added a whole new dimension to the concept of online dating. These services characterize themselves by being especially favoured by younger audiences, and arguably by being much more based on looks

and quick dating, often with sexual purposes. Another important characteristic is that they are not actually websites, but rather only appear in the form of mobile applications. The trend of mobile popularity has in fact been picked up by all renowned online dating websites in the previously mentioned groups, as they each create their own apps to match the existing online dating services.

2.1.2 Paid vs. Free

Another important distinction that can be made within the online dating market, is between paid and free dating websites. The most important players within the Dutch market are paid services, but some of the free websites are not far behind (Dating Insider, 2014). Currently, every dating website allows users to become a member for free, albeit with limited possibilities in most cases. Paid dating sites require users to update their account to a paid one in order to have access to additional options. The most popular free dating site at this moment is Paiq, and also Knuz is doing well. All functionalities on Paiq are free, although they are limited. This internet dating website is particularly interesting because of its matchmaking method. Users cannot enter search criteria, but are matched to others based on a series of personality questions. Based on the preferences of those matches, Paiq then 'learns' about you and proposes new matches (Paiq, 2014). This method seems similar to that of Parship, but is much less 'scientific'. Free websites like Paiq en Knuz do not make use of advertising.

2.1.3 Niche dating websites

Within all of the categories mentioned above, many niche dating websites are existent. These niches include level of education (Parship), religion (Christianmatch.nl), eating habits (vegadates.nl), posture (maatjemeer-match.nl), age (50plusmatch) and even for people with the same type of sexually transmitted disease (stdmatch.net). The smaller niche sites are nowhere near as popular or profitable as the top-rated dating websites, but targeting the right niche can still bring in a lot of money. One of the most successful niche dating websites apart from Parship is currently 50plusmatch which is specifically targeted at singles in the ages of 50 and up (Dating Insider, 2011). The popularity of this website is a solid argument for the topic of this study, as the popularity of 50plusmatch indicates that this target audience is indeed interested in online dating. Section 4.2 will discuss this website more thoroughly.

2.2 Conclusions introduction to the market

In conclusion it can be said that the Dutch online dating market is a diverse and niche-friendly dating market in which almost any consumer should be able to find a platform of their choice. The online dating market is relatively full, which is why the opportunities lie in targeting the niches. For smaller business with little budget, for whom it is impossible to compete with the aggressive marketing strategies of the bigger dating websites, targeting a niche may also be the answer (Dating Insider, 2013).

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

In order to arrive at answers to the sub-questions, research question and policy question of this study, multiple stages of research needed to be completed. Within this chapter, the research methods used will be discussed in detail. The research design was shaped by determining the specific needs of the research that were key in writing valuable recommendations, which were ultimately based on a combination of literature review, communication theories and facts obtained from quantitative research. The research design has been broken down into preliminary research, the theoretical framework and main research. In addition to discussing the research design, the procedure for collecting quantitative data will be described and justified.

3.1 Preliminary research

Preliminary research was carried out mostly as desk research, with the objective of obtaining as much information as possible on the research topic. This information was found in the academic library of the Hogeschool Utrecht, on the free web via Google.com and on the deep web via Google Scholar, Lucas and the Utrecht University portal. The main focus while searching these resources was to create an overview of the current situation of online dating in the Netherlands and 50-plus marketing. This pre-research was particularly valuable for formulating proper research questions and sub-questions. Some of the most important literature that was revealed during the preliminary research phase, is discussed in section 4.1.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In order to support any claims made in, and recommendations drawn from, this research, it was based on existing theories and information found in previous research and publications on internet dating, 50-plus marketing, and the 50-plus market itself. These theories were selected for their relevance to the research topic and led to a theoretical framework, which was then applied in several other phases of the research, and which was particularly helpful in drawing preliminary conclusions as well as shaping the questionnaire used for quantitative research. Within this study, the theoretical framework is not merely a compilation of theories but will also already generate relevant conclusions based on these theories. Please refer to chapter 4 for the complete theoretical framework.

3.3 Main research

The following section will discuss the various research methods that together make up the main research phase.

3.3.1 Mixed methods approach

The goal of this approach is to make use of an appropriate combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to properly tackle a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, Designing and conducting mixed methods research, 2011). The underlying premise of

mixed methods is that the use of both approaches together contributes to a better understanding of research problems as opposed to just one of those methods on its own. A mixed methods approach is also at core of this research, since it is particularly important to get information from different sources and angles and some approaches are simply more appropriate for obtaining certain information. As Hansen & Machin (2013) state, the choice and thus the combination of methods chosen for a research project should reflect the goals and objectives of this research. However, often more pragmatic factors like convenience, available resources and time have an important influence on research design. For this graduation assignment, some of these factors have indeed played a role in the development of the research. The paragraphs below contain a description and justification for each method used.

For the sake of clarity, Table 1 has been created which depicts a research approach matrix, schematically linking each sub-question with the methods used to answer that specific question as well as the sources that this information was drawn from.

3.3.2 Research approach matrix

Sub-question	Source	Method
1. What are the characteristics of the 50-plus market?	Previous research on 50plus market	Desk research - literature research
2. What are the wishes, expectations and viewpoints of the 50-plus with regard to online dating?	Members of 'Nationale 50plus panel'	Online survey

Table 1. *Research approach matrix*

3.3.3 Desk research

Desk research has functioned as one of the most important research methods in this study. Literature research as discussed here stands apart from other desk research like preliminary research and the theoretical framework. The most important literature that was researched for this part of the study consisted of both news articles and scientific articles, research reports, and books, dealing with topics including media usage and characteristics of the 50-plus and 50-plus marketing. Extensive analysis and combining of research findings from these sources helped to arrive at an answer to SQ1.

3.3.4 Online survey

As part of this study, a questionnaire was conducted in the form of an online survey. Surveys are the most frequently used method for measuring opinions, views, attitudes and knowledge of a large group of people (Verhoeven, 2011). The objective of this particular survey was to obtain information on how the aging consumer perceives online dating, what their opinions about it are and how they approach it. Surveys provide a more realistic and natural setting than an artificially created and controlled situation and are asked questions about their everyday beliefs and behaviours (Hansen & Machin, 2013). Especially with online dating, where a certain stigma is arguably still in place, answering from the comfort and privacy of the own home could be a very important influence on truthfulness of responses. Please refer to Appendix 3 for an overview of the complete survey.

The type of survey that was used for this study is also known as the cross-sectional survey. A drawback of this kind of survey is that it only provides a snapshot of respondents beliefs, attitudes and values, giving little information about underlying motivations and how these might change further down the road (Hansen & Machin, 2013). It is therefore of the utmost importance to ask the right questions and, if necessary, back up this quantitative method with qualitative methods.

In order to achieve the intended purposes of this method, the questions in the survey asked about demographic and psychographic variables, media usage, opinions, associations and valuable attributes with regard to online dating. The survey made use of extensive routing in order to be able to ask different respondents questions appropriate to previous answers. The questionnaire was branched into a section for people that were already familiar with online dating and a section for people that had no previous experience with online dating. The survey was sent specifically to age group 50 to 75 and was executed in Dutch, since this is the native language of the target group. Within the email to the panel members, they were asked to respond only if they were either single, or in a relationship and had tried internet dating in the past three years, with the purpose of excluding respondents unfit for this study. Consequently, the results do not give any information about the number of online daters in the 50-plus age group, but are not any less valuable in providing an answer to SQ2.

Sample

While there are many strengths and weaknesses to consider for using a survey, the reasons that were most relevant in this study were mostly of a pragmatic nature. Convenience presented itself in the form of a unique opportunity to make use of the national 50-plus panel in The Netherlands. The survey could therefore be distributed in cooperation with this research panel, officially called the 'Nationale 50plus Panel'. This is a research panel consisting solely of individuals of 50 years and older that was set up for 50-plus market research purposes. The sample was therefore collected by means of probability sampling (Hansen & Machin, 2013).

Analysis

The results of the quantitative research has been analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, graphically displaying the results (Gilbert, 2008). No statistical analysis, such as t-test of ANOVA has been applied to the results in chapter 6 due to the mostly categorical nature of the answer variable. This results in terms like significance, standard deviation and variance not being relevant for the analysis of these figures (Seltman, 2012; Creswell, 2003).

3.3.5 Considerations

The following section will touch upon a number of considerations that are relevant to the choice of research design. This section was added to the research to justify why certain choices were consciously not made, as opposed to simply neglected. The most important consideration was whether to include more qualitative research in the form of either focus groups or personal interviews.

Focus groups were under consideration from the beginning of this study. However, as the project progressed, this research method was regarded as less appropriate and was ultimately discarded. Within a focus group, participants may open up and become less guarded as the discussion progresses, but there is also a good chance that because of the existing stigma, people will not answer truthfully for the fear of being judged (Hansen & Machin, 2013). The expectation was that this will specifically be the case with a topic as online dating, especially amongst the older and less familiar audiences.

Similarly, a consideration was made to use semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview differs from personally administered questionnaires because it provides an opportunity to gather in-depth responses that reflect the insights of the respondent or interviewee. It also allows the researcher to probe into issues and pursue unexpected revelations (Polonsky & Waller, 2010; Verhoeven, 2011). According to Hansen & Machin (2013), individual in-depth interview and focused group interview produce similar data in many ways. However, these interviews were dependent on the number of respondents that had left their email address in the survey. For this qualitative method to have value, a large number of respondents would have had to be interviewed personally, but these resources were simply not available due to relatively low response. In addition, a majority of the respondents that were indeed willing to cooperate, were simply not representative for the overall outcomes of the survey.

CHAPTER 4 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Literature review

As mentioned previously, no research has been done yet on communicating online dating to the 50-plus specifically. However, multiple studies have been conducted on the topic of internet dating as well as on the topic of marketing to and communicating with the 50-plus demographic. Furthermore, one particularly relevant study dives into online dating in middle and later life, with the purpose of revealing gendered expectations and experiences. This section will give a brief overview of some of the most important studies that have aided in shaping this research including a mention of their topic, approach and relevance to this particular study. Please refer to Appendix 1 for the search strategy used in this preliminary research.

4.1.1 Online dating and relationships – Pew Research Center

One of the biggest studies on internet dating that has been carried out fairly recently, is the online dating and relationship study by the American Pew Research Center. This study was conducted in 2013 among a sample of the American population and comprised data ranging from basic facts to more elaborated opinions about internet dating. As such, the study provides very broad and useful insights into internet dating usage, as well as behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of Americans with regard to online dating. At the heart of this research was a survey, which has inspired the coming into existence of the online survey used to gather information for this graduation assignment. One particular strength of this study is that some of the questions it contained had been asked before, making it a longitudinal and thus more reliable study. The scope of this research reaches as far as the broader online environment around dating and relationships which, although extremely interesting, is not of much relevance for the research paper at hand.

4.1.2 Online Dating in Middle and Later Life: Gendered Expectations and Experiences - Summer McWilliams and Anne E. Barrett

This article explores connections between the variables age and gender and expectations and experiences of online daters. It has been a particularly important source of inspiration for this graduation assignment, in a way that it has inspired me to not look at the straightforward demographic, but at the arguably much more interesting, although much less researched, 50-plus audience. The research method for this article consisted of semi-structured interviews with participants aged 53 to 74. This article also provides proof that there is indeed a solid reason for considering the 50-plus as a separate audience when it comes to online dating and that there are noticeable differences in their experiences and expectations.

4.1.3 50-plus market research – Bindinc. Kenniscentrum

An extremely important source of information for this study has consisted of previously done market research by Bindinc. Kenniscentrum (previously known as Familie Kenniscentrum) which is a Dutch market research facility, focussed on the 50-plus demographic in The

Netherlands. The research articles that were particularly relevant dealt with specialized communication for the 50-plus, marketing to the aging consumer and other potential of the 50-plus market. This research project only covers the Dutch online dating market, since dating is not the same per country, which makes the studies carried out by Bindinc. Kenniscentrum particularly valuable. In combination with other studies and articles on media usage by this audience and 50-plus marketing, this research has formed a key element of this graduation assignment and will be discussed more in-depth in chapter 7, where their results form an answer to SQ2.

4.2 Theoretical framework implementation matrix

Table 2 is a schematic representation of the relation of each theory discussed in the following paragraphs with other parts of the research. The first column relates to the way the theory has been applied or how it has been used, the second column shows which research method the theory was implemented with, while the last column shows specific survey questions (see Appendix 4) that were derived from some theories.

Theory	Applied to/used as	Research method	Survey Q (as in Appendix 4)
The 50-plus niche dating site market	Market overview, research outcome confirmation	Desk research	
Consumer behaviour theory	Identifying audience characteristics	Online survey, Desk research	16, 17
Heightened appreciation model	Valued product elements discovered in online survey	Online survey	24, 29, 30
Socioemotional selectivity theory	Explaining research outcomes, recommendations	Desk research, online survey	
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs/Needs vs. Wants	Basic premise applies to recommendations		
Steps in developing effective marketing communication	Giving direction to research, Framework for recommendations	Online survey	21, 25
Communication objectives	Elaboration of previous theory	Desk research, Online survey	27, 28
Brand attitude strategy	Elaboration of previous theory	Online survey	27, 28
Changing attitudes	Relates to heightened appreciation model, recommendations	Desk research, online survey	12, 28
Emotionally effective advertising	Linking emotions to attitude strategy		

Table 2. *Theoretical framework implementation matrix*

4.3 The 50-plus niche dating site market

The following chapter will provide insights into the 50-plus internet dating market. First, the amount of active websites in the market will be mentioned, followed by a brief discussion of the most prominent website, 50plusmatch. This theoretical information will provide an overview of the current 50-plus niche market and will in addition be used to back up research outcomes.

A number of dating websites are already active within the Dutch market aimed specifically at singles aged 50 and older, varying between paid and free. However, the offer of 50-plus niche dating websites as presented by comparison website Start2Date is limited to just three (Start2Date, 2014). Start2Date indicates on their own website that merely those dating websites that are renowned and professional are included on their website and those who tamper with private information, are aimed at sex or cheating or are too small to make a difference are excluded. This selection will also be applied to this chapter. The three 50-plus dating sites that come forward are 50plusmatch, VijftigPlusDating and SeniorenDating.nl. The biggest and most popular of these three is 50plusmatch (Dating Insider, 2011).

50Plusmatch is one of the two subsidiaries of dating organization MatchMedia BV, the other one being Match4Me. The website has been around for 8 years and is doing very well at the moment, which arguably provides proof for the potential of targeting the 50-plus market specifically. Recently, they have won a Thuiswinkel award in the dating site category. The following chapter will look at some of the characteristics of 50plusmatch.nl, and draw conclusions on what other dating websites looking to target the mature market may learn from this successful organization.

The following section will discuss some of the characteristics of 50plusmatch. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a screenshot of the homepage under discussion. The website leads the slogan "Dating for the active 50-plus" (translated from Dutch). The cover photo shows two individuals in a natural environment. They have two important quality labels, Thuiswinkel Waarborg and Keurmerk Veilig Daten, which are clearly visible on the homepage. They clearly communicate checking all profiles manually and that dating on a mobile phone is possible. Moreover, the website puts a lot of emphasis on customer service.

The website has been featured in numerous articles and television programmes, but does not make any use of paid advertising (50plusmatch, 2014). The only form of advertising that could be found was on Marktplaats and other free advertising spaces.

4.4 Consumer behaviour theories

Every day, consumers make numerous buying decisions. Choosing for internet dating or a specific online dating website is a buying effort just the same. These buying decisions are at the core of marketers efforts. It is impossible to meet consumer expectations without first understanding their needs and motivations. Without knowing what to communicate, communication itself is most likely ineffective (Kardes, Cline, & Cronley, 2011). Knowledge about consumer behaviour can help marketers develop products that are not just products but which effectively meet consumer needs and will thus be considerably more likely to become profitable. The following section will present a number of relevant consumer behaviour theories that will be used to shape this graduation assignment. There are numerous factors that have a considerable influence on consumer behaviour. These include cultural, social, personal and psychological characteristics (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). An online survey has been a helpful tool in gaining insights into these characteristics. Chapter 7 gives an overview of the outcomes of this survey, while chapter 9 draws conclusions combining these outcomes with insights from the theoretical framework, desk research and interviews.

Personal factors like age and life-cycle stage, economic situation and lifestyle are important influencers of consumer behaviour. For the purpose of this study there is a need to discover how the 50-plus are characterized in order to be able to anticipate these facts in communicating with them. Within this study, these factors have been researched by means of desk research, the results of which can be seen in chapter 6.

The last factor impacting consumer behaviour is of a psychological nature. Consumers have different motivations, perceptions, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that have to be taken into consideration when targeting them. A wide range of theories is available that intend to explain consumer motivation, a selection of which will be discussed in the coming paragraphs. In order to be able to effectively communicate with the aging consumer about internet dating, it is important to know the beliefs they hold on this matter and their attitude towards it. Psychological consumer behavior factors have been revealed both by desk research and the survey and have aided in providing an answer to beliefs and values as sought in SQ1, and motivations for internet dating as sought in SQ2.

4.4.1 Heightened appreciation model

The heightened appreciation model suggests that key attributes of a product revealed by consumer research can be linked to the brand to reach consumer association with brand attitudes (Hughes & Fill, 2007). As Dan Hill (2010) argues, advertising should always “mirror the values, beliefs and attitudes of the target audience.” Consumer behaviour theory can help explain how consumers are influenced and how they make decisions. The heightened appreciation model will be applied to formulate recommendations based on the valued product elements discovered with SQ2.

4.4.2 Socioemotional selectivity theory

Socioemotional selectivity theory is a life-span theory of motivation developed by Stanford psychologist Laura Carstensen, proposing that time has an impact on predicting the goals that people pursue (Drolet, Lau-Gesk, Williams, & Jeong, 2010; Keehnen, 2008). The theory maintains that as time horizons decrease, as happens with aging, people become increasingly selective and start investing greater resources in emotionally meaningful goals and activities. Socioemotional selectivity theory is applied to answer SQ1 and is used as a basis for providing recommendations and advice in chapter 11.

Perceptions of time can be that it is either limited or that it is expansive. People that view time as limited, tend to be more focused on the present and on immediate satisfaction. Moreover, they are more oriented towards emotional and social goals. The perception of time as being limited, has implications on the selection of social partners, with the result that people with a limited time frame are more likely to interact with people whom they feel comfortable with and whom are familiar, rather than with new and unknown individuals. A consequence of this is that the 50-plus limit themselves to emotional experiences that are expectedly positive, in other words, to familiar experience only and not to new ones like internet dating.

What makes this theory especially relevant and interesting for marketing ends, is that the perspective with which people perceive time can also be created situationally (Drolet, Lau-Gesk, Williams, & Jeong, 2010). This opens up the possibility for marketers to have older adults adopt an expansive view of time so that they are more likely and more willing to engage themselves with the unknown, have new experiences and interact with individuals that are outside their social circle. Although this theory seems to be more applicable to interpersonal relationships, it is certainly relevant as well as looking at purchasing behaviour. Research has shown that the 50-plus are generally more brand-loyal than younger generations, which corresponds with socioemotional selectivity theory in that it shows how this audience is more inclined to stick to the familiar (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007). If having a limited time horizon view means that aging consumers are less likely to try out new things, changing this view could result in this audience being more prepared to engage in internet dating.

4.4.3 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Needs vs. Wants theory

Drive theory is a theory which suggests that people are always looking for ways to reduce their drives for basic psychological needs. Drawing on this theory, clinical psychologist Maslow created the Hierarchy of Needs – a multiple level triangle showing the order in which people attempt to meet their needs. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a figure displaying this triangle in full. In the middle of this triangle is the need for family, friendship and sexual intimacy, which is particularly relevant in the case of internet dating.

Needs vs. Wants theory draws further upon this hierarchy. A want is representative of a way society has taught us we can satisfy this need (Solomon, 2013). On their quest for the primary

need of love and affection, people interact, socialize and date in the hope to find that one special person. With the development of new technologies and the rise of the internet, available methods to satisfy our primal call for love have increased substantially. Whereas the younger generation almost instinctively looks to the internet for basically anything, the 50-plus generation is much less so. When they first started to date, the option of computer mediated relationships was nonexistent. It therefore makes sense that they are much less likely to look for love in less traditional ways like internet dating. Needs vs Wants theory is therefore generally applicable to the concept of internet dating. Moreover it is applied in the recommendations offered and served as a starting point for the online survey.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Needs vs Wants theory serve as a justification for why people resort to internet dating in the first place. Moreover its basic premise reoccurs within the recommendations in chapter 11.

4.4.4 Conclusions consumer behaviour theory

Consumer behavior theory is at the heart of any marketing research. There are numerous theories available that intend to explain consumer needs, motivations, influencers, values, beliefs and attitudes. Important factors that influence consumer behavior can be of a cultural, social, personal or psychological nature. The most basic theory that attempts to explain consumer motivation, is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory proposes that affection and sexual intimacy are basic human needs which people will seek to gratify. Society has taught consumers ways to gratify these needs by means of wants. Another possible influence on consumer behaviour, as implied by socioemotional selectivity theory, can be perception of time. Elderly people generally have a more limited time horizon, which influences their consumer decision. However, marketers can attempt to artificially expand or shorten time horizons to achieve their goals. Consumer behavior research has many important implications for marketers. By conducting consumer research, products and brands can be created and improved.

4.5 Marketing communication theories

The following sections will be a compilation of the most important and relevant marketing and advertising theories for this research project. The theories included intend to outline the best ways to reach consumers by designing the perfect message, selecting communication objectives and identifying a category and brand attitude strategy.

4.5.1 Steps in Developing Effective Marketing Communication

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) have created an action plan, which step by step describes the process of creating effective communication. This theory is especially useful for the purpose of this study and provides a solid starting point for answering the proposed policy question. The steps of the action plan will serve as a framework for providing recommendations in chapter 11.

The questions of the questionnaire have originated largely from the steps included in this action plan, and in addition it has given direction to desk research. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the steps for effective marketing communication.



Figure 1. Steps in developing effective marketing communication. Adapted from: Kotler & Armstrong (2010)

The very first step in the development of effective communication, is to identify the target audience. This group will have a great impact on decisions concerning the contents of the message. Within this research, the target audience has already been defined as far as age is concerned. However, there are more characteristics that need to be identified if a communication expert is to effectively target and reach the desired audience (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Are they current or potential users? What is their attitude towards internet dating? The online survey used for the purpose of this study has attempted to give answers to these questions, the results of which can be seen in chapter 6.

The next step is to make a decision about the sought response. It is important to be aware of the position in which the target audience finds itself and to what stage it needs to be moved. Kotler & Armstrong (2010) identify six buyer readiness stages that buyers pass through on their way towards making a purchase, which include awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase and is also known as the DAGMAR or Think-Feel-Do model. This model presumes that consumers approach the moment of purchasing or trying a product in a series of responses (Solomon, 2013). First, they think about a product rationally, then they move to an emotional response and have feelings about it and form an opinion, next they behave towards a product and try it out. Ehrenberg (1992) criticizes the DAGMAR model by saying that there is “no evidence that consumer experiences a strong desire or conviction before they purchase a product or a service.” Jones (1991) and Ehrenberg have presented an alternative theory, called the ATR model which stands for awareness, trial and reinforcement. Further criticism states that marketing communications is almost never directed to the so-called virgin non-users as is implied in the DAGMAR model, but rather to consumers with previous experience of a variety of brands (Ehrenberg, Hammond, & Goodhardt, 1992). However, this study focuses on communicating a product to a possibly unaware or hesitant audience. This makes the DAGMAR more relevant to this particular research study (de Pelsmacker, Geuens, & van den Bergh, 2007).

Step three in the process of effective communication, is designing the message itself. One classic approach is the AIDA-model, which proposes the desirable qualities of a message as getting attention, holding interest, arousing desire and obtaining action. Desired response goes

hand in hand with the appeal of the message. Three types of appeals that can be identified are rational, emotional and moral (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). At first glance, internet dating seems like a service that requires a mostly emotional approach, since love is a matter of the heart. However, rationale may play a big role when deciding to start with internet dating. Am I too old? Is it safe? Is it easy to use? These are all rational questions that may play a part in the decision making process of the 50-plus when selecting an online dating website. An online survey has attempted to reveal these appeals, the results of which can be seen in chapter 6.

Message structure is another point that communication experts have to decide on. There are three kind of message structures, but the most relevant one for this research is whether to choose for presenting a one-sided argument or a two-sided argument. The latter is particularly appropriate when audiences are highly educated or likely to hear opposing claims, which, in the case of internet dating is rather feasible (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Please refer to chapter 6 for the results of the online survey that was applied to provide an answer to these issues.

The fourth step is to decide on media choice. Communication channels can broadly be divided into two categories – personal and nonpersonal. Personal channels can include face-to-face contact, email contact and chat-contact. Nonpersonal media include print media, broadcast media, display media and online media, as well as events (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). With regard to this research, it is important to determine the kind of media channels that aging consumers are using. Desk research, in combination with an online survey, has produced facts about media choice of the the 50-plus. Please refer to chapter 5 and chapter 6 respectively, for the full scope of these answers.

Selecting the message source is the last step that will be discussed in this paper. How the audience views the communicator can have a tremendous impact on the effectiveness of the message. Highly credible sources are more likely to be persuasive and may also seem more trustworthy. Literature research has brought forth facts about what kind of persons the aging consumer regards as preferable, the specifics of which can be found in chapter 5.

4.5.2 Communication Objectives

Rossiter and Percy have identified four communication effects, from which Percy and Elliott have derived four potential communication objectives (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). The following section will give an explanation of each of these objectives and elaborate on which of them are relevant for this study and why. Each of these objectives have been researched either by means of desk research or survey questions and they have aided in arriving at an answer to SQ1 and SQ2.

Category need

The first objective, category need, is associated with the feeling of the target audience that they would like a certain product or service to satisfy a specific need (Percy & Elliott, 2009). Not everyone in the target audience realizes by themselves that they need a certain product, and the definition of 'need' is relative. From this it follows that it is possible to establish category need situationally; an advertiser can make the audience believe that they need a specific product or brand to satisfy a need. However, it has to be noted that category need applies to all brands within that category, so in this case to dating websites in general. In order to reach specific brand awareness, so to make the target audience realize that they need a specific 50-plus dating website aimed at them, the next three levels of communication objectives have to be completed.

Percy and Elliott (2009) propose various situations in which category need would become a communication objective. The most relevant situation for this particular study, is probably when it necessary to remind a consumer of an underlying or forgotten need. Reminding and selling category need are separate goals. The latter becomes a communication objective when the target audience is made up of people who have no experience with the category. In this case, selling category benefits in addition to brand benefits, is fundamental.

Brand awareness and brand attitude

Brand awareness refers to the audience's ability to identify a brand within a category, either by recognizing the brand passively, or recalling the brand actively. It refers to the level of understanding a potential consumer has about how they like a certain product and how it could satisfy their wishes and needs. Percy and Elliott propose that brand awareness and brand attitude are always a communication objectives. However, for this particular case I argue that the necessity and importance of each of these communication objectives is subjective to the position of the target audience and whether the main necessity is to sell them on the category or also on the brand. Since it is likely that for some consumers online dating does not even occur as an option for gratifying the need for affection, category awareness may be enough. Brand attitude is very important because of the need to establish a positive attitude in the mind of consumers. Especially when the audience is undecided or a certain stigma is at hand, as is relevant to the subject of internet dating, it is crucial to build positive attitude or change current attitude, as section 4.2.3 has elaborated on.

Brand purchase intention

This is when the consumer thinks to him or herself that they would like to try a specific brand or a more general category. The goal of communication here is to generate curiosity to try or definite intention to buy. The first applies to low-involvement product decisions, while the latter applies to high-involvement product decisions, terms which will be thoroughly discussed in the next section.

4.5.3 Brand Attitude Strategy

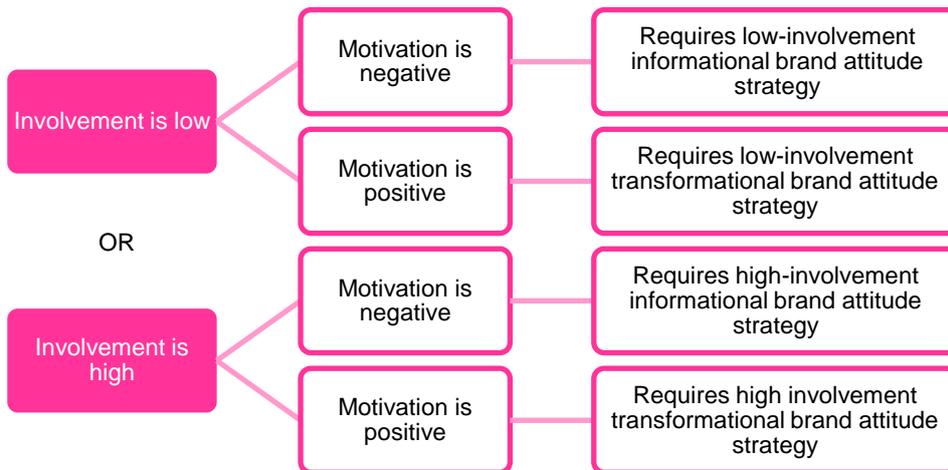


Figure 2: Brand attitude strategies. Adapted from: Percy & Elliott (2009)

The brand attitude strategy model displayed in Figure 2 is used to determine the kind of communication strategy required depending on the level of involvement of the purchase. Low-involvement purchases include those where very little risk is involved. On the other hand, high-involvement purchases are those purchases characterized by a high perceived risk of buying, which can either be accredited to high costs or psychological reasons. Recommendations will be given in chapter 10 based on this strategy.

Following the brand attitude strategy model, a combination of two factors determine the appropriate communication strategy. First is whether the 50-plus target audience regards becoming a member of an online dating as a high-involvement or low-involvement 'purchase.' Second is whether their motivation or reason for using an internet dating service is positive or negative. Examples of positive motivations are curiosity and looking for fun, and examples of negative motivations may include divorce or loneliness. Since internet dating for most people is quite a big step and there are personal and emotional factors involved, internet dating can be considered a high involvement activity. However, outcomes from the quantitative and qualitative research methods of this study will have to prove whether this assumption is correct. Positive motives require a transformational brand attitude strategy, since there is a need to change or transform a mood or feeling. Negative motives on the other hand call for an informational brand attitude strategy (Percy & Elliott, 2009).

4.5.4 Changing attitudes

Attitudes towards a certain product or brand can be changed by reshaping negative attitudes with the help of marketing communications. This can then in turn lead to a change in purchase behaviour. The aforementioned goal can be achieved by changing or highlighting one or more

aspects of the product, including the core product and its description, misunderstandings about the product, attribute priorities, perception and brand associations. The quantitative research part of this paper has shed a light specifically on what are regarded as being the most important aspects of internet dating websites, as well as audience perception and brand associations. Changing attitudes theory closely relates to the heightened appreciation model as discussed in section 4.2.1. Within the recommendations in chapter 11, this theory will be applied as advice is given on how attitudes can and should be changed.

4.5.5 Emotionally effective communication

Dan Hill (2010) makes multiple claims about what constitutes effective advertising through the use of emotion. Whereas Hill specifically makes use of the word 'advertising', for the purpose of this study his theories will be regarded as being relevant for a broader spectrum of communication efforts.. Hill's theories are specifically relevant for this research because emotion is an influential factor in online dating. The next paragraphs will discuss three relevant claims made by Hill and will include a grid as proposed by Percy and Elliott (2009), linking various emotions to attitude strategy. Theory about emotionally effective communication has given direction to desk research and has shaped survey questions around discovering values, beliefs and attitudes of the target audience. As such it can be implemented to provide an answer to SQ1 (main beliefs and values) and SQ2 (associations and position towards internet dating). Moreover, these theories will be applied in providing advice and recommendations on how use of emotion can be effective in targeting and reaching the 50-plus audience.

Research has shown that "reward and pleasure are always better motivators than force and fear of punishment." Therefore, Dan Hill (2010) argues, communication should always sell hope, and the promise of happiness and that communication experts should attempt to let their advertising "mirror the values, beliefs and attitudes of the target audience."

The most effective advertising starts with emotion and promotes desirability, but is always supported by utility. People will make a decision emotionally, but they will most always stop to think and justify the purchase to themselves on a rational level.

Informational Brand Attitude Strategy	
Negative motive	Emotional Sequence
Problem Solution	Mild Anxiety → Relief
Problem Avoidance	Fear → Relaxation
Incomplete satisfaction	Disappointment → Hope
Transformational Brand Attitude Strategy	
Positive Motive	Emotional Sequence
Sensory Gratification	Dull (neutral) → Joy
Social Approval	Apprehension → Flattered Ashamed → Proud

Table 3. Relationships linking emotion to motivation in advertising. Adapted from Percy & Elliott (2009)

Table 3 above, applied to advertising, shows that advertising should draw out emotions “that will not only encourage a positive affective response to the message, but also be consistent with the emotions that are associated with the underlying purchase motivation.”

If the main objective for the mature audience is to start online dating because they are lonely, this could be translated into ‘incomplete satisfaction’: they lead a fine life but they miss companionship. Consequently, these individuals feel disappointment and are looking for something more. They want to feel hope, perhaps for a brighter future, and this is exactly what should be communicated.

Similarly, when a positive motivation is at play, for instance looking for fun, ‘sensory gratification’ can be recognized as the underlying motive. Individuals may then go through an emotional sequence starting with a dull, neutral state of mind, which can then be transformed by communication into a more joyous emotion.

4.5.6 Conclusions marketing communication theory

Within this section, 5 necessary steps for developing effective marketing communication were identified. The direction in which to go for each of these steps, can be determined by consumer and market research. Step 2 is to develop communication objectives, which can be category need, brand awareness and brand attitude, and brand purchase intention. The necessary kind of brand attitude strategy is dependent on motivation and level of involvement. Attitudes brought forward by consumer research can be altered by changing or highlighting specific aspects of the product. Since a fair degree of emotion is at hand with internet dating, emotionally effective communication can be an effective tool.

CHAPTER 5 – RESULTS DESK RESEARCH

Before even considering targeting the 50-plus market, it is important to understand why this target audience should be approached as a separate group. What characterizes this audience? What media do they use? Where can they be reached? How should they be communicated with? These are all questions relevant to revealing the identity of the aging consumer for marketing purposes. The following chapter proposes the results of desk research done on the characteristics of the 50-plus. The topics discussed below originate from the marketing communication theories and consumer behavior theories as discussed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 4.

5.1 50-plus target audience characteristics

5.1.1 Physical influences

One thing that is almost certain to accompany aging, are physical and cognitive impairments³. Even though the aging consumer does not like to be reminded of his or her age, and would rather look at the positive aspects of aging as opposed to the negative, it would be incorrect to ignore the facts of getting older. Decrease in vision, hearing, motor performance and speed of processing are all elements that are of influence when communicating with older consumers, because they influence the way these consumer interpret communication efforts (Drolet, Lau-Gesk, Williams, & Jeong, 2010).

5.1.2 The identity of the 50-plus; main beliefs and values

As people grow older, their opinions may change and priorities may shift in one direction or another. As mentioned before, it would be incorrect to regard the entire population of 50 years and older as one group, yet research has shown that there are certain beliefs and values that are characteristic for this matured audience in general.

The 50-plus audience is a very heterogeneous group on many regards, but is similar in a way that they are generally with capital and are eager consumers (Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2011; Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012). The following section will outline some of the most important aspects of the 50-plus market taking in mind the purpose of this study.

On average, the aging consumer feels good and is active not only in the field of consumption but on a more general level as well. A majority of 80 percent says they have a positive outlook on life and that they enjoy it. The same percentage attaches high value to 'being together' (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2013). Their attitude is predominantly positive and many any of them believe in a 'seize the day' mentality and choose to realize their wishes now instead of waiting and dreaming (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007). Retirement is a factor that plays a role in

³ The impairments mentioned in this section mainly apply to the older ranges of the target audience.

determining this positive outlook. Research has shown that the 50-plus feel up to 10 years younger right after they have had their last day of work (CBS, 2010; Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012).

When it comes to defining the 50-plus audience, more so than with other audiences, a distinction has to be made between chronological age – the number of years a person has actually lived – and perceived age – how old a person really feels. Perceived age is measured by researches on multiple dimensions. “Feel-age” and “look-age” are two of these, the first one dealing with how old a person feels and the latter with how old a person looks. As people get older, they begin and continue to feel younger in relation to their actual age. In fact, the majority of this group has a feel-age that is lower than their chronological age (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2013). For this reason, they do not like to be reminded of their age, especially in advertising and marketing communication (Keehnen, 2008).

About half of all people in the age of 50 to 70, are still employed (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007). The 50-plus spend more time on free-time and on media consumption. The details of media consumption by the 50-plus audience will be discussed in section 5.1.2.

As mentioned before, people over 50 generally feel good. However, like any other individual, they too have idea about how their lives could be better. Figure 3 below displays the elements that the aging consumer would like to see a change in, in order to increase their happiness. As can be seen from the graph, the biggest percentage for each group would wish to change something about their relationship or relationship status. This desire is even more present in the older generations, especially for individuals that are unemployed and do not longer have any children living at home (empty nesters).

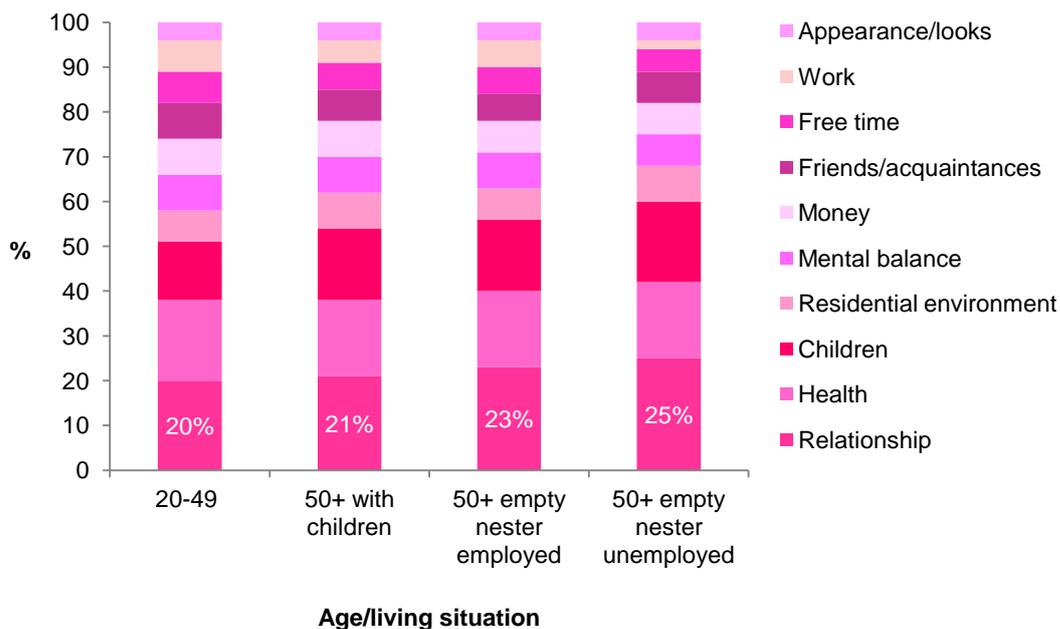


Figure 3. Elements of happiness. Adapted from: (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012)

All age groups state that having a relationship contributes to being content with life, although having a relationship is regarded as more important by the 50-plus in comparison to the population aged 20 to 49. When asked about their dreams, they also mention 'finding a nice partner' (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007). One third of single 50-plus say that their family and friends expect them to stay alone after a divorce or decease of a partner. 40 percent indicates that they do not dare to discuss the topic of starting a new relationship with their friends and relatives.

On many regards, the 50-plus audience feels that younger generations are targeted much more than their own. An example of this is new inventions, of which almost 40 percent of the 50-plus audiences wishes for these to be more tailored to their age group as opposed to the youth. The same goes for advertising, which will be discussed in more depth in section 5.1.6.

5.1.3 Leisure time and activities

With older age and especially with retirement, comes an increased interest and change in leisure time activities.

The top 3 of places for going out is composed of restaurants (46%), cafés (16%) and concerts (15%). Although this is more or less similar to what would be expected of younger adults, a difference can be seen when looking at daytrip activities. The most popular daytrip amidst this audience is going "into the wild" (56%) – or in different words, going on walk through nature. Visiting a city or town is also very popular (49%), followed by visiting a market or fair (39%) (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2013).

5.1.4 Media usage

At an average of 22 hours, the Dutch aging population are big media consumers. This number is approximately 3 hours higher than a person in their thirties and increases further with age (Overbeek, 2011). This increased media consumption can be attributed the fact that on average, the 50-plus work less than younger generations. This leaves them with more time to spend on recreational activities, but above all on media (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012). The following paragraph will discuss how and when the silver consumer makes use of media channels in the categories print, radio, television, internet, smart phones/tablets and social media.

Print

A majority of 93 percent of all aging consumers reads a newspaper. More than one third of the elderly population prefers reading a regional newspaper, which make these the most popular news medium amongst the target audience. Amongst the national newspapers, Telegraaf, Volkskrant and Algemeen Dagblad are on top of the list. Magazines are also a popular medium: 72 percent of them read at least one per week. The most popular magazine by far is Kampioen, which is read by almost 43 percent of people over fifty. Popular women's magazines include

Libelle, Margriet and Zin. Elsevier and HP/De Tijd are popular magazines amongst both men and women. The most popular popular tabloid amidst the 50-plus, is Privé (Dülker & Overbeek, 2011; Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012; mediaonderzoek.nl, 2008). Table 4 shows percentages of most read magazines as taken from research done by Familie Kenniscentrum (2012).

Magazine	Reach
Kampioen	42,8%
Libelle	24,1%
TV guides (Avrobode/Televizier/KRO Magazine/NCRV-gids)	20,3%
Margriet	17,6%
Plus Magazine	15,4%
Privé	25,1%
Vrouw	13,6%
Story	12,9%
Veronica Magazine	12,1%

Table 4. Most read magazines 50-plus audience. Adapted from: (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012)

In the age group 60 to 64, more than a third occasionally reads a daily magazine on the computer. For the age group 65 and up, this percentage is considerably lower, at approximately 20 percent (Rapportage 2013 Media Standaard Survey (MSS), 2014).

Radio

Almost the entire 50-plus audience, meaning 95 percent, listens to the radio. The amount of hours of radio listening is almost equally distributed amongst people aged 35 and up, but is significantly lower amidst younger audiences. Within the 50 to 64 audience, 37 percent are heavy radio listeners which only differs slightly from the 34 percent of heavy users in the 65-plus group. (mediaonderzoek.nl, 2014). A heavy user is characterized as a person who listens to the radio at least three hours a day. With at least half of the 50-plus audience listening, Radio 2 is the most popular radio station. Radio 1 and Qmusic are next on the list but are significantly less popular, with percentages of respectively 10 and 6,5. Almost 6 percent of all aging consumers prefer to listen to regional radio stations and these are therefore, as a group, the fourth most popular radio stations. Most of them are loyal listeners; the majority almost always listens to the same radio station (Seniorennet.nl, 2007).

Television

Looking at television consumption, many aging consumers are heavy users as well. However, the difference with younger generations in this case is considerably larger. According to statistics by the Media Standard Survey research (2014), 42,5 percent of the Dutch population ages 50 to 64 are heavy television watchers. For the population aged 65 and up, this number stands at 56,6 percent, which is very high compared to all of the younger generations.

Television programmes come and go, so drawing conclusions on preference for specific programmes would be a waste of time and effort. Genres on the other hand, are a much more consistent factor and often remain throughout a much larger period of time. The most popular genres amongst this audience are news programmes, current affairs programmes, consumer programmes, talkshows and quizzes. The popularity of music programmes and current affairs programmes increases with age. Dutch television channels Nederland 1, RTL 4, Nederland 2, SBS 6 and Nederland 3 are, respectively, the most popular TV channels amongst audiences of 50 and older. The other Dutch channels are considerably less popular (Sikkel & van der Groot, 2010).

Internet

In 2013, 92,1 percent of people between 50 and 64 were online. In the same year, 61.2 percent of all people in the age of 65+ were using the internet. For the older population, this number was only 57,9 percent in 2012, which is an increase of 5,5 percent, the biggest of all age groups . Since internet usage is almost at a hundred percent for each of the other groups, not much growth is possible here. However, there is much more potential for expansion in the older generations and as can be concluded from previously mentioned statistics, steady growth is already at hand. Please refer to Table 5 on the next page for percentages of internet usage per age group per medium.

The most popular activities amongst the 50-plus are e-mailing, online banking, reading newsletters, looking up information and reading the news. Online banking and reading newsletters are particularly popular activities in the ages 50 to 64, in comparison to younger generations (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2012). Between 2005 and 2013, the percentage of online shoppers aged 65 to 75 has increased from 7 percent to 32 percent (Akkermans, 2013).

Smart phones/tablets

Even though smart phones and tablets are not a form of media by themselves, they do present as a very interesting medium to explore since a lot of communication efforts flow through these devices nowadays. Moreover, most dating sites have been adding apps to their service repertoire over the past few years and by finding out information about smart phone and tablet usage of the aging consumer, it can be discovered whether these services are valuable for targeting them as well.

A large share of the 50-plus have access to the internet not only via a personal computer or laptop, but also via tablets and smart phones. In 2013, 39 percent was the owner of a tablet and 32 percent made use of tablet (Bindinc Kenniscentrum, 2013). Table 5 on the next page shows the percentage of internet users per medium and age group. It is clear that especially in the older generations, mobile devices like tablets and smart phones are not nearly as popular as in younger age groups. Since these devices have not been around for that many years, low usage percentage may be the cause of slow adaptation, rather than for instance unwillingness or

access problems (Familie Kenniscentrum, 2013). Despite the fact that the aging consumer is still behind on smart phones, looking at figures mentioned previously for internet usage, it is likely that these figures will increase over the coming years as well.

Platform	Age 35-49	Age 50-64	Age 65+
PC	67%	64%	39%
Laptop	74%	62%	35%
Tablet	46%	33%	14%
Smartphone	58%	33%	7%

Table 5. Internet usage per medium and age group. Adapted from: (Rapportage 2013 Media Standaard Survey (MSS), 2014)

When it comes to usage of apps on the smart phone, the aging consumer seems quite familiar. Half of them use Facebook, a third is on Whatsapp and 20 percent plays Wordfeud (Marketing Tribune, 2014).

Social media

Social media usage amongst the 50-plus has drastically increased over the past years; in 2010, social networking usage amongst American internet users of 50+ has nearly doubled from 22 percent to 42 percent. Of users 65 years and older, 26 percent was using social networking platforms in 2010 (Madden, 2010). Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are leading in popularity and they are mostly used to keep in touch with family. Data published by comScore (2013) reveals interesting and surprising facts about the unique visitor count of these social media websites. According to these statistics, with 23,6 percent, the largest share of visitors on Facebook is older than 55. On both Twitter and LinkedIn, people aged 45 to 54 made up the majority of visitors. The latter fact does not necessarily cover the target audience of this study, but nevertheless suggests that these social media platforms are indeed very popular amongst older audiences.

5.1.5 Buying behaviour

The 50-plus target market is different in their purchasing behaviour than younger age groups. This group of consumers is less impulsive and generally more brand-loyal than 20 to 49 year olds. They are more likely to choose a brand that they feel good about, based on previous experience (Drolet, Lau-Gesk, Williams, & Jeong, 2010). Moreover, comfort is an important factor. This is reflected in the fact that they highly value service and personal attention (Keehnen, 2008). When purchasing products, the 50-plus have a high appreciation of authenticity, more so than the younger generations (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007).

Within this study, internet dating is compared to shopping online. As with any purchase, internet dating requires the consumer to go online and transfer money without any direct contact. A

huge majority (92%) of the Dutch 45-plus market occasionally buys products online, which mainly include holidays, magazines and sporting gear. The remaining 8 percent of this sample never buys products via the internet. Their main and most important reasons for this are a lack of trust in web shops and perceiving payment through the internet as being unsafe. As mentioned previously, the 50-plus audience especially values service and personal attention. Coherently, one third of the mature online shoppers indicates that a web shop without proper customer service is their biggest irritation. This audience values security and likes to know who to approach when something goes wrong (Aué, 2013). Most online shoppers are directed to a new internet shop via a search engine and 35 percent is influenced by word-of-mouth advertising, a comparison website or because they have heard of it in the media. As a matter of fact, online shoppers in the age category 55 to 70 are more keen on buying at a web shop that they frequently see in the media. Half of all 50-plus shoppers check for the presence of a quality label on the web shop, which may thus also have an impact on buying behaviour. Examples of well known Dutch quality labels are Thuiswinkel Keurmerk and Thuiswinkel Waarborg. Since December 2013, a special quality label exists for internet dating websites. In cooperation with the nine biggest dating sites, the Dutch consumer's union has launched Keurmerk Veilig Daten which, loosely translated, means 'quality label for safe internet dating' (Düren, 2013). This quality label comprehends important agreements on safety, trustworthiness, transparency and customer friendliness. When it comes to payment methods, a large majority of online shoppers, approximately 70 percent, has a preference for paying through iDeal (Bindinc Kenniscentrum, 2013).

5.1.6 Advertising to the 50-plus

Research has been conducted on several aspects of advertising and marketing to the 50-plus target audience in general. The following paragraphs will discuss findings from these studies that are relevant for this thesis. From the wishes and values expressed by participants in this market research, conclusion can be drawn not only on what kind of advertising they prefer, but also on a more general level.

Research done by the 50+ Expertisecentrum (2006) shows that 20 percent of the 50-plus market agrees that there should be advertisements aimed specifically at their age group. A bigger group of 30 percent thinks there are too many young people in advertisements, especially for products in which an older person would be much more appropriate. A good example of this is anti-aging crème being advertised by a young, smooth skinned woman.

When it comes to advertising, whether specifically for their audience or in general, the 50-plus audience has a number of wishes and values that stand out. First of all, they prefer advertising to be honest and realistic. The target group prefers to see real people with a real message, like one of them says "It has to be honest and not filled with pretty talk." Secondly, advertising should be recognizable and have certain degree of familiarity. Indeed recognisability and familiarity are relative concepts, since this perception differs from person to person. Regardless,

the underlying premise here is that the aging consumer again wants to see real people in real situations and environments to which they can easily relate (Keehnen, 2008). Another important value of advertising as indicated by the 50-plus audience, is that it needs to be understandable. Advertising should contain more information and more appealing text, making it better comprehensible.

When it comes to magazine advertisements, 34 percent of all 50-plus indicate that they prefer to be addressed politely⁴. More than half prefers to be addressed the same way in-store, which may indicate that the aging consumer attaches less value to communication style in print media than they do in real-life. Both of these numbers are somewhat higher for the 65-plus market in comparison to younger cohorts (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2006).

As was established earlier, the 50-plus do not like to be reminded of their age, especially since in many cases, they feel considerably younger than their actual chronological age. Consequently, they prefer advertising communications that stress the positive aspects of being mature, rather than the deterioration which inevitably comes with old age (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2006).

An article on Selling and Marketing to the 50+ (2010) states that word-of-mouth is frequently used as an advertising vehicle by the 50-plus audience and friends are considered trusted sources of information by more than 90 percent. In contrast, a study by Radius Global Marketing Research shows that the baby boom generation is much more dependent on advertising, while the younger generations are better influenced by word of mouth (Marketing Charts, 2014). However, this study also shows different outcomes for different product categories.

In their book dealing with marketing to the aging consumer, Stroud and Walker argue that the product is usually the primary and often the only thing that companies adapt when they consider older consumers. Although the product itself is indubitably an important aspect of the sales process, each of the other stages are equally important and have to be adapted to fit the older consumer. This research will look predominantly at the communication aspects, including consumer support communications which Stroud and Walker (2013) highlight as being paramount to consumer acquisition and retention.

⁴ Unlike English, the Dutch language distinguishes between two different forms of addressing people. A distinction is being made between the regular 'jou' and the polite 'U', the latter being more common in formal conversation, or when addressing superiors or elderly people.

Based on 50-plus market research, Stroud and Walker (2013) have identified a set of basic conditions for a company's communications to be age-friendly, an overview of which can be seen in Table 6. Some of the effects of aging that influence communication to the 50-plus have already been discussed in section 5.1.1, which reoccur in this table as well.

Type of communications	Conditions for a company's Communications to be age-friendly
Advertising creative Advertising media Direct mail Public relations Sales collateral Sponsorship	The aging consumer must be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and see it • Hear it • Feel included by the message • Understand the message • Perceive the benefits of the offer • Find it simple and quick to decode the brand proposition • Perceive the offer as having relevance to them • Easily understand how to respond to the message

Table 6. Basic conditions for a company's communications to be age-friendly. Adapted from Stroud & Walker (2013)

5.2 Conclusions literary research

Concluding what was previously discussed, it can be stated that the 50-plus audience is a considerably distinct group with distinct characteristics. They have a generally positive outlook on life and do not feel old at all. The 50-plus even start to feel younger as soon as retirement is at hand. Even though the audience feels younger and does not like to be reminded of their elderly age, apparent physical and cognitive effects of aging are of influence on consumer perception. If this audience could make a wish to change anything about their lives, the majority would make a change in the relationship department, which is information that ties back to the core topic of this graduation paper. Elderly age comes with an increase in leisure time, which they spent differently than younger generations. Another notable difference is media consumption. This age group consist of the biggest media users and especially internet usage is on the increase. Desk research has also shed a light on buying behavior that is characteristic for the 50-plus and has even revealed facts about marketing and advertising specifically to the 50-plus market. The outcome is that communications should be honest, truthful and no-nonsense. The maturing audience is experience in the field of shopping online and feels comfortable with online payment systems like iDeal.

CHAPTER 6 – RESULTS ONLINE SURVEY

As part of this study, quantitative research was carried out in the form of an online survey. The survey was filled in by a total of 203 respondents, which resulted in a total of 99 valid responses. Table 7 on the next page specifies these numbers. The focus of this questionnaire was relatively broad which, after careful consideration, results in some parts of this survey not being relevant for this particular study. Within the following section, only the most relevant and interesting outcomes of the questionnaire will be discussed. The survey was aimed both at online daters and potential online daters. To achieve this, extensive routing was used which first of all directed the respondents to different parts of the survey based on whether or not they had previous experience with internet dating. This routing will be visible in the results below. The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4, while the complete list of tables and figures with results has been included in Appendix 5.

6.1 Selection questions

The survey was distributed to a panel with people aged 50 to 75. The youngest respondent was 52 and the oldest respondent was 81. Since it was not possible to make further selections from this panel, two selection questions were asked which intended to eliminate those respondents that were not useful for the survey. Respondents that answered either 'In a relationship' or 'married' in question one and answered 'No' in question two, were automatically directed to the end of the survey and were not presented with the rest of the questions.⁵

What is your relationship status?

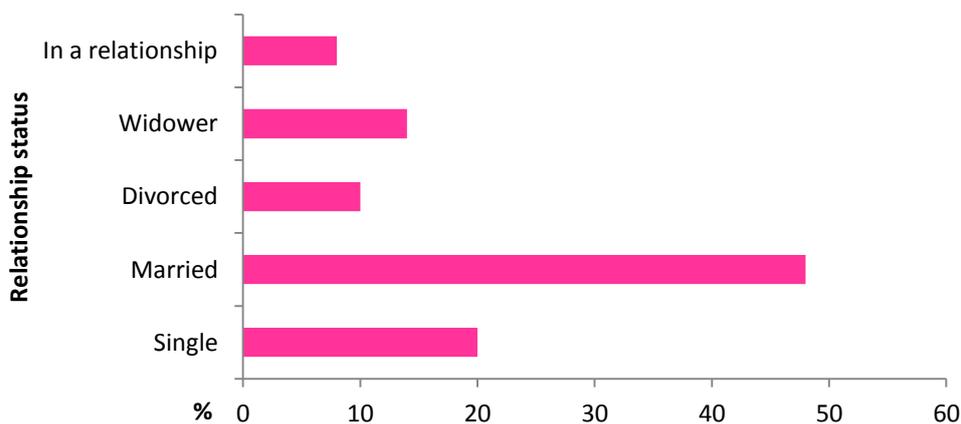


Figure 4. Relationship status. N = 203

Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years?

⁵ The main reason it was necessary to filter out these respondents beforehand, was because of the limited number of respondents possible in the survey program Qualtrics. The free version of Qualtrics only allows for 250 respondents, so it would have been a waste of allowed responses to include respondents that would be directed to the end of the survey anyways.

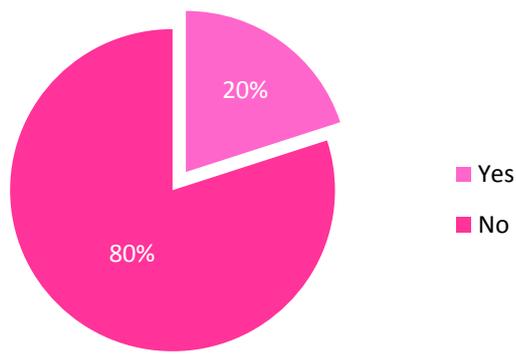


Figure 5. Dating site use yes/no. N = 203

Number of valid respondents

		Relationship status					Total
		Single	Married	Divorced	Widower	In a relationship	
Use of datingsite in the past 3 years	Yes	14	2	8	8	8	40
	No	27	95	12	20	9	163
	Total	41	97	20	28	17	203

Table 7. Number of valid respondents

As can be seen in Table 7 above, the total number of respondents to the survey is 203. Due to selection criteria, respondents that were married or in a relationship and had not tried online dating over the past 3 years, were automatically directed to the end of the survey and consequently did not fill in any of the remaining questions. The table shows that the number of these respondents is 104 (95 plus 9). This means that this survey has generated 99 valid responses.

6.2 Results – general questions

6.2.1 General characteristics

The average age of the sample is 64,85 which comes down to an average age of 65 and the survey was answered by 65 percent females and 35 percent males. More than half of this sample is retired, 18 percent is either full- or part-time employed and another 18 percent does not currently have a job.

6.2.2 Media usage

SQ2 asks about media usage of the 50-plus. Desk research had revealed most of the necessary facts about media usage, but two very interesting facts were not to be found in literature and were thus included in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked during which part of the day they use the internet most frequently for personal purposes. With 33 percent, the majority answered that they make use of the internet for personal purposes mostly during the evening. The same percentage indicates that their usage is equally distributed over the entire day. Another media question asked how often the sample made use of presented social media websites. The outcomes are quite conclusive, with Facebook being the most popular social media channel by far. YouTube is, especially on a monthly basis, considerably popular as well. Twitter and LinkedIn follow up these two. Newer platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are particularly unpopular amongst the 50-plus audience.

6.2.3 The 50-plus and dating

With the purpose of finding out about dating preferences in general, questions were asked about efforts for meeting new people and preferences for a first date. A majority of 69 percent of the sample indicated that they do not currently take any action to meet new people. When asked to envision their ideal first date, a large majority prefers to have a simple cup of coffee outside the house or a drink at a café. A dinner for two or trip to nature are also options that were listed multiple times, although less frequent than the previous options.

6.2.4 Online dating associations

This was an open question which intended to discover the terms internet dating is most commonly associated with. In order to be able to process the many results and draw conclusions from it, the responses have first been grouped together into a 'negative' or 'positive' category and the amount of words per category was then counted. The terms were then grouped together further where possible. Below, the answers to this question have been displayed in a word cloud, in visual representation of the amount of times a term was mentioned. Responses like 'no', 'n/a' or very vague responses have been excluded from the analysis.

As part of the analysis, the total number of negative and positive associations were also counted. These were almost equal and do as such not provide any conclusive information about whether associations are predominantly positive or negative.



Figure 6. Positive associations with internet dating



Figure 7. Negative associations with internet dating

6.2.5 Knowledge of dating websites

Respondents were asked to name a dating website from the top of their minds. A majority was able to do this, with 34 percent mentioning Lexa.nl and 19 percent mentioning Relatieplanet.nl. A percentage of 13 mentioned dating websites specifically aimed at the 50-plus demographic. Every other website was not mentioned by more than 7 percent of the sample. When presented with a list of dating websites, the majority of the respondents indicated to be familiar with Lexa.nl and Relatieplanet.nl, as well as Parship.nl. A number of 67 percent of the respondents was familiar with one of the two best known 50-plus niche websites in The Netherlands.

6.2.6 Attitudes

Respondents were presented with a number of statements about online dating and were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with those statements. These statements were based on assumptions following from the theoretical framework and desk research. The sample seems quite undecided on whether online dating is a suitable way to find a new partner. Of the respondents, 37 percent does not agree that online dating focuses too much on the younger generations. However, an almost equal percentage does agree with this statement. The third statement was inspired by the Pew Research study on internet dating in America (Smith & Duggan, 2013) and draws on the stigmatic beliefs that internet dating is only for desperate, sorry people. A large share of the sample disagrees although with 23 percent the stigma still seems to exist. In relation to the second statement, statement 4 asks respondents whether they believe online dating corresponds with their generation. The answer of the respondents is particularly uniform on this question, since a total of 62 percent does not agree with the statement and thus believes that online dating does indeed fit the current 50-plus generation.

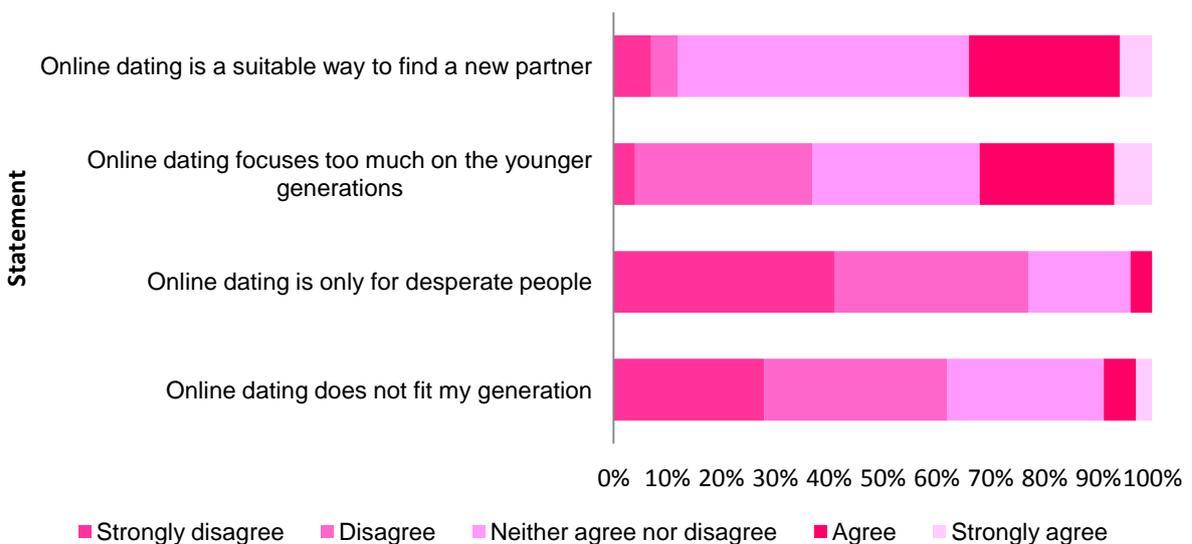


Figure 8. Answers to statements. (N = 88)

6.3 Results – Respondents that have experience with online dating

This section of the questionnaire was only presented to respondents that had indicated to have made use of a dating website over the past 3 years and was answered by a total of 35 people in the age of 50 to 75. The results below apply only to those respondents.

6.3.1 Dating site usage

Respondents were asked to identify those dating sites that they had used in the past three years. Websites e-Matching.nl and eDarling were not originally part of the answering options. However, these two dating sites were mentioned multiple times by a number of respondents and have therefore been included within the results in Figure 9.

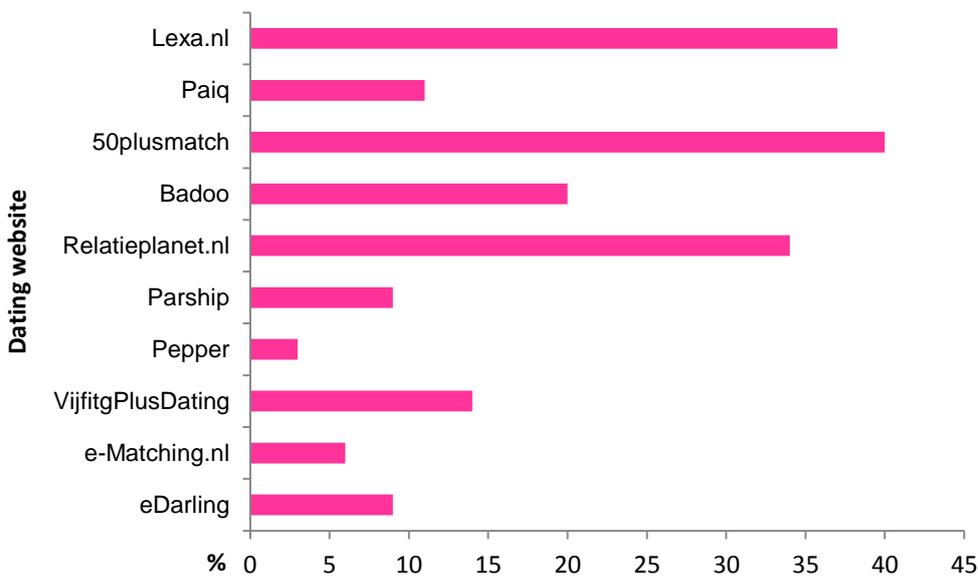


Figure 9. Dating websites used. Multiple answers possible. (N = 35)

6.3.2 Motivations for online dating

These respondents were asked what their most important reason was for starting with internet dating. The three reasons that stand out most are 'to start a new relationship', 'to get in contact with people, free of obligations' and 'out of curiosity.' A fair share of the respondents also indicates that they resorted to online dating because they felt lonely or because it is difficult for them to meet new people in their situation.

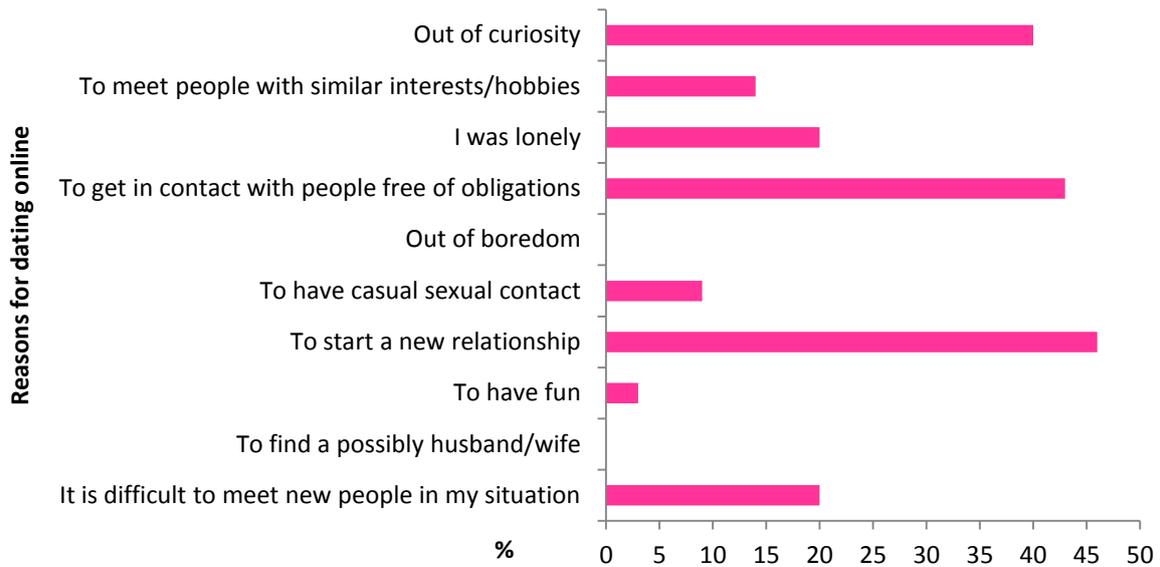


Figure 10. Motivations for internet dating. Multiple answers possible. (N = 35)

Another question was asked relating to stigma, as well as privacy concerns, which asked about who can know of respondents online dating activities. What stands out is, that amongst online daters, the majority is fairly open about their activities. 83 percent of the respondents will share their activities at least with friends, family and close friends and of this percentage, 40 percent shares it with everybody.

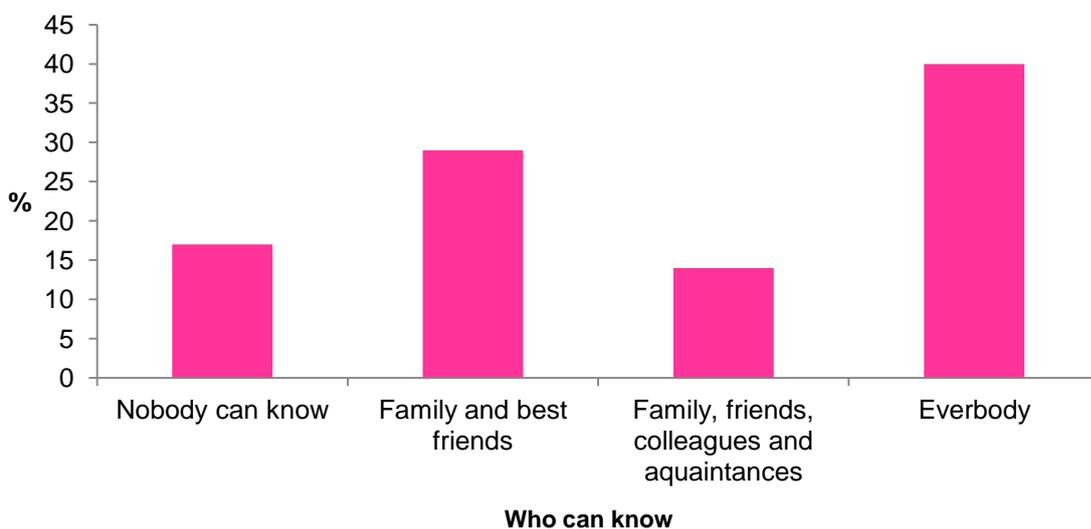


Figure 11. Sharing dating activities. (N = 35)

Respondents were presented with two statements, which can be seen in Figure 12 on the next page, and were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with these. A large share of the respondents answered that the threshold to start with online dating was not very high for them. When asked whether these respondents would recommend online dating to friends and family, a large share answered with 'yes.'

The threshold to start with online dating was very high for me

I would recommend online dating to friends and family

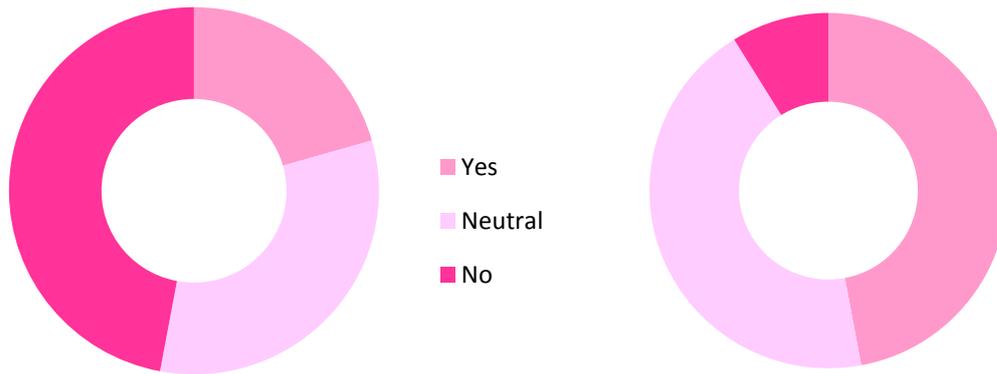


Figure 12. Threshold and recommending (N = 34)

6.3.3 Online dating preferences

Respondents were presented with three options of online dating websites with different, existing, member compositions. The majority of the 50-plus that are familiar with online dating would prefer to be a member of a dating website that consist only of members aged 50 and older.

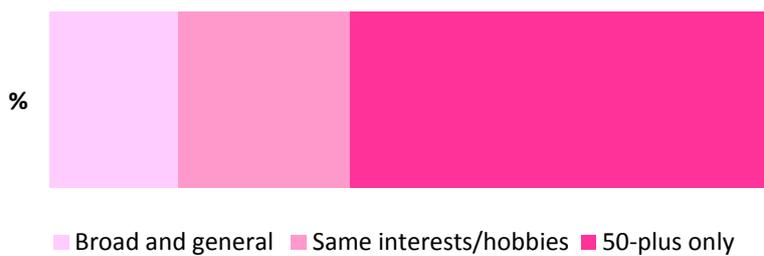


Figure 13. Type of dating website (N = 34)

Respondents were presented with a list of elements relating to a dating website and were asked to rate these elements on level of importance to them. The results can be seen below and as becomes clear, all elements are rated as being almost equally important. Therefore it is possible that these results are inconclusive.

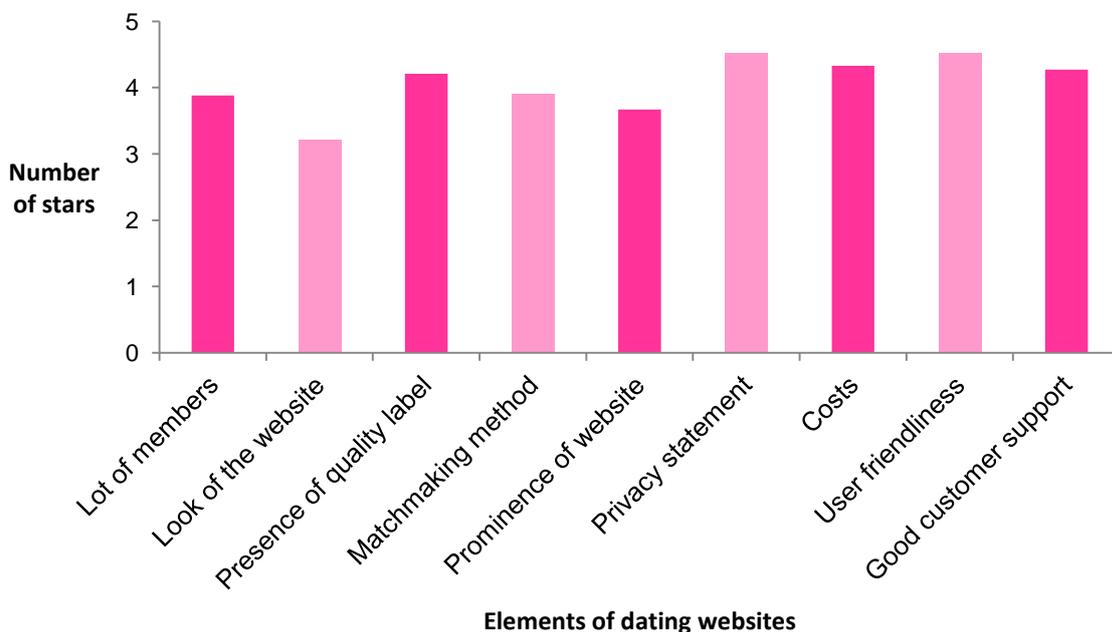


Figure 14. Dating site elements 1 (N = 34)

6.4 Results – Respondents that have no experience with online dating

This section of the questionnaire was only presented to respondents that had indicated to not have made use of a dating website over the past 3 years in question 2. A total of 163 respondents answered no, but due to the selection criteria, this section was filled in by a total of 53 respondents.

6.4.1 Reasons for not trying online dating

Respondents were asked whether, even though they had not yet tried internet dating, they had ever considered it. The percentages for yes and no are almost similar. When respondents were asked to indicate the main reason for this from a list of answering options, those that had answered 'yes', in most cases said that internet dating is

just not for them (36%). Another interesting answer that came forth in multiple cases was that they had not yet been able to find a suitable dating site for them (16%). A vast majority of people that answered with 'no', gave as a reason that they are not currently looking for a new relationship. This makes the question inconclusive, since targeting an audience that is not looking to gratify this need, is simply not relevant.

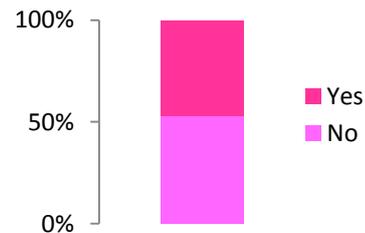


Figure 15. Considering internet dating (N = 53)

When presented with the statement “The threshold to start with online dating is very high for me” (Figure 16), 40 percent answers the question with ‘yes.’ An equal share answered ‘neutral’ and ‘no.’ However, the majority indeed agrees that the threshold for them to start with internet dating is very high.

The threshold to start with online dating is very high for me

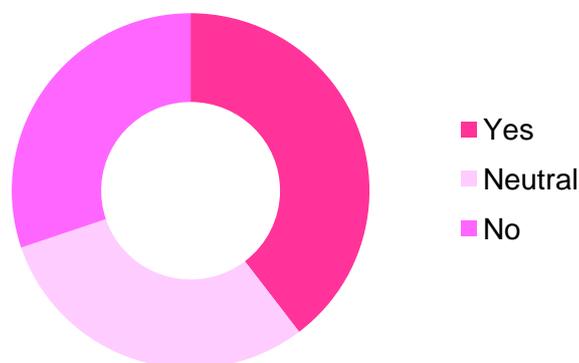


Figure 16. Threshold to start with internet dating 2. (N = 53)

Respondents were presented with four assumed reasons for having possible reservations with internet dating. The results to this question can be seen in Figure 17. Issues of privacy is one of the most determining factors in reservations with internet dating. Reputation and costs follow closely.

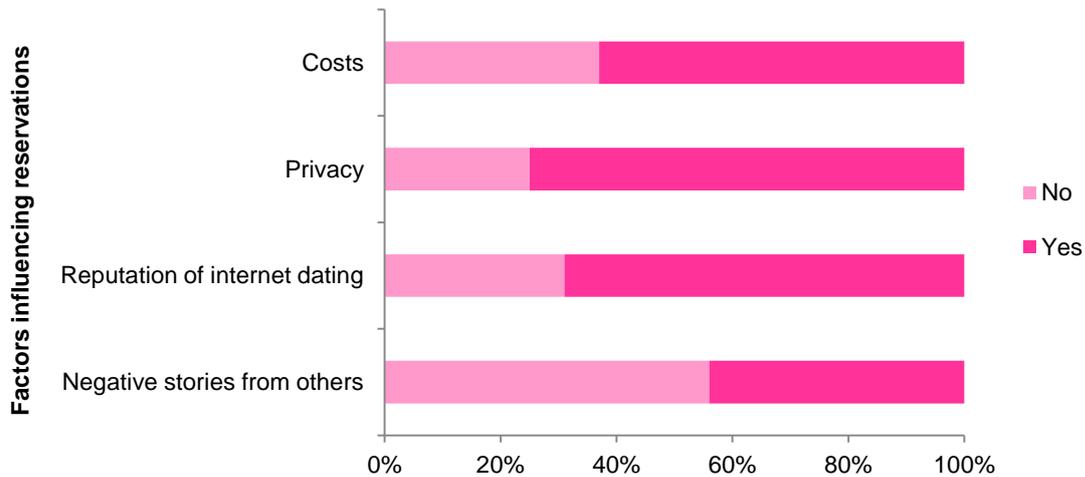


Figure 17. Factors influencing internet dating behavior. (N = 50)

6.4.2 Online dating preferences

Similar to the other branch, these respondents were asked to which factors could or would be of importance to them if they ever considered using an internet dating site. Whereas the elements customer service, costs, matchmaking technology and presence of quality are all rated almost equally important, more superficial factors such as how renowned a website is and the amount of members seem to be of notably less importance to these respondents.

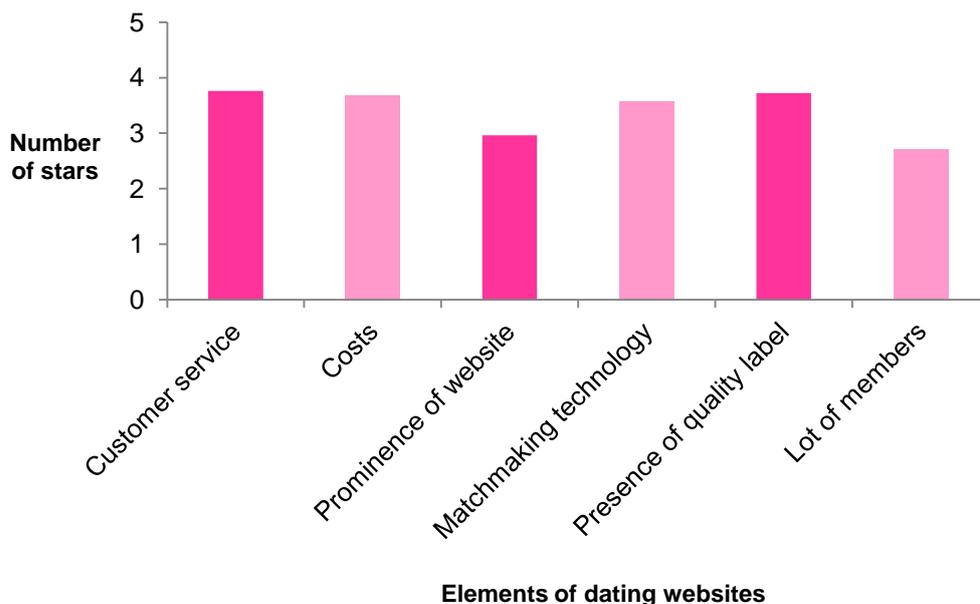


Figure 18. Dating site elements 2. (N = 50)

6.5 Cross tables

Figure 19 and 20 below display the results of the answers given to the statements question within the survey. Figure 19 shows the answers given by respondents that answered 'yes' to question 2 of the survey (Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years?) and Figure 20 shows the answers given by those who answered 'no' and were either single, divorced or widowed. By comparing these two figures, it is possible to identify differences, if there are any, between attitudes towards online dating of people who are familiar with it, and people who are not.

6.5.1 Answer to statements from respondents with experience

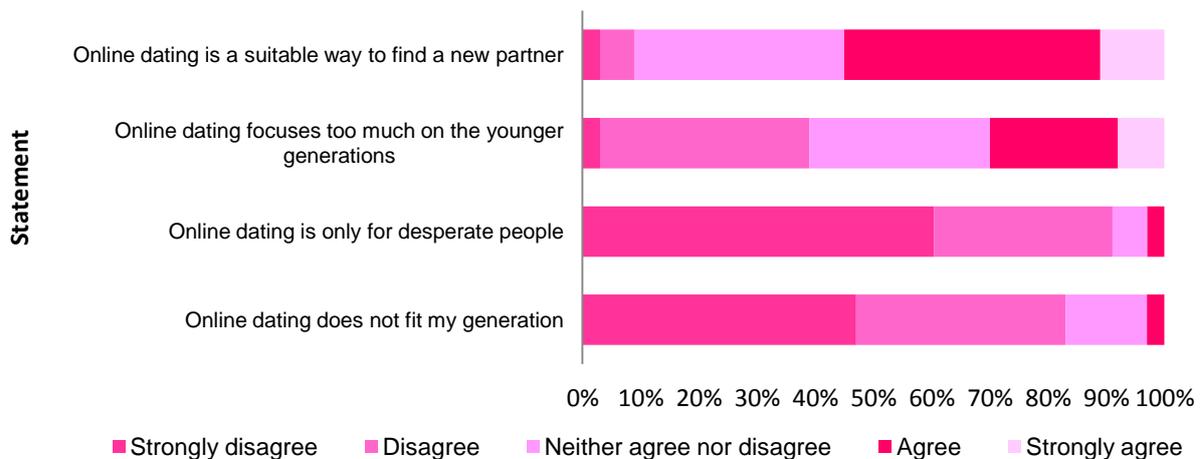


Figure 19. Cross-table: Answers to statements from respondents with experience

6.5.2 Answers to statements from respondents with no experience

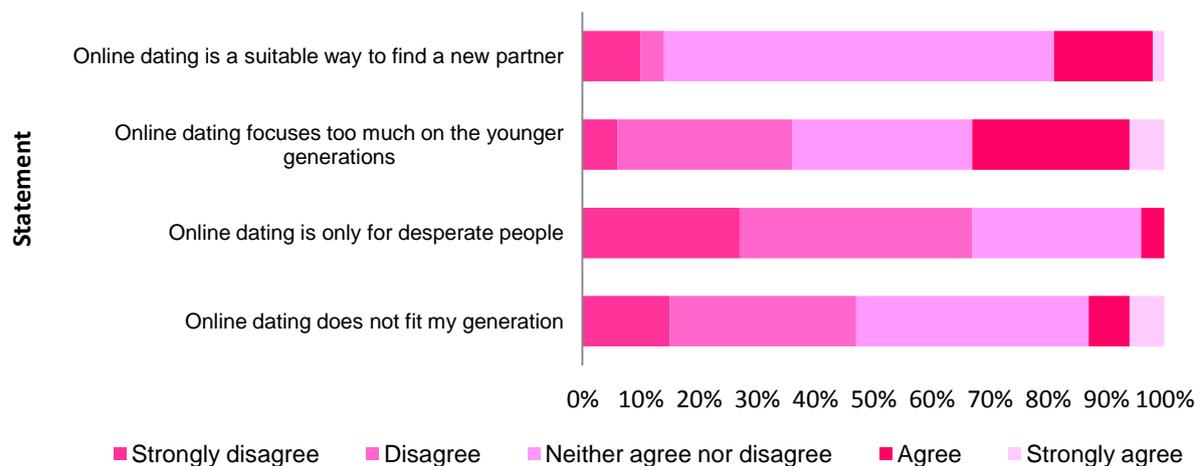


Figure 20. Cross-table: Answers to statements from respondents with no experience

Looking at the first statement, a large difference can be seen. 55 percent of the respondents familiar with internet dating think that it is indeed a suitable way to find a new partner. A percentage of 36 is undecided. However, for those who are unfamiliar, a big majority of 67 percent is undecided. Looking to the second statement, the two groups seem to feel almost the same. The familiars are very clear on how they feel about statement 3. More than 90 percent disagrees that online dating is only for the desperate, of which 61 percent disagrees strongly. As for those unfamiliar, they too mostly oppose this statement, although a noticeably larger percentage of 29 percent is not sure how they feel. Of those that have experience with internet dating, more than 80 percent disagrees with statement 4 and thus believes that online dating does indeed correspond with their generation. These numbers are slightly different for the other group, where 13 percent agrees that internet dating does not fit their generation. A large share of 40 percent is undecided, although a majority of 47 percent also disagrees with the notion that internet dating does not fit their generation.

6.6 Conclusions survey results

This survey was answered by a total of 99 respondents, specifically between the ages of 52 and 74, with one extreme of 81. Questions about media usage showed that most respondents used the internet mostly during the evening. Facebook and YouTube are the most popular social media channels amongst the 50-plus. A large majority of the respondents does not currently undertake any action to meet new people, but those that do go on dates prefer a simple cup of coffee or a walk through to nature. Their associations with internet dating are as much positive as negative. The negative association that comes forth most often is 'untrustworthy', while the most frequently mentioned positive association is 'exciting.' Knowledge of online dating websites among the respondents is largely reserved to websites lexa.nl, relatieplanet.nl and 50 plus niche sites. Of those respondents who have used an online dating site, the same websites are mentioned. In addition, a very large share has used 50plusmatch. A large share of the sample believes that internet dating is focused too much on the younger generation, and an even larger percentages thinks online dating does indeed correspond with the 50-plus generation. After these general questions, the survey was branched into two sections, one with people that had tried online dating and one with people who had not. The motivations for respondents to start with online dating are mostly of a positive nature. They are generally open about sharing their dating activities and would recommend it to friends and family. The majority of these respondents would prefer to use a dating site with a specific member base of only 50-plus members. Respondents that had not yet tried online dating, most of the time indicated that this was because they either think it is simply not for them, or because they have not yet been able to find a dating site to suit them. Privacy issues is a very important factor for them for feeling reservations with internet dating, but superficial factors like the number of members of the website and how renowned the website is are of notably less importance.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

The following chapter will draw conclusions based on the information and results of the theoretical framework and the results of the main research as were presented in the previous chapters. These conclusions intend to provide an answer to the each of the sub-questions as presented in chapter 1. After both sub-questions have been discussed, a brief conclusion to the research question will follow, purposely omitting any details that have already been mentioned in the answers to the sub-questions.

SQ1

What are the characteristics of the 50-plus audience?

Who are the 50-plus and what are their main beliefs and values?

One thing that has become clear from market research into consumer behavior of the 50-plus market, is that they are more than worth it to be considered as a separate and above all valuable target group. First of all, they make up one of the biggest age groups in The Netherlands. Secondly, they are generally wealthy. This combination makes them a particularly interesting market for product developers and marketers to pursue. The current generation of people aged 50 and over, mostly made up of baby boomers, have a lot of money to spend and they like spending it on themselves.

This audience has a positive outlook on life. They share a 'seize the day' mentality and choose to realize their wishes now instead of waiting and wishing. This fact supports claims made by socioemotional selectivity theory, which proposes that with age comes the perception of a limited time-horizon view. However, after retirement this time horizon appears to expand again, as the 50-plus say to feel up to 10 years younger immediately after their last day of work and they continue to feel younger in relation to their actual age as time progresses. Despite these figures, fact is that aging comes with a number of physical effects, which have an influence on the perception of this target audience.

Even though this audience generally happy about their lives, the first thing they would like to see a change in, is on relationship ground. Need for intimacy and affection is high up Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the wish to gratify this need, increases with age. A reason for this could be that this need is less satisfied in relation to other needs and that the wants to satisfy this need are less present. Moreover, children, who are on the same level of the triangle, are likely to have left the house in later ages which may account for a lack of gratification in this area.

Any of these values can be mirrored in advertising or other communication efforts in order to achieve emotionally effective communication.

How do they spend their free time?

About half of all people in the age of 50 to 70, are still employed. This results in an average amount of leisure time that is significantly higher than for younger generations. Their extensive amount of media consumption, which has important implications for marketing purposes, is a consequence of this extra time.

The 50-plus like to go to restaurants, cafés or concerts when they go out. As a daytip, they like to go on a walk through nature, visit a city or town, or a market or fair. Generally, they do not spend a lot of time on meeting new people, but when they do go on a date, a majority prefers a simple cup of coffee outside the house, a drink at a café, dinner, or again, a trip to nature.

What media do they use and how?

This information provides an answer to the fourth step of effective communication. Almost the entire target audience reads a newspaper, with Telegraaf, Volkskrant and Algemeen Dagblad being the most prominent ones, together with regional newspapers. Magazines too are a popular medium, with Kampioen leading. Radio is still a very prevailing medium amongst this target group as well, especially in relation to younger audiences, with radio station Radio 2 on top of the list. Most of them are very loyal listeners, which is in line with socioemotional selectivity theory stating that elderly people, who generally have a more limited time horizon view, are less likely to try out new things. Many aging consumers are heavy television watchers, which makes them one of the most interesting audiences to target with this medium. The public channels are most popular amongst this audience on which they mostly watch programs from which they can learn something, as opposed to entertainment programs.

Internet is on the rise amongst the 50-plus audience. The online survey has turned out that, of the sample consisting mainly of retired people (Appendix 5), a majority is on the internet during the evening. A large share has access to internet, and tablets and phones are steadily gaining ground, although these devices are not nearly as popular as with younger audiences, which may be ascribed to the fact that more than half of the 50-plus audience indicates that they sometimes have difficulty keeping up with new technological advancements. Social media platforms are increasing in popularity as well. Facebook and YouTube are by far the most accepted platforms. Twitter and LinkedIn are favoured as well, but newer platforms like Instagram and Pinterest appear wasted on the 50-plus. Smart phone applications are a familiar concept for the matured audience.

What is the attitude, opinion and behaviour of the 50-plus within the consumer marketplace?

The aging consumer is generally less impulsive and more brand-loyal. This again can be explained by socioemotional selectivity theory. Value, service and personal attention are valued highly by this audience. They are comfortable and familiar with online shopping, but most of them are more keen on buying at a web shop that they frequently see in the media, which may provide an explanation for outcomes of the questionnaire showing that websites Lexa.nl and Relatieplanet.nl, who are especially well represented in the media, are the most well known and also the most used dating sites amongst the ages of 50 and up. On web shops specifically, lack of proper customer service is their biggest irritation. Although survey results do not bring forth this element as being the most important, customer service does indeed appear as being highly valued and in addition this feature is also clearly present on the 50plusmatch website. The 50-plus audience is especially big on security and privacy. A larger share the online shoppers between 55 and 70 check for the presence of a quality label on the web shop, and survey outcomes confirm that this is indeed a very important element for the 50-plus on a dating site as well. Niche dating site 50plusmatch puts this in practise by clearly displaying the label on the homepage and emphasizing its existence.

Communications with the aging consumer should be honest and realistic and should show real people in relevant and real-life situations, as can be seen on the 50plusmatch homepage. Thus, the message source is credible if it is someone to whom the 50-plus can relate.

Although this audience is more dependent on advertising than younger generations, word-of-mouth is also a frequently seen advertising vehicle amongst them, which is supported by almost half of the online daters of the sample used for this research saying that they would recommend online dating to friends and family. Moreover, this notion is supported by the fact that 50plusmatch has become a relatively popular dating site without the use of advertising.

Summing it up, communications to the 50-plus should be:

- Specifically tailored to their age group
- Through suitable technologies
- Honest and realistic
- Recognizable
- Understandable
- Transparent
- Addressed appropriately
- Focussed on the positive aspects of aging
- Be clear about the benefits of the offer

SQ2

What are the attitudes, beliefs and values of the 50-plus with regard to online dating?

How familiar are the 50-plus with online dating

Only a small percentage of this group has ever tried a dating site, although a majority has read or heard about it (Appendix 5) and thus indicates that they know about the phenomenon 'internet dating.' The 50-plus are mostly familiar with Lexa.nl and Relatieplanet.nl as well as niche sites targeted at the 50-plus market.

What are their associations with online dating?

Associations with internet dating are as often positive as negative. Internet dating is seen as being exiting, fun and easy and according to the target audience it can result in friendships as well as relationships. It is also seen as something that is contemporary, and appropriate for older people just as much as for young people.

On the other hand, internet dating is also seen as untrustworthy, expensive, scary and time-consuming. These terms are characterized in the steps for effective marketing communication as 'opposing claims.'

What is their position towards online dating?

Earlier on in this research paper, mention was being made of a stigma surrounding internet dating. According to survey results, this stigma seems existent at least to some extent. Those that have tried internet dating have a mostly positive view towards it. The majority of the sample however had not tried internet dating and the prevailing attitude of those people was somewhat negative, but mostly undecided, and thus likely open for persuasion. This confirms the relevance of DAGMAR model for determining sought response.

What are their motivations for or against online dating?

Motivations for trying or not trying internet dating balance between being rational and emotional. Those who have positive motivations, try internet dating because they are curious, because they want to get in contact with people free of engagement or because they really want to start a new relationship. Sometimes this group resorts to internet dating for more negative motivations, like loneliness or because it is difficult for them to meet people in their situation.

Those that have no experience with internet dating, feel that it is just not for them or indicate that they have not yet been able to find a dating site that suits them. The reputation of internet dating is a factor that plays a role in reservations with trying it out, as are privacy concerns.

What product elements do they value?

The values that are expressed by the 50-plus with regard to internet dating, mirror the values that were expressed in the outcomes of desk research. Especially good customer service and the presence of a quality label stand out. Costs appear to be important to all those familiar and unfamiliar with internet dating as well. Since costs was also one of the most prominent negative associations mentioned before, this factor seems plays a big role in attitude towards internet dating. By applying the heightened appreciation model to these elements, it follows that brand attitudes can be enhanced by highlighting these elements and linking them to the product.

RQ

What are characteristics of the Dutch 50-plus market and what is the position of this target audience towards online dating?

The 50-plus market is made up of a very diverse audience with very distinct values, beliefs and attitudes. This matured audience values reality, authenticity, straightforwardness, a personal approach and lives in the here and now. They do not feel old at all, and do not like to be reminded of their age either. However, they do want and expect products and communication to be tailored to them whenever relevant. As the biggest media consumers of our society, the 50-plus watch a lot of TV, listen to the radio often and are increasingly making use of the internet and new media. Internet dating is not as popular for them as for the younger audience, but is steadily gaining ground. They are hesitant towards it and unsure how to feel and share motivations and emotions that are open for change. Privacy, costs and quality are all elements that are of the utmost importance to them, resembling the key values that this audience is so keen on.

CHAPTER 8 - CRITICAL DISCUSSION

During the course of this research, no effort was spared to work as professionally and meticulously as possible, and to look at the problem from every possible angle. Regardless, unforeseen circumstances have had an impact on the study itself, some of which were predictable beforehand and some of which presented itself spontaneously and which can be attempted to be omitted in the future. This chapter will now reflect upon the impact of the restrictions presented in the introduction, and discuss the impact of any new ones along with ideas for improvement.

A considerable amount of research has been done on marketing to the 50-plus, but professional research reports and literature dealing with 50-plus marketing specifically in The Netherlands are more scarce. The impact of this on this report is that there was a danger that a lot of the information leading to an answer to SQ1 would come from the same reports. However, every effort was made to find information from diverse sources and to back up claims with multiple sources where possible.

Within the introduction, the stigma surrounding online dating was discussed. The expectation was that the combination of this stigma with a hard to reach target group would cause problems with research methods. I can now conclude that it has indeed had an impact on response rates, both to the survey and to interview invitations, which were considerably lower than I had initially hoped for. Nonetheless, the amount of results generated was sufficient for the purpose of this study and the fact that the respondents were drawn from an official sample adds value to the research.

The survey has provided sufficient results, but considering the qualitative nature of the questions, a more qualitative research like focus groups may be used to either determine the validity of the results of this research, or enhance the outcomes and give better insights into specific motivations behind given answers.

The online survey should be discussed separately, because of faults in the survey design. In order to present the right answers to the right participants, as well as to be able to present different questions to those experienced with online dating and those who were not, extensive routing was used. However, a result of branching the survey in two, meant that each part was only answered by a section of the sample. Furthermore, the use of routing within these branches resulted in a relatively small number of answers for some questions. In addition, three questions appeared not to have been asked due to this routing, which fortunately were not of that much importance to the study and which were not foreseen during a trial run.

CHAPTER 9 – RECOMMENDATIONS & ADVICE

The main objective of this research was to provide insights into and offer advice on how to target and reach the 50-plus internet dating niche as an existing online dating organization. By means of desk research, literature reviews, and an online survey, a solution has been sought to answer the problem stated in the introduction. Within this chapter, recommendations will be presented on how the advisory question stated at the beginning of this report can be addressed:

How can Dutch online dating websites communicate effectively to target and reach the 50- plus market?

As a means of structuring these recommendations, they will be presented according to the “steps in developing effective marketing communication” as were discussed in the theoretical framework. These recommendations are aimed at any existing dating websites aspiring to target and reach the 50-plus niche market.

9.1 Recommendations

9.1.1 Create the product

When targeting the 50-plus, there are two options product-wise. One is to simply market an existing brand with communication aimed specifically at the aging consumer. Two is to create a separate brand for the 50-plus, building on the existing brand. The latter option is most advisable because it avoids confusion and the majority of the target audience does indeed prefer a dating website specifically for them. Moreover, this way special needs of the aging consumer with regard to website design can be anticipated as well.

Dating sites should attempt to adapt all levels of the product and sales process to the aging consumer, from the product itself to advertising.

9.1.2 Identify the target audience

Whenever communicating to the aging consumer, dating sites should keep in mind the physical impairments that come with aging. The 50-plus audience does not like to be reminded of their age, so do not disparage them with ridiculously big fonts, but give them the option to choose for a bigger font instead. When creating an application to accompany an internet dating site, make sure that it is recognizable and that usability is high.

Except from those 50-plus singles that are specifically not looking for a new relationship, the intrinsic motivation for intimacy is present in everyone. In communications, stress that internet dating is the perfect means to this end and that is available also for the aging consumer, according to their wishes and expectations.

The 50-plus are generally brand loyal and it is likely that a number of them is already using a specific dating website. Dating websites aspiring to target the 50-plus market should leverage the seniors already active on their website by generating word-of-mouth advertising for the new brand amongst these members.

9.1.3 Determine the communication objectives

Dating sites should put effort in creating brand awareness and improve category attitude and brand attitude. Category need is a key objective, because it is important to communicate internet dating to the 50-plus as a realistic and appropriate option for meeting new people since most are undecided about whether they think online dating is a suitable way to find a new partner. Brand awareness and brand attitude should be important communication objectives to make potential internet daters believe that a dating site is the perfect fit for them.

Even though as far as costs go, consumers view internet dating as a high involvement product decision, switching from one site to another is relatively easy. Motivations are mostly positive, but rational factors play a role as well. Therefore, a low-involvement transformational brand attitude strategy with informational elements appears to be the best approach for communicating internet dating to the 50-plus.

This limited time horizon view of the 50-plus can be expanded situationally and dating sites should attempt to do so in order to improve category and brand attitude. Remind the potential consumers that they are young enough to be active on internet dating sites and that they could have a whole life of fun, excitement and possibly love ahead of them.

The 50-plus audience is generally unsure how to feel about internet dating, besides a large pool of negative emotions. Dating sites should work at and with these negative attitudes, by changing them to improve the reputation of internet dating and to communicate that they are in good hands with your company, and by implementing emotionally effective communications. Let marketing communications mirror the values and beliefs of the target market, so make it realistic, understandable and straightforward, show real people of 50 and older in real situations and stress the elements of security, privacy and authenticity in order to change attitudes.

9.1.4 Design the message

Although the underlying premise of these advices is communicating to the 50-plus audience specifically, the emphasis should be put rather on product benefits as opposed to age-appropriateness because it depends on a consumers feel-age rather than their chronological age whether they are attracted to a product.

Dating sites should put emphasis on the excitement that is associated with internet dating. Emphasize that it is something of this time and that it is easy to use. Simultaneously, guarantee security and privacy. Present a two-sided argument to counter argue the idea that internet

dating is untrustworthy, time-consuming or expensive. This way, you show the audience that you know how they feel, but simultaneously tell them that these claims are ungrounded. Reassure the audience of the general acceptance of internet dating and remind them of reason to start, whether those are of a positive or a slightly negative motivation.

Quality labels are high on the value ladder of the aging consumer. If a dating site has one or more, communicate those in all promotions and on the website in order to achieve heightened appreciation. Explain to the consumer what it means to have such a label and more specifically, what it means for them. Take away perceived risks by ensuring excellent customer support whenever something is unclear or seems odd and always put emphasis on quality, security and privacy.

Make sure that the message is clear and understandable, that the benefits of what is being offered are clear, that what is being said is relevant to the 50-plus and always make it easy to understand how they can respond to and access the offer.

9.1.5 Select channels of communication

The 50-plus audience are big media consumers, so every part of the budget is likely well spent on them. Especially in comparison to younger audiences, the 50-plus watch a lot of TV and listen to the radio a lot. If on a big budget, invest in TV and radio commercials, particularly on public channels and stations. When choosing for print, it is advisable to look at magazines that target this market themselves. Dating sites with a small budget can profit by putting effort in word-of-mouth advertising.

The power of new media to reach this audience should not be underestimated, yet try to avoid platforms like Pinterest and Instagram. Facebook is an absolute must. The 50-plus market is keen on a personal approach, clarity and information. An idea of advice is to create a YouTube channel, with instruction videos et cetera to achieve this personal approach.

It is important to make sure that it is clear to the audience they can access the internet dating site from each of their devices, whether that is a laptop, tablet or smart phone. The 50-plus audience is familiar with the use of mobile applications, but especially with the older ages it is important to keep in mind to create an app that is especially tailored to their needs. There is no specific time around which online communication would be most effective, but if a choice has to be made, during the evening is probably the best time.

9.1.6 Select the message source

The aging consumer wants to see real people with a real message, in accordance with their own age group. There is no need for painting a prettier picture, keep it authentic instead. Thus, if an internet dating site aspires to target the 50-plus it is of paramount importance to show people that really are older than 50, with all the characteristics that come with it, like wrinkles and graying hair. In addition, show them in situation and environments they can easily relate to and that are corresponding with their interests, like simple cup of coffee in a café or walking in the forest. Since the 50-plus group is not at all homogenous, it is advisable to create a marketing campaign that relates to all levels of the target audience, by for instance using different posters with differently aged consumers.

Applying all of the above will help to take away the threshold for the aging consumer to try out internet dating and to choose for your specific dating website because it gives the silver consumer exactly what he, or she, is looking. Even if they do not even know yet themselves.

9.2 Suggestions for further research

As has been stressed within this research, the 50-plus market is a rapidly expanding one of which marketers have not by far grasped the full extent. The opportunities for 50-plus marketing are infinite and it is likely that future research will bring forth many new insights into this flourishing target audience. Even within a market as specific as the 50-plus niche dating market, further research is necessary to cover the full scope of it. During the course of this study, some of these possible research topics stood out specifically.

Within section 1.5.2. was discussed that in other 50-plus market research (50+ Expertisecentrum, 2007), often an important distinction is being made between different lifecycle stages of the 50-plus. Although the scope of this research did not allow for implementing this distinction, it is a very realistic one and it is advisable for future research to tap further into the different types of aging consumers.

The product itself is an important part of marketing to any target group. Therefore, further research should be done to reveal liking or disliking of specific product elements on internet dating sites, as well as desired product elements, in order to discover how the service itself can be perfectly fitted to the aging consumer.

Desk research has turned out that word of mouth is an important advertising vehicle for 50-plussers in some product categories. This was however not included in this research. Further research should reveal whether word-of-mouth marketing is a valuable option for marketing internet dating.

The results of the questionnaire used for this research were of a mostly qualitative nature, and statistical analysis did not go far beyond the point of the descriptive level. However, when the sample size is significantly increased, and additional questions about audience characteristics are included, further investigation of correlations could be extremely interesting and could provide valuable new insights.

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APPENDIX 1 – SEARCH PLAN/SEARCH STRATEGY

One of the justifications for this research study is that not a lot of research has been done internet dating specifically within the Netherlands, and no research has been conducted on targeting the 50-plus as an internet dating site. To support this claim, this appendix contains the search plan that was used for carrying out preliminary research.

In order to effectively search for articles and research reports related to internet dating and 50-plus marketing, a very extensive selection of search terms was made. However, within this appendix only those terms relevant to the search for internet dating within the Netherlands, internet dating amongst the 50-plus specifically, and marketing internet dating to the 50-plus audience, have been included.

The searches were carried out on the free web through search engine Google.com as well as the deep web, through Google Scholar, the HU databases and additionally the UU databases. All searches were limited to results that were either in English or in Dutch. No limiters relating to document type were included, so as to not exclude the possibility of finding reports through mention in for instance websites and newspaper articles. The combination of search terms that was used for each database, can be seen in the tables below. For the purpose of looking for Dutch materials, Dutch translations were used for table 2 and 3.

Subject
Internet daten OR online daten OR cyber daten OR e-daten OR digitaal daten

Table 8. Internet dating in The Netherlands

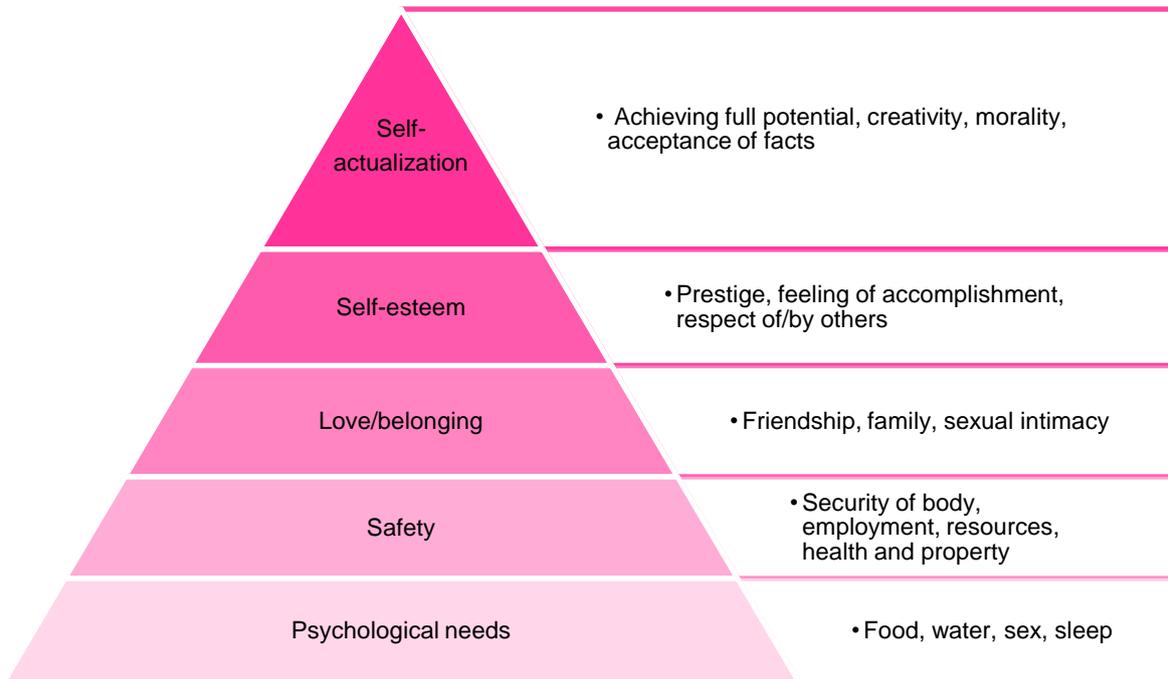
Subject	AND subject
Internet dating OR online dating OR cyber dating OR e-dating OR digital dating	50-plus OR fifty plus OR silver OR aging OR ageing OR elderly OR baby boom OR niche

Table 9. Search terms internet dating amongst 50-plusers

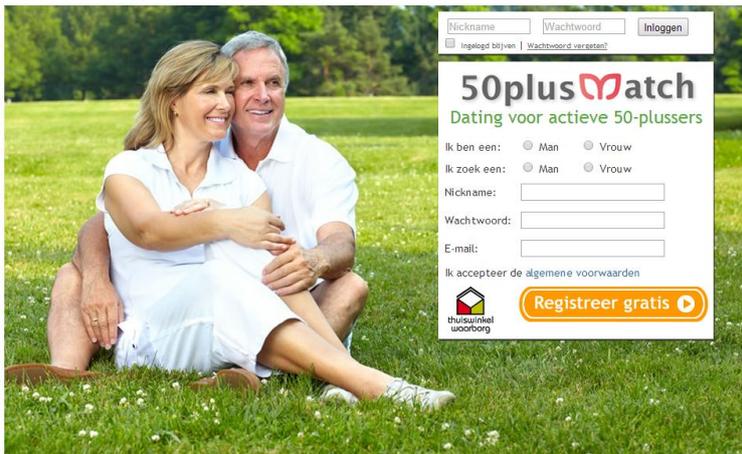
Subject	AND subject	AND subject
Internet dating OR Online dating OR Cyber dating OR e- dating OR Digital dating	50-plus OR Fifty plus OR Silver OR Aging OR Ageing OR Elderly OR Baby boom* OR Niche	Market* OR communicat* OR Advertis* OR Target* OR Survey OR Research

Table 10. Search terms marketing internet dating to the 50-plus

APPENDIX 2 – MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



APPENDIX 3 – 50PLUSMATCH HOMEPAGE



Vind hier je partner

Velen gingen je voor en vonden hun partner bij 50plusmatch.

"Dank voor alles, heb een geweldige vrouw in mijn eigen dorp door jullie site ontmoet en wil haar nooit meer kwijt."

Man, 57 jaar

"Daar ik een geweldige partner heb gevonden via deze website, wil ik graag mijzelf volledig uitgeschreven hebben.

Ik ben heel erg dankbaar en we hebben net besloten dat we januari ook samen in één huis verder gaan!

Ik ben heel dankbaar, groeten M. K. uit Gouda"

Vrouw, 54 jaar

"Heb nooit zo geloofd in datingsites, maar nu uiteraard wel!

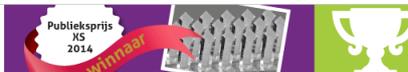
Ook nooit geloofd in liefde op 't eerste gezicht.

Nou, reken maar van Yes nu."

Man, 60 jaar

Winnaar Thuiswinkel Awards

50plusmatch is winnaar van de publieksprijs in de categorie datingsites. We zijn trots dat we door onze leden bekroond zijn als favoriete datingsite.



Duizenden leden

Duizenden actieve leden zijn op zoek naar een partner!



Veilig daten

Wij vinden het belangrijk dat je veilig kunt daten bij 50plusmatch, daarom controleren we alle profielen handmatig. Alle belangrijke gegevens worden versleuteld verzonden. We zijn lid van Thuiswinkel.org en voldoen aan het Keurmerk Veilig Daten.



Nooit iets missen

Of je nu thuis op de bank zit of onderweg in de trein, mis nooit een leuk contact.



Maak contact zoals jij het wil

Bij 50plusmatch kun je op vele manieren contact maken met andere leden:

- ✓ Een persoonlijk bericht sturen
- ✓ Direct chatten met andere leden die online zijn
- ✓ Meepraten op Things2Share
- ✓ Zelf een leuke activiteit organiseren

Wij helpen je

We hebben een uitgebreide 'Veelgestelde vragen' rubriek en je kunt ons een bericht sturen, dan helpen we je snel, desnoods telefonisch. Samen komen we er altijd uit!

50plusmatch internationaal

We zijn begonnen in Nederland en zijn ook actief in andere landen.



APPENDIX 4 – ONLINE SURVEY

Online dating onder 50-plussers



Bedankt dat u de tijd neemt om deze enquête over online daten in te vullen. Het invullen zal niet meer dan 10 minuten van uw tijd in beslag nemen. Er zijn geen goede of foute antwoorden en er zal vertrouwelijk met uw informatie worden omgegaan. Als u een vorig antwoord wilt wijzigen, kunt u op de rode knop links onderin klikken. Als u een vraag bent vergeten in te vullen, zal er een melding verschijnen. Sommige vragen zijn verplicht. Voor vragen over de enquête kunt u contact opnemen met Roos Eversdijk via roosmarijnevversdijk@gmail.com.

1 Wat is uw relationele status?

- Alleenstaand
- Nee
- Gescheiden
- Weduwnaar/weduwe
- In een relatie

2 Heeft u in de afgelopen 3 jaar gebruik gemaakt van een datingsite?

- Ja
- Nee

3 Wat is uw leeftijd?

4 Wat is uw geslacht?

- Man
- Vrouw

5 Wat is uw huidige werkzame situatie?

- Werkend deeltijd
- Werkend voltijd
- Op dit moment heb ik geen baan
- Gepensioneerd

Er volgen nu 2 korte vragen over mediagebruik.

6 Gedurende welk dagdeel gebruikt u het internet het vaakst voor persoonlijke doeleinden?

- 's Ochtends (vóór 12.00)
- 's Middags (12.00 - 18.00)
- 's Avonds (na 18.00)
- Alle dagdelen even vaak

7 Hoe vaak gebruikt u onderstaande social media websites?

	Dagelijks	Wekelijks	Maandelijks	Nooit
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pinterest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De rest van de enquête gaat over relaties en online daten. Uw openhartige mening wordt op prijs gesteld!

Answer If Wat is uw relationele status? Alleenstaand Is Selected And Wat is uw relationele status? Gescheiden Is Selected And Wat is uw relationele status? Weduwnaar/weduwe Is Selected

8 Bent u op dit moment geïnteresseerd in een nieuwe partner/relatie?

- Ja
- Nee
- Misschien

If Nee Is Selected, Then Skip To Heeft u wel eens wat gehoord/gelezen ...

Answer If Wat is uw relationele status? Alleenstaand Is Selected And Wat is uw relationele status? Gescheiden Is Selected And Wat is uw relationele status? Weduwnaar/weduwe Is Selected

9 Wat is de ideale leeftijd van uw toekomstige partner?

- 20-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 70+

Answer If Wat is uw relationele status? Getrouwd Is Selected And Wat is uw relationele status? In een relatie Is Selected

10 Hoe heeft u uw huidige partner ontmoet?

- 'Offline' (Niet via het internet)
- Op een datingsite
- Online, op een andere manier dan een online datingsite

11 Heeft u in het afgelopen jaar iets gehoord/gelezen over internet daten?

- Nee
- Ja, in een TV programma
- Ja, reclame op TV
- Ja, op de radio
- Ja, in een tijdschrift
- Ja, in een krantenadvertentie
- Ja, maar op een andere manier, namelijk: _____

12 Welke drie woorden komen in u op als u aan online daten denkt?

#1 _____

#2 _____

#3 _____

13 Kunt u spontaan de naam van een datingsite noemen? Zo ja, welke komt het eerst in u op?

14. Van welke online datingsite heeft u wel eens gehoord? (Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Lexa.nl
- Paig
- Relatieplanet.nl
- Parship.nl
- VijftigPlusDating
- Badoo
- Pepper
- 50plusmatch
- Anders, namelijk: _____
- Ik ken geen online datingsites

15 Hoeveel mensen kent u ongeveer die aan online daten doen of hebben gedaan?
(Vul een cijfer in)

16 Wat doet u als u nieuwe mensen wilt ontmoeten?

- Ik ga naar een bar/café
- Ik bezoek feestjes van vrienden
- Ik ga naar een interesseclub (boeken, tuinieren, computers, bridge etc.)
- Ik ben actief op internetforums
- Ik ga op een vakantie met andere alleenstaanden
- Ik bezoek evenementen/beurzen
- Ik onderneem op dit moment geen actie om nieuwe mensen te ontmoeten

17 Wat is uw ideale eerste date?

- Een drankje drinken in een café
- Een museum bezoeken
- Samen uit eten
- Een uitstapje in de natuur
- Een kopje koffie drinken buiten de deur
- Bij iemand thuis afspreken
- Naar de bioscoop
- Een attractie bezoeken (Keukenhof, dierentuin, Madurodam etc)
- Anders, namelijk: _____

18 Hieronder staan een aantal stellingen. Wilt u aangeven in welke mate u het hiermee eens bent?

	Zeer oneens	Oneens	Neutraal	Eens	Zeer eens
Online daten is een geschikte manier om een nieuwe partner te vinden	<input type="radio"/>				
Online daten is teveel op de jongere generaties gericht	<input type="radio"/>				
Online daten is alleen voor zielige mensen	<input type="radio"/>				
Online daten past niet bij mijn generatie	<input type="radio"/>				

BRANCH: Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years? Yes

19 Van welke datingsite hebt u in de afgelopen 3 jaar gebruik gemaakt? (Meerdere opties mogelijk)

- Lexa.nl
- Paiq
- 50plusmatch
- Badoo
- Relatieplanet.nl
- Parship
- Pepper
- VijftigPlusDating
- Anders, namelijk: _____

20 Hoe bent u op het idee gekomen om met online daten te beginnen?

- Het is me aangeraden door familie/vrienden/kennissen
- Ik heb er een TV programma over gezien
- Ik heb er op de radio over gehoord
- Ik heb er een artikel over gelezen in een tijdschrift
- Het zien van reclame heeft me op het idee gebracht
- Ik ben zelf op het idee gekomen

21 Wat was uw voornaamste beweegreden om met online daten te starten? (Maximaal 2 aanvinken)

- Ik was nieuwsgierig
- Om mensen te ontmoeten met dezelfde interesses/hobbies
- Ik voelde me eenzaam
- Om op een veilige/vrijblijvende manier met iemand in contact te komen
- Uit verveling
- Voor ongedwongen seksueel contact
- Om een nieuwe relatie te beginnen
- Om plezier te hebben
- Om een mogelijke huwelijkspartner te vinden
- In mijn situatie is het moeilijk om mensen op een andere manier te ontmoeten

22 Wie mag van uw online dating praktijken afweten?

- Niemand mag het weten
- Alleen familie en beste vrienden
- Familie, vrienden, collegas en kennissen
- Iedereen

23 Welke soort datingsite zou uw voorkeur geven?

- Een datingsite met een heel breed en algemeen ledenbestand
- Een datingsite waarop alleen mensen met dezelfde interesses actief zijn
- Een datingsite voor alleen 50-plussers

24 In welke mate zijn onderstaande elementen belangrijk voor u op een datingsite? Klik op het aantal sterren dat van toepassing is; 5 sterren is heel erg belangrijk, 1 ster is totaal onbelangrijk)

Veel leden	*****
Het uiterlijk van de website	*****
Aanwezigheid van een keurmerk	*****
De manier waarop de website matches maakt	*****
Bekendheid van de site	*****
Privacy reglement	*****
Kosten	*****
Gebruiksvriendelijkheid	*****
Goede klantenservice	*****
Privacy	*****

25 Zou u als laatste nog kunnen aangeven in hoeverre u het eens dan wel oneens ben met de volgende stellingen?

	Oneens	Neutraal	Eens
De drempel om te beginnen met online daten is/was voor mij erg hoog.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou online daten aanbevelen aan vrienden/familie	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

BRANCH: Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years? No

26 U heeft aangegeven nog nooit gebruikt te hebben gemaakt van een online datingsite. Heeft u dit wel ooit overwogen?

- Ja
- Nee

Answer If U heeft aangegeven nog nooit lid te zijn geweest van een online datingsite. Heeft u ooit overwogen om lid te worden? Ja, maar ik heb de stap nooit gezet. Is Selected

27 U heeft de stap nog nooit gezet. Wat is de voornaamste reden hiervoor?

- Ik ben er te oud voor
- Het is niks voor mij
- Mijn vrienden/familie zouden me raar aankijken
- Ik heb nog geen datingsite kunnen vinden die bij me past
- Ik heb hier geen specifieke reden voor

If Ik heb hier geen specifieke... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Mijn vrienden/familie zoude... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Mijn vrienden/familie zoude... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Ik ben er te oud voor Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...

Answer If U heeft aangegeven nog nooit lid te zijn geweest van een online datingsite. Heeft u ooit overwogen om lid te worden? Nee. Is Selected

28 U hebt nog nooit van een online datingsite gebruik gemaakt. Wat is de voornaamste reden hiervoor?

- Ik ben niet opzoek naar een nieuwe partner/relatie
- Het is nog nooit in me opgekomen
- Ik ben er te oud voor
- Het is niks voor mij
- Mijn vrienden/familie zouden me raar aankijken
- Ik heb nog geen datingsite kunnen vinden die bij me past
- Ik vind de computer geen geschikt middel om een partner te vinden
- Ik ben niet bekend met online daten
- Ik heb hier geen specifieke reden voor

If Ik ben niet opzoek naar een... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Mijn vrienden/familie zoude... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Het is nog nooit in me opge... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Ik ben niet bekend met onli... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Ik heb nog geen datingsite ... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...If Ik heb hier geen specifieke... Is Selected, Then Skip To Als u lid zou willen worden van een o...

29 Spelen onderstaande factoren wellicht een rol in uw terughoudendheid ten opzichte van online daten?

	Nee	Ja
Kosten van het abonnement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reputatie van online daten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Privacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aanwezigheid van profielcontrole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

30 Als u lid zou willen worden van een online dating site, wat zou dan belangrijk voor u zijn? Klik op het aantal sterren dat van toepassing is; 5 sterren is heel erg belangrijk, 1 ster is totaal onbelangrijk)

Het aantal leden op de datingsite	*****
Aanwezigheid van een keurmerk	*****
De manier waarop de website u met andere mensen in contact brengt	*****
Bekendheid van de site	*****
Prijs	*****
Goede klantenservice	*****

31 Zou u als laatste nog kunnen aangeven in hoeverre u het eens dan wel oneens bent met de volgende stelling?

	Oneens	Neutraal	Eens
De drempel om te beginnen met online daten is voor mij erg hoog	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik ben nieuwsgierig naar online daten	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32 Bedankt! Dat was de laatste vraag. Heeft u verder nog opmerkingen die voor het onderzoek van belang zouden kunnen zijn?

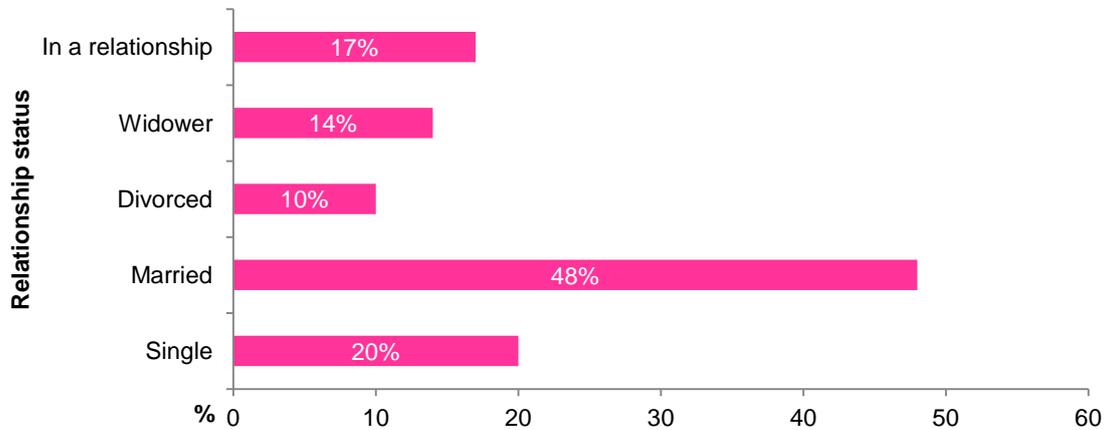
33 Als ik u mag benaderen voor toelichting op uw gegeven antwoorden, kunt u hier uw email adres achterlaten.

- Nee, ik wil niet benaderd worden.
- Ja, geen probleem. _____

APPENDIX 5 – SURVEY RESULTS

1. What is your relationship status?

(N = 203)



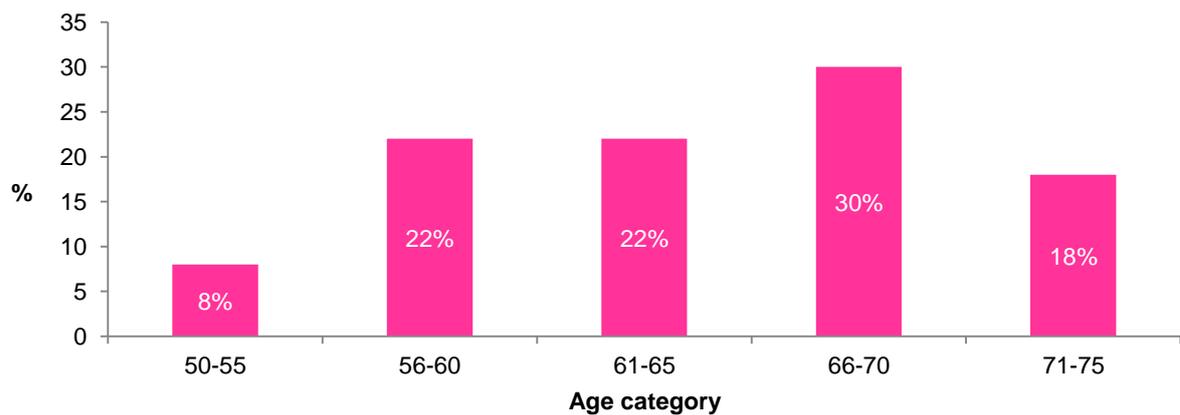
2. Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years?

(N = 203)

Answer	Percentage
Yes	20%
No	80%

3. What is your age?

(N=97)



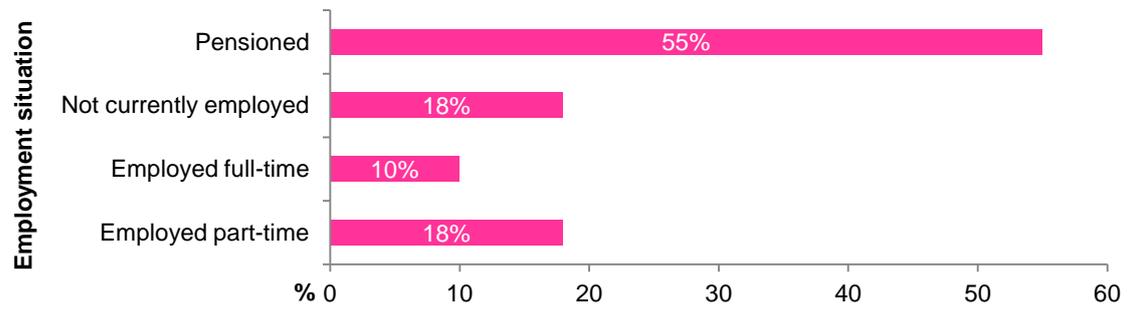
4. What is your gender?

(N=97)

Answer	Percentage
Male	35%
Female	65%

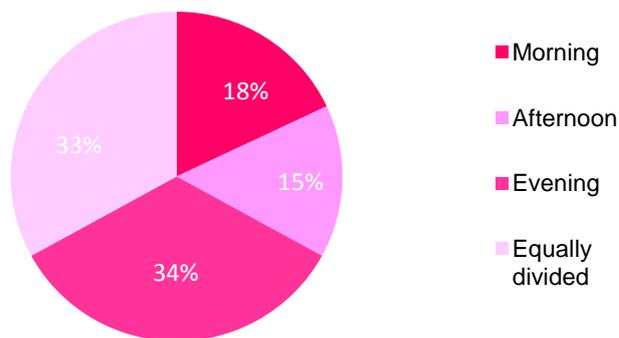
5. What is your current employment situation?

(N=97)



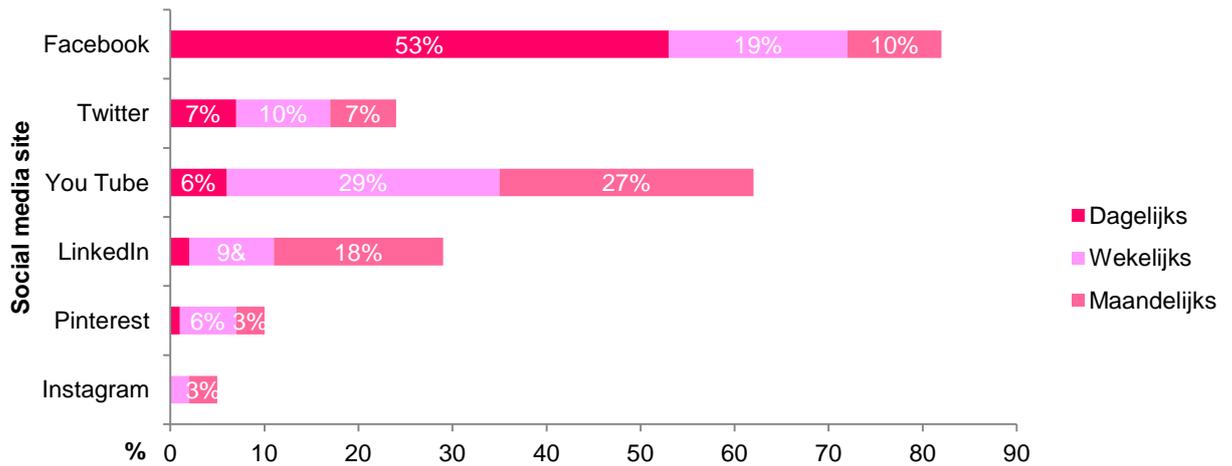
6. During which time of day do you use the internet most often for personal purposes?

(N=97)



7. How often do you use the following social media sites?

(N=97)

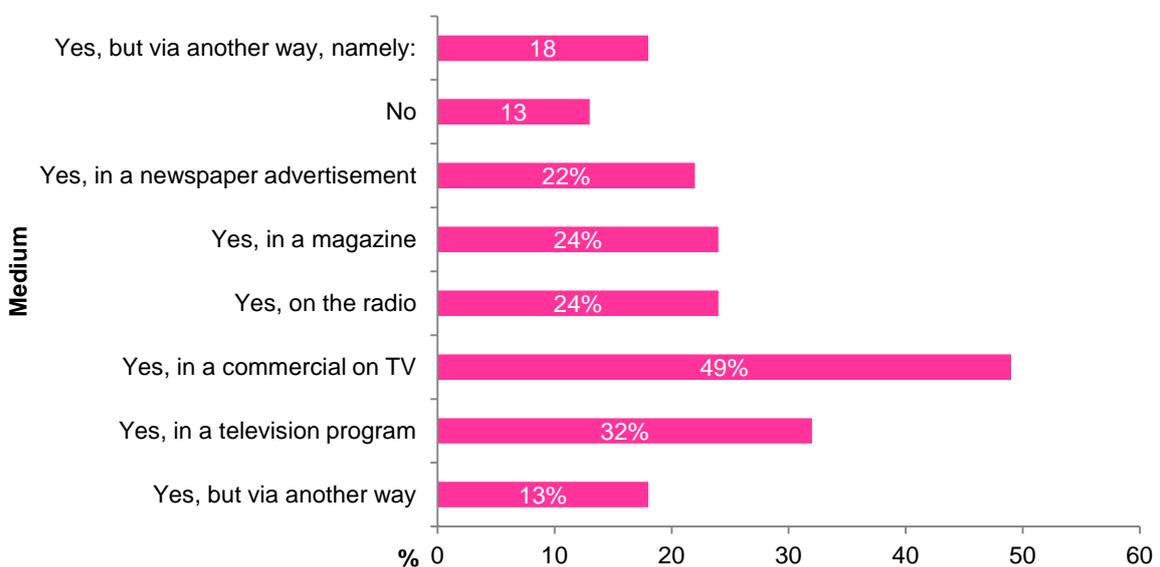


The following 3 questions were not asked to any of the respondents due to a mistake made in the routing:

- 8. Are you currently interested in having a new partner/relationship (N=0)
- 9. What would be the ideal age of your potential partner? (N=0)
- 10. How did you meet your current partner? (N=0)

11. Have you read/heard about internet dating in the past year?

(N=92)



Yes, but via another way, namely:
internet
internet
You can not avoid it

On the internet
Various ways
via internet
heard about it
via the internet
email and internet advertising
via friends
I just know about it
via friends
mailings
internet

12. Which three terms come to mind when you think of internet dating? (Next page)

(N=85)

#1	#2	#3
koffie	uit eten	ontmoeting
geen		
contacten	chatten	vrienden
neen	nooit	geen
knuz	lexa	seiordating
makkelijk	leuk	tijd rovend
bedrog	oneerlijk	niet serieus
moeilijk	betrouwbaar?	duur
onbekend	onbekend	onbekend
liefde	sex	gein
niks		
gezellig	afstand	eng
nooit	niet doen	nee
veeleisend	hoogdravend	oppervlakkig
Onbetrouwbaar	Spannend	Niet reëel meestal
lexa	nee	nee
vriendschap	relatie	problemen
geen	behoefte	aan
niks	niks	niks
moeizaam	liegen	foto's
single	betrouwbaar	veilig
ENG	KOST GELD	HOU IK NIET VAN.
leuk	aardig	gemakkelijk
kennis maken		
Gokken	Loterij	Teleurstellingen
eng	spannend	relatie?
Geldklopperij	Bedrog	tijdverlies
relatie	lat	eerlijkheid
man	vriend	uitgaan
relatie	sex	vertrouwen
gemakkelijk	leuk	spannend
spannend	oppassen	niet te happig
Van deze tijd	Anoniem	Wel zo handig
mooi	gelukt	gelukkig
niet serieus	fake	bedriegerij
geluk	vriendschap	lat rel
proberen	eigentijds	stortvloed
Sexzoekers	Profielbedrog	Uitgaan
persoonsgegevens	eerlijk?	vrijblijvend
niets	voor	mij
Weinig response	Betalen	Geen leuke mannen
Onzin	Raar	tijdverapilling
samen	moeizaam	tijd
hoeft voor mij niet	geen interesse	druk ik weg
Gezelligheid	Contact	Liefde
vermoeiend	geen respons	moeilijk te beslissen
Duur	Soms niet te	
	vertrouwen	
hoe	durf	misschien
makkelijk	veiligheid	gericht
eng	onbetrouwbaar	gedurfd
Onpersoonlijk	Oppassen	Gemakkelijk
		manipuleerbaar
LEEFTIJD	EERLIJKHEID	VERTROUWEN

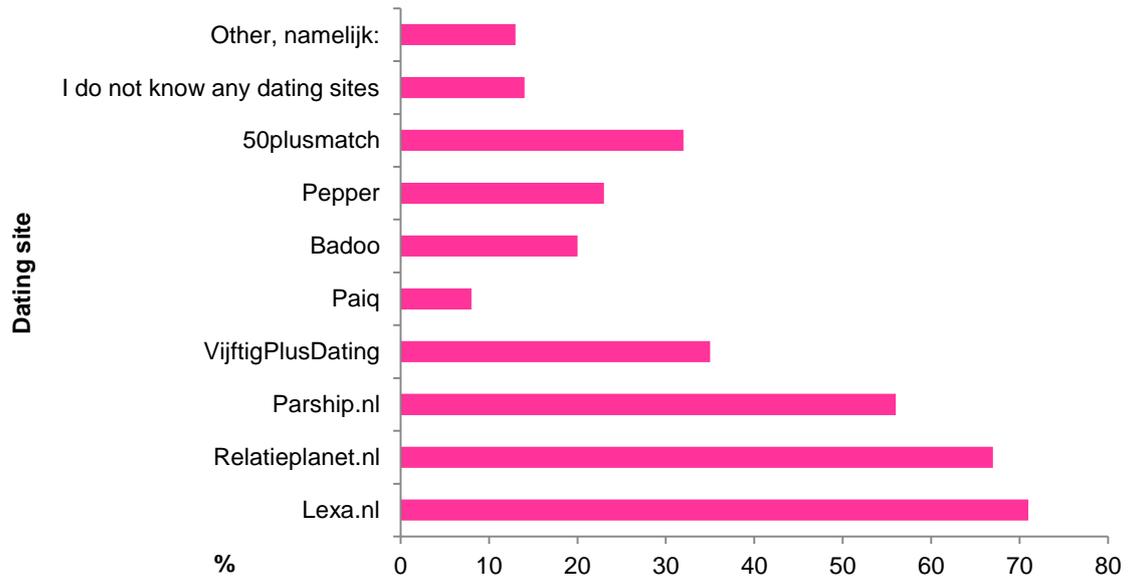
kans	energie	onzekerheid
?	?	?
weet niet		
nvt	nvt	nvt
niets voor mij	link	geen idee
onveilig	oneerlijk	leugenachtig
niet	echt niet	nog steeds niet
?	?	?
spannend	benieuwd	hoopvol
sex	huwelijk	nooit
eng		
mooie vrouwen	sex	scam
Nee	never	nooit
te duur	alleen kijken	sex
nep	bedrog	oppervlakkigheid
slank	sportief	liefst jonger
vertrouwen	voorzichtig	afwachten
nigerianen	rare types	nee
fun	spannend	nieuw
Vreemd	Afstandelijk	Kansloos
respect	vertrouwen	geduld
niet	mijn	manier
Spanning	Bedrog	Leugens
contact	chatten	afpraak
spannend	leuk	gezellig
niet doen	risico	relatie
niet betrouwbaar	gelukzoekers	jan rap en zijn maatschappij 5\
Bang	Oude	
geen		
Partner	Gelijk gestemd	Maatje
afpraak	spannend	resultaat?
nieuw	spannend	relatie
		O

13. Can you spontaneously recall the name of a dating website? If so, which one comes to mind first? (N = 82)

This was an open question. In total, 56 respondents were able to recall a dating website from the top of their minds. Of these respondents, 34 percent mentioned Lexa.nl and 19% mentioned Relatieplanet.nl. A percentage of 13 mentioned a website aimed at 50-plussers. Every other website was not mentioned by more than 7% of the sample.

14. Which dating website(s) have you heard of?

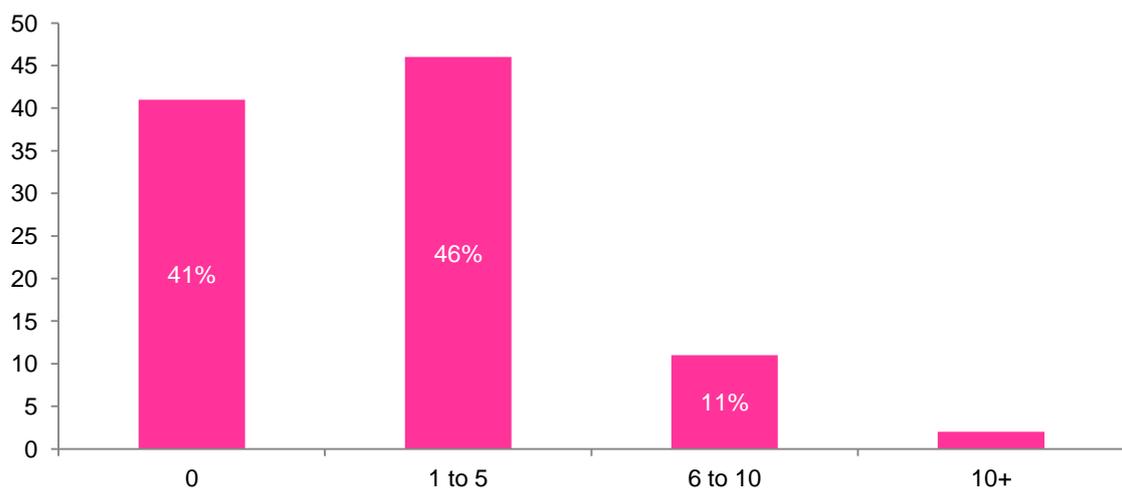
(N = 90)



Other, namely:
twoo
knuz
edarling
E-matching
Flash
weetwiejedate
E-matching, seconddate
faceplace, Zoosk, wie date jij.nl
ematching
twoo
edarling
e-matching

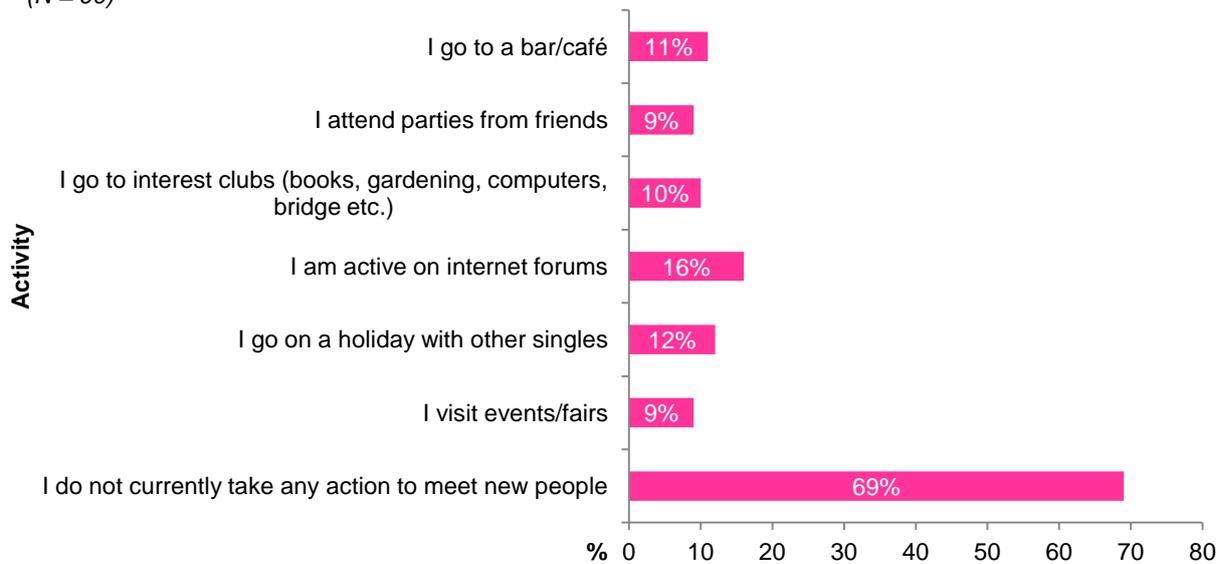
15. How many people do you know that have tried internet dating?

(N = 85)



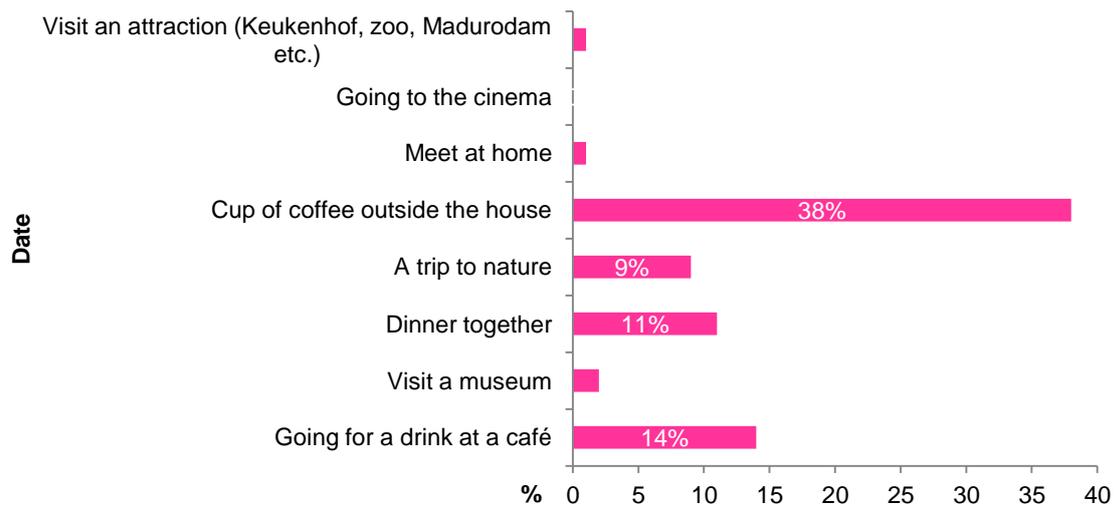
16. What action do you normally take when you want to meet new people?

(N = 90)



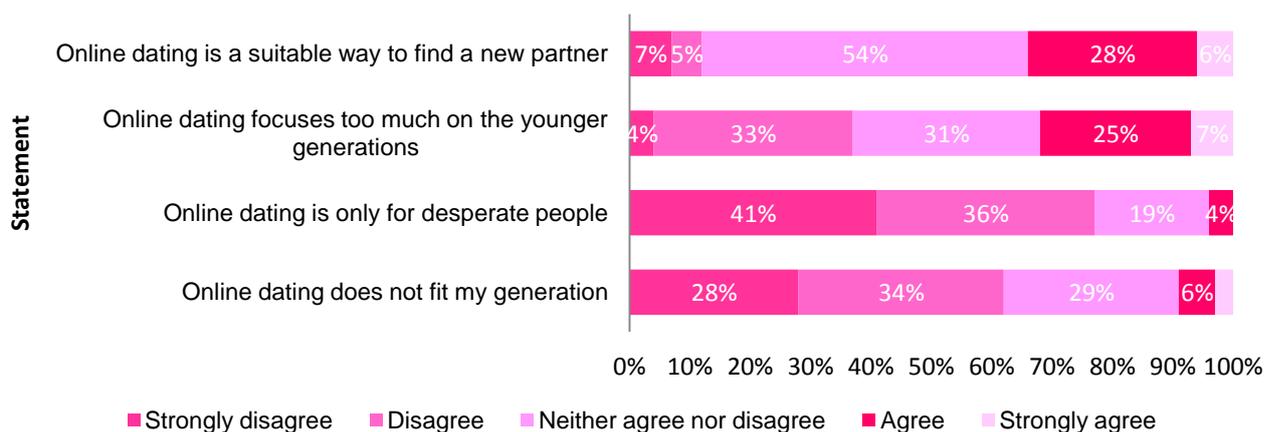
17. What is your ideal first date?

(N = 88)



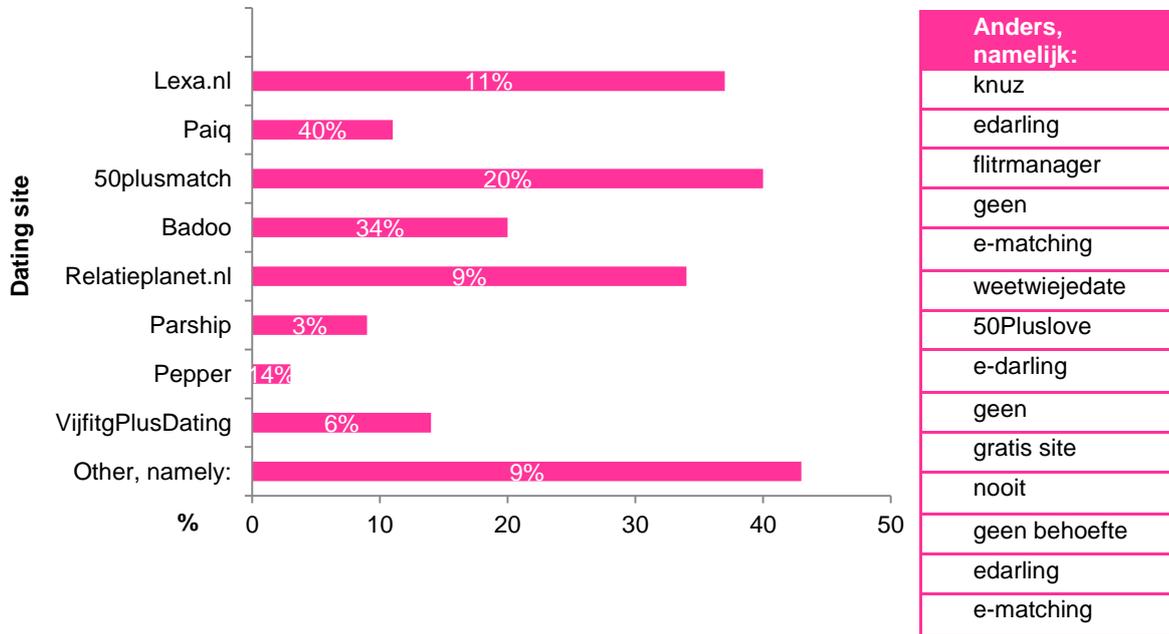
18. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(N = 88)

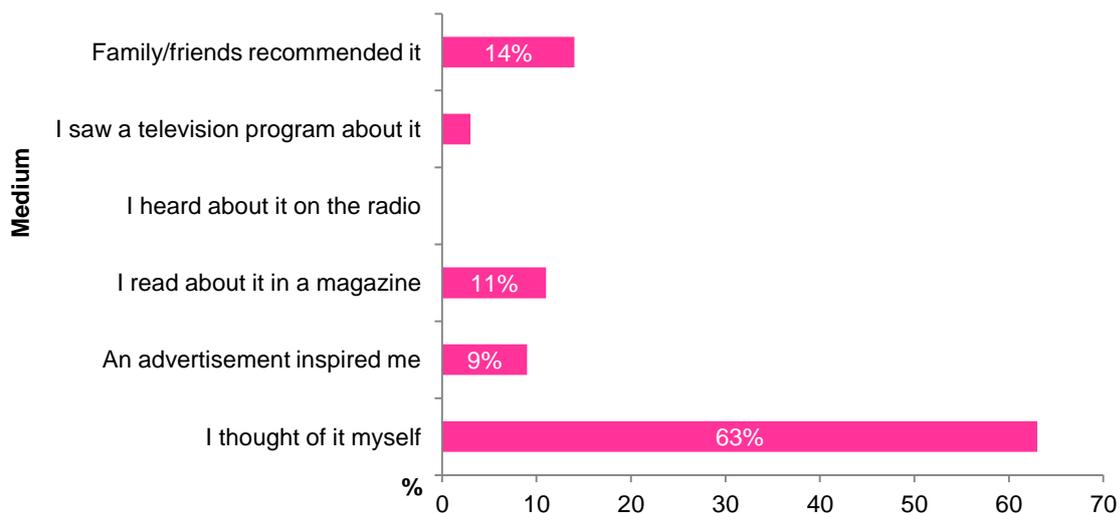


→ **BRANCH: Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years?**
YES

19. Which dating website have you made use of over the past 3 years? (Multiple answers possible) (N = 35)

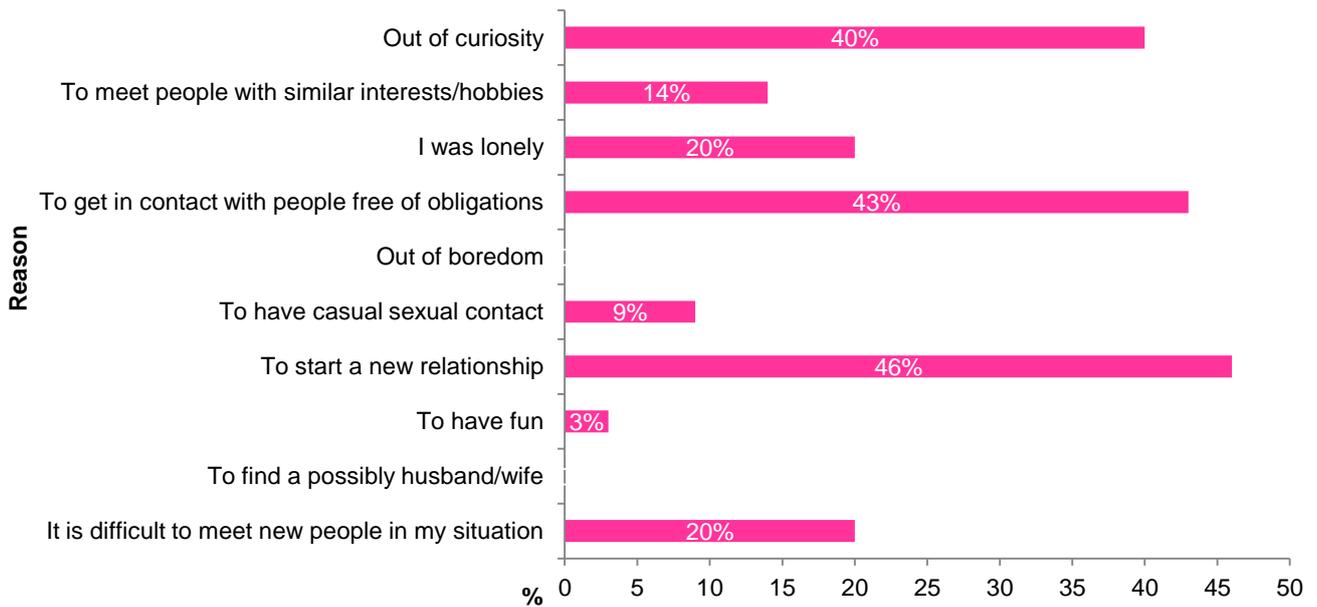


20. Where did you get the idea to start with internet dating?
(N = 35)



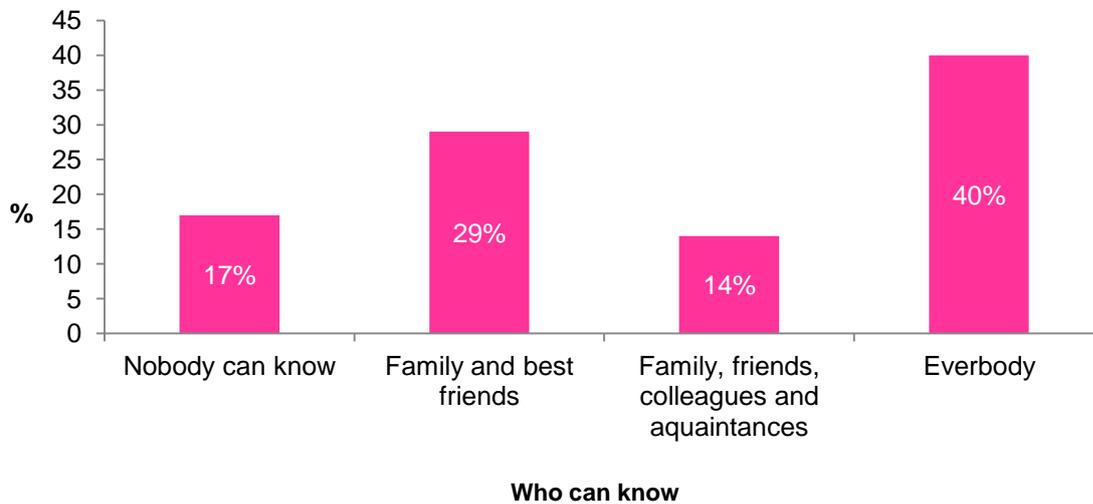
21. What was your most important reason to start with online dating?

(N = 35)



22. Who can know of your online dating activities?

(N = 35)



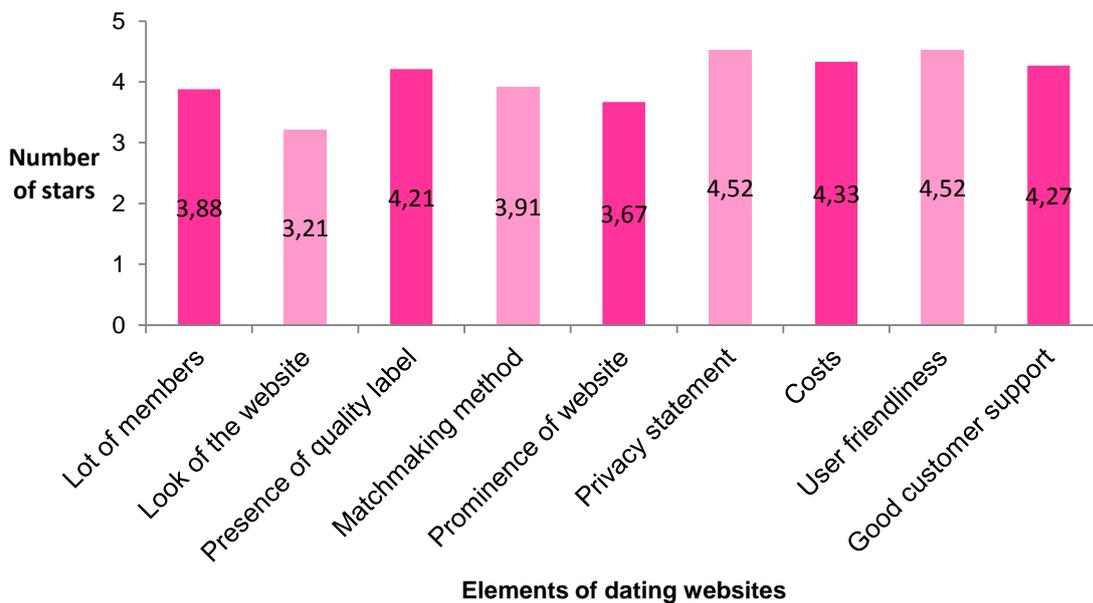
23. What kind of dating site would you prefer?

(N = 34)



24. To what degree are the following elements important for you on a dating website?
(N = 34)

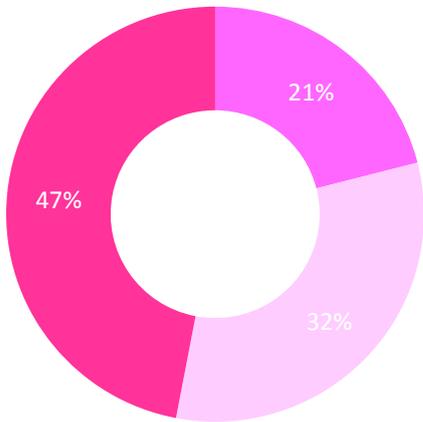
Element	Min Value	Max Value	Average Value
Lot of members	1.00	5.00	3.88
Look of the website	1.00	5.00	3.21
Presence of quality label	3.00	5.00	4.21
Match-making technology	1.00	5.00	3.91
Prominence of websites	1.00	5.00	3.67
Privacy statement	2.00	5.00	4.52
Costs	2.00	5.00	4.33
User friendliness	0.00	5.00	4.52
Good customer support	1.00	5.00	4.27
Privacy	1.00	5.00	4.52



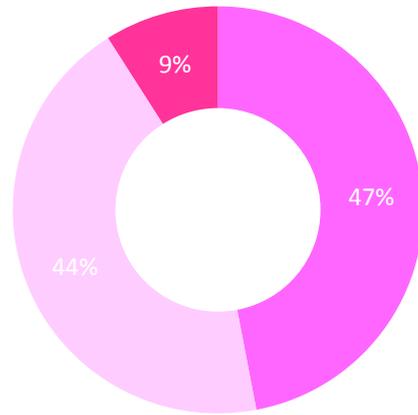
25. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(N = 34)

The threshold to start with online dating was very high for me



could recommend online dating to friends and family



■ Yes
■ Neutral
■ No

→ BRANCH: Have you made use of an online dating site over the past 3 years?

NO

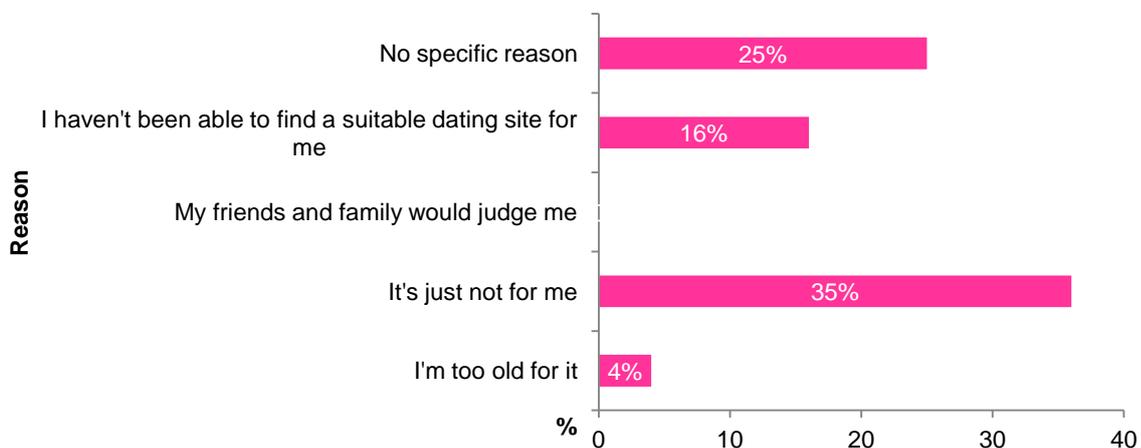
26. Have you ever considered to start with online dating?

(N = 53)

Answer	Percentage
Yes	47%
No	53%

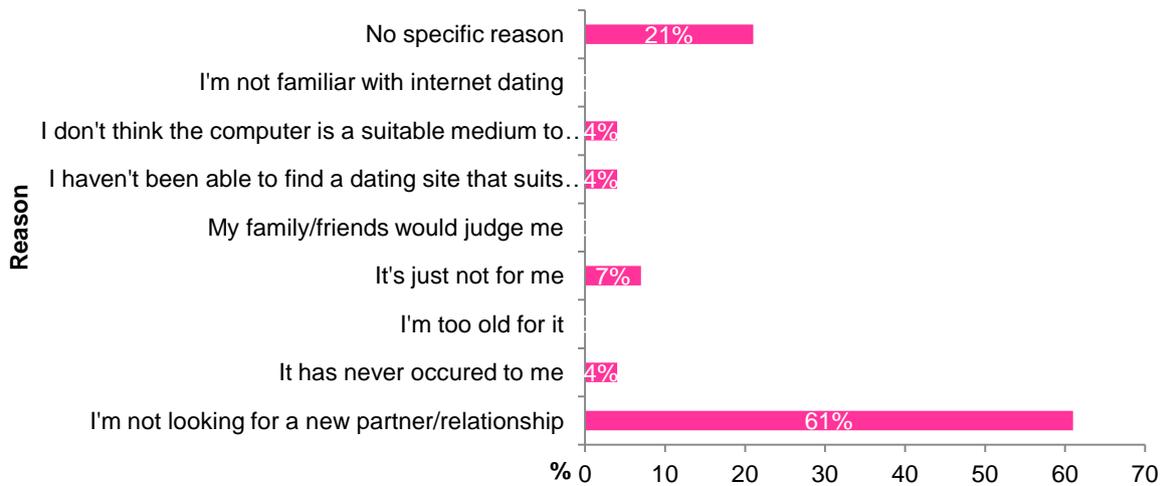
27. If yes: what is your primary reason for not having taken the leap?

(N = 25)



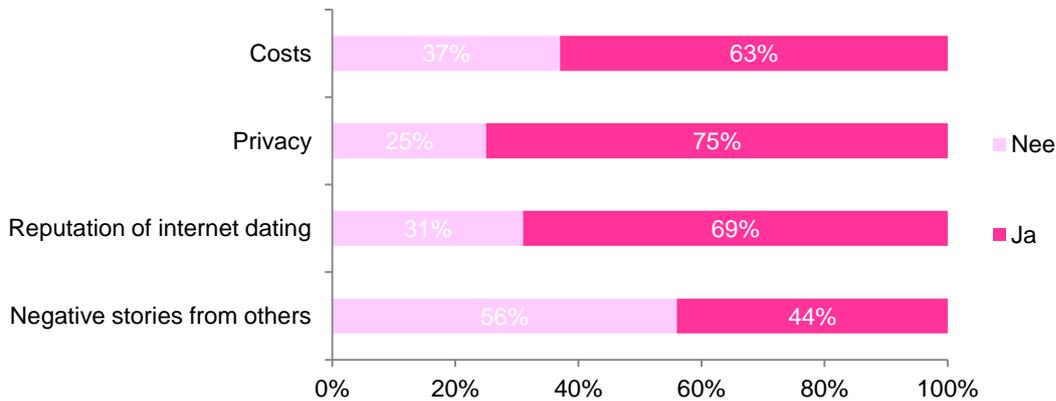
28. If no: Why have you never considered it?

(N = 28)



29. Do the following factors possibly play a role in your reservations with online dating?

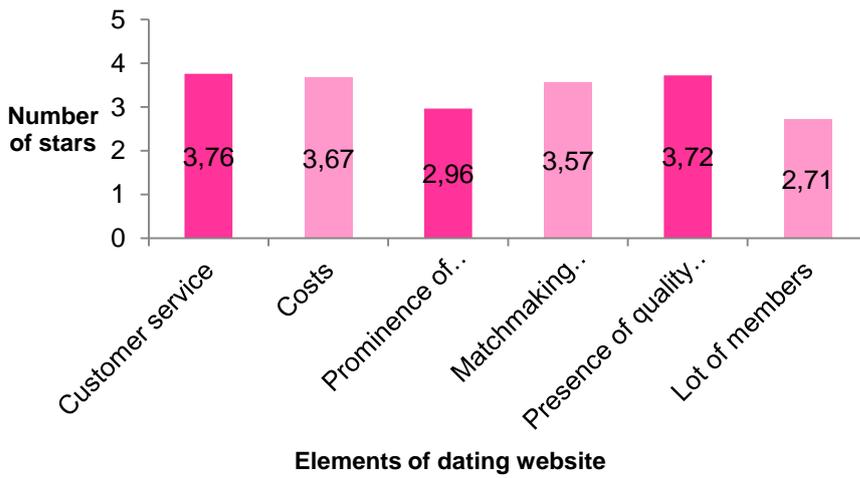
(N = 50)



30. If you would consider using an online dating site, which factors would be important to you?

(N = 50)

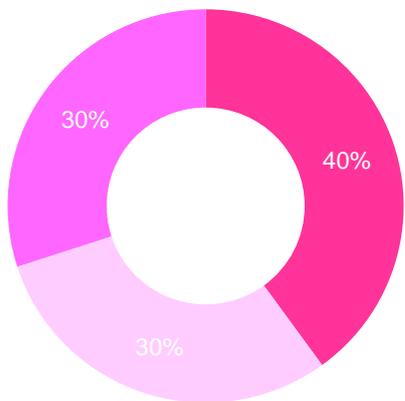
Element	Min Value	Max Value	Average Value
Lot of members	0.00	5.00	2.71
Presence of quality label	0.00	5.00	3.72
Matchmaking technology	0.00	5.00	3.57
Prominence of site	0.00	5.00	2.96
Costs	0.00	5.00	3.76
Customer service	0.00	5.00	3.76



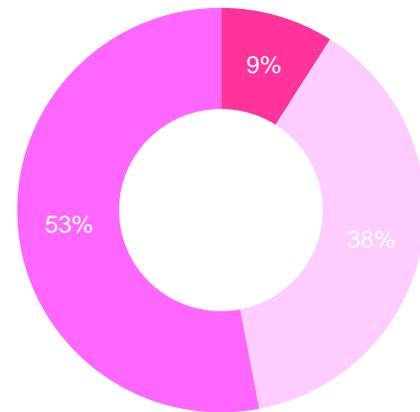
31. To what extend to you agree with the following statements?

(N = 53)

The threshold to start with online dating is very high for me



I am curious about online dating



■ Yes
 ■ Neutral
 ■ No

32. Thank you! That was the last question. Do you have any other remarks that could be of importance to the study?

Answers not relevant to the research design

33. If I can approach you personally to clarify your given answers, you can leave your email address below.

Answers not relevant to the research design