
New Jewish Matchmaking: A Quantitative Analysis of JDate Users

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JDate's popularity is evident in many Jewish social circles. Conversations among friends often include anecdotes from someone's latest JDate horror story or talk about the couple down the street that met on JDate and just got engaged. Yet, little is known about the users of JDate. Why are they using the site? Have they found true love and happiness? How many people actually get married to someone they met on the site?

Although JDate does significant market research, many of the Jewish attributes and practices of JDate users go overlooked by JDate and its commercial ventures. The research reported in this article was undertaken in an effort to explore the growing usage of JDate by Jewish singles seeking to meet one another. It focused on the typical characteristics of JDate users, such as their Jewish background, ritual and religious practices, and degree of involvement in the Jewish community. The study examined the motivations of JDate users in an attempt to understand their rationale for using a site geared toward Jewish matchmaking. Additionally, it explored the success rates on JDate via the frequency of marriages, engagements, and long-term relationships that have developed between individuals who met on the site.

Matching Jewish singles with Jewish mates remains one of the challenges to Jewish continuity. Throughout history, Jews have developed ways to ensure that Jewish men and women had the opportunity to meet and marry. The popularity of sites like JDate, which cater to Jews meeting one another for the purposes of dating and marriage, shows both that much has changed and much has not changed for today's generation of Jews: these young Jews are more likely to seek out new, convenient ways of meeting one another, yet they are still bound toward tradition and do, in fact, seek out Jewish mates with whom to raise Jewish families.

The implications for the Jewish community are great: Jewish organizations must learn from the success of entrepreneurial adventures such as JDate, which invent creative, convenient ways for Jews—singles and other target populations alike—to access and use Jewish community services and online resources.

METHODOLOGY

The lack of any previous studies on this topic at the time of this research in 2006 required the development of a study methodology to create a demographic

Based on a thesis presented to the School of Jewish Communal Service of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, California School in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Jewish Communal Service.

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profile of JDate users. I first conducted a background literature review and then had many candid conversations with contacts who had used JDate. These conversations formed the study's basic research question: "Why is JDate an appealing method for Jews to meet other Jews for dating purposes?" As JDate represents the primary service provider for Jewish Internet dating, the study was geared toward JDate users while not being exclusive to its users.

Specific research questions emerged based on anecdotal evidence presented in the press and offered by my personal contacts related to their JDate experiences. The research centered on the following questions:

- What is the religious and ritual practice of JDate users?
- What is the success rate of JDate, including the percentage of engagements and marriages that result from the site?
- What are the motivations for using JDate?

Hypotheses based on this anecdotal evidence included the following:

- JDate users choose the site because they date only Jews.
- JDate users find it easier to meet strangers through JDate because of their commonalities with fellow Jews.
- The Jewish background and identities of JDate users are high.
- The Jewish ritual and religious practices of JDate users tend to the secular.

With such research questions and hypotheses in mind, I developed a survey instrument that included the following categories: screener question (previous or current use of JDate); demographic data (age, gender, location, education, etc.); measures of Jewish identity; measures of ritual and religious practices; Jewish background and experiences; relationship status; general dating practices; use of JDate (length and frequency of usage, motivation for usage); success rates of JDate; stereotypes regarding JDate; and comparison of satisfaction between JDate and other Internet dating sites. Included in the survey were ten questions taken directly from the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) to provide a comparison basis between survey respondents and the NJPS findings regarding ritual and religious practices; this comparison presented an additional opportunity for study, but is not reported in this article.

Sample Selection

Although random sampling is the ideal method of obtaining a representative sample of a population, Spark Networks (the parent company of JDate) declined to participate in this study. Therefore, logistical limitations ruled out a randomized sample. Consequently, the sample obtained in this study can be described as self-selected; this means that survey respondents may have been more extreme in their opinions, as they self-elected to take the survey after having received it. The final survey was administered using www.Surveymonkey.com, an Internet-based company that allows a survey to be written and distributed through an online link that feeds directly to the survey. Conscious attempts were made to disseminate the survey to diverse groups of respondents. The survey was publicized through e-mail promotions by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR; sent to current students and alumni), the Los Angeles Jewish Federation's Real Estate Division, and Los Angeles *Atid* Young Professionals

Group. I also publicized the survey at an event sponsored by the Los Angeles Jewish Federation's Young Leadership Division.

These publicity efforts generated about one-sixth of the total number of 611 respondents: 51 people reported receiving the survey from the HUC-JIR student list, 36 people from the HUC-JIR alumni list, 23 people from the Jewish Federation's Young Leadership Division, 3 people from the Real Estate & Construction Division e-mail list, and 10 people from *Atid* Young Professionals Group. However, the great majority (415 respondents) reported that they were forwarded the survey by a friend; an additional 78 saw the survey posted on an Internet blog.

The survey sample consisted of the 611 respondents who viewed and responded to the survey from January 18, 2006, to February 12, 2006. Within this sample, a total of 546 people had tried JDate, whereas 65 people had not. There were 170 males and 439 females in the sample. This gender discrepancy represents one of the limitations of the study, as females were consistently overrepresented in the sample population. Additionally, 295 of the 611 respondents (48.4%) reported their age was between 22–28 years old, another overrepresentation in this sample. An additional 20.7% fell into the age range of 29–32.

Nearly 70% of the respondents were in the age range of post-college new professionals. One general characteristic of this group is transience, which suggests that individuals may be less rooted to their communities and thus more apt to need programs and services to help them meet new friends and dating partners. A total of 93 individuals (15.3%) who took part in this study were older than age 39, which suggests that JDate hosts a significant population of middle-aged adults. This group provides an interesting category of individuals to study in future research. Finally, this sample of JDate users was very highly educated: 65.7% had completed or were working toward advanced degrees.

RESULTS

Religious Identity and Background

A key objective of this study was to gain insight into JDate users' religious identities and backgrounds. Of the respondents, 593 people or 97.1% of this study self-identified as Jewish. Given changing and cross-denominational identities among young Jews, participants were asked to choose up to two denominational affiliations that reflected their current affiliations; indeed, most did choose more than one affiliation. Interestingly, 17.2% of survey respondents considered themselves either "Just Jewish" or "Culturally Jewish," which reveals that a significant number of JDate users may be less inclined to affiliate with a movement, but instead see themselves through postdenominational or alternative religious lenses.

The Jewish educational background of the majority of JDate users in this sample was quite significant. Only 6.2% of this sample indicated that they had no Jewish education from first to seventh grade. Several academic studies have linked Jewish educational experiences to Jewish involvement as an adult (Bock, 1971); perhaps the formal Jewish education experiences of many JDate users may have influenced their desire to date and marry Jews.

Survey respondents also indicated high levels of attendance in informal Jewish educational activities such as Jewish summer camp or Jewish youth group: 66.4% of survey respondents reported that they "attended or worked at a summer sleep away camp that had Jewish religious services or other Jewish content,"

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and 60.1% said they “regularly participated in an organized Jewish youth group during high school.” Thus, more than half of the sample had participated in informal Jewish education experiences.

Participant Jewish Identity and Expression

A third area of this study inquired about the way JDate users express their Jewish identities and how important religion is in their life.

Results in this area show that many JDaters consider religion to be quite important in their lives. In fact, 266 people (43.5%) highlighted religion as “very important” in their life, and an almost equal number, 243 people (39.8%), found religion “somewhat important.” Only 15 people, or 2.5%, cited religion as “not at all important.” With religion holding such a high degree of importance in most respondents’ lives, it makes sense that they chose to use JDate.

The question of how JDaters choose to express their Jewish identity was of key importance in understanding the Jewish activities of this population. Respondents were asked to check all the ways they expressed their Jewish identity.

Following the news about Israel was the most popular way (67.3%, or 411 people) that JDaters from this sample expressed their Jewish identity. Close in importance were participation in a Jewish organization (409 people, or 66.9%) and attendance at movies, arts events, or cultural events on Jewish topics (392 people, or 64.2%). A surprisingly high percentage (62.4%, or 381 people) cited that they express their Jewish identity through synagogue attendance; however survey results showed that in practice, actual synagogue attendance was unlikely to be more than a few times per year. This discrepancy reveals that JDate users perceived that synagogue attendance is one important way they express their Jewish identity; however, their frequency of attendance shows a different reality.

Ritual and Religious Participation

The fourth area the study addressed was the religious and ritual behaviors of JDate users. Survey respondents were asked about their attendance at synagogue and various other ways they participated in ritual Judaism. Synagogue attendance results varied tremendously; however, this sample of JDaters was heavily involved in Jewish holiday practices and ritual observance: 572 people, an overwhelming 93.6%, held or attended a Passover seder, 78.7% fasted all or part of the day on Yom Kippur, and 68.7% (410 people) lit Hanukkah candles all or most nights. Clearly, Jewish holidays are very important to this sample of JDaters, whereas synagogue attendance seemed to be more of an individual choice.

Motivations for Using JDate

One hypothesis of this study was that JDate users chose the site because they are only interested in dating Jews. To examine this hypothesis, questions were asked about motivations for using the site.

As shown in Table 1, the hypothesis seems to be correct: *an overwhelming percentage (78%) of individuals stated that at least one of the reasons they chose to use JDate was because they wanted to meet a Jewish partner for dating purposes.* The interesting results here, however, fall under the question of convenience as a motivational factor for JDate usage: 46.3% of survey respondents chose JDate because they thought it would be an easy way to meet people. However, only 24.8%

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chose JDate because they thought it would save time. Thus, JDate may be perceived as an *easy* way to meet people, but it takes time to sift through the plethora of entries online. Finally, curiosity seemed to be an important factor: 41.4% stated that they chose JDate because they were “just curious.” This curiosity element, coupled with the ease and convenience factor, may be reasons for its popularity.

JDate Success Rates

The final area examined the success rates of those individuals who use the JDate service. For the purpose of this study “success” was defined as someone who used JDate and met their husband or wife, fiancé, or life partner. The study additionally examined the total number of dates and second dates that JDate users had gone on, as well as traced the number of individuals who experienced long-term relationships (3 months or longer) through their JDate.

As shown in Table 2, 117 people, or 19.1% of survey respondents, reported that a marriage, engagement, or life partnership resulted from their experience on JDate. In addition, 195 people, or 31.9% of survey respondents, experienced a 3-month or longer relationship with someone they met on JDate. *Thus, almost 1 in 5 people experienced a marriage, engagement, or life partnership with someone they met on JDate, and almost 1 in 3 people met someone on JDate whom they dated for an extensive period of time.*

Effect of Jewish Education on Attitudes Toward Dating Jews

JDate users in this sample consistently reported having past Jewish educational experiences. Jewish formal and informal educational experiences are often used as predictors of Jewish involvement in adulthood (Bock, 1971). However, does formal Jewish education as a child influence one’s attitude toward dating other Jews in adulthood? With this study’s emphasis on JDate users’ motivations, it was important to understand what experiences or actions (past or present) affected JDate users’ attitude toward dating Jews. Table 3 shows a cross-tabulation of formal Jewish education and attitudes toward dating Jews.

Feeling that it is important to date only Jews was positively correlated to time-intensive Jewish education: 77.7% of Jewish day school attendees reported that they believe it is important to date only Jews. Thus, past formal Jewish education is an important predictor of positive attitudes toward dating other Jews. *The more time intensive the educational experience (with Jewish day school leading the way), the more likely one is to only date Jews.* This finding supports earlier research findings that Jewish education as a child is a predictor of Jewish identity and involvement as an adult (Bock, 1971).

Table 1.
Participant
Motivations to
Use JDate

Motivations for Using JDate	N	%
I want to meet a Jewish partner for dating purposes	477	78
I thought JDate would be an easy way to meet people	283	46.3
I was just curious	253	41.4
I know someone who met their significant other on JDate	226	36.9
My friends had positive experiences on JDate	217	35.5
I thought Internet dating would save me time	152	24.8
I was pressured by friends or family to meet someone Jewish for relationship purposes	76	12.4

Jewish informal educational experiences, such as attendance or employment at Jewish summer camp or participating in a Jewish youth group, have also been shown to be significant predictors of involvement in Jewish activities as an adult (Bock, 1971). An additional cross-tabulation of survey results revealed that 75.2% of those who attended or worked at Jewish summer camp reported that it is “important to date only Jews.” Only 4.5% of these individuals who attended summer camp said that it is “not important to date only Jews.” In contrast, those who did not attend or work at a Jewish summer camp were more likely to feel indifferent about dating only Jews: 22% reported that it is “somewhat important to date only Jews,” and 14.7% stated that it is “not important at all to date only Jews.”

A similar cross-tabulation about participation in Jewish youth groups and attitudes toward dating Jews also revealed a positive correlation: 73.9% of those who participated in Jewish youth group reported that it was important to date only Jews. Only 4.9% of those who attended youth groups stated that it is “not important to me to date only Jews,” in contrast to 11.7% of those who did not participate in Jewish youth groups.

This analysis thus showed that participation in informal Jewish educational experiences has a significant effect on adults’ attitude toward intra-dating. *Individuals who had informal Jewish educational experiences were much more likely to date only Jews.*

Effect of Motivation on Success Rates

Survey results showed that 78% of individuals surveyed stated that their primary motivational reason for using JDate was “I want to meet a Jewish partner for dating purposes.” From this statistic, it was inferred that one’s attitude toward dating Jews was an important motivational factor that influenced users to try the site. A correlation matrix illustrated that motivation was also a strong predictor of success rates. Success on JDate (defined by marriages, engagements, or life partnerships) was also positively correlated with attitude toward dating only Jews. *This means that the more important it was to a JDate user to date only Jews, the more likely that person was to find success on the site.*

Similarly, desired outcomes from one’s experience on JDate and their reported success rate were linked. *Those who wished to become married as their outcome from the site were more likely to achieve such an outcome in the end.* Of those

Table 2.
Participant
Success Rates
on JDate

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Met spouse, fiancé, or partner on JDate	117	19.1
Experienced a long-term relationship (3 months+) as a result of JDate	195	31.9
Number of total dates as a result of JDate		
0–5	224	36.7
6–10	125	20.5
11–19	81	13.3
20–30	41	6.7
More than 30	37	6.1
Number of total <u>second</u> dates as a result of JDate		
0–5	381	62.4
11–19	28	4.6
6–10	84	13.7
More than 20	15	2.5

respondents who were already married or engaged to someone they met on JDate, 76% reported that their desired outcome for going on JDate had been marriage; 34 married or engaged individuals, or 44.7%, stated that their ideal outcome from JDate was marriage, yet they had not met their spouse or partner on JDate. Only two individuals, or 2.1%, hoped for “casual dates” as the outcome of their JDate experience and ended up married from the site. Thus, motivation to find marriage was a key factor in the actual success encountered on JDate.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This study represents one of the first academic efforts to understand the characteristics of JDate users including their demographic traits, ritual and religious practices, and motivations for using the site. Through these research findings, a more complete picture has emerged of JDate users and also of JDate’s role in the Jewish singles scene.

An important implication of this study for the Jewish community is that JDate has taken on the role of the modern Jewish matchmaker and in many ways is successful in such a role. JDate offers an individualized approach through which Jewish singles can meet one another without facing the stigmas of singles parties or dances. The Jewish community must acknowledge this important role that JDate is filling and encourage and embrace its continued presence as the modern matchmaker. JDate advertises its mission “to strengthen the Jewish community and ensure Jewish traditions are sustained for generations to come.” As evidenced in the findings reported in this article, JDate users are clearly committed to expressing their Jewish identity in a variety of ways. With nearly 1 in 5 JDate users entering into a marriage, engagement, or life partnership with someone they met through the site, JDate is leading the way in creating Jewish marriages and thus positively affecting Jewish continuity for future generations.

Second, the organized Jewish community should realize that JDate represents an emerging entrepreneurial model of providing services that are appealing to young adult Jews. Using a for-profit model, JDate must make its services convenient, accessible, and simple in order to appeal to busy Jewish singles. Unlike traditional models of Jewish organizations that are based on volunteer commitment, JDate does not require long-term commitments; instead, members can choose to “join” by paying the membership fees or not and are then free to try JDate for any amount of time they desire. Additionally, JDate represents entrepreneurialism that is appealing to younger Jews: as a for-profit enterprise, JDate members expect superior customer service and are subsequently given such service. Marketing is also of key importance, and JDate targets its audience of young adults through online advertising and billboards in locations frequented by Jewish young adults.

Finally, the Jewish community should invest in partnerships with JDate. With more than 650,000 members worldwide, JDate commands an audience of Jews who are committed to meeting other Jews, which means they have a sense of Jewish identity and involvement. Because JDate offers a self-identified audience of eager individuals, Jewish community organizations should build relationships with JDate in an effort to engage young Jews in a variety of activities from Israel programs to social action to philanthropic giving.

Individuals who had informal Jewish educational experiences were much more likely to date only Jews.

Future research should focus on the larger role of Internet dating in the Jewish community. This study was limited by the sample itself: women in their twenties were largely overrepresented, and the sample was composed of Jews who received the survey through their various affiliations or membership with established Jewish organizations. Different types of questions would need to be designed to gain more nuanced understandings of religious practices and JDate users' sense of success or failure on the site. Questions could focus more on users' personal experiences on the site. Thus, a future study should pursue a larger sample of Internet daters and, if possible, identify these users through cooperation with the Internet dating site itself to provide a more randomized sample.

Despite the limitations of the study, the findings clearly show that JDate is leading the way in matching Jewish singles with one another. Almost 1 in 10 Jewish singles has a profile on the site (Carpenter, 2006), and approximately 1 in 5 JDate users met their spouse or fiancé through the site. Moreover, study findings show that the majority of Jews using the site are invested in developing and expressing their Jewish identities: their desire to date and marry a Jew is one concrete expression of the significant role that Judaism plays in their lives.

With JDate leading the way in engineering Jewish marriages, now more than ever, the Jewish community has much to learn from this important venture. For-profit entrepreneurial models such as JDate are delivering services in a nontraditional manner and are achieving success both in appealing to younger Jews and in filling specific needs of the Jewish community. The organized Jewish community should welcome JDate as an influential player in the mosaic of Jewish organizations that are working to ensure the vitality of Jewish religion and culture.

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Table 3.
Cross-Tabulation of Jewish Education and Attitudes Toward Dating Jews

Jewish Educational Experiences (Grades 1–7)

Attitude Toward Dating Only Jews	None	1 day/week program such as Sunday School	Part-time Jewish school such as Hebrew School/ Talmud Torah or Heder	Full-time Jewish Day School/ Yeshivah
It is important to me to date only Jews	N=12	N=161	N=180	N=80
Total (survey respondents that answered these questions)	n=22	n=240	n=243	n=103
	54.5%	67.1%	74.1%	77.7%