

Personal finances increasingly play second fiddle to personality, finds study

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Personality has become a more important factor than finances when it comes to dating, a new study has found.

Researchers from the University of York and the University of Essex analyzed more than a million lonely hearts (personal) ads and found that in the U.S., France, and Canada, there was a sharp decline in economic factors when choosing a partner. However, finances remained an important issue in India when it came to relationships.

To see how partner preferences changed over time, the researchers analyzed ads from various major news outlets from Canada, France, and India. They collected data from publications from 1950 to 1995, the year that most of these ads shifted to being online. They also looked at ads from 41 regional newspapers from Canada and the U.S. in 1995.

The researchers analyzed the language of these ads and categorized them into four distinct preferences. The first of these was economic, which focused on a potential partner's financial situation. The second was personality, which covered traits such as openness or extroversion. The third category was physical, in which ads expressed a preference for body types, and the final was taste, which covered issues like hobbies or habits. This allowed the researchers to identify broader trends of how partner preferences changed over time in a range of countries.

The researchers found that between 1950 and 1995, personality played a much greater role in partner preference in Western countries, while economic factors declined in importance, particularly after the 1960s. However, in India, finances remained a key issue for people searching for love, becoming more prominent after 1970, while personality factors remained stable.

In the sample of ads from Canada and the U.S., by 1995 around 40-45% of the words used by women to describe their ideal [partner](#) related to personality criteria. At the same time, only around 10% mentioned finances. Similarly, 35-40% of words in lonely hearts ads placed by men by 1995 focused on personality traits, while only 5% were related to

economic factors.

The researchers found that up until the 1970s, the share of words relating to finances in Indian ads remained stable at around 35%, but after the 1970s this started to rise. By 1995, this had increased to around 60%.

There was some [gender disparity](#) in the data from the ads, with a greater rise in the importance of [economic factors](#) in ads placed by women than those placed by men.

Study co-author Khushboo Surana, from the University of York's Department of Economics, said, "The data we have found supports Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs. In this framework, material needs—i.e. financial factors—have to be satisfied before you can focus on the immaterial ones, such as [personality traits](#). It is possible that unlike in the west, people's first-order needs still haven't been satisfied, which is why we see a focus on economic criteria."

Co-researcher Quentin Lippmann, from the University of Essex, also argued, "Our study shows personality becoming more and more important in [western countries](#) such as the United States, but we don't see the same trend in India. Once India's economy develops further, and the current generation are more secure financially, they may show a change in preference for [personality](#) factors as well. This would align them with the trends we see in the western countries we sampled."

This research is being presented at the [Royal Economic Society annual conference](#) on Tuesday, April 4, in Glasgow.

Provided by University of York

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