



Research Paper

A sociological Analysis of Online Dating Platforms.

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Abstract

Online dating sites have transformed the terrain of modern romance, drastically changing how people interact and create personal relationships. This sociological examination looks at the complicated dynamics and societal repercussions of online dating sites. Key issues investigated include the influence of technology on social interaction, the monetization of intimacy, and the development of identity in virtual places. This research explains how online dating platforms develop and reflect larger social norms and values by critically examining user behavior and platform design. By combining empirical research and theoretical frameworks from sociology and allied disciplines, this study gives significant insights into the multidimensional phenomena of online dating platforms and its relevance in modern social life.

Keywords

online dating, technology, intimacy, identification, social interaction, commercialization, digitalization, inequality.

Received 09 Mar., 2024; Revised 20 Mar., 2024; Accepted 22 Mar., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

MacIver and Page have defined Society as a web of social relationships and there are different types of relationships. A relationship can either relate an individual to a larger group like an organization, institution, community, and society or can define the connection on a more individual level. Connections on an individual level can consist of familial ties consisting of marital relationships, relationship between parents and children etc. The focus of this study is to analyze a similar relationship on an individual level which is based on the connection of courtship between two and trace its evolution over time. This analysis will be conducted by first understanding the traditional meaning of the term courtship, exploring the current and modern jargon relating to dating culture. With the explanation of the modern jargon, there comes an introduction to the modern ways of courtship and dating. These modern ways are based on the utilisation of technological platforms facilitated by the internet which consist of websites and applications.

Along with this, this project aims at studying the concepts of courtship/dating and online dating in the context of India. This will be achieved by throwing light on the tropes of dating culture, and charting the advent and evolution of online dating in India. As India is a country with a myriad of social identities, understanding the experiences of people having different social identities becomes crucial. Therefore, this study aims at looking at the phenomenon of online dating through a multi-dimensional perspective. This project also attempts at finding out the impact of the covid 19 global pandemic on online dating. Lastly, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the subject, this study formulates a list of benefits and drawbacks of online dating which range from general or universal to specific to India.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Tracing the history and origin of online dating.
2. Study the psychology behind right and left swipe on online dating platforms.
3. Study the advent of the online dating culture in India.
4. Analyze the different experiences of people with different social identities and ages.
5. Find the benefits and drawbacks of online dating

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. History of Online dating platforms

The first online dating app was pioneered by Gary Kremen in 1995. Before Tinder, Bumble, Meetme, and Hinge there was Match.com, he believed that this revolutionary idea would help singles to find someone special. "I thought it would be really interesting to use the internet for relationships and to do it right." (Gary Kremen in an interview with Outlet, 1995). As online dating started to become popular in the United States of America, so has the number of interracial couples, according to a research by National Academy of sciences. The first spike of these marriages was experienced soon after the launch of Match.com in 1995. The company expanded in 24 countries and territories, offering the websites in 15 different languages. The company claims that over the years, they have learned more and more about what people are looking for and what exactly they need that will help them in their search for a perfect match.

India- considered as the land of arranged marriages, conveys us a totally different story. After the advent of dating apps, a country where casual cross gender relationships are still not accepted socially, the influence of this app on youngsters is breaking the convention by promoting the idea of seeking love and companionship online, not necessarily with the intention of marrying. The 1990s apps like jeevansathi.com and shaddi.com were the medium for people meeting online with the intention of marrying, but now due to the growing culture of dating every relationship may or may not end in marriage. Dating platforms give a more liberal approach rather than focussing on religion, caste and community it focuses on their interests, compatibility and common beliefs. India is considered to be a country of youth according to a report of online global data, statista.com the online dating segment, India's turnover is expected to reach \$783 million by 2024 from \$454 million in 2021 making it the second largest country national revenue generator for dating apps after the United States. The second reason for the growing culture is due to the covid pandemic which hit the country, during that period this market grew phenomenally. Apps like Aisle achieved 3 million downloads in 2021, HiHi an Indian app launched last year has received a strong response during/ post pandemic, another example of this is OkCupid which was launched in 2018 and experienced a 26% increase in the registration and matches. QuackQuack saw 70% of users logging from smaller cities while only 30% were from big cities.

According to a Delhi based sociologist Bhavna Kapoor, "Indian society is a churn". Due to rising education and financial independence among youth especially women making them financially independent. She also states that the society is growing more complex and the growing concept of individualism youth find it difficult to maintain a large social group or find dates offline hence they prefer online as a medium of meeting.

2. Drawbacks of online dating platforms

Dating apps existed and were more prevalent in metropolitan cities but the covid pandemic, isolation caused them to boom in other parts of the country as well. According to a report by Match (An online dating Platform) there are 45 such applications (the most popular one being Hinge, Tinder, and Match), there has been a 15% rise in the number of people using dating platforms from February 2020 to July 2020. These applications have helped many people to connect over the years but there have been cases of harassment, abuse, and catfishing on these platforms. Shani Silver (New York based writer and host of a dating podcast) spoke how she was being treated on these platforms, "I was being used for free sex work, it doesn't feel good it hurts." She also said that before someone says hello or states their name or introduces themselves, they ask for sexual favours on these applications. All these incidents have made her feel of lesser value. These messages have multiplied across platforms and it has an effect both on men and women. A data from 2020, (Pew Research Center study) stated that woman online daters aged between 18 to 34, 57% of them received sexually explicit messages or images they didn't ask for, adding to this research they also reported threats of physical harm to women on these platforms. One study also showed that how transgender, bisexual men felt unsafe on these apps. Sexual assault is also a big problem with these dating sites. A 2019 survey by, (ProPublica and Columbia Journalism Investigations) found that "More than a third of women stated that they were sexually assaulted by someone that they met through a dating app and more than were raped." Now when these women try to report, the dating apps fail to take satisfactory and active measures. This leads to psychological stress and even worse experiences. Cyber-crimes have also increased, a total of 3000 cyber-crime cases have been reported since the lockdown began, including deaths and murders due to online dating platforms (Kaur and Iyer, 2021).

According to space transition theory of Prof. Karuppanan Jaishankar which is concerned with cybercrimes states that, "Any human being suppressed in their real time environment, feels a kind of power or strength to vent or remove such anger from behind a screen." (Kaur and

Iyer, 2021). He thinks that he will live guilt free, his actions will remain anonymous. This boosts the criminals' morale and this dwells in deeper crime. As per a news article published in the Times of India (October 2019), A woman working in an IT sector in Pune lost 10 lac rupees in matrimonial fraud. A cyber-crime case was also reported in vadodara in which a 35 year old woman from vadodara got in contact with a man from UP through tinder on 14th February 2020. After a month's friendship the man asked for 4000 rupees via Google pay which was returned in a few days, after the trust was gained he demanded for a huge amount from March to July. The woman in that time period transferred 11.35 lacs in different bank accounts. When she asked to return money the man blocked her on all social networking sites. (Our Vadodara, January 5 2021). These frauds are common on applications like Tinder, Hinge, etc (Kaur and Iyer 2021). Harassment, Assault, and cybercrime are considered to be macro drawbacks of these platforms but what about the micro aspects like ghosting, the term means cutting off contact with a potential partner, a friend etc. When someone ghosts you they stop replying to your messages, calls, they just vanish without any explanation. The mental toll which ghosting takes on your mind is quite underrated. It destroys your self-esteem, creates self-doubt, trust issues, and fear of abandonment. Along with this, the leaking of intimate and nude pictures/videos has been taken up as a new modus operandi by online frauds/potential partners, to blackmail for money or as a mode of harassment. The root cause of this is "sexting", this term describes the activity of sending naked, seminaked pictures or videos, through phones, it may be accompanied by explicit sexual conversations (Kaur and Iyer 2021).

3. Are dating apps in India designed to make us swipe right on privilege?

In this growing complex society, where individualism is prevailing, mostly the younger generation rather than meeting someone organically, in real life, prefer making online matches. A major surge in online dating platforms is due to the feeling of loneliness which was created due to the Covid pandemic. But apps like Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, Happn, and OkCupid have developed dramatically. On these applications before swiping right you can see a person's pictures, age, bio, hobbies, height, political beliefs, religion etc.

Now, when we have so much information we feel we can't be wrong about this person but on these platforms there is always ghosting and a chance of catfishing involved, that's why success stories on these platforms are celebrated because it's very rare. The notion of swiping right in India is said to be done on the basis of social strata. Example, when you are looking at a profile picture, quality matters it states that the camera is good which leads to the phone being expensive and the person in the photo would be well to do. Next, the outfit: what's the person wearing a designer suit or pajamas, and finally the location of the photo clicked. Are we swiping right on iPhones and fair skin? A lot of youngsters try hard to make their bio attractive and we judge them on the basis of their pictures. Like, if someone is looking for someone who loves to travel, and their travel photos also attract you but what if the picture is a little grainy, does it mean that they'd be a bad traveller. All these filters have caught us in a web and blindfolded us, from seeing the world as it is. This above phenomenon is called 'The Halo Effect', coined by Thorndike (1920). This effect can be, "caused by the physical attractiveness of an individual" (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). This attractive Halo is known as "beautiful is good". (Ramaker, Ashley A, 2020). This Halo Effect is ingrained in the mind from the time humans are born. An example of perpetuation of this can be seen in how most Disney movies talk about the way a good woman should be - fair, long haired, and thin. With reference to men they should be tall, muscular, and possessed with socially accepted manly abilities. Adding on to this, advertisements of fairness and beauty products show how fairness and beauty will get one success, luck and confidence in life, as opposed to not fitting in the widely accepted Eurocentric beauty standards. There is a similar situation that is emulated on these dating platforms as before swiping right on someone we unconsciously base our solely/majorly on their appearance and the visible cues to the lifestyle that the people follow.

4. Advantages of Online dating platforms.

The growth of online dating platforms have increased dramatically.

Millennials, on dating apps like Tinder and OkCupid, love to find companions. This new trend has taken over the relationship market, they find everything that fits their schedule and find like minded people within the four walls of their room. Talking about its advantages, it saves a lot of time in this post-modern society where it feels that even 24 hours is less, these apps provide you convenience. A variety of options for finding people who are like minded, have the same hobbies that you have, in simple terms you can find what you are looking for.

Also, these apps allow you to keep things informal and be open about it. You have the option of taking things slow as per your pace. A report by, (Pew Research Center, February 6 2020) claims that adults who identify themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual (48%) and LGB Adults (55%) stated that they all have used these platforms and out of which (20%) in each group have either married or been in a committed relationship with someone they first met through these apps. On these platforms, there is an option known as 'Incognito Mode', which gives you an option of hiding your profile with someone whom you dislike or even from your family members. It gives you an option to change your location and increase your proximity, for instance on Bumble, they have this special feature of "Travel Mode", where in it provides you with the option of changing your location 7 days prior before you reach that place so you can look, swipe on people and when you reach your desired location you may not be alone. They also provide with the proper pronouns, what you identify as, for example He/Him, She/Her, They/Him. It also gives a way to promote your business/support towards a cause. It can be for support towards women's health, art and culture of a specifically indigenous tribe. Lastly, post-pandemic it gives you an option of what are your preferences with regard to Covid, Example, your first date online or offline, Vaccination certificate, etc.

5. Do men and women look for different things on these applications?

According to researchers at Queen Mary University of London, Sapienza, University of Rome and Royal Ottawa Health Care Group found that men and women look for different things on these applications (Kathryn Lindsay, July 28 2016). According to Hallam, De Backer, Fisher and Walrave (2018), they documented that, "it is men's tendency to prefer Sexual variety and casual sex with a number of partners as compared to women (Grant Hilary Brenner, Psychology Today, May 26 2018). In a study done by Gareth Tyson, Vasile C. Perta, Hamed Haddadi, and Michael C Seto, created 14 fake profiles of men and women and released them in New York and London. The research findings showed that men swipe right far more than women. The male users matched with 0.6 percent and fake women 10.5 percent. This shows that women are far more selective in choosing their matches, whereas men swipe right whatever comes their way (Kathryn Lindsay, July 28 2016). Finding a potential partner on these apps is a tiring, gloomy, and tedious process. Hinge, was marketed as an application for long-term relationship but men are looking for "ethical non-monogamy" also known as 'polyamory' (Louise Perry, 13 July 2022).

Another study shows that out of 100 a male user likes 35 profiles and skips 65 while a female user likes only four and skips 96 (The Economic Times, Panache, May 14 2020). Ironically, it also stated that a male user logs into his profile 20 times in a day and a female user logs in to their profile 26 times a day. Thus, Males look for casual hook-ups/sex while females look for something more serious and valuable. However, this situation differs from person to person.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research is exploratory and qualitative. A thorough analysis of available literature on the above-mentioned objectives will be conducted. This will include statistical data and objective data regarding the number of users of online dating services in India and Worldwide, gender ratio in the number of users, popular Online dating apps in India, change in the pattern of number of users during and post-pandemic etc. Qualitative methods of primary data collection will be employed to understand the experiences of different people with different social identities in India.

Research Methodology

Sampling: Snowball sampling method will be used, it is a recruitment technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects. The aim is to have a sample size of 100 respondents who are actively using these platforms.

Questionnaire: The tool for collecting primary data would be questionnaire, it is a list of questions which is used to gather data from respondents about their attitudes, experiences and opinions regarding their usage of online dating services.

The data has been collected from 41 participants, who have been an active/previous user of these applications.

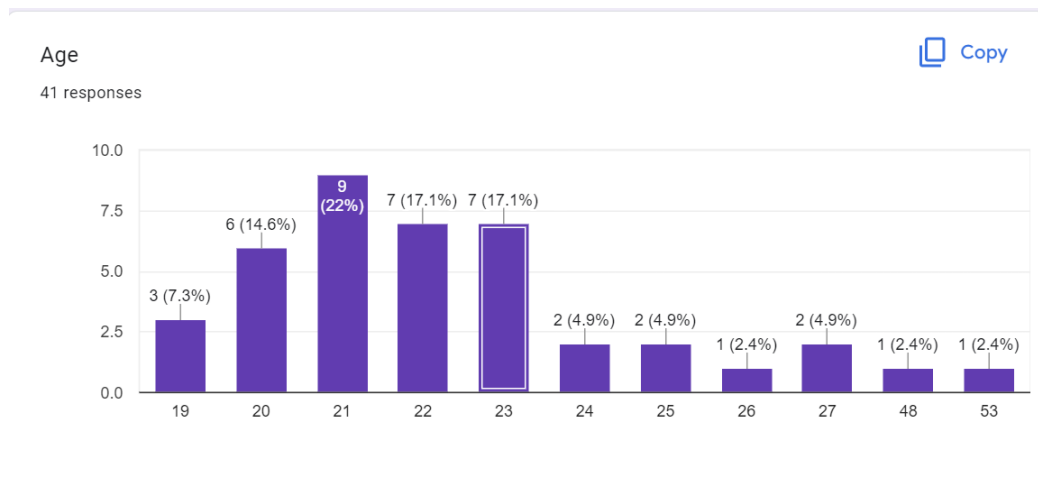
V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Survey method was used to collect the Primary data. The participants of the survey were users of various online dating platforms like Bumble, Hinge, and Tinder etc. And were majorly current residents and native to the state of Gujarat and the city of Vadodara. The objectives kept in mind while forming the survey questionnaire were as follows-

1. To collect the first-hand experience of people of different gender identities, age, place of residence/native place, on various online dating platforms
2. To understand the drawbacks and advantages of using online dating platforms
3. To find the most used and most reliable online dating platform from the perspective of its users
4. To find the least used and least reliable online dating platform from the perspective of its users
5. To understand the psycho-social implications of choosing a potential match on various online dating platforms
6. To study the most the motive behind the usage of these applications by different people
7. To understand the legal connotations and awareness behind cyber-crimes/scams conducted through online dating platforms
8. To throw light on the suggestions to make these applications a safer, inclusive and user-friendly place

DATA ANALYSIS

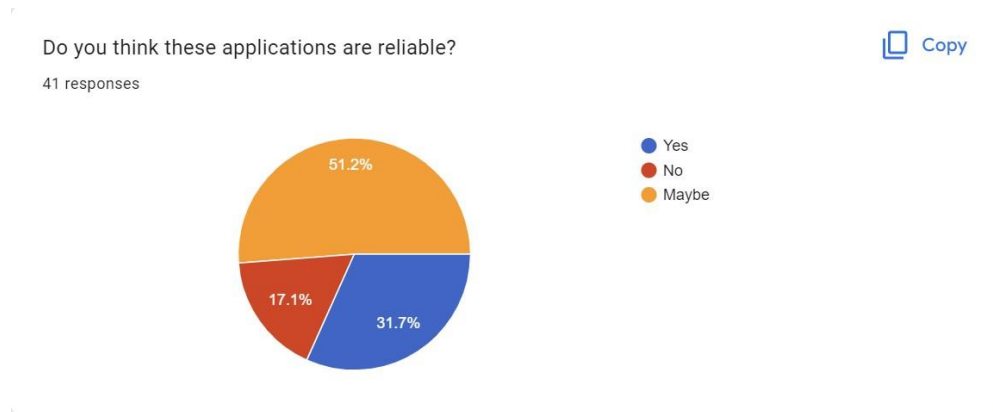
After a thorough analysis of the data collected through the survey, it can be observed that the most number of participants who are users of online dating applications are 21 years old. Followed by 22, 23, and 20 years of age. Through this observation, it can be concluded that majority of the users of online dating applications approximately fall within the age range of 20 to 23.



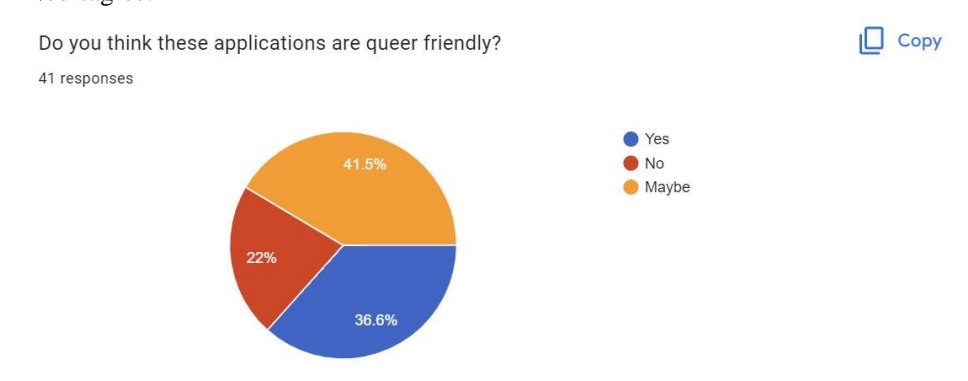
It was also observed that the most used application among these participants was Bumble and the least used applications were Grindr and Blue.

A whopping 36.6% of the participants claimed that their motive behind using these applications is to seek a romantic relationship and another 36.6% claimed that they wanted casual relationships through these applications. 9.8% of the participants wanted to find friends through these applications.

When it came to reliability, 51.2% of the participants were dubious and responded with a "maybe". 31.7% believed that these applications are reliable and 17.1% don't believe in the reliability of these applications.



41.5% of the participants think that these applications might be queer friendly. 36.6% of the party completely agree and 22% disagree.



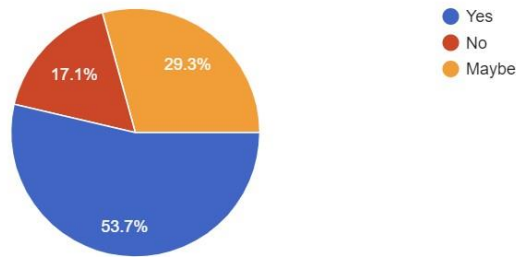
A majority of 65.9% of the participants haven't been victims to any kind of scam, abuse or harassment on these platforms. 34.4% of the participants have faced scam, abuse or harassment on these platforms.



53.7% of the participants believe that women and queer people are more susceptible to harassment and abuse on these applications. 29.3% are dubious and 17.1% disagree.

Do you think women and queer people get harassed/scammed more than men on these applications?

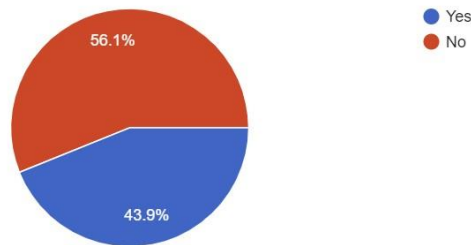
41 responses



An almost equal number is observed when it came to the awareness of legal laws pertaining to cybercrimes.

Are you aware of the legal laws pertaining to catfishing/ Abuse /Harassment?

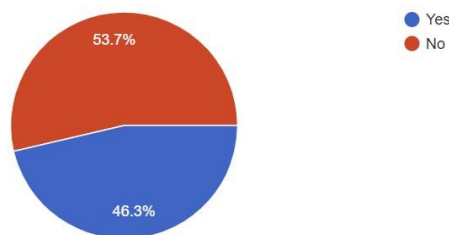
41 responses



Again, an almost equal percentage of participants have and haven't faced any stigma while using these applications.

Have you ever faced any kind of stigma while using these applications? Did you ever feel the need to keep your identity a secret?

41 responses

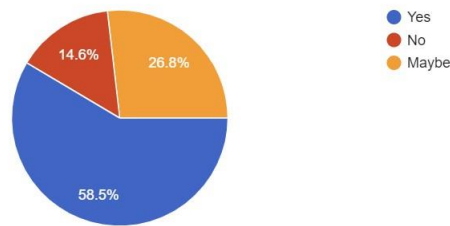


Here are the trends regarding wiping right/selecting a match with someone on these applications. Most of the people swipe right on the basis of bio/interests and pictures. Verification of the account seems to be the third priority, and religion and political orientation fourth priority.

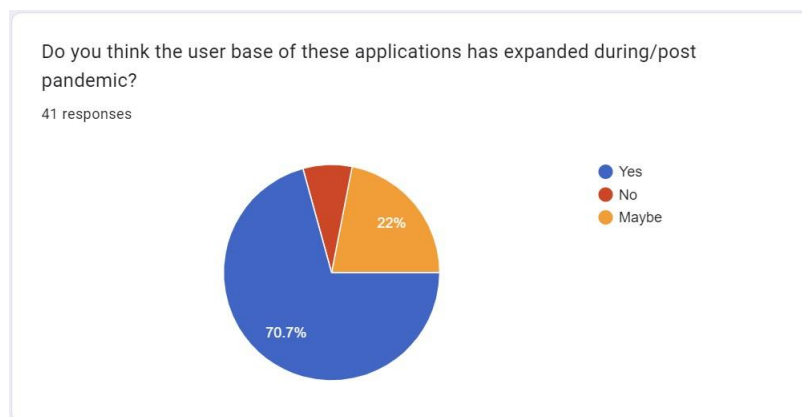
A majority of 58.5% of the participants agree that the experience on these applications varies on the basis of one's social identities like gender, religion, sexual preferences, age etc. 26.8% are dubious and 14.6% disagree.

Do you think your experience on these applications varies on the basis of your social identities like gender, religion , sexual preference, age?

41 responses



Again, a majority of 70.7% of the participants agreed that the user base of these applications has expanded during/postpandemic. 22% are dubious and 7.3% disagree.



Some of the benefits of online dating platforms according to the participants:

1. Easy to find people with the same motives as yourself
2. You get to meet new people, get new experiences, and explore more of the outer world
3. The introverts have the best advantage on these platforms, talking virtually makes it easy for them to interact
4. Can help you find a partner irrespective of location
5. It helps in passing the time, it's a distraction. Texting someone can help me in a lot of ways. Also, these applications work well for cis-het men and women

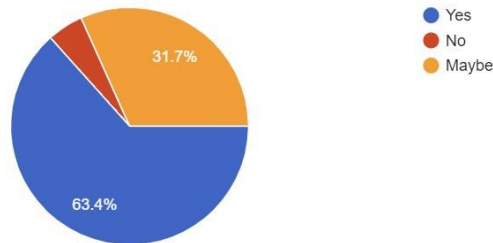
Some of the drawbacks of online dating platforms according to the participants:

1. Catfishing
2. Bad algorithms based on appearance, paywalls, people looking for quick fun rather than actual connection
3. No accountability
4. These apps are designed to be queer friendly but that doesn't happen. A few weeks ago, I came across cases of gay men being manipulated through fake profiles on the app Grindr. They were asked for money in exchange of them being left alone, safely. A cis-het man can pretend to be gay and emotionally abuse queer people
5. Social exhaustion

63.4% of the participants agree that people in different locations like different cities or states have different experiences on these apps. 31.7% are dubious and 4.9% disagree.

Do you think people in different locations like different cities or states have different experiences on these apps?

41 responses

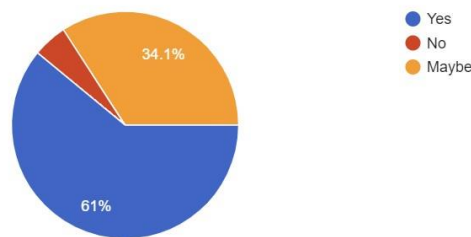


Majority of the participants believed that the most common motive for people to be on these applications is casual/short term relationships. A congruence between the participant's own motive and their perceived motive of others can be seen here.

61% of the participants believe that men and women look for different things on these applications. 34.1% aren't sure and 4.9% disagree.

Do you think men and women look for different things on these applications?

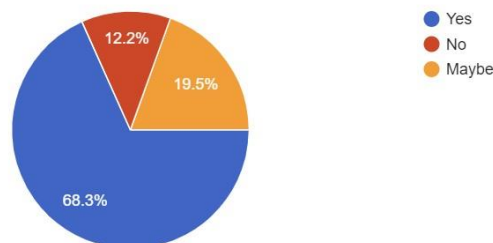
41 responses



68.3% of the participants agree that dating, expression of sexuality, pre marital relationships are a taboo in India, 19.5% aren't sure and 12.2% disagree.

Do you think dating, expression of your sexuality, pre marital relationships are a taboo in India?

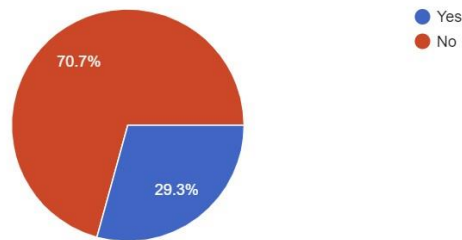
41 responses



A huge majority, 70.7% of the participants have hidden their usage of these applications from their parents/family.

Does your family/parents know that you are a user of these applications?

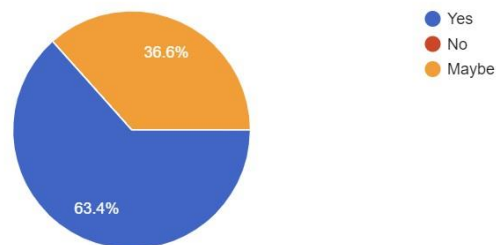
41 responses



63.4% of the participants believe that people of different ages look for different things on these applications, 36.6% aren't sure. No one disagrees.

Do you think people of different ages look for different things on these applications?

41 responses



Some of the positive personal experiences shared by the users of these applications:

1. I found it useful for casual relationships but when things don't work out it's easier to put a boundary.
2. I have found my partner on Bumble and it's been 2 years we are together and we are going strong so it turned out to be great for me
3. Understanding new perspective and getting into something short term
4. Finding people from your community
5. Provides good connecting platform for like-minded people

Some of the personal negative experiences shared by the users of these applications:

1. On apps like Grindr, middle-aged men have sent explicit pictures even after I have resisted replying, it is unsafe for women and queer people
2. There was this one man who was too quick to ask about my sexual preferences, I was quite shocked because we had just exchanged names and he started talking about sexting
3. I have met a lot of dumb people through these platforms
4. Stealing of personal data
5. No matches and constant advertisements for subscriptions, matched with fake accounts

Majority of the participants believe that Bumble is the safest and most reliable application. There is a congruence observed here as a majority of the participants are users of Bumble.

Tinder is believed to be the least safe among all the available dating applications.

Some of the suggestions provided by the participants to make these platforms better, safe and inclusive:

1. There should be more verification, don't need to confirm a person's age
2. Strict action for people who try to harass other people on these platforms
3. A feature of deleting text
4. Instead of buying premium subscription like Gold/Platinum some other option should be given
5. Sending a notification to people if their display picture is being misused
6. Helpline numbers on these platforms to reach out if they have faced any kind of Harassment/Abuse/Catfishing. Adding to this mentioning the laws pertaining to different crimes.

7. I don't know how can these applications be structurally designed better. There can be something that can be done, however, I do feel that however good the applications are designed, a society that has misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic elements roaming around like this will make any space unsafe and unreliable. That's my opinion though.

VI. CONCLUSION

The analysis of online dating platforms consisted of reviewing the existing literature regarding the origin and the history of online dating platforms. This review also includes statistical trends regarding number of users, their gender identities, spike and decline in the number of users and their subsequent reasons etc. Followed by this is a thorough discussion on the benefits and the drawbacks of these applications, the way people with different identities are impacted through these applications and a novel approach on the elitism and status quo perpetuated by the applications through its exclusionary membership offers. Along with this, there is also an in-depth analysis of the psycho-sociological phenomenon called the "Halo effect" that leads to "swiping right" on someone and finding a potential match.

Family and Marriage are always considered to be social institutions of utmost importance and value. They determine our course of socialization and assimilation into the society, ensure the continuity and passing on of cultural and traditional values. Courtship and romantic relationships thus form an equally important sociological phenomena that receive very little scientific attention. This study is an attempt to break this trend and shed light on the sociological aspect of romantic relationships in the technological era.

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