

# Analyzing Tinder Through User Motivations and Experiences Among Indian Young Adults

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## Abstract

Traditional conventions of match making and meeting potential partners were replaced by the Internet almost three decades ago. Today, mobile dating apps (MDAs) have become the preferred choice for young adults to meet new people. The trend which originally started in the Western world has eventually caught up with India as well. In the absence of any published studies in the Indian scenario, the present study examined the consumption of the dating app, Tinder. In addition to understanding the motivations for Tinder use, user perceptions and experiences were also explored. The findings of the study are suggestive of a male-dominated user base. The study also found that physical appearance was the most popular factor which influenced a right swipe, which justifies the user interface of the app. In the light of the Tinder Motives Scales (TMS), the study attempted to understand the motivations for Tinder use. Tinder use for entertainment was found to be the most popular motive. The study also revealed that an overwhelming majority of Tinder users did not believe in the possibility of finding a long-term romantic partner. Using these insights, theoretical and managerial implications are also discussed, one of which pertains to how the scope for Tinder extends beyond just bringing people together or finding potential partners.

**Keywords :** Tinder, mobile dating apps, digital romance, social media

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With the entry of Reliance Jio into the Indian market and the subsequent reduction in data plan costs, the country became the second-largest in the world in terms of Internet usage, only behind China (Meeker, 2019). Also, the penetration of new technologies, like the smartphone, has tremendously expanded in the last few years, making India one of the largest markets for tech companies. For a developing country teeming with a vibrant population of young adults, this means a great deal. Mobile dating applications (MDAs) have become the latest tool used by this population to meet other people. MDAs, also known as “proximity dating applications,” use GPS technology to help people connect with others in their vicinity. These apps are used to form friendships, casual sexual relationships, and long-term romantic relationships (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017b). Tinder is the market leader when it comes to MDAs.

Tinder is characterized by a gamified interface where users “swipe” on photos of other users based on whether they are attracted to them or not. In contrast to many online dating sites, the mobile application Tinder is free to use and setting up of an account takes only a few minutes. However, there is an option to upgrade to a premium version called “Tinder Gold” at extra cost, which gives added benefits to the user. These benefits include a greater number

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of right swipes per day, the option to swipe in different locations in the world, etc. The Tinder account is based on a maximum of six photographs, an optional 500-character bio, and search preferences which include sex, age, and distance. Tinder's matching algorithm does not take into account complicated personality traits of the individuals. Instead, it focuses on mutual attraction at the physical level. It is also interesting to note that Tinder is marketed differently when compared to apps like OkCupid that position themselves as tools to find more meaningful, long-term relationships.

There is enough evidence, which suggests that Tinder is gaining a foothold in India. There have been reports which show that 7.5 million daily swipes take place in India, and the highest average number of messages exchanged per match in the world. Also, cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Gurugram featured in its list of 10 most “superliked” markets globally for the year 2018 (Jha, 2019). However, there is a severe lack of understanding in terms of usage patterns and outcomes of Tinder use, especially in the Indian context. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by analyzing user motivations and behavioural patterns of Tinder use while further examining the scope of the application.

## Literature Review

Matchmaking intermediaries always had their place within the various cultures on our planet. The use of computers for finding partners could be traced back to New York in the 1940s. However, it was match.com in 1995, which opened the doors of the Internet to daters around the world, initiating an industry that would grow over the years.

Online dating profiles are quite extensive and contain in-depth information about users. There have been studies (eg., Frost, Chance, Norton, & Ariely, 2008), which have shown that due to this nature of dating websites, users spend close to 12 hours per week vetting potential partners and responding to their messages. Although online dating allows users to present themselves to the world like never before, it was the introduction of MDAs which changed the scenario entirely. The fact that MDAs, especially Tinder, are a combination of low effort and instant gratification, means that its value proposition would always be extremely attractive (Bernstein, 2019). Eleven percent of Americans over the age of 18 have used online dating sites or MDAs. One in every 10 American adults has used a dating website or MDA (Smith & Duggan, 2013). Vogels (2020) showed that more individuals, especially those from the LGB community, were using dating platforms to find potential matches. The majority of American adults also reported having an overall positive experience on these platforms.

The success and widespread usage of a dating app like Tinder could be attributed to multiple factors. Giddens (1992) and Paul and Hayes (2002) observed a shift in cultural attitudes among the youth when it came to romantic love and sexual behaviour. Triggered by the sexual revolution of the 1960s, removal of sexual exclusivity within the framework of relationships also meant that individuals would be seeking out partners for short-term relationships without commitments or hookups. Researchers (eg., England & Thomas, 2006) also pointed out that the genesis of relationships is changing from traditional dating to hooking up. A platform like Tinder hugely facilitates this need in today's connected world.

A study by Sumter, Vandenbosch, and Ligtenberg (2017) on Tinder users between the ages of 18 and 30 indicated that young adults use Tinder for various reasons. The important ones being love & casual sex, validation & self-worth, excitement, and ease of communication. The same study also speculated that when Tinder users gave excitement as a reason for using the app, there was a greater chance of them indulging in riskier offline behaviours such as one-night stands (Sumter et al., 2017).

In the light of the uses and gratifications (U&G) theory, Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017a) developed the Tinder Motives Scale (TMS). The scale consists of 13 motivations for using Tinder. The findings of the associated study shattered the image of Tinder as a pure “hookup application.” The results of the study carried out on samples

in the U.S. and Belgium showed that the app was not used exclusively for casual encounters. It was found people were using Tinder for a multitude of reasons based on their personality traits (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017b).

Skinner's operant conditioning (1938) could also be used to understand Tinder psychology. It could be hypothesized that continued positive reinforcement leads to addiction. This is because finding 'rewards' result in a dopamine rush, which is only short-lived, and users find themselves swiping again once it is settled (Nunez, 2018). A recent study which surveyed 1300 college students found that those that used Tinder had significantly lower levels of self-worth (Nunez, 2018).

As Tinder has an element of unpredictable rewards associated with its usage, users don't know when they will get a match or when a match will respond to an initiated conversation. This unpredictable nature keeps users hooked. Cognitive overload is another issue with having too many choices. Schwartz noted that having too many options reduced the likelihood that any decision would be made at all. Choice overload also reduces the certainty that any specific choice we make is the correct one (as cited in Henderson, 2018).

It also has to be noted that MDAs operate differently when compared to other forms of new media. It could be argued that the nuances of Tinder psychology differ from other forms of social media, and hence, the need to be studied separately.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Tinder Motives Scale (TMS)***

This study will employ the Tinder Motives Scale (TMS) as a backdrop to understand the motivations of Tinder use among young adults. The scale was developed in the light of the uses and gratification (U&G) theory. Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017a) developed the TMS based on four independent mixed-method studies in the United States and Belgium. It was found that people use Tinder :

- (i)** As an entertainment tool when wanting to pass time.
- (ii)** Out of curiosity.
- (iii)** As an ideal tool to befriend strangers.
- (iv)** For the quest of romantic love.
- (v)** As an ego-booster.
- (vi)** As a distraction.
- (vii)** To improve flirting and social skills.
- (viii)** To meet people with a similar sexual orientation.
- (ix)** Because a friend created a profile for them.
- (x)** To communicate with locals while travelling.
- (xi)** To increase their sexual experiences.
- (xii)** To forget about their ex.
- (xiii)** Because everyone else around them is using Tinder.

These motives are ranked serially where the most popular motive is ranked 1, while 13 represents the least common reason why people use the application.

While popular media and the general public constantly refer to Tinder as a “sex app,” the TMS clearly shows that sexual outcomes are contingent upon the motives behind the use of the app. For the purpose of this study, the motive of “communicating with locals while travelling” was excluded, as the sample consisted of predominantly university students who were not financially independent to undertake a lot of travels.

## Objectives of the Study

- ↳ To understand the motivations and behavioural patterns of Tinder use.
- ↳ To examine the attitude of young Indian adults towards Tinder in terms of engagement, perceived effects, and outcomes.

## Methodology

In the absence of existing literature on this specific topic, a mixed-method study was designed to explore Tinder usage. By mixing both these methods, we were able to gain a broader understanding of the subject while offsetting the drawbacks present in using these individual approaches by themselves.

### Sample

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the study. The criterion was that they had to be current or past users of Tinder and between the age of 18 and 30. The study was conducted from the months of September – October 2019. The initial sample for the survey consisted of 229 participants. However, while analyzing the data, 11 respondents had not attempted one or more items in the survey questionnaire. To minimize error, their responses were not considered. Data from the final sample of 218 participants were analyzed. Apart from these 218 individuals, 10 Tinder users participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs) that followed.

### Data Collection

A multiple-choice questionnaire was administered to the survey participants for the quantitative analysis and 5-point Likert items were used to measure agreement and disagreement. Google Forms was used to disseminate the questionnaire to Tinder users across the country. In the light of preliminary findings and trends from the survey, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to understand the nuances surrounding the topic.

## Data Analysis and Results

### Quantitative Study

Data were analyzed from a sample ( $N = 218$ ) of young adults who were past or current users of Tinder at the time of the study. The participants were in the age group of 18 – 30 ( $M = 21.84$ ,  $SD = 2.62$ ).

Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants from the survey ; 57.8 % ( $n = 126$ ) of the respondents were identified as male, 41.7 % ( $n = 91$ ) were identified as female, and 0.5 % ( $n = 1$ ) were identified as non-binary. Out of the 218 respondents, 90.4% ( $n = 197$ ) were identified as straight individuals, 9.2 % ( $n = 20$ ) were identified as bisexual, and 0.4% ( $n = 1$ ) were identified as homosexual. While responding to their relationship statuses, 64.6% ( $n = 141$ ) were identified as 'single,' 20.2% ( $n = 44$ ) identified themselves to be in a 'committed monogamous

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

| Characteristics     | Subcategories     | Responses    |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Gender              | Male              | 126 (57.8 %) |
|                     | Female            | 91 (41.7 %)  |
|                     | Non-binary        | 1 (0.5 %)    |
| Sexual Orientation  | Straight          | 197 (90.4 %) |
|                     | Bisexual          | 20 (9.2%)    |
|                     | Homosexual        | 1 (0.4 %)    |
| Relationship Status | Single            | 141 (64.6 %) |
|                     | Committed         | 44 (20.2 %)  |
|                     | Open Relationship | 15 (6.9 %)   |
|                     | Not Sure          | 18 (8.3 %)   |

relationship,' 6.9% ( $n = 15$ ) were in an 'open relationship,' and 8.3% ( $n = 18$ ) were 'not sure' of their relationship status.

Table 2 shows the participant distribution by states with the highest representation in the sample. The majority of the participants were from Kerala (27.9 %,  $n = 62$ ), Karnataka (24.3 %,  $n = 54$ ), Maharashtra (12.2 %,  $n = 27$ ), West Bengal (8.6 %,  $n = 19$ ), and Tamil Nadu (4.1 %,  $n = 9$ ). The remaining respondents identified one among Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Goa, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and Delhi NCR as their state of origin.

Table 3 shows the distribution of survey respondents based on how long they have used Tinder ; 31.7 % ( $n = 69$ ) responded to have used Tinder for less than a month, 31.2 % ( $n = 68$ ) of the respondents had used Tinder from 1 – 6 months, 11.9 % ( $n = 26$ ) from 7 – 12 months, and 25.2 % ( $n = 55$ ) reported to have used the app for more than a year.

**Table 2. Participant Distribution by States with the Highest Representation**

| State       | Responses | %    |
|-------------|-----------|------|
| Kerala      | 62        | 27.9 |
| Karnataka   | 54        | 24.3 |
| Maharashtra | 27        | 12.2 |
| West Bengal | 19        | 8.6  |
| Tamil Nadu  | 9         | 4.1  |

**Table 3. Participant Distribution by Duration of Tinder Usage**

| Duration          | Responses | %    |
|-------------------|-----------|------|
| Less than a month | 69        | 31.7 |
| 1 – 6 months      | 68        | 31.2 |
| 7 – 12 months     | 26        | 11.9 |
| More than a year  | 55        | 25.2 |

Table 4 shows the participant distribution by frequency of Tinder use ; 17.4 % ( $n = 38$ ) of the sample reported to

**Table 4. Participant Distribution by Frequency of Tinder Use**

| Frequency         | Number | %    |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| Daily             | 38     | 17.4 |
| Few times a week  | 81     | 37.2 |
| Few times a month | 99     | 45.4 |

be daily users, 37.2 % ( $n = 81$ ) reported to use Tinder few times a week, and 45.4 % ( $n = 99$ ) reported to use Tinder few times a month.

As shown in Table 5, participants responded to the question of the most appealing factor which influences a right swipe ; 47.2 % ( $n = 103$ ) responded 'Physical Appearance,' 41.3 % ( $n = 90$ ) responded 'Bio,' 2.3 % ( $n = 5$ ) responded 'Job/ Education,' and 9.2 % ( $n = 20$ ) responded that none of the factors mentioned affected their swipe decision. The fact that the Tinder interface has the display photograph occupying a large part of the screen justifies this response.

Table 6 shows the participant distribution in terms of their perception towards finding a long-term romantic partner on Tinder ; 20.3% ( $n = 44$ ) believed in the possibility of finding a long-term romantic partner, while 72.8% ( $n = 159$ ) did not believe that they could find a long-term romantic partner, and 6.9% ( $n = 15$ ) of the participants had already found a long-term romantic partner on Tinder.

**Table 5. Participant Distribution by the Most Appealing Factor which Influences a Right Swipe**

| Factor              | Number | %    |
|---------------------|--------|------|
| Physical Appearance | 103    | 47.2 |
| Bio                 | 90     | 41.3 |
| Job/ Education      | 5      | 2.3  |
| None of these       | 20     | 9.2  |

**Table 6. Perception Towards Finding a Long-Term Romantic Partner on Tinder**

|  | Number | %    |
|--|--------|------|
| Yes  | 44     | 20.3 |
| No   | 159    | 72.8 |
| Already found a romantic partner on Tinder | 15     | 6.9  |

Table 7 shows a cross-analysis between gender and perception towards finding a long-term romantic partner on Tinder. This could be an indicator for how different genders perceive the utility of the app. It can be observed that the number of males who believed in the possibility of finding a long-term romantic partner on Tinder is almost twice the number of females.

As per Table 8, the motive of using Tinder as an entertainment tool has the highest mean score (3.64). However, Tinder use to forget ex is the least favourite motivation, with a mean score of 2.08. Responding to whether the sample respondents used other swipe apps like Bumble or Tan Tan, 35 % ( $n = 76$ ) responded to have used them, while the majority (65 % ,  $n = 142$ ) reported to have not used these apps.

**Table 7. Gender Differences and Perception Towards Finding a Long-Term Romantic Partner**

| Gender     | Yes | No | Already found a romantic partner |
|------------|-----|----|----------------------------------|
| Male       | 29  | 94 | 3                                |
| Female     | 15  | 64 | 12                               |
| Non-binary |     | 1  |                                  |

**Table 8. Tinder Motives and Their Mean Scores**

| Motives   | Mean Scores |
|---|-------------|
| Tinder as an entertainment tool to pass time                | 3.64        |
| Tinder use out of curiosity                                 | 3.29        |
| Tinder use to make friends                                  | 2.61        |
| Tinder use to find a romantic relationship                  | 2.40        |
| Tinder use as an ego booster                                | 2.35        |
| Tinder use as a distraction                                 | 2.37        |
| Tinder use to improve flirting and social skills            | 2.69        |
| Tinder use to meet people with a similar sexual orientation | 3.02        |
| Tinder use because a friend created the profile             | 2.15        |
| Tinder use to increase sexual experience (casual sex)       | 2.49        |
| Tinder use to forget ex                                     | 2.08        |
| Tinder use due to everyone else using it                    | 2.17        |

Table 9 shows attitude measures of various usage-related specifics of Tinder. The participants responded to several statements pertaining to these specifics using a 5-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*). The percentages are reported in Table 9.

**Table 9. Attitude Measurements About Engagement, Perceived Effects, and Outcomes**

| Statement  | SD    | D     | N     | A     | SA    |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| People on Tinder are honest about their information.   | 17.4% | 22.5% | 47.2% | 11%   | 1.9%  |
| In-app conversations are important before arranging an offline meeting with a Tinder match.          | 2.4%  | 3.7%  | 12.8% | 24.7% | 56.4% |
| I'm impulsive while I swipe on Tinder.   | 29.5% | 15.7% | 20.7% | 20.7% | 13.4% |
| Tinder makes me feel that people are superficial and that they do not want meaningful relationships. | 16.1% | 14.2% | 26.1% | 26.1% | 17.5% |
| Tinder use has negatively impacted my self-worth.  | 49.8% | 23%   | 14.7% | 8.3%  | 4.2%  |
| Tinder is addictive.   | 33.6% | 22.1% | 20.3% | 16.6% | 7.4%  |
| I like Tinder because it requires less investment from my side compared to other dating platforms.   | 16.6% | 18%   | 30%   | 22.1% | 13.3% |
| Tinder has made dating better.   | 23%   | 19.8% | 31.9% | 16.1% | 9.2%  |
| I've had negative experiences on Tinder.   | 32.7% | 18.9% | 19.8% | 17.5% | 11.1% |
| I'm satisfied with my outcome of using Tinder.   | 14.7% | 12.9% | 30.5% | 29.5% | 12.4% |

## Qualitative Study

We used focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand Tinder use in an in-depth manner. The age bracket of participants was 21 – 25 years ( $M = 23.2$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ); 50% ( $n = 5$ ) of the users were current users of the app, while 50% ( $n = 5$ ) were past users. All of them had responded to the survey questionnaire as a prerequisite.

Two FGDs of four and six participants each were completed in about 45 minutes on average, during which time, majority of the participants answered and gave their perspectives on all topics that were put forth. Preliminary findings from the survey were also used to frame questions and channelize the FGDs.

**Table 10. Description of Participants Across the Two FGDs**

| Participant | Gender | Age | Status of Tinder use |
|-------------|--------|-----|----------------------|
| P1          | Female | 22  | Past user            |
| P2          | Male   | 23  | Past user            |
| P3          | Male   | 24  | Current user         |
| P4          | Male   | 24  | Current user         |
| P5          | Male   | 24  | Current user         |
| P6          | Male   | 24  | Current user         |
| P7          | Female | 22  | Past user            |
| P8          | Male   | 25  | Current user         |
| P9          | Male   | 21  | Past user            |
| P10         | Female | 23  | Past user            |

Table 10 indicates the description of participants across the two FGDs that were conducted. Several critical themes were identified from the focus group discussions. Although there were overlapping sub-themes brought up by several participants during these discussions, the overarching themes were named motivations, engagement, and outcomes.

### Motivations

As observed in the light of the Tinder Motives Scale (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017a), this theme covers the motivations or motives with which the participants started using Tinder. When participants were asked about the first thing that comes to their mind when they think of Tinder, the responses were “sex,” “time-pass,” “instant dating,” “socializing,” “hookups,” “chatting,” and “making conversations”. A male participant (P6) also referred to Tinder as a “millennial life choice.”

However, a female participant (P1) demonstrated that the consensus may be more complicated :

From a girl's perspective, it's slightly more complicated. There are some girls who look for friendships on Tinder and they mention in their bios also that they don't want hookups or sex. Some girls look for relationships on Tinder : they want to go on dates, hookup, get into a relationship. Some are there for just casual sex : go, do it, get out.

Another male participant (P2) noted differently, “I've been on Tinder at different times for different reasons. Mostly, it has worked out as a distraction for me.”

One of the male participants (P3) also mentioned curiosity as a motive : “People just download it (Tinder) for curiosity. Irrespective of their relationship status. Even just for an hour.”



Another male participant (P6) pointed out the following, “I got on Tinder because my friend said she hooked up with someone on Tinder. And I didn't know what Tinder was at that time.”

The majority of the participants said that Tinder being used by other people around them was not a factor in them installing it and starting to use it. A male participant (P2) responded, “No, probably not. In fact, I got to know that a lot of people are on it only after I started using it.”

The participants were made aware of the Tinder Motives Scale and how casual sex is ranked low on the scale based on studies in the West. One of the participants (P1) mentioned about how culture could be a factor in this :

Western culture is so open, now I'm not trying to bring India down.... but Indian culture is very.... submissive till date. So whatever people do....they do it with the fear that.. Oh my god! My parents shouldn't come to know.... In the UK and US, parents send their children on dates.

A male participant (P6) presented the idea of people 'looking for jobs' on Tinder :

Ultimately what you get out of Tinder is what you want from it.... Just because you are on Tinder, it doesn't mean you're there for sex. People even look for jobs on Tinder. I've seen freelancers looking to get a gig.

While discussing the motive of finding a romantic relationship on Tinder, the participants had varying opinions across the two focus groups. One female and one male participant (P5 and P7) said that they had found a romantic partner on Tinder in the past. Another female participant (P1) opined that this could be a 'long shot.' However, there were other participants (P9 and P10) who believed that finding a romantic partner on Tinder is possible. A female participant (P7) introduced the motive of using Tinder to not feel lonely into the discussion. She said, “Also.. I think Tinder.. Apart from everything else, people use it because they are lonely.. There is no motive like I want casual sex.. I want hook up....I just wanna talk.”

### **Engagement**

In the FGDs, several aspects regarding how participants engage with the app were discussed. These include everything from their swiping preferences, bio, profile pictures (impression management), etc. The importance of the bio on Tinder was pointed out by several participants. However, the majority of female participants believed that male users give utmost importance to physical appearance.

A male participant (P5) indicated that due to the excessive use of Snapchat and Instagram filters, users end up 'seeming very similar' to other users that may have just right-swiped.

The importance of profile pictures was commented on by a participant (P8). According to the participant, “If you look at the way Tinder is designed, most of the screen space is occupied by the picture.. And not the bio.”

A participant (P7) stated that her 'swipe path' is photo first, and then the bio :

The way I used to use the app was like..... There is a plethora of options, right? I'm not going to sit and read everyone's bio.... So, if I find someone good looking, then I go and look at their bio. Because it's easier that way.. Why would I read everybody's bio?

Several participants felt that improper use of the English language (eg., abbreviating words unnecessarily) was unattractive. A female participant (P7) felt that in-app conversations play an extremely important role before meeting offline, or indulging in casual sexual behaviour. A male participant (P8) emphasized the importance of having a 'common ground' which could only be established through in-app conversations with a Tinder match.

When asked about whether people are honest about their information on Tinder, majority of the participants responded 'no.' One participant (P8) believed that information on Tinder was honest 'to an extent.' A female participant (P7) thought otherwise. She said, "There is definitely an element of exaggeration. Tinder is so superficial that you are putting out the best of you. I'm doing it, everyone is doing it."

### **Outcomes**

From the literature, the survey, and through the course of the focus group discussions, it is clear that the outcomes of Tinder use are closely linked to the motives. However, the overwhelming majority of the participants believed that Tinder use ends in casual sex or hookups. In today's day and age, traditional dates have been replaced by the act of hooking up (England & Thomas, 2006), as confirmed by a female participant (P1):

When you get a match on Tinder, usually, the conversation starts with, what are you here for? You establish in the first 10 lines of the conversation the reason you are here for. You casually agree to go on a date, but in the end, it's about the hookup.

A female participant (P7) demonstrated that Tinder is a 'catalyst'. She said, "Tinder is just a catalyst to what happens in reality.. I was from an all-girls college, okay? And this (Tinder) was like a bar where I used to meet guys."

A male participant (P2) reported that Tinder provided him with multiple gratifications. "I got a good companion, a good friend, and of course, sex."

Another male participant (P4) mentioned that Tinder has 'intermittently fulfilled' his motives. A participant (P5) noted that he was able to get an apartment on rent with help from a Tinder match.

Most participants had used Tinder in different cities of India. A male participant (P6) demonstrated that the outcomes of Tinder use turned out to be different in various cities. Participants (P7, P9, and P6) reached a consensus that the difference in the hookup culture of cities like Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai reflect in the outcomes of Tinder use in these cities. A participant (P9) had used Tinder in Chennai for 3 years but did not find an 'actual person' on it. He opined that this was due to the conservative culture in the city in comparison to Bangalore or Mumbai. A female participant (P7) also agreed that Chennai would have a lesser understanding of the concept of hookups than Bangalore.

All participants agreed that Tinder use and outcomes in a university town is different to that of a city. They also indicated that the hookup culture within university campuses is far more intense than in metropolitan cities. One participant (P1) believed that Tinder has facilitated hookups between students in different colleges of the same university.

A male participant (P8) demonstrated that he had 'spoofed the location in his android device' to swipe on Tinder users in different cities of the world. Another participant (P5) had purchased the premium version of Tinder so that he could swipe in 'cultural centres' of the world, like New York, Paris, London, etc. When probed further into the reason he chose to purchase the premium version, he responded that he "wanted to differentiate how Tinder is used in India, and all over the world." He discovered that there is a 'huge difference.' When asked about their overall experience of using the app and whether they were satisfied with their Tinder use, majority of the participants responded positively.

The participants were asked whether they found Tinder to be addictive. An overwhelming majority responded positively, and indicated that they found it to be addictive at some point:

According to P1:

Yeah..see.. You get a match today. You get more tomorrow. You don't know when you will get the

next one. There may be phases where you won't get matches. This applies to guys more than girls.. You become hooked.

According to P2, “Yes.. when you start getting matches, it becomes a bit addictive.”

P3 said, “Yes.. see.. I'm a new user. Once you get the hold of it, you keep coming back to it more.”

The same participant (P3) also felt that the app is 'made that way.' He opined that, “they (Tinder) want users to purchase the premium version.” A female participant (P10) found the limited number of swipes per day to be 'irritating.' According to her, “There's one thing that's really irritating.... If you keep swiping and it gets over for the day, you can't do anything about it.”

A participant (P8) felt that Tinder is 'designed to be addictive.' “I think Tinder is designed to be addictive. You get a dopamine rush every time you get a match.”

A male participant (P5) demonstrated that he has swiped for 'straight two and-a-half hours.' A female participant (P7) opined that she got 'sick' of the app :

Sometimes.... when you are bored or something.... you want to hookup..... you use it for a period of time.. 2, 3 months..... Then you get sick of it.. You get off it.. Then you come back again.... 2, 3 months later.

This 'on and off' usage of Tinder was found to be applicable to the majority of the users. Exceptions were P8 and P5, who noted that they had never uninstalled the app since the first time they started using it. In fact, the participant (P5) mentioned that he has been using the app for the past 5 years.

The perceived negative effects of the application were observed by another male participant (P2). He said, “Personally.. Yes.. I think it sometimes drains your mind. I don't use the app anymore, but I feel like when I used to.. I used to spend so much time on it.”

## **Discussion of Findings**

There is definitive evidence which suggests that online dating and its intermediaries are gaining a foothold in India (eg., Jha, 2019 ; Khosla, 2018). This, in turn, is influencing the cultural landscape of the country. The traditional ways in which people used to meet have been replaced by the Internet and its various channels. Studying these entities, especially Tinder, requires close observation of its users. In the process of dissemination of the questionnaire, it was discovered that a large number of university students were hesitant to talk about their presence on Tinder. This could be due to the social stigma that is still attached to such an application in the Indian context. Although studies in the West have shown that the stigma attached to online dating is progressively diminishing (eg., Vogels, 2020), this does not seem to be the case with India.

Although the results of this study do not give an overview of the larger Indian Tinder user base, it indicates that the bulk of the users fell into the age group of 23 and below. The majority of Tinder users (57.8 %) that participated in the study were male. This is in conjunction with the non-academic consensus that male users outweigh female users on Tinder. There are also reports (eg., Khosla, 2018) which talk about a disproportionate male user base for the app.

The study also finds that over 90% of the users were straight. This could be due to the existence of specialized dating apps, like Grindr, for individuals who are homosexual. The study also finds that religiosity could be a predictor for Tinder use. The majority of the users (96.3%) in the survey described themselves as moderately religious or not religious. The majority of the participants in the focus group discussions (FGDs) also identified themselves as moderately religious or not religious. This is not only in alignment with the findings of Fielder and Carey (2010), which draws a correlation between casual sexual behaviour and religiosity, but is also suggestive of

the fact that religiosity could be a predictor for Tinder use.

We also observe that 17.4% of the participants in the study could be categorized as 'heavy users,' 37.2% as 'moderate users,' and 45.4% as 'light users' of the application. Female users generally tend to have more number of matches. Only in the '6 – 10 matches' category do male users outnumber female users. In the category of users who had gotten over 20 Tinder matches (41.3% of the sample), 42.6% were male, and 57.4% were female.

The study observes that 47.2% of the users found 'physical appearance' to be the most influential factor in a 'right swipe,' while 41.2% responded that it was the 'bio' that influenced them the most. These findings are validated in the FGDs. Although physical appearance was the primary influence, the lack of a good bio was deemed unattractive and the chances of users swiping right were reduced. This also justifies the app interface, which gives primary importance to physical appearance.

The study reveals that an overwhelming majority (72.8%) of Tinder users did not believe that they would find a long-term romantic partner on the application. We were unable to validate this finding entirely through the FGDs, as majority of the participants in the FGDs believed that finding a long-term partner on Tinder was 'not impossible.' In fact, some of the participants had already found romantic partners on Tinder. From the survey, it was found that 80% of the users who found a long-term romantic partner were females. The general notion of Tinder not being suited for 'serious relationships' could tempt the older population among young adults to look for alternatives in the dating space. These alternatives (eg., Woo, OkCupid, happn, etc.) consciously place themselves as apps for more serious romantic affairs, or even matrimony. In their advertising and other forms of communications, these alternative brands draw a very clear distinction between themselves and Tinder. However, the swipe feature which Tinder invented is something the other apps have adopted over time. Matrimony apps have also incorporated a variant of the swipe feature.

There have been studies that psychologically segment users of a particular social network (eg., John, Senith, & Ramson, 2014). Although, a similar approach was not taken in the present study, we were able to identify popular motivations for using Tinder and how the outcomes may be linked to these motivations. The motives based on popularity were found to be as follows :

- ↪ Entertainment
- ↪ Curiosity
- ↪ To meet people with similar sexual orientation
- ↪ To improve flirting and social skills
- ↪ To make friends
- ↪ Casual sex
- ↪ To find a romantic relationship
- ↪ As a distraction
- ↪ As an ego booster
- ↪ Because everyone around is using Tinder
- ↪ Because a friend created a profile
- ↪ To forget about an ex

This finding gives an indication of how the Tinder Motives Scale (Timmermans & De Caluwe, 2017a) would fair in the Indian context. It was observed that 'casual sex' ranked substantially higher on an Indian sample in comparison with the original scale. Further analysis through future testing would help concretize this finding.

Majority of the participants were neutral or were in agreement when asked about their satisfaction with the

outcome of using Tinder. The FGDs validated this finding as most participants, despite having varying outcomes and negative experiences, were satisfied with their Tinder use. The study shows that majority of users were neutral, or did not think that Tinder has made dating better. Also, we were unable to find strong evidence for addiction to Tinder use.

## **Managerial Implications**

The study indicates an overwhelming perception that Tinder is a hookup application. There is also considerable disparity in terms of the perception towards finding a long-term romantic partner. Due to this, it could be hypothesized that the older population (age > 25) with the motive of serious relationships or matrimony would prefer online dating agencies like OkCupid, TrulyMadly, or even matrimony websites. This would potentially affect app revenue, especially since it is already hard to establish a robust revenue model in the Indian market as consumers are hesitant to use subscription-based premium versions (Khosla, 2018).

The young user base of Tinder presents several opportunities for marketers and campaigners working in other avenues. Tinder was used by the Labour Party in the UK General Elections. An automated bot sent anti-Conservative messages using hundreds of Tinder profiles (Woodford & Darrah, 2019). The idea of using social media for election campaigns is not new in India. WhatsApp was heavily used for campaigning by the BJP in the 2019 elections (Murgia, Findlay, & Schipani, 2019). Since Tinder has already been established as a Tier 1 phenomenon (Khosla, 2018), the app could be successfully commissioned to effectively communicate to young adults in Tier 1 cities in the country during political campaigns and for general advertising as millennials have demonstrated affinity towards social media advertising due to its various perceived qualities (Arora, Agarwal, & Kumar, 2018).

Just like how radio was predicted to be integrated with social networking sites (SNS) (Padmakumar, 2015) and SNSs revolutionizing marketing and advertising (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011), individuals and organizations could find similar utility with dating apps like Tinder. Tinder's scope beyond dating was demonstrated by the participants during the FGDs as well. There have been studies that found 'creativity' within social media advertising to be an important predictor for how the content is perceived (Padival, Michael, & Hebbar, 2019). This finding could be used by advertisers in the future as the app transforms into an ad-friendly platform. The drawbacks of organizations employing social media for promotional activities has been discussed in studies (eg., Yadav, 2017), however, the limitations of using dating applications for the same is yet to be explored.

## **Theoretical Implications**

As discussed earlier, the study is able to indicate how the TMS would fair in the Indian context. In spite of cultural differences, two of the most popular motivations for India seem to be the same as in the Western context. Also, from a socio-cultural perspective, the present study indicates that Tinder is influencing Indian courtship behaviour by bringing its focus on mutual physical attraction rather than attributes such as religion, caste, and even language. It could be hypothesized that cultural differences will slowly but surely become redundant when it comes to mate selection and matrimony. Social scientists and theorists would have to look at the long-term effects of this shift in attitudes. The study is unable to confirm the operant conditioning model on Tinder use. Therefore, it is unsure whether continued positive reinforcement is causative of increased use of the application.

## **Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research**

In the absence of literature on this niche topic of Tinder use in the Indian context, the present study was designed

as an exploratory enquiry into the nuances of the user consumption of the app. The small sample size is not fully representative of the larger population, and hence, the findings may have reduced validity and reliability outside of specific contexts and situations. Also, the Tinder Motives Scale (TMS) needs to be further validated detailed statistical testing on a larger sample. A nation-wide study needs to be undertaken to fully comprehend the usage of Tinder. The patterns of usage may very well be different from Tier 1 cities to Tier 2 cities to university towns.

## Authors' Contribution

Ananthu Nair conceived the idea and carried out the study under the direct supervision of Dr. Padmakumar K. Dr. Padmakumar K. verified the analytical methods, offered insights, and supervised the study. Ananthu Nair wrote the manuscript in consultation with Dr. Padmakumar K.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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