What really happens inside a dating app

An analysis of a breakthrough approach to online dating. Tim Kitt Cofounder

What really happens inside a dating app

Imagine opening a dating app for the monthly and there are a lot of interesting things.

Imagine not having to be without any structure or there are many things to say.

Imagine a dating app that allows you to be yourself, to be open and to be honest with people in a very differently than mainstream. The likelihood is the and exchange under homosexual groups is much higher than in heterosexual. The likelihood of meeting a long-lasting partner for homosexuals and lesbians is much higher than in heterosexuals.

User Ranking

There was a lot of discussion about SO-called and whether or not SO is a real or fake. Result, I don't think there is a real or Fake or a Fake or a Real. Everybody is a little bit in between. Everybody is a little bit in between. Everybody is a little bit in between

multiple choice format, in multiple choice + free text, by checking patterns in their like history. The truth is people don't know what they like and look for in a partner.

Which makes sense, how many of us can really say "Oh I don't like when a guy/girl is X" and then falling in love with someone that actually IS X? That's why relying on what users think they look for is not a good strategy in terms of product. Most people will contradict themselves when describing what they look for. Also, we also analyzed per user, what they said they were looking for and what they did like after that, and it was not corresponding. Girls would say, red flag if a guy has shirtless pictures and then liking profiles where guys were shirtless. Same thing for having tattoos, wearing eyeglasses, etc.

Girls specifically also for most of them just say the same things that are completely irrelevant. If you really asked girls "what kind of guy are you looking for?" and asked for a free text answer they would answer "I want a guy that makes me laugh, that is kind to others, that takes care of him and is faithful." In 70% of cases there were their answer, which yes is true, but if you think about it, saying that is not going to help anyone find you a relevant person.

What we tried to do at the end is only getting a few "no go/requirement" preferences. Which I think is the way to go, and have only like a maximum of 2 or 3 choices allowed. But we never managed to make a framework that is really able to get that information from users.

AB testing

AB testing is important because it is almost impossible to know beforehand what people will like or dislike, sometimes small things have a big impact, and sometimes big things have a small impact. And usually, the most given feedback has no impact on retention. Most of the time we did what a lot of users asked, this didn't have any impact on retention.

It is difficult to AB test the algorithms of the feed because the change usually has an impact on the user that gets a specific variant but also users that he likes that are on any variant. Other than that, you can gain 10 points of retention just with AB testing and finding the best things that work.

It is actually pretty easy to create a dating app that works in terms of retention if you use extensive AB testing.

Notification

If you send a notification to a guy that a girl has liked him, if he logs in and sees nobody, the user will have a higher retention than if you didn't send him a notification.

Notification of likes received by men or women had a huge impact on retention, about 4 points.

Notification open rate was close to 80%, except for non-contextual notifications which were closer to 30%.

Sending notifications to make users come back to the app works but is not a game changer; you can make jokes, push people to open the app, offer them something, as in the end, it slightly improves people opening the app. Transactional notifications (Someone liked you, you matched, you received a message) on the other hand have a major impact on retention.

Users that didn't activate notifications didn't have bad retention; it was just a bit lower. But they still logged into the app. This was still a big portion of users (about 30% didn't allow notification permission). You can request permission at the beginning or the end of the onboarding; it doesn't change much how many users will accept them (I find it really weird to go on a dating app and not authorize notifications, but well ...)

Fun data

Non-binary doesn't exist; we had like 0.1% of users registering that said they were not a man and not a woman.

There are more girls that don't want children than men: 20% of girls didn't want children and 16% of guys.

10% of users that delete their account recreate it in the following 3 days, and it was 17% in the following month.

75% of girls want someone taller than them.

65% of young people wouldn't date someone that is too politically extreme.

Showing who likes you didn't have any impact on retention, but we weren't "locking" likes, so that's maybe the reason why.

Users with iOS are more attractive, have better retention, and are younger than users on Android. I strongly believe Tinder and co. boost users that have iOS vs Android.

The ratio peaks in the first 24 hours and then degrades, for men and women, because at the beginning you are highly exposed to people that have been on the app for a long time, which are usually people that like more.

1% of guys received 10% of the likes, 3% of the guys received 20% of the likes, 10% of the guys received 40% of the likes, and 20% of the guys received 55% of the likes.

More than 50% of men just never receive a like, and never means maybe 2 or 3 likes in the lifespan of several weeks

The best day of the week in terms of acquisition and user activity is Sunday by a large margin; Friday and Saturday are the worst.

Only 50% of girls sent 10 likes in their account lifespan.

25k new users per day in the US is a good performance for a dating app.

10% of girls that finish the onboarding never send any pass or like, after an onboarding of an average of 13 minutes.

Shady idea

I think that if you are a marketing person and have a bit of a shady personality, you can create a dating app that has significant revenue easily. What you have to do is to create fake girls' profiles; you don't really have to make them talk or match, just be visible on the feed. Then you make guys pay for similar things that Tinder is doing (you can just copy their plans). The best would be to communicate around being an app for sex. When a guy pays, you would just not do anything different than non-paying users. You will probably end up with 90% real guys and 10% real girls, but I would be surprised if you don't make a lot of money with that. Probably a lot of not really popular dating apps you find on the Play Store/Apple Store are just that, and that have no girls.

Retention as a metric for dating apps

I don't think retention is a good metric for a dating app, unfortunately that's how VC evaluate performance of B2C apps. When we think about dating it is more about quality than quantity.

- The issue is that for some people they have pretty specific things that they are attracted to, for example if you like someone with piercings, and you have that passion. There are very few people that have a piercing, so you will scroll through the available people during the period you are using the app, and at one point you will stop using the app. In truth you want to be notified when someone with a piercing has registered into the app and you want to 100% be able to talk to him, not to hope he will like you back.
- For other people it is only about focusing on one person, instead of accumulating a lot of matches. When you have a feed you are just unconsciously encouraged to keep scrolling and to not be satisfied with what you already have. The app should just handpick a few profiles for you, and make you focus on these ones.
- For some people that are not super picky about their partner, and for these people usually dating apps work very well.

The problem with not using a feed is that it will inevitably get you a bad retention compared to the retention you have on Tinder for example. What makes you keep scrolling on TikTok or YouTube or Instagram? It is the feed, it is the same on a feed-based dating app. Pursuing retention will just bring you to recreate Tinder.

As a consequence if you really want to create a novel dating app, and not a dating app that looks like Tinder for example, then you mustn't follow retention too closely, of course it is important to follow retention because it is also a great marker that your users like your app. But optimizing for retention all the time is going to end you doing the exact same thing as Tinder is doing, and Tinder is a cash machine, a wonderful one, but not a dating app. So you will end up with a worse retention than Tinder so VC won't want to give you money, so you need to be self-funded. So you need to monetize your app almost from the start. It is not super expensive to acquire users on a dating app, because a lot of people are looking for love and are testing a lot of apps all the time. What is expensive is to acquire a high number of users all the time.

MATCH group

I used to think Match Group was an evil monopoly. What now I think is that they have super knowledge on how to operate a dating app, how to market a dating app, how to be profitable doing user acquisition, how to optimize every single part of a funnel to extract as much money from users without losing them.

I don't think they are a monopoly, Bumble is a super big company that once had a lot of money to do whatever they wanted and compete with Match and they managed for some time, but stopped and now will become whatever happens.

I don't think they prevent the field from innovating, on the contrary they are super agile for their size to copy what other dating apps are doing when they feel it is interesting.

I don't think they bring anything interesting to the world either, they could crash and that wouldn't change a thing, other apps will gain more visibility and do the same things as them.

They are not hugely profitable, their profit margin is 20% (Google is 23%, Visa is 50%, Nvidia is 55%).

Operating a dating app is just about filling out a leaky bucket by nature, and so you need to be good in user acquisition, in monetization and then do anything you can to reduce the churn.

Can dating apps work?

There are a lot of people saying that dating apps are evil, that Match Group exploits people's feelings. That's true on one hand and wrong on the other.

First the expensive resource on a dating app is girls, not girls because they will pay you, but because if you have girls it will attract guys, what impacts the retention of girls on a dating app? The number of likes they send, so the first goal of a dating app is to make girls like, clearly not something evil. There is no interest in making them pay as none will do it. (Hot girls can be replaced by bots, or by girls that promote their Instagram, they should just not like everyone but they don't need to be real for the system to work, in truth it is not super complex to acquire these girls, so no need to have bots.)

Second the most expensive resource on a dating app is hot guys, because without hot guys you won't get girls, well hot guys are the users that have the best retention, without effort they will have a 50% retention, so in fact you just have to wait some time and the app will fill up with those guys, need a specific strategy? No, do nothing. Is this evil? No.

Then the last most expensive resource on a dating app is guys that are willing to pay, what can you offer to guys that want to pay? More likes received. Well good news more likes received = more retention for these guys. So the things these apps do, is how to make a guy pay the most to access likes? It is very similar to any business, a football club has the same objective, a restaurant has the same objective, a gaming app has the same objective, a gym has the same objective. The ones that are left behind are actually the ones that are not paying. Tinder for example, they are just the best at converting you into a paying user and keeping you, and they will not keep you if you don't get likes.

The problem of dating apps is not the product in itself if it is the users of these apps. People that complain about datings app are either:

MALE

- Not willing to date (so they complain they cant accumulate matches as fast as they would like),
- Make no effort to be attractive (everyday we would receive emails to the support of guys saying "im not receive likes and im not the less attractive", well yes you are),

FEMALE

- Not willing to like anyone (We have plenty of girls that can scroll through 300 profiles and not like anyone and deleting their account saying "I dont like anyone" well
- Liking users too attractive that would only want to have sex with them

The hard truth is that if you are a guy and you dont go on a date with at least one new girl per week and dont have your picture taken by a professional photograph you are loosing your time on a Tinder-like dating app

And if you are a girl and you dont date at least one guy per week and you dont lower your appearances standards then you are also loosing your time on a Tinder like dating app

So for me dating apps currently work, and actually they are the biggest place people meet these days. But using them is very disappointing

Can Dating apps be fixed ?

What I meant by "fixed", is an app where:

1. It is possible for someone to reach out to anyone and get an answer, and discussion can be interesting from the start (at least as much as in real life)
2. Your looks, how you behave, the tone of your voice,... reflect what you look like in real life
3. It is easier to meet new people than attending local events

I don't think it can. I think our digital representation either via photo, video, text, voice doesn't represent us very well and as a result we will either over-hyperoptimize before meeting and be disappointed when meeting. To minimize that risk girls will always increase their standards (which are currently too high) and guys will lower them, which is a recipe for mismatch.

But I think dating apps can currently be used at each women and men advantage, it is just necessary to have the right strategy:

- For girls you need to lower your standards and force you to go on a date with guys that you dont have the flame for (it is actually very hard to do that for a girl, very very hard)
- For guys, you need to pay a photograph (to get liked) and pay the premium plan (so that your profile is shown to other users). If you think a dating app has no incentive to show paying users to girls, then you didnt read this article ^^

I think Tinder has reached peak business revenue, and it will not decrease much nor increase much. They are not really 100% in the dating business, their business is more to entertain you in the context of dating. There are other apps that help you meet with strangers like Timeleft, and they seem to do fine, but are not really apps, they just pair you with people without letting you choose who you will meet (which I believe is a very interesting take, and could work very well in the long term). But they are not a dating app. I wouldn't look into AI to find the next dating app, because AI has already been present there for a long time, and it doesn't increase meeting people and can't fix the fact that pictures are biased, people don't know what they look for, etc ...

The biggest advantage of a dating app is that it gathers only people that are actually looking to create intimate relationships with other people. And as a result, they are seen as a more effective way of meeting new people. Their biggest issue is that coming from that users expect the rest of the process to be seamless and to find a partner in hours without doing much work.

To me, the next revolution is really concepts that will make you meet other people without having much information about them. As a user, you will trust the algorithm to match you with the right people. And these concepts will be paying only.

- Users would be able to fill out a maximum of 2 or 3 criteria in addition to the custom-made algorithm (the custom-made algorithm will try to create couples that have the same interests, the interesting variables for that are age, localization, job position (to infer social status), body type, ethnicity, religion, attractiveness level, kind of relationship searched), and the 2 or 3 criteria would be some things like (sporty, don't smoke, tall, small, white, black, no bald, high status, ambitious, ...) these ones are not easy to find and would not be entirely respected by the matching algorithm, but more a help
- Users would have limited information on the other before meeting with each other, it could be either 1-1 meetings or meeting in a group setting, (group settings is a very interesting idea, because that directly lowers the expectation of the date and you are not afraid to be locked with someone that is awkward during xx minutes)
- Users would need to pay to access the service from the start. Free dating apps are not efficient because they need to get something in return, which is your attention to monetize some features and need to keep you in the app, which is the opposite of what we want. (And yes, make girls pay, it will work, Timeleft has proved it)

So to summarize, a concept where users pay and commit that they will meet people without knowing them before. So yes, it will take a few dates to really find someone that you like, but so is going every day in dating apps and meeting people that you don't like either.

Conclusion

I'm not a lover of Match Group, I don't own their stocks, I'm not, and never have been paid by them. I don't like Tinder, I find Bumble's product to be super annoying. I don't recommend to people to install dating apps (unless you are a hot guy and looking for sex).

But really I challenge anyone that tells me that they are shit what would they change to make the product better for users (and don't tell me to remove paying features, they are a business they need to make money and it is going either through ads or through user membership).

The core problem is users (YOU) don't want to go on a date and want to find a gf/bf staying in their bed with unrealistic criteria