



User Motivation and Personal Safety on a Mobile Dating App

Vanessa Breitschuh^(✉)  and Julia Göretz^(✉) 

Heinrich Heine University, Universitätsstr. 1, 40225 Düsseldorf, Germany
vanessa.breitschuh@hhu.de

Abstract. With mobile dating apps taking over the lives of millions, researchers have become more interested in the subject in recent years. Tinder is often perceived as a dangerous place, where users are only interested in one-night stands, while collecting your data for blackmail. Prior research also showed that Tinder collects and stores a variety of information about their users. To see whether or not users are motivated to protect their data from misuse, and why they do so specifically, as well as why they use Tinder in general, a survey was conducted. Results showed that the majority of the 346 participants are more truthful when providing information than not, and usually only change their names. The main reasons for doing so were to protect their privacy and for personal safety. They mostly use Tinder out of boredom, to find a steady relationship, or as a joke. Casual sexual encounters were only the fourth most common reason for using Tinder.

Keywords: Mobile dating app · Personal safety · User motivation · Tinder

1 Introduction

1.1 Mobile Dating Apps

Social media influences most peoples' lives, including how we meet people. Online dating has been around and studied for much longer than two decades, but really gained more popularity in the early 2000s [1]. As mobile apps are taking over, providing a constant stream of information directly to our phones, the way is paved for location-based real-time mobile dating apps like Tinder¹, Bumble², Grindr³ and Hinge⁴ to be introduced to millions [2]. This study focuses on Tinder, which has received a lot of attention in prior research, as well as in mainstream media.

¹ <https://tinder.com/>.

² <https://bumble.com/>.

³ <https://www.grindr.com/>.

⁴ <https://hinge.co/>.

When signing up for Tinder each user is presented with two options: Logging in using Facebook⁵ or logging in via phone number. By signing up with a phone number one can set all information manually, meaning birthday, gender, name and pictures. One has to provide an email address, password and access to the phone's location. The sexual orientation can also be defined via the settings. Once all the information is gathered the user can start *swiping* straight away to create *matches*: They are presented with the pictures, names and ages of other users, as well as optional additional information. Once a match has occurred the users can start messaging each other. If either of the two swipes left, a match will not occur. Messaging is similar to most other messaging services, with the exception that the sending of pictures is prohibited.

Based on these functionalities, the question arises, what motivates users to use a service like Tinder? According to Koch, Ott and Oertelt [3] motivation is the willingness to perform an action as well as the totality of all the reasons that caused it. In particular, the human need for social inclusion and the associated striving for recognition and acceptance by other people represents a decisive motivational aspect for human action [4]. In addition to social interaction, McQuail [5] identifies three other reasons for using media: entertainment, information and personal identity. The following studies show how these motivational aspects are addressed by Tinder and how they influence self-expression and appearance on a dating app.

1.2 Related Research and the Current Situation

Location-based real-time dating apps have been studied in general [6–8], although predominantly with a focus on men who have sex with men [9, 10]. Looking into the study Lemke and Merz [11] published in 2018 sparked ideas regarding the app Tinder. Their paper focuses on “the prevalence of nude pictures and gratifications sought while displaying them” [11]. However, Tinder does not allow the sending of pictures and the amount of nude self-presentation in profile pictures seems minor.

In their paper, Farnden, Martini, and Choo [12] state that they “recover a number of data types from these apps that raise concerns about user privacy.” The researchers have studied eight different dating apps regarding the data each one stores. After gathering the information in a five step process, they created a table to evaluate their findings. Tinder stores the messages, profile images and precise location of a user, among other data.

Additionally, not only may the data collected by the app itself be a potential threat: “Unfortunately, the hopeful optimism and convenience of sharing in-depth, personal information online with strangers can put the user's safety and well-being in jeopardy” [13]. This statement is based on information given in an article in the British newspaper ‘The Telegraph’. “Crimes linked to dating apps Tinder and Grindr, including rape, child sex grooming and attempted murder, have increased seven fold in just two year [sic]” [14]. Murphy [13] has studied the misconducts linked to mobile dating apps,

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/>.

focusing on “Crimes of Sexual Violence and Assault” and “Stalking and Harassment”, as well as “Cyber Crimes”. During her research, the following was found by Murphy [13]: “If a crime is committed, as a recourse, information can be extracted and used against a fellow user of a mobile dating app. [...] Probable cause is not required because the user lacks a reasonable expectation of privacy in his or her geolocation and such data can be obtained without a warrant.”

This raises the question whether or not Tinder users are concerned for their privacy or personal safety, and if users are motivated to take measures to protect themselves, like using false information. “Profiles are essential for online daters because they constitute a gateway for future [Face to Face] dating” [15].

Other papers [16, 17] have already focused on the reasons people have for using Tinder. Sumter et al. [16] found six motivations: “Love, Casual Sex, Ease of Communication, Self-Worth Validation, Thrill of Excitement, and Trendiness.” This particular research, however, was conducted on a limited amount of people, who all fit a tight age range (18–30) and all come from the same country (Netherlands).

Lastly, it is necessary to gather data about the participants to see if there are any demographic differences between their answers. Tinder asks their users for a variety of data. Following this, the research model will be presented, outlining the approach chosen for this research, to fill the current research gap.

1.3 Research Model and Research Questions

The research model consists of three dimensions. Dimension 1 focused on the usage of the application. It was to be studied if the frequency with which participants use the app relates to other factors. Additionally, it was also interesting to see which different reasons a user may have for using the dating app. This dimension aimed to answer the first research question (RQ):

RQ1: Why do people use Tinder?

The second dimension regarded the personal safety online, studying whether or not users of Tinder use real information regarding their name, age, location and appearance. Additionally, if the users gave false information, Dimension 2 aimed to find out why they do so, and then answer the second research question:

RQ2: What motivates users to protect their data on Tinder?

The third dimension regarded the personal data that may have value when trying to assess possible demographic differences, and therefore was kept close to the data which users disclose publicly on Tinder, with the exception of the name (Fig. 1).

Next follow the methods, showing how the questionnaire was developed and explaining how the research was conducted specifically.

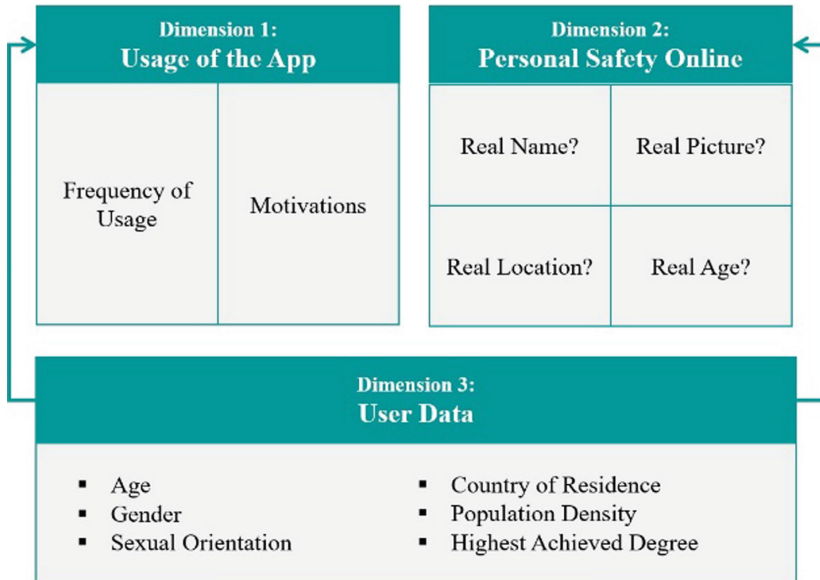


Fig. 1. Research model.

2 Methods

2.1 Building the Questionnaire

The survey consisted of the three dimensions mentioned previously, two dimensions which are excluded from this paper and two additional filter questions. It was modelled in English and then translated into German and French. Firstly, participants were asked whether they use Tinder or not and only those who use Tinder were brought to the second filter question, which checked that only participants above the age of 18 partake in the rest of the survey. Apart from these two questions, every question gave the option to not provide an answer.

The first block of questions regarded the personal safety online, enquiring whether or not the participants used true in their Tinder profile. If they indicated that they did not provide true information they were led to two sub-questions (or three in the case of age), where they were asked why they use wrong information.

Following some questions which were excluded from this paper, the participants were asked how often and why they use Tinder.

Lastly, the survey concluded in questions about the participants' demographic data. They were firstly asked about their age, to check if the age groups for Tinder are similar to those of the general online dating community: "Some 22% of 25–34 year olds and 17% of 35–44 year olds are online daters" [18]. The participants were then also asked about their gender, sexual orientation on Tinder, country of residence and the population of their local area, to monitor whether population density has an influence on the other dimensions.

After conducting a pretest which resulted in minor changes of wording, the survey was posted on multiple social media platforms, websites designed to spread surveys, as well as reddit⁶, a forum in which members can discuss anything, and lastly to a forum-section of the German platform Kleiderkreisel⁷. It is focused on trading second-hand clothing articles, and has a very active, but predominantly female user base in the forums. Next, the results of the survey will be regarded and checked for co-occurrences.

3 Results

The survey was completed by 346 participants. Firstly, in Sect. 3.1 the demographic data the participants were asked to give will be presented, as well as their usage of the app. Secondly, Sect. 3.2 will record the participants' view of personal safety online.

3.1 Personal Information

The participants were asked about age, gender, sexual orientation, country of residence and population of their local area. They were also questioned about their educational background and their usage of the app.

Firstly, the participants were asked about their age, which was then sorted into five groups. 110 participants (31.79%) were between the ages of 18 and 22. 151 participants (43.64%) were between the ages of 23 and 27, this was also the majority of participants for this question. Another 54 participants (15.61%) were between the ages of 28 and 32.

Next, the participants were asked with which gender they identify. 272 participants (78.61%) said they identified as female, 73 participants (21.1%) indicated they identified as male and one participant (0.29%) stated that they identify as non-binary.

The participants were then asked about their sexual orientation on Tinder. 278 participants (80.35%) chose heterosexual, while eleven participants (3.18%) answered with homosexual. 47 participants (13.58%) disclosed that their sexual orientation is bisexual and four participants (1.16%) chose pansexual. Eight participants (2.31%) either chose not to give an answer or chose 'other'.

When it came to their country of residence, 79.19% (274 participants) of the 346 participants who were asked said that they live in Germany. Another 5.49% (19 participants) come from the United States of America and 4.91% (17 participants) are from Great Britain. Overall 21 countries were chosen from a drop-down menu by the participants.

The participants were then asked how well populated their local area is. 67 participants (19.36%) stated that they live in a Metropolis or city with more than one million inhabitants. 173 participants (50%) are living in a city that has between 100,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants. 58 participants (16.76%) are living in a suburban area, which has more than 10,000 inhabitants, but less than 100,000. 34 participants (9.83%)

⁶ <https://www.reddit.com/>.

⁷ <https://www.kleiderkreisel.de/>.

live in an exurban area, which has between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, and lastly 14 participants (4.05%) live in a rural area with less than 1,000 inhabitants.

Lastly, the participants were asked what their highest achieved degree was. The results of the educational levels were compared to the other results, showing no significant outliers.

3.2 Usage of the App

When asked about how often they use the app, 153 of the 350 participants (43.71%) stated they use it a couple of times a day. Another 63 participants (18%) said they use it once a day. 59 participants (16.86%) use the app a couple times each week. The remaining 56 participants (16%) who gave an answer use the app once a week or less. None of the remaining intervals given were chosen by more than 10% of the participants, as can be seen in more detail in Fig. 2.

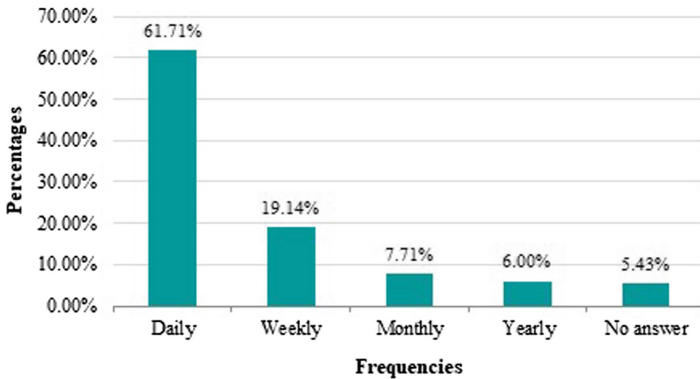


Fig. 2. Frequencies of using Tinder. N = 350

When checking how often the different age groups use Tinder, most values were close to the general data gathered, with the exception of participants between the ages of 33 and 37. Here 60% of the 25 participants use Tinder a couple of times a day, compared to the average of 43.71%. Also within the age group of 28 to 32, only one participant (1.85%) indicated that they use Tinder a couple of times per week.

Afterwards, the participants were asked about their reasons for using the app, as shown in Fig. 3 below. This question was aimed to answer the first research question:

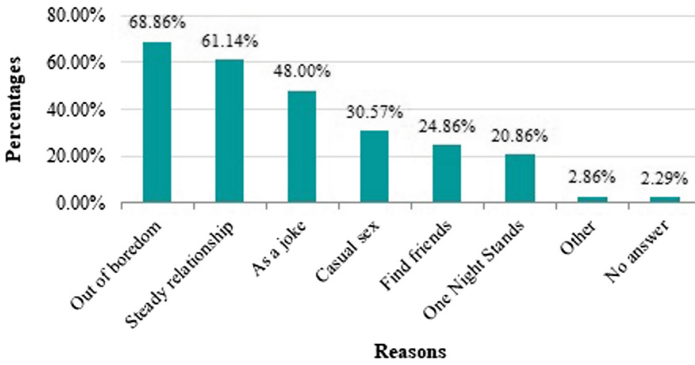


Fig. 3. Motivations for using Tinder. N = 350

RQ1: Why do people use Tinder?

The 350 participants had the option to choose multiple answers. Eight participants (2.29%) chose the option ‘I’d rather not say’. The majority, 241 participants (68.86%) for this question, indicated that they use Tinder out of boredom. 214 (61.14%) stated that they use it to find a steady relationship. 168 participants (48%) stated that they use Tinder as a joke.

The groups were then compared with each other, to check for co-occurrences within answers, as can be seen in Fig. 4. Firstly, of the 73 participants who gave ‘one-night stands’ as a reason for using Tinder, only 35 (47.95%) use Tinder ‘to find a steady relationship’. However, 62 of those 73 participants (84.93%) also chose ‘casual sex’ as a reason for using Tinder. For those who gave ‘casual sex’ as a reason, ‘one-night stands’ were only the secondary reason (57.94%, 62 participants) for using Tinder, alongside ‘finding a steady relationship’ (also 57.94%, 62 participants) and after ‘out of boredom’ (73.83%, 79 participants).

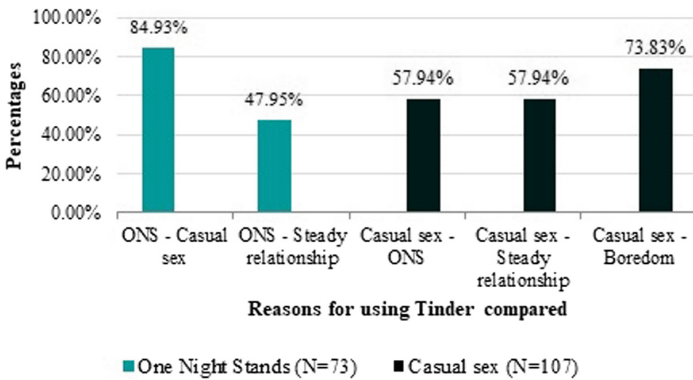


Fig. 4. Co-occurrences of reasons for using Tinder.

The reasons for use for female participants mirrored the overall distributions quite closely, and most men (47 participants, 64.38%) gave boredom as a reason for using Tinder, which is close to the average. The second most given reason for using Tinder among the 73 men was casual sex, as indicated by 38 male participants (52.05%).

When looking into the age groups for this question, the distributions were again close to the average, and between the ages of 18 to 32, the top three reasons were always boredom, using Tinder as a joke, and to find a steady relationship, in varying orders. For those participants aged between 33 and 37, the first two reasons were also boredom and finding a steady relationship, yet the third most common reason, which was selected by 10 participants (40%), was casual sex. Additionally, of the five participants who were older than 37, only one participant (20%) disclosed that they use Tinder to find a steady relationship, while using Tinder to find friends, one-night stands, casual sex and out of boredom were each given three times (60%).

3.3 Personal Safety Online

The following is focused on personal safety online, as well as how and why users try to protect their data. The questions posed here were aimed to answer the second research question:

RQ2: What motivates users to protect their data on Tinder?

Truthfulness of a Tinder Profile. Firstly, users were asked about the truthfulness of their profile, specifically if they use a real or fake name, picture and age, and whether they disclose their location to other users (distance to them). Figure 5 shows how many participants use true information regarding the aforementioned aspects in their Tinder profiles. Of the 392 participants who were asked about their name, 277 (70.66%) stated that they use their real name on Tinder, 109 (27.81%) said that they do not use a real name on Tinder and six (1.53%) chose not to answer the question. In comparison, of 390 participants asked, 375 (96.15%) indicated that they use a real photo on Tinder. Only 0.51% (two participants) use a fake photo, however, 2.8% (eleven participants)

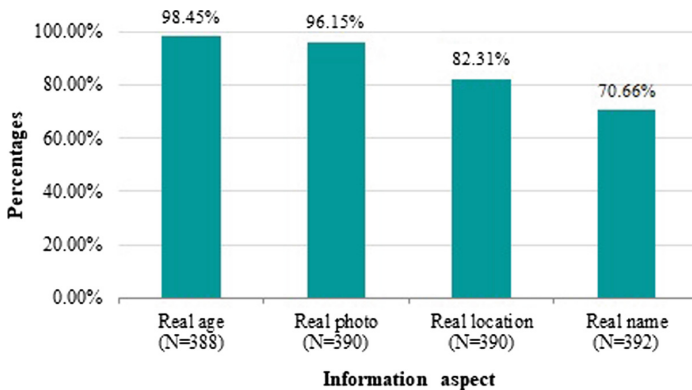


Fig. 5. Truthfulness of information in Tinder profiles.

use a picture in which they are unidentifiable and 0.51% (two participants) are shown with a group of friends. The same 390 were asked about their location and 82.31% (321 participants) stated that they have their real location disclosed, whereas 13.59% (53 participants) disabled the information. 4.1% (16 participants) chose not to respond. When asked whether or not they use their real age on Tinder, 382 (98.45%) of the 388 participants who were asked confirmed that they use their real age. Four (1.03%) stated that they use a fake age and two (0.52%) chose not to answer.

Comparing the truthfulness of information in the participants' Tinder profiles with the population of the participants' local areas showed some disparities. For example, 64.71% of participants from exurban areas (22 participants) use a real name, in comparison to the average of 70.66%. Also, ten out of 14 participants from rural areas (71.43%) use a real photo, whereas the average is 96.15%. Lastly, ten participants from rural areas (71.43%) and 42 participants from suburban areas (72.41%) use a real location, the average here is 82.31%.

Participants who chose 'homosexual' as their sexual orientation all use their real names, photos and ages in their profiles, and only one participant (9.09%) stated that they do not disclose their real location. In comparison, all four participants who chose 'pansexual' do not use a real name, even though for their ages, locations and photos they provided true information.

Reasons for Wrong Data. If participants stated that the data they give on Tinder is not entirely truthful, they were then asked for their reasoning behind this.

Of the 106 participants that were asked why they do not use their real name, 92 participants (86.79%) use a different name due to privacy reasons. 69 participants (65.09%) indicated that they use a different name as a measure of personal safety. 28 participants (26.41%) have a fake name on Tinder, because they want to stay in control. 50 additional answers spread over five other reasons were given by 37 participants (34.91%).

Truthfulness varied greatly amongst the different aspects of picture, location and age, compared to their name. Of the 15 participants asked why they use a photo in which they cannot be identified, eight (53.33%) chose 'privacy'. Another eight (53.33%) chose their 'personal safety' as a reason. Five participants (33.33%) stated that they want to stay in control. Another five (33.33%) answered that they are afraid someone will try to use their profile or chat against them. Five participants (33.33%) chose four additional reasons with varying distributions.

Regarding the location, 51 participants⁸ gave insight on the reasons why they disabled their real location. 36 (70.59%) stated that they did it for privacy reasons. Personal safety was a reason for 41 participants, which equals 80.39%. Another 20 (39.22%) want to stay in control and chose to hide their location because of that. 15 participants (29.41%) chose five additional reasons.

Of the four participants who said that they give false information regarding their age, three (75%) did it for privacy reasons. Two participants (50%) chose 'other'.

Looking at the overall information given here, it becomes apparent that privacy, as well as personal safety are the most common reasons for giving false information.

⁸ One participant was excluded due to inconclusive data.

Additionally, some participants have concerns regarding misuse of their personal data, and some wish to stay in control of the situation. The distributions for each aspect can be seen in Fig. 6.

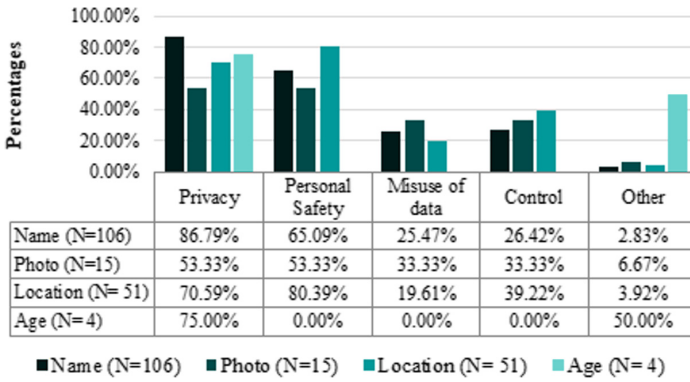


Fig. 6. Reasons for using false information in Tinder profiles.

The least given answers were a variation of individual reasons, a fear for consequences if they did give the correct info, or the fact that the participants did not want to be in a relationship.

Seven out of twelve participants (58.33%) from exurban areas stated that they are afraid someone might use their profile or chat against them.

Finally, the same goes for comparing reasons for providing wrong location information when it comes to participants from rural areas. Two participated for this question and both chose only privacy (100%). On the other hand, when looking into the reasons for participants from suburban areas, eight (66.67%) indicated that they use a fake location for privacy and eleven (91.67%) stated that they use a fake location for personal safety. The average, regarding privacy as a reason for using fake location information, is 70.59% and the average for personal safety is 80.39%, meaning that people from suburban areas are a little less concerned about their privacy in this sample. Then again, they are a little more concerned about their personal safety.

4 Discussion

4.1 Reasons for Using Tinder

Sumter et al. [16] stated in their paper that their “study identified six Tinder motivations, namely Love, Casual Sex, Ease of Communication, Self-Worth Validation, Thrill of Excitement, and Trendiness.” Though their sample size was smaller than the one used in this study (n = 266, of which 163 had used Tinder) [16], there are some commonalities found in both studies. For example they found that “the Love motivation was stronger than the Casual Sex motivation” [16], which is in line with the

findings presented in this paper. The participants of this study use Tinder mainly out of boredom, an aspect which was not studied by Sumter et al. [16]. However, their results showed that “[...] Trendiness was a main motivation [...]” [16], which might be similar to the aspect of boredom. If there is nothing else to be done, one might look into the most recent trends. It is important to note that boredom is a common reason not only for mobile dating apps like Tinder, but also for Social Live Streaming Services (SLSSs), such as YouNow⁹ and others, as Friedländer [19] found: “Most of [the streamers] appear to be using these services out of simplistic reasons, such as boredom (21.8%) and fun (13.5%).”

Mainstream media portrays Tinder as the hook-up network, where people only go to find the next best thing [20–22]. And while this is true for almost one-third of the participants, a little under two-thirds of the participants are looking for a steady relationship on Tinder. The aforementioned article by Sales [20] features various interviews with users of the app. It is correct that while more than half of the male participants of this study use Tinder to find partners for casual sex, it is still not the most common reason amongst them. That being said, 65% of women are interested in finding a steady relationship, yet this is only true for 47% of men. One has to keep in mind, though, that the survey was completed by a lot more women than men, and therefore these results may be due to a lack of data. The article by Sales [20] suggests that men are mostly interested in sex when using Tinder. “They all say they don’t want to be in relationships” [20]. The present study suggests that while men do have a higher interest in casual sex than women, sex is neither their main nor their only motive. The picture of women on dating apps painted by the article is quite one-sided as well. Towards the end of the article a different opinion is given, which is closer to what the present study found as well. As Sales [20] writes: “‘Women do exactly the same things guys do,’ said Matt, 26, who works in a New York art gallery. ‘I’ve had girls sleep with me off OkCupid and then just ghost me’ – that is, disappear, in a digital sense, not returning texts. ‘They play the game the exact same way’”.

The most important sentence regarding the women’s attitudes featured in this article is mentioned at the very beginning: “‘Tinder sucks,’ they say. But they don’t stop swiping” [20]. This also perfectly summarizes the answer for the first research question: Most participants use Tinder out of boredom. Some are looking for casual sex; but not nearly as many as mainstream media portrays it to be. The majority are still interested in finding a steady relationship and use Tinder to do so.

Deci and Ryan [23] established “that integral to intrinsic motivation are [...] the needs for autonomy and competence.” They also found that “choice and the acknowledgment of their internal perspective have been found to increase people’s sense of autonomy, [...] positive feedback tends to affirm people’s sense of effectance, thus satisfying their need for competence and enhancing their intrinsic motivation [...].” This shows two key aspects of Tinder and may be another clue as to why it is so successful. Users are presented with an abundance of choice, and even if they are limited by their lightly populated area, they can increase the displayed radius and will in turn receive more possible matches, thus giving them a lot of choices. By receiving

⁹ <https://www.younow.com/>.

matches, which serves as positive feedback on their appearance or their profile in general, they feel validated, and their “competence” [23] in dating strengthens their intrinsic motivation.

4.2 Protectiveness of Data on Tinder

Truthfulness. The study shows that participants are mostly motivated to protect their name, with just under 30% of participants using a false name on Tinder. Following this, users are most protective of their location, which is a paradox given that Tinder is a location-based application. Farnden et al. [12] also found that they “were able to recover messages sent or received by the user.” Since Farnden et al. [12] conducted their research, several new features have been added to the app, and the additional data collected through these features can likely be accessed as well. In her article in ‘The Guardian’, Duportail [24] shares which data specifically she received from Tinder, when invoking her right to retrieve the information. Duportail [24] writes: “Some 800 pages came back containing information such as my Facebook ‘likes’, links to where my Instagram photos would have been had I not previously deleted the associated account, my education, the age-rank of men I was interested in, how many Facebook friends I had, when and where every online conversation with every single one of my matches happened ... the list goes on.”

When looking into the demographic data for these questions, it was interesting to see that participants from bigger cities and metropolitan areas are more truthful in their profile than those from less populated areas. It is important to note, though, that the number of participants for each category varied greatly, which is also the case when regarding sexual orientations. This is due to the fact, that especially for users whose sexual orientation is homosexual, other apps dominate the market.

Protectiveness of Data on Tinder. The two most common reasons for using false information on Tinder are privacy and personal safety for each aspect, except for age. This is in line with the research by Farnden et al. [12]: “It is also problematic that many users are not aware how much data is being sent, stored and what their data is being used for. Many users would not appreciate their privately shared images and conversations being seen by third parties that they had not consented to.”

As an important note: With the current legal situation in the EU, Tinder is required to grant insight about the data stored to their users. “Every European citizen is allowed to do so under EU data protection law, yet very few actually do, according to Tinder” [24]. The fourth most picked reason for using false data by the participants was being afraid that their profile or chat will be used against them. Given that the information in a Tinder profile can be accessed easily by anyone, this fear is understandable. As blackmail is a threat in online dating apps [14], and Tinder users can provide information on their jobs, potential repercussions have to be considered.

Conclusion. To really assess what motivates users to protect their data is difficult. The participants showed protectiveness for their name and location, but not so much for their picture and age. The majority uses true information for all four aspects, which can result in issues caused through potential data breaches, or misuse of data from potential matches. The majority of those who use false information seem to be aware of the potential problems, which is why the most picked reason for providing false data is

privacy. It has not been established though whether those who use their real names, ages, locations and pictures are not aware that Tinder stores this data or not, neither has it been confirmed that those who provide false information truly are aware of Tinder storing all their data.

4.3 Limitations

When considering the reasons of use, most demographic data showed interesting results. However, all groups that can be distinguished (male and female participants, different age groups, sexual orientations, population densities) were imbalanced in number of participants, which means that many of the findings need to be checked against more balanced groups of participants to reliably confirm the differences that were found.

It is not certain whether the participants who stated that they use a different name due to privacy reasons mean that they are scared that Tinder will be hacked or their data sold, or that they want to protect their private data from other users.

4.4 Future Research

Several interesting new aspects for future research came to light when analyzing the results. A variety of research papers and articles in the mainstream media discuss why Tinder is so popular, while painting the app in a poor light; in Nancy Sales' article in *Vanityfair*, one interviewee stated: "I call it the Dating Apocalypse" [20].¹⁰ And even the most common reason for using Tinder given in this study, boredom, does not really explain Tinder's popularity. While other studies seem to have found reasons [16, 25], it has not been studied whether or not users actually enjoy the experience. Pages like *tindernightmares*¹¹ on Instagram suggest otherwise. Additionally it would be important to utilize some of the more recent models to study the behavior and motivation of Tinder users, such as the one created by Zimmer, Scheibe and Stock [26], who developed "a heuristic theoretical model for the scientific description, analysis and explanation of users' information behavior on [Social Live Streaming Services] in order to gain better understanding of the communication patterns in real-time social media." Even though Tinder is not a live streaming platform, the model might still be relevant, as "it is (with small changes) suitable for all kinds of social media" [26].

It would be interesting to see if the results are similar when the sample includes more participants who are more mature, male, homosexual or pansexual, or from suburban, exurban, and rural areas, in order to then compare it to the data gathered in this survey.

Another revealing aspect regarding the personal safety online would be to see which information the users find most important. At first one only sees the picture, name and age of a potential match. What do the participants feel when their match does not provide true information? A comparison between different dating apps could help

¹⁰ Which influenced the title of the article: "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse'".

¹¹ <https://www.instagram.com/tindernightmares/?hl=de>.

to gather more data on this when it comes to different sexual orientations. Also, are users aware of how much data Tinder stores and do they care? Is that what the participants who use false information in their profile due to privacy reasons want to prevent?

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