Online Dating/Dating Apps

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, online dating services are increasingly becoming popular venues for finding romantic relationships. In 2012, Match.com reported that one in six marriages started online (Ramirez, Sumner, Fleuriet & Cole, 2015). In 2013, the online mating services brought $2.1 billion (Ginsberg, 2015) whereas compared to ten years ago, in 2004, the dating industry revenue was only $473 million. Nowadays, there are many online dating sites such as Match.com, eHarmony, and PerfectMatch.com, with over 50 million users combined (Consumer Rankings., 2012), and the online dating business keeps growing (Visual Economics Credit Loan blog, 2015). Online dating refers to web sites and apps that facilitate romantic relationships' initiation by offering users (1) access to the profiles of potential romantic candidates, (2) a communication channel to initiate contact, and (3) a romantic compatibility matching-algorithm to be paired for potential romantic initiation (see Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). Indeed, most online dating platforms are similarly structured (Rosen, Cheever, Cummings & Felt, 2008), in general: users post a photograph and answer questions in regards to personal information and other relevant demographics; however, there is considerable variance among online dating forums with regard to users' level of involvement, interaction, and self-disclosure.

Despite the array of online dating sites and apps, a new online dating app entered to the online dating market, and it is taking over the entire online love business: Tinder. The new app just entered to the market in 2012, and, two years later, it reached approximately 30 million users, almost a third of the total online dating population (e.g., 96 million users) (Forbes, November 2014). Thus, the popularity of the app has rapidly grown. Tinder app innovates the usual online dating service explained above, by providing users a seemingly endless selection of photos of potential mates without the need to answer questionnaires or forms (Bertoni, 2014a); then, the algorithm of the app links users' contacts from Facebook profiles to provide photographs of potential romantic candidates. After solely looking at photos of potential mates, users swipe right if they like a person and, by the contrary, swipe left if not (Bertoni, 2014a); finally, if both parties like each other, the platform provides a parallel interface to send messages to each other to decide whether or not to meet in person and exchange personal contact information.

Besides the successfulness of online dating market, the online dating service has always been severely criticized for its 'overemphasis' on physical appearance. However, disregarding the communication context (i.e., Face-to-Face and Online), physical appearance is the initiator for communication behaviors in most of the cases. The online dating success trend has been widely explained by the new media pervasiveness argument or the idea that this service is prosperous 'only' or 'mostly' because the access to personal computers and smartphone is wide spread, then focusing only on related phenomena such as self-presentation, self-disclosure, and/or social anxiety. If new media pervasiveness explains this new

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social trend, why did commercial video-dating not become so popular during the 90s when the access to video cameras was also pervasive in the U.S.? Little attention has been directed to how online dating mirrors human perception of first impression while forming interpersonal relationships.

Therefore, the present chapter understand the role of human perception of physical appearance during first impression formation which may better tune with Tinder' interface; in other words, Tinder feels more natural to users compared to other dating apps, swipe to left or to the right feels better than 'browsing' profiles; in addition to the pervasiveness argument of new media and apps, this chapter explains Tinder' increasing popularity seems to match to interface architecture as well. Consequently, the concept of technological affordance tuning will be discussed to explain the success on online dating in addition to new media pervasiveness argument; however, the idea of affordance tuning is not widely discussed in the CMC research on online dating, and this concept is the main contribution from this chapter.

BACKGROUND

The online dating technology has been around since 1970, but the rapid rate of development of cheap, fast, reliable, and user personal computers with Internet made online dating technology to evolve from being just an online interface for personal romantic advertisement (see Byrne, Ervin & Lamberth, 1970), then to become an algorithm-based matching system (i.e., e-Harmony.com or Match.com) to finally a combination of both; with the inclusion of smartphone-based dating applications and GPS technology (i.e. Blendr or Skout), the new version of this CMC technology also became into satellite dating (Quiroz 2013). Nowadays, online dating users cannot only browse romantic candidate profiles, but also know where they are given information to decide whether or not meet them in person. But, if online dating success is explained by the argument of new media pervasiveness solely, then why did commercial video-dating not enjoy similar popularity during the 1990s when the access to video cameras was also pervasive in the U.S.?

Then a new app entered to the market in 2012: Tinder. In only two years, in 2014, Tinder reached approximately 30 million users who have used this app to find a partner making, more than 15 million matches daily; then, users are checking out about a 1.2 billion profiles -14.000 per second- (Bertoni, 2014). While the entire U.S. dating business is worth somewhere between 5 and 6 billion dollars (Forbes, 2014), just Tinder is worth somewhere between $.1 billion and $.1.5 billion, and some big bank analysts said that Tinder could even top $. 5.5 billion in few years, which is almost the entire online market soon (Forbes, 2014). The app is very popular and is one of the top producing online dating apps.

This chapter argues online dating popularity responds more to how technology closely mirrors actual human interaction in the early stages of forming a romantic relationship than other (and earlier) dating services venues; furthermore: why did Tinder get that level of popularity in only 4 years, whereas other online dating sites have been around for more than a decade without obtaining the same users' preference? There exists a constant tension between tasks and technologies in interface design; Gaver (1991) accurately explains that a design based on only technology innovations is functionally awkward, and, by the contrary, a design just based on users' needs may lead to overlook technological innovations; indeed, the main purpose for artifact interface design should be to create a CMC architecture which reflects an interaction between human sensory systems and CMC affordances. Consequently, in order to answer the main queries of this chapter, non-verbal research on physical attractiveness and first impression formation with the concept of affordance tuning along the way will be discussed to explain online dating increasing engagement across the world, an idea which has been ruled out by scholarly research.