Dating Apps in the Lives of Young Romanian Women. A Preliminary Study

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Abstract: The emergent field of study into mobile dating applications has focused primarily on American and Western European young adults, with consistent results. This study is intent on laying forth the basic groundwork for the extension of this inquiry to more culturally conservative groups such as Central and Eastern European young adults. In a culture where one third of adults consider that pre-marital sex is never justifiable[1], can dating apps make a dent in established 'traditional' courting rituals and family formation values? By means of self-reported quantitative research, we looked at how young women in Romania (N=155) perceive mobile dating apps, what motivates them to use online dating and what effects this usage has on their sexual and romantic relationships. More than half (54%) of the women who participated in our study reported having engaged in a form of offline relationship as a result of using online dating apps. Their motivations range from the desire to meet partners with similar interests, to simply passing the time. The intention to form a stable romantic relationship is only slightly dominant over finding partners for

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[1]According to results of the World Values Survey wave 6, 2010-2014 (Inglehart et al. 2014).

casual sex. The two intentions are clearly in conflict, resulting largely in quitting the usage of the app. Another reason for withdrawal from using the app has been the frequency of unpleasant experiences that they were exposed to in this medium. This suggests a connection between pursued outcomes and harassment in online mobile dating. Underlying user perceptions and behavior, responses indicate some unease in using online dating against the background of traditional dating. In turn, this leads to devaluing online dating as a desperate measure or an experience lacking in substance. The study offers preliminary insight into whether dating apps disrupt or reinforce values and behaviors commonly experienced by young Romanian women in traditional or offline dating.

Keywords: sexuality, dating, Tinder, dating apps, uses and gratification theory.

Introduction

The popularization of internet-based social technologies has produced fundamental changes in the way dynamic discourses, attitudes, values and practices intersect to create new, mediated constructs of social relations. In 2017, around 70% of global Internet users were also using one or more social media services (Johnson, Liu, and Peart 2017). The degree to which social media usage has changed behaviors in just two decades, as well as the growing availability of data, have facilitated the growth of social media research. Today, it is an exceptionally prolific field of study[2]. A more recent and less homogenous branch of social media research is the study of online dating through dedicated mobile applications (hereafter *dating apps* or *mobile dating apps*). Prompted by how the first popular dating apps challenged existing ideas about dating, sex and relationships, studies have predominantly looked at how these technologies have been used by North Americans and Western Europeans.

Why should we care about how Romanian, or Central and Eastern Europeans for that matter, use dating apps? Firstly, the sheer popularity of such apps raises a non-trivial problem: dating apps might be irreversibly changing our concepts of love, sex, and our relationship initiation

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[2] One exhaustive meta-analysis of articles referencing a social network site identified 610 such texts between 2004 and 2011(Osch and Coursaris 2015), and this body of work has likely become much larger since 2011 due to the exceptional growth of Facebook (1 billion monthly active users in 2012, 2,23 billion monthly active users in 2018) (Facebook 2018).

behavior. Dating apps make meeting people easy and fun. They remove the social constraints and rituals involved in creating the right conditions for meeting a sexual or romantic partner, and they introduce a dimension of play by employing user interface elements that gamify dating (Albury et al. 2017; Nickalls 2017). Secondly, any significant consequences of dating apps usage that might be found in studies using American and Western European samples will likely manifest differently in Eastern European populations due to cultural differences and distances in values related to sexuality and family formation. As the past years have seen a global rise in the usage of dating apps, they have increasingly shaped the present and future of modern relationships across all of these populations.

We are interested in looking at how young Romanian women perceive the usage of dating apps and what their motivations and outcomes are in using the apps. Perceptions of app usage refer to the negative or positive attitudes that women hold towards using dating apps. By motivations, we understand any reasons invoked by the participants in our study as motives for signing up for a mobile dating app. Outcomes refer to how people's intentions for using an app are fulfilled or denied. In a larger sense, outcomes include any aspect of their user experience (swiping, matching, messaging) and changes produced in their offline social relations as a result of engaging with the app (starting an online relationship outside the dating app, going on a date, engaging in sexual activity, starting a romantic relationship).

Our research questions are:

Q1: How are dating apps perceived by young Romanians? Is there any stigma associated with using dating apps?

Q2: What are the most frequent motivations driving young Romanians to create a dating app profile?

Q3: What are the outcomes of using dating apps (i.e. do most people end up hooking up, starting a romantic relationship or a friendship) and do users get to actually move past swiping and messaging?

Conceived as an exploratory, non-exhaustive investigation, this study aims to provide several descriptive indicators about the usage of dating apps by young people (and specifically young women) in Romania. Our intention is to offer preliminary data about the local specificities

of the mobile dating experience, and how this experience might differ from that of young people in North America and Western Europe.

Dating apps: functions and usage

Mobile dating apps are social networks accessed via a smartphone, that use GPS (location tracking) in order to help connect people. Their purpose is to allow people in the same area to find dates, meet, chat, have casual sex, or potentially get involved with someone in a romantic way.

The most popular dating app worldwide is Tinder by all industry estimations, with the parent company confirming that the app was downloaded 40 million times by December 2014. Launched in 2012, Tinder's rapid growth is the most likely driving force behind tipping online dating from desktop to mobile in 2014, when an industry report estimates that the ratio of online dating users shifted to 60% mobile and 40% desktop (Dogtiev 2018). Like most mobile dating apps, Tinder relies on a mobile phone's GPS to match users located in proximity of each other. The paid subscription version of Tinder also allows for choosing a different location than the user's current geolocation. With Tinder, you get to swipe right (signaling you want to engage with that person) or left (to say that you do not). If the person whose profile you swiped right on swipes right back on your profile, then you have "matched." A "match" means the two parties are now able to start a conversation via an in-app text chat. Blocking or reporting someone is also usually possible in all dating apps.

Attempts at creating location-based mobile dating existed as early as 2003 through *proxidating*, a connecting technology using Bluetooth (Jung and Blom 2006). This was reported about in the Romanian press (Andone 2005), but we don't have access to any usage data. As expected, it wasn't until after the introduction of the smartphone that mobile dating really took off. The first app that differentiated itself through an unprecedented number of users was Grindr, a dating app for gay and bisexual men, or other men who have sex with men, which launched in 2009 and reached 6 million users by 2013 (Goedel and Duncan 2015). From 2014 onwards, Tinder continued to be the global market leader in mobile dating. In Eastern Europe, however, industry reports indicate Badoo as the most downloaded app (BBC News 2017). Not much is known so far about the use of any of these apps in Romania.

We consider mobile dating to have a different impact on internet users than online dating websites, as they are created to be easier to use and within one's reach all the time. Same as dating websites, mobile dating apps permit users to create a profile on their platform and provide a description about themselves, their lifestyles, as well as to add pictures on their profiles. Some criteria for setting up the mobile dating account include sexual orientation, age, and gender. Unlike dating websites, mobile dating apps are location-based, meaning that people can connect with other users based on their proximity, thus facilitating the chance of meeting face-to-face.

Dating apps: impact

Some of the first studies on online mediated dating show that about 10% of Internet users in the United States have met sexual and/or romantic partners online in the early 2000s (J. Katz and Aspden 1997; J. E. Katz and Rice 2002) and one third of American marriages developed from relationships started online between 2005 and 2012 (Cacioppo et al. 2013). The Pew Research Center has been monitoring online dating in the United States as early as 2013 (Smith and Duggan 2013). Their last report on the topic shows that in 2016, 15% of Americans have used an online dating service. Between 2013 and 2016, in just three years, online dating through a mobile application has spiked from 11% to 15% of the total American population (Smith 2016). When it comes to the demographics of online dating, we know that it has been used most frequently by 25-to-34-year-olds (Smith and Duggan 2013). However, mobile dating apps have driven usage growth among emerging adults between the ages of 18 to 24, a group that now reports using dating apps more than any other age group (24%) (Smith and Anderson 2016).

We know much less about online dating in Central and Eastern European countries. To the extent of our search up to mid-2018, we have not been able to find descriptive data about online dating usage in this part of the world. Some indications can be found in mobile industry reports or whitepapers, which point towards a total dating app uptake in Eastern Europe of around 9% (Startapp 2017), and show that the most popular dating app by number of downloads in this region seems to be Badoo (BBC News 2017). Central and Eastern Europeans have occasionally been sampled in connection with online dating in studies dealing with highly specific topics. To give only two examples, a Hungarian study looked at the addictive use of dating apps (Orosz et al. 2018), and a Polish study (Marganski 2017) looked at sexting among Polish youth. More research

is needed into the impact of dating apps on general dating behavior for the population of this region.

Dating apps: a potential disruption to traditional values about relationships through motivations and outcomes

Romania, and Eastern Europe in general, present an interesting case for testing how the rise in popularity of dating apps is affecting attitudes about relationships, because of the region's post-socialist culture of conservative values about sexuality and family formation. Are dating apps as used by Romanian women disruptive to socialized, commonly shared conceptions about sexuality and to common social practices of sexuality passed down from older generations?

Many Romanians still adhere to a traditional view of close personal relationships. This view includes attitudes against pre-marital sexual relations and support for the traditional family model. As mentioned before, World Value Survey data from 2012 shows that many Romanians are not favorable towards pre-marital sex (only 23.3% of up to 29-year-olds and 8.7% of people over 50 years old consider pre-marital sex to be morally acceptable) (Inglehart et al. 2014). Furthermore, a 2006 survey (Rotariu 2006) reports that 92% out of 1953 Romanian women surveyed agreed with the statement "to grow happily, a child needs a family with a mother and a father." A longitudinal analysis of the changes in values among Eastern European youths based on results of the European Value Survey from 1990 (Comsa and Rusu 2009) found that support of young Romanians for the traditional family model had increased from 2000 (-.018) to 2005 (.009)[3]. As defined by the authors, the traditional family model consists of attitudes towards 3 dimensions: "woman as a single parent," "marriage is an outdated institution" and "child needs a home with a father and a mother." In 2005, Romanian youth were the most supportive of the traditional family model out of all Eastern European countries surveyed by the EVS. Likewise, the study defines a model of sexual permissiveness (attitudes towards homosexuality, divorce, abortion and prostitution) and shows that support from Romanian youth for these dimensions has decreased between 1995 (.012) and 2005 (-.631)[4]. These results suggest that the case of Romanian views on

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[3] Means of latent variable for pro traditional family attitude across the EVS waves for Romania as reported by Comsa and Rusu 2009.

[4] Means of latent variable for attitudes on sexual permissiveness across the EVS waves for Romania as reported by Comsa and Rusu 2009.

relationships is complicated by the fact that many Romanians in the younger generations are more conservative than their parents were at the same age.

Considering this evidence about the change in values towards a conservative direction, dating apps could hold some subversive potential. They operate on a more individualistic, pleasure- and gratification-centric level which clashes with conservative values about relationships and may alter how young people relate to each other.

Gratification in connection to media usage has been theorized by the Uses and Gratification theory (hereafter *Gratification theory*), which explains the sense of gratification derived from media usage through three types of motivations: physical, social and psychosocial (Valkenburg and Peter 2007; Tong and Van De Wiele 2014). An important aspect of analyzing the impact of mobile dating apps on youth values and behaviors will therefore consist of understanding the motivations and goals set by users engaging with these services.

According to some authors, the Gratification theory of media (Rubin, 1993) can be applied to mobile media usage too (Leung and Wei 2000). Of course, the Gratification theory takes a different turn when we talk about dating apps. According to this theory (Tong and Van de Wiele 2014), the gratification mechanisms can take a more explicit form, moving from abstract gratification (e.g. knowledge gained by watching a show or sadness felt after listening to a song), to more active responses, such as actually meeting a new friend, having a bad dating experience or engaging in a sexual act. In this sense, it is an agency-centered approach towards media analysis (Rubin 1993), which makes it a promising framework for the study of forms of media consumption that rely on high levels of personal engagement, such as mobile dating app use.

The outcomes of apps usage can depend on expectations from other potentially matching users of the same application. Recent studies (Ward 2017; Ranzini and Lutz 2017) have looked at this dynamic from the opposite direction: self-presentation, understood as the sum of actions through which users try to control how they are perceived. Ward (2017) found that most Tinder users aim to present themselves paradoxically idealized and authentic at the same time, and that sometimes they swipe right (indicating "liking" someone) on profiles of similar people, not just because they are attracted to them, but to learn how to be more attractive themselves.

The outcomes of dating apps usage also depend on the motivations behind usage, as shown by Gudelunas (2012) and Sumter at al. (2017). Both studies suggest that people who use dating apps for casual sex engage more in sexual relationships as a result of using the apps. The question

arises of whether the gratification of casual sex is in conflict with values regarding relationships which favor long-term romantic relationships or marriage.

Methods

Procedure: The questionnaire was applied online, between May 25 and June 6, 2018. Due to the intimate nature of the questions, and the nature of the interactions we were going to look at, we opted for online application.

Sampling: We have used convenience sampling by recruiting participants online, from among the members of Facebook groups of students from Cluj-Napoca. In the original sample, the total number of participants was N=192, with ages ranging between 18 to 34 years old and a gender distribution of 80,7% women, 18,2% men, and 1% other. Sexual orientation was 85,4% heterosexual, 10,9% bisexual, 2,6% gay or lesbian, 1% other. We have not excluded participants based on demographic criteria, with the exception of gender.

Due to the imbalanced gender representation in the total number of respondents, we limited our data analysis to a sample of female-only respondents (N=155). This was necessary based on the results of the one-way ANOVA test of variance between groups. The test returned significant differences between men and women for three of the survey questions: with how many people met on a dating app did you engage in sexual relations (F=0.682, p=0.01), romantic relations longer than 3 months (F=2.495, p=0.01) and friendship relations (F=0.403, p=0.03).

Across our final female-only sample, sexual orientation was: 85.8% heterosexual, 12.3% bisexual, 1.3% lesbian, 0.6% other.

Methodology: Quantitative study, survey.

Data analysis: Descriptive statistics.

Results

Who? Users and attitudes

First, we wanted to see what our respondents think of dating apps in general. More than half of the women surveyed believe that *dating apps are a good way of meeting new people* and do not believe that *dating apps prevent people from having long-term relationships*. Most also don't hold the negative attitude that *dating apps are for desperate people* (but some do: 16.1% agree that they are and 9.7% strongly agree). However, they are rather skeptical about the prospect of finding a compatible partner through dating apps (only 22.6% agree or strongly agree with *Dating apps help you find compatible partners easily*).

Table 1 Attitudes towards dating apps

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Dating apps are a good way of meeting new people	155	0	3.61	1.07		
Strongly Disagree					5	3.2
Disagree					18	11.6
Neutral					46	29.7
Agree					49	31.6
Strongly Agree					37	23.9
Dating apps help you find compatible partners easily	155	0	2.76	1.09		
Strongly Disagree					17	11
Disagree					51	32.9
Neutral					52	33.5
Agree					22	14.2
Strongly Agree					13	8.4
Dating apps are for desperate people	155	0	2.62	1.25		
Strongly Disagree					34	21.9
Disagree					45	29
Neutral					36	23.2
Agree					25	16.1
Strongly Agree					15	9.7

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent
Dating apps prevent people from having long-term relationships	155	0	2.49	1.19		
Strongly Disagree					37	23.9
Disagree					47	30.3
Neutral					41	26.5
Agree					18	11.6
Strongly Agree					12	7.7

When it comes to which apps are preferred, Tinder leads with 75.5% of respondents indicating that they have used it in the past or are currently using it. The second most used app is Badoo at 12.3%. Some also indicate having used OkCupid (3.9%). Less than 1% used Zoosk, Sapio, and others.

Table 2 What dating apps are you using now or have used in the past

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Tinder	155	0	0.75	0.43		
No					38	24.5
Yes					117	75.5
Badoo	155	0	0.12	0.33		
No					136	87.7
Yes					19	12.3
OkCupid	155	0	0.04	0.19		
No					149	96.1
Yes					6	3.9
Zoosk	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Sapio	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Connected2me	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Omegale	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6

	N				Frequency	Percent
Once	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Happn	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Twoo	155	0	0.01	0.08		
No					154	99.4
Yes					1	0.6
Never used dating apps	155	0	0.21	0.41		
No					121	78.1
Yes					34	21.9
Don't know/Don't Answer	155	0	0.012	0.11		
No					153	98.7
Yes					2	1.3

The ages when most of the women surveyed started using dating apps was between 18 and 19 years old (34.8%), and between 20 and 22 (20.6%), while only 10.3% started using them before reaching 18 and only 11.6% after the age of 23.

Table 3 At what age did you start using dating apps?

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
At what age did you start using dating apps?	120	35	2.48	1.02			
Before 18					16	10.3	13.3
18 - 19					54	34.8	45.0
20 - 22					32	20.6	26.7
23 - 25					14	9.0	11.7
26 - 28					2	1.3	1.7
After 29					2	1.3	1.7
Total	155				120	77.4	100

Why? Motivations

We did not identify coherent factors in the motivation to use dating apps in our data analysis. We did find a negative correlation (r=-.401, sig=.000) between *casual sex* motivation and the belief that *traditional dating techniques don't work nowadays*.

Table 4 What are the most important reasons for using a dating app?

	N		Mean	Std Deviation	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
To meet partners with similar interests and tastes	155	0	0.7484	0.43535	116	74.8
To meet partners with similar values and beliefs	155	0	0.4645	0.50036	72	46.5
To find a long-term partner	155	0	0.3613	0.48193	56	36.1
To meet partners for casual sexual relations	155	0	0.3161	0.46647	49	31.6
Because traditional dating methods don't work nowadays	155	0	0.2581	0.43899	40	25.8
Because the app lets you know the person before you meet	155	0	0.3613	0.48193	56	36.1
Because I don't have time to meet partners through other methods	155	0	0.4065	0.49276	63	40.6
For fun/To pass the time	155	0	0.0839	0.27809	13	8.4

Among the motivations for choosing to meet in real life with a person found through an online dating application, good communication or conversation experiences over the app's chat feature was the most popular, followed by similar interests, while physical attraction or good looks came only third. Here is a sample of some recurring reasons formulated by those surveyed:

Good conversation: *I prefer to talk for a longer period of time to see if we resonate, then we usually move on to a social network where I can find out more things about that person from their profile (if we have common friends, if we have common interests, etc.); I met my boyfriend 3 years*

ago on Facebook. Before we met, we talked every day for about half a month. It was only after we realized we were getting along that I wanted to meet him.

Humor and a laid-back attitude: *If we have the same sense of humor; if we do not have big expectations from each other for when we meet and it's a relaxed meeting; If he behaves normally and he is not insistent.*

Physical attraction / Good looks: *What they look like, their pictures; What they look like in their pictures and how they approach you; My opinion is that physical attraction comes in first place, other things like common interests and aspects that impressed us come after.*

Personality: *If I like how he thinks, his personality, if he's polite; The fact that he's not just cute, but also affable; If he seems like an interesting person.*

Curiosity: *Curiosity. The more we talk, and we see that we have things in common, the more curious I am to meet them in real life.*

Table 5 Categorization of the answers given to the open-ended question "What makes you meet offline with a person found on an online dating app?"

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
What makes you meet offline with a person found on an online dating app?	126	29	5.373	3.67638			
Good communication					54	34.8	42.9
Similar interests					19	12.3	15.1
Physical Attraction					11	7.1	8.7
Personality					10	6.5	7.9
Trust					7	4.5	5.6
Other					5	3.2	4
Compatibility					4	2.6	3.2
Out of boredom					4	2.6	3.2
Curiosity					4	2.6	3.2
Humor					3	1.9	2.4
Intelligence					3	1.9	2.4
Good grammar					1	0.6	0.8
Common friends					1	0.6	0.8
Total	155				126	81.3	100

How? Experiences and outcomes

In our analysis, *age* and *because of dating apps I started a friendship relationship* are positively correlated (r=.201, sig=0,012), meaning that as respondents get older, they tend to use these apps in a different manner, shifting away from romantic or sexual relationships and towards friendship. The Gratification theory does not take into account age differences in people's choice of media (see Greenberg 1974), so this is one result which may put into question if indeed this is the best framework for such a study.

Among the outcomes of using dating apps, more than half of the respondents reported that they have engaged in sexual relationships (53,5%). Fewer participants said that they went on dates (27,7%) as a result of using dating apps.

Table 6 Using online dating apps led you to:

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency	Percent
	Valid	Missing				
Go out on dates	155	0	0.27	0.44		
No					112	72.3
Yes					43	27.7
Engage in sexual relations	155	0	0.53	0.50		
No					72	46.5
Yes					83	53.5
Start a romantic relationship	155	0	0.27	0.44		
No					113	72.9
Yes					42	27.1
Start a friendship	155	0	0.07	0.26		
No					143	92.3
Yes					12	7.7
Other	155	0	0.39	0.49		
No					94	60.6
Yes					61	39.4
Don't know/Don't answer	155	0	0.01	0.11		
No					153	98.7
Yes					2	1.3

Of our respondents, 79.4% acknowledged that they research their online dating matches on Google and social media websites such as Facebook.

Lastly, we looked at reasons why they stopped using dating apps. A good portion of those questioned stated that they quit using the mobile dating apps after entering a committed relationship and thus no longer needed them. However, a similarly large number of users ended up either bored or disappointed in their experiences. A disheartening share of those surveyed ended up leaving the dating apps because of harassment or other unpleasant interactions. Of our respondents, 20.6% confirmed they had had some form of unpleasant experiences because of using dating apps, and 8.4% of all respondents gave up using the apps because of these experiences. A sample of the most common reasons for leaving an app includes:

Started a relationship: *I've met someone; I became monogamous; I've found a boyfriend on Tinder; I found my prince and didn't need it anymore; I've found the person with whom I'd like to have a relationship; I was in a relationship which got serious; I found the one :).*

Became boring: *It became routine; It became redundant, same conversations, most partners were looking for opportunities for sex; It became boring and tiring to meet new people and go through the same story/conversation over and over again. In the end I hooked up with someone.*

Toxic people/Harassment: *I ran into weirdos on it lol; I found all sorts of weirdos in my area; It became a pretty toxic environment; The messages became disturbing; I haven't stopped using the app, but if I had, it would've been because of the harassment or the contact with weird people; The people were too insistent and sometimes became obsessive.*

The apps weren't for me: *I installed Tinder out of curiosity to see how it is but uninstalled it the next day; I didn't find it interesting, because I'm not looking for someone, and I think it would be hard to meet someone who would want a serious relationship through this kind of app; Because of certain imposed limitations, specifically the fact that online dating apps completely eliminate the friendship stage, a stage I consider essential for a balanced and trusting relationship; I prefer dating in contexts that require face to face interaction; My lifestyle and values have changed, no longer being compatible with dating apps; I think that dating with the help of an online app isn't who I am.*

Other users were only interested in sexual relationships: *It was full of men who wanted something other than a relationship from me.*

Too time-consuming: *Lack of time; Not enough free time.*

Table 7 Categorization of the answers given to the open-ended question "If you have stopped using a dating app, what was the reason?"

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
If you have stopped using a dating app, what was the reason?	74	81	3.12	2.20			
Started a relationship					30	19.4	40.5
Became boring					13	8.4	17.6
Toxic people/Harassment					13	8.4	17.6
The apps weren't for me					8	5.2	10.8
Other users were only interested in sexual relationships					6	3.9	8.1
Too time-consuming					2	1.3	2.7
I only wanted to try the app, wasn't looking for a partner					1	0.6	1.4
I prefer traditional dating methods					1	0.6	1.4
Total	155				74	47.7	100

Table 8 Did you ever have a bad experience during a conversation or a date with a person met through a dating app?

	N		Mean	Std Dev	Freq	Percent	Valid Percent
	Valid	Missing					
Did you ever have a bad experience during a conversation or a date with a person met through a dating app?	127	28	0.25	0.43			
No					95	61.3	74.8
Yes					32	20.6	25.2
Total	155				127	81.9	100

Discussion

Who? Users and attitudes

Generally, the attitudes towards dating apps of the Romanian women surveyed were positive, which indicates that no stigma was attached to using the apps. The only negative attitudinal trend was towards the idea that it's easy to find compatible partners on dating apps. We were unable to explain this attitude through the motivations and outcomes measured.

Tinder dominated app preferences, with Badoo placed on a distant second position. This differentiates our participants from other Eastern European users, who seem to prefer Badoo (BBC News 2017).

Why & how? Motivations, experiences and outcomes

Even though more than half of our respondents reported that they have engaged in sexual relations as an outcome of using dating apps, we see a comparatively low reporting of sexual gratification as a motivation for using the apps. Similarly, physical attraction is only the third reason for deciding to go on an offline date with someone met on a dating app. This can be an effect of the social desirability bias on self-reported data (Van de Mortel et al. 2008) or it can indicate a bias in participants' self-perceptions of their own motivations for using dating apps.

The gratification implied in the Gratification framework considers the engagement, active or passive, of the media consumer, and attempts to isolate within these forms of engagement their particular needs and the ways in which these needs are fulfilled through media consumption. Starting from this perspective, Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg (2017) identified six main motivations for which young people use Tinder: casual sex, love, ease of communication, self-worth validation, excitement, and trendiness. Other studies have found four motivational factors, such as sex, love, self-esteem enhancement, and boredom (Orosz et al. 2018). Ranzini and Lutz (2016) adapted Van de Wiele and Tong's (2014) Grindr motives and gratification scale to Tinder and identified six motives: sex (finding sexual partners), friends (building a social network), a relationship (finding someone to date), traveling (dating in a different place), self-validation (getting an ego-boost), and entertainment (satisfying one's social curiosity).

In terms of the Gratification theory, the dating apps being used are all forms of media with a highly instrumental rather than ritualistic orientation. This means they entail an active, involved and goal-oriented engagement on the part of the user, rather than passive habit-based consumption (Rubin 1993). This leads to a much more motivated and therefore stronger outcome from media consumption, which explains to a large degree the types and patterns of usage we have seen with dating apps. As indicated above, over half of those surveyed did have at least partial success, despite the wide variety of their pursued goals, and ceased using the apps once they no longer adequately fulfilled their purpose.

However, this framework does not provide a complete picture of the way in which internalized attitudes affect media usage and expectations. While the Gratification theory does take into account the attitudes towards a particular form of media, and the ways in which they shape usage and expected outcomes, they heavily rely on self-reporting. Therefore, Uses and Gratification can, to a degree, tackle how explicit attitudes regarding media influence usage. However, internalized implicit attitudes are harder to identify and isolate. For example, the experiences some users had with dating apps were negatively affected by their perceptions (that dating apps are primarily for casual sex, that only desperate people use them, etc.), since, as we have seen, other users were successful in both starting relationships with the help of the apps, as well as developing friendships. However, in other cases, it is not clear to what degree the feelings that the interactions were forced, artificial, unnatural, repetitive, etc., were due to the users' own expectations of what dating apps entail, and thus whether their negative experiences were merely

"self-fulfilling prophecies", or if these negative outcomes are inherent in some aspect of the medium itself.

This leads us to the problem of attitudes and values surrounding sexuality and relationships. While, overall, our respondents behaved more liberally than other research on Romanian youth suggested (Inglehart et al. 2014), at least some displayed conservative attitudes towards relationships, albeit sometimes in subtle ways. There does seem to be at least a partially shared negative attitude towards dating apps, even among those who use them. This negative view of dating apps seems to be shaped both by its perceived outcome – casual encounters vs. stable, exclusive relationships – and by the fact that many of those surveyed assume that building a relationship through online interactions is somehow inferior to traditional courting rituals.

Furthermore, as we have mentioned, some users reported feeling that the encounters were monotonous or artificial. It would be interesting to focus further research on the relationship between these forms of discomfort with dating apps (as well as other forms of social media) and the internalized attitudes and beliefs of their users, in order to show more precisely if and how the latter trigger the former.

In what concerns the negative correlation we found between *casual sex* motivation and the belief that *traditional dating techniques don't work nowadays*, it is unclear if this is due to the respondents' expectations regarding the outcomes of dating being oriented more towards casual encounters, and thus traditional dating techniques being ill-suited for their needs, or because of some other underlying cause affecting both elements.

Dating apps such as Tinder may have limitations such as the scarcity of information characteristic of an image-based app. Creative strategies for surpassing such limitations involve searching for information about one's matches on other social media sites. One such strategy described by David and Cambre (2016) is to use reverse image searches. This is confirmed in our sample too, with a large majority of respondents confirming they use other social media sites to research their matches.

Conclusions, limitations and further research

The data explored in this study poses several specific questions. Further research is needed in order to understand the sources of the positive and negative attitudes identified. Our findings

regarding the motivations behind dating app usage do not neatly follow results of other studies in the field employing the Gratification theory. It is worth investigating whether this is simply for research design reasons or cultural reasons in connection with any potential stigma associated with using the apps or values about relationships.

In the UK, the Office of National Statistics (2018) found that more young people than ever identify as bisexual, with the total number of women who identify as bisexual increasing from 142,000 to 236,000 between 2012 and 2016. A significant share of our sample identified as bisexual (12.3%). This suggests that Romania may be undergoing the same trend. However, this cannot be verified for the time being, because we were unable to find statistical data about sexual orientation among Romanian youth, in order to have a frame of reference. It would also be worth exploring how bisexual dating experiences differ from heterosexual experiences. Are Romanians who identify as bisexual less likely to hold conservative sexual values?

Considering the widespread phenomenon of harassment of women on dating apps (Shaw 2016), it would be interesting to study how outcome expectations and instances of harassment relate, if at all, in the Romanian online dating environment. Moreover, while the presence of online harassment is hardly surprising, it is still unclear to what degree the values regarding gender roles that Romanian women hold permit them to perceive online male aggression as gendered harassment or as typical "boys will be boys" - style patterns of behavior.

The main limitation of our study is the non-probabilistic sampling procedure. To avoid any biases, no generalizations to the larger group of young Romanian women should be made based on our results. Rather, the study is meant as a starting point for further research on more representative samples which would address this limitation.

Within the limitations of our present study, it seems that our expectations that mobile dating apps would be disruptive towards previous, more traditional ideas and practices surrounding sexuality and relationships were met. The individuals in the studied sample behaved in more liberal ways than general data on their generational cohort would have suggested. Also, the discomfort with using the apps themselves, without reporting any negative experiences with the users, suggests that this shift comes into deeper conflict with traditional forms of courtship and relationships than other recent innovations.

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