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„Love me Tinder.
A comparative study of media representation and user
perception“

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List of abbreviations

CMC	Computer mediated communication
FtF	Face to face communication
LBMD	Location based mobile dating
LBRTD	Location based real time dating
LBS	Location based services
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Queer Community
MSM	Men who have sex with men
SIDE theory	Social identity-deindividuation theory
SNS	Social network sites

KEYWORDS

Tinder, online dating, mobile dating app, media bias, content analysis, user survey

ABSTRACT (ENG)

The proclaimed objective of this thesis was to test the existence of a negative media bias on Tinder. Based on Entman's (2007) concept of "content bias", the concept of **media bias** as the news favoring one set of views and arguments rather than providing equivalent treatment to both (or all) sides in a social debate was introduced and investigated upon.

In order to do so, a qualitative content analysis of news media articles as well as an online survey among users of the app were conducted. Both focused on three central factors: (1) **motives** for using Tinder, (2) **concerns** about using Tinder and (3) the assumed **impact** Tinder has on dating practices in general and users' personal dating experiences as depicted in the media and described by the sample of users. Media representation was explored by means of a **content analysis** of Austrian, German and US-American news outlets (newspapers and magazines) between 2014 and 2015. An **online survey** among users of Tinder gave insight into user perception. The results of both studies were compared through a grounded theory approach and the **existence of a negative media bias towards Tinder** explored by comparing the salience of motives, concerns and impacts among press coverage and user indications in the survey. The results provided a mixed picture:

With regard to the general representation and perception of Tinder, an imbalance between media and users could be observed: While a majority of media articles provided a negative or rather negative view on Tinder, respondent's estimation of Tinder's impact on society in general as well as on their personal dating experiences, were divided almost equally between positive, neutral and negative ratings. **In this, elements of media bias can be identified**, with the analyzed media failing to represent both positive and negative arguments in the social debate about Tinder.

(1) With regard to **motives**, the following was observed: While press coverage by news outlets in all three analyzed countries referred to "Sex" as a motive most often, the majority of users indicated that they used Tinder out of boredom, to have fun or out of curiosity

(categorized as “Escapism”). However, in their assessment of other users, participants were confident that everybody else was mainly looking for “Sex” on the app, too. Also, among the participants of the study, motives differed according to age groups, with older participants (30-39 years) emphasizing “Sex” and “Love” more than younger ones, among which “Escapism” was more salient. So, while the majority of analyzed articles did not represent the large spectrum of motivations and reasons users might have to sign up on Tinder, it might have had an influence on what users about other people’s main motives on Tinder. **In this, elements of media bias were recognized.**

(2) As to **concerns** about Tinder, media representation and user perception did not differ greatly and showed **no indication for an existing media bias**. On both sides, concerns about “Superficiality”, “Deception” and “Harassment” were most salient. However, on comparing women’s concerns with those most salient in the media, it seemed that the issue of “Harassment” was a much bigger issue for female participants than indicated by its salience among news coverage.

(3) Regarding the perceived **impact** Tinder might have on dating and society in general, **no tendency for a media bias could be identified**: In media and from a user perspective as well, impact categories “Lack of commitment” and “Expansion of dating pool” were among the most salient.

Although the tonality of media coverage didn’t correlate to the way users rated Tinder’s effect on their personal experiences or dating and society in general, this difference was not significant enough to infer any biased reporting from this. **In conclusion, the existence of a negative media bias towards Tinder could, at this point, not be documented sufficiently.**

However, the data collected in the user survey did provide valuable insights and adds to existing literature on individuals’ motivations for employing Tinder and other mobile dating services. Especially the insights on user motives can be compared and linked to other studies on Tinder and also be applied to future research on new dating apps that will undoubtedly continue to arise on the market.

ABSTRACT (GER)

Ausgangspunkt für die vorliegende Arbeit ist die vermutete einseitige Berichterstattung rund um die bei jungen Erwachsenen verbreitete Dating-App "Tinder" im Sinne einer negativen *media bias*. *Media bias* wird in Anlehnung an Entman (*content bias*, 2013) definiert als eine Vorgangsweise, bei der Medien verstärkt einseitige, eine Argumentation fördernde Sichtweisen einer sozialen Debatte darstellen anstatt allen Perspektiven und Sichtweisen gleichermaßen Platz in der Berichterstattung einzuräumen. Der Fokus der Analyse lag auf drei Faktoren: (1) **Motive** für die Nutzung von Tinder, (2) **Zweifel** an und Bedenken zur Nutzung und (3) vermutete **Auswirkungen** und Konsequenzen der App sowohl auf individueller, als auch gesamtgesellschaftlicher Ebene. Das Erkenntnisinteresse wurde in drei Schritten verfolgt: Eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse österreichischer, deutscher und amerikanischer Printmedien über einen Zeitraum von zwei Jahren (2014-2015) gab zunächst Aufschluss darüber, welche Motive, Zweifel und Auswirkungen in der medialen Berichterstattung besonders präsent waren. Eine Online-Befragung von Tinder-Nutzern ermöglichte Einblick in Motive, Zweifel und Auswirkungen aus Usersicht. Die Ergebnisse der beiden Untersuchungen wurden schließlich zusammengeführt und hinsichtlich ihrer Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten verglichen, wobei der Ansatz der *grounded theory* für die Analyse und Diskussion der Ergebnisse herangezogen wurde. Die Ergebnisse lauten wie folgt:

Im Hinblick auf die generelle Darstellung und Wahrnehmung von Tinder konnte ein Ungleichgewicht zwischen medialer Berichterstattung und User-Einschätzung festgestellt werden: Während die Mehrheit der analysierten Pressebeiträge Tinder in einem eher bis klar negativen Kontext thematisierte, waren User beinahe ebemäßig geteilt in ihrer Einschätzung des Einflusses, den Tinder auf ihre Daterfahrungen und Dating generell hat. **Eine Beobachtung, die als Indiz für eine bestehende media bias gedeutet wird.**

(1) Hinsichtlich der **Motive** konnte festgestellt werden, dass die untersuchten Presseartikel der Vielfalt an möglichen Motiven und Gründen zur Nutzung von „Tinder“ nicht gerecht wurden. In einer klaren Mehrheit der Analyseobjekte wurde „Sex“ als Motiv genannt, während die befragten User am häufigsten „Spaß“ oder „Neugier“ als persönlichen Beweggrund nannten (zusammengefasst in der Motivkategorie „Spaß/Neugier“). In der Fremdeinschätzung anderer User jedoch war auch hier „Sex“ das am häufigsten genannte Motiv. Hinsichtlich des Alters der Befragten konnten ebenfalls Unterschiede nachgewiesen

werden- so war das dominante Motiv 30-39-Jährigen „Sex“ und „Liebe“, während bei jüngeren Studienteilnehmern „Ablenkung“ (= Spaß, Neugier) stark präsent waren. **Diese Abweichung von medialer Darstellung und Usersicht wird als Hinweis für eine media bias gewertet.**

(2) Die Analyse der medial und userseitig genannten **Bedenken** zu Tinder lieferte übereinstimmende Ergebnisse, wodurch **die Möglichkeit einer negativen media bias ausgeschlossen** werden konnte. Auf beiden Seiten waren Sorgen hinsichtlich „Oberflächlichkeit“, „Täuschung“ und „Belästigung“ am präsentesten. Bei näherem Vergleich der medialen Darstellung mit den Sorgen von weiblichen Befragten stellte sich jedoch heraus, dass die Sorge um „Belästigung“ unter Frauen einen sehr viel höheren Stellenwert einnahm und dies nicht mit dem Ausmaß der Thematisierung in den untersuchten Medien übereinstimmte.

(3) Auch im Hinblick auf die thematisierten **Auswirkungen** der Dating-App konnten keine nennenswerten Differenzen zwischen medialer Darstellung und Userwahrnehmung festgestellt werden: Auf beiden Seiten waren „Bindungsangst“ und „Erweiterter Dating-Pool“ die am häufigsten genannten Kategorien, **womit auch in diesem Bereich keine media bias nachgewiesen werden konnte.**

Aus der Inhaltsanalyse ging hervor, dass die Mehrzahl der analysierten Artikel zu „Tinder“ eine klar oder eher negative Tonalität aufwies. In der Befragung bewerteten User die generellen Auswirkungen von Tinder auf ihre Dating-Erlebnisse und die Gesellschaft als Ganzes klar neutraler bis leicht negativ. Obwohl diese Ergebnisse auseinandergehen, so reicht dies nicht aus, um die Behauptung einer negativen *media bias* zu rechtfertigen. **In Summe lieferten die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung keinen schlüssigen Beleg für eine bewusst negative mediale Darstellung der App „Tinder“ im Sinne einer media bias.**

Die gesammelten Daten und Ansätze sind jedoch keineswegs vergeblich. Die durchgeführte Untersuchung ermöglichte wertvolle Einblicke zur Wahrnehmung, den Motiven und Bedenken von Usern – Erkenntnisse, die einerseits direkte Anknüpfungspunkte zu anderen Studien ermöglichten und andererseits bei der

zukünftigen Erforschung von Tinder und neuen mobilen Dating-Apps eingesetzt werden können.

1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2015, I read an article in the New York Times titled „A Tinder Turn Toward the Indifferent“. It wasn't the first time that I had stumbled upon a headline like that – a few months before, Vanity Fair had had published a short essay about "Tinder and the Dawn of the 'Dating Apocalypse'". As you might deduce from the titles, both articles presented a rather negative perspective on the app and its users. I was surprised to read "*Tinder sucks*" in the second paragraph of the article, followed by statements like "the *extreme casualness of sex in the age of Tinder leaves many women feeling de-valued*" or "*the whole mating system tends to shift towards short-term dating*" (New York Times, 2015). I wanted to find out more about the media coverage about Tinder, so I did the logical thing: I googled it. Here's some of what I found:

- Has Tinder replaced dating with hookup culture? (CNN, Aug. 18, 2015)
- Why Tinder in NYC is the absolute worst (Thrillist, Oct. 2, 2015)
- Hook-up apps like Tinder have killed romance on campus (The Guardian, Feb. 24, 2013)
- "Tinder Made Me Depressed": Why The Dating App Is Bad For Your Feelings (Vulcan Post, 2015)
- What Tinder does to your Brain (Newshub, Sept. 7, 2015)

And, a personal favorite: "*Tinder is Tearing Society Apart*", published in the New York Post (August 16, 2015). Of course, I picked the juiciest headlines to make a point here, but you get the general idea. It seemed that approximately eight out of ten media articles about Tinder depict our whole society going down the gutters, romantically. According to them, my generation – that is, young people between the age of 20 and 35 – are slowly turning into emotional robots, unwilling or even unable to commit to long-term partnerships. Because we are scared of real-life relationships and revealing our emotions, we restrict human contact to a bare minimum and prefer to have conversations via smartphones only. And if we are emotional robots, Tinder is our central server – enabling us to find like-minded partners and helping to destroy any hope of "real love" that might still exist out there.

At that time, quite a few friends and acquaintances of mine were using the app to meet new people, and I had been “tindering” myself a few months earlier. Everyone I had talked about the app so far had told me that yes, of course the whole swiping left-and-right on people sometimes felt kind of superficial and (this coming from my female friends mostly) that there were a lot of jerks on Tinder – but basically, there was nothing new here, as you hear the same talks in real life. What most of my friends liked about the app was that it entertained and enabled them to meet new people in a safe and easy way. As far as I could observe, those of my friends who had been known to have a lot of casual dates, used the app to continue doing exactly that. Others, who were less outgoing, used the app because they appreciated how they could anonymously select potential dates. None of them felt cheated or as if the app was changing their romantic lives – because they were using it according to what they had been doing all along.

Personally, I felt that the picture presented to me about Tinder by the media differed drastically from what I had experienced so far. As an academic, however, I knew the plural of anecdote is not data. A vague impression, fueled by statements from my friends, a few articles and a short Google research wasn’t enough evidence to support my theory. As a student of journalism and communication sciences, I had found a topic for my Master’s thesis.

2. SCIENTIFIC INTEREST & RELEVANCE OF TOPIC

Starting point for this study is the assumption that the media are overly drastic in their representation of Tinder, displaying the dating app in a mostly negative context. Press coverage focuses on negative effects the use of Tinder might have on the dating behavior of young adults, e.g. that it might promote *“a more calculated and consumerist perspective towards mate selection”* (Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010: 442), a phenomenon also known as „Relation-shopping“. However, it is argued that this kind of dating behavior has existed among daters for many years and is only made more explicit by apps like Tinder. Research so far has provided a few references to support the assumption:

As often stated, dating via app is not a sign for the inability of this generation to communicate in any other way than by smartphone, but rather the next step in the development of dating. Finkel et. al. summarized it very aptly:

“Just as printed personal advertisements followed the emergence of newspapers, and just as video-dating followed the emergence of video cassette recorders, computer-based matching services followed the emergence of computers“ (Finkel et. al, 2012: 9)

.. and with the emergence of smartphones, it is only logical that dating apps entered the market. It is not only the technological advances in the field of media and telecommunications that have had an influence on dating – much more important indeed, the *“impact of technology on courtship practices has been seen in the use of the automobile, birth control pill, telephone answering machine, Internet and cell phone“* (Browne & Urish, 2014: 121).

Following this line of argument, dating apps should be considered not a symptom of a decrease in romance, but as the next step in the general (and technical) advancement of dating. As such, these apps deserve to be looked into from a scientific perspective, which quite a few scholars have done.

Corriero (2016: 122) argued that *"apps such as Tinder, Hinge, and the ,all-male' Grindr provide new ways for people to initiate romantic connections and affect the ways in which people communicate when doing so"*, while Seefeldt pointed out the importance of them as platforms on which cultural norms become visible (see n.a.: 1).

Gibbs pointed out how research on dating apps enables us to reflect and re-examine the way we form and present our own identities (see Gibbs et. al, 2011: 152). In her research about "Kids living and learning with new media", Pascoe noticed that *"young people are at the forefront of developing, using, reworking, and incorporating new media into their dating practices in ways that might be unknown, unfamiliar, and sometimes scary to adults."* (2010: 1). Quiroz pointed out that GPS dating and the changing ways of relationship-building offer insight into *"how people adapt to the challenges of the postmodern world"*, therefore ascribing it both *"sociological and practical interest"* (2013: 185).

Since the scientific community has recognized the relevance of research on dating apps with regard to their influence on communication, cultural norms, identity performance, and so many other factors of inter-personal relationships, it seems remarkable that apparently, none have yet focused on their (negative) representation in the mass media.

Scholars around the world have reviewed the study of the existence, origin and symptoms of media bias for years, mostly in context of politics, minorities or, most recently, terrorism (e.g. Entman, 2007; Ross & Lepper, 1985; DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006; and many more). These topics appear highly relevant to modern society and therefore deserve to be researched. However, just as politics form an important part of our daily lives, dating practices and the forming of relationships are essential to it and deserve, if not the same, but at least some, attention.

Therefore, the proclaimed objective of this study is to test the existence of a negative media bias by way of comparing media coverage about Tinder over the course of two years with statements from users themselves. In order to do so, a content analysis of news media articles as well as an online survey among users of the app will be conducted. Both will focus mainly on three central factors:

- **motives** for using Tinder,
- **concerns** about using Tinder, and

- the assumed **impact** Tinder has on dating practices in general and users' personal dating experiences

as depicted in the media and described by the sample of users. Thus, **differences between the two sides** shall be elaborated and the **existence of a negative media bias towards Tinder** investigated.

At this point, it is important to define the key phrase "media bias". Based on the concept of Entman's (2007:163-173) "*content bias*", that is "*news that favors one side rather than providing equivalent treatment to both sides in a political conflict*" (163), the author suggests to extend the scope of the concept beyond political conflicts. In the course of the study, "media bias" shall therefore be defined as **the news favoring one set of views and arguments rather than providing equivalent treatment to both (or all) sides in a social debate**.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As stated before, the planned study aims to follow up on a possible media bias on Tinder by focusing on three key factors: motives, concerns, and impacts of using Tinder. Literature research so far has shown that there exist a number of scholarly works on the matter of motives and concerns for using online dating apps.

Tinder is often said to be used primarily as a means to find and meet people for casual sex. However, it is assumed that other motives are more salient among users. Some scholars have already shown that users are guided by more than one motivation when dating online or via mobile apps (see Gudelunas, 2012 or Van De Wiele & Tong, 2014). Citing Rice et. al (2012), Corriero and Tong (2015: 125) listed the following motivations for the use of the mobile dating app Grindr: *“killing time”, “making friends”, “connect to the gay community”, “meet people to have sex / hook up”, “find someone to date”*. They also referred to other a list of more general motives, compiled by Van De Wiele & Tong (2014), including *“social interaction”, “sex”, “social inclusion / approval”, “entertainment”, “dating / romance relationships”* and *“location-based partner searching”* (Corriero and Tong, 2015: 25).

Another common accusation that Tinder users have to face is that their motive in using Tinder (or other dating apps) is to cheat on their partners (see for example articles published by the Huffington Post, 2013 or by YouGov UK, 2014). However, a study conducted in 2014 based on interviews with online daters, came to the conclusion that *„online daters largely do not want to intentionally deceive their online dating partners because they think such lies would quickly be discovered face-to-face“* (Zytka, Grandhi & Jones, 2014: p1).

There have been a number of studies especially on users' motives for using, concerns about or reasons for quitting social media or dating platforms, most of them will be discussed in the course of the next chapter. By focusing on motives, concerns and impacts as key elements of analysis, the author aims at making the results of this study comparable to other works in this field. The primary research questions and their sub questions are as follows:

Q1. How and in which context do the media represent Tinder? Which differences between Austrian, German and US-American media can be made out?

Q1a. Which motives for using the app are salient in the media? Which differences between Austrian, German and US-American media can be made out?

Q1b. Which concerns about using the app are salient in the media? Which differences between Austrian, German and US-American media can be made out?

Q1c. Which impacts that Tinder has on dating and society in general are salient in the media? Which differences between Austrian, German and US-American media can be made out?

Q2. How do Tinder's users perceive Tinder, its users and the app's impact on dating and society in general?

Q2a. Which motives for using the app are salient among users?

Q2b. Which concerns about using the app are salient among users?

Q2c. From the users' perspective, which impact does Tinder have on dating and society in general and on their personal dating experiences?

Q3. Where do these two points of view meet?

Q3a. Do media and users differ in their description of motives for using Tinder? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

Q3b. Do media and users differ in their description of concerns about using Tinder? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

Q3c. Do media and users differ in their description of Tinder's impact on society and dating in general? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

The research questions will be investigated qualitatively. While the first group of questions will be explored by means of a qualitative content analysis, answers to questions 2a-c will

be provided by a user survey. Q3 and its sub-questions 3a-c will be investigated by comparing the first two groups of research questions.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research for this chapter was conducted via the database of the University of Vienna and Google Scholar. The following keywords were (and will be) used in order to identify relevant literature:

- *Tinder*
- *Grindr*
- *Online dating*
- *mobile dating*
- *computer mediated communication*
- *dating app*
- *location based mobile dating*
- *location based real time dating*
- *self-representation*
- *self disclosure*
- *dating + communication*
- *dating + matching*
- *social matching*
- *matching app*
- *social information theory*

„New Media and Society“, „Mobile Media and Communication“, „The Journal of Computer Mediated Communication“ and the „Journal of Communication“ proved to be very helpful sources of information. Also, the „Journal of social and personal relationships“ and a number of journals from the psychological and sociological sciences provided valuable insights.

Overview

The body of literature relevant to the research presented in this paper will be discussed in four parts. The first section will take a look at **computer mediated communication (CMC)**, as the specifics and challenges of this mode of communication are referred to in almost all works discussed.

Next follows a review of works on **online dating** in general, a field that has been intensely investigated since the 1990ies, with studies focusing on smaller and bigger dating websites such as eHarmony.com or Match.com. We continue with research on **location based mobile dating (LBMD)** or **location based real time dating (LBRTD)** apps.

Amongst the various apps investigated, one has gained especially much attention by the scientific community: Grindr.

Grindr was founded in 2009 (Grindr, 2016), two years before Tinder was released on the iOS App Store. Although designed solely for homosexual men looking for casual encounters, the app's interface and functionality are very similar to Tinder, and it is often described as the latter's forerunner.

Chronologically last, but certainly not least, we will review relevant scientific works about **Tinder** itself, ranging from studies of user motivations, the apps effect on offline relationship building, gamification and design features or even linguistic studies of initiation messages.

It goes without saying that in this chapter, not *all* the existing scholarly work relevant to this field can be listed. Especially the field of online dating is one that has sparked the interest of scientists of a variety of academic fields, from psychology or sociology up to anthropology and information technology. Online dating is not only widely, but also intensely researched, with new studies (scientific and not-so-scientific ones) being published almost by the day. As Finkel et. al (2012: 7) phrased, "*any attempt to be comprehensive would achieve immediate obsolescence*". Therefore, what this chapter offers to the interested reader is not a final report, but a starting point for his/her own research.

Computer Mediated Communication

Most online dating websites and mobile dating apps enable their users not only to establish a personal profile, but also to contact their matches (that is, people that have signaled interest by accepting invitations, sending "likes", "winks", etc.) by means of E-Mail, messaging services, or – in the case of mobile dating apps – via an in-built chat. Irrespective of the means of communication, the fact remains that in order to find a partner via online dating services, one of the biggest and most important parts of the process is the initiation and – however long – continuance of textual communication. This is why, in this section, we will take a look at existing research on what has been coined "computer mediated communication" or **CMC**.

CMC is commonly understood as "*the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems that facilitate encoding,*

transmitting, and decoding messages" (December, 1996). One of the best-known works in this field is Walther's (1996) reconceptualization of CMC and its effects on interpersonal relationships. In it, he consolidated key elements of impersonal and interpersonal CMC and *"hyperpersonal"* relationships (see Walther, 1996: 3-4):

Up to 1996, a number of studies had been conducted, suggesting that in the process of CMC, visual and auditory cues are excluded from the communicative exchange. Walther challenged these so-called **"cues-filtered-out-theories"** by referring to various other studies with converse results. In researching *"why CMC appeared impersonal in some research and not elsewhere and what accounts for the difference"* (1996: 8). Based on social exchange theories, he stated that a key difference between CMC and face-to-face (FtF) communication is not about *"the amount of social information exchanged but with the rate of social information exchange"* (1996: 9). As people communicate by CMC, all those cues normally gained by visual or other factors are now solely derived from a textual basis, which is why this process is not non-existent, but only *"retarded in CMC relative to FtF communication"* (1996: 9).

Asides from this important conclusion, Walther also coined the term **„Hyperpersonal CMC“**, explaining that in some cases, CMC can even lead to the forming of relationships that have *„surpassed the level of affection and emotion of parallel FtF interaction"* (1996: 16).

Citing Lea and Spears (1992)- who in turn based their research on the SIDE theory (social identity-deindividuation theory, see Reicher, Spears & Postmes, 1995)- he argued that *„in the absence of FtF cues and prior personal knowledge about one's partners, whatever subtle social context cues or personality cues do appear in CMC take on particularly great value"*, leading to *„overattribution"* (Walther, 1996: 17) of desirable features in the opposite's persona.

In CMC, not only are there less cues available about one's opposite – we also sent out less cues about ourselves, resulting in a higher degree of control over our **self-representation**. The absence of physical cues, as Walther notes, is also why *„we shift attention from our need to maintain simultaneous expressive and sensory systems and devote it instead to language selection."* (Walther, 1996: 22), a behavior he calls *„conversational planning"* (23).

Twenty years after Walther's article was published, anyone who has ever spent more than fifteen minutes brooding over the composition and exact phrasing of a text as simple as „Hey! Do you want to grab a coffee sometime?“ or similar will confirm the lasting accuracy of this observations.

There are two forms of CMC: Real-time or **synchronous** communication (for example communication via live-chat) and time-delayed or **asynchronous** communication (e.g. E-Mail, etc. - see Romiszowski, 1996: 398). Walther identified asynchronicity as a key benefit of CMC: While FtF communication requires (at least) two people being at the same place at the same time, CMC enables persons to take part in the conversation „*at time intervals of their own convenience*“ (1996: 23), again resulting in more control over it. Romiszowski noted that CMC holds the potential for so-called „**Highly Interactive Communication**“, combining

„the permanent nature of written communication (which in itself has implications for research processes) with the speed, and often the dynamism of spoken communications, for example via telephone.“
(Romiszowski, 1996: 398)

The interested reader may find a comprehensive overview of linguistic studies in CMC in the work of Georgakopolou (2011: 93-110). The afore-mentioned Spears and Lea examined social influences in CMC (1992: 30-65), and Lea further focused on the relationship between CMC and hostile behavior (1992: 89-112).

It is assumed that in the course of analyzing the answers of the user survey, some of the above mentioned findings could prove to be insightful, for example when reviewing the intensity of relationships formed on Tinder, respectively over chat. For now, however, we will not further discuss any more elements of CMC but, in accordance with the chosen approach of grounded theory, discuss relevant elements and findings step by step later on.

Online Dating

One question the scientific community has shown the most interest in when dealing with online dating is the one about self-representation on the internet - how do people present

themselves online, how does this differ from their actual, real-life selves, and which strategies do they pursue in their online quests for love?

The 2012 article „Online Dating: A Critical Analysis From the Perspective of Psychological Science“ by Finkel and colleagues presents a comprehensive overview about online dating from a psychological view. Their first objective was to examine differences between traditional and online dating, a topic they investigated along the three key services that online dating services provide, namely (a) *“access to potential romantic partners”*, (b) *“communication with potential romantic partners”* and (c) *“matching with compatible partners”* (Finkel et. al, 2012: 4). The second part of their study then aimed at finding out which of the two ways of finding a partner, traditional or online, would *„yield better romantic outcomes“* (Finkel et. al, 2012: 3). While they were able to determine the differences between the two dating approaches quite clearly, the superiority of one of the two over the other could not be established quite as definitely.

Ellison argued that, when constructing a profile and presenting themselves on a dating platform, users are caught between the pressure of depicting an *„ideal self“* and staying true to their actual one (2006: 425f). Also, small cues that tend to be overshadowed by visual or auditory impressions in real-life interactions, gain much more importance in computer mediated communication:

„they [the participants] carefully attended to subtle, almost minute cues in others’ presentational messages, and often seemed to take the same degree of care when crafting their own messages.“ (2006: 424)

Again, think about the hypothetical text message we drafted before: „Hey! Do you want to grab a coffee sometime?“. Now think about the kind of answer you would like to receive from your subject of desire:

“Hello! Yeah, sure - are you free tomorrow afternoon?”,

“Hey! Sure, why not. How about tomorrow?”, or

“Sure. Maybe tomorrow”

Although the quintessence of all three messages may be the same, due to the lack of other cues like facial expression or tone of voice, we have to rely on the text itself.

Suddenly the sheer number of words (I sent him a full sentence and all I got back was three words, clearly not interested), the type of words (Why “Hello!” instead of “hey”, that sounds way too formal, I bet he just wants to be friends) or interpunction (“Maybe tomorrow” without a question mark, is he bored of me???) become immensely meaningful.

In her study about „Presentations of Self on an Internet Dating Site“, Whitty examined differences in female and male profiles as well as which types of presentations of self resulted in the most successful encounters in the offline world (2007: 1707-1723).

Apart from the subject of self-representation, there has also been a lot of interesting research on other aspects of online dating: Rosen et. al studied how daters form first impressions about their matches by analyzing the wording used in their e-Mails (2008: 2124-2157).

Gibbs and colleagues took another interesting approach to the matter by including uncertainty reduction behaviors and privacy concerns in their considerations about self-disclosure on the Internet (2011: 70-100), while Zytka, Grandhi & Jones asked their interviewees about their relationship goals, feedback and the frustrations they experienced during their search for potential romantic partners (2014: 53-62).

By examining a real-time dating site specifically designed for HIV-positive homosexual men looking for casual encounters, Handel and Shklovski raised the interesting question of whether a dating website can „*use particular design features in their interfaces to enable negotiation of safer sex strategies*“ (2012: 175).

Another major theme in the discussion of online dating is the matter of deception or dishonesty among daters. Toma & Hancock rightly stated that „*concerns about online deception are as old as the Internet itself*“ (2012: 78). Their study „What Lies Beneath: The Linguistic Traces of Deception in Online Dating Profiles“ aimed at identifying linguistic cues for honesty or deception among the bodies of texts online daters wrote about themselves. Guadagno, Okdie & Kruse (2012: 642-647) took daters’ estimated chances of a meeting as a starting point to explore on how this would lead to a higher degree of deceptive behavior, the hypothesis being that participants who expected to have a date soon would show more significant changes in their personality scores, that is behave more deceptively (644).

Lo and colleagues (2013: 1755-1762) conducted two experiments to examine the relation of users' photographs and the degree of authenticity other users assigned to their profiles. According to their findings, users that appear more attractive on their profile pictures also have to face being accused of deception from their matches (to put it crudely, the more attractive you are, the more likely people are going to think you're a fake). Interestingly, their female participants overall *„presented higher levels of deception than men“* (1760).

Tinder is not the first (nor will it be the last) dating service accused of promoting the so-called „Relation-shopping“-mindset amongst daters. Studies that focused on how social relationships can be explained by means of marketing and consumer behavior models have been conducted at least since the Eighties (see for example Hirschman, 1987). In 1993, Ahuvia & Adelman continued this line of research and noted that

„because language shapes as well as reflects our understandings, these market metaphors for dating can influence the attitudes of singles towards romantic relationships and hence impact their dating behaviors and relationship development“. (Ahuvia & Adelman, 1993: 2)

More recently, Heino et. al took a go at „Investigating the market metaphor in online dating“ (2010: 427-447). By means of conducting qualitative interviews, their objective was to find out whether users would *„embrace“* the market metaphor and if so, *„how it affects their online dating behavior and interactions“* (429). After coding and analyzing the transcripts of approx. 35 interviews, they found that the market metaphor was *„indeed salient“* for online daters:

„...over half of them used such metaphors without being prompted. During interviews, they compared online dating to an economic transaction, referring to their list of potential partners as a ‚sales pipeline‘, or describing the site as like a ‚supermarket‘ or ‚catalog‘ (...) both with positive and negative connotations.“ (Heino et. al, 2010: 434)

We see that using economic vocabulary to describe dating experiences is in no way a new trend, but has been around for more than 20 years.

LBMD, LBRTD and differences to „traditional“ online dating

With the rise of smartphones, location-based mobile services became part of our everyday routine. By definition, location-based mobile services (LBS) are *“a category of location-aware applications used through smartphones that access a user’s location in order to accomplish a task”* (Wong, 2008: Abstract). LBS became increasingly popular as a means to track vehicles, parcels or for medical and health applications, before entering the field of online dating, resulting in location based mobile dating (LBMD) apps. In recent years, the term LBMD has been refined into „location based real time dating“ (LBRTD) or „location-aware dating app“, caused by advanced technical developments, enabling apps to identify and actively search for other users based on how far away they are. For the purpose of simplicity, we will from now on only refer to LBMD or „mobile dating apps“, including the real time-versions as well.

In researching mobile dating apps, scientists have often asked the same questions as their colleagues did when investigating online dating websites. Birnholtz and colleagues for example took a look on self-presentation on LBMD apps, specifically *„how people manage potentially stigmatized identities in using these apps and what types of information they use to self-present in the absence of a detailed profile or rich social cues“* (Birnholtz et al., 2014: 23).

Here we find mentioned what could be defined as a one of the major differences between online dating websites and mobile dating apps: While on websites such as Match.com or eHarmony.com, users can enrich their profile with elaborate self-descriptions, many apps (also due to the fact that the profile is displayed on a much smaller screen) usually allow their users only a few words about themselves.

Mascaro et. al (2012: 200-206) noted another important difference concerning the intensity and length of time daters spend messaging before meeting face-to-face. While on browser-based online dating websites users might spend more time and more words on messaging with their matches before going on a date, mobile dating apps, with their matching notifications, encourage immediate interaction, soon followed by an actual face-to-face meeting (see Mascaro et. al, 2012: 200-206).

As mobile dating apps became more and more popular in the last few years, of course the question has been raised of whether „traditional online dating“ - notice how the old differentiation between „traditional (real-life) dating“ and „online dating“ is now being

redefined! - will become replaced by these new apps, with Quiroz (2013) aptly concluding that

„The same explanation for the growth of personal advertising we have witnessed in the last decades of the twentieth century applies to the appeal of mobile dating Apps—the benefits of mobile dating coincide with features of our postmodern society” (2013: 184)

As has been argued by Riepl (nowadays widely known as „Riepl’s law“), new technologies never completely replace older ones but instead tend to converge or change the way they are used. (see Riepl, 1913). Following this line of argument, mobile dating apps will not replace online (or real-life) dating, but represent the next step in the development of digital courtship, shaped by the general changes in their users’ lifestyles.

Uses & Gratifications

The uses and gratifications approach is very popular in the field of sociological and communication studies. By definition, it investigates

“the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.” (Katz et. al, 1943/74: 510, citing Rosengren, 1972)

The approach has been applied to many fields of interest, ranging from on the radio (see for example Herzog, 1942; Suchman, 1942) and TV to comics (see Wolfe and Fiske, 1949), newspapers (see Berelson, 1949) and magazines (see Payne et. al, 1988), to cell phones (Leung et. al, 2000). In later years, a number of researchers have devoted themselves to exploring the uses & gratifications of users online, studying the internet (see Eighmey et. al, 1998 or Stafford et. al, 2004) and new platforms as they came along, such as Myspace, Facebook and, later on, dating apps:

Raacke & Bonds-Raacke (2008) investigated uses and gratifications on friend-networking sites such as Myspace and Facebook, concluding that the most salient motives were

initializing new friendships and locating old ones (see 2008: 171). Quan-Haase & Young (2010) explored Facebook and instant messaging services in order to see why young people tend to use various different (online) channels in their communication with others. Gudelunas (2012) applied the uses & gratifications approach to Grindr and other SNS (social networking sites), observing that homosexual men use various platforms at once, each to display or enhance a certain aspect of their personality. With regard to Grindr, the main purpose identified by Gudelunas was finding friends and sexual partners, and other SNS like Facebook served to crosslink other users' profiles and to gain more knowledge about them (see 2012: 360).

Grindr

As already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Grindr is a location based mobile dating app aimed primarily at homo- or bisexual men. It was „*the first mainstream gay geo-social app to launch in the iTunes App Store*“ (Entrepreneur, 2014) and today, more than two million people in 172 countries use it (Grindr, 2016).

Because of its then new approach to mobile dating, the following rise in popularity, and its clear focus on MSM („men who have sex with men“), Grindr has been the center of a number of scientific studies.

Corriero & Tong (2016) conducted interviews with Grindr users in order to find out how they experience uncertainty and which concerns they associate with the app (see 2016: 121-141). Their results showed that „*those interested in sexual encounters would desire more uncertainty, while users seeking longer term romantic relationships would desire less uncertainty*“ (137). In this context, it is especially mentionable how they distinguished between users according to their motive for using the app. As to the concerns, they were able to follow up on earlier research by Gibbs et. al (2011), who identified three types of concerns about online dating - „*personal security*“, „*misrepresentation*“ and „*recognition*“ (2011: 89) - and added „*misrepresentation of health/serostatus*“ and „*social stigma/judgment*“ to the list. In the course of this study, it will become apparent if and to which extent these concerns are also relevant to Tinder users.

Gudelunas (2012) explored the uses and gratifications perceived from Grindr and other social networking sites providing further insight into the how and why gay men use the app. Brubaker et. al (2014) investigated when and why users stop using Grindr, arguing

that the decision to leave is embedded in a larger process.

Another interesting way of approaching Grindr was chosen by Blackwell, Birnholtz and Abbott (2014): Based on the theoretical model of „co-situation“, they argued that Grindr as a LBMD app creates a virtual dating space (parallel to real-life places) in which other rules of normative behavior, impression formation and interaction apply (see Blackwell et. al, 2014:1-20). Their key argument, that LBMD apps form a kind of „second reality“ in dating, which allows (or forces) users to behave, self-represent and communicate differently from the way they would in a real-life setting, is a recurrent theme in the research about Tinder.

Tinder

During the research for this section, the author was surprised to find out that there have been very few studies about Tinder published in scientific journals. They, and a number of academic works focusing on Tinder from various scientific perspectives, shall be discussed briefly.

Seefeldt (n.a.) argued that initiation messages on Tinder „*reflect culturally accepted courtship scripts*“. He questioned which effect gender and sexual orientation have on users' success (that is, amount of matches) and the type of initiation messages they receive. Following up on this by creating dummy accounts on Tinder and analyzing the received messages on the app's chat, he concluded that there is a clear difference between male and female users, with females receiving much more matches and therefore also more initiation messages. This agrees with earlier research on online dating websites that found that men are usually the initiators of contact (O'Sullivan & Beyers, 1992: 435, based on McCormick, Brannigan & LaPlante, 1984). Furthermore, Seefeldt found that „*users of Tinder expect return messages in a short time period*“, a result in accord to the aforementioned findings of Mascaro et. al (2012: 200-206).

Ward (2016) investigated impression management strategies on Tinder, while Stenson, Balcelss & Chen (n.a.) attended to the matter of privacy in context with Tinder usage. In order to find out which privacy concerns exist among users and how they correlate with their general privacy habits, they chose a very original approach and used Google's reverse image search to identify and link Tinder profiles to other social networks. By this

means, they were able to identify almost half of their interviewees by name. A corresponding series of interviews revealed that Tinder users are surprisingly slack in their privacy habits and mostly unaware of how easy it is to identify them using and linking the information on their Tinder profiles with their other social network profiles.

Håkansson & Rosén (2014) are believed to have dived into this matter when examining Tinder and how it affects social norms and users' view on online dating. Unfortunately, the thesis was composed in Swedish and – apart from the abstract – no English translation was available to the author, which is why the results and details of the study cannot be further discussed at this point.

Gatter & Hodkinson (2016) explored the reasons individuals use Tinder, how they differed from motives to use dating agencies and strived to establish different user characteristics.

Tinder profiles have to be linked to Facebook accounts, a fact the company reportedly explains to guarantee bigger authenticity among its users. In her essay "Dressing up Cinderella: interrogating authenticity claims on the mobile dating app Tinder", Duguay (2017) explores how authenticity is constructed on the app.

In his Master's thesis, Borrow explored *„practices young people employ to perform identity through their online profiles.“*, emphasizing on how these practices are shaped by social norms (Borrow, 2014: 45-46). He presumes that

„With respect to social components, Tinder's young users experiment with notions of the self (...), while seemingly remaining cognizant of a duty to represent oneself in an appealing yet „achievable“ light“ (2014: 47).

The results of Braziels (2015) ethnographic study about college students' use of Tinder could serve as a useful reference in order to compare possible differences between US-American and Austrian students regarding the goals, concerns, experiences and effects of using Tinder.

In another Master's thesis, Ligtenberg (2015) investigated Tinder from a uses-and-gratifications perspective. The motives for the use of Tinder established in his study - „*companionship, intimacy, boosting self-esteem, casual sex, excitement, passing time, cool and new trend, surveillance, entertainment and relaxation*“ - will be revisited and compared for the coding scheme of the planned content analysis and the questionnaire for the user survey.

Roeffen (2013/14) discussed Tinder in the context of „*nearness*“. The focus of his Bachelor's Thesis lay on how the functionality and design of Tinder influence the perceived „*physical and social nearness*“ (2013/14: abstract) between matched users and how this in turn shapes their interactions, both romantic and sexual. According to his analysis, one reason for the app's success is the fact that it

„provides a rich sensory, emotional and cognitive experience to its users creating a positive attitude towards the app and its users. By not showing rejection, the app provides a safe basis for its users to form rich online interactions, stimulating the sense of social nearness.“ (2013/14: 21)

As to the interactions and relationships forming on Tinder, she arrives at the (at this point) none-too-surprising conclusion that „*romantic and sexual relationships in Tinder are different and similar to the way individuals initiate, develop and maintain relationships formed in offline settings or other online dating platforms*“ (2013/14: 22) but that Tinder is an excellent example on how „*a more shallow approach to online dating can be just as, if not more, successful than the deepened serious approach online dating is known for*“ (2013/14: 23).

Lately, academics have also approached Tinder from a uses and gratifications perspective: Snitko (2016) dedicated her dissertation to the uses and gratifications of Tinder, focusing on why people use Tinder and which differences between genders can be determined. Another Master's thesis, submitted by Lang (2016) compared gratifications levels of Tinder and Match.com, concluding that while there are not clear differences between the two platforms regarding their gratification levels, women received much less „relaxation“ from them than males (see 2016: abstract).

It seems that so far, there have not yet been any studies focusing on the depiction of Tinder and its users in the media.

Grounded Theory & other fields of research

Not all fields of research relevant to this study can be attended to in this chapter. Interpreting and combining the results from the content analysis and user survey will be the most exciting and challenging part of this Master's thesis. The analysis of the motives for using, concerns about and assumed impacts of Tinder will be conducted according to the principle of Grounded Theory, "*a general methodology for developing theory that (...) evolves during actual research (...) through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection*" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994: 273).

With regard to the research objective and questions, it is conceivable that at one point, insights from *Agenda Setting* theories (see Shaw, 1977) or the *News Values* (Schulz, 1989) will be of relevance when analyzing the media content. These models and their findings will be addressed in the course of the comparison.

5. STUDY DESIGN

In order to investigate the research questions presented in chapter three, a study design consisting of two parts was established. Research questions Q1a – Q1c were pursued by conducting a **qualitative content analysis** of media articles about Tinder. To follow up on the second group of research questions (Q2a- Q2c), a standardized **online survey** was created. In case the results of the survey would fail to provide a comprehensive grasp of user motives, an additional sample of approximately five qualitative interviews was planned to gain deeper insight. This proved not to be necessary, though.

The results of both phases were then compared and analyzed in order to examine the third group of research questions (Q3a – Q3c). For this, a **Grounded Theory** approach was esteemed most suitable, as it provided the necessary qualitative flexibility to „*allow themes in the data to emerge naturally, and theory to emerge from these themes*“ (Zytka, Grandhi & Jones, 2014: 56).

The framework and details of the respective methodical designs will be discussed in this chapter.

Content analysis

Sample

Following Krippendorff's approach of "relevance sampling", the sample of this study aimed at "*selecting all textual units that contribute to answering given research questions*" (2013: 120). The objects of analysis were selected according to a number of criteria:

Time frame: Tinder was developed in the USA (Tinder, 2016) and released in the USA in the fall of 2012 (Crook & Escher, 2015). In the following two years it spread like a wildfire and hit its first big goal of (in total) 1 billion matches in spring, 2014. In November of the same year, Tinder was introduced to the app stores in Germany and Austria. Today, it is available in 196 countries, creating approximately 26 million matches per day (Tinder, 2016).

Looking at the app's short but nonetheless impressive history of success, it is assumed that now in 2016, four years after its introduction, the biggest media hype about Tinder is

over. In order to gain relevant data, it was therefore decided that the content analysis should cover news reports about Tinder from a time when it was still new, but already known to a wider audience in the USA, Germany and Austria. After careful consideration and a short pretest to determine whether enough data could be collected, the timeframe for the content analysis was set to Jan 1st, 2014 until December 31st, 2015 (two years).

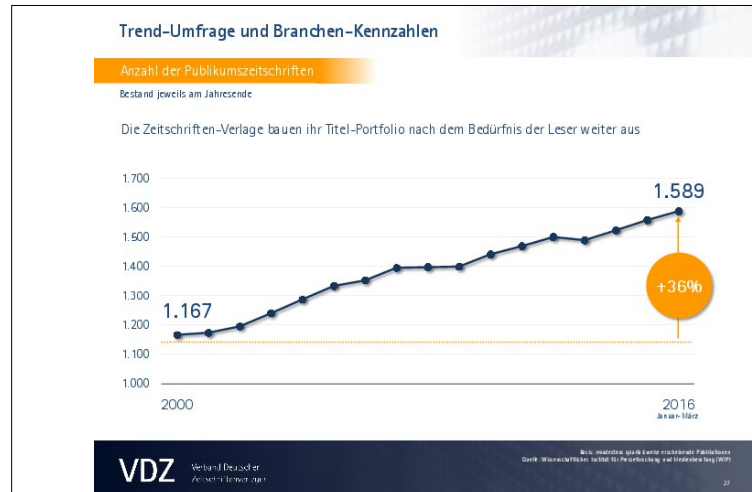


Figure 1: Number of German magazines from 2000 to 2016 (VDZ, 2016)

Type of publication: A second limitation for the analysis had to be made concerning the news media from which the data will be retrieved. As a full study of the total press coverage on Tinder from 2014-2015 would most likely go far beyond the scope of this Master's thesis, it was decided to analyze articles from newspapers (daily and weekly) and magazines (weekly and monthly) from Austria, Germany and the USA

Relevance: This still left an incredible amount of possible sources. In Germany alone, 1,589 magazines were registered by the VDZ (Verband Deutscher Zeitschriftenverleger) in 2016 (see figure 1) and in 2013, the Alliance for Audited Media listed 593 newspapers (at least that's the number of papers reporting data) in the U.S (AAM, 2013).

In order to provide meaningful insights, this study did not require to cover the complete amount of print publications from all three countries. Rather, the sample was further restricted as to the estimated relevance of the titles and their content. Starting with a list of newspapers and magazines ranked by circulation¹ in each country, those with a specific

¹ Rankings based on public data published by the Audience for Audited Media's (AAM) list of "Top 25 Daily Newspapers" (March 2013) and "Top 25 Consumer Magazines by Paid & Verified Circulation, Single-Copy Sales and Digital Replica Circulation" (June 2014). Data for Austrian and German magazines and newspapers is based on rankings published by the *Österreichische Auflagenkontrolle* (ÖAK, 01-06/2015) and the *Informationsgemeinschaft zur Feststellung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern e.V.* (IVW, 03/15).

political, financial or religious focus (e.g. Wallstreet Journal, „Jüdische Allgemeine“) were excluded from the sample, as well as those who didn't have „Lifestyle“, „Culture“, „Feuilleton“ or other featured pages, as it was assumed that reports about Tinder would be most likely to appear in these sections.

Among the magazines, the same criteria of selection were applied, also excluding special interest publications (e.g. magazines for extreme sports, parenting or TV programs). In Germany for example, the sample was taken from those magazines considered „popular“ and „women's magazines“ ("Publikumsmagazine“, „Frauenmagazine“), while the US-American sample was drawn from the category of „consumer magazines“.

Among the remaining titles, a short pretest was conducted in order to determine whether they had published at least one article about Tinder during the time frame of the analysis and whether these were available on the databases NEXIS and APA Online Manager.

Following Krippendorff, *“the resulting units of text are not meant to be representative of a population of texts; rather, they are the population of relevant texts, excluding the textual units that do not possess relevant information”* (2012: 120). The final sample list of publications is depicted in table 1.

USA	Austria	Germany
Newspapers		
<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Kronen Zeitung</i>	<i>Bild (incl. Bild am Sonntag)</i>
<i>USA Today</i>	<i>Der Standard</i>	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>
<i>Los Angeles Times</i>	<i>Die Presse (incl. Die Presse am Sonntag)</i>	<i>FAZ (incl. FAZ am Sonntag)</i>
<i>Daily News (New York)</i>	<i>Kleine Zeitung</i>	<i>Die Welt (incl. Welt am Sonntag)</i>
<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>Kurier</i>	<i>Handelsblatt</i>
<i>The Denver Post</i>	<i>Heute</i>	<i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i>
Magazines		
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	<i>News</i>	<i>Der Spiegel</i>
<i>Glamour</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>Stern</i>
<i>Vogue</i>	<i>Profil</i>	<i>Bunte</i>
<i>Vanity Fair</i>	<i>Wienerin</i>	<i>Focus</i>
<i>New Yorker</i>	<i>Trend (incl. Format)</i>	<i>SUPERillu</i>

Table 1: Sample list

Analysis

After the list of publications was set, the number of articles was estimated by conducting searches in the two databases NEXIS and APA Online Manager. Even in this very restricted sample, it (see table 2- sample size: 683) turned out too big to handle. Therefore, the content analysis was splitted into multiple steps.

First, all articles were coded according the extent of their reference to Tinder as a topic (see coding scheme). **Only those articles with Tinder as the main or sub topic of the text** were then further analyzed with regard to their tonality and the motives, concerns and impacts described in them. This reduced the number of **articles for detailed analysis** to a **total of 179** (see tables 2a and 2b).

Collected analysis units					
U.S.A.		Austria		Germany	
Newspapers					
New York Times	134	Kronen Zeitung	7	Bild (incl. Bild am Sonntag)	23
USA Today	25	Der Standard	8	Süddeutsche Zeitung	67
L.A. Times	6	Die Presse (incl. Die Presse am Sonntag)	30	FAZ (incl. FAZ am Sonntag)	36
Daily News (New York)	26	Kleine Zeitung	7	Die Welt (incl. Welt am Sonntag)	22
The Washington Post	48	Kurier	38	Handelsblatt	13
The Denver Post	13	Heute	11	Frankfurter Rundschau	13
Sum	252	Sum	101	Sum	174
Magazines					
Cosmopolitan	46	News	12	Der Spiegel	4
Glamour	11	Woman	15	Stern	4
Vogue	2	Profil	9	Bunte	3
Vanity Fair	14	Wienerin	5	Focus	13
New Yorker	8	Trend (incl. Format)	8	SUPERillu	2
Sum	81	Sum	49	Sum	26
U.S.A.	333	Austria	150	Germany	200
		Total sum of analysis units	683		

Relevant articles (main and sub topic) for further analysis					
Newspapers					
New York Times	28	Kronen Zeitung	1	Bild (incl. Bild am Sonntag)	6
USA Today	4	Der Standard	5	Süddeutsche Zeitung	15
L.A. Times	0	Die Presse (incl. Die Presse am Sonntag)	4	FAZ (incl. FAZ am Sonntag)	12
Daily News (New York)	6	Kleine Zeitung	1	Die Welt (incl. Welt am Sonntag)	4
The Washington Post	10	Kurier	19	Handelsblatt	2
The Denver Post	1	Heute	1	Frankfurter Rundschau	5
Sum	49	Sum	31	Sum	44
Magazines					
Cosmopolitan	10	News	5	Der Spiegel	2
Glamour	2	Woman	8	Stern	3
Vogue	1	Profil	4	Bunte	0
Vanity Fair	10	Wienerin	2	Focus	6
New Yorker	1	Trend (incl. Format)	0	SUPERillu	1
Sum	24	Sum	19	Sum	12
U.S.A.	73	Austria	50	Germany	56
Total sum of analysis units		179			

Table 2: a) Number of collected analysis units, left b) Relevant articles for further analysis, right - (content analysis)

Nr	Country	Type	Publication	Year	Date	Headline	Reference			Tonality
							main topi	sub topi	minor mentio	
7	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	05.09.15	WHAT PERV, MOM? Rosie kid testifies for ex-con	0	0	1	
8	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	24.08.15	Millennials' troubles are looking perennial	1	0	0	negative
9	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	24.08.15	MOMENT OF SPOOF NYC Millennials are ripe parody target	0	0	1	
10	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	24.08.15	Rosie's dad dies of cancer at 81	0	0	1	
11	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	20.08.15	ROSIE'S TEEN WITH EX-CON AWOL kid found in druggie's home	0	0	1	
12	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	19.07.15	Reconsider Rosé No need to blush: These wines can be as	0	0	1	
13	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	17.05.15	Solitary refinement Streaming a concert alone at home be	0	0	1	
14	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	28.04.15	Wallace has a hii of a story	0	0	1	
15	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	16.04.15	Jenny sees dim 'View' of future	0	0	1	
16	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	10.04.15	In the now!	0	0	1	
17	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	23.03.15	DRAKE TAKES THE CAKE With Drizzy app,-be a honey bun-	0	0	1	
18	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	08.03.15	HANKS GOING TO POP Stars in new Carly Rae vid	0	0	1	
19	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2015	02.01.15	LET IT GO! Leave all your physical and emotional baggage	0	0	1	
20	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2014	29.12.14	Ain't Too Proud' to do the hits	0	0	1	
21	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2014	29.12.14	NEW YORK, NEW YEAR Here are 15 fresh starts for '15	0	1	0	rather negative
22	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2014	21.11.14	N.J. 'Wives' in a state of limbo	0	0	1	
23	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2014	17.11.14	Dating grab bag Singles are flocking to new paths for roma	1	0	0	negative
24	U.S.	Newspaper	Daily News (New York)	2014	25.10.14	Weiner back at it Sexter favorites hottie's racy Twitter pic	0	0	1	

Table 3: Coding scheme. Articles marked green will be analyzed further

Coding scheme

Each article was treated as one **analysis unit**. Each analysis unit was numbered and the name and type of the medium as well as title and date of the publication determined. Next, the extent of reference and – if the aforementioned criteria were met – tonality, motives, concerns and impacts were coded. In the following section, the coding scheme and its categories will be described.

Number: Sequential number of the analysis unit

Country: Country of origin, e.g. Austria, Germany or USA

Type: Type of publication, e.g. newspaper or magazine

Title: Title of publication, e.g. “The New York Times”

Year & Date: Year and date of publication, e.g. “2014” and “06.02.14”

Headline: Headline of the article, e.g. “Sweet ways to romance your valentine”

Reference

This category describes to what extent Tinder is the topic of the article. Analysis units are sorted into three sub-categories:

Main Topic: The article is mainly about the dating app Tinder or takes Tinder as starting point to broach the issue of dating behavior and practices.

Sub topic: The article is not about dating exclusively, but at one point refers to Tinder in regard to dating.

Minor mention: The article only briefly mentions Tinder, e.g. satirical comments or news stories (e.g. “Woman crossed the street without looking while using Tinder on her phone, got hit by car”), rankings, etc. or refers to Tinder in another context than dating, e.g. data security, mobile applications in general or financial news.

Tonality

How the app/users/motives/concerns/impacts are described in the article. Analysis units were sorted into six sub-categories:

Positive: In the article, Tinder, the way it is used or its impact on dating is described in an overall positive way. Example:

„I would like to point out that Tinder has been **a great boon** for many L.G.B.T.Q. people around the country. It is **much less sexualized** than Grindr (for gay and bisexual men) and Craigslist, and has **many more users** than most dating apps and sites marketed toward lesbian, bi, and/or queer women. This makes it particularly **useful** in places without a large, visible L.G.B.T.Q. community.“

Rather positive: In the article, Tinder, the way it is used or its impact on dating is described in a rather positive way. Example:

„It was disheartening to learn of other women's negative experiences on **Tinder**, but I would argue that **the technology doesn't enable rampant misogyny** and male privilege-**it reveals it.**“

Neutral/ambivalent: In the article, Tinder, the way it is used or its impact on dating is described in both a positive and negative way or there is no clear tendency towards one or the other.

Rather negative: In the article, Tinder, the way it is used or its impact on dating is described in a rather negative way. Example:

"Rom-coms were always ninety minutes of a man and a woman talking, having sex in another way, through the conversation," she said. "How do you make a rom-com for twenty-four-year-olds who have **no idea what courtship or foreplay is**, who just hook up on Tinder?"

This category will also include passages in which questions about negative effects of Tinder raised, such as

„Does Tinder **inspire emotionless encounters**? Emotions run high."

Negative: In the article, Tinder, the way it is used or its impact on dating is described in an overall negative way. Example:

„Your app panders to the **lazy** and **tech addicted**. Bring back retro dating!"

„Once social media became the law of the land, it was only a matter of time before the instant-gratification culture came to include **no-commitment**, hurry-up sex. (...) This flick of the thumb has accelerated the process that people, usually complete strangers, go through to make "matches," which increasingly means **nothing more than meeting for casual sex**, sometimes within the half-hour."

n.a.: The article is too short for its tonality to be determined or cannot be codified distinctly because of its satirical/humorous composition.

Motives

In their study of user motives for the app Grindr, Corriero and Tong (2015: 125) listed the following: "*killing time*", "*making friends*", "*connect to the gay community*", "*meet people to have sex / hook up*", "*find someone to date*". They also referred a list of more general motives, compiled by De Wiele & Tong (2014), including "*social interaction*", "*sex*", "*social inclusion / approval*", "*entertainment*", "*dating / romance relationships*" and "*location-based partner searching*" (Corriero and Tong, 2015: 25).

Ranzini & Lutz (2016) observed that *“women use Tinder more for friendship and self-validation, while men use it more for hooking up/sex, traveling, and relationship seeking”* (2016: 1).

Couch and Liamputtong (2008: 271) identified *“seeking a soul mate, seeking sex, looking for fun, relaxation, to ease boredom, or because it seemed like an easy way to meet people”* as main reasons why participants of their study started online dating.

In order to fit the objective of this study, the motives listed above were compiled and slightly rearranged (e.g. splitting social approval and inclusion in two different categories), resulting in the following categories:

M1: Escapism / Entertainment

Articles with references to people using the app in order out of curiosity, to “kill time”, “out of boredom” or “just for fun” will be coded with “M1”.

M2: Social Interaction / Connection

References to people signing up on Tinder in order to meet new people in a non-sexual way, e.g. form platonic friendships or connect to locals or fellow tourists while travelling. In a broader sense, “M2” will also be coded if Tinder is depicted as an app that encourages social inclusion or “digital intimacy”, making people feel more connected to others.

M3: Sex

References to people mainly using the app in order to meet sexual encounters or “hook ups” will be coded M3. This also includes people in open or polyamorous relationships who are (with the knowledge and consent of everybody involved) looking for another/third partner. (Not to be confused with category “M5: Deception”, where the motive is to find a sexual partner outside of a monogamous relationship).

M4: Love

References to singles using the app in order to form a romantic relationship, that is find a new boyfriend/girlfriend, fall in love or getting married, will be coded “M4”.

M5: Deception

References to users who signed up on Tinder in order to cheat, that is find sexual partners although they are in a monogamous relationship and without knowledge of their partner, will be coded “M5”.

M6: Self-validation

Mentions of users tinderering in order to boost their self-esteem (e.g. finding out how many matches they can get) will be coded “M6”.

M7: Others

Articles that mention motives other than those listed above will be assigned “M7”. Afterwards, this category will be reviewed in order to see whether new categories can be formed from the collected data.

Concerns

In order to systemize voiced concerns about Tinder, five categories were defined:

C1: Deception

This category covers concerns about other users representing themselves not accurately (false facebook profile, misleading pictures, married) on the app, creating false hopes or disappointments when meeting face to face.

C2: Superficiality

Concerns about the superficiality of the app will be coded “C2”. It includes objections to the superficiality of other users on Tinder (and becoming the object of flippant judgments) as well as concerns about becoming shallow oneself.

C3: Harassment

This category includes concerns about being harassed by other users, for example by receiving inappropriate pictures, abusing or insulting messages, stigmatization (“slut-shaming”) or becoming a victim of stalking.

C4: Safety risks

Concerns about negative consequences of meeting/dating unknown persons, for example health (sexually transmitted diseases) or personal security (sexual abuse, robbery) risks, will be coded “C4”.

C5: Others

Articles referring to concerns other than those listed above will be assigned “C5” and again be revisited after the first analysis in order to see whether new categories should be established.

Impact

These categories serve to map the negative and positive consequences Tinder is said to have on dating practices. Four of them describe negative impacts, two of them positive ones:

I1: Relation-shopping (negative)

An article will be coded “I1” if in it Tinder is accused of fueling the phenomenon of “Relation-shopping” among daters, e.g. dating behavior driven by a desire for quick/instant gratification.

I2: Promiscuity (rather negative)

Articles accusing Tinder of promoting promiscuity among users will be coded “I2”. However, the sole mention of people using the app in order to find partners for sex will not suffice (for this, the motive-category “sex” was set). Rather, the author strived to map concerns about young people feeling pressured into behaving (more) promiscuously on the app than they would without it.

I3: Lack of commitment (negative)

This category will be used to code all articles that voice concerns about users who, because of Tinder and the vast number of potential matches it promises, become unable or not willing to commit to long-term personal relationships anymore.

I4: Extermination of “traditional” dating (negative)

Articles producing the argument that because of Tinder, people don't meet and go out in traditional ways² (meeting at the supermarket, boy going up to girl at a party, etc.) or simply forget how to date in these traditional settings, minimizing possibilities to form meaningful and long-lasting romantic relationships.

I5: Sexual empowerment (positive)

One of Tinder's core features is that chatting between two users is only possible if both have swiped right on each other. Based on this principle of reciprocity, one could argue that the app gives its users (not only women) the chance to have more control over the mate selection and initiation process. Articles referring to this will be coded "I5".

I6: Expansion of dating pool (positive)

This category is coded if the article refers to Tinder expanding its users' dating pool. This can be understood in three ways:

- **size:** expansion of the sheer number of potential dates, e.g. like Tinder did for single women in India (see CNET, 2016)
- **sexual orientation:** increasing the heterogeneity of the dating pool, e.g. Tinder giving ethnic minorities or members of the LGBTQ community easier and more access to like-minded dates
- **access:** Tinder giving shy people a platform to find partners more easily, safely and (more or less) anonymously, thereby expanding their dating pool significantly.

Representations underlining one or all these aspects will be coded "I6".

I7: Others

Articles that mention concerns other than those listed above will be assigned "I7" and revisited later to establish any further categories deemed reasonable.

User survey

² As defined by Finkel et. al as "*the myriad ways that people meet potential romantic partners in their everyday lives through non-Internet activities*" (2012:7)

In order to conduct the survey, an online questionnaire was prepared. It has often been argued that surveys conducted online cannot lead to broad conclusions about their target groups— however, since this study focuses on a mobile app and its users, this posed less of a problem. In order to use Tinder, a smartphone and facebook account are required, which implies that the owner also has access to the internet.

Apart from convenience, economic and efficiency reasons, *“the anonymity possible on the Internet is believed to help in gaining access to respondents normally difficult to reach, and it may facilitate the sharing of their experiences and opinions”* (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006: 437). Interviewing users about their dating behavior on Tinder will to some extent lead to them having to reveal personal information. Contrary to a personal interview or group discussions, where social desirability or embarrassment might keep participants from talking freely, it was hoped that an online survey and its anonymity would offer the right framework for the collection of genuine statements.

The **target population** of the proposed user survey was adults that have used Tinder at least once in the last three years. The **survey sample** was non-probable, as the author aimed not at representing the total population but only a sub-group (see Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006: 439). The sample was unrestricted, meaning that access to the survey required no password or the like. Participants were encouraged to pass on the link to the survey, and it was hoped that by means of the well-known (and, among students, well sought after) snowball-effect, a sufficient amount of data would be collected.

“While coverage is less of a concern in this type of Web survey, and the population of inference, while restricted, is known, nonresponse remains a key concern” (Couper, 2000: 486). Due to the high number of online surveys conducted by students at the university each semester, nonresponse is a problem for young scholars, and one that this study may have to face. As Van Selm & Jankowski argued (citing *Babbi, 1990*) *“non-probability sampling should meet the condition of sufficient response rate; otherwise the sample becomes no more than a self-selected group of respondents”* (2006: 439). In order to draw significant conclusions from the survey, it was estimated that a minimum of 100 completed questionnaires should be collected.

The user survey was built and designed via the online service Typeform. After a short pretest, during which the questionnaire was sent to three people, the survey link was

published on social media (facebook³ and twitter⁴) on November 5th, 2016. In addition, a thread calling for participants was established on the online forum reddit⁵.

The survey remained online and open for participation for two weeks (November 5th – November, 19th, 2016). After that, a total number of 501 filled out questionnaires were available for analysis.

Survey design

In designing the questionnaire, the author considered Van Selm & Jankowski's advice on "*tailoring a questionnaire to the interests and style of the target audience*", as well as draw on other findings and "*principles, such simplicity, cultural independence, completeness, relevance and neutrality*" (2006: 441).

The questionnaire started with a short welcome note, describing the objective of the survey in a few words, emphasizing the anonymous and strictly confident character of the study. The first question of the survey served as qualifying question:

Are you currently using Tinder or have you used the app at least once in the last three years?

Participants who selected "no" were directed to the end of the survey. Those who selected "yes" were allowed to continue.

Next followed a series of demographic questions about the gender, age and relationship status of the participant. Next, the country in which Tinder had been used mostly was inquired, in order to make the collected data comparable to the results of the content analysis of media from different countries.

In the main section of the questionnaire, user motives, concerns and the presumed impact Tinder has on dating and society in general were inquired. Questions on motives and concerns each had a number of multiple choice answer options, from which the participant could choose as many as he/she liked. The answer items were designed in order to

³ <https://www.facebook.com/ari.bru/posts/1297009076984334?pnref=story> (Nov. 5, 2016)

⁴ <https://twitter.com/Aribrux/status/794864685518561281> (Nov. 5, 2016)

⁵ <https://www.reddit.com/user/AriBru/> (Nov. 8, 2016)

correspond with the categories of the content analysis. Each motive and concern category was represented with two answer items (see table 3).

Why do/did you use Tinder?
and
In your opinion, what is other people's main purpose for using Tinder?

Answer item	Corresponding motive category
To meet new people while abroad	Social Interaction
Out of curiosity/ just for fun	Escapism
To fall in love	Love
To find friends	Social Interaction
To find casual dates	Sex
To see how many matches I/they would get	Self-validation
To find people to have sex/hook up with	Sex
To find a partner for a long-term relationship	Love
To see which friends of mine/theirs are on it	Escapism
To boost my/their self-confidence	Self-validation
None of the above	
Other	
Answer item	Corresponding concern category
To make fun of the people on it	Harassment

Table 4: Answer items - motives

The answer item “To make fun of the people on it” served as an indicator for the concern categories “Harassment”. The motive category “M5: Deception” was represented with a separate question on whether the user had ever used Tinder to cheat on their partner, accompanied by a short notice again reassuring participants of the study’s confidentiality (see appendix A, question 9).

When asking about users’ concerns about Tinder, a similar pattern was chosen, with each category of concern represented by two statements, from which the participants could choose as many as they liked (see table 4).

Before or while using the app, did you have any concerns about Tinder?
For example....

Answer item	Corresponding concern category
I was concerned about people using fake profiles.	Deception
I worried about people only pretending to be single on Tinder.	Deception

I was concerned about being treated like an object by others.	Superficiality
I feared that by using Tinder, I would become more shallow in my judgment of others.	Superficiality
I feared being insulted or otherwise harassed by users.	Harassment
I was concerned about receiving inappropriate messages or pictures in the chat.	Harassment
I was anxious about my personal safety when meeting Tinder dates.	Safety risks
I worried about safe sex on Tinder, e.g. being infected with a sexually transmitted disease.	Safety risks
None of the above	
Other	

Table 5: Answer items - concerns

In order to inquire into users' opinions on the impact Tinder might have on its users and society in general, a likert scale was used. After the main question "It is often argued that Tinder is changing people's dating behavior in general. Which of these statements do you agree with most?" (see appendix A, question 10) users were presented with various statements. Again, each of the statements referred to a category from the content analysis.

Each category was represented with two statements, with one exception: The impact category "Expansion of dating pool" applies to three statements in order to address all aspects mentioned in the coding scheme.

It is often argued that Tinder is changing people's dating behavior in general. Which of these statements do you agree with most?

Answer item	Corresponding impact category
Tinder makes people approach dating in a much more rational and calculated way	Relation-shopping
Because of Tinder, people now choose their dates like goods in a supermarket.	
On Tinder, people who date tend to have sex much sooner than those who date in traditional ways.	Promiscuity
On Tinder, people content themselves with hookups even if they would like to have more out of the relationship.	
Because of Tinder, people are less willing to commit themselves to each other.	Lack of commitment
On Tinder, one is constantly on the lookout for something better.	

People on Tinder increasingly forget how to date without it.	Extermination of traditional dating
Thanks to Tinder, traditional dating practices, like asking somebody out face to face, dinner and a movie, holding the door open for somebody, etc. are a thing of the past.	
Tinder is great for women who date online, giving them more control over their matches.	Sexual empowerment
Tinder helps us to explore our sexuality.	
Because of Tinder, we can meet way more people to date than generations before.	Expansion of dating pool
Tinder is great for the LGBTQ (<i>lesbian gay bi transgender queer</i>) community because it makes it easier to find like-minded matches.	
Tinder is perfect for shy people, because one experiences no direct rejection.	
Tinder is not ruining, but simply accelerating the dating process.	Acceleration
Tinder is the most honest way to meet other people – like in real life, the first impression is all about the looks.	

Table 6: Answer items - impacts

In addition to the statements, users were asked to rate the general impact Tinder has had on dating and society on a scale from 1 to 7 (see appendix A, question 11), followed by another scale on which to rate their personal experiences with the app (see appendix A, question 12).

→ In your opinion, which impact has Tinder had on dating in general?
(1 = extremely negative, 7 = extremely positive)*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Figure 2: Likert scale on Tinder's impact on dating in general

→ Overall, how would you rate your personal experiences on Tinder?
(1 = utter catastrophe, 7 = best time ever)*








						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 3: Likert scale on the user's personal experiences with Tinder

The complete questionnaire can be found in appendix A.

Grounded Theory

After the content analysis and user survey were completed, the results were compared and interpreted according to the principle of Grounded Theory. Developed by Glaser & Strauss, this method aims at generating theory from social research (see 2012: 2) in order to „*help interpret or explain the data in general manner*“ (2012: 4).

Opposed to quantitative studies, where hypotheses are developed by collecting data and testing them against it, Glaser & Straus stressed that their approach leads to theories that are deeply rooted in the underlying data and are therefore much more long-lasting (see 2012: 4).

In applying the concept of Grounded Theory, the author will be guided by Charmaz (2008), who provided practical advice for data analysis:

“A grounded theorist starts with gathering focused data and stays close to the data, while developing concepts that synthesize and conceptualize the collected data – in short, make analytic sense of these data. (...) Thus, you build levels of abstraction directly from the data and, subsequently, check and refine them by gathering further data. You gain a dense conceptual analysis about the empirical problem that you study.” (2008: 82)

It is estimated that this approach will be especially useful for analyzing the data from the user survey.

6. RESULTS of the content analysis

In this chapter, the results of the content analysis will be presented. During Jan 1st, 2014 and December 31st, 2015, a total of 683 articles were published in Austrian, Germany and US-American news outlets. After the first step of the content analysis, 179 of them were selected for further study. The table below provides an overview of the analysis units and their thematic relevance.

Number of analysis units and their thematic relevance								
	Total		Austria		Germany		USA	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
Main topic	98	14%	27	18%	30	15%	41	12%
Sub topic	81	12%	23	15%	26	13%	32	10%
<i>Sum</i>	179		50		56		73	
Minor mention	504	74%	100	67%	144	72%	260	78%
<i>Sum</i>	683	100%	150	22%	200	29%	333	49%

Table 7: Number of analysis units and their thematic relevance (content analysis)

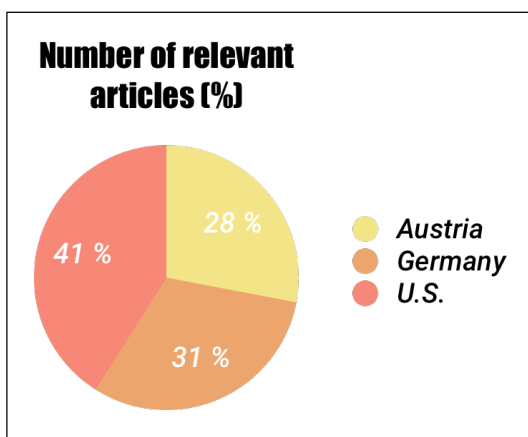


Figure 4: Number of relevant articles (main + sub topic) by country

Unsurprisingly (as Tinder was founded in the USA), news outlets in the USA published most of the relevant articles (those with Tinder as main or sub topic) during the analysis period, that is 73 articles, or 41% of all units selected for further analysis. 31% of all relevant analysis units were German articles, 28% of them were published in Austrian print outlets (see figure 2). This slight imbalance of analysis units must be considered especially when comparing the results of the three countries.

Tonality

In order to answer research question 1, the tonality of those news articles analyzed provides first insights:

	Total		Austria		Germany		USA	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
positive	9	5%	2	4%	0	0%	7	10%
rather positive	7	4%	0	0%	3	5%	4	5%
neutral	64	36%	19	38%	23	41%	22	30%
rather negative	62	35%	19	38%	20	36%	23	32%
negative	37	21%	10	20%	10	18%	17	23%
<i>Sum</i>	179	100%	50	100%	56	100%	73	100%

	Total		Austria		Germany		USA	
	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%	Absolute	%
positive	16	9%	2	4%	3	5%	11	15%
neutral	64	36%	19	38%	23	41%	22	30%
negative	99	55%	29	58%	30	54%	40	55%
<i>Sum</i>	179	100%	50	100%	56	100%	73	100%

Table 8: Tonality

Of the relevant number of analysis units (179), only a total of 9% were coded as “positive” or “rather positive” in their depiction of Tinder or its users. On the opposite, 55% of all analyzed articles showed a “negative” or “rather negative” tendency in their portrayal of the app. In all three countries, more than half (AUT: 58%, GER: 54%, USA: 55%) of articles published during the period of analysis were coded “negative” or “rather negative” in reference to their tonality (see figure 5). This trend is constant when comparing articles from Austria, Germany and the USA.

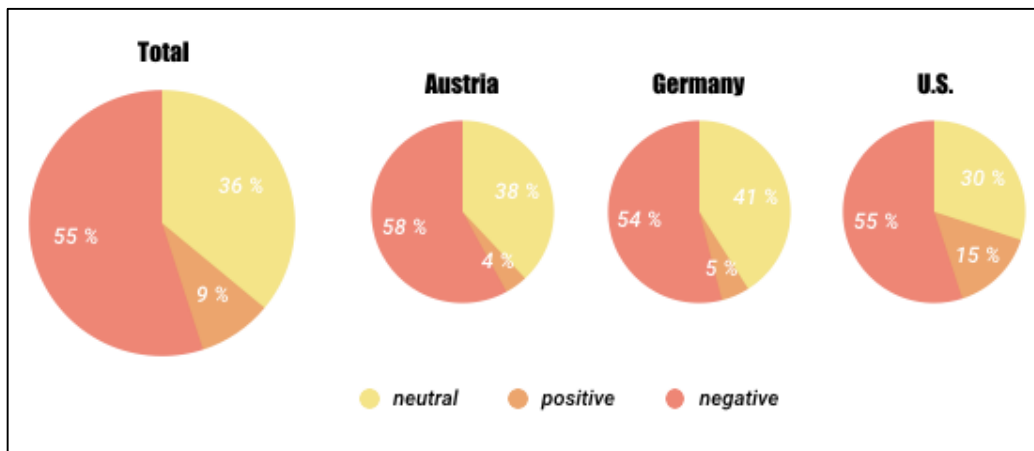


Figure 5: Tonality of relevant articles about Tinder

Based on these results, research question Q1 is thus answered as follows:

Q1. How and in which context do the media represent Tinder?

In their representation of Tinder and its users, media in Austria, Germany and the USA showed a mostly negative tendency. Across all three countries, a majority of articles (55%) published in 2014 and 2015 depicted the app in a negative or rather negative context. 36% of all articles with Tinder as their main or sub topic showed a neutral tonality, while only 9% of the articles could be described as rather positive or positive in their mentioning of Tinder.

Motives

Regarding the motives for using Tinder mentioned in the news articles, the results were as follows: Overall, “Sex” was the motive most often associated with using Tinder (37%), followed by “Love” (19%) and “Social Interaction” (16%). Motives with a negative connotation, such as “Self-validation” or “Deception” (that is, people using tinder in order to cheat on their partner, using fake profiles, etc.) were only voiced in 10%, respectively 7% of all articles.

Motives	Absolute figures
Sex	56
Love	29
Social Interaction	25
Escapism	18
Self-validation	15
Deception	10
Others	10
Sum	163

Table 9: Motives – absolute figures

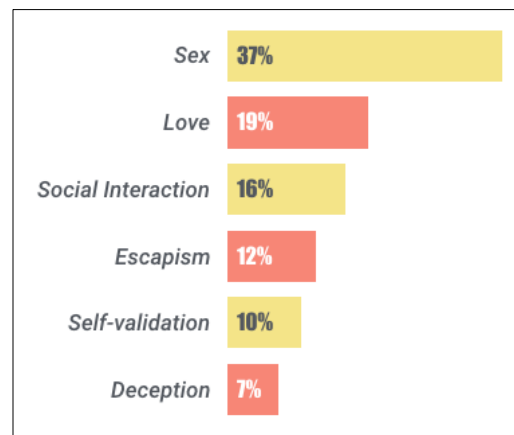


Figure 6: Motives - figures in %, incl. round-off error

As opposed to the motive “Deception” which has a clear negative connotation, the motive “Sex” can be contextualized both in a negative or positive way. Authors describing Tinder as a means to find sexual partners may have argued that the app thus makes it easier for shy people to find a partner, or that it instigates inconsiderate promiscuous behavior in its users. This required a closer look at the tonality of those articles that stated “Sex” as

motive. As can be deduced from table 11, Tinder being used in order to find sexual partners is a motive depicted predominantly in a negative context (53,57%).

Tonality of articles mentioning motive "Sex"	Absolute figures	Figures in %
Positive	2	3,57%
Rather positive	1	1,79%
Neutral	23	41,07%
Rather negative	24	42,86%
Negative	6	10,71%
Sum	56	100%

Table 10: Tonality of articles mentioning "Sex" as a motive

In order to compare the results of the three countries, the figures had to be weighted (see table 12). After that, it became clear that again, the overall results resembled those on a national level- with one difference: In the US, the motive "Social Interaction" was mentioned slightly more often than "Love" (14% vs. 11%).

Total	AUT	GER	USA
n (total)=	50	56	73
Motives			
Sex	16	28	12
Love	9	12	8
Social Interaction	8	7	10
Escapism	5	7	6
Self-validation	3	7	5
Deception	5	4	1
Others	0	0	0

Weighted (total)	AUT	GER	USA
weight factor=	1	0.89	0.68
Motives			
Sex	16	25.00	8.22
Love	9	10.71	5.48
Social Interaction	8	6.25	6.85
Escapism	5	6.25	4.11
Self-validation	3	6.25	3.42
Deception	5	3.57	0.68
Others	0	0.00	0.00

Weighted (%)	AUT	GER	USA
n (weighted)=	50	50	50
Motives			
Sex	32%	50%	16%
Love	18%	21%	11%
Social Interaction	16%	13%	14%
Escapism	10%	13%	8%
Self-validation	6%	13%	7%
Deception	10%	7%	1%
Others	0%	0%	0%

Table 11: Weighted comparison of motives

With regard to research Q1a, the results can be interpreted as follows:

Q1a. Which motives for using the app are salient in the media?

Overall, **the motives for using Tinder voiced most often** in Austrian, German and US-American news media between 2014 and 2015 **were "Sex", "Love" and "Social**

Interaction". The top motive "Sex" (54%) was mostly referred to in a negative context. In the USA "Social Interaction" (14%) as a motive was slightly more salient than "Love" (11%). **The motives "Deception" and "Self-validation" were least salient in all three countries.**

Concerns

In 76 of the 179 analysis units (42%), concerns about using Tinder were voiced. Among these, “Superficiality”, (defined as “objections to the superficiality of other users on Tinder and becoming the object of flippant judgments, as well as concerns about becoming shallow oneself”) was brought up most often (46 articles). The subject of “Safety risks” (both in terms of personal as well as health risks) was only discussed in three articles (4% of the sample).

Concerns	Absolute figures
Superficiality	46
Deception	15
Harassment	12
Safety risks	3
Others	0
<i>Sum</i>	76

Table 12: Concerns – absolute figures

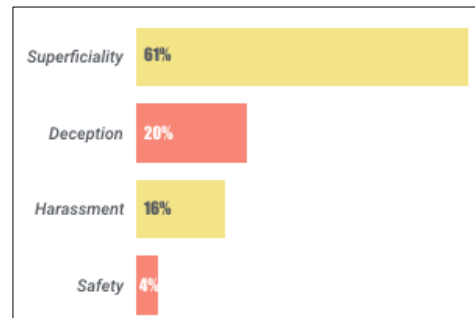


Figure 7: Concerns - figures in %, incl. round.off error

Again, the numbers for each of the countries of origin (table 14) correspond with the overall result, with “Superficiality” as the most salient concern in Austria, Germany and the USA.

Total	AUT	GER	US	Weighted (total)	AUT	GER	US	Weighted (%)	AUT	GER	US
n (total)=	50	56	73	weight factor=	1	0.89	0.68	n (weighted)=	50	50	50
Concerns				Concerns				Concerns			
Superficiality	14	15	17	Superficiality	14	13.39	11.64	Superficiality	28%	27%	23%
Deception	10	4	1	Deception	10	3.57	0.68	Deception	20%	7%	1%
Harassment	4	1	7	Harassment	4	0.89	4.79	Harassment	8%	2%	10%
Safety risks	3	0	0	Safety risks	3	0.00	0.00	Safety risks	6%	0%	0%
Others	0	0	0	Others	0	0.00	0.00	Others	0%	0%	0%

Table 13: Weighted comparison of concerns

However, when taking a look at the rest of the table, an interesting observation can be made: While in Austria and Germany, “Deception” was the second most common concern, US-American print outlets showed a different picture: Here, concerns about “Harassment” (e.g. receiving inappropriate messages, stigmatization, stalking) on Tinder were slightly more salient (10%) than in Austria (8%) or Germany (2%).

Research question Q1b is thus answered as follows:

Q1b. Which concerns about using the app are salient in the media?

In Austrian, German and US-American media, concerns voiced most frequently were those of the category “Superficiality” (61% of all articles). While in Austria, “Deception” appeared to be a big concern also (20%), media in Germany (7%) and the USA (1%) were less concerned about this. **In the USA, concerns about “Harassment” (10%) were more salient in news articles than in the other two countries (AUT: 8%, GER: 2%).**

Impact

Almost all articles analyzed during the content analysis (174 of 179) discussed the impact Tinder supposedly has on its users, dating or society in general. Almost a quarter of them (24%) brought up the (negative) assumption that Tinder promotes a “Lack of commitment” among its users. This observation is followed by 21% discussing a positive impact, namely that Tinder has expanded the dating pool of its users. 14 percent of analysis units were coded with the impact category “Relation-shopping”, with authors describing mostly negative aspects of this phenomenon.

Impact	Absolute figures
Lack of commitment	42
Expansion of dating pool	36
Relation-shopping	24
Extermination of traditional dating	19
Promiscuity	10
Sexual empowerment	4
Others	39
Sum	174

Table 14: Impacts – absolute figures

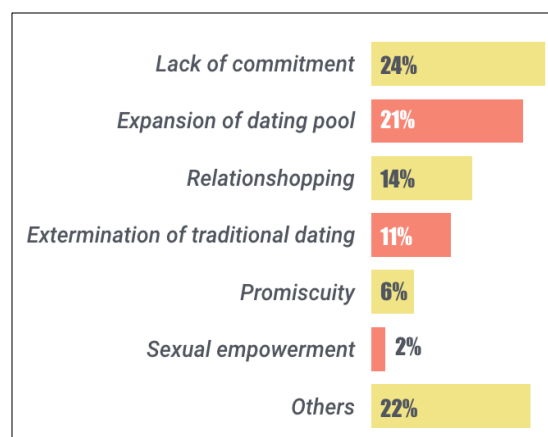


Figure 8: Impacts - figures in %, incl. round-off (error)

Comparing media coverage in Austria, Germany and the USA, the author again observed that the results closely resembled each other, with only minor deviations regarding the top

two impact categories “Lack of commitment” and “Expansion of dating pool”. However, in the USA assumptions about Tinder promoting “Relation-shopping”-behavior among its users were voiced slightly less often, and more emphasis lay on the fear that Tinder and its way of dating may replace more traditional forms of dating (= “Extermination of traditional dating”).

Total	AUT	GER	USA	Weighted (total)	AUT	GER	USA	Weighted (%)	AUT	GER	USA
n (total)=	50	56	73	weight factor=	1	0.89	0.68	n (weighted)=	50	50	50
Impact				Impact				Impact			
Lack of commitment	14	15	13	Lack of commitment	14	13.39	8.90	Lack of commitment	28%	27%	18%
Expansion of dating pool	15	12	9	Expansion of dating pool	15	10.71	6.16	Expansion of dating pool	30%	21%	12%
Relation-shopping	10	8	6	Relation-shopping	10	7.14	4.11	Relation-shopping	20%	14%	8%
Extermination of traditional dating	5	7	7	Extermination of traditional dating	5	6.25	4.79	Extermination of traditional dating	10%	13%	10%
Promiscuity	3	1	6	Promiscuity	3	0.89	4.11	Promiscuity	6%	2%	8%
Sexual empowerment	1	3	0	Sexual empowerment	1	2.68	0.00	Sexual empowerment	2%	5%	0%
Others	4	7	28	Others	0	6.25	19.18	Others	0%	13%	38%

Table 15: Weighted comparison of impacts

After reviewing those analysis units coded with “I7: Others”, it became apparent that a number of articles presented another motive not yet included in the category system: In them, authors expressed their concerns about Tinder accelerating the dating process,

*“...turning the search for love (or at least a nearby body) into a Ritalin-paced video game, it is probably more accurate to say that it has not fundamentally changed the local dating scene so much as **quickened and coarsened its already abrupt, aggressive nature.**” (analysis unit 601: New York Times, Taking a Swipe at Love (or Something))*

However, this was not only described in a negative way. As Eli J. Finkel stated in “In Defense of Tinder”, the acceleration happened only at the first part of dating – the “*actually meeting someone*”, after which people were once again on their own:

*“With Tinder, online dating is capitalizing on its strength -- an expanded dating pool -- and then **accelerating the process of actually meeting someone**. In this respect, it takes dating back to the pre-Internet era, to a time when people met potential partners, about whom they knew relatively little, at parties, bars, dog parks -- situations in which people can get a strong initial sense of romantic compatibility.” (analysis unit 600, The New York Times, In Defense of Tinder)*

In order to check whether users of the app felt the same way and whether they also saw this as negative development, two answer items corresponding to the new impact category **“Acceleration”** were added to question 10 in the survey.

In summary, the results of this section of the content analysis provide the following answer to research question Q1c:

Q1c.Which impacts that Tinder has on dating and society in general are salient in the media?

Across media in all three countries of analysis, Tinder is most often described as having a negative impact on its users and dating in general, namely promoting “Lack of commitment” among daters (24%). References to Tinder expanding people’s dating pool were second most frequent (21%), followed by presumptions with regard to Tinder intensifying “Relation-shopping” (14%) among its users.

7. RESULTS of the user survey

The online survey conducted between November 5th and November 19th, 2016 produced a total of 501 responses. Out of those, 433 people stated that they had used Tinder at least once in the last three years. Their answers were then subject to further analysis. The figure below gives an overview of the respondents' sociodemographic origins:

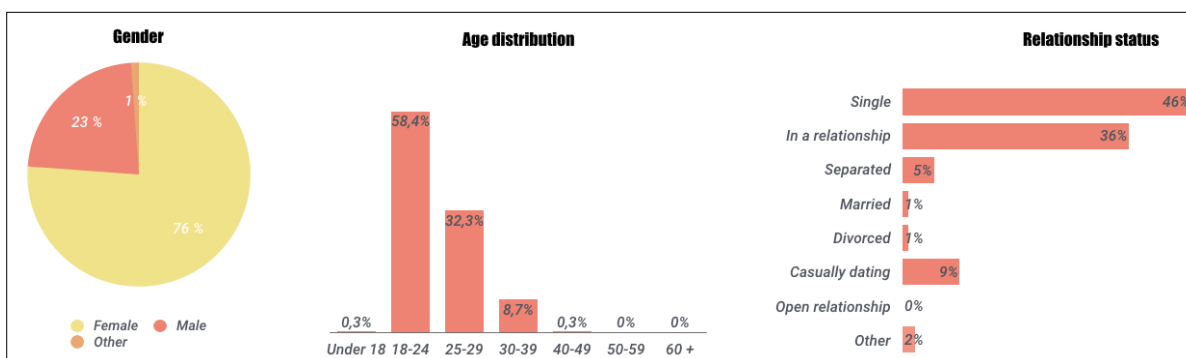


Figure 9: Gender, Age and relationship status distribution among respondents

A clear majority of respondents were female (76%), 1% of participants stated their gender as “Gender-variant / Non-conforming”, “Transgender male” or preferred not to answer. In the following discussion of results, this group won’t be considered separately, as the data pool is too small to derive any conclusive statements.

The age distribution of respondents closely correlates to Tinder’s main target group (see Web Index Q1/2015: 38% of users are between 16 and 24, 45% between 25 and 34) with the majority (58.4%) of participants between 18 and 24 years old, followed by 32.3% between age 25 and 29. It also confirms with the Pew Research Center, which stated that mobile dating is very prevalent among users in their mid-twenties (Smith & Duggan, 2013: 1). Almost half of all interviewees (46%) were single, the second biggest group (36%) of respondents stated that they were currently in a relationship.

Given that the user survey was conducted in Austria, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents had used Tinder in Austria, too (291). 40 respondents indicated that they used or had used the app primarily in Germany and two in the USA (89 chose not to disclose this information). Table 15 gives an overview over the countries participants used the app in mostly.

Austria	291	China	1
Germany	40	Luxembourg	1
United States of America	2	Norway	1
Netherlands	1	Portugal	1
Philippines	1	Spain	1
Australia	1	United Kingdom (UK)	1
Bulgaria	1	Angola	1
		n.a.	89

Table 16: Countries respondents used Tinder in

Unfortunately, the small number of users from Germany and the USA rendered a separate comparison of the press coverage in and user perception from those countries tenuous.

Motives

In question 6 and 7 of the user survey, participants were asked to state why they use or had used Tinder and what, in their opinion, other people's main purpose in signing up on the app was. For each question, respondents could choose multiple items from 13 answer options. Among those, each of the five motive categories was represented with two answer items (the other three were "None of the above", "Other" and one item on the concern category "Harassment").

In order to determine which motive was chosen most often by the participants, it was necessary to consolidate the data for each of the answer items according to their corresponding motive category. This produced the following ranking:

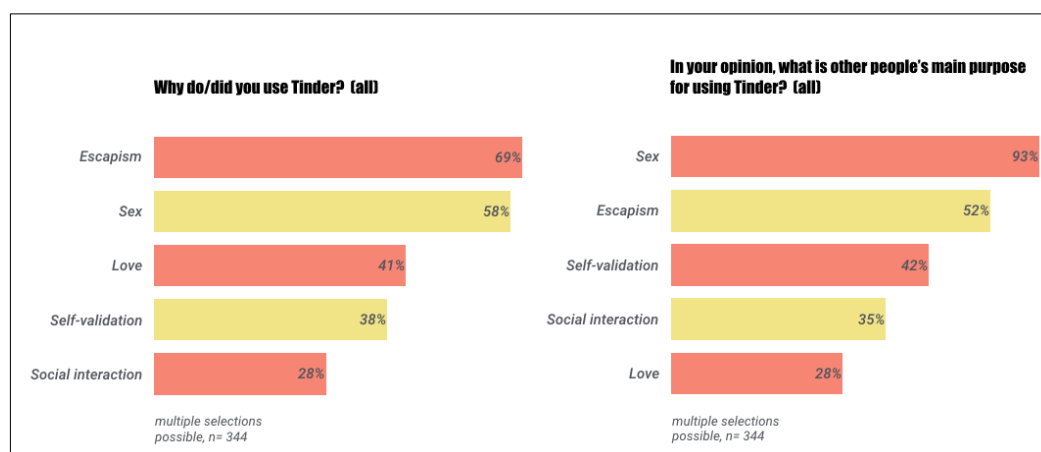


Figure 1: Motives

The figures shown above allow for a few observations:

In their self-assessment of motives, 69% of all participants chose “Escapism” by selecting one or both of the corresponding answer items (*“Out of curiosity / just for fun”* or *“To see which friends of mine are on it”*). The second most common motive was “Sex” (58% of all users). In describing other users’ motives, the top two motives were the same (although in reverse sequence). This finding is in line with another study about Tinder motivations, conducted 2015 in the Netherlands: Here, “surveillance” as a motive, that is checking out other users’ profiles and pictures, was identified as the most important motive for using the app (see Ligtenberg, 2015: 27). It also conforms with other studies on the use of social network sites, where the primary motivation was found out to be “entertainment”, while “companionship” was among the least important motives (see for example Ryan et. al, 2014).

While 41% of the participants stated that one of their reasons for using Tinder was looking for “Love”, only 28% thought that this was also a main motive for other users. The numbers could be interpreted as follows: While respondents admitted to romantic motives in their self-assessment, they were less willing to believe that others could be looking for “Love” on Tinder, too. Participants also estimated that other users were looking for “Self-validation” (42%) more often than themselves (38%). The same holds true for “Social Interaction” as a motive (35% vs. 28%).

The figure below provides further insight into how often the respective answer items of each motive category were chosen:

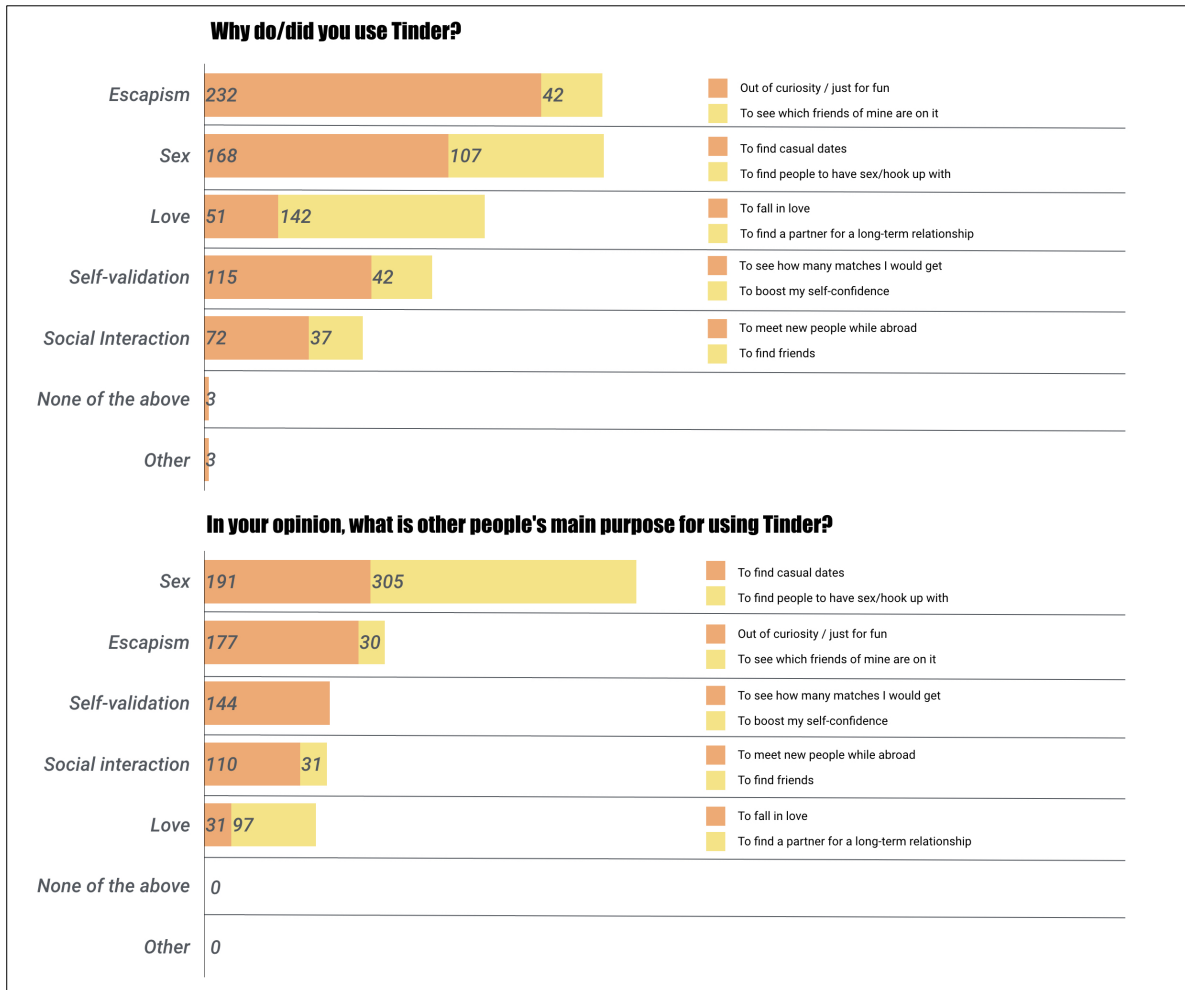


Figure 11: Motives, according to answer items

On comparing these figures, it seems that participants were reluctant to disclose their own motives and more likely to make assumptions about other people's motives (for example, motive category "Sex": 275 vs. 496 indications).

The motive category "Sex" was represented by two answer items. "*To find casual dates*" is not as explicit as "*To find people to have sex/hook up with*". It doesn't seem surprising that when describing their own motives, participants were more likely to select the more implicit answer item (168 indications) while ascribing the more explicit one to others (305 indications).

Gender differences

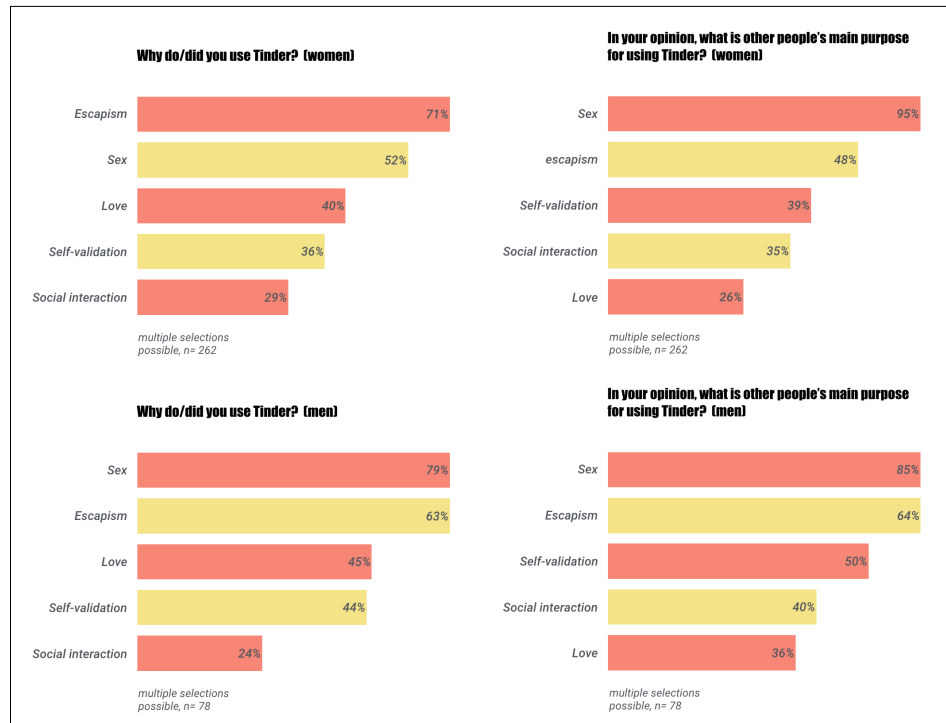


Figure 12: Female and male users' motives

Looking at men and women's motives, we notice that the overall result ("Escapism", "Sex" and "Love" as the top three motives) positively correlated with the one for female participants. This is only comprehensible, given that the majority of participants were female (76% vs. male 23%, 1% other).

While "Escapism" turned out to be the most common motive for women on Tinder (71%), 79% of all male participants (n = 78) stated that they were looking for "Sex" by selecting one or both correlating answer items. In both gender groups, "Love" was the third most common motive (women: 40%, men: 45%) followed by "Self-validation" (women: 36%, men: 44%) and "Social Interaction" (women: 29%, men: 24%) on the last ranks. These results mirror those of a similar study on the uses and gratifications of Tinder, conducted by Snitko (2016) in the USA: Here, focus group interviews and an online questionnaire showed that female participants primarily used Tinder for reasons of entertainment and validation, while men reportedly used it mainly for relationships and hookups (see Snitko, 2016: Abstract).

Comparing men's and women's self-description with their assessment of other users, the overall result became apparent again: Although it was one of the top three motives for both genders, neither men nor women seemed to believe that other users were looking for "Love" on the app in the same extent that as they themselves (women: 40% vs. 26%, men: 45% vs. 36%).

Motives according to age

Among the participants, the biggest age groups were those between 18 and 24 years (58.4%), as well as 25-29 (32.2%) and 30-39 year olds (8.7%). Due to this, these three age groups were examined closer with regard to their respective motives for using Tinder.

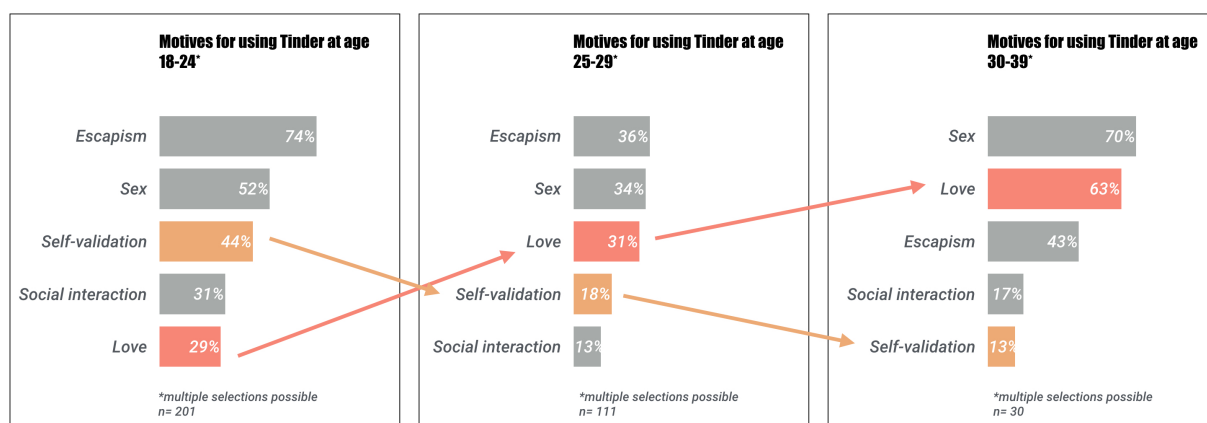


Figure 13: Motives according to age

As displayed above (figure 13), two trends could be observed: The older participants were, the more often they selected "Love" as a motive for using Tinder (age 18-24: 29%, age 25-29: 31%, age 36-39: 63%). At the same time, the commonness of "Self-validation" as a motive decreased with age (age 18-24: 44%, age 25-29: 18%, age 36-39: 13%).

Deception as a motive - Cheating

In the content analysis, "Deception" was coded as a motive category whenever the article raised questions or stated assumptions about Tinder users signing up on the app in order to cheat on their partners. In the survey, this was pursued with Question 9, "Did you ever use Tinder in order to cheat on your partner?". Of the 344 participants, 5% admitted to having cheated at least once on Tinder, 2% of them women and 3% men, either in a relationship (2%), single (1%) or casually dating (1%).

Questions about such intimate information are doomed to be problematic due to socially desirable responding. Still, given these numbers, it seems be safe to conclude that among participants, Deception or cheating as a motive was not preeminent.

Taking into consideration these results, research question Q2a was answered thus:

Q2a. Which motives for using the app are salient among users?

The motive most salient among Tinder's users was "Escapism", with 69% of all respondents choosing either one or two of the corresponding answer items. **On second rank**, 58% of users admitted to using Tinder as a platform to find people for casual dates and/or have sex/hook up with (motive category **"Sex"**). The results for men and women differed only slightly. Two potential trends could be observed on comparing age groups: **The motive "Love" was most salient among users between 30 and 39 years old** (63%) and least salient at those aged 18-24 years (29%). In reverse, **"Self-validation" was a common motive among 18 to 24 year olds** (44%), but played only a minor role (13%) for adults aged 30-39 years. **Deception as a motive was not salient among users**, with only 5% admitting that they had ever cheated on their partners on Tinder.

Concerns

Question 8 of the survey asked participants to disclose which concerns they had while using Tinder. Again, two answer items represented each of the concern categories, and the data was consolidated accordingly to produce a ranking of most salient concerns among participants:

In total, the most salient concern about Tinder from a users' perspective was "Deception" (31%), e.g. others using fake profiles or only pretending to be single on Tinder. About a quarter of all participants (26%) stated that while using the app, they had been concerned about receiving inappropriate messages or pictures in the chat, being insulted or otherwise harassed by users (**"Harassment"**).

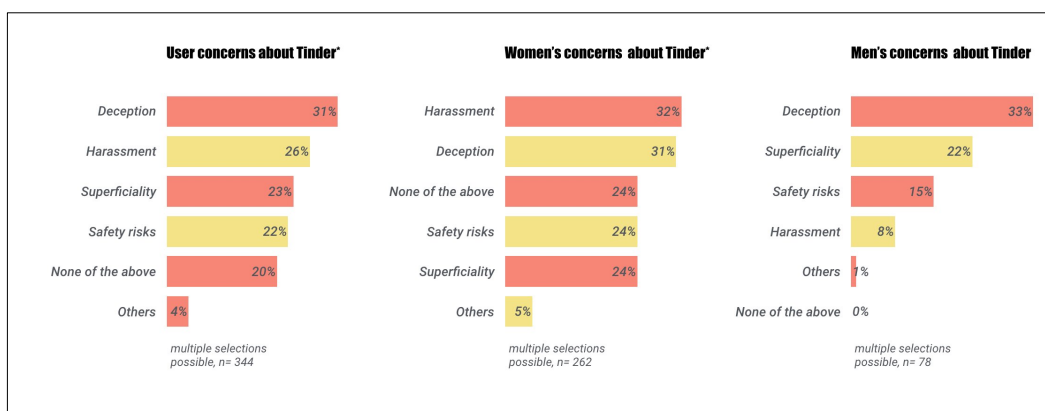


Figure14: Concerns about Tinder – total, female and male

“**Safety risks**”, such as threats to personal or health issues, posed less of a concern for the interviewees. 20% of them even stated that none of the above issues had ever occurred to them as a reason for concern.

Among those concerns brought up in the answer option “Others” (4%), almost all regarded worries about **privacy** (e.g. “*I had concerns that I might be seen by people who are not supposed to see me there*”), **judgment** (“*People from work seeing me and think I’m needy or desperate*”) and **data security** (“*I was worried about sharing my pictures/data more or less publicly*”), indicating that at least two more concern categories “Privacy/Data security” and “Judgement” would have been valuable.

Especially interesting was the comparison between women’s and men’s concerns. For 32% of female participants, “Harassment” was an issue of concern on Tinder. Only 8% of men felt the same way. Equally interesting, men were more concerned about the apps or other users’ “Superficiality” (22%), while this was the least common concern for female respondents (24%).

Regarding research question Q2b, the following conclusion was derived:

Q2b. Which concerns about using the app are salient among users?

While using Tinder, most users (31%) were concerned about “Deception” (e.g. others using fake profiles or only pretending to be single), followed by the concern categories

“Harassment” and “Superficiality” (26% and 23%). While women tended to see “Harassment” as a bigger issue of concern (32% of all female users selected one or both corresponding answer items), only 8% of male participants shared their concern and were much more anxious about “Superficiality” (24%).

Impact

In order to determine how users assessed Tinder’s impact on their romantic lives, respectively dating and society in general, participants were asked to rate their agreement with various statements on a scale from 1 (=strongly disagree) to 5 (= completely agree). The following figure provides an overview of their answers:

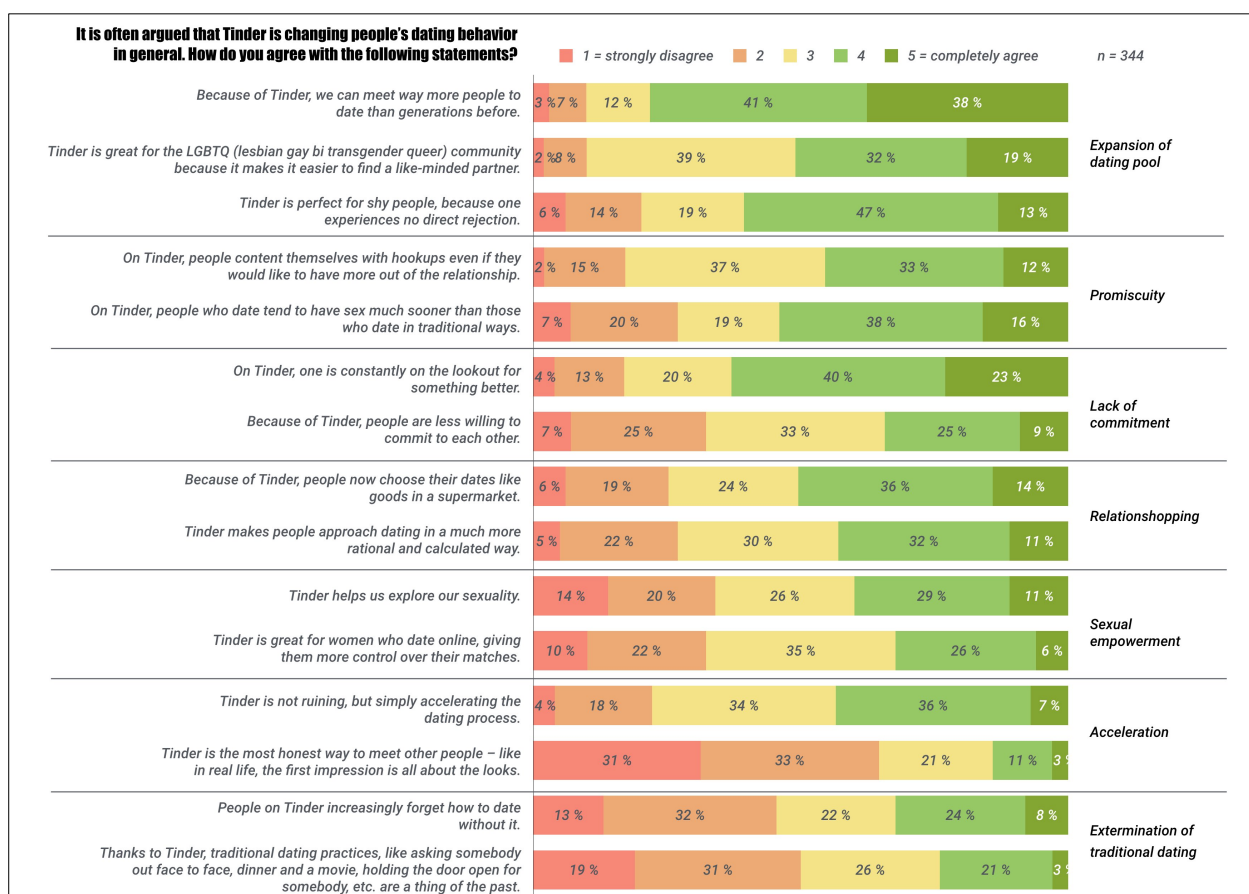


Figure 15: User agreement on impact statements (survey)

The statements corresponded with seven impact categories, two of them expressing a positive impact on society (“Expansion of dating pool”, “Sexual empowerment”), one a neutral impact (“Acceleration”), and four a rather or clearly negative form of impact (“Relation-shopping”, “Extermination of traditional dating”, “Promiscuity” and “Lack of commitment”).

The impact category scoring the highest level of agreement overall was “Expansion of dating pool“:

- 79% of all respondents completely (5) or almost completely (4) agreed with the statement “Because of Tinder, we can meet way more people to date than generations before”
- 51% completely (5) or almost completely (4) agreed that “Tinder is great for the LGBTQ (lesbian gay bi transgender queer) community because it makes it easier to find a like-minded partner”, and
- 60% are of the opinion that “Tinder is perfect for shy people, because one experiences no direct rejection”.

Second among user agreement was the rather negative impact category “Promiscuity”, with 45% and 54% of respondents agreeing completely or almost completely with the two corresponding statements.

On rating the statement of the category negative “**Lack of commitment**”, 63% of users stated that they (completely or almost completely) agreed upon the fact that “On Tinder, one is constantly on the lookout for something better”, while 34% thought that “Because of Tinder, people are less willing to commit to each other.”

Impact in general & personal experiences

In their estimation of Tinder’s overall impact on society in general, 31% of all respondents chose a value between 1-3, which indicates a rather positive impact. The same percentage of people (31%) indicated a balanced impact (choosing 4) and 37% of the respondents presumed a negative impact by selecting a value between 5 and 7.

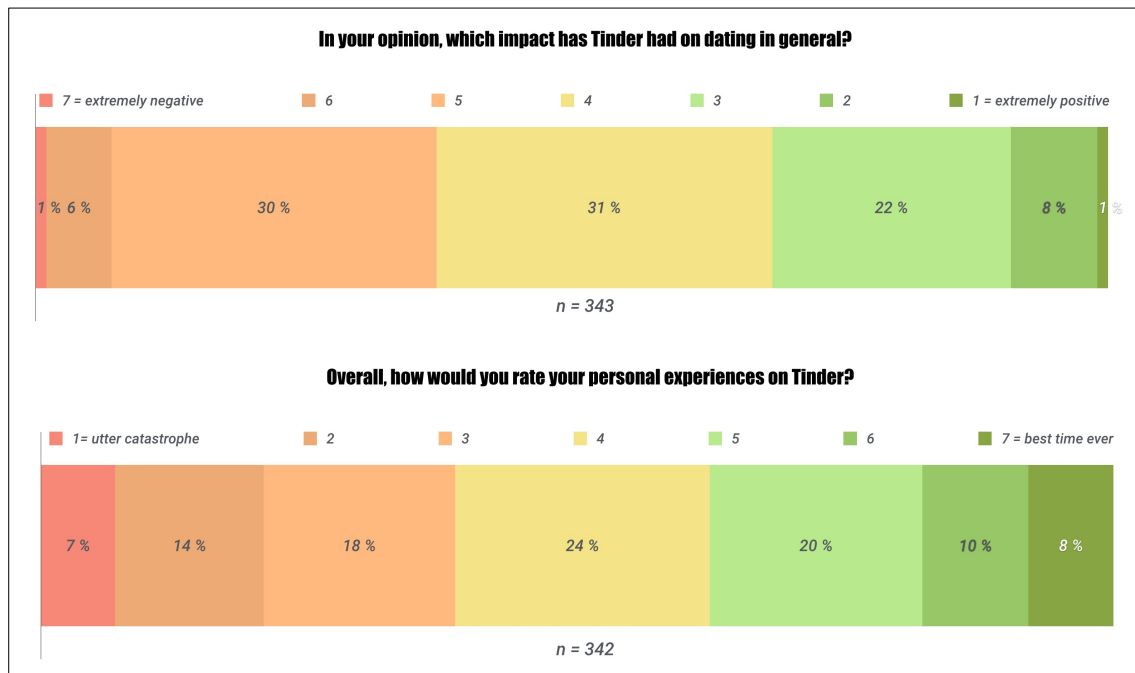


Figure 16: Tinder's impact on dating in general (above) and on users' personal experiences (below)

Additionally, users were asked to rate the impact that Tinder has had on their personal dating experiences, again on a scale from 1 to 7. Again, emotions were mixed: 38% of all respondents stated that they had had rather positive experiences on Tinder (value 5-7), 24% chose the middle value and 39% described them as rather negative (value 1-3).

From the results above, the author arrived at the following conclusion with regard to research question Q2c:

Q2c. From the users' perspective, which impact does Tinder have on dating and society in general and on their personal dating experiences?

When asked about the impact Tinder may have on dating, **most interviewees agreed on the (positive) statement that the app gave them access to a larger dating pool** than was available to previous generations (79%). However, they also agreed that Tinder encourages "Promiscuity" among its users (45% and 54%) and "Lack of commitment" in relationships (63% and 34%). **The opinion that Tinder will lead to the end of**

traditional dating as we know it was only shared by a minority of users (24% and 32%).

When asking respondents about Tinder's presumed impact on society in general as well as on their personal dating experiences, opinions were split almost equally between positive, neutral and negative ones. In both categories, general impact and personal experiences, negative estimations were of the majority (general: 37%, personal: 39%).

8. COMPARING the results: Where media and user perception meet

In this section, the results of the content analysis and user survey will be compared. Based on the grounded theory approach, the thesis will take a closer look at differences and similarities, as well as possible links to other studies, causes or broader implications.

General

As became apparent in chapter six and seven, the picture presented by the media and the one perceived by users are differing: In their representation of Tinder, its users and the app's impact on dating practices in general, media in Austria, Germany and the USA showed a mostly negative tendency. In all three countries, a majority of articles (55%) published in 2014 and 2015 depicted the app in a negative or rather negative context.

Respondents' estimation of Tinder's impact on society in general was mixed, with positive (31%), balanced (31%) and negative (37%) ratings almost evenly distributed among respondents. In describing their personal experiences with the app, opinions were split, too: While 39% stated that they had had rather negative experiences on Tinder, 38% reported having had good ones. So, whereas in the media a clearly negative picture of Tinder's impact on dating was established, users were clearly not unanimous in their estimation.

In this, elements of media bias can be identified, with the analyzed media failing to represent both positive and negative arguments in the social debate about Tinder.

Motives

While press coverage by news outlets in all three countries of analysis referred to "Sex" as a motive most often (37%), the majority of users (69%) indicated that they used Tinder out of boredom, to have fun or out of curiosity, which was categorized as "Escapism". However, in their assessment of other users, participants were confident that everybody else was mainly looking for "Sex" on the app (93%). Also, among the participants of the study, motives differed between age groups, with older participants (30-39 years)

emphasizing “Sex” and “Love” more than younger ones, among which “Escapism” was more salient.

One possible explanation could be that it is more profitable for media to present Tinder in a slightly negative way and to pick out and discuss only sex as a motive, as it will attract the most attention. Because this motive is most salient in the media, it changes how users think about the motives of others. Thus, a gap between self-assessment and perception of others is created and widened by the media.

What might come to mind first are the two journalistic principles “*sex sells*” and “*bad news are good news*”. In his theory of news values, Östgaard (1965, and later Galtung/Ruge, 1965 and Schulz, 1991) described how the journalistic process of selection is guided by a set of news values or news criteria, such as simplicity, sensationalism or negativity. The more criteria a story meets (or the more of them are ascribed to the story by the journalist), the greater its prospect of catching the attention of a wide audience and for the news outlet and journalist to profit from it (see Östgaard, 1965). Consequently, Journalists often highlight those aspects in their stories that meet those criteria.

A story about Tinder and how it is all about sex definitely meets a few news criteria. An app that young people use to find others and have sex, forfeiting romantic values of the past? Familiarity (the news happens “close to home”, it concerns us, our neighbors, kids, nephews and nieces, etc.): check. Conflict (generational conflict, conflict between men and women): check. Negativity (loss of values): check. Sensationalism (Sex!): check. The story becomes even more attractive because of its simplicity. We have a problem - a decrease in marriages, rising number of divorces, fewer traditional families, more single men and women, shorter and new forms of relationships - and now, it seems we have identified the cause for it: Tinder. Portraying the app and its users to a broader extent and taking into account all the possible motives users could have for using the app would destroy this simplicity.

Apart from the obvious hyperbole, the point the author is trying to make should be clear: News values could be one possible reason for the media’s slightly one-sided presentation of Tinder, its users and the reasons they are using the app. As to how and to which extent

this representation influences actual users of Tinder, one can refer to the well-known agenda setting theory, more precisely McCombs awareness and salience model (McCombs, 1977): Media outlets do not actually determine what people think, but they can influence *about what* they think, respectively how important or salient certain topics or aspects of topics are to them. This is due to the fact that texts published and distributed widely by the media are not only read, but are adopted in their readers' every-day conversations and shape the public's opinion (see Krippendorff, 2012: 78). So, while no print outlet could convince readers that their motives for using Tinder are any different than what they know them to be, they could change what they think of others in this respect.

Revisiting user motives according to age (see figure 13), we see that the primary motives for using Tinder differ between the three major age groups (18-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-39 years):

The frequency of "Self-validation" as a motive decreases with age (30-39: 44%, 25-29: 18%, 18-24: 13%) while "Love" as a motive for using Tinder (30-39: 63%, 25-29: 31%, 18-24: 29%) is more salient the older the participants are. Also, "Sex" becomes more salient as a motive among older age groups (25-29: 34%, 30-39: 63%), possibly indicating that as young adults leave the phase of *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress), Tinder (and dating in general) becomes less of a game but an important tool in the serious quest for "Sex" and/or "Love".

The fact that motivations for using Tinder may vary according to age was addressed only seldom, and if so often in reader's comments like the following:

*„Your article about **twentysomethings** using the dating app Tinder to arrange multitudes of emotionally devoid sexual encounters unfortunately misses what is actually fascinating about the Tinder revolution: the co-opting of newfangled technology by **forty- and fiftysomethings** using the app to arrange multitudes of old-fashioned, traditional dates.“* (analysis unit 56, Vanity Fair, reader comment by Jeremy Lopez on „The Tinder Trap“)

Fortunately, there were some authors who put an emphasis on the vast number of possible motives one could have to sign up for Tinder. In two articles, which appeared in US-American magazines, the authors considered that using Tinder (as well as other mobile apps and social media platforms) for dating could be seen as a new defense mechanism, making it easier for young adults to have personal contact without committing to any serious relationship:

“For some singles, ADD [attention deficit disorder] dating acts as a convenient defense mechanism to avoid feeling vulnerable when someone doesn't return your affections.” (analysis unit 108, Cosmopolitan, Do you have dating ADD?, Cosmopolitan)

“There is no dating. There's no relationships,” says Amanda (...). “They're rare. You can have a fling that could last like seven, eight months and you could never actually call someone your 'boyfriend.' [Hooking up] is a lot easier. No one gets hurt-well, not on the surface.” (analysis unit 50, Vanity Fair, Tinder is the night)

Another author pointed out that Tinder is not only a dating app, but serves more general social role in connecting people, introducing them *“to things you might never have done before”*:

„There was the foodie Tinder user, for instance, who likes to place herself in upscale Manhattan neighborhoods, wanting nothing more than to be taken out for expensive dinners by her matches. There was the business user who leverages the app as a client-development tool. There was the bearded Brooklyn user who rarely goes on dates yet chats with his matches, chastely, often for weeks on end. There was the Wall Street user who slavishly served a match by folding her laundry and picking up her groceries.“ (analysis unit 601, New York Times, Taking a Swipe at Love (or Something))

In his article “Tinder taps an age-old truth”, Nick Bolton summarized it aptly: “*Whether Tinder is used for a late-night rendezvous or for finding a soul mate lies just as much in the eye of the swiper as it does in the way people choose to represent themselves.*” (analysis unit 580, The New York Times)

Revisiting research question Q3a, the following is stated:

Q3a. Do media and users differ in their description of motives for using Tinder? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

While press coverage by news outlets in all three countries of analysis referred to “Sex” as a motive most often (37%), the majority of users (69%) indicated that they used Tinder out of boredom, to have fun or out of curiosity, which was categorized as “Escapism”. However, in their assessment of other users, participants were confident that everybody else was mainly looking for “Sex” on the app, too. Also, among the participants of the study, motives differed according to age groups, with older participants (30-39 years) emphasizing “Sex” and “Love” more than younger ones, among which “Escapism” was more salient.

Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of analyzed articles failed to represent the whole spectrum of motivations and reasons users might have to sign up on Tinder. **The significant frequency with which news outlets published stories about Tinder focusing on only one or two motives for signing up on Tinder shows elements of the aforementioned definition of media bias.**

Concerns

On comparing the results of this section, we can again observe a discrepancy between concerns of the media and Tinder’s users:

Overall, the most frequent concern voiced in the media coverage about Tinder was the supposed “Superficiality” of the app and superficial behavior among its users that it promoted (46 of 179 articles). Users, however tended to be much more worried about “Deception” (31%) and “Harassment” (26%).

Top 3 concerns according to media	Top 3 concerns according to users
1. Superficiality	1. Deception
2. Deception	2. Harassment
3. Harassment	3. Superficiality

Table 17: Top 3 concerns among media and users

The overall difference between the two perspectives is not a very big one – after all, the top three concerns only differ as to their ranking. Taking a closer look on women’s biggest concerns, however, we get quite a different picture:

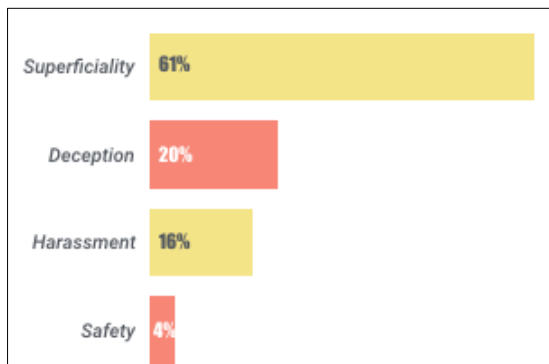


Figure 17a: Concerns about Tinder, as voiced in the media (n=76)

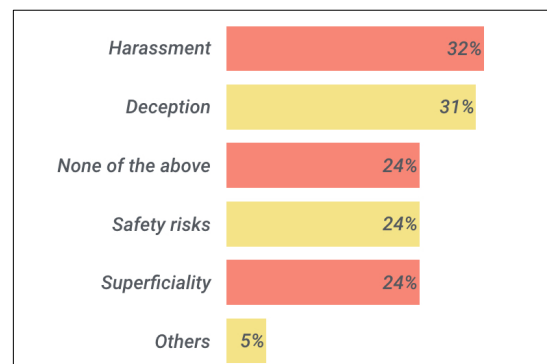


Figure 2b: Female users' concerns about Tinder (n= 262)

For women, the fact that on Tinder, they could become the object of flippant or shallow judgments was a less relevant concern (24%). Instead, worries and fears of being insulted or deceived by their matches on Tinder was a much more important issue, as indicated by 32% respectively 31% of the female respondents.

This is not a new finding: In their study of online dating & relationships for the Pew Research Center, Smith & Duggan (2013) noted that 42% of female internet users had at least once been “*contacted by someone through an online dating site or app in a way that made them feel harassed or uncomfortable*”, an experience that only 17% of male users shared (Smith & Duggan, 2013: 5).

Whether it be through movies⁶ or print outlets⁷, colleagues at university⁸ or men in general⁹, society has always produced ideals on how a woman should look and behave like. In western culture of recent decades, the ideal could be described, as Waites put it, “*the esthetically perfect but behaviorally compliant woman*” (1981: 435). Given that women are already used to being confronted with superficiality in their daily lives, it may not come as a big surprise that this issue wasn’t a main concern in the survey. Daniel (2014) argues that it is not only women, but a whole generation that has grown up with superficiality. He cites an executive of Badoo¹⁰, a German dating app very similar to Tinder, stating: “*There’s not a lot of text, not a lot of substance. It’s about appearance. And everything’s very quick. ‘Show me your photo, tell me how old you are, then let’s connect.’ (...) The key reason for Badoo’s success is that Badoo reflects society. It’s all about you.*” (Slater, 2014: 75).

Among men, the biggest concern about Tinder was the risk of “Deception”, with 33% of all participants choosing one of the corresponding answer items of this category. Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen (1998) analyzed deceptive patterns in online dating and arrived at the conclusion that men are more likely to deceive others about their looks. In another study, male students admitted to “*being more willing to use deception to appear more dominant, more resourceful, and more kind than they actually were*” (Guadagno, Okdie & Kruse, 2012 citing Took and Camire, 1991). Should these results also apply to the male participants of this study, it could serve as an explanation of why “Deception” was such a big issue for men: If the user himself is deceptive in his self-presentation, it is likely that he would expect this type of behavior from others, too.

However, it has been shown that in online dating, deceptive behavior is often limited to a small extent, with users choosing carefully which aspects of their personality to highlight or keep quiet about (see Toma & Hancock, 2012: 78), for example slightly exaggerating height, understating weight or otherwise idealizing their self-description in a small and indirect way (see Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010: 435). Beyond such subtle enhancements,

⁶ As Majorie Rosen showed in her study of “Women, Movies & the American Dream” (1973): “*Each period [of Hollywood movie making] is marked by a varied but superficial and sometimes demeaning depiction of women.*” In: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED083657> (Dec 26, 2016)

⁷ Magazines have proven to be one of the leading sources for body dissatisfaction and unrealistic thin body ideals for women, see Tiggemann and Polivy (2010) or Martin & Gentry (1997).

⁸ See „Female and male perceptions of ideal body shapes: Distorted views among Caucasian college students” (Cohn & Adler, 1992)

⁹ Studies on perceptions on ideals and self-portrayal have shown that while women described a rather androgynous model as their ideal, men’s ideal was clearly more as „sex-typed” (Scher, 1984)

¹⁰ Badoo Website, <https://badoo.com/de/> (3.1.2016)

users tend to stay true in their self-description, due to the simple fact that in dating, the ultimate goal after matching is to meet face-to-face, and any deceptions regarding one's appearance would immediately be discovered (see Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2011: 46). People interviewed about their ideal relationship reportedly use online-dating profiles in order to establish trustful and real-world relationships (see Hardy, 2002: 570) and would prefer their partner to appreciate their true self rather than a manufactured and ideal online version (see Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2011: 46 citing Swann, 1994). So while dating profiles may not be an exact replica, they can still be *“characterized by an underlying attempt to represent as positively and truthfully, the user’s offline persona”* (Borrow, 2014: 17).

Q3b. Do media and users differ in their description of concerns about using Tinder? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

With regard to concerns about the app Tinder, media representation and user perception did not differ greatly and showed **no indication for an existing media bias**. However, on comparing women's concerns with those most salient in the media, it seems that the issue of **“Harassment” is a much bigger issue for female participants than indicated by its salience in news articles**.

Impact

Impact in general & personal experiences

The content analysis revealed **a clear negative tendency in the press coverage of Tinder** between 2014 and 2015, with 55% of all articles depicting the app in a negative or rather negative context. When asking respondents about Tinder's presumed impact on society in general as well as on their personal dating experiences, opinions were split almost equally between positive, neutral and negative ones. In both categories, general impact and personal experiences, negative estimations were of the majority (general: 37%, personal: 39%).

Other studies have shown that over the years, attitudes about online dating have become more positive. Some 15 years back, college students expressed that they felt much more

negative than positive about online dating (see Finkel et. al, 2012: 12). In 2013, opinions about online dating are “*relatively nuanced*” according to the Pew Research Center, with a majority of the interviewees agreeing with positive statements about the process (Smith & Duggan, 2013: 21).

Rating their **personal experiences** with the app, the participants’ estimation was again mixed, with a slight majority of negative experiences reported (39% vs. 38% positive). This finding also falls into line with previous results, provided by the Pew Research Center: “*Even as online daters have largely positive opinions of the process, many have had negative experiences using online dating.*” (Smith & Duggan, 2013: 5).

Specific impacts

In 97% of the analysis units, at least one assumption about the impact Tinder might have on our dating society was voiced. Most common were comments on the “Lack of commitment” that the app assumedly promotes among its users:

“In our pop culture haze of meet-cutes and meet-quickies (I'm talking to you, Tinder), we've fetishized any minor indication that a relationship will or will not work.” (analysis unit 146, Cosmopolitan, I Saw the Signs)

“Between Tinder swipes, Lulu hashtags, and Match winks, dating is more dizzying than ever. Who has time to focus on finding Mr. Right when you're texting with Mr. Tonight?” (analysis unit 108, Cosmopolitan, Do you have dating add)

„Tinder, das hat den Ewigkeitsanspruch „app-geschafft“¹¹ (analysis unit 441, Die Welt, Liebe? Haben wir nicht app-geschafft)

„(...) Bindungsängste führen häufig sogar dazu, sehr viele flüchtige Beziehungen zu führen – und immer, wenn es zu Ernst wird, flüchtet man. Auch das wird durch (...) Handy-Apps wie Tinder begünstigt.“¹² (analysis unit 476, Frankfurter Rundschau, Chatten hilft nicht)

„Flirt-Apps wie Tinder verstärken dieses Gefühl, dass es nach jedem Wisch jemanden geben könnte, der noch besser passt. (...) Dese Unverbindlichkeit, die durch das Verteilen von Herzchen und Kreuzchen gelebt wird, ist der große Nachteil der Flirt-Apps.“¹³ (analysis unit 266, Kurier, Hallo, Mr. Right!)

¹¹ “Tinder has abolished any claim on eternity [in dating]”

¹² “Fear of commitments often leads to people having a lot of short-term relationships. Whenever it gets serious, they flee. This, too, is encouraged by mobile apps like Tinder.”

¹³ “Flirting apps like Tinder make us believe that after each swipe, there could be somebody else out there, someone who's an even better match for us. This lack of commitment, fueled by the easy distribution of „hearts“ and „crosses“, is their biggest harm.”

References to Tinder expanding people's dating pool were second most frequent (21%), followed by presumptions with regard to Tinder intensifying "Relation-shopping" among its users (14%).

In the user survey, participants most strongly agreed with impact statements of the three categories "Expansion of dating pool", "Promiscuity" and "Lack of Commitment".

Impacts according to media	Impacts according to users
1. Lack of commitment	1. Expansion of dating pool
2. Expansion of dating pool	2. Promiscuity
3. Relation-shopping	3. Lack of commitment
4. Extermination of traditional dating	4. Relation-shopping
5. Promiscuity	5. Sexual empowerment
6. Sexual empowerment	6. Acceleration
7. Acceleration	7. Extermination of traditional dating

Table 18: Impacts among media and users

With regard to research question Q3c, the following answer is presented:

Q3c. Do media and users differ in their description of Tinder's impact on society and dating in general? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

As to the perceived impact Tinder might have on dating and society in general, **no tendency for a media bias could be identified**. Although the tonality of media coverage doesn't correlate to the way users rate their personal experiences or Tinder's impact on dating and society in general, this does not suffice to prove the existence of a bias. In media and from a user perspective as well, impact categories "Lack of commitment" and "Expansion of dating pool" were among the most salient. While in the media, assumptions about Tinder encouraging "Relation-shopping" was the third most commonly mentioned impact (in 14% of all articles), this was not significantly salient among users (14% and 11% completely agreeing with the corresponding statements). For them, "Promiscuity" was a bigger issue (with 16%, respectively 12% agreeing completely to the corresponding statements), a topic that was only featured in 6% of the analyzed news articles.

As they were most salient both among media and user perception, a closer look at the impact categories "Lack of commitment", "Expansion of dating pool", "Promiscuity" and "Relation-shopping" was deemed reasonable.

Lack of commitment & expansion of dating pool

Assumptions about the rising lack of commitment among daters in the media were almost always traced back to the expanded dating pool apps and platforms provide. Therefore, these two impact categories will be discussed in detail together.

A majority of participants and the news articles in this study indicated that Tinder might cause a bigger “Lack of commitment” among daters. These results fall in line with a Pew Research Center study from 2013, where *“32% of internet users agree with the statement that ‘online dating keeps people from settling down because they always have options for people to date’”* (Smith & Duggan, 2013: 3). At the same time, 53% of these respondents stated that by means of online dating, people met a lot more potential partners and were therefore more likely to find a better match (see Smith & Duggan, 2013: 21).

In his book “A Million First Dates. Solving the Puzzle of Online Dating”, Dan Slater (2014) approached the issue of online dating in modern society by means of interviews with executives and founders of online dating services (such as Match.com, OkCupid or Grindr and Tinder) as well as scientific studies in this field. At one point, he concludes: *“a majority of the dating execs interviewed for this book agreed with what research appears to suggest: The rise of online dating will mean an overall decrease in commitment”* (Slater, 2014: 120) and elaborates by citing Mr. Blatt, CEO of IAC InterActiveCorp, the company that owns Match and Tinder: *“You could say online dating is simply changing people’s ideas about whether commitment itself is a life value”* (2014: 121).

How much a person commits to a relationship or even becomes part of one can be explained by the Social Exchange Theory, stating that each partner weighs the costs and benefits of such an arrangement – if the rewards beat the costs, the exchange is beneficial and most likely the relationship is pursued (see Zytka, Grandhi & Jones, 2014: 60).

Once in a relationship, the investment model teaches us that strength of commitment depends on three factors: It can be *“a) strengthened by the amount of satisfaction that one derives from a relationship”*, *“b) weakened by possible alternatives to that relationship”* (Le & Agnew, 2003: 38) or c) strengthened by how much one has already invested in the relationship, e.g. children, shared property, etc. (see Le & Agnew, 2003: 38).

Tinder mainly changes factor b), in that it introduces its users to a much broader number of alternatives to their current relationships, tempting them to choose what they perceive as the “superior” choice. Also, it could change the extent and easiness with which users place investments into their dating relationships: If you are constantly aware of how many potential partners are out there, it makes only sense to minimize any investments until you have found your best choice. But here, a paradox starts to form: Relationships tend to get better the more you invest in them, e.g. spend time with someone, get to know them better, share more memories with each other, etc. (see Abad, 2015: 9). If no investments are made, the relationship is likely to remain unsatisfactory, leading to a review of even more alternatives, which then in turn are not invested upon, cause less satisfaction, followed by a review more alternatives, and so on.

With regard to Q3c, we can thus sum up this section as follows:

Q3c. Do media and users differ in their description of Tinder’s impact on society and dating in general? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing bias in the media?

A correlation between the increased number of potential matches provided by online dating apps such as Tinder and a decrease in commitment among daters is fairly accounted for by scientific and other studies. The fact that this aspect was very salient among media coverage about Tinder is therefore only reasonable, and with regard to users’ valuation in the user survey, **the possibility of an existing media bias in regard to this particular impact can be eliminated.**

Promiscuity

The impact category “Promiscuity” was very salient among users in the user survey, with 45% and 54% of users agreeing with the statements “On Tinder, people content themselves with hookups even if they would like to get more out of the relationship” and “On Tinder, people who date tend to have sex much sooner than those who date in traditional ways”.

In the media, this topic was less prominent (6%). Among the articles broaching the issue of “Promiscuity”, almost all (9 out of ten articles) did so with a negative tendency, highlighting how dating on Tinder makes people feel and act more insecure and turns sex into something as meaningless as a snack:

“People feel like they have so many options and they're not quite sure how to settle down, or they get physical with people very quickly and they're not sure how they stand with them.” (USA Today, Rom-coms hop in bed with modern dating, Sept 9th, 2015)

“Man muss kein altmodischer Kulturpessimist sein, um unter das Phänomen einer solchen Sex-als-Snack-Entwicklung keinen Like-Daumen zu positionieren.”¹⁴ (Profil, Tingle Bells, 21.12.15)

None of the pieces published during the period of analysis brought up the fact that there could be more to this phenomenon. As Slater (2014) observes, *“Relationships that begin online (...) move quickly. (...) First, familiarity is established during the messaging process, which also often involves a phone call. By the time they meet face-to-face there's already a level of intimacy”* (Slater, 2014: 126). Online dating creates a different bond between daters, often accelerating the process of meeting and feeling connected (see Rosen et al, 2008: 2124). Studies have shown that people who met online tend to reveal personal information about themselves much sooner (Rosen et al, 2008: 2148) and tend to feel a higher level of attraction and intimacy (Finkel et. al, 2012: 36) than those who did in traditional settings. It is argued that the same applies to mobile online dating. A late study conducted by Parship, a well-known German dating website, showed couples who had matched online were much quicker in initializing a relationship after meeting for the first time: 25% of couples started a romantic relationship one week after the first date, as opposed to the majority of offline couples, for which it took about 1-2 months (see Parship, 2012). One major reason for this is that on online dating websites or apps, the opposite's intentions are clear (e.g. meeting someone to date), whereas in offline settings daters first have to find out whether the subject of one's attention is even available or interested in

¹⁴ “One doesn't have to be especially conservative and pessimistic about today's culture to begin with in order to not support the concept of sex as a snack.”

dating. However, online couples were not only faster at initializing the relationship, but also showed to move in together, marry and become parents sooner than dyads who had met offline (see Parship, 2012). Obviously, researchers at Parship did not ask their participants to disclose any details about how soon the couples had engaged in sexual intercourse. But given that online couples were moving faster in all these aspects of their lives, it would seem only comprehensible if they did so in this regard, too. If so, however, this behavior should not simply be labeled and stigmatized “promiscuous” but rather discussed with regard to what seems to be a general trend in dating.

Q3c. Do media and users differ in their description of Tinder’s impact on society and dating in general? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing media bias?

Given the high ranking that “Promiscuity” as an impact category received among respondents in the user survey, the fact that this issue was broached in so few of the analyzed articles may be a first sign of a media bias. Given the aforementioned (and many more) findings on promiscuity and online dating, it is surprising that none of the articles analyzed provided a both-sided view on promiscuity and Tinder. Instead, all of them presented the issue in a negative context. **Together, these two observations seem to indicate the existence of a media bias. However, due to the small amount of analysis units, it is not possible to arrive any distinct conclusions at this point.**

Relation-shopping

Among the analyzed media coverage, “Relation-shopping” as a direct impact of dating apps such as Tinder was another salient impact, with 14% of all relevant articles mentioning the topic at least once, like the US-American newspaper “The Washington Post” or the German “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung”:

*“It seems obvious, right? This premise is so well-worn that sites like Tinder, Hinge and Coffee Meets Bagel offer little information about users beyond a collection of pictures and a two-line profile. “Online services enable a downright Seinfeld-ian level of superficial nitpickiness,” one Fortune article lamented. They’ve “given rise to a **pick-and-choose shopping behavior**”*

that prioritizes looks more than ever before." (The Washington Post, Onlinedating, October 4th, 2015)

*„Lässt man sich aber einen Augenblick auf den Gedanken ein, dass selbst in diesem allzu menschlichen Bereich **die Prinzipien des Marktes** gelten könnten, wird schnell klar, warum man **Tinder für eine riesige Effizienzmaschine** halten kann: Mit den Worten eines Sonntagsökonomen gesprochen, reduzieren die Flirt-Apps die **Transaktionskosten auf dem Liebesmarkt, sie ermöglichen eine bessere Partnerallokation und steigern das Wohlfahrtsniveau.**“*¹⁵ (FAZ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die neue Flirtökonomie, 26.04.2015, S. 22)

In the survey, users rated indicated their opinions about this impact category as follows:

- 50% of users felt that *“Because of Tinder, people now choose their dates like goods in a supermarket”* (by selecting 1 = completely or 2 = almost completely agree), and
- 43% of users (completely or almost completely) agreed with the proposed statement *“Tinder makes people approach dating in a much more rational and calculated way”*.

Although other impact categories were more salient, this level of consent cannot be dismissed. But while in the media, “Relation-shopping” as an impact category was mostly coded in articles with a negative or rather negative tendency (17 out of 24 articles), it is possible that not all respondents of the user survey perceived it just as negatively. Studies have shown that users appreciate the “shopping” atmosphere in dating applications and the efficiency they provide in searching a suitable mate, *“because it allowed them to target individuals with certain characteristics and to avoid those with qualities that were ‘deal-breakers’* (Heino, Ellison & Gibbs, 2010: 437-438).

¹⁵ “If the rules of a free market were to apply to these all-too human realms [of love], one would quickly realize why Tinder is perceived as such a success in terms of efficiency: From an economists’ perspective, flirting apps reduce transaction costs, optimize allocation of partners and increase social welfare.”

Keeping this in mind, the answer to research question Q3c in regard to the impact “Relation-shopping” is as follows:

Q3c. Do media and users differ in their description of Tinder’s impact on society and dating in general? If so, to what extent can this be ascribed to an existing bias in the media?

Although other impacts were more salient among users of the user survey, a majority of them strongly agreed with the proposed statements from the impact category “Relation-shopping”. The high attention this probable impact has gained in the media can thus be deemed concurrent and **the existence of a media bias can by no means be verified.**

Broader discussion (or “Love me Tinder”, the Denmark version)

As mentioned in the literature review, any attempt to provide a conclusive overview of the existing scientific work on Tinder would be immediately obsolete. When it was time to review the results and draw conclusions, the author conducted another short research on new studies that may have been published in the past months and indeed, found something very interesting: Shortly after the content analysis and user survey of this study were concluded, Sumter et. al (2017) published the results of their own survey “Love me Tinder: Untangling emerging adults’ motivations for using the dating application Tinder” in the journal “Telematics and Informatics”. The two studies shared much more than the title: As in this work, Sumter and colleagues conveyed a user survey on young adults, focusing on their motivations in using Tinder. After initial shock and regret about the unfortunate timing of this, on second glance it proved to be a rather happy coincidence, as the results of this study can now immediately be compared and discussed in a broader context.

The survey was performed in Denmark, on young adults between 18 and 30 years old. Sumter et. al's list of motives was significantly more extensive than this study's, with respondents having to choose from 46 answer items. The results lead to the identification of six key motives in using Tinder: “*Love, Casual Sex, Ease of Communication, Self-Worth Validation, Thrill of Excitement, and Trendiness*” (1).

Apart from “Trendiness” and “Ease of Communication”, all of these categories were represented in the study at hand. It is however noted that Sumter et. al's motive category

“Ease of communication” somewhat resembles the impact category “Expansion of dating pool” used in this study, in the sense of Tinder making it easier for shy people to connect.

In Sumter et. al’s investigation, most participants reportedly used the app “because it is a new and cool app”, an answer item which referred to their motive category “Thrill of Excitement” and “Trendiness”. This result that can be directly linked to this study’s findings on “Escapism” as the most salient motive among users. In the Danish study, “Love” was more common than “Casual Sex”, a fact that could not be observed in this one.

Sumter et. al also observed different motivations for using Tinder according to age, with “Love” and “Casual Sex” becoming increasingly salient motives among older participants – directly corresponding to the results presented in this thesis.

Although they placed no special focus on Tinder’s depiction in the media, the Danish authors pointed out that “*Although media coverage of Tinder suggests that this app is used mainly for meaningless sexual hook-ups, no empirical study had yet investigated emerging adults’ reasons to use Tinder*” and concluded that “*Tinder should not be seen as merely a fun, hookup app without any strings attached, but as a new way for emerging adults to initiate committed romantic relationships*” (Sumter et. al, 2017).

9. CONCLUSION

In comparing the results of the content analysis with those of the user survey, it became clear that while not in all, at least in some aspects, the two sides presented quite a different picture of Tinder.

In their representation of Tinder, its users and the app's impact on dating practices in general, media in Austria, Germany and the USA showed a mostly negative tendency. Across all three countries, a majority of articles (55%) published in 2014 and 2015 depicted the app in a negative or rather negative context.

Respondent's estimation of Tinder's impact on society in general was mixed, with positive (31%), balanced (31%) and negative (37%) ratings almost evenly distributed among respondents. In this, elements of a media bias can be recognized. With regard to the effect Tinder has had on them, personally, the results showed a slightly more negative result, with 39% of users expressing that they had had rather negative experiences versus 38% indicating positive ones. **In this, elements of media bias can be identified:** While among users, there is no clear unanimity about the influence and effect Tinder has had on dating in general and their personal dating experiences, among media we find that negative views and arguments are in the majority.

While press coverage by news outlets in all three countries of analysis referred to "Sex" as a motive most often, the majority of users (69%) indicated that they used Tinder out of boredom, to have fun or out of curiosity, which was categorized as "Escapism". However, in their assessment of other users, participants were confident that everybody else was mainly looking for "Sex" on the app, too. Among the participants of the study, motives differed according to age groups, with older participants (30-39 years) emphasizing "Sex" and "Love" more than younger ones, among which "Escapism" was more salient.

The majority of analyzed articles failed to represent the whole spectrum of motivations and reasons users might have to sign up on Tinder, instead heavily focusing on "Sex" as salient motive. **In this, the author recognizes elements of media bias, in the sense of Entman's (2007) definition of biased news.**

With regard to concerns about the app Tinder, media representation and user perception did not differ greatly and showed **no indication for an existing media bias**. However, on comparing women's concerns with those most salient in the media, it seemed that the issue of "Harassment" was a much bigger issue for female participants than indicated by its salience in news articles.

As to the perceived impact Tinder might have on dating and society in general, **no tendency for a media bias could be identified**: In media and from a user perspective as well, impact categories "Lack of commitment" and "Expansion of dating pool" were among the most salient. While in the media, assumptions about Tinder encouraging "Relation-shopping" was the third most commonly mentioned impact (in 14% of all articles), this was not significantly salient among users. For them, "Promiscuity" was a bigger issue, a topic that was only featured in 6% of the analyzed news articles.

A correlation between the increased number of potential matches provided by online dating apps such as Tinder and a decrease in commitment among daters is fairly accounted for by scientific and other studies. The fact that this aspect was very salient among media coverage about Tinder is therefore only reasonable, and with regard to users' valuation in the user survey, **the possibility of an existing media bias in regard to this particular impact can be eliminated**.

Given the high ranking that "Promiscuity" as an impact category received among respondents in the user survey, the fact that this issue was broached in so few of the analyzed articles may be a first sign of a media bias. Given the aforementioned (and many more) findings on "Promiscuity" and online dating, it is surprising that none of the articles analyzed provided a both-sided view on promiscuity and Tinder. Instead, all of them presented the issue in a negative context. **Together, these two observations seem to indicate the existence of a media bias. However, due to the small amount of analysis units, it is not possible to arrive any distinct conclusions at this point.**

Although other impacts were more salient among users of the user survey, a majority of them strongly agreed with the proposed statements from the impact category "Relation-shopping". The high attention this probable impact has gained in the media can thus be deemed concurrent and **the existence of a media bias can by no means be verified**.

Although the tonality of media coverage (55% negative or rather negative) didn't correlate to the way users rated Tinder's effect dating and society in general (37% negative, 31% positive), **this does not suffice to prove the existence of a bias.**

The main objective of this study was to determine whether signs of an existing negative media bias towards Tinder could be observed in Austrian, German and USA media. **As to Tinder's general representation and perception, an imbalance between media and users could be observed:** While a majority of media articles provided a negative or rather negative view on Tinder, users were almost equally positive and negative in their estimation of Tinder's effect on dating in general.

With regard to users' motivations on Tinder, media representation and user perception did not match completely. However, the data was not distinct enough to verify a media bias. For the other two factors, concerns and impacts of Tinder, the collected data did not indicate the existence of a media bias. In conclusion, the existence of a negative media bias towards Tinder can, at this point, not be documented sufficiently.

10. IMPLICATIONS for further research

The results presented in this thesis are limited by a number of factors: An obvious drawback is the sample size both of the content analysis and user survey. The comparably small number of analysis units (179 press articles) and number of respondents to the user survey (433 participants) allow only for careful considerations and in no way empirically conclusive statements.

Second, the user survey, although open to the public, was filled out by a majority of Austrian users, which is why its results allow assumptions for this country, at most. In face of these foreseen difficulties, however, it is argued that the goal of this thesis was not statistical analysis but analytic generalizing, establishing propositions and insights that can then be further tested in bigger research studies.

However, the data collected in the user survey did provide valuable insights and adds to existing literature on individual's motivations for making use of Tinder and other mobile dating services. The list and categorization of motives can be compared and linked to other works on Tinder and also be applied to future research on new dating apps that will undoubtedly continue to arise on the market.

Among the most interesting observations in this study was the significant difference between individual's self-assessment and their evaluation of other users' motives for using Tinder. In this, the author sees a promising starting point for future research: How does the way in which Tinder or other, future, dating apps are depicted in the media influence people's self-assessment and evaluation of other users? Would there be more accordance between the two perspectives if news outlets provided a more balanced view of individual's motivations to use Tinder or other dating apps, and could this lead to more authenticity and/or less distrust between daters?

We live in an age of changes, economic, political, technological and social. In adjusting to these, individuals redefine traditional values such as love, companionship, commitment or happiness, often in a pace that can seem scary to those not ready for it yet. The media, although also changing, still hold the potential to make a big difference on how these changes are perceived and should be held to this responsibility. As Slater so aptly put it:

“...many traditions and taboos surrounding meeting and mating are on their way out, and more will likely fall, replaced by whichever new theories of relationship happiness win out in a marketplace of possibilities that never in history has been so vast. Monogamy is not going away, and neither is infidelity. Rather, it is the way we make sense of these behaviors, the values and labels and portent we place on them, that will evolve.” (Slater, 2014: 224).

The author is convinced that more and open exploration of relationships and dating in a time of such rapid change is needed and, with this study, hopes to have made a small contribution to this field of research.

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12. APPENDIX

A. Complete questionnaire of the user survey

Hello and welcome!

First of all, **thank you** for agreeing to take part in this survey. In this study, I look into motives and concerns about the mobile dating app Tinder as well as the impact it may have on our society's dating practices generally.

The questionnaire should only take about 3-5 minutes to complete. Be assured that this survey is anonymous and all answers you provide will be kept in strictest confidentiality.

Please click the button below to start the survey.

1. Are you currently using Tinder or have you used the app at least once in the last three years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

So far, so good. Now, let's start with a few personal questions!

2. What is your gender?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Transgender male
- ☐ Transgender female
- ☐ Gender-variant / non-conforming
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other

3. How old are you?

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60+

4. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ In a relationship
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated

- Casually dating
- Other

5. In which country do you mostly use Tinder?

(Type or select an option)

Now, for the important stuff...

6. Why do/did you use Tinder?

- To meet new people while abroad
- Out of curiosity / just for fun
- To fall in love
- To find friends
- To make fun of the people on it
- To find casual dates
- To see how many matches I would get
- To find people to have sex/hook up with
- To find a partner for a long-term relationship
- To boost my self-confidence
- To see which friends of mine are on it
- None of the above
- Other

7. In your opinion, what is other people's main purpose for using Tinder?

- To meet new people while abroad
- Out of curiosity / just for fun
- To fall in love
- To find friends
- To make fun of the people on it
- To find casual dates
- To see how many matches I would get
- To find people to have sex/hook up with
- To find a partner for a long-term relationship
- To boost my self-confidence
- To see which friends of mine are on it
- None of the above
- Other

8. Before or while using the app, did you have any concerns about Tinder? For example...

- I was worried about people using fake profiles
- I feared being insulted or otherwise harassed by users.
- I was anxious about my personal safety when going on Tinder dates.
- I feared that by using Tinder, I would become more shallow in my judgment of others.
- I was concerned about being treated like an object by others.
- I was concerned about receiving inappropriate messages or pictures in the chat.
- I worried about people only pretending to be single on Tinder.

- I had concerns about safe sex on Tinder, e.g. being infected with a sexually transmitted disease.
- None of the above
- Other

9. Did you ever use Tinder in order to cheat on your partner?

(I know this is a very personal question, and you don't have to answer. However, please remember that this is an anonymous survey and I am asking for academic reasons only.)

- Yes
- No
- Other

10. It is often argued that Tinder is changing people's dating behavior in general. How do you agree with the following statements? 1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I completely agree

	1	2	3	4	5
Tinder makes people approach dating in a much more rational and calculated way					
Because of Tinder, people now choose their dates like goods in a supermarket.					
On Tinder, people who date tend to have sex much sooner than those who date in traditional ways.					
On Tinder, people content themselves with hookups even if they would like to have more out of the relationship.					
Because of Tinder, people are less willing to commit themselves to each other.					
On Tinder, one is constantly on the lookout for something better.					
People on Tinder increasingly forget how to date without it.					
Thanks to Tinder, traditional dating practices, like asking somebody out face to face, dinner and a movie, holding the door open for somebody, etc. are a thing of the past.					
Tinder is great for women who date online, giving them more control over their matches.					
Tinder helps us to explore our sexuality.					
Because of Tinder, we can meet way more people to date than generations before.					
Tinder is great for the LGBTQ (<i>lesbian gay bi transgender queer</i>) community because it makes it easier to find like-minded matches.					
Tinder is perfect for shy people, because one experiences no direct rejection.					
Tinder is not ruining, but simply accelerating the dating process.					
Tinder is the most honest way to meet other people – like in real life, the first impression is all about the looks.					

11. In your opinion, which impact has Tinder had on dating in general? (1 = extremely negative, 7 = extremely positive)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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12. Overall, how would you rate your personal experiences on Tinder? (1 = utter catastrophe, 7 = best time ever)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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13. Would you care to explain your rating with a few words?

You did it! **Thank you** so much for participating in this survey.
If you want to invite others to this survey, you are very welcome to do so by sharing it.