

Why Swipe Right? Women's Motivation for Using Mobile Dating Applications such as Tinder

Maureen Tanner
University of Cape Town

Michelle Huggins
University of Cape Town

Mobile dating applications like Tinder have grown in popularity. Past studies revealed that males and females use the internet for different reasons and yet, little is known about women's motives for using these apps. The goal of this research was to identify the factors that motivate women to use mobile dating applications. A conceptual model based on Timmermans and De Caluwé's research was employed. The study was conducted in South Africa. Data was collected by means of 10 semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the main motives for women to use Tinder are: socialising, entertainment, distraction, curiosity, flirting/social skills, getting over an ex, self-esteem, sexual orientation and relationship seeking.

INTRODUCTION

The use of mobile dating applications has increased dramatically in recent years, with Tinder being one of the first applications to enter the mainstream heterosexual market (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Tinder is a location-based, real-time dating application which uses the geographical distance between users as a major factor to identify potential partners (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017). Location-based, real-time dating applications such as Tinder are different to online dating sites for a number of reasons. Online dating sites assess the characteristics of their users as well as their expectations so as to create a match (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016). In contrast Tinder's matching algorithm relies on the importance of physical appearance and mutual attraction as well as on physical distance (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). Online dating sites target adults over 25 who are often looking for serious, long term relationships while mobile dating applications are available to everyone including minors over 13. However, these mobile dating applications target people over 18 (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016). Lastly, the fact that smartphones and tablets are portable, allows for the ubiquitous use of Tinder. In contrast, online dating sites are accessed from a fixed location.

Despite the fact that mobile dating is a popular strategy to find a romantic partner (James, 2015), academic research into applications such as Tinder is scarce, particularly in relation to usage motivation (Gatter & Hodkinson, 2016). Moreover, there is currently limited research into why women are motivated to use mobile dating apps/Tinder. This issue is particularly important and interesting since past studies have revealed that males and females use the internet for different reasons. Women's online behaviour is

more interpersonally oriented while men are more task and information-oriented (Barker, 2009). The scarcity of literature on this topic suggests that there is a need for more in-depth inquiry if we are to understand women’s motivation for using mobile dating applications such as Tinder.

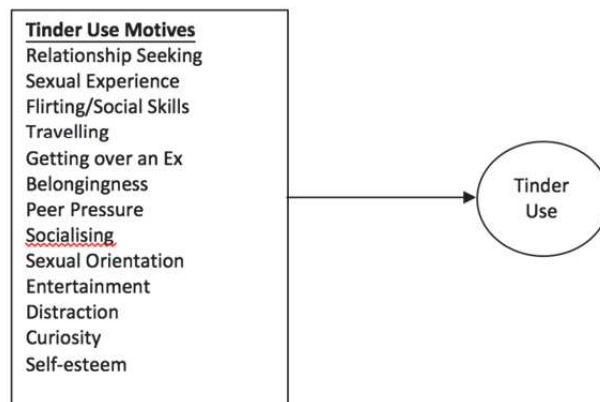
The aim of this research project was to describe what motivates women to use a mobile dating application such as Tinder. For that purpose, a conceptual framework based on Timmermans and De Caluwé’s research was employed. Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) identified 13 motives for using Tinder namely social approval, relationship seeking, sexual experience, flirting/social skills, travelling, ex, belongingness, peer pressure, socialising, sexual orientation, pass time/entertainment, distraction and curiosity . The research question being addressed is “What are the ‘motives’ that influence women’s use of mobile dating sites such as Tinder?” Online dating is a phenomenon which has revolutionised the way people form relationships and the dating scene. Understanding what drives women to engage in this activity might give us some insight into women’s psycho-social needs in relation to dating.

The paper is organised as follows. First a review of literature and a description of the research framework are presented, followed by an overview of the methodology followed for the study. The research findings are then described and compared to existing literature and the paper is finally concluded.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an effort to better understand women’s motivation for using Tinder, Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)’s framework was employed. The aim of this literature review is to describe the various constructs in the framework shown in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**



Relationship Seeking

While Tinder was officially designed for dating purposes, not all users seem to be actively looking for a relationship on the application. In Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)’s study, less than half of the participants admitted to using Tinder for relationship seeking purposes. However, the “love motivation” was seen to be more pervasive than the “casual sex” motivation (Sumter et al., 2017).

Sexual Experience

Some participants in the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) study admitted to being motivated to using Tinder to increase their sexual experience. This is in line with Sumter et al. (2017) who found that when people give excitement as a reason for using Tinder, this could be linked to the desire for one-night stands. Past studies suggest that this behavior is mostly associated to male users (Sumter et al., 2017).

Flirting / Social Skills

A number of participants in Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)'s study remarked they used the application in order to improve their flirting or social skills. Other studies have also found that similar mobile dating applications are used for flirting purposes and even stigmatised these applications because of this (Li, 2016).

Travelling

Tinder also seems to be an interesting tool when travelling or living abroad. More specifically, participants in the Timmermans and De Caluwé study specified that they were motivated to use Tinder as a tool to get valuable information from locals about the area they were visiting. They also mentioned that Tinder was a useful tool to meet other travelers in the area (Timmermans & Caluwé 2017).

Getting over an Ex

Respondents in the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) study admitted to using the application to forget about their exes. This was supported by Ward (2017) who also found that people used the application to recover from a break-up.

Belongingness

Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) investigated the concept of belongingness as a Tinder use motive. Belongingness refers to the fact that Tinder is perceived as a "trendy app" hence, the motivation to using it because one wants to be trendy (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). Sumter et al., (2017) also found that some young users are motivated to using Tinder because of the novelty and trendiness associated to the application. However, Sumter et al. (2017) did not find that the trendiness motivation factor was significantly related to gender.

Peer Pressure

Another motive for using Tinder according to Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) is that of peer pressure. Participants in the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)'s study felt they use Tinder because it is popular. This view is supported by LeFebre (2017) who found that people use Tinder because many of their friends are using it.

Socialising

Past studies have found that Tinder is often used as a tool for socialising, to make new friends and to broaden users social network (James, 2015). Sumter et al. (2017) also found that some people use Tinder because they prefer communicating on the internet as opposed to communicating face to face.

Sexual Orientation

While investigating sexual orientation as a Tinder use motive, Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) found that people were motivated to use Tinder as they felt that it is a valuable application to get in touch with people with a similar sexual orientation or to learn more about their own sexual orientation. Moreover, Ranzini and Lutz (2017) found that the hooking up motivation is influenced by users' sexual orientation, especially for homosexual and bisexual users.

Entertainment

Past studies have found that users who seek entertainment often refer to Tinder as "a fun app" or something to use "just for fun." Some users admitted to using Tinder to pass time (Timmermans & De Caluwé 2017). Ward (2017) supports this view. However, they also noted that the motives can change over time. For example, some users who initially used Tinder for entertainment later wanted to find love, while others who initially wanted to find love, ended up using it for entertainment (Ward, 2017).

Distraction

Timmermans and De Caluwé (2010) investigated distraction as a Tinder motive use. They specifically enquired about whether people were motivated to use Tinder to take a break from work or study, to procrastinate or to avoid getting bored when working or studying. However, other studies have also found that Tinder affordances can instead lead to distraction from real life (Marcus, 2016)

Curiosity

Participants in the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) study noted that they mainly used Tinder out of curiosity, either towards the application or towards potential matches. Not many studies investigated the concept of curiosity as a Tinder use motive.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem can be defined as a “positive or negative attitude toward the self” (Rosenberg, 1965 p. 7). Past studies have investigated self-esteem in relation to online dating and Tinder. For example, Sumter et al. (2017) found that if a user received a notification of a match on Tinder, this would generate feelings of validation or self-worth and they used the application to receive positive feedback on their looks with the intent of improving their self-esteem (Sumter et al, 2017). In relation to gender, James (2015) found that men used Tinder to boost their confidence level whereas women did not. Interestingly, Strübel and Petrie (2016) posited that individuals with lower self-esteem might be more inclined to use these types of applications. They further stated that because of how the application operates, users tend to “feel depersonalized and disposable in their social interactions, develop heightened awareness (and criticism) of their looks and bodies and believe that there is always something better around the corner, or rather with the next swipe of their screen, even while questioning their own worth” (Strübel & Petrie, 2016)

Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) do not directly reference self-esteem in their study but they noted that several of their participants used Tinder to get an ‘ego-boost’. They used the term “social approval” to describe this phenomenon (Timmermans & De Caluwé 2017). Instead of considering “social approval” as a Tinder use motive, this study will use the term self-esteem in line with other previous studies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative, deductive and descriptive in nature. Moreover, a cross-sectional timeframe was followed. A qualitative approach was found to be particularly suited for this study as the aim was to examine feelings and behaviours while encouraging participants to reflect and elaborate on their responses (Saunders et al., 2009). In doing so, it was anticipated that more detailed insights into the Tinder use motives would be obtained in contrast to other quantitative studies that investigated this issue.

The sampling technique used in this study was “purposeful sampling” as the interviewees had to be females, aged 18 to 24, from all sexual orientation and from the major cities in South Africa. This age range was targeted since 45% of Tinder users are aged between 16 and 24 years old (GlobalWebIndex Q1, 2015). The sample focused on female adults over 18 years of age even though the GlobalWebIndex Q1 (2015) indicates that users below the 18 years old also exist.

Data for the study was collected through 10 semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions (Kajornboon, 2005). Data was collected in August – September 2017. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes to 1 hour. In addition, the first few interview questions were biographical questions to ascertain whether the respondents were between 18 and 24 and belonged to the relevant demographics. All the interviews were recorded using a handheld device and later transcribed by the researchers. The respondents’ demographics are summarised in section 4.1.

Nvivo was used for data analysis. Deductive thematic analysis was used as a technique to analyse the data. This technique involves looking for patterns within the data in line with the research framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A first round of analysis was conducted by the second author to identify the patterns. This was, followed by a second round of analysis by the first author to validate the results. Data

was collected until saturation was reached and similar themes repeatedly occurred. Appropriate ethical approval was obtained for the study and consent was obtained from the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics

As can be seen in Figure 2, the participants' age group ranged between 18 and 24. In addition, 7 were heterosexual while 3 were bisexual, as per their responses to one question on their sexual orientation. Participants were located in four major cities in South Africa as shown in Figure 3. Lastly, the participants had been using of Tinder from three weeks up to three years.

**FIGURE 2
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS**

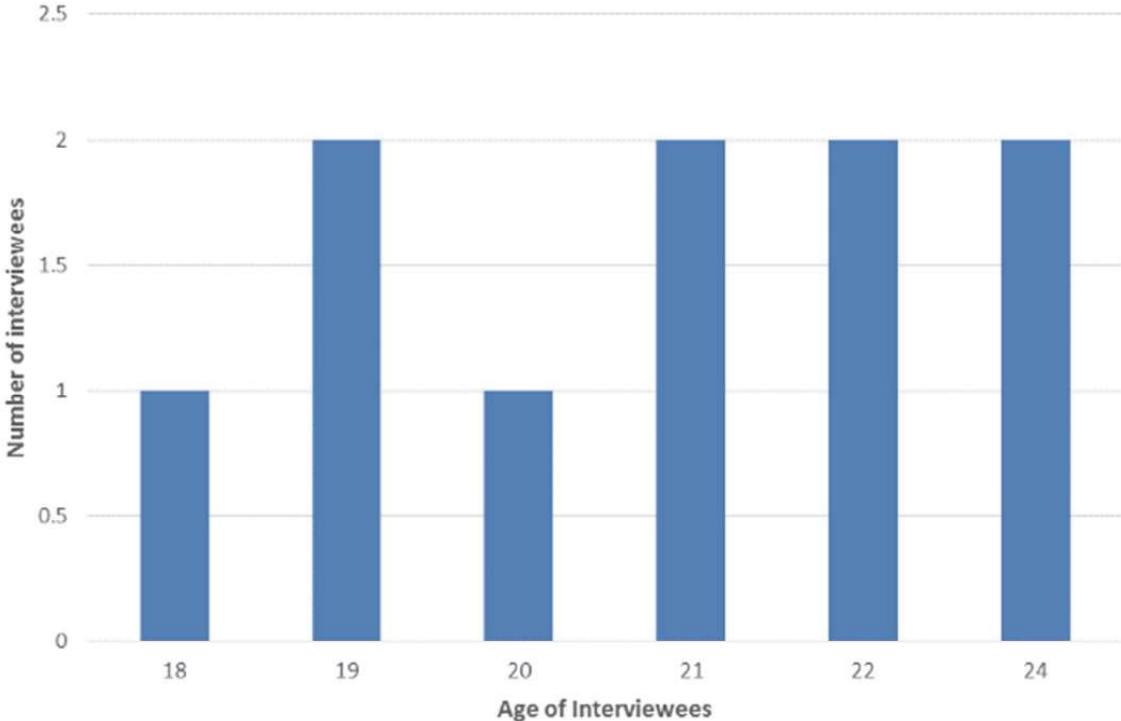
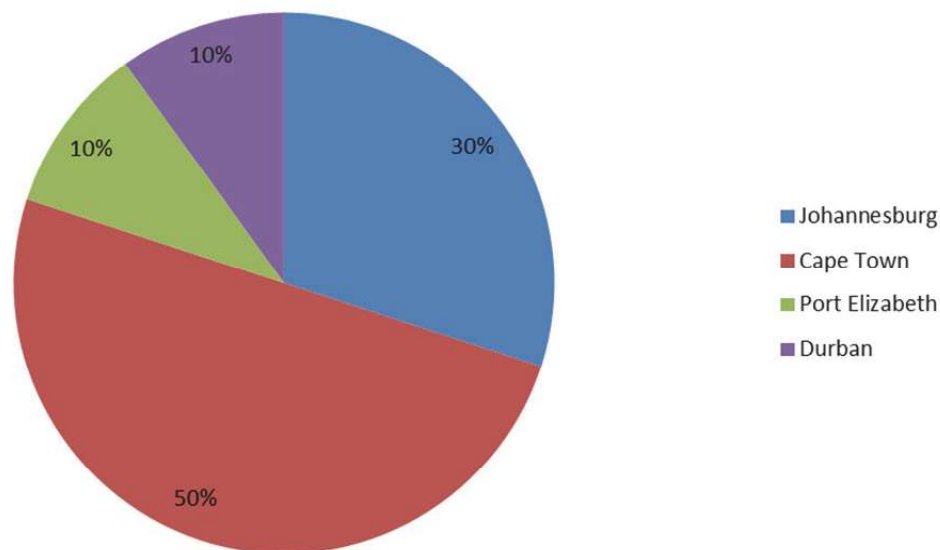


FIGURE 3
RESPONDENTS LOCATION



Tinder Use Motives

The Tinder use motives identified from the study are described below.

Sexual Orientation

Only one of the respondent stated being motivated to using Tinder to experiment on her sexual orientation – “*I use it to experiment*”. However, as a bisexual, she did not find that the use of Tinder influenced her sexuality – “*I am bisexual but Tinder has not influenced my sexuality*”. Participants who classified themselves as bisexual also expressed the fact that the “*app does not promote gay dating*” as they usually tend to “match” with more men than women. In contrast, the other respondents who classified themselves as heterosexual did not feel that they were motivated to use Tinder to explore their sexual orientation.

Sexual Experience

In relation to the Tinder use motive of sexual experience, some participants indicated that they never used Tinder for one-night stands and others indicated that they did or had occasionally done so. Those who indicated that they never intended to use Tinder to acquire sexual experience and one night-stands appeared to be strongly opposed to this possibility. Comment such as “*I am a virgin I am not interested in Tinder for this reason*” or “*I am saving myself for marriage*” were made. Given the personal nature of this question, there is a possibility that respondents were not comfortable enough to answer truthfully, but this cannot be ascertained. In contrast, some women appeared to be open to the idea: “*When I go on a Tinder date I have no idea how it is going to turn out. It might end up in a one night stand, it might not. I just go with the flow*” – “*It is the main reason I use it. Sometimes I stay friends with the person*”. Others used Tinder for one-night stands when they were sure not to see that person again: “*Once when I was in Germany – because I would never see that person again*”. Past studies have mostly attributed this behavior to male Tinder users (Sumter et al., 2017) but the findings indicate that female users might also have such Tinder use motives.

Self-Esteem

Only one of the participants indicated being motivated to use Tinder to boost her self-esteem – *“I was craving ego stroking. My self-confidence was low so was looking to boost my confidence”*. Others instead felt a self-esteem boost while interacting with other users. Self-esteem boost was therefore mostly noted as a consequence of using Tinder, as opposed to being a Tinder use motive. The female participants noted that *“matches make you feel attractive”* and that it *“improves your social skills and it is a form of validation”*. Another quote which strongly illustrates this point is *“I feel like it opened up my eyes to the fact that I don’t need technology to forge relationships. I am quite capable to go up and chat to people. I would not have realised this had I not used Tinder. It improved my self-esteem”*. It is therefore posited that, as opposed to intentionally using Tinder to boost their self-esteem, female Tinder users from this study felt a self-esteem boost as a consequence of having had positive experiences on Tinder.

This is in line with past studies who also found that people have increased feelings of self-worth when they receive positive feedback because of their looks on Tinder (Sumter et al., 2017) and that women do not tend to intentionally use Tinder to boost their confidence level (James, 2015). But in addition, the findings reveal this feeling of empowerment that some women might feel when they realise that their self-worth extends beyond the use of Tinder.

Socialising

The motivation to use Tinder for the purpose of socialising was prevalent in the study. Socialising, in this context relates to the need to meet people for other reasons than forging a romantic relationship – *“I moved to Cape Town a year and a half ago and found that it was difficult to meet people. It can sometimes work”*. One respondent even explained that she used Tinder for work: *“I work as a consultant in a recruitment company so I use it for work. I end up being friends with the people”*. It is interesting to note that for some, even though the primary motivation was not to make new friends, their motivation gradually changed, leading them to eventually use Tinder to make friends – *“Initially I was not using it for that at all. Towards the end that was all I was using it for. I made a couple of really good friends”*. In contrast, some participants felt that they had no desire to make friends through the use of Tinder as they already had enough friends. Their aim was to form a romantic relationship – *“I feel that I have enough friends already. I use Tinder because I want to go into a relationship with someone”*.

This is in line with past studies who also indicated that Tinder can be used as a tool for socialising (James, 2015; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). But the study also reveals that the motivation around the need to socialise can evolve. Participants might not have had the initial motive to socialise when they first started using the tool, but after having found friends through the use of the app, their perception of how Tinder can be used may have evolved.

Peer Pressure

Participants did not feel pressurised socially to use Tinder, but for some, using Tinder was perceived as a social endeavour amongst their existing friends group – *“I am the first of my friends to use it. We have had a lot of fun with it. We went out for supper and we spoke about it. They are all open to it. They now know what it is all about”*. They also indicated that *“it is more fun when your friends are using it as you can compare stories”*. Others explained that none of their peers use Tinder and that some even *“find it taboo to use it”*.

Entertainment

The Tinder use motive of entertainment was noted by some of the participants but not all of them. Some participants indicated that they used Tinder because it is fun – *“I often advise friends to use it – it is so much fun”* – *“Everyone is flirting on Tinder – it is good to practice and it is fun”*. Others found that while they derive entertainment while using the tool, the face-to-face meetings which sometimes happen afterwards can be disappointing – *“The act of swiping was really fun – it felt like a game and I enjoyed that. The first meeting was huge disappointment though. The guy was nothing like his profile”*. The fun aspect of Tinder was also reported in other studies (Timmermans & De Caluwé 2017; Ward, 2017).

Distraction

Some participants also explained that they were motivated to download and use Tinder because they were bored and needed distraction. According to the participants, boredom related to either not having anything to do or boredom with not being able to find a partner – *“I was on holiday and I needed to do something to pass the time, boredom”* – *“It was boredom, pretty much. I don’t have a problem making new friends but it is an issue to take it to a romantic level. At least with Tinder you will meet like-minded people who want a romantic relationship”*. The fun aspect of Tinder was also reported in other studies (Marcus, 2016).

Travelling

Most of the participants of this study indicated that travelling was indeed a Tinder use motive. They were motivated to using Tinder to *“meet people with similar interests”* while travelling, or to find people to show them around – *“People who live in that city know it better than a tour guide” - I was in Ireland for a month recently and I met three people. They showed me around the place”*.

Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) also identified “travelling” as a use motive in their research and stated that users of Tinder see it as a tool to get information from locals about the area they are visiting and the ability to meet other visitors in the area. There is thus congruence between this study and the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)’s study.

Curiosity

Curiosity towards the app was a major motivator amongst the respondents of this study. Respondents either read about Tinder or saw it on television and were curious about what the tool could offer – *“The entire process was out of curiosity. I had never considered using Tinder before so it was experimentation. It was all curiosity”* – *“Curiosity is at the top of my list. I saw it on CSI, a television program. It showed how dangerous it could be as the app discloses your location. I was interested to see who is around in my area”*. This is in line with Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017)’s findings.

Flirting/Social Skills

The participants of this study differentiated between flirting and social skills improvement. For instance, while some participants did not feel the need to improve their social skills through the use of Tinder, they felt that they *“suck at flirting”* – *“My social skills are okay. My flirting skills are non-existent. I use tinder to perfect my flirting skills”*. Others were conscious of their lack of social skills and were motivated to use Tinder to improve – *“I am trying to improve my social skills and it makes me feel more confident”*. It was interesting to note that in relation to flirting, some women felt more comfortable to do so online because *“if you embarrass yourself you just move onto the next person”* and *“it is easier to communicate on line. It is easier to make mistakes online but people are more forgiving”*.

Getting over an Ex

Respondents provided mixed responses for this use motive. Some of them mentioned that they did use Tinder to get over a past relationship - *“Getting over my ex was my main reason for joining Tinder”* and others did not - *“I don’t think that I do. I feel like I need to mourn properly. I don’t want to have rebound relationships”*. This Tinder use motive might perhaps be dependent on users’ personality traits.

Relationship Seeking

Only three of the participants stated being motivated to using Tinder to find a relationship. One respondent expressed the desire to take control of the situation instead of waiting for someone to come by – *“You cannot wait for someone to come your way. You have to take control of the situation. Let’s try it!”*, and another one wanted to explore a final avenue for finding a relationship after having had several unsuccessful relationships – *“I have had a string of unsuccessful relationships. I wanted to explore the last and final avenue”*. This is in line with past studies like Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) and Sumter et al. (2017).

CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen a surge in popularity in the use mobile dating applications like Tinder to find a romantic partner (James, 2015). However, few studies have been conducted to investigate women's motives for using such applications. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate women "Tinder User Motives" based on Timmermans and De Caluwé's (2017) framework. The study was deductive and qualitative in nature and 10 semi-structured interviews of South African women were conducted.

The findings indicate that the use motives identified in this study are similar to ones identified in the Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) study, with some variations. The most salient findings of this study are summarised in the key points below:

- *Relationship Seeking* - While Tinder was mainly designed for relationship building purposes, women are motivated to use the tool for many other reasons
- *Sexual Orientation* - Some bisexual women are motivated to use Tinder to meet people of similar sexual orientation but are not fully satisfied with the outcome. This might be due to the users' demographics in South Africa, who might be skewed towards male users.
- *Sexual Experience* - Some women are also motivated to use Tinder for one night stands
- *Self-Esteem* – Self-Esteem boost is also a consequence of using Tinder amongst women
- *Socialising* – Women are motivated to use Tinder to socialise. However, the motivation to use Tinder to socialize and make friends can also emerge over time, when women realise that this is also a possibility
- *Peer Pressure* – When the use of Tinder is a socially accepted behaviour, women feel motivated to using it
- *Entertainment* – Women are motivated to use Tinder as it is perceived as a fun app
- *Distraction* – Women are motivated to use Tinder to fight boredom
- *Travelling* – Women are motivated to use Tinder while travelling to meet similar minded people and meet locals
- *Curiosity* – Women are motivated to use Tinder as they are curious about the tool
- *Flirting/Social Skills* – Women are motivated to use Tinder to either flirt or improve their social skills as they feel that it is an environment where there are fewer negative consequences
- *Getting over an Ex* – Women's motivation to use Tinder to get over an Ex might be dependent on their personality

This study has shed more light in the Tinder use motives proposed by Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) and has ascertained that their Tinder use motives can also be applicable to a different context like South Africa.

However, there are some limitations to this study, one of which relate to the sample size. In addition, given the personal nature of some of the questions, there is the risk that some of the participants might not have answered truthfully. Further studies could therefore be conducted to validate these findings. For example, a quantitative study with a larger sample size could be conducted. A longitudinal qualitative study would also be useful to build trust between the researcher and the respondents and ensure more in-depth and truthful answers.

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