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More Than a Swipe: A Psychometric and Behavioural Investigation of Online Dating App Use in an Indian Sample

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Abstract

Online dating platforms have rapidly grown in popularity across India, especially among young adults. While global research has explored user motivations and problematic use, limited studies have addressed these dynamics in non-Western settings. This study adapts and validates the Tinder Motivation Scale (TMS) in the broader Indian context. We also examined critical psychological motivations related to dating app usage. A cross-sectional, online survey was administered to 318 Indian adults who stated they had used dating applications previously or currently. The sample comprised 318 adults (140 women, 173 men, 5 non-binary; $M\ age = 22.89$, $SD = 3.59$), recruited via snowball sampling through social media platforms and email. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to assess the factorial validity of the adapted instrument. Multiple regression modelling was also employed to identify motivational predictors of frequent and problematic use of the dating app. CFA supported the original six-factor model. Motivations related to casual sex, love, and self-worth were all shown as significant predictors of both high use and problematic use. The study indicates that online dating apps are increasingly used as emotional and psychological outlets, rather than alone as a novelty. This study can provide culturally relevant frameworks of digital well-being for mental health education and app design policies that will address motivation rooted in emotions and improve the development of healthier ways to engage with online relationships.

Keywords: Digital well-being; Mental health; Online dating applications; Relationship motives

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Introduction

Dating apps are a widely accepted platform to meet new people in the digital age. With the advent of digitization and increasing internet access, even in remote areas, there has been a significant cultural shift in how individuals navigate dating and relationships in the digital space. Globally, there has been a notable boost in the popularity of dating apps (Phan et al., 2021). In India, Tinder has led this trend since its launch in 2012, recording approximately 7.5 million daily swipes (Curry, 2026). The broader dating app market in India has seen sustained growth, with an estimated 100 million registered users across platforms by 2024 and market revenues projected to reach USD 1.42 billion by 2030 (MarkNtel Advisors, 2025), making India one of the five fastest-growing dating app markets globally (Grand View Research, 2025).

Dating app use has been widely researched to understand individuals' motivation for use, problematic behaviours, and negative mental health consequences. Online dating has substantial benefits, like being able to connect with a wider network of people (Finkel et al., 2012). One of the most popular reasons behind the use of dating apps was found to be the fun and ease of connectivity (Solis & Wong, 2019). Other motivations to use a dating app include love, socialization, distraction, trendiness, and sexual experience (Menon, 2024). Many users have also reported that they use the app to boost their ego and as a form of social approval (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). Demographic differences also emerge: Men were more likely to use Bumble for sexual experiences, while women often prioritize ease of communication and emotional connection (Menon, 2024). Age differences have also been found in the motivation to use online dating apps. Emerging adults are more likely to use dating apps for casual encounters, whereas older adults often focus on finding a serious romantic relationship (Luz et al., 2022).

There are numerous dating apps that are presently in the market. The use of such apps is not without psychological and social consequences (Her & Timmermans, 2021). Several studies have highlighted the negative outcomes and mental health consequences associated with the use of dating apps. These include reports of sexual harassment (Gewirtz-Meydan et al., 2024), trolling and other forms of cyber harassment, such as sending hate mail, sending threats, and spreading rumours (March et al., 2017). Stalking is a behavior that may be facilitated by the geolocation feature associated with dating apps (Phan et al., 2021). An increasing number of people have also been found using dating apps despite being in committed relationships, leading to a remarkable increase in infidelity behaviours (Alexopoulos et al., 2020). Research studies have found a positive link between dating app use as a risk factor for risky sexual behaviors (RSBs) among adolescents and young adults (Mignault et al., 2024). Long-term use of dating apps has also been linked to

emotional, physical, and cognitive fatigue. Users often report feelings of exhaustion from repetitive conversations, time and energy drain due to excessive screen use, as well as decision overload, compulsive swiping, and increased self-doubt (Godara & Phakey, 2025).

Despite the growing number of users in India, little is known about how these platforms are used and experienced in the Indian context. Most existing research originates from Western societies, and cultural factors are likely to influence motivations and outcomes. There are several tools assessing dating app motivations, each with its own limitations. The Tinder motive scale developed by Timmerman and De Caluwé identifies 13 motives spread across 58 items (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). The factorial generalisability to non-Western contexts has not been established, and cross-cultural researchers have selectively adopted only a few subsets when applying it outside Western settings (Kim et al., 2024). The Tinder Motivation Scale (TMS) addresses these limitations on multiple fronts. Its six-factor structure is theoretically grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory and conceptually coherent, making it suitable for India's multi-app dating landscape. Critically, it is the only motivation scale with documented cross-cultural validation evidence beyond its original Western sample (Ren & Wang, 2022). Its 24-item conscience format further reduces respondent burden with rich construct coverage. These conceptual and psychometric strengths collectively justify the TMS as the most appropriate instrument for adaptation and validation in the Indian context.

This study aims to validate a culturally adapted version of the Tinder Motivation Scale for use in the Indian context and to examine how specific motivational factors predict problematic dating app usage among young adults.

Methodology

Participants

We conducted an online survey of 346 respondents using Microsoft Forms. Participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling. Two student researchers initiated recruitment by sharing the survey link within their personal and academic networks, including WhatsApp groups, Instagram, and university email lists. Initial contacts were asked to further circulate the survey within their own networks, allowing the sample to expand organically across institutions and social circles. Participants provided informed consent after reading the description of the study. Informed consent was obtained via a mandatory checkbox at the beginning of the survey, which participants were required to complete before accessing the questionnaire; they were also informed of their right to withdraw at any point without consequence. The anonymity of the responses was mentioned in the study description. This study was approved by the Research and Ethics Review

Board of one of the authors' universities. Out of 346 respondents, 318 consented to be part of the study and completed the survey.

Measures

Sociodemographic

We asked participants about their gender, sexual orientation, and age. Further, they were asked if they had used or were using any online dating applications. Those who responded with a yes were asked about their frequency of use and have they had met any of their online matches or not. Along with this, we also asked our participants whether they experienced any sort of sexual harassment or threatening behaviours on such platforms and has anyone had shared any unsolicited intimate pictures with them or not.

Tinder Motivation Scale (TMS)

In this study, TMS was used to assess participants' motivations for using online dating applications. The scale assesses the motivation for Tinder usage on 6 dimensions and 24 items. The six dimensions are Love, casual sex, ease of communication, self-worth validation, thrill of excitement & trendiness. The scale consists of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher Scores indicate greater motivation in that dimension (Sumter et al., 2017). The original scale was developed in the context of Tinder only; we modified the items of the scale slightly by using the term online dating applications in place of Tinder. This adaptation was done to increase the generalisability of the scale, considering the popularity of various applications that are used nowadays beyond Tinder. Therefore, this adapted version will be referred to as the Online Dating App Motivation Scale (ODAMS) in our study. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study is 0.96.

Problematic Tinder Use Scale (PTUS)

The PTUS Scale is based on Griffith's six-component model of behavioural addiction. The scale was developed to assess the compulsive or addictive usage of Tinder. It consists of 6 items, each representing 6 components, i.e., salience, tolerance, mood modification, relapse, withdrawal, and conflict. This provides a conceptually robust framework to assess problematic dating app use. Also, this scale has demonstrated cross cultural validity beyond its original sample making it much suitable for use in diverse Indian cultural context. The participants were asked to rate each on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(Never) to 5 (Always). A Higher Score Indicates problematic or addictive usage of online dating application platforms.(Orosz et al., 2016) Like TMS, the items of

PTUS were also modified slightly in a broader context of online dating app usage. The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the present sample was 0.89.

Data Analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and IBM AMOS version 24. SPSS was used for assessing data normality, means, frequencies, and other descriptive statistics. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 24. The Maximum Likelihood Estimation method was employed to analyse the factor structure of ODAMS in the Indian Scenario. The model fit was analysed on various goodness of fit indices, including the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the Hoelter Critical N value. Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability were used to assess Internal consistency (Hair et al., 2010).

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

The adaptation was undertaken with a sample of 318 adults (140 women, 173 men, and 5 non-binary). Majority of the participants reported a heterosexual orientation (n= 284), followed by bisexual (n=26), gay (n= 3), and lesbian (n=5). The participants had a mean age of 22.89 years (SD = 3.59). (Table 1)

Table 1.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Women	140	44.0
	Men	173	54.4
	Non-binary	5	1.6
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	284	89.3
	Bisexual	26	8.2
	Lesbian	5	1.6
	Gay	3	0.9
Age	Mean (SD)	22.89 (3.59)	
Most Used App	Bumble	226	71.1
	Tinder	147	46.2
	Hinge	104	32.7
	Happn	22	6.9
	OkCupid	21	6.6

	Aisle	15	4.7
	Grindr	14	4.4
	Coffee Meets Bagel	9	2.8
	Others	4	1.3
Met Matches Offline	Yes	173	54.4
	No	145	45.6
Negative Experiences	Unsolicited images	94	29.6
	Sexual harassment	62	19.5
	Threatening behaviour	62	19.5

App Usage and Online-Offline Interaction

Among the participants, 173 individuals highlighted meeting their matches offline, while 145 individuals reported that they had not met any of their matches from these platforms in person. Bumble was found to be the most preferred dating application (n = 226), followed by Tinder (n = 147), Hinge (n = 104), Happn (n = 22), OkCupid (n = 21), and Aisle (n = 15). Other applications that were included are Grindr (n = 14), Coffee Meets Bagel (n = 9), and less commonly used apps such as Muzz, Tantan, Her, and Feeld (n = 1 each).

Negative Experiences

A considerable number of participants shared negative experiences with the use of online dating platforms, where 62 participants indicated they had experienced sexual harassment, and 94 participants stated receiving unsolicited images. Additionally, 62 respondents also experienced aggressive or threatening situations while interacting on these platforms.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The original study used exploratory factor analysis to develop and validate the factor structure of TMS (Sumter et al., 2017). In contrast, the present study aimed at extending the psychometric evaluation of the scale among the Indian Adult population by using a confirmatory factor analysis approach. To reflect the broader range of platforms accessed by Indian users, the scale was renamed as the Online Dating Application Motivation Scale (ODAMS). Only minimal wording adjustments (e.g., substituting 'Tinder' with 'online dating applications') were made to preserve the integrity of the original factor structure. Although the initial CFA results yielded moderate fit indices, but supported the proposed six-factor structure. Incremental fit indices such as Comparative fit Index (CFI=0.858) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI=0.834) were not within the acceptable conventional fit of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2010). Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was also 0.096,

indicating refinement in the current model fit. Overall, the results suggested that the model requires further iterations.

To improve the model fit, items with low factor loadings, high modification indices, or semantic redundancy were chosen for deletion (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The following items were removed to improve the model fit: Items 4,14,27,35, 37, and 39. Following the deletion, the model improved significantly and yielded largely acceptable fit indices. The revised model demonstrated a significant chi-square value, $\chi^2 (120) = 446.615$, $p < .001$, with a CMIN/DF of 3.72. CFI also improved to 0.904, with an SRMR value of 0.066, and an RMSEA of 0.08, indicating a stronger fit. Hoelter's Critical N analysis was conducted to assess the adequacy of the sample in supporting the model's stability. The critical N values were 105 at the 0.05 significance level and 113 at the 0.01 level. This adds further support to the model's structural reliability and appropriateness for the target population. Since the two models were nested, a χ^2 difference test was conducted. The test yielded a statistically significant result, $\Delta\chi^2 (117) = 486.945$, $p < .001$, confirming that the revised model fit the data significantly better than the initial model.

Hence, the improved incremental and absolute fit indices support the factor structure of the original scale with slight refinements. Additionally, convergent and discriminant validity were also evaluated using composite reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). As described in Table 2, CR values for most constructs exceed the acceptable threshold of 0.70, demonstrating good internal consistency. CR values for all the constructs ranged from 0.640 to 0.907. Similarly, AVE value for all the constructs was above 0.50 (minimum required threshold), except for two constructs, i.e., Thrill of Excitement (AVE 0.482) and Trendiness (AVE = 0.471), indicating marginal convergent validity. Cronbach's Alpha was 0.96 for the entire scale, indicating excellent test-retest reliability. (Table 2, Table 3 and Figure 1 and 2)

Table 2.

Confirmatory factor analysis results for the Scale

	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	TLI
Cut-Off Value	<0.06	≥0.90	≥0.90			Between 1 and 3	>0.90
First Iteration	0.096	0.858	0.820	933.56	237	3.93	0.83
Final Model	0.08	0.944	0.905	446.615	120	3.72	0.89

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); Tucker Lewis Index (TLI); Normed Fit Index (NFI); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Chi Square statistics (CMIN); Degree of Freedom (df)

Table 3.*Reliability & Validity Analysis of the Scale*

Variable	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Love	0.903	0.652
Casual Sex	0.905	0.706
Ease of Communication	0.886	0.611
Self Worth	0.904	0.657
Thrill	0.765	0.482
Trendiness	0.743	0.471

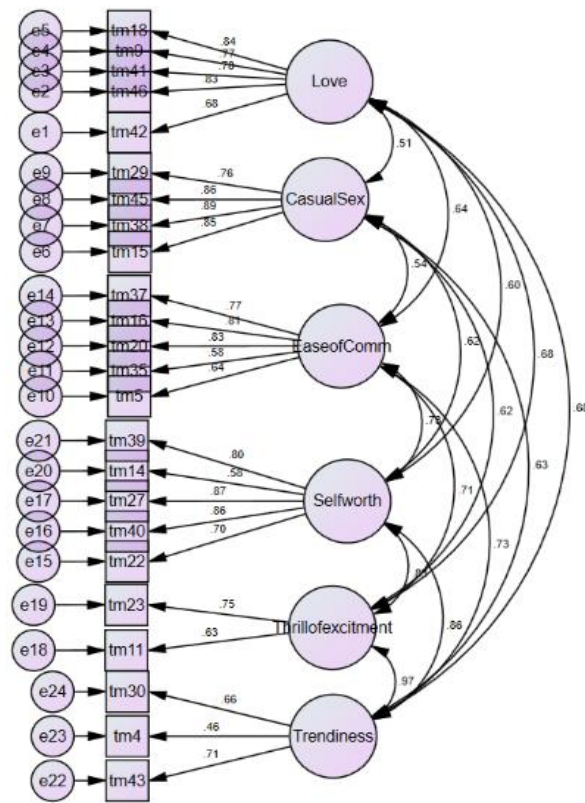
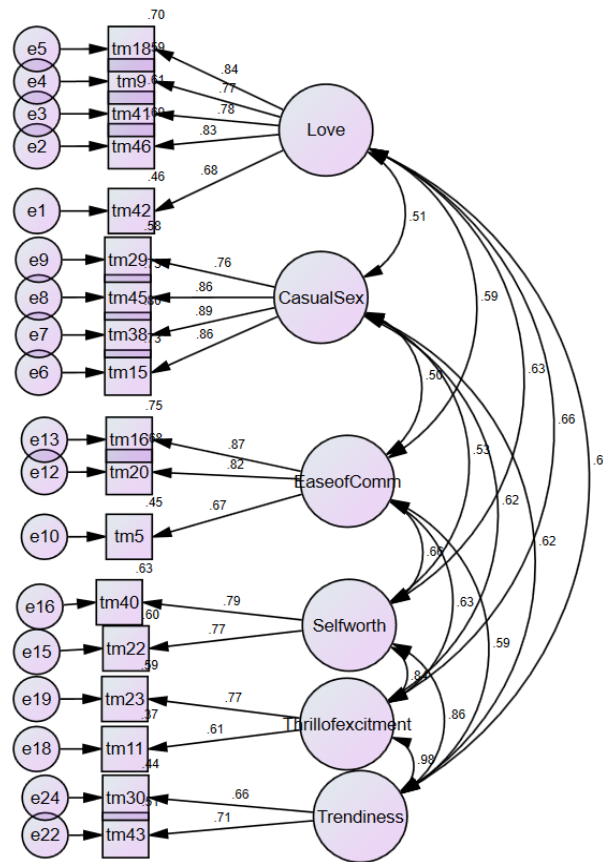
Figure 1.*Path Model of the ODAMS Scale before Item Removal*

Figure 2.

Final Path Model for the ODAMS Scale



Prediction of Problematic Dating App Usage

The study also investigated the psychological correlates of Online dating application usage. Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out using six constructs of ODAMS as predictors of Problematic Online Dating application use. The Scale's scores were used to assess the problematic online dating application usage. The regression model was found statistically significant, $F(6, 311) = 27.86$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 35% of the variance in PTUS scores.

Problematic Online dating application use was predicted positively by three motivational factors. Self-worth ($\beta = .181$, $p = .006$), Love ($\beta = .202$, $p = .001$), and Casual Sex ($\beta = .392$, $p < .001$) were the major predictors of problematic app use patterns. These findings indicated that participants who are looking for romantic partners, casual sex, or to boost their self-esteem are more likely to indulge in problematic app use patterns. On the other hand, factors like trendiness, thrill of excitement, or ease of communication don't predict any patterns of dating app usage. These findings highlight the emotional aspects of online dating application usage, which could be the core factor responsible for obsessive use of such applications. (Table 4).

Table 4.

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Online Dating App Usage Motives Predicting Problematic Dating App Use

Tinder Motives	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	p
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Love	.209	.063	.202	3.341	.001
Sex	.414	.066	.392	6.257	.000
Ease of Communication	-.076	.104	-.046	-.736	.462
Self-Worth	.452	.162	.181	2.787	.006
Thrill	-.237	.183	-.084	-1.293	.197
Trendiness	.123	.186	.043	.663	.508

$R^2 = .35$, Adjusted $R^2 = .34$, $F(6, 311) = 27.86$, $p < .001$

Dependent Variable: Problematic Online Dating Use Scores, Predictors: Online Dating App Usage Motives

Prediction of Dating App Use Frequency

The second multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate whether online dating motives predict the frequency of dating app usage. The model was found statistically significant, 17.9% of the variance in app usage frequency was explained by these motives. Casual Sex surfaced as the strongest positive predictor ($\beta = .396$, $p < .001$) of online dating application usage frequency, followed by Love ($\beta = .207$, $p = .002$). Self-worth, Thrill, and Trendiness were not found significantly associated with Usage frequency. Interestingly, ease of communication emerged as a negative predictor ($\beta = -.248$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants who value communication ease are less likely to engage with online dating platforms. (Table 5)

Table 5.

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Online Dating App Usage Motives Predicting Frequency of Dating App Usage

Coefficients ^a					
Tinder Motives	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Love	.053	.017	.207	3.057	.002
Sex	.104	.018	.396	5.622	.000
Ease of Communication	-.102	.029	-.248	-3.525	.000
Self-Worth	.067	.045	.109	1.487	.138
Thrill	.022	.051	.032	.438	.661
Trendiness	-.094	.052	-.133	-1.818	.070

$R^2 = .18$, Adjusted $R^2 = .16$, $F(6, 311) = 11.33$, $p < .001$

Dependent Variable: Frequency of using dating apps, Predictors: Online Dating App Usage Motives

Discussion

The current study aimed to validate the online dating application motivation scale in the Indian Context. For this purpose, the Tinder Motivation Scale (TMS) was used, but to reflect the broader range of platforms accessed by Indian users, the scale was renamed as the Online Dating Application Motivation Scale (ODAMS). While the original TMS Scale was developed and validated using exploratory factor analysis in a Western sample (Sumter et al., 2017), This study employed CFA to test the factor structure. The findings of this study reinforce the theoretical relevance of this scale. Additionally, it sheds light on underlying psychological drivers motivating the participants to use online dating platforms through a culturally grounded lens.

The CFA findings offered preliminary support for the six-factor model proposed in the original scale, except for trendiness and Thrill of excitement. Our findings align with the previous scale validations, where Thrill of excitement and Trendiness have demonstrated minor deviations in AVE values and fit indices, when applied outside Western contexts (Orosz et al., 2016). These findings suggest that these two factors might not manifest similarly cross-culturally, especially in collectivistic cultures like India, China or Korea. In Chinese validation of TMS, Trendiness was not supported as a motivation for the app usage (Ren & Wang, 2022). This might also happen because dating app motives are ever evolving with a continuous shift in sociocultural landscapes,

peer influence, and platform-specific affordances (swiping, algorithms, etc) (Kim et al., 2024; LeFebvre, 2018)

Such variations underscore the importance of considering cultural frameworks when interpreting dating motives. Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a helpful lens to understand these differences. According to the theory, individuals actively engage with media platforms to fulfil specific psychological and social needs (Sichach, 2023) . In the Indian context, motivations linked to emotional and identity-related gratifications appear to be more central, while those associated with novelty or social visibility play a more peripheral role. "Complementing this theoretical perspective, Zywica and Danowski's (2008) Social Enhancement and Social Compensation hypotheses offer an additional explanatory lens. These hypotheses suggest that motivations for app use may differ fundamentally depending on users' offline social and psychological resources, with compensatory motivations potentially driving more intense and emotionally invested engagement with the platform. From the perspective of Digital Affect Theory dating apps are not just tools for communication but also affective environments that shape users' emotional and relational experiences (Döveling et al., 2018; Paasonen, 2020),.

Regression analyses further supported these theoretical interpretations suggesting that Casual Sex and Love are strong positive predictors as motives of frequent usage of dating platforms. These findings are consistent with similar longitudinal studies depicting that relational and sexual motives are the primary drivers behind sustained engagement on such platforms (Alexopoulos et al., 2020; Castro & Barrada, 2020; Degen & Kleeberg-Niepage, 2022; LeFebvre, 2018). Interestingly, Ease of Communication was found to be a negative predictor of usage frequency, challenging the assumption that communicative efficiency leads to greater usage frequency (Rochat et al., 2019; Sumter et al., 2017). It's possible that users who find communication effortless achieve matches quickly, reducing their need for prolonged use, or they feel socially confident enough, thus reducing their dependence on these platforms for initiating interactions (Blackwell et al., 2015). It was also found that Trendiness and Thrill didn't influence usage frequency within this sample, suggesting that novelty-driven motives may spark initial interest but do not indicate sustained activity. This aligns with Ranzini and Lutz's (2017) argument that dating app use becomes part of one's digital identity rather than a pursuit of novelty. The other possible explanation could be that since online dating platforms have now been prevalent for quite a long time, they have become a well-established mode of online dating. The novelty embedded in the usage of these platforms is no longer the strong motivation solely to engage on these platforms.

When predicting problematic dating app use, Casual Sex, Love, and Self-Worth emerged as three key motives primarily predicting problematic dating app usage. Among these, Casual Sex was found as the strongest predictor, consistent with existing literature that individuals seeking sexual gratification via dating apps are more susceptible to problematic usage patterns (Bonilla-Zorita et al., 2021). These patterns usually include compulsive behaviours like endless swiping, excessive checking, and emotional dependency, especially among those individuals who seek external validation or mood regulation through app usage (Orosz et al., 2018; Vera Cruz et al., 2024). Similarly, Love and Self-Worth motives were significantly tied to problematic usage, indicating emotional investment and self-esteem needs as drivers of distressful engagement (Holtzhausen et al., 2020; Portingale et al., 2022). For such users, the app becomes not merely a meeting platform but a primary source of emotional regulation and identity affirmation, a pattern consistent with the compensatory digital engagement described by Zywica and Danowski (2008). Moreover, it was found that dating apps when used for managing negative emotions often lead to dependence and lower psychological well-being for the user (Thomas et al., 2025; Timmermans et al., 2018).

Interestingly, motives related to surface-level appeal like Trendiness, Thrill, and Ease of Communication weren't connected to problematic use. This mirrors findings where the researchers suggested that motivations rooted in emotional or identity needs are more effective at driving ongoing, sometimes unhealthy app engagement (Carpenter & McEwan, 2016).

Our research provides evidence for a broader interpretation of online dating applications as spaces for emotional expression, where motives of intimacy, identity, and self-worth frequently take priority over novelty and convenience. This work highlights a greater potential in fostering cross-sector collaboration in responsible online dating. In practice, new policies may encourage working relationships between technology companies, mental health agencies, and educational organizations in order to develop fully-featured culturally-sensitive interventions. For developers and mental health interventions, this underlines the need for the development of tools which foster online well-being through reflective engagement or the use of measurements of engagement with the platform to deter compulsive use, particularly for users motivated by emotional or relational drivers. Within the context of India's evolving digital culture, these initiatives provided policymakers with options for addressing the problematic dating app use without losing the positive social role that dating platforms can provide.

Nonetheless, the study has limitations. First, its cross-sectional design precludes causal explanations; it can only describe associations of various motives and how they relate to usage. Second, the participants were primarily educated, urban Indians; therefore, the results may not be

generalizable across demographic variations. Additionally, the focus to understand the dating app use of the specific sample was largely limited to six different motives. Future studies may examine how different motives interact and affect user behaviour. A further psychometric limitation is that the current validation relied predominantly on convergent validity established through associations with a single instrument, PTUS. Therefore, the present study can be best characterised as a preliminary validation; future studies should employ a more comprehensive validity framework, incorporating discriminant validity assessment alongside multiple convergent criteria, to establish the psychometric robustness of ODAMS more definitively. Finally, longitudinal studies can assist researchers in understanding how motivations for dating patterns change prospectively and temporally across contexts and stages of life.

Conclusion

This study examined the reasons why young adults in India use dating apps, while also validating a new six-factor model of the Tinder Motivation Scale. The study showed that Casual Sex, Love, and Self-Worth motives were significant predictors of both frequent use and problematic use of dating apps. This indicates that dating apps are not simply platforms for casual encounters or entertainment, but rather digital spaces where users seek emotional connection, validation, and a sense of self-worth. What was also interesting about the motives was that Trendiness and Thrill were not strong predictors of continued or problematic use. These findings show that dating apps are increasingly connected to users' emotional lives. That usage is motivated by the internal motivations of users, rather than external social pressures or expectations. This also suggests that while some core motives of intimacy and validation may be cross-culturally affirmed, the ways and relevance of use may differ. This would add to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive understanding of online dating behaviour.

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