

# Self-Presentation Strategies Among Tinder Users: Gender Differences in Russia

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**Abstract.** The research outlines major self-presentation strategies and gender patterns of the online dating application Tinder users in Moscow. Authors conducted the case study and analysed 400 profiles of 20-40 years old female and male app users. Upon the content analysis, few patterns of gendered self-presentation were depicted, explained further through the prism of gender roles theory with the focus on the dominant cultural traits in modern Russia.

**Keywords:** Online Dating, Self-presentation, Tinder.

## 1 Introduction

In the past, the cyberspace has been intensely stigmatized for the lack of emotional, trustful and natural communication within the process of relationship building and maintenance. Such a stigma had been applied to online dating as well as computer mediated romantic relationships in general (Wildermuth, 2004). As in the early 80's the practice of exposing your desire to find a mate through the advertisement in printed media was associated with embarrassment and desperation, the situation nowadays is changing (Finkel, Eastwick, Karney, Reis & Sprecher, 2012). With the wide spread of Internet and online dating websites launch another major drive for the engagement in computer-mediated relationship (CMR) turned into the opportunity - to find a romantic partner without being exposed, known or humiliated by the society (Schnarch, 1997). Nowadays the attitude to online dating is changing, as a positive image of such practice appears in various media. CMR becomes more popular as the benefits of such approach to search for a partner and selection tend to be settled as a common norm for the modern community. While research on online relationship development and online dating as a part of this process is well established, the new forms and types of media evolve to fit the changing demand of people. Online dating websites become old-fashioned and new forms of matchmaking have appeared - web

applications for smartphones that provide users with an opportunity for easier partner search. Presented inquiry discloses the limitations for relationship formation within such means of communication as in online dating application (Tinder) focusing on the very first step - self-presentation as a part of the strategic impression management and outlining the gender differences presented within users.

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the presence of different self-presentation strategies on Tinder and how such strategies vary due to gender differences. This exploratory analysis is aimed to glance whether cultural patterns existing in the society would define the self-presentation strategies of individuals, which thus would be indicated thorough their profile analysis. Authors suggest that Tinder in Russia introduces gendered cultural context that reflects current online social practices of users and will be relevant for their self-presentation strategies.

## **2 Literature review**

While conceptualizing digital dating, Merkle and Richardson (2000) focus on essential differences that draw the gap between face-to-face and computer-mediated relationships: the process of formation, nature of self-disclosure, methods of conflict management and the meaning of infidelity. Recent research highlights the essence of CMR as being more thoughtful and strategic in many ways while both partners can appeal to the advantages of the mediated environment: e.g., extended time for message formation, increased self-disclosure, driven by raised self-investment time (Merkle and Richardson, 2000; Jiang, Bazarova & Hancock, 2011) and a comprehensive approach to getting to know a prospective partner. Thus, online dating sites vary in their focus, goals and affordances. Finkel et al (2012) presents a solid classification and distinguishes 14 types of romantic matchmaking services available based on their distinctive features. Apart from mobile apps, scholars identify general and niche self-selection sites, where a number of profiles of prospective partners are available for surfing and approaching. The other option is matching sites, applying specific algorithms to create matches e.g. self-reporting, matching interests, etc. The arousal of online dating applications and their widespread usage can be seen as a response to changing patterns in the instant gratification era, around 2000's (Homnack, 2015). Revolutionary for the market, Tinder, follows a similar application focused on same-gender partner search smartphone app Grindr, offered a simplified version of a communication tool, based on the "like or not" principal in 2012. The distinguishing features are: location-based search option and the order of prospective partners' profile appearing. The application interface includes 4 major parts: user profile, settings section, prospective partners profiles displaying one by one and chatroom. Tinder allows users to login with their Facebook profile and then upload up to 6 photos and fill a description text up to 500 symbols where users are encouraged to put any relevant

information. The option to connect an Instagram profile is available for users along with the possibility to show favourite music and “life anthem” from Spotify. Settings allow to choose the distance for your search (limited to 180 km in its free version), gender and age range of a desirable match. The application streams user profiles compatible through geo-location, interests and mutual Facebook friends. At this point user carries on a decision: to like (swipe right) or stay not interested (swipe left). In case both users have liked each other, they will be able to start a conversation in a chatroom to exchange information or arrange a meeting offline. Tinder hits its popularity in 2016 with approximate number of users reaching up to 50 million which is still increasing. Such interest is presented in the academic research as well. Tyson et.al (2016) distinguished the gender differences between female and male user experiences of application. Timmermans and De Caluwe (2017) identified 13 motives most frequently appearing among the users. Apart from socializing, relationship seeking and sexual experience, researchers identified that Tinder fulfils the psychological need of users in belonging and social approval, works as a distraction and a procrastination tool. It is also used by travellers to meet up with locals and as psychological support for people who went recently through break ups, as the number of matches helps to upgrade self-esteem to continue searching for a partner. Curiosity and peer pressure were distinguished among other motives. Another study conducted among Dutch emerging adults identified few similar motives: love, casual sex, ease of communication, self-worth validation and thrill of excitement (Sumter, Vandenbosch & Ligtenberg, 2017). Therefore, profile structure may highlight or hide users’ intentions, which defines the communication pattern and is usually driven by the individuals’ motives.

Still, self-presentation appears to be one of the drivers in social media usage (Kramer & Winter, 2011). Self-presentation is generally motivated by user’s intent to make a favourable impression on others. Combined with the approach to online dating as a ‘market’ where such profiles are shopped, authors assume that a certain strategy is picked by a user consciously or unconsciously to create a profile which would fit to the search criteria of a desired partner: e.g. Heino, Elisson and Gibbs (2012) provide such definition: ‘marketplace where individuals shop each other’s profiles’. The user’s profile can be perceived as ‘a promise’, constructed and an adapted form of a person which aims to be attractive to the prospective mate (Ellison, Hancock & Toma, 2012). According to Myers (Merkle & Richardson, 2000), individuals tend to engage in a relationship that is rewarding or can be associated with a reward. Therefore, the significant body of research, devoted to the issue of deception in online dating, point out the problem of strategic image formation while providing untrue information about self. Users are balancing between the honest information and the idealised version of themselves they want to use to attract the prospective partner (Hancock, Toma & Ellison, 2007). Focusing on Tinder, Ranzini, Lutz and Gouderjaan (2016)

revealed the correlation between individuals' psychological traits and the self-presentation patterns, claiming that ought-to self-presentation is most common self-presentation strategy, which is followed by actual and ideal ones. Such findings point to the fact, that individuals are strategic in their experience with application and the information provided is dependent on their psychological traits and usage purposes, which most likely reflects in the patterns possibly traced through the profile analysis.

The research on gendered self-presentation in social media refers to multiple studies underlying the differences across different media outlets. A recent study suggests that young females tend to limit visibility and extend privacy settings, facilitate social interaction through textual self-presentation and upload photos that 'appear attractive and sexually appealing' while boys were not that cautious about privacy, tend to provide false information and their 'linguistic choices reflect assertiveness in both style and tone' (Herring & Kapidzic, 2014). The research conducted by Tifferets & Vilnai-Yavetz (2014) on gender differences in Facebook self-presentation focused on the visual aspect, considering photos uploaded by users. As hypothesized by scholars, male's photos were mostly reflecting the status of individual and risk-taking attitude while females uploaded pictures that showed family relations and emotional expression. The rhetorical analysis on self-presentation in dating media identifies that individuals even when searching for a partner (match) with specific characteristics tend to put in more socially desirable ones, which violates the strategic approach in matchmaking (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Another inquiry points out that the physical attractiveness appears to be more important for the women, contrary to the men, which results in the strategic choice of the profile pictures (Toma & Hancock, 2010). Focusing on the patterns of gendered self-presentation in online dating, Buss (1988) comes to the conclusion that physical attractiveness appears to be one of the main drivers for the decision-making process among male individuals and thus, women tend to adapt their self-presentation strategies to the demands of prospective partners. Nevertheless, in the modern Russian society, social relationships are still engaging the dominant gender roles and traditional relational patterns between male and female heterosexual individuals. The explicit characteristic of online dating is that communication occurs in a reduced cue environment as non-verbal cues are excluded from this process as well as you have constant control over your profile and can provide changes any moment (Ward, 2017). As communication appears in the reduced nonverbal cues environment, the means by which individuals can present their personal identity are limited. Thus, the impressive body of research supports our idea of finding certain patterns in self-presentation, which can be explained through the gendered approach to communication. Russian society is claimed to be mostly navigated by the patriarchal discourses and embedded gender roles (White, 2005). With the changes occurring, women still are expected to be responsible for home and make a preference towards family on the contrary to the carrier. Outlining the preferred qualities for the ideal women, Russian man point at such characteristics as physical attractiveness and sexuality, while desired

image of wife most often refers to thrift and love to children. At the same time, women express the need in a man, who is physically strong and has no pernicious habits for the ideal image, while the perfect husband is expected to be loyal and be a bread winner (Lezhnina, 2014). Thus, the hypothesis of this research is supported by the mainstream representation of citizens values in the search of prospective partner and expected to be reflected in the general self-presentation patterns.

### **3 Method and data**

#### **3.1. Sampling strategy**

The data reported in this article comes from a quantitative content analysis of Tinder profiles. The data was collected in December 2016 using the focused method, a quota sampling of each gender was selected per two groups of age, constructing subsequently four mini-samples. The total number of profiles collected for the research was 400: 100 of male profiles aged 20-30, 100 profiles of females, aged 20-30, 100 profiles of male aged 30-40 and 100 profiles of females aged 30-40 respectively. The age distribution within mini-samples was random. Authors created neutral profiles (male and female) to collect these profiles, launched the search and took first 100 profiles for each sub-category that fit the limitations. The unit of analysis for this research is a Tinder profile item. The profile item is conceptualized as the mix of textual information about a user (maximum 500 symbols) along with visual information - users' photos (maximum of 6). For our research, authors choose only «complete profiles», containing at least one sentence of text and one photo. Moreover, the geography was limited to the centre of Moscow (10 km in diameter around the location point).

#### **3.1 Coding Procedures and Measures**

Five independent coders were trained in the application of a common codebook. Coder training included detailed discussions of key concepts as well as different examples of individual profiles. Prior to the beginning of the coding process, different coder-trainer tests were performed to ensure that they had a similar understanding of the codebook. The coding was done manually between February and April 2017. Based on Krippendorff's alpha formula, overall intercoder reliability was 0.74. Reliability scores ranged from 0.72 (interpretation) to 0.96 (for emotions).

The coding of the profile items was divided into four sections:

1. Metadata. In the first section, basic information of each profile item should be identified (time, date, source, author etc.).

2. General information. The second section of this codebook refers to basic characteristics of the profiles (number of photos and text; emoji; language; links to social media)

3. Users information. The third section of the codebook analysed personal information in the profiles (work/university; social networks; style of narration; motives for registration; information about self; descriptions (appearance and character); requirements for prospective partner; description of prospective partners).

4. Visual information. Users often tell us about themselves using images. Therefore, picture becomes a part of everyday communication and representation of usual practices. The last section analysed the models of visual representation such as type (selfie/not selfie); shot (long shot/full shot/medium shot); photos quality; number of people; location; other objects, etc. Collectively, 25 variables proposed by authors have been used. Each indicator was coded on the presence-absence basis.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 General information

First of all, authors identified general characteristics of the profiles. The average text length composed by males is 7.1 lines, contrary to 5.45 among female profiles. Content analysis identifies that men communicate more about themselves and try to explain who they are and what they want. This fact is confirmed by the next indicator – the number of photos. Men, on average, upload 4.89 pictures, whereas women demonstrate themselves carefully – with only 3.47 photos. The majority of women tend to upload only one photo in the profile, as this trend occurs in approximately 40% of the cases.

**Table 1.** Distribution of photos according to genders

Male		Female	
1 photo	4.1 %	1 photo	39.0 %
2 photos	1.0 %	2 photos	1.5 %
3 photos	10.2 %	3 photos	5.5 %
4 photos	18.3 %	4 photos	10.0 %
5 photos	18.8 %	5 photos	14.5 %
6 photos	47.2 %	6 photos	29.5 %

Moreover, an analysis of self-presentation in the description text, below the set of profile pictures was conducted. It showed that man tend to provide more textual information as well, while women use more emoji's in their texts (38% against 24% in male profiles). Moreover, younger group uses emoji often, but this difference is

minor, and is found in about 3% of all cases. Considering the relationship between the text length and emoji presence, an interesting pattern can be traced. Among women, in cases of emoji presence - the average text length is 6.59, and in case of their absence – text is only 4.77. Another characteristic was the language of profile description. Male profile is often written in English, which is a significant share of 35.5%, while only 22% percent of women use English instead of Russian. It is noteworthy that some profiles had descriptions both in English and in Russian.

**Table 2.** Language of the description text

<b>Language</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
English	35.5 %	22.0 %
Russian	50.8 %	61.0 %
Russian, English	11.2 %	12.5 %
Other	2.5 %	4.5 %

Users also keep the tendency of uploading links to the social media in their profiles. The most popular social media used as an additional source is Instagram. The link to Instagram profile appears in 13% of female profiles and in of 9.6% men's profiles. Older groups of the sample often use visual reinforcement, as the link to the Instagram appears in 13.5% of the cases for both men and women. Thus, the general information section shows a more open men's attitude, which is reflected in their complete profiles and the broader range of data about themselves. Women, however, limit the potential scope of the proposed profile - write less, post fewer pictures and limit the textual self-expression, substituting with universal emoji language.

#### **4.2 Visual information**

Authors tried to identify the patterns for photos uploaded by individuals to be in the focus of their profiles. First characteristic was the type and quality of the photographs. Selfie appeared to be most popular among women - 42% versus 27% among men. This explains the popularity of the full shot for the female part of the sample (54%), while men prefer the medium shot. It is also noteworthy, that among male images, group photos with two or more people are seen more often, which complicates the process of recognizing the account owner. Thus, men tend to encrypt themselves. Such images appear in 10% of the cases in the sample, which is four

times less compared to female profiles sample. In addition, women tend to upload professional photographs. Popular locations for the main profile picture differ. Still, overall women tend to pick the locations creating an association with home and cosiness. The top five locations for men and women are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Top-5 photo locations

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
1	Urban view 16.8 %	Home 21.0 %
2	Home 13.7 %	Urban view 12.1 %
3	Nature view 12.7 %	Nature view 9 %
4	Beach 7.6 %	Restaurant 8 %
5	Club, bar 7.1 %	Beach 7 %

Summarising, women emphasize homely atmosphere, nature and cosy restaurants. Men emphasize a more urban lifestyle with clubs, bars and the ability to relax, and travelling as a symbol of adventurous lifestyle and character.

#### **4.3 Users information**

There is also a description of appearance - 7.5% of male profiles and 4.5% of female. The description or other information about the desired, prospective partner was not found often in the profiles. Users tend to hide their job and workplace as well. In particular, this information is absenting in 67% of the profiles. The remaining part more often indicates both the company and the position - 13%. Men tend to focus on their professional status (25% versus 15% among women), which emphasizes the role of their social status in this practice of strategic self-presentation.

**Table 4.** Distribution of attitudes in the description text

<b>Language</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Seriousness	58.9 %	66.5 %
Humor	10.2 %	3.5 %
Self-irony	6.1 %	9.5 %
Provocation	2.5 %	5.0 %
Other	22.3 %	15.5 %

Authors analysed the style of narration in such descriptions and for the given sample it appeared that the majority writes about themselves in a serious way: 67% of female

and 59% of male profiles in such manner. For instance, users outline their intentions: "...in search of a serious relationship with the prospect of a family" or "looking for a husband". As for the differences – men more often write about themselves with humour (10%) and women are more self-ironical (10%).

Unfortunately, 72 percent of the database contains no significant self-description, despite the fact that only profiles that contain at least a minimal text description go to the sample. The remaining profiles most often describe character traits through positive identification (15%), this figure does not differ between the gender groups.

## **5 Conclusion**

The research conducted on online dating self-presentation patterns in Tinder showed that there are some major differences between men and women strategies. Male users tend to provide more information, create a complete image of adventurous individuals, sharing their hobbies through the usage of related profile pictures, interests and personal data. Therefore, female users are more cautious while sharing their personal data, yet women tend to use more emoji's in their self-descriptions. Some of the traits were distinguished among different age groups: mature users tend to be more straightforward in their profiles, identifying direct search aspects and expectations towards the prospective partner. Younger individuals, on the contrary, use more flexible descriptions and focus on their own personalities. Authors thus can assume that patterns of self-presentation appear to be just the part of an overall cultural trait, and can be distinctly related to the gender roles existing in modern Russia society.

As for methodological aspects - case study tactic suits for this research questions - four user groups were considered by content-analyses. Still, a number of limitations is embedded. First of all, the sample of profiles is reduced to the active users, located within the city centre of Moscow. Secondly, the algorithm for issuing potential partners is unknown, which does not allow us to talk about diversity or further generalizations to all Tinder users in Russia.

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