

Grieving & Swiping: Online Dating as Consumers' Post-Breakup Resolution

Introduction

Recently, a dating coach reports on Time the changing pattern of their clientele's dating app usage, since it is "interesting to see how something that was so common a few years ago is losing steam with certain daters, especially those who are of a younger demographic" (Battle 2024, n.d.). As news outlets discuss, it is no secret at this point that the online dating application industry is entering its stagnation era after benefitting from years of exponential growth (Wilson 2024). Industries can expand and stagnate; over time their profit margins can shrink given the saturation of the market. There is another issue to be considered, however, in tangent with this emerging pattern concerning the dating apps. That is, the shifting consumer expectations parallel to the changing consumer generations. Accordingly, in the hyper-modern era of love which is defined by disembodiment and detachment (Kolluoğlu, Dinçer and Yenal 2024); examining the role of the diverse perceptions of consumers regarding the dating app consumption is necessary to better grasp the extent of manifold nature in their experiences, and, to address the newly emerging expectations. Moreover, there is an aspect of the current contested dating market that remains largely overlooked, which is the phenomenon of online dating app usage post-breakup.

People have different ways of dealing with the negative feelings caused by a breakup and one of those is using online dating applications. Therefore, this study is shaped around an exploratory research question: How consumers utilize dating apps to manage their break-up grief? Thus, we are to explore what is the function of online dating applications for consumers who use them after a romantic relationship ends and unveil consumers' motivations behind engaging in this practice. This pursuit can help to reveal the underexplored dimensions attached to the consumers' dating app usage, to create a point of leverage through which the online dating application industry can relate to the evolving expectations of the forthcoming consumer generations.

Hence, we first provide an overview of the literature streams regarding the motivations for using dating apps and the emotional resolutions for managing grief. Following this, we move on to explain the method of this study. Then, in the upcoming sections we share the findings regarding the 1) motivations behind consumers' usage of online dating apps in relation to managing the feeling of grief after romantic breakups, and the

2) diverging pathways for post-breakup emotional resolution. Finally, we discuss the contributions of the study concerning theoretical and managerial implications.

Literature

Motivations for Using Dating Apps

Recently, dating has become a practice that is increasingly mediated through online platforms. Online dating market has been growing rapidly and domineering apps readily became brands that target particular segments or demographics (Phillips 2016). Consequently, today, all over the world, dating apps are rooted into the everyday lives of especially the younger and young-adult consumers, as popular instruments for finding intimate relationships (Finkel et al. 2012; Duguay 2017). Online dating applications operate, however through algorithmic structures that perpetuate “quite a harsh culture” for users since matching with a potential mutual interest essentially requires “the process not only of selection but also screening out” (Phillips 2016, p. 481). Nevertheless, they provide several advantages to users such as, opportunity to effortlessly meet multiple potential partners and simplification of the first attempt to connect with people. In addition, they enable easiness to identify alternative choices and advantages for cheating (Finkel et al. 2012).

In face of this abundance of advantages and disadvantages, people have grown into using online dating apps. While the notorious early millennials swiped their way into a post-modern wave of sexual liberation, only this time mediated first by the internet revolution and then by the rise of social media apps; they pioneered what is now known as the badly reputed hook-up culture (Riley 2015). Among the top three of the currently most popular online dating apps, OkCupid, Tinder, and Bumble, have been found respectively in 2003, 2012, and 2014. Up until recently, the marketing discourse prompted by these apps have been embellished with confidence in being single and free to mingle (e.g., Tinder’s “Single, Not Sorry” campaign in 2018); post-feminist empowerment (e.g., Bumble’s subversive model that leveraged women to initiate the first contact for matching namely “Girls will be Girls” campaign in 2020); playful adventurousness (e.g., Tinder’s “It Starts with a Swipe” campaign in 2020); finding meaningful relationships (e.g., Bumble’s “Find Them on Bumble” campaign in 2021); finding a perfect match (e.g., OkCupid Türkiye’s “Just for You” campaign in 2021); and fun and safe dating (e.g., Tinder’s “Share My Date” campaign in 2024). Main selling points were slightly different among these apps, as some leaned towards mediating sexual encounters and some towards mediating romantic relationships. Although, mere narrative nuances were

lost in the actual practices since the business model of an online dating app inevitably requires more engagement like any other social media platform. This translates into constant need for recruiting more users, need for more single users to come back to the app, and need for initiating more and more fast-moving-consumer-experiences to capitalize on.

While it is not necessarily the case in reality that hook-up culture took over every corner and destroyed love in contemporary age, it is also a truth that dating apps provide an unprecedented opportunity to seek sexual encounters detached from emotional baggage (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber 2017). Therefore, not long after the establishment of the online dating apps as a major part of many consumers' social lives, the dating market became characterized by an overwhelming abundance of suitors without any opportunity to establish genuine connections (Vinter 2023). Concurrently, consumers of this market found themselves piled into a slope of disenchantment over the promises of online dating application industry (Stacey 2024).

The next generation of consumers, the young adults of today, took over the scene at this setting as the emerging consumer segment, where the costs and benefits of dating apps began to put under scrutiny. Apart from concerns over the tarnishing of meaningful experiences surrounding the trials and tribulations of love and sex (Bandinelli 2022), specifically for women, relationships lacking romance and caring (Minia, Masè and Smith 2022) became more apparent. Because of wide-spread perception of lost authenticity in human relationships associated to emotionless contacts mediated by the dating apps, consumers who were originally raised into the age of internet and also seen a global pandemic, are feeling alienated from the online dating application industry.

To better understand the consumers' side of the industry, researchers have been working on understanding the motivations of engaging in dating app usage. Studies on the motivations of Tinder users discuss various results. Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) found thirteen different motivations (i.e., social approval, relationship seeking, sexual experience, flirting/social skills, travelling, getting over ex-partner, belongingness, peer pressure, socializing, sexual orientation, entertainment/passing time, distraction, curiosity). Among these motives, time/entertainment and curiosity were the strongest intentions, revealing that seeking relational or sexual intimacy is not the only or main motivation. Thus, Timmermans and De Caluwé's (2017) results signify that people are using online dating applications for various reasons. For instance, participants may be seeking a romantic relationship or social approval, rather than only looking to increase sexual experience. Based on this

ground, online dating applications are mostly conceptualized as modern channels for initiating sexual or romantic relationships.

Examining specifically the young-adults' primary motivations behind the Tinder use, Sumter and colleagues (2017) found six major motives which are casual sex, ease of communication, self-worth validation, thrill of excitement, and trendiness. Love and casual sex motivations are related to seeking new relationships; though where love is triggered by a social need to find a long-term committed relationship, casual sex is more associated with a libidinal need. Ease of communication is related to feeling more comfortable communicating online, and self-worth validation reflects the need to feel better and more confident about oneself by using social media and receiving positive feedback about physical appearance. The last two motives, thrill of excitement and trendiness, are associated with entertainment needs and socializing. Similar to Timmermans and De Caluwé's (2017) research, Sumter and colleagues (2017) also argue that motivations to use online dating applications go beyond fun and hooking-up and there are various needs and motivations involved in their use. Online dating can even become the new means for emerging young-adults to initiate committed romantic relationships as well (Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg 2017). Orosz et al. (2018) found four fundamental motivations, which are sex, love, self-esteem enhancement, and boredom. Self-esteem motivation is related to feeling more valuable and appreciated by others. Sex motivation is associated with finding casual sex partners, whereas love motivation relates more to romantic love. Finally, the last motivation in Orosz and colleagues' study (2018) is to reduce or relieve boredom. Among those findings, looking for romantic-sexual relationships is one of the common motivations.

Drawing from there, previous research has focused on understanding consumers' experiences with online dating applications and exploring the general motivations behind the usage of these apps (Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg 2017; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017; Orosz et al. 2018). To extend the existing understanding with a fresh perspective, we suggest that online dating applications can be thought of as useful tools for recovering after romantic breakups, due to the many conveniences provided for users' social re-engagement, such as ease, flexibility, and wider choice (Mininia, Masè and Smith 2022). Although there is abundance of research on the recovery after romantic relationship loss, we have not come across any studies which particularly examine online dating applications as a tool to resolve such grief. Among the prior studies, only Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) stated the motivation of getting over or thinking less about an ex-partner tied to dating app usage. They did

not reflect, however, on the grief that a prior breakup might have caused and did not investigate the deeper potential embedded in the connection between romantic breakups and dating apps. Subsequently, this study aims to understand the ways online dating applications can be evaluated as supportive instruments in terms of emotional resolution for younger adults who experienced grief in response to romantic breakup. This new take as we argue can contribute to the insights regarding consumption of the dating apps; henceforth can deliver valuable implications for marketing professionals.

Emotional Resolutions for Managing Grief

To proceed further, it is important to understand grief as a concept and how it is related to consumers' experience with loss of romantic relationship. Grief is an emotional reaction to loss (Stroebe and Schut 1999). It can be expressed as a psychological, social, and a somatic response (Rando 1984). Being a shared human experience thus a cross-cultural phenomenon, considerable amount of effort by the parts of researchers from both social and cognitive science backgrounds have been invested in understanding grief. As so, researchers have created different models to explain this experience. These models can be divided into two core groups, namely traditional grief models and modern grief models (Walter and McCoyd 2015). Kübler-Ross's five stage model (1970) and Bowlby's (1980) four sequential stages after loss are examples of the traditional models. Since their main purpose is to create a strict agenda to explain grief process universally, they overlook the uniqueness in diverse cases of grief (Holland and Neimeyer 2010). Modern grief models, on the other hand, are fundamentally concerned with coping strategies and adaptation to loss (Stroebe and Schut 1999). Martin and colleagues' (2000) model of grieving styles, Worden's (2009) four task model, Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual process model, and cognitive process models, constructivist models, and the meaning reconstruction model are some examples for modern grief models.

Zisook and Shear (2009) further conceptualizes grief as a collection of sentimental, cognitive, functional, and behavioural reactions towards the loss of a loved one. Albeit grief is being generally associated with death, similar responses can also emerge after non-death related losses (Halifax 2009; Memarnia et al. 2015). Hence, grief is a wide-reaching emotion that can be experienced in relation to death and other forms of loss beyond it.

One of the examples of most universal and non-death related grief is the romantic breakup (Robak and Weitzman 1995). Breakup of romantic relationship, particularly in early adulthood period, can cause several problems such as depression (Monroe et al. 1999), emotional dis-adjusting

(Barbara and Dion 2000), distress (Moller et al. 2003), anxiety and anger (Neimeyer 2000), insomnia, disorganized behaviour (Field et al. 2009), and decline in life satisfaction (Rhoades et al. 2011). These problems can be interpreted as grief symptoms since they are parallel to Worden's (2009) four categories of grief responses: emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physical responses to grief.

Servaty-Seib and Pistole (2007) stated that emotional proximity of the relationship has a direct positive impact on the intensity of grief reactions towards its loss regardless of the type of relationship. In line with this, Field et al. (2009) found that level of grief and sadness after romantic breakup are affected by the closeness of the relationship, the duration of the relationship, and the time that has passed since the breakup. Focusing on grief related to romantic breakups, it is argued that adaptation to breakup is affected by a great variety of forces, such as; amount of time spent with a partner during the relationship, how frequently the partners saw each other after the relationship ended, social support, previous experiences, length of relationship, initiator status, level of love between partners, and how quickly the partners started dating after the relationship ended (Locker et al. 2010). Dating after breakup, thus appears as a natural link to this storyline, which here is to be investigated via the association of romantic breakup grief and specificities of consumers' motivations in using dating app under this condition.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' online dating application usage by specifically focusing on the consumers who experienced grief after a romantic breakup and resorted to dating apps in pursuit of their emotional resolution journey. The goal is to gain insight into consumers' post-breakup usage of online dating applications concerning their motivations in engaging with this form of consumption.

Method

We explored consumers who similarly experienced grief and resorted to online dating applications to swipe away the heartbreak. We set out to understand the diversity of consumer experiences in the matrix of grieving and swiping. For this purpose, phenomenological research design is used to understand consumers' specific experiences regarding online dating application usage after romantic breakups.

According to prior research, online dating is common among middle-aged adults, who are in search for long-term, serious relationships (Stephure et al. 2009). More recent studies show, however, that young adults are more likely to use online dating apps (Timmermans and De

Caluwé 2017). Furthermore, in other studies consumers were found to be more likely to have casual relationships during emerging adulthood (Cohen et al. 2003). Accordingly, we based our sampling on the consumers who were in their young-adult stage of life, in other words, who were living in their emerging adulthood phase, which is defined as the period between the ages 20 to 29 (Arnett 2000).

Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that researchers should interview from five to twenty-five people who have all experienced the same phenomenon. Thus, 10 interviews were conducted with different individuals who all used online dating application after their romantic relationship has ended (Table 1). Primary strategy for participant selection in this study was “purposeful sampling” (Creswell 2007, p.119) based on their age, relevant experience, and ability to shed light on the research topic. Since this research focuses on early adulthood period, all participants were intentionally preferred among people aged around 25 years old. Therefore, participants were selected with the criteria of 1) being young-adults, and, 2) having the experience of grief after a romantic breakup and using online dating apps (i.e., Tinder, OKCupid, Bumble, etc.) in connection to that particular experience.

Starting the purposeful sampling from researchers’ social circles and “snowballing” (Huberman and Miles 1994, p.28), the participant group was formed. All participants identified themselves as woman and lived in metropolitan cities. All experienced romantic relationships that have ended in four to fourteen months before the day of their interview participation, and either earlier used or was still actively using online dating applications. Eight of the participants had bachelor’s degree and one of them had master’s degree as well. Only the last participant was still a university student at the time of the interviewing, thus except for the last participant all of the participants had full time jobs.

Data was collected in the form of in-depth interviews with semi-structured flow. All interviews were conducted between February 1st and March 18th, 2021, through Zoom meetings, due to extended pandemic safety measures. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes on average. Participants were all Turkish speakers. Therefore, Turkish was the medium of the interviews. Before the interviews, participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and the research and were guaranteed confidentiality. Permission for the recording of the meeting and transcription was received at the beginning of the interviews and a pseudonym for each participant was used in both data analysis and display. Recordings were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data set was consisted of 94 pages of double-spaced text in total.

Drawing from the four commitments of phenomenological research highlighted by Høffdin and Martiny (2016), the analysis focused on; unveiling the descriptions of the consumers' own experiences under investigation, grasping the invariant structures by detecting overlapping patterns in consumers' experiences, creating emic codes from consumers' subjective perspectives, and lastly confronting with the phenomenon by acknowledging the layers of interviewing. Researchers put extra attention to be aware of their possible unconscious biases and crosschecked each other's interpretations during the analysis. Two of the three researchers were unfamiliar with dating apps and were mostly exposed to negative reputations surrounding online dating such as mass-market logics of abundance causing dispensability of emotions (Illouz 2007). Therefore, researchers employed "bracketing" which means "suspending (...) as much as possible the researcher's meanings and interpretations [while] entering into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed" (Hycner 1985, p.281). Bearing these commitments in mind, data was analysed according to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) microanalysis approach which includes open coding, axial coding, and selective coding procedures.

Analysis thereon proceeded with iteration of the emic codes and categorization of the themes (Corbin and Strauss 2008). Transcripts were primarily coded paragraph by paragraph in order to define categories and jot down analytic memos with distinctive aspects, dimensions, category comparison. Then in axial and selective coding steps, categories were transformed into broader themes representing the motivations and strategies of the participants. As explained in the consumers' pathways of emotional resolution, some of the participants were optimistic whereas others were more pessimistic. Validity of the findings was ensured by the collaborative contribution of the researchers (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). For instance, while collecting the data one of the researchers recognized their initial assumptions in several instances, as they initially set out to focus on disenfranchised grief because she thought that the participants are suffering from lack of social support during their romantic dissolution process. Data showed that the truth was different than their assumptions, and through feedback loops and active discussions between the researchers, the direction of the study was reorganized and evolved into what it is as presented here.

Table 1: Details of the Participants

	Gender	Age	Residential	Education	Occupation	Duration of relationship (in months)	End of relationship (months ago)	Duration of the interview (Minutes)
P1	Woman	25	Istanbul	Master's degree	Trade specialist	34	12	32
P2	Woman	25	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Veterinarian	40	10	40
P3	Woman	26	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Import-export specialist	12	8	33
P4	Woman	24	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Lawyer	10	6	32
P5	Woman	24	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Lawyer	16	7	34
P6	Woman	24	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Insurance appraiser	24	9	26
P7	Woman	25	Bursa	Bachelor's degree	Import-export specialist	20	4	30
P8	Woman	24	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Call centre specialist	18	12	32
P9	Woman	24	Izmir	Bachelor's degree	Lawyer	10	14	33
P10	Woman	24	Bursa	Bachelor's degree	Undergraduate student	10	10	31

As a result, twelve codes under the theme of motivations for using dating apps post-breakup were found. These codes then were grouped under the categories of coping, updating, and desiring. Furthermore, findings also demonstrated highlights of some consumers' diverging expectations and strategies regarding using dating apps for their emotional resolution. These codes were categorized under three pathways being dating app usage as a tool for self-improvement, dating app usage as an opportunity for

adventurousness, and dating app usage as a hope for re-enchantment. The findings shed light onto these motivations and different strategies consumers adopt concerning their utilization of dating apps for managing their post-breakup grief.

Findings

The inspiration behind this study is a real story of grieving after a romantic breakup and benefitting from dating app usage, which was experienced by a mutual acquaintance of the researchers. This person shared their experience with the researchers in these words we directly quote below:

“When I was 23 years old, my girlfriend and I decided to end our one-and-a-half-year-long relationship. After that decision, I felt terribly sad, worthless, down, and completely alone even though my friends always gave me genuine emotional support. During that period, I realized that I was emotionally fluctuating; it was difficult for me to control my emotions. Although I knew that this was just a temporary period, I was feeling down due to struggling with this situation. I decided to create an account on an online dating app (OKCupid) which I used to use before I knew my former girlfriend. I was hoping to find someone to whom I could open my heart to, or who could just listen to me as a friend. Then I just decided to try to see what will happen next. The result was much better than my expectations! I met wonderful people, and I become sincere friends with many of them. I developed a new social circle, and somehow one of those friends later became my new girlfriend. After that, I started to recommend using online dating applications to my friends who suffer from a breakup and some of them reaped the benefit of it. Based on my own experience, I believe that using online dating applications is beneficial for people who have romantic breakup distress.”

As expressed in detail in above excerpt, some individuals go through a grieving process after a romantic breakup and manage grief to find emotional resolution through purposefully utilizing dating apps in this process. As emerged from our data, however, we will first reflect on the participants' recollections over their reactions and emotions associated to the breakup they went through to understand how they processed grief under the circumstances in which their experiences are situated. Therefore, details of the findings are presented in three themes: breakup grief experience, motivations for using dating apps post-breakup, and strategies they adopt through dating apps for emotional resolution.

Experience of Breakup Grief

The research is concerned with participants who experienced grief stemming from the ending of their romantic relationship. To begin with, it is useful to understand that there were two main reasons that resulted their relationships in a breakup, which underlined the grief experience: having a monotonous relationship (i.e., “lack of passion”), or failing to overcome problems (i.e., “lack of trust”). For P8 it was both, however, as she said she decided to leave her boyfriend because he was cheating. Most of the participants declared that they decided to breakup together with their partners, and since they defined their relationships as serious romantic relationships, the importance of the relationship for them was similarly high despite the differences in the duration of their relationships.

Participants situated two main patterns based on their first emotional reactions towards the escalation of breakup. One group primarily had a gradual pattern of feeling relief that was followed by sadness, depression, and anger. The other group’s pattern was a simultaneous mix of sadness, depression, and anger. Each participant declared that they experienced several mental and physical reactions after their romantic relationships ended, such as crying, physical pain, disappointment, sadness, and anger. The point of consideration is that all these reactions were parallel with Worden’s (2009) categorization of grief symptoms; namely emotional, cognitive, behavioural and physical responses. At this point, it should be noted that when participants declared they were in depression, actually, what they were expressing was a high level of low spirits and distress and not an official diagnosis of depression. Because, in Turkish everyday language, “depression” connotes a troubling mood, rather than referring to a diagnosed psychological condition. Distinct from the rest of the participants, P3 said that they felt only resentment once their relationship ended.

Thus, it is understood that all participants experienced grief after they lost their romantic relationship and most of them described their pain by using cultural idioms related to physical pain such as “feeling a pain in the chest” (*göğüste bir ağrı hissetmek*) and as if they are “being punched” (*yumruk yemiş gibi olmak*). In addition to those, it was seen that the major problem they faced after a breakup was losing their best friends, alongside and sometimes more destructive than the failed romance, which only adds to the feeling of loss.

There were three routes participants tried to take for managing the unpleasant situation they found themselves in following the breakups. The first one was finding a distraction, which means participants gave an extra effort to spend time with activities that involve concentrating on their job,

study, and hobbies in order to decrease the time they spend thinking about the breakup. The second route is increasing the time that they spend with their friends in order to get emotional support. At that point, P4 had an interesting approach, she said that she adopted a cat after her breakup to satisfy her need to love and be loved. The last route for all participants was socialization, but it was not as easy to take as former routes.

To be more precise, all participants were rather distant from having a closer kind of relationship with their colleagues from their occupational circles compared to their friends outside work. This was tied to their consideration of sharing their emotional turmoil and personal secrets with colleagues as inappropriate, and they wanted to avoid any possible unpleasant consequences for their professional lives. Problematically, since most participants had full-time jobs, they did not have the opportunity to get to know new people as much as they used to do in their university years. Moreover, even though P10 was university student, due to preventative pandemic measures as well as her own introverted personality, she was unable to easily meet new people. It is understood that, even though the participants could succeed in taking first two routes on their own, they had difficulty socializing and meeting new people. In short, all participants found that online dating applications were the single and the most fitted channel for them to socialize, which means meeting and getting to know new people; as this was caused collectively by their reserved personalities, dynamics of their occupations, and regulations related to the 2020 pandemic.

Motivations for Using Dating Apps Post-Breakup

In light of the consumers' experiences with grief and circumstances that influenced them to try online dating application post-breakup, it was found that participants have 12 different motivations to create an account and use online dating applications. Then, these motivations were grouped under three main categories, which are namely coping with grief, updating one's self, desiring for new (Table 2). The first theme of coping with the romantic breakup grief involved codes of forgetting the past relationship, distracting oneself, passing time and sharing emotions with others for relief. The second category of updating the dating skills to support their process of overcoming grief covers the motivations of re-learning how to flirt, gaining/improving social skills, and improving one's sexual experience, and boosting one's self confidence. Lastly, there is the category of desiring to have a fresh relationship as a marker of getting over the grief associated with the lost relationship altogether, which compensates the codes of meeting new people, starting new romantic relationships, engaging in casual relationships and having fun.

It is beneficial to note that P5, P8, and P10 were consumers who stopped using the dating apps after a period of trial, since their experiences seized to make any positive impact in their endeavour of restoration after breakup. P5 described herself as a person who loves to get to know a new person slowly by building and pursuing deep conversation and apps were unable to meet this expectation because of the users' profile.

In real life when you talk to men they spend effort to understand your story but those I chat over online dating apps were only asking me if I was available for a cup of coffee or drink. But normally I am not this kind of person. I prefer to talk to him for 2 weeks or more before we go out. Therefore I decided to quit the apps. (P5)

P8 expressed that she landed on this decision after almost five months of using online dating apps, which included three face-to-face meetings. She believed these apps are suitable for people who do not have a chance to meet people through traditional ways and these new ways are not suitable for her. P8 explained her personality by disclosing the nickname of "innocent girl" that many of her relatives and close friends use to describe her. She added that she believed in true love and dreamt of finding her soulmate in an occasion such as in a wedding ceremony of a mutual friend. P10, on the other hand explained her situation as:

In daily life, no one is looking for a relationship every day, but every time I used the app, I started to think about whether I was really looking for a relationship, whether I needed it, whether I was ready for it. Because of these kinds of personal questions and thoughts, I felt myself more stressed when I used the app, so I decided to stop using the apps. (P10)

On the other hand, other participants, being, P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, either carried a belief that online dating apps were suitable and helpful for achieving their goals namely meeting new people for socialization and meeting new people for romance or found no pathway for romance outside the realm of online dating applications. Thus, all participants first had grief rooted from their romantic breakups and then they had demonstrated routes to overcome this, which involved the usage, or at least the trial, of dating apps.

Overall, the twelve codes concerning the post-breakup user motivations for online dating applications that were found in this study have some similarities with previous studies in the literature and some differences

from the research mentioned in the dialogue. The reason behind these differences may be derived from the fundamental research purpose of this study. Discussion section will further highlight these contributions.

Table 2: Motivations for Using Dating Apps Post-Breakup

Managing grief over romantic break-up through online dating applications		
coping with grief	updating one's self	desiring for new
“forgetting the past relationship”	“re-learning how to flirt”	“meeting new people”
“distracting oneself”	“gaining/improving social skills”	“starting new romantic relationships”
“passing time”	“expanding one's sexual experience”	“engaging in casual relationships”
“sharing emotions with others for relief”	“boosting one's self-confidence”	“having fun”

Pathways for Emotional Resolution through Dating Apps

In addition to identifying prior motivations behind the usage of online dating apps, interpreting the participants' actual experiences related to using the apps enabled the clustering of three main strategies that consumers used to resolve their emotional problems related to breakup and restore their emotional state (Table 3). During the interviews P1 and P7 expressed that they felt “like a wreck” as their moods were down for a long time after the loss of their romantic relationships and they wanted to “get back” to their better selves. Owing to this, the concept of restoration here refers to the motivated action, which is conducted in order to re-establish something into its previous good and feasible condition after a deconstructive damage, meaning, a project of “bringing back to a former position or condition” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Drawing from this conceptualization, the restoration metaphor was found suitable in further exploring the different strategies linked to the participants' multiple motivations and expectations of using online dating apps after experiencing breakups.

As highlighted in the previous section, participants had twelve different prior motives, which are grouped under 3 categories to try or use

Table 3: Pathways for Emotional Resolution through Dating Apps

Pathways of post-breakup emotional resolutions through online dating applications	Dating app usage as a tool for self-improvement	
	exemplifying participants	P1, P7, and P9
	experience	preparing oneself to have a new romantic relationship and meeting new people for socialization
	outcomes	“helping my self-confidence issues” “improving social skills” “re-learn how to flirt”
	resolution	using online dating apps is a passing phase for the consumers who see it as a good “preparation school” for the next relationship
	Dating app usage as an opportunity for adventurousness	
	exemplifying participants	P2 and P6
	experience	making many new contacts and gaining many new experiences
	outcomes	“to attract attention” “gaining sexual experiences” “re-feel that I am a wonderful woman”
	resolution	using online dating apps is an opportunity for new experiences and touches consumers with a “magic wand” that boosts their ego
	Dating app usage as a hope for re-enchantment	
	exemplifying participants	P3 and P4
	experience	Starting a new relationship to overcome the lost relationship and meeting new people for romance
outcomes	“find the one to love” “I want to trust” “meeting someone that can make me confident”	
resolution	using online dating apps is a “placebo drug for curing loneliness” since they provide temporary happiness but consumers are still lonely in the end	

online dating apps in order overcome their grief that stem from romantic relationship break up. Even though all of them had a common problem to

resolve, they slightly had different prior motives behind the use of apps. Eventually, as they started using the apps, they developed three different pathways to overcome the grief based on their experiences and the outcomes: namely, dating app usage as a tool for self-improvement, dating app usage as an opportunity for adventurousness, dating app usage as a hope for re-enchantment.

The first pathway of emotional resolution being the dating app usage as a tool for self-improvement was demonstrated by P1, P7, and P9. Their strategy of using dating apps post-breakup was defined by their aim of reconstructing themselves, in the sense that improving their own wellbeing. The primary problem for these participants was the adaptation to social life after the romantic breakup, as they complained specifically about how they felt that they even forgot how to flirt because their last experience was a long-term relationship.

I really forget how to flirt with someone; how someone shows their interest in me to because my last relation was almost 3 years long and we almost met each day and talked each day during this period. Due to the fact that I am single now, I feel that I should be back in the game of flirting and improve myself to start a new relation. (P1)

I really don't know what I should wear if I go on a date or what is the difference between a coffee date and late-night date because I just broke up from a 20 months long relationship just 4 months ago and I need to relearn the flirting skills that I used to know and be able to use them again. (P7)

Since they wanted to restore themselves in order to get ready to be in a new romantic relationship, they started to use online dating apps to re-learn the ways of flirting, improve their social skills, and gain self-confidence as they thought that these listed features are mandatory for anyone who wants to start a relationship. For example, one of the major reasons for them to use these apps is that these platforms are the best options to easily find new people. P7 and P10 both mentioned that they actually lost their best buddies who accompanied them for social events. P10 said that she and her former boyfriend were studying together, sharing the notes about lectures and preparing for exams together. They got mutual friends and went out together but after the end of their relationship she also lost her large group of friends, so she thinks that she needs to get new friends now. Since they could rationally determine what they were looking for and they were optimistic to achieve their goals, they demonstrate a strategical usage

that simply aims to benefit from these platforms to resolve their emotional wreck for their future romantic relationships. From their motivations and the strategical standpoints they showcased, for these consumers the dating apps were clearly worked as gateways between the past romantic relationship and the next one. It can be said that dating apps were actually a “preparation school” for these consumers, providing a re-orientation into social life for their next romantic relationship. P7 addressed that:

Just like we need to practice to improve ourselves in dancing, cooking or foreign languages, we need to practice in flirting too. Therefore, online dating apps seem to me like a preparatory school that teaches or reminds us how to flirt again. (P7)

The second pathway of emotional resolution was dating app usage as an opportunity for adventurousness, including the participants P2 and P6. These participants were using dating apps post-breakup to expand themselves out of the boundaries of their past. They also manifested logical explanations of why they decided to use online dating apps, and they were optimistic to achieve their expectations through these apps. But, their focal interest and points they personally feel the lack of were in the exact opposite direction of the participants mentioned above, who used the dating apps as a tool for self-improvement. Back then, these participants were suffering from not feeling attractive and sexually charming after the loss of their last relationship. Leaving the old way of negative and critical self-perception behind, this group wanted to thrive and feel the best-ever version of themselves. P2 said that in her last relationship, her partner often complimented her on how attractive she was, how beautiful her eyes were, etc., but after the breakup, she missed hearing these nice words.

I decided to use online dating apps to experience this feeling again, which gave me the chance to meet new people who were ready to make me feel more attractive. (P2)

I started using apps to feel sexy again because even though I know I'm a beautiful woman, I need to take compliments from men, so I think online dating apps are suitable platform for me to meet this need. (P6)

Thus, their solution to overcome the bad feelings burdening them during their grief after the breakup was to contact as many people as possible through online dating apps. They were using the “magic wand” of

dating apps to satisfy their demand to feel sexy and empowered. Taking advantage of the high supply of available people on online dating apps, these consumers were eventually rebuilding their confidence and self-love by gaining an ego-boost from engaging in fresh experiences with new people.

The last pathway covered P4 and P5 and was the strategy of dating app usage as a hope for re-enchantment. Even though these participants wanted to overcome the distressed situation caused by breakup like the others, they claimed that they needed help from other people, which made their goals orient more towards others' than their self-improvement or the potential adventures they look forward to. They were using dating apps post-breakup to match with someone else in a romantic manner. This means that, whereas other participants manifested their own journey of casual encounters, participants who were adopting this strategy distinctively expressed their need to have a trustable person to be involved in their life and a willingness to start a new stable romantic relationship to overcome the grief of the past. That is why their fundamental motivations to use online dating apps were oriented upon dominantly emotional expectations of hopeless romanticism. They, however, found themselves stuck in an uncomfortable situation.

P4 shared an interesting case about lack of trustworthiness concerning the online dating scene, as she had to face extremely bad experiences compared to others. She said that her money, which was placed in a hidden compartment in her apartment, was stolen by her date whom she met on an online dating app, while she was sleeping. She realized only after waking up that both her money and her date disappeared. In consideration of this case, it is no surprise that P3 and P4 did not believe that online dating apps fulfil their expectations. P3 explained what she feels about using online dating apps as below:

I still feel lonely since my last relationship of one year ended. Although my relationship ended 8 months ago, I noticed that I could not meet new people easily. I have a routine 9 to 5 job. I have some hobbies like painting and cycling and I participate in group activities but I still do not have a suitable environment for dating. I am against flirting with my co-workers due to ethical principles. On the other hand, I became friends with the people I met at the cycling and painting activities. We are like a team or a large group of friends so we do not flirt with each other. Since I neither flirt with someone from my job nor buddies from my hobbies, I decided to use online dating apps but unfortunately online dating does not directly match my

demands. So now, I am in a difficult situation, I do not want to keep using online dating apps but I have to use them because they are the only option for me to meet and flirt with new people. (P3)

P4's situation slightly differs than P3. P4 explained her dilemma as:

I am a lawyer, who works very hard, so I don't have time to join activities regularly. Also because of my job, I have to be really careful who I date. For example, if I date other lawyers or a judge, it can create gossip material and might negatively affect my career. That is why, I decided to use online dating apps, which I thought might be safer for me. But the problem is that I still have to be really careful when I use online dating. I don't declare my profession or where I work when I chat over the apps. This situation is quite difficult for me but I keep doing because online apps are the still optimal flirting alternative for me nowadays. (P4)

So be it, they continued using apps since they thought that those were still the optimal choice to meet new people, so they find themselves in a paradox.

While these participants wanted to find real love and dreamt of feeling the re-enchantment in their life again through a perfect match made in algorithm, some were pessimistic about the possibility of making this goal a reality. Some participants did not believe that they could find an appropriate match that would be on the same page romantically, as they are among countless alternatives in online dating applications. Nevertheless, they continued to use these apps for a period of time since they thought that dating apps were the only channel for them to find love even though they are aware that it is rather unlikely. This was the primary reason behind their strong opinions about online dating app usage as being a dilemma. For instance, these reluctant users said that they tolerated many inappropriate people just for the chance to meet the one that they seek. It was obvious that these consumers were not happy to be almost mandatorily using dating apps, as this form of dating was only a "placebo drug for curing loneliness" with no real remedies. They thought, however, that sometimes a placebo is exactly what makes a cure for post-breakup distress, and they also expressed that they keep their hopes up to find someone with suitable qualifications for their rather collaborative emotional resolution process.

Discussion

In this study, the major goal was to gain a deeper understanding of people's dating app usage related to grief after romantic breakup during their young-adulthood period, as existing studies are interested in motivations of consumers' dating app use in a general sense regardless of specific life period or particular condition under which experiences are contextualized.

Our analysis of the findings reveals twelve complementary motivations to use online dating apps after romantic breakups, which are grouped under three main categories of coping, updating, and desiring. Finding love is the ultimate desirable outcome perceived by participants as a good experience to have with online dating apps, while issues of distrust, deception, and disappointment were examples of bad experiences. Meeting new people is the first and most common motivation for all participants to use online dating apps. While some regarded this as the main goal, for others, however, it was only the first step towards recovery or an adventure.

Based on participants' overall evaluations of using apps, there were two generic assessments regarding consumer experience with breakup grief and dating app usage. One of those was the participants' perception of dating apps as helpful to channel out the consumers from the situation of deep grieving. Whereas some participants perceived dating apps as similar to harmful addictive drugs, because they thought that resorting to dating apps just gave the consumers temporary hypes, but not the real happiness. Orosz and colleagues (2018) similarly addressed this problematic facet of online dating applications. While their primary reason to use online dating apps was similar, participating consumers' overall evaluations of these apps were various. It was observed that majority of the participating consumers preferred to pay extra attention to their jobs, hobbies, or other activities during their post-breakup era. In this sense, the main coping strategy among the participants can be broadly defined by Martin and colleagues' (2000) term: instrumental coping strategy.

Even though the categories and themes that are retained from the findings of this study do have some common ground with relevant literature, the difference of the findings are explained by comparing them with studies in literature about consumers' motivations regarding Tinder usage. This is because, Tinder is currently considered as the most popular dating app among emerging adults (Sumter, Vandenbosch and Ligtenberg 2017; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017). Eight out of the total twelve motivations for online dating use that were found in this study comply with Timmermans and De Caluwé's (2017) thirteen motives, which are namely relationship seeking, sexual experience, flirting/social skills, ex-partner, socializing, passing time/entertainment, distraction, and seeking social approval. In

contrast to their research, traveling, belongingness, peer pressure, sexual orientation, and curiosity were not found as a motivation in this study. The reason behind why sexual orientation was not found as a motivation may actually be due to excluding questions about the participants' sexual orientations, which is addressed as a limitation of this research. Peer pressure and curiosity were mentioned by some participants but since they were not the determinant factors to use online dating applications, they were not considered among the main motives. Besides, no participant emphasized the influence of traveling and belonging in reference to their decisions.

Moreover, three out of the six major motivations for young adults that use Tinder, which were discussed by Sumter and colleagues (2017), matched the finding of this study, namely, casual sex, love, and self-worth validation. The other three motivations – ease of communication, thrill of excitement, and trendiness – however, had no impact on the participants' decision to use online dating applications. Lastly, among the four motivations behind Tinder usage that Orosz and colleagues' (2018) found, the motivations of love, sex, and self-esteem enhancement are in line with the findings of the study; exempting the fourth motivation which is coping with boredom. This is because, in the present study, the focal point was not simply to reduce or relieve boredom but coping with grief after romantic relationship loss during the early adulthood.

While there are no specific differences between the participants in the sense that all participants experienced the emotion of grief and tried to engage in online application usage to manage it, they did so through adopting different strategies in their pursuits. Owing to this diversity, representing pathways of emotional resolutions as strategies to implement the motivations to use dating apps post-breakup enabled interesting insights in terms of consumers' responses to romantic breakups and what comes after the heartbreak in implication of online dating application usage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study firstly contributes to Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017) and Sumter and colleagues' (2017) interpretations of online dating applications being the contemporary way of finding a romantic relationship. It relates to these discussions and expands the understanding of dating apps by exploring them as consumers' tools for emotional restoration in cases of suffering from grief after a romantic breakup. Therefore, we present a new perspective to investigate romantic breakup grief in conjunction with online dating application consumption. It was obvious in

our findings that the motivations to use dating apps cannot be explained solely in terms of sexual expectations and pure pleasure seeking.

Hence, the study also engenders managerial implications, as this new perspective represents consumers' diverging strategies regarding the usage of dating apps post-breakup. Therefore, insights provided in this study can be useful for creating better marketing communications for the niche segment of grieving consumers, moreover to grasp a silver lining with the upcoming generations in the dating market who seek meaningful experiences. Considering the still growing – albeit being perceived as rather problematic – online dating application industry worldwide, planning informed marketing practices regarding diverse consumer experiences will be more useful than ever to capture authenticity in era of manifold human emotions for the positioning of these platforms. Thus, this study offers a valuable contribution for marketing of dating apps particularly in light of the “preparation school,” “magic wand,” and “cure for loneliness” phrases that consumers used for describing these apps, as these phrases could be beneficial to use in process of creating points of relatability. We suggest this could help attracting prospective users who experienced breakup grief and want to lift themselves up by kick starting their resolution process.

Limitations

Apart from theoretical and managerial contributions, this study also has certain limitations. Data used in this study was collected from a female participant group. Even though earlier studies signify that the level and frequency of post relationship grief is similar between genders (Morris and Reiber 2011), future studies can focus on a more diverse sample of participants in terms of gender. In addition, all participants had at least a college degree and lived in metropolitan cities, as these factors might have influenced the efficiency of the online dating apps regarding social-geographical benefits. Thirdly, researchers disregarded the dimension of sexual orientation in romantic relationships on behalf of limiting the scope of the study, hence did not ask questions about participants' sexual orientation. This can also be a fruitful point to develop in future studies, to generate a cross-analysis of consumer experiences on dating apps in relation to diversity in sexual orientation. Moreover, prior studies show that those who initiate a breakup appear to be less traumatized than those who were broken up with (Morris and Reiber 2011). Therefore, who initiated the break-up may change individual's motivations behind the use of online dating applications, so future studies might also take this into account. Lastly, this study was concerned with the specific condition that existed in a specific period, the early adulthood phase and what insights may be relevant for designing marketing strategies to better connect with future

generations in the dating market. So, findings might differ based on a different orientation regarding the context of consumer generations. Future studies might be interested in exploring the experiences of elder consumers' usage of online dating applications, particularly concerning a grieving process which might start after they lost their significant ones or experiences of consumers who recovered from an illness or in recovery phase and in need of a fresh start with a new companion.

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