Sex, Love and Geolocation : a sociological study of Tinder

Finished research

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While our romantic encounters used to take place casually in public places, our mobile apps now allow us to manage our encounters from a distance and throughout the day. The pace of our romantic meetings has changed; the importance of bars and cafes has declined while our daily routes have taken on a new significance because of geolocation based matchmaking. The project Sex, Love and Geolocation aimed at exploring the synergies between Tinder's design, the mobilities brought about by the app, and the types of encounters and urban sociability it gives rise to.

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I. The research

Geolocation mobile applications have received growing interest from the gaming industry (Mogi, Ingress, etc.), social networks (Facebook Place, Google Latitude, Foursquare, etc.) and geo-localized recommendation apps (Yelp, etc.) in the past ten years. However, their true success has been in the area of romantic meetings, initially with the application Grindr and, more recently, Tinder, a geo-localized hookup app that is becoming

increasingly popular among 16-35 year olds. The research presented here explores the uses of this application. Unlike its predecessor, Grindr, and though designed based on the same working principles, Tinder offers a variety of uses, from spontaneous sexual encounters to the search for true love.

The *Sex and Love in the Age of Geolocation Applications* project, led by Christian Licoppe, Julien Morel and Laurent Camus, aims to explore the link between Tinder's design and the types of mobility and encounters its use leads to. Whereas people once relied solely on chance encounters to meet other people, mobile applications now allow us to find new people to meet and manage our encounters remotely. This changes not only our relationship to romantic/sexual relationships, but also to physical meeting places and the role public places play (cafe, bar, nightclubs, exhibition venues, etc.). Notably, it raises the issue of co-presence. Thanks to geolocation apps, users can choose who they want to meet beforehand, thus avoiding superfluous meetings. However, does this reduce the number of daily encounters, whether they lead to a physical/romantic relationship or not? How do virtual meetings redefine our need for physical encounters?

Moreover, the methods these applications offer to manage our hookups focus on the geographical proximity of other users. The researchers hypothesize that, like other geolocation mobile apps, this mechanism leads users to change their daily commutes as well as how they travel so as to better exploit the possibilities the app offers. But does this augmented mobility participate in finding quality meetups, regardless of the distance traveled to reach the locations where daily activities are carried out? Are behaviors the same in a big city like Paris versus a smaller city, where the people we run into are not anonymous?

Launched in early 2016 and completed in early 2018, the investigation was based on the original methods developed by the research team over the past several years. The latter combined two waves of semi-structured interviews in various settings (downtown and peri-urban areas) with recordings of cell phone screen activity over several days. The latter notably allowed the researchers to visualize individuals' habits, to consider them compared to the use of other mobile applications and to observe their online discussions. The recordings also capture ambient sounds, thus providing additional contextual information that was useful for characterizing situations. All of these data provide information about the participants' interpersonal histories and backgrounds relative to their use of fixed and mobile dating sites and perception of the different apps used.

II. Key findings
The survey findings offer insight into the role mobile apps play in mobile lifestyles. At the Mobile Lives Forum, we drew lessons concerning the relationship between lifestyles and mobility, differences in practices (depending on users' lifestyles), and the possibilities the

application offers in terms of being in charge of where, when, how and how often one makes romantic encounters and manages one's love life.

1. Lifestyles and mobility

Virtual mobility as a way of organizing lifestyles!

The application allows users to meet more potential partners in a given geographical area than they would without it, and at the same time offers numerous physical and social criteria preferences. The application enables them to manage the geographical and social distance that separates them from possible encounters. Use of the application highlights the wide variety of definitions that accompany the concept of mobility. The application allows users to hook up with strangers that may come from outside their immediate environment as well as their social background. . However, as part of the social activity takes place online, the ergonomics the virtual application offer replace those produced by actual physical travel and co-presence. Virtual mobility increases physical travel Tinder makes meeting people easier. However, its use does not truly replace everyday sociability (outings with friends, etc.) or hookups with new partners in the usual physical places (bars, clubs, etc.). In some cases, the opposite is even true; there is every reason to believe the use of Tinder, unlike Grindr (a homosexual dating app designed for immediate encounters based on spatial proximity), considerably increases physical travel for social reasons.

2. Living environment and mobility

Human density in urban areas is not dense enough to bring inhabitants closer together Essentially, the Tinder app meets a goal everyone has at one time or another in their life: to have a romantic encounter outside of their circle of acquaintances. However, this remains universally difficult, even in big cities where, despite the number of strangers and potential partners, anonymity and conventions remain obstacles. Tinder creates a virtual context that makes it possible to overcome this obstacle, regardless of the density of the living environment.

Tinder, a density "enhancer"

On the other hand, the density of the living environment greatly changes the ease with which one actually meets people and the personal investment put into each virtual relationship before making a physical encounter. In sparsely populated areas, this is more difficult and requires greater investment. One question remains: is this difference in app users' personal investment the result of the fact that users in low density areas tend to spend more time on them, or is it merely the terms of the meetings themselves that

change, without necessarily impacting the time spent or number of connections made?

Fewer "bitter" exchanges in less dense areas

Human relations are more brutal in the big city: the throngs of potential partners and meeting opportunities in Paris, for instance, lead to the practice of serial dating and seemingly reduces the quality of social exchanges. In this sense, we could say that low density living environments are more conducive to "common decency" (Orwell).

In other words, these findings question the hypothesis of the intrinsic "urbanity" of city dwellers. According to this social-geography concept, the denser a place is, the more it favors social exchanges and neutralizes communitarianism.

3. Social and spatial proximity

A triple social control of the profiles

The different options for communicating the app offers gives users three types of tools to reduce the social distance with the people they want to meet:

> Physical appearance: profile photos play a key role in making contact as they serve as a basis for starting conversations. Self-portraits play a role (I find him/her attractive), but it is rather daily, travel and vacation photos that foster the most exchanges and opportunities for discussion with people who share the same interests.

> Language: Unlike Grindr, the Tinder meeting system is based on conversation. Written language etiquette (humor, spelling, topics of interest) makes it possible to identify a user's socio-economic background.

> Neighborhood: Geolocation and the option of limiting the physical distance for possible encounters (especially for inner Paris dwellers) can serve as a social filter. Effectively, the first proposed threshold (one kilometer) allows Parisians to choose to not meet people from the suburbs. Note that this level of selection is only possible in very dense living environments. In less dense environments, users must widen the meeting perimeter due to the limited number of profiles available.

An indirect definition of spatial proximity

When one analyzes dating preferences in terms of geolocation, we learn that users do not all have the same definition of distance and geographical proximity:

> Parisians often limit encounters within a radius of one kilometer, which allows them to stay inside Paris,

in low density areas, users will travel further but rarely exceed 50 kilometers

4. Pace of life and mobility

Mastering the rhythm of one's social relations

For some users, Tinder seems to help them decide or have more control over the pace at which the relationship moves forward, how quickly they physically meet another person, etc.

Ultimately, a time-consuming activity

Although Tinder gives users the impression of being more efficient and of saving time, it turns out that "Tindering" is often a time-consuming activity that can interfere with other daily activities, thus becoming a kind of mental burden. This burden is all the heavier as reactivity is crucial for making "matches" come to fruition. Practical when on the move/for appropriating commute time

Tinder tends to be used during down times throughout the day, but can also become a substitute for other activities (television, reading, etc.) and even interrupt others (cooking, ...). However, its use is always done in private, or with friends. Daily commutes on public transportation are not an appropriate venue for this type of activity, as it can create discomfort. On the other hand, daily commuting may allow Tinder users to make new contacts beyond the geographical area of the home or the work place.

III. Bibliography

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IV. Research report (in french only)

Les usages de l'application de rencontres géolocalisées TINDER

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Mobility

Broadly, the word mobility can be defined as the intention to move and the realization of this movement in geographical space, implying a social change.

More

Lifestyle

A lifestyle is a composition of daily activities and experiences that give sense and meaning to the life of a person or a group in time and space.

More

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Disciplines : Social sciences

Transport mode(s) : All modes of transport

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