

Teză de doctorat

Agency and Structure in Digitally-Mediated Dating.  
A Sociological Case Study of Tinder

Rezumat

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Școala Doctorală de Sociologie

2022

Într-un interviu cu un utilizator Tinder, acesta mi-a mărturisit că, înainte de a instala aplicația, nu s-ar fi gândit vreodată că va merge la întâlniri săptămânale cu persoane diferite. În ultimii ani, tot mai mulți oameni au început să folosească platforme și aplicații pentru întâlniri romantice, intime sau sexuale (en. dating) pentru a depăși probleme precum timiditatea, accesul limitat la activități sociale și responsabilitățile zilnice. Cultura din jurul aplicațiilor de întâlniri a devenit, de asemenea, mai relaxată, pe măsură ce utilizarea telefoanelor inteligente și a aplicațiilor mobile a crescut. Cu toate acestea, lansarea în 2012 a aplicației mobile Tinder este ceea ce a dus utilizarea aplicațiilor de dating la un alt nivel în multe părți ale lumii.

Tinder a deschis noi posibilități prin modelarea tehnologică a procesului de dating ca un joc. Designul aplicației este bazat pe elemente de gamification (Garda & Karhulahti, 2019). Pentru a menține o atmosferă relaxată, utilizatorii puteau construi un profil încărcând maximum nouă fotografii și oferind informații de bază, cum ar fi vârsta, sexul și locația lor, contrastând astfel cu formele anterioare de dating digital. Prin urmare, oricine, oricât de ocupat, putea să creeze rapid un cont și să înceapă să gliseze (swiping). Aplicația Tinder a fost lansată pentru prima dată în campusurile universitare din Statele Unite și a vizat în principal utilizatorii tineri, având în vedere că aceștia sunt mai predispuși să experimenteze cu diferite forme relaționale (Lundquist & Curington, 2019). Însă, de atunci, Tinder a câștigat rapid o mare varietate de utilizatori din toate categoriile de vârstă și sociale, iar acum se află printre cele mai populare aplicații de dating din lume.

Utilizând abordarea lui Giddens (1984) privind relația dintre *agentitate și structură*, am evaluat experiențele utilizatorilor prin recunoașterea mediului în care au loc acestea. Pentru a ajunge la o perspectivă mai completă, am aplicat și conceptul de *oportunități tehnologice (technological affordances; Hutchby, 2001)*, care aduce în discuție contextele în care tehnologiile sunt utilizate și utilitățile acordate de utilizatori, nu de designeri. Pentru a analiza experiențele utilizatorilor, m-am bazat pe mai multe lentile sociologice. Și anume, am folosit conceptul de *munca temporală*, avansat de Flaherty (2003, 2011), pentru a analiza cum utilizatorii gestionează temporalitatea activității de dating propusă de Tinder; conceptul de *muncă emoțională*, înaintat de Hochschild (1979), pentru a înțelege normele emoționale și regulile de simțire dezvoltate în acest spațiu digital; conceptul de *vocabularii de motive* așa cum a propus Mills (1940) pentru a examina justificările oferite de utilizatori pentru utilizarea aplicației; și conceptul de *carieră morală* introdus de Goffman (1963) pentru a analiza traiectoriile sociale și de învățare ale utilizatorilor.

Datele incluse în analiză au fost obținute prin utilizarea următoarelor metode: ancheta sociologică, analiza documentelor, observația și analiza de conținut. Pentru analiza datelor colectate, am folosit analiza tematică discursivă, combinând instrucțiunile oferite de Braun și Clarke (2006) și Gill (2000) precum și metoda walkthrough (Light et al., 2018), tehnica observatorului complet (Baker, 2006) și analiza calitativă de conținut (Prasad, 2008). Drept urmare, teza doctorală este compusă din șapte capitole principale care prezintă investigațiile desfășurate atât pentru înțelegerea organizării sociotehnice a aplicației, cât și pentru a surprinde experiențele utilizatorilor rezultate din analiza dinamicii dintre agentitate și structură.

Primul capitol, „Agency and Structure in Digitally-Mediated Dating. A Sociological Case Study of Tinder”, oferă o analiză detaliată a elementelor structurii sociotehnice ce constituie produsul digital (adică, viziunea afacerii, identitatea și sloganul, modelul de afaceri, caracteristicile aplicației, elementele de design, algoritmul de machine learning, și modelul de interacțiune modelat tehnologic) și a agenților care interacționează și co-crează mediul digital de întâlniri (adică, fondatorii și actualii proprietari ai companiei, și utilizatorii). Datele analizate în acest capitol cuprind anunțurile făcute de compania Tinder de-a lungul timpului, rapoarte realizate de organizații independente, statistici oferite de institute de cercetare și observații captate prin instalarea și navigarea aplicației. Una dintre principalele constatări este că experiența de dating oferită de Tinder este influențată în mod semnificativ de obiectivul comercial al companiei. Designul tehnologic oferit de aplicație și strategiile sale de afaceri devin noi reguli ale jocului de dating, ceea ce duce la o raționalizare crescândă a acestuia prin cuantificare și accent pe cantitate și viteză.

Tinder este un produs care a stimulat schimbări sociale semnificative în modul în care oamenii se cunosc și relaționează. De asemenea, a creat noi oportunități și riscuri. Din acest motiv, în cel de-al doilea capitol, „Perils of Digital Intimacy. A Literature Review”, m-am uitat îndeaproape la literatura științifică care a înregistrat schimbările, circumstanțele favorabile și pericolele introduse sau amplificate prin utilizarea pe scală largă a aplicației. Capitolul conține o analiză sistematică narativă în care arăt principalele constatări pe o serie de subiecte legate de online dating: transformarea intimității (de exemplu, cultura hook-up, despărțirea prin ghosting, efectul alegerilor nesfârșite, etc.), discriminare, riscurile aduse de confidențialitatea configurată digital, amenințările de securitate cibernetică și pericolele cu care se pot confrunta utilizatorii. În esență, rezultatele au arătat că normalizarea căutării de parteneri prin Tinder a dus la oportunități de dating mai abundente, dar și la schimbări sociale și riscuri care afectează utilizatorii. Persoanele care aleg să utilizeze Tinder sunt influențate de tema erotică ce însoțește

utilizarea aplicației și de reputația acesteia, aspect care poate înclina balanța în favoarea interacțiunilor ocazionale și pe termen scurt. Prioritizarea confidențialității digitale intră în conflict cu nevoile de siguranță ale utilizatorilor. Anonimatul are beneficii, dar aduce și provocări semnificative în construirea de platforme sigure de dating. De asemenea, utilizatorii sunt mai predispuși la atacuri de inginerie socială, care au înflorit pe aplicațiile de dating în ultimii ani.

Aplicațiile digitale precum Tinder permit auto-analize dincolo de cercurile sociale apropiate, oferind mijloace de feedback instantaneu de la numeroase persoane și posibilitatea de a interveni, modifica și testa variații până la obținerea unui rezultat satisfăcător. În capitolul „Learning About Self and Society through Online Dating Platforms. A Case Study of Tinder”, am analizat strategiile utilizatorilor de înțelegere a contextului de dating modern prin participarea la întâlniri prin intermediul aplicației Tinder și în comunitățile digitale dedicate reflecției colective asupra acestor experiențe. Capitolul este bazat pe o analiză de conținut a postărilor utilizatorilor pe platforme digitale externe. În conformitate cu ideologia neoliberală și tehnosoluționistă a oamenilor aflați în ipostaza de cumpărători individuali de tehnologii pentru a-și rezolva singuri problemele, rezultatele arată că utilizatorii Tinder sunt puși în situația de a înțelege și de a aborda singuri situațiile confuze și frustrante pe care le experimentează. Astfel, interacțiunea cu platformele digitale externe pe probleme legate de Tinder a devenit un obicei pentru mulți.

Pe Tinder, distribuția pe sexe a utilizatorilor este inegală. Bărbații folosesc aplicațiile de întâlniri într-un număr mai mare decât femeile. În capitolul „The Moral Careers of Male Tinder Users: An Exploratory Sociological Analysis” am analizat factorii care stimulează sau inhibă utilizarea aplicației Tinder în rândul bărbaților, dacă scopul principal este atins sau dacă se schimbă în timp, sau ce diverse noi utilități apar în timpul utilizării. Studiul folosește conceptul de *carieră morală* (Goffman, 1963), care vizează traiectoria socială a indivizilor care află (în copilărie sau mai târziu în viață) că posedă un anumit atribut care îi poate discredita din punct de vedere social și atrage stigma celorlalți (Goffman, 1963). Astfel, acest studiu explorator prezintă diversele rute ale carierei morale parcurse de utilizatorii bărbați ai aplicației Tinder. Analiza este organizată tematic pentru a discuta diferitele situații trăite de cei clasificați ca utilizatori seriali, orientați către relații, pasivi, episodici, și discreditați. Constatările arată că dinamica sociotehnică conținută în aplicație pare să promoveze oportunități inegale de întâlniri în cazul utilizatorilor heterosexuali de sex masculin, încurajându-i pe aceștia să își evalueze valoarea prin rezultatele obținute în aplicație.

Maternitatea este adesea studiată prin prisma creșterii copiilor ca activitate dominantă, în detrimentul altor interese. Odată cu apariția aplicațiilor de dating și, în consecință, oportunitatea de a planifica și programa cu mai multă ușurință întâlniri, au apărut mai multe informații despre modul în care mamele singure gestionează și pun în realitate dorințele lor de intimitate. În capitolul „Swiping as a Single Mom: A First Look at the Experiences of Single Mothers who Use Tinder” m-am uitat la modul în care mamele singure folosesc aplicația de întâlniri Tinder. Studiul se bazează pe șapte interviuri cu mame singure și pe șapte articole media publicate online de mame singure care povestesc despre experiențele lor (adică, în ziare, platforme de știri și bloguri). Conform rezultatelor, mamele singure extrag beneficii din utilizarea aplicației cu succes variabil prin depășirea anumitor limitări și prin explorarea posibilităților extinse oferite de spațiul digital.

Căutarea intimității online este încurajată de avantaje precum viteza și caracterul direct al interacțiunii: participanții își dezvăluie disponibilitatea mai repede și depășesc barierele impuse de cercurile sociale tradiționale și rutinele zilnice de interacțiune. Ca instrumente agențiale pentru activități romantice, aplicațiile de dating deschid oportunitatea cercetării dating-ului mediat tehnologic, cu scenarii temporale aflate în evoluție și schimbări ale formelor de angajament. Capitolul numit „Users’ Temporal Agency on Tinder” oferă o analiză a agentității temporale a utilizatorilor aplicației Tinder. Studiul folosește conceptul de muncă temporală (Flaherty, 2003) drept cadru teoretic. Constatările arată că diversitatea experiențelor și strategiilor de dating ale utilizatorilor legitimează puterea muncii temporale de a remodela structurile temporale create de proiecte tehnologice. Utilizatorii Tinder se adaptează la configurațiile temporale specifice aplicației, căutându-le pe cele mai potrivite pentru ei. Aceștia profită de avantajele tehnologice și decid când este mai bine să trimită un mesaj, cât de repede să se întâlnească sau cât de curând să devină intimi, practici susținute de normele sociale predominante (Yeo & Fung, 2018). Cu toate acestea, interacțiunile sunt adesea întrerupte de momente de așteptare, care se pot transforma în ghosting. Gestul de glisare care stă la baza utilizării Tinder (swiping) a fost descris ca provocând dependență de majoritatea utilizatorilor. Structura temporală a platformei este descrisă prin caracteristici precum rapiditate, ușurință și amuzament. Cu toate acestea, unele relații necesită consistență, complexitate și consolidare a încrederii. În timp ce interacțiunile ocazionale prosperă pe baza vitezei, alte tipuri de relații necesită timp și răbdare ca ingrediente esențiale. Astfel, designul aplicației Tinder aduce o schimbare socială semnificativă în structura temporală a intimității, iar utilizatorii fac față provocării cu tactici temporale adaptative.

Prin utilizarea aplicațiilor de dating, indivizii folosesc noțiunile acumulate anterior (norme sociale, comportamente specifice procesului de curtare) pentru a naviga instrucțiunile de interacțiune modelate tehnologic și pentru a înțelege regulile „jocului” de dating. Pe parcurs, utilizatorii încep să asocieze emoțiile cu funcții digitale (adică, se simt validați atunci când primesc un „like”, respinși când aprecierile sunt unilaterale sau când trimit mesaje fără răspuns) și își modifică reacțiile emoționale în funcție de ceea ce este considerat a fi mai adecvat pentru contextul de dating digital. Capitolul „Tinder and the Emotional Structure of Intimacy” prezintă modul în care intimitatea este organizată pe Tinder și efortul de gestionare a emoțiilor depus de utilizatori în atingerea obiectivelor de intimitate. Analiza a arătat că întâlnirile facilitate de aplicație necesită o muncă emoțională semnificativă: utilizatorii sunt încurajați să se prezinte într-o lumină favorabilă, dar cu așteptări scăzute, și muncesc pentru a fi plăcuți, ceea ce se reduce la a fi atractivi, joviali și având abilități sociale și digitale. Pe Tinder, indivizii învață să respingă rapid utilizatorii care au performanțe slabe, sancționând indecența, impertinențele, dar, ca dezavantaj, discreditează onestitatea neprelucrată, vulnerabilitatea și trăsăturile sociale și fizice neconforme cu spațiul digital.

Dezvoltarea acestei teze de doctorat vine cu un set de limitări. Mai precis, studiul s-a concentrat pe utilizatorii care au folosit Tinder în mod sistematic, explorând astfel impresiile, justificările, percepțiile, experiențele care îl interpretează ca pe un instrument valoros. O prezentare diferită a experiențelor de întâlniri ar putea apărea de la persoanele care folosesc alte aplicații de întâlniri, nu consideră aplicația utilă sau refuză să folosească aplicații de dating din diverse motive.

Prin studiul doctoral desfășurat, am contribuit la literatura științifică cu o investigație sociologică integrată a beneficiilor și dezavantajelor unei tehnologii utilizate de milioane de oameni. Poate cea mai semnificativă contribuție a acestei teze este analiza justificărilor mamei singure pentru utilizarea Tinder în relație cu statutul și rolul lor de mamă într-un contextul social și digital aflat în schimbare. Analiza carierelor morale ale utilizatorilor bărbați Tinder umple un gol în literatură și clarifică ce îi face să folosească aplicația în primul rând, cum se schimbă implicarea lor, de ce Tinder este atractiv pentru ei și cum modelul aplicației influențează utilizarea ulterioară. O altă contribuție o reprezintă analiza muncii temporale și emoționale a utilizatorilor Tinder, aspecte neabordate anterior în literatură, care clarifică dinamica specifică a interacțiunii de dating mediată digital. Teza se încheie cu recomandări pentru proiectarea unor tehnologii de dating mai bune și cu predicții pentru viitorul procesului de dating.

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