

Are you afraid of missing love?

The role of fomo within the affordances of Hinge and Tinder



Universiteit Utrecht

**BA Thesis Media & Culture
Pre-Master New Media & Digital Culture
Student: Timo Nieuwenhuis (6868061)
Supervisor: Dr. René Glas
Block 4, 2019 - 2020
Date: June 11, 2020**

Abstract

People move their social and cultural activities to online platforms. These online platforms do not only facilitate but also shape the social acts that occur through those platforms. The platforms' computer codes and business models reconfigure social norms, but changing social norms also reshape how these platforms operate. Dating apps could be an example of such a place where these computer codes, business models, and changing social norms shape the facilitated sociality. In our online dating culture we would avoid the choice of our partner because of the endless options that online dating provides. Dating apps would cause a fear of missing out while dating. Dating app *Hinge*'s vision seems not to support a concept of fomo. Noteworthy is that *Hinge* is owned by the same umbrella company that also owns *Tinder*. Remarkable is that *Tinder*'s economic value would rely on the user data that is generated by active user activity. Perhaps active users could be established by stimulating the fear of missing out within *Tinder*'s features. Which raises the question if *Hinge*'s affordances really differ from those of *Tinder*. Therefore this thesis aimed to answer the question what role fomo plays within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The walkthrough method, as proposed by media scholars Light, Burgess and Dugua, is used as a *structure* while analyzing the role of fomo within the affordances of both apps. The walkthrough method took the relevant economic interests of the apps in regard during the first stage; the environment of expected use. During the second stage, the technical walkthrough, an affordance analysis examined the role of fomo within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The six affordance mechanisms, as proposed by sociologists Jenny L. Davis and James B. Chouinard, are used as a *focus* during the affordance analysis. During the first stage of the analysis it was found that only *Tinder*'s vision seemed to support the concept of fomo. However, it was also found that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* manage their monetization through the freemium business model, which suggests that both apps features are shaped by the same economic interests. During the second stage of the analysis it was found that fomo plays a prominent role within several affordances of both *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Several affordances seem to relate to fomo as they stimulate the awareness of experiences in an environment from which one is absent, stimulate to avoid the closing of options in potential partners, and stimulate to secure maximum opportunity. Noteworthy is that the role of fomo within the apps' affordances seems to be different. The role of fomo within *Tinder* seems to be focused on establishing more options, while the role of fomo within *Hinge* seems to be focused on establishing the best option. *Tinder*'s 'Top Picks' function and *Hinge*'s 'Most Compatible' function display this different role of fomo within the affordances.

Keywords: fomo, affordances, *Hinge*, *Tinder*, dating apps, dating culture, data culture, economic interests.

Preface

Dating apps are widely used over several communities all over the world. Nowadays a lot of relationships start from dating apps, especially within the LGBTQ community as seventy percent of the same sex couples know each other from a dating app. This made it very appealing for me to study dating apps because these dating apps will spread their own message about love and relationships. I believe that love, in all its different shapes, is the most precious gift we received as human beings. Therefore I think it is important that we are mindful of how the digitalization of dating could mediate how we see love and relationships.

This research has been a joyful process for me. I am happy that I have finally decided to choose a study that really suits my interests. Therefore, I am thankful that Utrechts University Media and Culture department offered me to enrol in the premaster for New Media and Digital Culture. I am especially thankful that Dr. René Glas has accepted me into the premaster and guided me through the process of writing this bachelor thesis.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Preface	2
Introduction	4
Theoretical Framework	7
Fear of Missing Out Love	7
Fear of Missing Out Data	9
Researching Affordances	10
Interrelated Mechanisms	11
The Walkthrough Method	12
Analysis	14
The Environment of Expected Use	14
The Technical Walkthrough	17
Conclusion	23
Bibliography	25
Appendix	27
Appendix 1.1 Hinge's vision	27
Appendix 1.2 Tinder's Vision	28
Appendix 1.3 Scheme of elements of fomo within affordances	29

Introduction

“A ‘digital revolution’ is underway with regard to dating, courtship and modern romance”.¹ People move their social, cultural and professional activities to online platforms² which, according to media scholar José van Dijck, influences the human interaction on an individual and community level, as well on a larger societal level.³ These online platforms do not only facilitate but also shape our social acts.⁴ The platforms’ computer codes and business models reconfigure social norms, but changing social norms also reshape how these platforms operate.⁵ Dating apps could be an example of such a place where these computer codes, business models, and changing social norms shape the facilitated sociality. For instance, sociologist Bauman argued that internet dating comes with “a reduction of the risks coupled with the avoidance of option-closing is what is left of rational choice in a world of fluid chances (...) ”.⁶ Which suggests that in our online dating culture, where we have endless potential partners, we avoid the choice of our romantic partner. In addition, according to communication scholar Vuzharov dating apps would make it easier to jump from one relationship to another.⁷ This would cause a fear of missing out while dating, dubbed fomosexuality by Vuzharov.⁸ It seems that Bauman and Vuzharov both notice similar social phenomena that occur around online dating. This thesis refers to these social phenomena with the widely used concept of fomo.

According to media scholar Gillespie online platforms’ economic interests have consequences for their features.⁹ Vuzharov for instance argues that dating apps features would be designed to take advantage of the fear of missing out phenomenon in order to keep the users attention.¹⁰ Remarkable is that dating app *Hinge*, developed by Justin McLeod in 2012, seems to suggest that the dating app is not designed to encourage fomo, as the motto regards “The dating app designed to be deleted”.¹¹ Noteworthy is that *Hinge* is owned by the same umbrella company that also owns dating app *Tinder*, developed by Hatch Labs in 2012.¹² Remarkable is that *Tinder*’s economic value would rely on the user data that is

¹ Mitchell Hobbs, Stephen Owen, Livia Gerber, “Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy,” *Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 2 (2017): 272.

² Van Dijck, José, *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 4.

³ van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity*, 4.

⁴ van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity*, 29.

⁵ van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity*, 42.

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 65.

⁷ Mihail Vuzharov, “UX & FOMO: Looking for Love or Looking for Options?,” *Digital Age in Semiotics & Communication* 2 (2019): 89.

⁸ Vuzharov, “UX & FOMO,” 89.

⁹ Tarleton Gillespie, “Platforms Intervene.” *Social Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115580479>.

¹⁰ Vuzharov, “UX & FOMO,” 89.

¹¹ “Homepage,” *Hinge*, accessed on February 20, 2020. <https://hinge.co/>

¹² “Our company,” MatchGroup, accessed on February 20, 2020. <https://mtch.com/>

generated by active user activity on the dating app.¹³ Perhaps active users could be established by stimulating the fear of missing out within *Tinder*'s features. Which raises the question if *Hinge*'s economic interests and affordances really differ from those of *Tinder* as both dating apps are commercial enterprises and furthermore owned by the same company. This could for instance mean that both apps secretly shape the same idea of modern relationships. Perhaps *Hinge* still does not stimulate fomo or perhaps *Hinge* stimulates fomo just differently than *Tinder*. Therefore it is interesting to investigate what role fomo plays within both *Hinge* and *Tinder*. New forms of technology, such as dating apps, would actively cause new forms of social relations according to Sociologist Hutchby.¹⁴ He proposes to study technology in terms of their affordances; “functional and relational aspects, which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object”¹⁵ Affordances and fomo are therefore key topics for this thesis.

Fomo is a well-established phenomenon in culture that has been successfully appropriated for commercial purposes, however this would have had limited academic attention according to business scholar Chris Hodkinson.¹⁶ Researching the role of fomo within the affordances of dating apps is still limited to Vuzharov's research. In addition, media scholars Albury et al. argue that more knowledge is needed about the ways that developers draw on users' data to create premium services within free dating apps.¹⁷ The scholars argue that despite their wide adoption and economic importance, dating apps have received less attention in communication, media and cultural studies compared to other facets of mobile location-based communication.¹⁸ Media scholars Garda and Karhulathi have been examining the affordances of *Tinder*.¹⁹ Their research shows for example that *Tinder*'s ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ function has not assigned any official meaning. In contrast, other dating apps would give an official meaning when someone matches with another user. For example within *OkCupid*²⁰ the users have to define their intentions by choosing between the categories ‘long relationship’, ‘short relationship’, ‘hookup’ and ‘friendship’.²¹ *Tinder* would in contrast with its competitors attract diversely motivated users by not constructing any framed rules for matching, and this would serve the app's underlying economic interest. This indicates the role that dating apps' economical interests can have within the affordances of a dating

¹³ Kath Albury, Jean Burgess, Ben Light, Kane Race, Rowan Wilken. “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating and Hook-up Apps: Emerging Issues for Critical Social Science Research.” *Big Data and Society* 4 (2): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717720950>.

¹⁴ Ian Hutchby, “Technologies, texts and affordances,” *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 442.

¹⁵ Hutchby, “Technologies, texts and affordances,” 444.

¹⁶ Hodkinson, Chris. 2019. “‘Fear of Missing Out’ (FOMO) Marketing Appeals: A Conceptual Model.” *Journal of Marketing Communications* 25 (1): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2016.1234504>.

¹⁷ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating,” 8.

¹⁸ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating,” 3.

¹⁹ Maria B Garda, Veli Matti Karhulahti, “Let’s Play Tinder!: Aesthetics of a Dating App,” *Games and Culture* (2019): 2.

²⁰ Match Group/AIC, 2004, online dating website.

²¹ B Garda, M Karhulahti, “Let’s Play Tinder!” 9.

app. The scholars further argue that *Tinder* would promise that there is something for everyone as long as they keep looking hard enough.²² This thesis is contributonal in the sense that it examines how the affordances of *Tinder* and *Hinge* stimulate the users to ‘keep looking hard enough’. As the commercialization of fomo within dating apps would also rely on active users ‘who keep looking’. This thesis’ **Research Question** is as follows: *What role does the so-called fear of missing out play within the affordances of Hinge and Tinder?*

As previously mentioned, fomo could be in favor of a platform’s economic interest, and these interests shape the affordances. Therefore the first sub question regards the role fomo plays within these economic interests that shape the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The second sub question regards how fomo is visible within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The walkthrough method, as proposed by media scholars Light, Burgess and Dugua, is used to answer these sub questions within the analysis.²³ This method first examined the economic related visions, operating models, and governance during the investigation of the environment of expected use. Secondly it is examined how fomo is visible within the affordances during the method’s technical walkthrough. The six affordance mechanisms as described by sociologists Jenny L. Davis and James B. Chouinard are used to analyse the affordances during the technical walkthrough.²⁴ These mechanisms represent gradations in the ways that an artifact affords certain actions.²⁵ So these mechanisms revealed through which graduations fomo seems to play a role within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*.²⁶ The method is further described within the chapter ‘Researching Affordances’.

Altogether, to answer the research question the theoretical framework gives attention to the relation between fomo and dating apps and gives attention to the economic interest of dating apps. The following chapter, researching affordances, gives attention to the affordances mechanisms and describes how the analysis in the shape of the walkthrough method is operated. Then, first the vision, operating model, and governance of *Hinge* and *Tinder* are examined and compared during the examination of the environment of expected use. Secondly, is examined what role fomo plays within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* during the technical walkthrough. The examination of both the visions, operating models, governance, and affordances mechanisms give the chance to investigate what role fomo plays within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Finally, within the conclusion, the research question is answered and future research suggestions are given.

²² B Garda, M Karhulahti, “Let’s Play Tinder!” 8.

²³ Light, Ben, Jean Burgess, Stefanie Duguay, “The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps,” *New Media and Society* 20, no. 3 (2018): 896.

²⁴ Jenny L. Davis, and James B. Chouinard. “Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse.” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 36, no. 4 (2016): 241, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467617714944>.

²⁵ Davis, and Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances,” 241.

²⁶ Davis, and Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances,” 242.

Theoretical Framework

“Online and mobile dating sites and apps are complex and data-intensive, and they mediate, shape and are shaped by cultures of gender and sexuality”.²⁷

As pointed out by scholars Albury, Burgess, Light, Race and Wilken, dating apps are shaped by both sexuality and data. Therefore within this chapter attention is given to both the sexual related aspects as the data related aspects of dating apps in order to understand how both data and sexuality shape these dating apps. The paragraph, Fear of Missing Out Love, describes theories about fomo and online dating culture. This helps to recognize the stimulation of fomo within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The second paragraph, Fear of Missing Out Data, describes theories about the economic interest of dating apps in order to get a better understanding of how the value of data could influence the dating apps’ affordances that reconfigure social norms. The theories about fomo, online dating culture, and the economic interest of dating apps are discussed together in order to understand how both the social norms as the economic interest shape the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*.

Fear of Missing Out Love

The proliferation of choices in our current society makes it seem as if the notion of securing maximum opportunity has become firmly entrenched. However, too many choices could lead to choice paralysis, where decision making would be undermined. According to psychologists Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, and Koestner this constitutes fomo; the arise from abundance of choices among experiences, particularly of social nature, coupled with an uncertainty over the best choice and anticipatory regret over the options that have not been selected.²⁸ Social media, like dating apps, would make it easier to be aware of these experiences one could be missing out on.²⁹ As fomo would be related to people’s need to stay connected with others, this lack of this connection would lead to fomo.³⁰ According to business scholar Dogan one could moreover describe fomo as the awareness of favorable and self-relevant experiences in an environment from which one is absent.³¹

But how could the fear of missing out be visible within our dating culture? Nowadays adults would have a seemingly endless variety of potential romantic and sexual partners available through their

²⁷ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating,” 2.

²⁸ Marina Milyavskaya, Mark Saffran, Nora Hope, and Richard Koestner, “Fear of Missing out: Prevalence, Dynamics, and Consequences of Experiencing FOMO,” *Motivation and Emotion* 42, no. 5 (2018): 726, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9683-5>.

²⁹ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, “Fear of Missing out”, 726.

³⁰ Volkan Dogan, “Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)? Exposing the Link Between the Self and the FoMO Through Self-Construal,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 50, no. 4 (2019): 526, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022119839145>.

³¹ Dogan, “Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)?,” 527.

smartphones. Traditional places and ways for meeting potential partners have been partially replaced by the internet and dating apps.³² Vuzharov claims that these dating apps are designed to take advantage of the fear of missing out phenomenon. They would make it easy to find new partners and actuate the desire for instant gratification. The dating apps' affordances would be designed to remind users of the potential partners they could be missing out on.³³ These dating apps would highlight fomo by for instance sending the users notifications that remind the users of the potential partners they could be missing. The concept of confluent love by sociologist Giddens and the concept of liquid love by sociologist Bauman seem to describe similar social phenomena related to online dating as Vuzharov does. The concepts of confluent love and liquid love are enlightened in order to give more context to the phenomenon of fomo within our dating culture.

For instance, a distinction between romantic love and confluent love was made by sociologist Anthony Giddens. Confluent love would develop an ideal that almost everyone has the chance to feel sexually accomplished. It would be more based on the special relationship than on the special person, it would be distinct from the idea of love that is forever after.³⁴ Confluent love would not be necessarily sexually exclusive. The role of sexual exclusiveness would be to the degree to which both partners deem it desirable or essential. Therefore the one-and-only aspect of romantic love would not be always the case with confluent love. In addition, Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman referred to liquid love. He comments that life-long partnerships are being contested by our modern life setting that offers an extensive network of romantic and sexual possibilities.³⁵ The rise of online dating would reduce the risks and avoid the closing of partner options in a world of fluid chances.³⁶ Bauman compares online dating with online shopping, where one could always return to the online date environment to shop for a new partner.³⁷ Dating would be transported into a recreational activity where people would be seen as disposable as one could always press delete.³⁸

Noteworthy is that Vuzharov, Giddens, and Bauman describe similar social phenomena around online dating culture. As for example the choice paralysis seems to play a role within the scholars' description of dating culture, therefore it is interesting to examine in which ways the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* could stimulate a certain fomo. This can be done by examining how the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* stimulate the awareness of favorable and self-relevant experiences in an environment from

³² Hobbs, Owen, Gerber, "Liquid Love?," 272.

³³ Vuzharov, "UX & FOMO," 89.

³⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 62.

³⁵ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, X11.

³⁶ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.

³⁷ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.

³⁸ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.

which one is absent. Furthermore, it is interesting to examine if *Hinge* and *Tinder* indeed stimulate their users to secure maximum opportunity and stimulate them to avoid the closing of options in partners. Although noteworthy is that Vuzharov, Giddens, and Bauman are scarce in their description about the role that technology has within the dating culture. The scholars only describe the role of sexuality and love within the online dating culture, they do not mention the role of the dating apps' economic interest as for example personal data. Therefore the following paragraph, Fear of Missing Out Data, will clarify the dating apps economic interest for the stimulation of fomo within their affordances. Van Dijck mentioned that next to social norms also economic interest shape how networking sites operate.³⁹

Fear of Missing Out Data

Van Dijck argued that an online platform's economic and political interests could influence a platform's development, business model and the computer's codes that reconfigure social norms.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is relevant to take economic interests in regard while researching dating apps. Vuzharov argued that dating apps' business models rely on active users, which would make active users one of the most important metrics for the design of dating apps.⁴¹ According to media scholars Albury et al. dating apps are complex data-intensive and mediate and shape cultures of sexuality.⁴² The scholars argue that dating apps would exist on social media business models, where user data is gathered and distributed by corporations, governments, developers and advertisers.⁴³ A wide range of user data would be gathered in the process of using dating apps. The data gathering begins as early as when a user signs up, when for example the app collects users' contact lists, work history and educational backgrounds. Subsequently, the data collection comes in the form of user activity on the dating app, where the interactions are measured and gathered.⁴⁴ Furthermore the geo-location of the users would also be significant as the accumulation of geocoded information enriches the information within the data pool.⁴⁵ Why do these apps rely on data that is generated by active users? According to business scholars Deubener, Velamuri and Schneckenberg freemium business models are crucial for the monetization of the global app industry.⁴⁶ These business models combine a basic product free of charge with more sophisticated product components which users are charged for.⁴⁷ The freemium business model would be the most successful in direct monetization that

³⁹ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 42.

⁴⁰ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 9.

⁴¹ Vuzharov, "UX & FOMO," 88.

⁴² Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating," 2.

⁴³ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating," 2.

⁴⁴ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating," 3.

⁴⁵ Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating," 4.

⁴⁶ Johannes Deubener, Vivek K. Velamuri, Dirk Schneckenberg, "A Typology of Freemium Business Models for Mobile Applications," 24th European Conference on Information Systems, (Summer 2016): 3.

⁴⁷ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, "A Typology," 3.

combines value creation and value capture.⁴⁸ Remarkable is that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* offer a basic product for free and additional product components where users are charged for. Van Dijck argued that ‘free use’ came to mean: ‘paid for’, not in actual money but in the users’ attention and their profiling and behavioral data.⁴⁹ Noteworthy is that only five percent of the freemium app users would be paying customers, which means that the other 95 percent does not pay any fees.⁵⁰ However, according to van Dijck, platforms are more interested in ‘free’ users than in paying users, because platforms can acquire the data of ‘free’ users which makes them more profitable.⁵¹ The users’ data carries immense commercial value, thinking of the possibilities for location-aware advertising and data analytics.⁵² Therefore the dating apps rely on active users as the valuable data is produced through active use. Perhaps that is the reason why according to Vuzharov dating apps take advantage of fomo. As users could be lured to the app when they are reminded of the potential partners they could be missing out on.⁵³

Altogether, this indicates the urgency of active users, which could be stimulated when users experience fomo when they are not actively using the dating apps. Users who avoid the closement of options in partners will generate more personal data by their active use, this makes users who experience fomo probably interesting for the dating apps. Therefore analyzing if the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* indeed stimulate active use is relevant as it seems to be connected to fomo and the underlying economic interests of dating apps. The following chapter, Researching Affordances, will clarify how the dating apps’ affordances can be researched.

Researching Affordances

“Sociality is not simply “rendered technological” by moving to an online space; rather, coded structures are profoundly altering the nature of our connections, creations, and interactions”⁵⁴ As pointed out by scholar van Dijck, coded structures have a mediating role. Therefore, this chapter provides theory that describes how one can study those coded structures that render our sociality within dating apps. By examining these coded structures one can better understand how they might shape our sociality. Theory about affordances and their mechanisms is described in order to highlight how these

⁴⁸ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, “A Typology,” 16.

⁴⁹ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 169.

⁵⁰ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, “A Typology,” 3.

⁵¹ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 170.

⁵² Albury, Burgess, Light, Race, Wilken, “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating,” 5.

⁵³ Vuzharov, “UX & FOMO,” 89.

⁵⁴ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 20.

mechanisms are used as *focus* while analysing affordances. Further is explained how the walkthrough method is used as a *structure* while analysing the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*.

Social processes and the properties of technological artifacts would be interrelated and intertwined, therefore Hutchby proposes to study technologies neither in terms of their interpretive textual properties nor their essential technical properties but in terms of their affordances.⁵⁵ Game researcher Linderoth argues that the history of technological development could be seen as a way of changing what the environment affords the human, as technology could constitute new affordances.⁵⁶ So perhaps the technological development of dating apps affords society new possibilities while dating, such as the fear of missing out on partners. There could be individual differences for the concept of affordances, as for humans, affordances would often be an outcome of training.⁵⁷ One would take actions to perceive what the world around them can afford and they act upon these affordances, which sometimes shows them new possibilities. So there could for instance be differences in what different dating apps ‘teach’ their users. Furthermore, some affordances would only be realizable by ‘experts,’ however Linderoth argues that those affordances would still be recognizable by non-experts.⁵⁸ Those specific affordances could refer to for example dating apps’ additional product components, which are only realizable by freemium app users that pay fees.

Interrelated Mechanisms

But how could one examine the role of fomo within affordances? Sociologists Jenny L. Davis and James B. Chouinard proposed a set of interrelated mechanisms and conditions for a nuanced and dynamic way of analysing affordances. The mechanisms represent gradations in the ways that an artifact affords certain actions.⁵⁹ The mechanisms can serve as an analytical tool while researching the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Examining the affordances mechanisms can show how and in what ways fomo could be stimulated within *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The mechanisms include; *requests*, *demands*, *allow*, *encourage*, *discourage* and *refuse*.⁶⁰ *Requests* and *demands* refer to the bids that the artifacts place upon the users. They especially refer to the technological efficacy, as *requests* and *demands* lead users upon given paths, with different levels of insistence. A *request* invites the user to engage the object in a particular way. A

⁵⁵ Hutchby, "Technologies, texts and affordances," 442.

⁵⁶ Jonas Linderoth, "Beyond the Digital Divide: An Ecological Approach to Gameplay," Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play, (2011): 6.

⁵⁷ Linderoth, "Beyond the Digital Divide," 4.

⁵⁸ Linderoth, "Beyond the Digital Divide," 4.

⁵⁹ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 241.

⁶⁰ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 242.

demand happens when an object's use is conditioned on a particular set of circumstances.⁶¹ For instance *Hinge* and *Tinder* could *demand* the users to give the apps permission to collect their data if the users want to use the dating apps. *Encouragement*, *discouragement* and *refusal* refer to how the artifact responds to the users' desired actions. They especially refer to the artifact's response to the things a user might wish to do. An object *encourages* when it fosters and nourishes some line of action while suppressing other actions. In contrast, an object *discourages* when one line of action is only accessible through a certain concerted effort. For example, *Hinge* and *Tinder* could with certain affordances *encourage* the users to avoid or postpone their choice of a romantic partner. An object *refuses* when it makes certain actions unavailable to the users. *Allow* refers to both bids placed upon the user as on the artifact, an object allows when actions are available.⁶² Important to take in regard is that the affordances' mechanisms are interrelated, when an artifact *encourages* one thing, it thereby also *discourages* other things. If *Tinder* and *Hinge* for example encourage the users to look for new matches they also *discourage* the users to narrow their choices. Davis and Chouinard further mention that the affordances and their mechanisms are shaped by the contexts where they are embedded within, which enlightens the importance of taking the broader context of the object and its use in regard while researching the object's affordances.

The Walkthrough Method

But how could one structure the affordance analysis of *Hinge* and *Tinder*? Media scholars Light, Burgess and Dugua proposed the walkthrough method through which one can perform an affordance analysis of an app. The method examines the environment of expected use and operates an affordance analysis during a technical walkthrough. It investigates embedded cultural values within the app's features and functions by examining deeply how an app frames relationships and interaction of the users.⁶³ Before the technical walkthrough, first the apps' vision, operating model, and governance are described in order to contextualize the process.⁶⁴ This allows one to understand how an app's design expects users to receive and integrate it into their technology usage practices.⁶⁵ The visions regard the app's purpose, target user base and scenarios of use which are often communicated through the app's organisational materials. The operating model regards the app's business strategy and revenue sources which indicate underlying economic and political interests. The governance regards the app's rules and guidelines which are for example shown within the terms of service. Secondly, during the technical walkthrough the affordance analysis gives attention to affordances that occur while registering and entering the app, while everyday

⁶¹ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 243.

⁶² Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 243.

⁶³ Light, Burgess, Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method," 897.

⁶⁴ Light, Burgess, Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method," 888.

⁶⁵ Light, Burgess, Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method," 889.

use, and while suspending, and leaving the app. During the technical walkthrough one gives attention to indicators of embedded cultural discourse. This involves the observation and everyday documentation of the apps' screen, features and flows. The duality of the walkthrough is relevant for this research as the chapter, Fear of Missing Data, made clear that certain affordances could be in favour of *Tinder* and *Hinge*'s economic interests. The dating app's reliance on user data could shape the mechanisms of the affordances. Therefore by first analysing the vision, operating model, and governance one gets the chance to analyse the dating apps' affordances within the context of their economic and political environment.

Altogether, in order to answer this thesis' research question the walkthrough method and the six mechanisms are used to operate an affordance analysis. The walkthrough method serves as a *structure* for the analysis. First, within the examination of the environment of expected use, *Hinge* and *Tinder*'s vision, operating model and governance are investigated by examining how fomo is visible within these elements. Secondly, within the technical walkthrough, the six mechanisms are used as *focus* while analysing the affordances. These mechanisms revealed through which gradations fomo seems to play a role within the affordances.⁶⁶ Within the affordance analysis the focus relies on the affordances that stimulate active use. This is done by examining if the affordances stimulate the awareness of experiences in an environment from which one is absent, if the affordances stimulate to avoid the closing of options in potential partners, and if the affordances stimulate to secure maximum opportunity. The affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* are individually examined and also compared. As mentioned within the theoretical framework 95 percent of the freemium app users would use the free version of the app.⁶⁷ Therefore the free versions of *Hinge* and *Tinder* are used for the analysis. Within the free version of the apps fomo could perhaps play a bigger role as the monetization probably contains the gathering of data that is provided by active use of the apps.

⁶⁶ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 242.

⁶⁷ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, "A Typology," 3.

Analysis

“Therefore, analysing an app requires attention to its embedded sociocultural representations as much as its technological features or data outputs, which also have social and cultural influences”.⁶⁸ As pointed out by scholars, Light, Burgess, and Duguay, both sociocultural aspects as technological aspects should be taken into regard while analysing an app. Therefore within the analysis the focus relies on how *Hinge* and *Tinder*’s technological features are related to the sociocultural aspects as described within the chapters Fear of Missing Love and Fear of Missing Data. The analysis is split into two stages. Firstly, this chapter describes the results of the examination of *Hinge* and *Tinder*’s environment of expected use. During this examination it is described and analysed what role fomo plays within the vision, operating model and the governance of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Secondly, this chapter contains an affordance analysis of *Hinge* and *Tinder* during a technical walkthrough. During the technical walkthrough the six mechanisms (*requests, demands, allow, encourage, discourage, refuse*) are used to display what role fomo plays within the affordances.⁶⁹ One can use the appendix for more information about statements made within analysis.⁷⁰

The Environment of Expected Use

The app store is one of the first places where one meets the **vision** of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Therefore the app store is viewed in order to examine how the apps communicate their vision. For instance, the following title is visible when one searches for *Hinge* within the app store⁷¹; “Hinge: Dating & Relationships”.⁷² *Tinder*’s title within the app store seems to be more broadly and less specific about its goal; “Match. Chat. Date”. Both dating apps clearly communicate that dating is one of its purposes. *Hinge*’s description section within the app store opens with the following text: “Hinge is the dating app for people who want to get off dating apps”. *Tinder* opens with the following; “With 30 billion matches to date, Tinder is the world’s most popular app for meeting new people”.⁷³ Noteworthy is that *Hinge* seems to suggest that the app is for people who want to meet someone as it mentions that it is for people who want to get off dating apps. In contrast *Tinder* seems to highlight the endless romantic options that it provides. Further is mentioned within *Hinge*’s app store description; “A great option for those fed up with temporary love”. This seems to suggest that *Hinge* is for people who are looking for permanent love. This therefore does

⁶⁸ Light, Burgess, Duguay, “The Walkthrough Method,” 885.

⁶⁹ Davis, and Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances,” 242.

⁷⁰ Appendix p 27-30

⁷¹ The appstore within iOS

⁷² Appendix 1.1 *Hinge*’s vision

⁷³ Appendix 1.2 *Tinder*’s Vision

not support a concept of fomo where love would be temporary and where dating as according to Bauman would be seen as a recreational activity.⁷⁴ Furthermore stated within *Tinder's* description section; “And remember, when in doubt, give a swipe right. Trust us, the more options you have, the better looking life becomes”. This seems to emphasize the securing of maximum options, which could constitute fomo by establishing choice paralysis.⁷⁵ When comparing the communicated visions, it is noteworthy that *Hinge* clearly communicates a vision that supports more relation-oriented use than *Tinder's* vision does. As in contrast, *Tinder's* vision seems to communicate the importance of maximum partner choices, which according to Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, and Koestner could stimulate fomo.⁷⁶ Moreover, *Hinge's* vision gives the impression that it does not try to keep the users active on the app, which could become clear during the technical walkthrough. However, it is remarkable that *Hinge* seems to suggest a certain urgency of a dating app when someone wants to meet someone.

These different visions could be established due to different **operating models**. However, remarkable is that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* seem to manage their monetization through the freemium business model. Both apps offer a combination of a basic product free of charge and more sophisticated product components within a paid subscription. It seems that the basic products of *Hinge* and *Tinder* already offer the apps diverse opportunities for revenue sources. As both *Hinge* and *Tinder* share on their website within their privacy policy that user data can be used for data mining, can be shared with other companies, and can be used for advertisements.^{77 78} *Tinder* for instance shows advertisements within the basic product, *Hinge* on the other hand does now show any advertisements. Furthermore, it seems that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* have a partnership with Facebook and Instagram as both apps offer the users the possibility to link their profile with their Facebook and Instagram profile. This shows how *Hinge* and *Tinder* create value with their basic product. As the gathered user data can be sold to advertisers, data miners and data could be traded with other partnership platforms. Relevant to take in regard is that more active users will result in more gathered data. Therefore *Hinge* and *Tinder's* economic interests will benefit from active use, which could be stimulated by fomo. Supplementary revenue could be collected by *Hinge* and *Tinder's* paid subscriptions. For instance, *Hinge* offers the ‘Preferred Members’ subscription that gives the users additional components such as seeing everyone who liked them, more advanced partner preferences, and sending unlimited likes. It is noteworthy that within *Hinge's* app it is stated that the ‘preferred members’ get twice as many dates. This could suggest that more opportunities secure more

⁷⁴ Bauman, Liquid Love, 65.

⁷⁵ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, “Fear of Missing out”, 725.

⁷⁶ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, “Fear of Missing out”, 725.

⁷⁷ “Terms,” Hinge, accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hinge.co/terms>

⁷⁸ “Privacy,” Tinder, accessed on May 2, 2020 <https://policies.tinder.com/privacy/intl/nl>

chances to find a romantic partner, this seems to take advantage of fomo. In addition, *Tinder* even offers two subscriptions; Tinder Plus and Tinder Gold. Where Tinder Plus gives the users additional components such as sending unlimited likes and the ability to undo a dislike or like. Perhaps this ability to undo a dislike is a way of securing the maximum choices even more for the users who experience fomo. Tinder Gold gives the users even more additional components, such as the ability to see which users already liked them, so that they do not have to miss any opportunities. Altogether, it seems that *Hinge* and *Tinder's* additional components provide the users more opportunities to match with other users, perhaps those additional options are designed to exploit fomo.

Despite *Hinge* and *Tinder's* different vision, the operating models still seem generally similar. This makes *Hinge* ‘designed to be deleted’ concept less trustworthy as the app, just like *Tinder*, relies on active users, which could be stimulated when users experience fomo. Although both apps offer paid subscriptions as well, as mentioned before 95 percent of freemium app users would not pay any fees.⁷⁹ Furthermore, platforms would be more interested in not paying users as data would be of more value than fees.⁸⁰ This makes it interesting to view how this translates to *Hinge* and *Tinder's* **governance**. For instance, *Hinge* clearly communicates the recommended use as *Hinge* has a page on their website, ‘8 ways we are’, that explains how the app is designed to be deleted.⁸¹ Within the page users are for example, recommended to share their religion, education and lifestyle habits. In contrast *Tinder* does not encourage the users to share certain information. As on *Tinder's* page, community guidelines, the app only shares what behaviour is not appreciated within the community.⁸² The difference between *Hinge* and *Tinder* here is that *Hinge* shares recommendations on how to improve the chance to meet someone through the app. Within *Hinge*'s ‘8 ways we are’ page it is argued that matches mean more when one is thoughtful with giving likes.⁸³ This does not seem to encourage a concept of fomo as one is encouraged to avoid choice paralysis.

Altogether, within the environment of expected use it is noteworthy that *Hinge*'s vision and governance seem to be more focused on establishing a relationship through the app than *Tinder*'s vision and governance do. However, both *Hinge* and *Tinder* operate their apps through a freemium business model which suggests that both apps are shaped by the same economic interests. Therefore the exploitation of fomo would be in favor of these economic interests. This makes it interesting if and how

⁷⁹ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, “A Typology,” 3.

⁸⁰ van Dijck, The culture of connectivity, 70.

⁸¹ Designed-to-be-deleted,” Hinge, accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hinge.co/designetdobe-deleted>

⁸² “Guidelines,” Tinder, accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://www.gotinder.com/community-guidelines?locale=nl>

⁸³ Designed-to-be-deleted,” Hinge, accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hinge.co/designetdobe-deleted>

the different visions and governance result in the role of fomo within the affordances. These visions, operating models and governance are taken in regard during the following technical walkthrough.

The Technical Walkthrough

During this walkthrough the six mechanisms (*requests, demands, allow, encourage, discourage, refuse*) are used to display what role fomo plays within the affordances. These mechanisms reveal through which gradations fomo plays a role within the affordances.⁸⁴ The six mechanisms are italicized when used in the text in order to highlight them.

Registration and Entry Stage

This paragraph examines the role of fomo within the registration and entry stage of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. When one opens the apps for the first time it is noteworthy that both apps mention that users agree to the app's term of use by logging into the app. This includes permission for the processing and use of user data. Therefore the apps *demand* the users to give them permission to process and use their data. *Hinge* for example shares the following text within the first page after a user logs in for the first time; "By signing up for *Hinge* you agree to our Terms of Service. Learn how we process and use your data in our Privacy Policy and how we use cookies and similar technology in our Cookies Policy". This reveals the freemium business model that *Hinge* and *Tinder* both seem to operate. This business model is benefitted by fomo that could increase active app use. The stimulation of active app use appears for example when the users completed their basic information within the registration, where the users are *encouraged* to put on their notifications. Both apps *encourage* as both welcome a particular line of response, especially vis-à-vis alternate lines of response.⁸⁵ *Tinder* for instance does this by stating the following text after completing the profile editing; "Keep me posted. Find out when you get a match or a message". *Hinge* *encourages* the users further by utilizing fomo; "Never miss a message from someone great" (Figure 1). This seems to emphasize the securing of maximum opportunity which, according to Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, and Koestner, constitutes fomo.⁸⁶ When one chooses to disable the notifications within *Hinge* the following is argued within the screen; "Are you sure? By disabling notifications, you will miss new likes, matches and messages from other members" (Figure 2). This *discourages* the users to put off the notifications as the text suggests that one then will miss opportunities. Thereby this *discouragement* highlights one's fear of missing out experiences. Moreover, both *Hinge* and *Tinder* *demand* their users to link their email address to their profile, as further use of the app is *refused* when one does not link the

⁸⁴ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 242.

⁸⁵ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 243.

⁸⁶ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, "Fear of Missing out", 725.

email address to their profile. Remarkable is that the apps for instance send users an email when they have a new match or message from a match. This again reminds the users of possible experiences which could be missed out on when one does not return to the app.

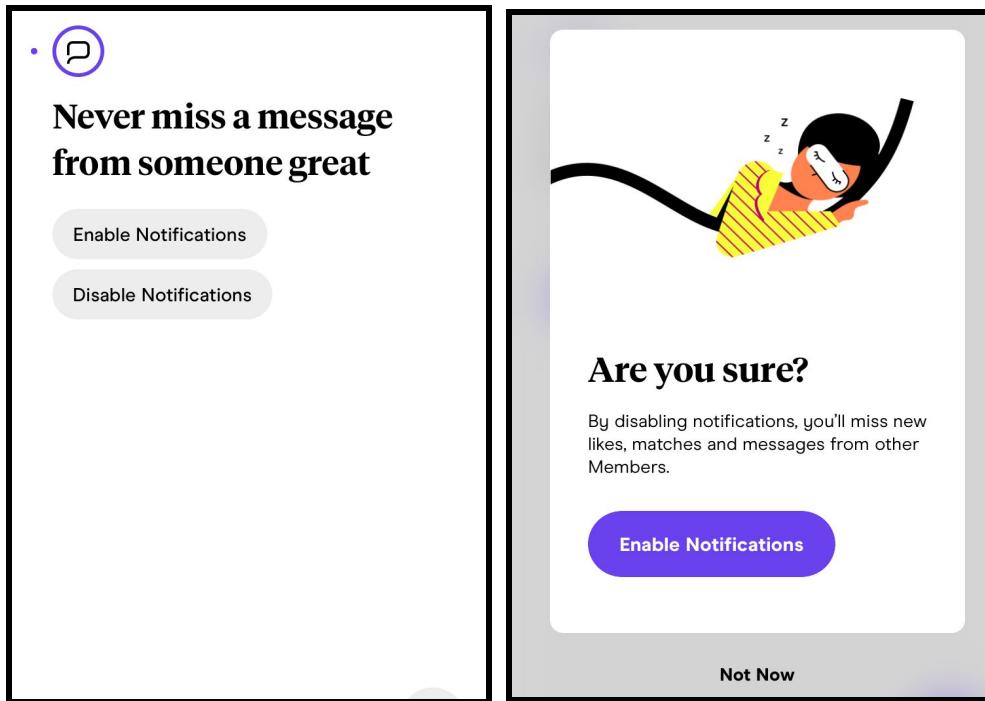


Figure 1 and figure 2 : Hinge encourages notifications⁸⁷

Altogether, it seems that fomo does play a role within the registration and entry stage of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Both apps try to *encourage* active app use by highlighting the missing out on experiences when one is not active. Noteworthy is that within the *encouragement* of putting on notifications, *Hinge* seems to emphasize fomo more than *Tinder*. When one takes the visions in regard the opposite would have made more sense. The vision of *Tinder* seems to be more related to fomo than *Hinge*'s relationship oriented vision. The following paragraph examines what role fomo plays within *Hinge* and *Tinder*'s affordances during everyday use, this regards the affordances that registered users regularly engage with.⁸⁸ Therefore, both apps have been daily used in order to examine how and in what affordances fomo plays a role.

Everyday Use

During the everyday use of *Hinge* and *Tinder* it became clear that there are similarities and differences of the role of fomo within the affordances. Perhaps these similarities are due to the similar operating model

⁸⁷ *Hinge*, “Notifications”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 7.19.0

⁸⁸ Light, Burgess, Duguay, “The Walkthrough Method,” 13.

of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. For instance, within the main screen of both the apps the other users are shown. These regard the potential matches which one is *allowed* to match with if both press the ‘like button’. When both users press this button the users become a match with each other and are *allowed* to talk to each other within another screen in the app. Remarkable is that talking without a match is *refused*. Moreover, both *Hinge* and *Tinder* allow the users to send a limited amount of likes every day. This could *encourage* users to be active the other day when they reached the limited amounts of likes within one day. Otherwise they will miss opportunities for more options. According to Dogan fomo would arise when one is aware of favorable and self-relevant experiences in an environment from which one is absent.⁸⁹ When you take this in regard it is noteworthy that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* show new potential matches everyday. These shown potential matches are based on one’s location and one’s selected allowed distance with other users. However, after a while both the apps *refuse* one to see any more potential matches, although most times the day after there are again new potential matches shown. The latter could *encourage* to be active on the apps everyday as everyday there are possibilities for more options. This could constitute fomo as not being active everyday results in missing potential partners. Moreover a similarity between the role of fomo within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* could be the ‘preferences section’. Within this section the users select preferences for the users they want to come across within the main screen, for example preferences as age and allowed distance with each other. When there are no potential matches shown any more, both the apps

request to broaden these preferences by mentioning that enbroaden them results in seeing more potential matches (Figure 3 and 4).

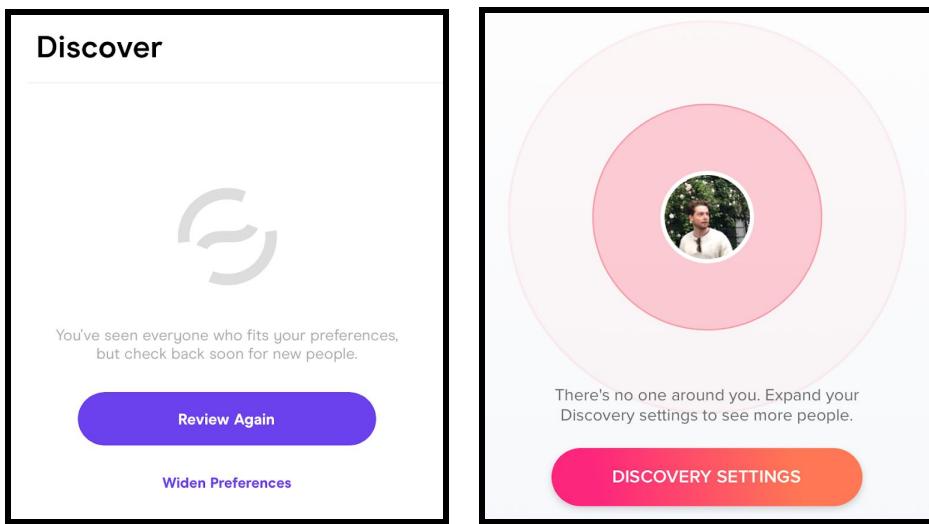


Figure 3 and 4:
Hinge (left) and *Tinder* encourage other preferences⁹⁰ ⁹¹

⁸⁹ Dogan, “Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)?,” 527.

⁹⁰ *Hinge*, “Preferences”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 7.19.0

⁹¹ *Tinder*, “Notifications”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 11.16.0

Davis and Chouinard mentioned that what an artifact requests it can also encourage.⁹² For instance, changing the preference settings is *encouraged* when no more potential matches are shown. Because the *request* stimulates fomo by suggesting that broadening these settings results in more options for potential partners. More options of potential partners shown within the apps could additionally *encourage* more active use as the users have the chance to look for more options.

Some differences of the role that fomo plays within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* could be due to their different vision and governance. The role of fomo within *Hinge* seems to be less obvious at first sight, perhaps this is caused by its vision. For example *Hinge* has the ‘We Met’ function where it is *requested* to share with the app if one went on a date with a match. Within the app the following information about the function is shared: “Privately let us know how your dates went and we will improve your recommendations” and “Learning which dates were great will help us find more of them for you” (Figure 5). This seems to relate to the relationship oriented vision, although this function also relates to fomo. As the text suggests that feedback can result in better options for potential matches. Furthermore it states it will supply more dates for the user, more options. Altogether this seems to *encourage* one to look further and therefore to avoid the option-closement regarding a potential partner. It relates to Bauman’s stating internet dating would avoid closements of partners options in a world of fluid chances as *Hinge* suggests that one great date could result in even more great dates.⁹³ Another fomo related function within *Hinge* could be the ‘Most Compatible’ function, which *allows* the user to see one user everyday who would be the most compatible based on one’s preferences.⁹⁴ This could *encourage* one to go to the app everyday to view this best option. This again utilizes the fear of missing out on better options.

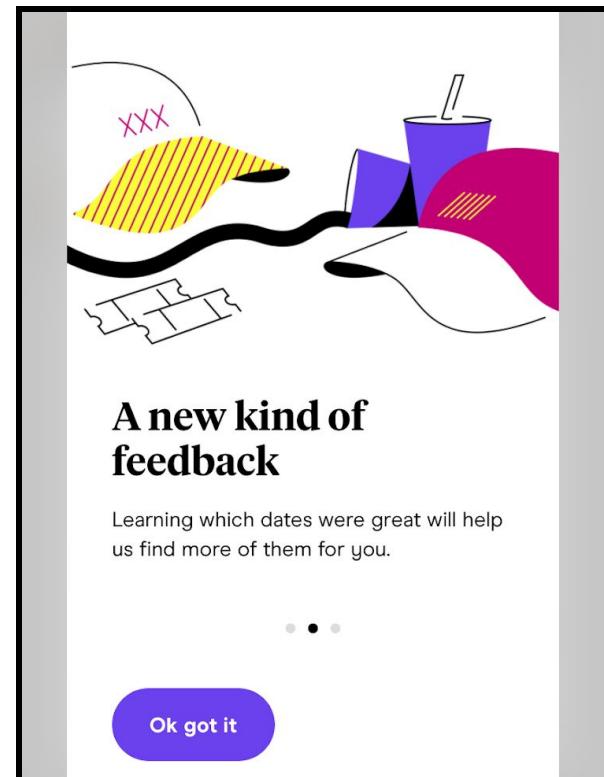


Figure 5: *Hinge* encourages more options⁹⁵

⁹² Davis, and Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances,” 243.

⁹³ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.

⁹⁴ “Most Compatible,” *Hinge*, accessed on May 2, 2020.

<https://hingeapp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011233073-What-is-Most-Compatible->

⁹⁵ *Hinge*, “We Met”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 7.19.0

Figure 6: *Tinder's Top Picks*⁹⁶

It is noteworthy that the ‘Most Compatible’ function seems to be somewhat similar to *Tinder’s* ‘Top Picks’ function (Figure 6). This function *allows* one to see a top ten of recommended potential matches every day. Noteworthy is that *Tinder* shows ten recommended matches and *Hinge* only shares one every day. Within the ‘Top Picks’ one can like one of the top recommended potential matches every day. One is *refused* to like more than one ‘Top Picks’. Similar to *Hinge*’s ‘Most Compatible’ this function as well seems to *encourage* one to go to the app every day to look for the best options. This seems to be in line with the argument of Davis and Chouinard that apps *encourage* one by carefully designed algorithms that present users with the content, in this case potential matches, most likely to evoke engagement.⁹⁷ *Tinder* moreover has a differentiating function compared to *Hinge*; the ‘Matches’ function (Figure 7). This function is shown next to the screen where one can chat with matches. The function shows every profile update of the matches, as for example new photos or new profile texts. This makes it easier to see every update of the matches. The screen *encourages* the user to view these updates with a red notification that tells one there is something new to see. This seems to utilize fomo as it makes one aware of the experience in an environment from which one is absent, and it again *encourages* active app use. Furthermore, it is remarkable that both *Hinge* and *Tinder* *encourage* the users to be active on the app with the notifications that tell that other users liked them. *Hinge* for example has a separate area within the app where one is *allowed* to view the profiles of the users that liked them.

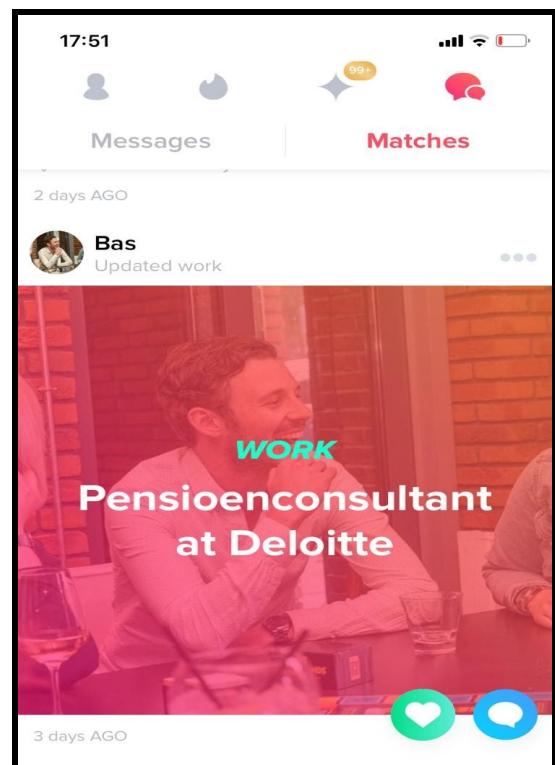
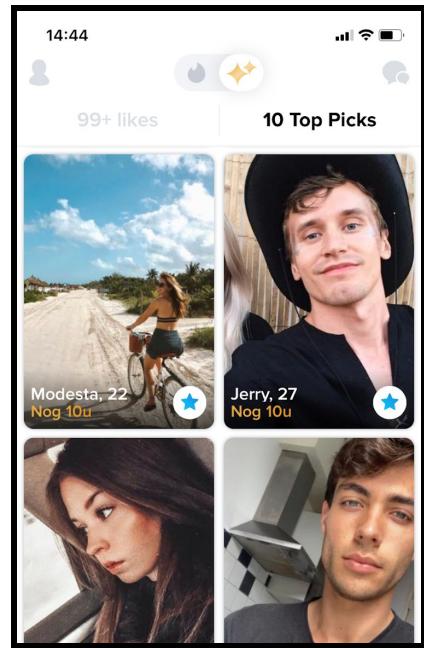


Figure 7: *Tinder’s ‘Matches’*⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Tinder*, “Top Picks”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 11.16.0

⁹⁷ Davis, and Chouinard, “Theorizing Affordances,”243.

⁹⁸ *Tinder*, “Matches”, purchased in Apple App Store. Version 11.16.0

A push notification is sent when one receives a like from another user. This way *Hinge* encourages one to be active on the app by sharing the fact that an option for a potential match occurs. *Tinder* on the other hand has a function that tells how many users already liked them, although one is *refused* to see who those users are. So *Tinder* therefore *encourages* one to be active on the app in order to find those other users by liking other users on the app. Therefore it seems that within this specific affordance mechanism fomo plays a bigger role within *Tinder* than within *Hinge*. Altogether it seems that during everyday use within both *Hinge* and *Tinder* fomo plays a prominent role within the different affordances. The following paragraph examines what role fomo plays within *Hinge* and *Tinder*'s affordances during leaving the apps.

Suspension, Closure and Leaving

When one during closure examines the role of fomo within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder* it is noteworthy that the apps use fomo several times to encourage the user to return to the app. For example one could choose not to enter the app environment. Although, one is still *encouraged* to be active on the app when one does not enter the app as both *Hinge* and *Tinder* send notifications about for example messages from matches that remind users of experiences that they could miss out on. However, one is *allowed* to unsubscribe from all notifications. Therefore the role of fomo can be limited, as then it will not be *requested* or *encouraged* to be active on the apps by those notifications. One could furthermore delete the apps of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Remarkable for *Tinder* is that after the *Tinder* app is deleted *Tinder* still sends notifications to the user's email. Those notifications for example share that one has a new match. These notifications will then still *encourage* one to return and be active on the app. Moreover one could also delete the *Hinge* and *Tinder* account. Remarkable is that within *Tinder* this is *discouraged* as when one tries to delete one's account it is requested to put the account on pause instead. A paused account is only visible for the matches, yet one is still *allowed* to chat with these matches. So this account can still receive notifications from the app that *encourages* participation on the app. *Hinge* does not *request* to put one's profile on pause when one requests to delete the account. Therefore it seems that when one leaves *Tinder* fomo is more utilized than when one leaves *Hinge*.

To wrap it up. Within both the affordances mechanisms of *Hinge* and *Tinder* fomo seems to play a prominent role. Noteworthy is that the role of fomo within *Hinge* seems to be less obvious at first sight, perhaps this is due to its more relationship oriented vision. However *Hinge*'s operating model manages its monetization through the freemium business model, just as *Tinder* does. The stimulation of fomo within the basic product of both apps will benefit the economic interest of these operating models. The role of fomo within the apps is visible when the apps for example *encourage* the users to put on the notifications in order to make the users aware when experiences occur within the apps' environments. Furthermore the

limited amount of likes one can send within the apps could *encourage* the users to be active every day in order to not miss out on options. The role of fomo within the apps does seem to be different. It seems that the role of fomo within *Tinder* is more focused on establishing more options, while the role of fomo within *Hinge* on establishing the best option. *Tinder's* ‘Top Picks’ function and *Hinge's* ‘Most Compatible’ function display this different role of fomo within the apps. Perhaps this is due to their different visions.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the following **Research Question**: *What role does the so-called fear of missing out play within the affordances of Hinge and Tinder?*

The first paragraph of the analysis, The Environment of Expected Use, described the role of fomo in regards to the economic interests of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. The results of this chapter have shown that *Hinge's* vision seems to support a more relationship oriented use where fomo does not seem to play a role, in contrast *Tinder's* vision seems to emphasize the securing of maximum options when dating. This suggests that within *Tinder's* vision fomo seems to play a role as Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, and Koestner argued that securing maximum opportunity would constitute fomo.⁹⁹ However, both *Hinge* and *Tinder* operate their apps through a freemium business model which means that both apps are shaped through the same economic interests. The exploitation of fomo would be in favor of these economic interests as 95 percent of these freemium app users would not pay any fees and instead create value with their data.¹⁰⁰

Within the second paragraph of the analysis, The Technical Walkthrough, it became clear that fomo indeed plays a role within the affordances of both *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Although the role of fomo within *Hinge* seems to be less obvious at first sight. Perhaps this is due to its relationship oriented vision. For example, *Hinge's* ‘We Met’ function seems to relate to its relationship-oriented vision, however even when the date was great it still *encourages* one to avoid the option-closement regarding a partner. This relates to Bauman stating that internet dating would avoid closements of partners options in a world of fluid chances.¹⁰¹ According to Dogan one could describe fomo as the awareness of favorable and self-relevant experiences in an environment from which one is absent.¹⁰² When you take this in regard it is remarkable that both apps *encourage* the users to put on the notifications in order to make the users aware

⁹⁹ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, “Fear of Missing out”, 725.

¹⁰⁰ Deubener, Velamuri, Scheckenberg, “A Typology,”, 3.

¹⁰¹ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.

¹⁰² Dogan, “Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)?,” 527.

when experiences occur within the apps' environments. This as well confirms Vuzharov statement that dating apps' notifications would highlight fomo by reminding the users of the potential partners they could be missing out on.¹⁰³ *Hinge* even seems to utilize fomo in order to discourage the users from turning the notifications off by arguing that turning notifications off results in missing matches. In addition, *Tinder*'s 'Matches' function as well seems to utilize the awareness of missing out on experiences as it *encourages* the users to view every prolific update of the matches. Furthermore both the apps *allow* the users to send a limited amount of likes every day which could *encourage* the users to be active every day in order to not miss out on potential partners and secure maximum opportunity. However, the role of fomo within the apps' affordances seems to be different. It seems that the role of fomo within *Tinder* is focused on establishing more options, while the role of fomo within *Hinge* is focused on establishing the best option. *Tinder*'s 'Top Picks' function and *Hinge*'s 'Most Compatible' function display this different role of fomo. As for instance the 'Top Picks' provide the users ten best potential matches and the 'Most Compatible' provides the users just one best potential match. This differing role of fomo seems to be in line with the different vision of *Hinge* and *Tinder*.

Reflection and further research

The walkthrough method provided a suited *structure* and the mechanisms provided a suited *focus* for this thesis' analysis. The examination of the environment of expected use provided a contextualisation for the following technical walkthrough. During the technical walkthrough the six mechanisms displayed through which gradations fomo plays a role within the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. This research has shown that fomo clearly plays a prominent role within both the operating models as the affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Investigating the role of fomo within the affordances of both *Hinge* and *Tinder* allowed them to be compared and contrasted, which made it easier to perceive several aspects of the affordances mechanisms. Although this research only focused on two dating apps, which are both owned by the same umbrella company. Perhaps comparing two dating apps that are not owned by the same company shows different results. Further research could also focus on more dating apps in order to get a broader understanding of the role of fomo within our online dating culture. Furthermore, this research primarily focused on the affordances within the basic product components of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Further research could also investigate the role of fomo within the additional product components which the users have to pay for. This would also give the opportunity to investigate the relation of the role of fomo between the free versions and the paid version of *Hinge* and *Tinder*.

¹⁰³ Vuzharov, "UX & FOMO," 89.

Bibliography

- Albury, Kath, Jean Burgess, Ben Light, Kane Race, and Rowan Wilken. 2017. “Data Cultures of Mobile Dating and Hook-up Apps: Emerging Issues for Critical Social Science Research.” *Big Data and Society* 4 (2): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951717720950>.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Liquid Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Chin, Kristi, Robin S. Edelstein, and Philip A. Vernon. “Attached to Dating Apps: Attachment Orientations and Preferences for Dating Apps.” *Mobile Media and Communication* 7, no. 1 (2019): 41–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157918770696>.
- Davis, Jenny L., and James B. Chouinard. “Theorizing Affordances: From Request to Refuse.” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 36, no. 4 (2016): 241–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467617714944>.
- Deubener, Johannes, Vivek K. Velamuri, and Dirk Schneckenberg. “A Typology of Freemium Business Models for Mobile Applications.” *24th European Conference on Information Systems*, (Summer 2016): 1-20.
- Van Dijck, José. *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Dogan, Volkan. “Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)? Exposing the Link Between the Self and the FoMO Through Self-Construal.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 50, no. 4 (2019): 524–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022119839145>.
- Garda, Maria B., and Veli Matti Karhulahti. “Let’s Play Tinder! Aesthetics of a Dating App.” *Games and Culture*, 2019, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019891328>.
- Giddens, Anthony . *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Gillespie, Tarleton. “Platforms Intervene.” *Social Media and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115580479>.
- Hinge. “Designed-to-be-deleted. Accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hinge.co/selected-to-be-deleted>.
- Hinge. ‘Homepage’. Accessed on February 20, 2020. <https://hinge.co/>
- Hinge. “Most Compatible”. Accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hingeapp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360011233073-What-is-Most-Compatible->
- Hinge. “Terms,”. Accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://hinge.co/terms>.

Hodkinson, Chris. 2019. “‘Fear of Missing Out’ (FOMO) Marketing Appeals: A Conceptual Model.” *Journal of Marketing Communications* 25 (1): 65–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2016.1234504>.

Hutchby, Ian. "Technologies, texts and affordances." *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 441-56.

Hobbs, Mitchell, Stephen Owen, and Livia Gerber. “Liquid Love? Dating Apps, Sex, Relationships and the Digital Transformation of Intimacy.” *Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 2 (2017): 271–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783316662718>.

Justin McLeod. Hinge, purchased in the Apple App Store. Version 7.19.0

Linderoth, Jonas. “Beyond the Digital Divide: An Ecological Approach to Gameplay.” Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: *Think Design Play*, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.26503/todigra.v1i1.9>.

Light, Ben, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay. “The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps.” *New Media and Society* 20, no. 3 (2018): 881–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438>.

MacLeod, Caitlin, and Victoria McArthur. “The Construction of Gender in Dating Apps: An Interface Analysis of Tinder and Bumble.” *Feminist Media Studies* 19, no. 6 (2019): 822–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2018.1494618>.

Matchgroup. “Our company”. Accessed on February 20, 2020. <https://mtch.com/>

Milyavskaya, Marina, Mark Saffran, Nora Hope, and Richard Koestner. “Fear of Missing out: Prevalence, Dynamics, and Consequences of Experiencing FOMO.” *Motivation and Emotion* 42, no. 5 (2018): 725–37. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-018-9683-5>.

Sumter, Sindy R. Laura Vandebosch, and Loes Ligtenberg. “Love Me Tinder: Untangling Emerging Adults’ Motivations for Using the Dating Application Tinder.” *Telematics and Informatics* 34, no. 1 (2017): 67–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.04.009>.

Tinder Inc. Tinder, purchased in the Apple App Store. Version 11.16.0

Tinder.”Homepage”. Accessed on February 20, 2020. <https://tinder.com/?lang=en>

Tinder. “Privacy”. Accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://policies.tinder.com/privacy/intl/nl>.

Tinder. “Guidelines”. Accessed on May 2, 2020. <https://www.gotinder.com/community-guidelines?locale=nl>.

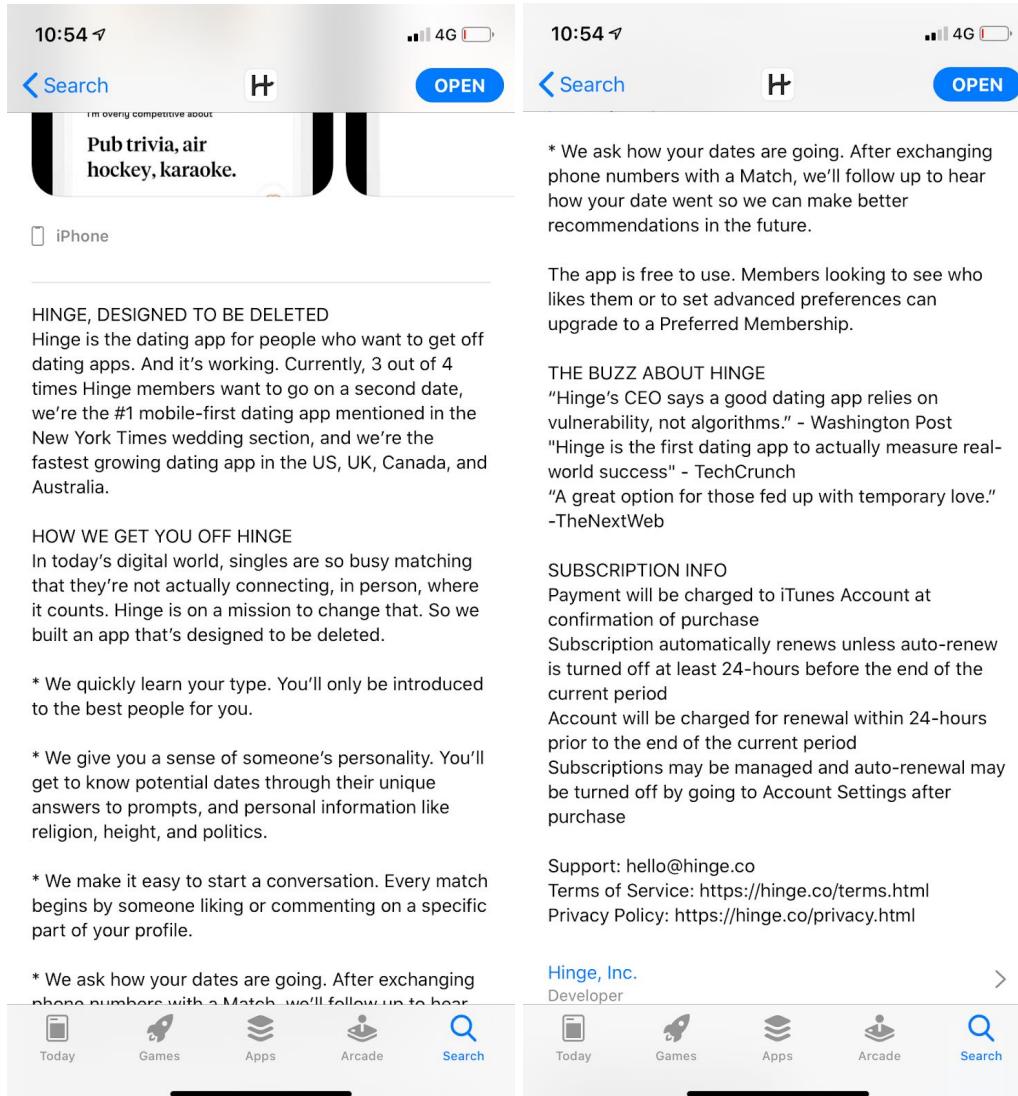
Vuzharov, Mihail. “UX & FOMO. Looking for Love or Looking for Options?” *Digital Age in Semiotics & Communication* 2 (2019): 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.33919/dasc.19.2.5>.

Appendix

This appendix includes screenshots of the content within the Apple app store's regarding *Hinge* and *Tinder's* vision. Furthermore this appendix includes a scheme of elements of fomo within *Hinge* and *Tinder's* affordances.

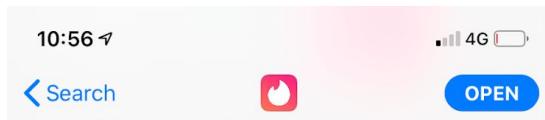
Appendix 1.1 Hinge's vision

These screenshots contain the text that displays *Hinge*'s vision, as shown within the Apple app store.



Appendix 1.2 Tinder's Vision

These screenshots contain the text that displays *Tinder's* vision, as shown within the Apple app store.



With 30 billion matches to date, Tinder® is the world's most popular app for meeting new people. Think of us as your most dependable wingmate — wherever you go, we'll be there. If you're here to meet new people, expand your social network, meet locals when you're travelling, or just live in the now, you've come to the right place. We're called "the world's hottest app" for a reason: we spark more than 26 million matches per day. How many dating apps do that?

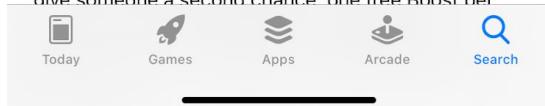
Match. Chat. Date. Tinder is easy and fun — use the Swipe Right™ feature to like someone, use the Swipe Left™ feature to pass. If someone likes you back, it's a match! We invented the double opt-in so that 2 people will only match when there's a mutual interest. No stress. No rejection. Just tap through the profiles you're interested in, chat online with your matches, and then step away from your phone, meet up in the real world and spark something new.

Now, let's get started. And remember, when in doubt, give a Swipe Right™. Trust us, the more options you have, the better-looking life becomes.

Welcome to Tinder — the largest, hottest community of singles in the world. Don't be shy, come on over.

MORE FEATURES? THAT'S A PLUS

Upgrade to Tinder Plus® for premium features, including unlimited likes, so you can use the Swipe Right feature to your heart's content; Passport to chat with singles anywhere around the world; Rewind to give someone a second chance; one free Boost per



Appendix 1.3 Scheme of elements of fomo within affordances

This scheme shows which elements of fomo are visible within the several affordances of *Hinge* and *Tinder*. Within the analysis the six mechanisms (*requests, demands, allow, encourage, discourage, refuse*) are used to display what role fomo plays within the affordances. These mechanisms revealed through which graduations fomo plays a role within the affordances.¹⁰⁴

	The stimulation of the awareness of experiences in an environment from which one is absent ¹⁰⁵	The stimulation of securing maximum opportunity ¹⁰⁶	The stimulation of avoiding the option-closment regarding potential partners ¹⁰⁷
Notifications	x	x	
Emails	x		
Limited amount of likes	x	x	
Almost everyday not potential matches	x		
Adjusting preferences when no any more potential matches are shown		x	
Hinge's 'We Met'			x
Hinge' 'Most Compatible'	x	x	
Tinder's "Top Picks"	x	x	
Tinder's 'Matches'	x		
Users who liked you	x		
Tinder sending emails after being deleted	x		x

¹⁰⁴ Davis, and Chouinard, "Theorizing Affordances," 242.

¹⁰⁵ Dogan, "Why Do People Experience the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO)?," 527.

¹⁰⁶ Milyavskaya, Saffran, Hope, Koestner, "Fear of Missing out", 725.

¹⁰⁷ Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 65.