



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAM OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

**THE ROLE OF AFFORDANCES IN ONLINE DATING
EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN ON BUMBLE IN TURKEY**

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

ISTANBUL, 12, 2024

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Master of Communication Studies Thesis

2024

**THE ROLE OF AFFORDANCES IN ONLINE DATING
EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN ON BUMBLE IN TURKEY**

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A thesis (or Project) submitted to
the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Communication Studies in
2024

Istanbul, 12, 2024

APPROVAL

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To my family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Aylin Sunam Audry, for her heartfelt and never-ending support, patience, and guidance throughout my thesis process and participation in her research project. I am also deeply grateful to Asst. Prof. Dr. Özen Baş, Asst. Prof. Dr. İrem İnceođlu, and Asst. Prof. Dr. Güzde Cöbek for their great support during this process.

I express my sincere gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Levent Soysal, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bülent Diken, and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Melis Behlil for their advice, encouragement to push my limits, and support in making me see different possibilities.

I am very thankful to Meriç and Bengisu for being the best companions in this journey and hopefully in future ones, and to Mert for lightening my burden and giving me encouragement. You are the most precious gifts this journey has given me. I am also deeply grateful to Elif for always being my biggest champion.

Finally, I am eternally grateful to my mother, father and brother for their unconditional love, and support, and for believing in me even when I did not.

THE ROLE OF AFFORDANCES IN ONLINE DATING EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN ON BUMBLE IN TURKEY

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to understand the role of app affordances in the online dating experiences of young, metropolitan, heterosexual, and non-heterosexual women on the dating platform Bumble in Turkey. Firstly, it examines how Bumble has incorporated its feminist premise into its current app architecture. Secondly, it analyses how the affordances of Bumble, a self-identified feminist dating app, are shaped mutually by the online dating practices of young women in Turkey. This study builds upon existing scholarships of techno-feminism, the mutual shaping of technology and society, and the affordances. The concept of affordances was employed in both theoretical and methodological approaches. The walkthrough analysis method was employed to understand the most recent iteration of Bumble's brand identity, and app architecture, it was also used to determine to what extent its stated feminist objective was reflected in its design. Based on these initial findings, the critical app analysis technique was employed by conducting interviews to understand how young adult women perceive Bumble and engage with it, and how the affordances are shaped. This study is based on data collected through walkthrough analyses and critical app analysis technique interviews with 16 young adult women between 18 and 30, comprising both urban heterosexual and non-heterosexual individuals in Istanbul, Turkey. The features of the app's architecture that are informed by Bumble's feminist positioning create a sense of comfort and safety for young female users, albeit to a limited extent. However, recently introduced features have the effect of undermining the capacity of women-initiated conversations. Additionally, some of the affordances become redundant due to differences in user practices and the cultural context of Turkey. This thesis illustrates the multiplicity of affordances of Bumble (Pentzhold and Bischof 2019), and how they are shaped mutually by urban young female user practices (Costa 2018) in the cultural context of Turkey.

Keywords: dating apps, online dating, Bumble, affordances, techno-feminism, gender, Turkey



TÜRKİYE'DEKİ KADINLARIN BUMBLE'DAKİ ÇEVİRİMİÇİ TANIŞMA DENEYİMLERİNDE OLANAKLARIN ROLÜ VE SINIRLILIKLARIN ROLÜ

ÖZET

Bu tez, Türkiye'de metropolde yaşayan, heteroseksüel ve heteroseksüel olmayan genç kadınların tanışma platformu Bumble'daki çevrimiçi flört deneyimlerinde uygulama olanaklarının rolünü anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. İlk olarak, Bumble'ın feminist önermesini mevcut uygulama mimarisine nasıl dahil ettiğini incelemektedir. İkinci olarak, kendini feminist olarak tanımlayan bir tanışma uygulaması olan Bumble'ın olanaklarının Türkiye'deki genç kadınların çevrimiçi flört pratikleriyle beraber nasıl şekillendiğini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, teknofeminizm, teknoloji ve toplumun karşılıklı biçimlenişi ve olanaklar kavramı üzerine mevcut araştırmalara dayanmaktadır. Olanaklar kavramı, hem teorik hem de metodolojik yaklaşımlarda, walkthrough analiz ve çözümsel uygulama analizi tekniği uygulanarak kullanılmıştır. Walkthrough analizi yöntemi, Bumble'ın marka kimliği, ve uygulama mimarisinin son halini anlamak için kullanılırken, aynı zamanda belirtilen feminist amacının tasarımına ne ölçüde yansıdığını belirlemek için de kullanılmıştır. Bu bulgularına dayanarak, genç yetişkin kadınların uygulamayı nasıl algıladıklarını ve uygulamayla nasıl etkileşime geçtiklerini ve dolayısıyla bu süreçte olanakların nasıl şekillendiğini daha iyi anlamak için çözümsel uygulama analizi görüşmeleri yapılmıştır. Bu çalışma, İstanbul, Türkiye'de metropolde yaşayan, heteroseksüel ve heteroseksüel olmayan bireylerden oluşan 18-30 yaş arası 16 genç yetişkin kadınla yapılan walkthrough analizler ve çözümsel uygulama analizi tekniği görüşmeleri yoluyla toplanan verilere dayanmaktadır. Uygulamanın mimarisinin Bumble'ın feminist konumlandırmasından beslenen özellikleri, genç kadın kullanıcılar için sınırlı da olsa bir rahatlık ve güvenlik hissi yaratmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, yakın zamanda tanıtılan özellikler, yalnızca kadınların konuşma başlatabiliyor olmasının kapasitesini zayıflatma etkisine sahiptir. Ayrıca, kullanıcı pratiklerindeki farklılıklar ve Türkiye'nin kültürel bağlamının farklılığı nedeniyle bazı olanaklar gereksiz hale gelmektedir. Bu tez, Bumble'ın sunduğu olanaklarının çoğulluğunu (Pentzhold ve Bischof 2019), ve bunların Türkiye'nin kültürel bağlamındaki şehirli genç kadın

kullanıcı pratikleri (Costa 2018) tarafından karşılıklı nasıl şekillendirildiğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: flört uygulamaları, çevrimiçi flört, Bumble, olanaklar ve sınırlılıklar, teknofeminizm, toplumsal cinsiyet, Türkiye



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CAAT: Critical App Analysis Technique

GLAAD: Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation



1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Online dating emerged in the 1990s, websites like Match.com and eHarmony began offering online matchmaking services, allowing users to create profiles and connect based on compatibility (Bergström 2022). The introduction of smartphones in the late 2000s brought apps into the picture, and in 2009 the first dating app Grindr emerged (Bergström 2022; Ansari and Klinenberg 2015). The use of dating apps has become a common practice among young adults in recent times, particularly over the past decade the dating app market grew, catering to different demographics, niche groups, relationship types and interests emerged (Gudelunas 2012; Ansari and Klinenberg 2015; Chambers 2021). While some dating apps trying to achieve the overall popularity, others offer unique features targeting specific groups in society. In these days dating apps are not only used for finding long term relationships, but also friendships and short term sexual encounters (Sunam et al 2023; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017). Currently, Turkey is one of the leading countries globally in dating app user engagement, following India, Kenya, and Nigeria (Statista 2023). According to Gemius (2022), only Tinder, OkCupid, and Happn are popular dating apps with a substantial user base of approximately 7.4 million in Turkey. Moreover, dating app usage in Turkey is most prevalent in young adults between 18 and 29 (Statista 2023). This illustrates the significance of dating apps in young adults' social and romantic lives.

TÜBİTAK funded research project "The Analysis of Turkish Youth's Mate Selection Practices via Location-Based Mobile Dating Applications," supervised by Assistant Professor Aylin Sunam Audry aimed to gain crucial insights into young adults' dating app usage, particularly how online dating practices are often gendered and shaped by the effect of cultural context. One of the findings of the research project, which I was a part of as a research assistant for one year, illustrated how online dating app practices of users, especially young adult women, and app affordances differ in relation to unique cultural context of Turkey (Sunam et al. 2024).

Earlier studies indicate that dating app use is heavily gendered in Turkey (Özyeğin 2015; Cöbek and Ergin 2021; Narin 2018; Deniz 2020; Aydoğan 2020; Gürcan and Üstünel 2024). To illustrate, the stigmatization of dating apps has decreased in Western contexts in recent years (Degen and Kleeberg-Niepage 2022; Farvid and Aisher 2016), young adult women in Turkey still fear encountering social stigma and serregarding to dating app use (Cöbek 2022; Gürcan and Üstünel 2024). Moreover, the recent political environment in Turkey, with the consolidation of conservatism, pro-Islamism, neoliberalism, and authoritarianism, creates regulatory discourses on women and LGBTQ people's bodies and sexualities (Cindoğlu and Unal 2016; Acar and Altınok 2013). These discourses stem from anti-gender, anti-feminist, and anti-democratic ideologies (Ünal 2021; Özbay and Soybakış 2020). As Unal explains, in recent years, this hypermasculine anti-gender rhetoric intermingled with pro-Islamism and anti-Westernism has been more visible in public discourse in Turkey (Ünal 2021).

In light of these changes, the lives of women and LGBTQ+ people have become more precarious and open to possible violence in many different ways. This atmosphere affects social lives of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in terms of the manner, time, and place of their interactions. It is therefore necessary to gain a deeper understanding of whether dating apps can provide a secure environment for heterosexual and non-heterosexual young adult women to navigate their romantic lives and whether they can facilitate the formation of new social connections.

1.2 The Research Problem and Objectives

This research aims to understand the role of app affordances in young and metropolitan heterosexual and non-heterosexual women's online dating experiences on Bumble in Turkey. I have selected Bumble for this research because it positions itself as a feminist dating app, claiming to support women's empowerment. Bumble's feminist self-identification is a significant factor in the critical investigation of whether the app's architecture and its claims align with users' actual experiences. Furthermore, it is among the most popular dating apps among young adults living in Turkey's metropolitan cities.

Despite Bumble's claim of empowering women (Bumble, n.d.a.), the app's impact on young adult women's online dating experiences is shaped by their motivations, expectations, and the cultural context in which these apps operate (Young and Roberts 2023; Pruchniewska 2020). Moreover, investigating the app's affordances is imperative in understanding how women perceive and engage with and within the app. For example, Bumble's most distinctive feature is that only women can initiate conversations in heterosexual matches, unlike other dating applications. Considering Bumble is a self-proclaimed feminist dating app, Bumble's co-founder and former CEO claims that this design choice is intended to empower women and give them equal footing in the dating realm (Bumble 2020). However, how this feature is perceived and experienced by its users and its effect on their online dating practices is another matter.

An investigation into Bumble and its young adult female users' online dating practices and experiences offers a valuable opportunity to evaluate how feminist principles shape its brand positioning, the effect of this feminist self-identification on the design of the app's architecture, and what are the outcomes of their use in the real world, as affordances, when young adult female users engage with the app. Therefore, the research questions this study is moved by are:

1. In what ways has Bumble incorporated its feminist premise into its current app architecture and affordances?
2. How do urban female young adults in Turkey perceive a self-identified feminist dating app Bumble's affordances?
3. How do the affordances offered by Bumble as a self-identified feminist dating app influence the mobile dating experiences of urban female young adults in Turkey?

This research aims to contribute to the scholarship on the affordances of dating apps and online dating experiences of women in a non-Western cultural context. Although the affordances of Bumble and women's online dating experiences have been investigated in earlier studies (Bivens and Hoque 2018; Pruchniewska 2020), there has been a lack of empirical research on Bumble's distinctive affordances and their role in young adult

women's online dating practices in a non-Western cultural context. Furthermore, the lack of investigation into the impact of recent change in characteristics of Bumble represent significant gaps in the existing literature. The most recent rebranding of Bumble and the introduction of the new features as opening moves and compliments raises some new and significant questions about the app's affordances that have not been answered yet. Moreover, it aims to understand the cultural nuances of how affordances are shaped, and to address the existing research gaps concerning the online dating practices of young adult women in Bumble's newest iteration with its unique affordances, particularly in the cultural context of Turkey, and to establish a groundwork for future investigations into Bumble.

1.3 Theoretical Perspective and Research Model

This study employs a techno-feminist lens to examine how the affordances of Bumble are shaped by women's experiences and interactions on the platform. It builds upon the theories of techno feminism (Wajcman 2007), the mutual shaping of technology and society (Lievrouw 2014; Bergström 2022), and the concept of affordances which was derived from the actor / network theory in communication and media studies (Hutchby 2001). Although in the 1990s, fueled by the rise of the internet and digital media, cyberfeminist views were dominant with an utopian outlook into technology's power to change society for the better in terms of gender equality, it became quickly apparent that online and offline worlds are not completely removed from each other, they are intertwined, therefore existing social norms are not only challenged with the use of technological possibilities, but also reproduced and enhanced (Wajcman 2007; Tsatsou 2011). Therefore, I find it necessary to utilize the theories of techno feminism and mutual shaping of technology when focusing on dating apps.

On the other hand, dating apps that are often created in Western contexts, carry the traces of their owners' and designers' social and cultural capital which stems from their own habitus (Sunam 2017, 163). Moreover, they came into our lives by "global cultural flows" (Appadurai 1996). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the ways in which young adults in Turkey experience these mobile apps that are shaped by different gender norms and sexuality cultures (Albury 2017), in order to understand how they negotiate

romantic encounters on these apps with prevailing social norms in their current cultural context in Turkey. Because of this reason, the concept of “affordances in practice” (Costa 2018) is employed in this thesis study to gain a better understanding how these apps effect the online dating experiences of young adult women in the real life, and their experiences and architecture of Bumble mutually shape the affordances of the app (Hutchby 2001).

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized as follows:

- **The Literature Review:** This chapter consists of existing research on dating apps, focusing on the literature about contemporary relationships and critical theories about neoliberalism’s effect on them, the evolution of mediated matchmaking and dating apps, the mutual shaping of technology and society, and affordances in the context of dating apps.
- **Methodology:** This chapter details the research design and the chosen methods, such as The Walkthrough Analysis (Light et al. 2018) and The Critical App Analysis Technique (CAAT) (Sunam Audry 2024). CAAT method was developed during the research project "The Analysis of Turkish Youth’s Mate Selection Practices via Location-Based Mobile Dating Applications," to understand ‘affordances-in-practice’ (Costa 2018). This method employs media go-along incorporated semi-structured/structured interviews whose questions were derived from the walkthrough analyses.
- **Walkthrough Findings & Analysis:** In this chapter, the walkthrough analysis of Bumble is explained in detail, followed by Tinder and OkCupid walkthrough analyses. Tinder and OkCupid were also chosen to be examined for being the main competitors of Bumble among young adults living in metropolitan cities in Turkey (Sunam Audry et al 2023).
- **CAAT Findings & Thematic Analysis:** The findings of the media go-along incorporated interviews analyzed thematically in this chapter. Themes were derived from the data from the interviews.
- **Conclusion:** In this chapter, the results of walkthrough analyses and the thematic analyses were reflected upon and discussed further in the light of previous

studies. Limitations of this study and possibilities for future studies are discussed as well.



2.THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing literature to understand how dating apps came to be and how they play a role in our social lives. Moreover, earlier studies that focus on different aspects of dating apps, such as self-presentation, and affordances, are examined in order to understand the changes in the dating app realm. These studies investigate how traditional gender norms are negotiated in dating apps and how apps and user practices and experiences mutually shape each other continuously. Therefore, the theoretical framework of mutual shaping of technology and society and affordances in the context of dating apps are developed.

2.1 Evolution of Online Dating

Dating applications are the evident product of our time's technical and economic environment, though they are only the next step in the history of matchmaking. Continual transformations in the mediatization of matchmaking have connected technological innovations through the emergence of industrial printing to computers, the internet, and today's smart mobile phones (Bergström 2022). In the nineteenth century, personal matrimonial advertising in newspapers provided the ground for the publication of newspapers exclusively for matrimonial matchmaking (Cocks 2013).

Later in the 1960s, with the emergence of the dating concept, matchmaking shifted to computational technologies. Clients would fill out lengthy questionnaires, the computers would analyze the data, and they would be matched according to their answers, preferences, personality traits, age, ethnicity, religion, and social and occupational status (Sindberg et al. 1972). Although these computer matching agencies were held through the 1980s, Dial Your Match, and Matchmaker introduced a more efficient way of computer dating in 1981 and 1986 as bulletin board systems (BBS). In addition to filling bios with users, BBS dating services compared users' questionnaire

responses and matched compatible ones using an algorithm. Users then could choose to contact suitable partners by sending private messages (Scharlott and Christ 1995).

With the emergence of the internet, dating websites were one of the first interactive social platforms on the web (boyd and Ellison 2007). In 1995, Match.com was launched, and it worked differently than BBS. Match.com gave its users the means of matching in real time without using an algorithm. In ten years, forty million people have registered with Match.com (Ansari and Klinenberg 2015).

With smartphones entering our daily lives, online dating platforms transformed from websites to apps as mobile technologies (Bergström 2002; Hobbs et. al. 2017; Sumter and Vandebosch 2019). Grindr, for gay, bisexual, and trans men, was the first high-profile dating app that launched for smartphones in 2009. The utilization of geolocation by Grindr provided a template for other apps to emerge: Blendr (2011), Tinder (2012), Happn (2014), and Bumble (2014) (Bergström 2022). According to Statista (2024), there will be an estimated 395.22 million dating app users worldwide in 2024. It is predicted that this number will reach 452.47 million by 2028. In the first quarter of 2024, Tinder was the most downloaded dating app worldwide, with 4.403.964 downloads, followed by Bumble with 3.207.141 downloads.

New dating apps emerge constantly targeting different groups and preferences in more niche formats and affordances: Veggly for finding dates with fellow vegans, Schmooze for matching based on humor taste, Ilios for astrology lovers, and Kippa to date in the metaverse as a playable character, targeting gamers (Lord 2022). Though it may seem paradoxical, the dating app Raya is for celebrities. Furthermore, after the pandemic, dating apps started to facilitate dating in different ways. Matt McNeill Love has thought of the solution of moving forward from an online match to a face-to-face date quickly by co-founding a dating app Thursday. Thursday, which markets itself as an offline dating app, works only on Thursdays, and anyone matched will disappear by midnight, pushing its users to act fast to arrange a face-to-face meeting (Lord 2022).

In her recent work, *The News of Love*, Bergström (2022) points out that although online dating platforms have received harsh critiques from academia, they “fall short of capturing its specificity and explaining its success – explaining how and why people use these platforms” and continues as to these criticisms “stem from a past that never existed, fueled by fears of technological change, sexual transformations, and the ever-tightening grip of economic forces” (Bergström 2022). Bergström also indicates that empirical research often conflicts with these arguments. Bergström (2022) underlines privatization of dating as the most important transformation. She defines privatization of dating with online dating platforms as a twofold change. Firstly, dating has transformed from a public to a private activity; meeting and dating with potential partners facilitated by online platforms has become an insulated interaction, in which these platforms and their designers and entrepreneurs have become intermediaries rather than friends and familial circles as before. Secondly, these online platforms are owned by private corporations; therefore, online dating has become a commercial service embedded in the technology industry. Bergström also points out that dating has become widely accepted since the emergence of matrimony agencies and thrived as an industry sector for the first time in history (Bergström 2022). Similarly, Dobson, Carah, and Robards argue that these digital intimacies need to be examined “in relation to the commodification of relationships built into social media platform infrastructure” in which they are privatized, commercialized, and taken ownership of (Dobson et al. 2018).

2.2 Online Dating in Turkey

Online dating entered the sphere of romantic relationships in Turkey in the early 2000s with the emergence of local dating websites, such as Siberalem and Pembe Panjur (Sunam 2017). While some targeted different motivations by providing matchmaking or matrimony prospects, they also appealed to various demographic groups (Sunam 2017). Later in the 2010s, with the introduction of mobile apps, dating apps became more popular for online dating due to their mobility and ability to match by geolocation. Today, adults use different apps to facilitate different motivations in Turkey (Sunam Audry et al. 2023; Phua 2020). While Tinder has been the most popular dating app in Turkey since its inception, other dating apps such as OkCupid, Bumble, and Happn are

also popular (Similarweb 2022). Young adults in Turkey today use dating apps not only for finding romantic relationships but also for diverse motivations such as finding friendships, expanding beyond their social network, building self-confidence and a repertoire of social skills, and seeking a queer community (Sunam Audry et al. 2023; Pym et. al 2020).

Turkey has a unique cultural context where it is an amalgamation of both conflicting sides of Eastern and Western cultures (Ahıska 2007). This conflict is particularly evident in urban versus rural contexts, with the latter exhibiting a pronounced predisposition towards traditional values. Moreover, social demographics, such as education and religion, play a big part in influencing young adult women's romantic lives. Educated urban young females enjoy the anonymity provided by their setting and have more freedom over their romantic lives than their counterparts in rural settings (Özyeğin 2015). This also affects their choice of dating apps. At the same time, urban young adults prefer the most popular dating apps, such as Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid, while young adults who reside in rural settings tend to use more niche and LGBTQ+-oriented apps (Sunam Audry et al. 2023).

Despite the global popularity of dating apps and the decline in their stigmatization in Western contexts in recent years (Degen and Kleeberg-Niepage 2022; Farvid and Aisher 2016), previous studies indicate that there is a tendency to stigmatize the use of dating apps in Turkey, particularly regarding facilitating casual encounters and the promotion of promiscuity (Cöbek 2023; Gürcan and Üstünel 2024). Moreover, this stigmatization has a gendered nature, whereas young adult women in Turkey tend to avoid disclosing their dating app use to some circles (Cöbek 2022). Their hesitation stems from the fear of social stigma and being seen as promiscuous, as Turkey is a highly patriarchal society. According to Özyeğin (2015), their hesitation can be described with Suad Joseph's (1993) notion of "facade," as "a form of deception, a barrier, a form of protection and a liberating tool for claiming a new/different self/identity" (Özyeğin 2015, 5). Özyeğin further explains facades as having two functions: firstly, they "provide resistance and refusal and can offer access to emotions, identities, and experiences whose pursuit can give individuals agency." At the same

time, they "also allow for the enactment of rituals of conformity, connection, and continuity." (Özyeğin 2015, 5).

Additionally, these past ten years, with the entanglement of authoritarianism, conservatism, and pro-İslamism, the anti-gender discourse of the government has been more prominent to pose regulatory policies over bodies and sexualities, especially of women and LGBTQ+ individuals (Cindoğlu and Unal 2016; Acar and Altınok 2013). These discourses have influenced the rise of anti-democratic and anti-feminist ideologies in the public discourse (Ünal 2021; Özbay and Soybakış 2020). Turkey's current political and social environment affects young adults' social and romantic lives, both online and offline.

This current social and political atmosphere is also reflected in previous studies on the Turkish cultural context. Earlier studies on dating apps in the context of Turkey mainly focus on self-representation (Hetsroni et al. 2020; Cöbek 2022; Narin 2018) and the gendered use of dating apps (Aydoğan 2020; Deniz 2020; Cöbek and Ergin 2021; Gürcan and Üstünel 2024). As demonstrated in these studies, while dating app use is a heavily gendered practice, young adult women seek a sense of safety during their online dating practices to avoid facing stigmatization (Cöbek and Ergin 2021; Deniz 2020) and prevent potential online and offline harm (Aydoğan 2020; Gürcan and Üstünel 2024; Sunam et al. 2024). Nevertheless, there has been no existing literature that focuses on these apps' affordances in a standalone manner until recently in Turkey (Sunam Audry 2024; Genç and Çelikoğlu 2022). Therefore, Bumble's claims of providing a safe space for women are crucial to investigate further regarding its affordances and urban young female users' practices, as Bumble is the most popular app in this demographic group.

2.3 Stages of Online Dating Practices

Considering the increasing popularity, there has been a proliferation of literature focusing on dating apps in different trajectories: user motivations, self-presentation and impression management, affordances, partner selection and uses, and sexual health and harassment risks (Young and Roberts 2023; Chan 2021b; Comunello et al. 2021;

Sobieraj and Humphreys 2021; Duguay et al. 2020; Pruchniewska 2020; MacLeod and McArthur 2019; Bivens and Hoque 2018; Timmermans and Courtois 2019; Gillett 2018; Byron and Albury 2018; Aydoğan 2020; Cöbek 2022; Sunam Audry et al. 2023). Most of these studies have been conducted in Western contexts (Chan 2018). These studies have come to a common conclusion that online dating is a practice that is shaped by gender dynamics (Cöbek 2023). The following section will present a discussion of the aforementioned studies.

2.3.1 The motivations behind the use of dating apps and the factors that influence the preference for one app over another

Despite the prevalence of the association between dating apps and the hookup culture, empirical research has revealed a significant diversity in the motivations for their use. These motivations may encompass a spectrum of reasons, including social curiosity, entertainment, the pursuit of new friends, and the desire for a romantic relationship. The motivations of users can differ based on social demographics, such as gender, age, and sexual orientation (Cöbek and Ergin 2021; Ranzini and Lutz 2017; Sumter et al. 2017; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017). In regard to gender, studies show that men are more inclined to have a casual sex motivation than women on dating apps (Sumter and Vandebosch 2019; Ranzini and Lutz 2017; Timmermans and De Caluwé 2017). The prevalence of non-heterosexual users of dating apps is greater than that of heterosexual users, while heterosexual men use dating apps more than heterosexual women generally (Sunam Audry et al. 2023; Castro et al. 2020). It can be reasonably argued that differing expectations of men and women may result in an unsatisfactory outcome for both parties in heterosexual online dating experiences (Sumter and Vandebosch 2019).

Most studies examine users' motivations and use focus on Tinder in the context of Western culture. Recent studies in Turkey (Sunam Audry et al. 2023; Cöbek and Ergin 2021), China (Chan 2021b), and India (Menon 2024) demonstrate that the cultural context plays a significant role in influencing user practices. While the cultural context may not always have an impact on empirical findings, there are instances when divergent themes emerge regarding the usage of dating apps.

The reasons for users' preference for different dating apps are multifaceted and shaped by the apps and associated practices. Different socio-demographic groups may prefer different apps. Sunam and colleagues (Sunam Audry et al. 2023) have indicated that users in non-metropolitan areas tend to favor niche, Muslim-oriented and LGBTQ+-focused applications as a means of avoiding social stigma in Turkey. In contrast, their counterparts prefer the most popular apps, such as Tinder, Bumble, and OkCupid (Sunam Audry et al. 2023). Women also tend to regulate their dating app use regarding their behavior on the platform and restrict their use to more private contexts (Cöbek and Ergin 2021).

As Chan (2018) argues, in terms of romantic and sexual encounters, intentions are a significant factor in determining attitudes. Cöbek (2023) notes that Tinder has the effect of reducing the partner selection process to a yes/no binary (David and Cambre 2016, 7) by swiping for matches, which in turn contributes to the perception of Tinder as a hook-up app rather than a dating app. Furthermore, due to the prevalence of men's aggressive attitudes toward women during their conversations on Tinder, Turkish women tend to prefer OkCupid as an alternative (Cöbek 2023).

2.3.2 Self-presentation and impression management

Profile construction on dating apps balances an ideal and an authentic self (Ward 2017). Users present themselves with their profiles to other users by managing a desirable impression of themselves (Goffman 1959). Therefore, the information users give is “malleable and subject to self-censorship” (Ellison 2012, 3).

Profile pictures have a particular significance in attracting potential partners, given their prominence on the interface (Ward 2016). Ellison emphasizes the importance of profile pictures as “Profiles are essential for online daters because they constitute a gateway for future FtF (face to face) dating” (Ellison 2012, 2).

The dating app users manage their desirability not by just visual clues in photos but also in textual information (Hackett et al. 2023), such as education (Ward 2017), political

stances (Chan 2020), and religious beliefs (Menon 2024), signaling their socioeconomic status.

Studies on online dating websites and apps demonstrate the gendered nature of self-presentation and impression management (Tanrıöver and Sunam 2017; Toma et al. 2008). Sedgewick et al. (2017) discovered that the angle at which selfies are taken exhibits gender-related patterns. Men take pictures from below, while women take pictures from above. Men gravitate to signal their social and economic status by displaying luxurious accessories, expensive cars, and yachts on their profile pictures, as well as their education level and occupation. Conversely, women are more inclined to signal their attractiveness through body images (Casimiro 2015). Deceptive behavior in the profile creation process also varies by gender, as men tend to lie about their height on their profiles, whereas women are more inclined to lie about their weight (Toma et al. 2008). Furthermore, these are not a product of a change in information over time but somewhat intentional deceptions to make oneself more desirable (Toma and Hancock 2010).

Furthermore, self-presentation is an ongoing process. While swiping, users tend to seek clues to ascertain the most effective ways of self-presentation to attract others like them (Ward 2016). As self-presentation online is an asynchronous process distinct from face-to-face communication, users can edit and optimize the information on their profiles. Creating a curated self aims to attract matches that are not just suitable but also higher in number (Pond and Farvid 2017). Pond and Farvid (2017) argue that regardless of Tinder's reputation, many non-heterosexuals are still drawn to Tinder due to its considerable popularity and potential to get more matches.

Although Tinder maintains its popularity by being the most used and well-known dating, the emergence of niche apps and the implementation of new features for self-presentation show us the increasing importance of common interests in shaping romantic relationships. Listing interests on a dating app profile could function as a "taste performance" (Liu 2008, 273). In his seminal work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984, 466) argues that taste is socially organized and explains that "it functions as a sort of

social orientation, a ‘sense of one’s place,’ guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position.”. Wright conceptualizes Bourdieusian "taste" as a reflection of power relations within social structures, whereby an individual's cultural capital is represented. This capital may be manifested in three distinct forms: institutionalized through accredited institutions, objectified through the ownership of specific cultural artifacts, or embodied in one's behavior and appearance (Wright 2010).

Although Bourdieu’s work focuses on taste’s role in the social stratification of society, it could be implemented to understand how a person relates to others and forms relationships. By listing one's interests, education, and known languages on a profile, one presents one's cultural capital on a dating app. They position themselves to others through institutions, schools studied subjects, occupations, and workplaces; interests; genres of movies, TV series, music, and books; and embodiment of taste, style, and clothing on profile photos and the language of written bios.

2.3.3 Swiping and matching with potential partners

Dating app companies are mostly not transparent about how their algorithms work; how they select potential partners for users is a mystery for most users (Gillespie 2014). While OkCupid’s algorithm is its main marketing point, that is not true for Tinder and Bumble. Although it is stated on their website that Tinder no longer uses the Elo rating system, their new algorithm is described ambiguously as “a dynamic system that continuously factors in how you’re engaging with others on Tinder through Likes, Nopes, and what’s on users’ profiles.” (“Powering Tinder® — the Method behind Our Matching” 2014). On the other hand, Bumble refuses to disclose any information about how their algorithm work (Iovine 2021).

How users navigate the application and adopt or reject the subject positions is encouraged by its user interface function of swiping (David and Cambre 2017). Swiping in high quantities on a dating app does not necessarily result in an elevated number of

matches; women generally get more matches than men (Timmermans et al. 2018). While men tend to swipe right more to enhance their possibility of getting matches, women are likely to be more careful (Comunello 2021). Excessive swiping may also have adverse psychological effects on users and can be linked to upward social comparison, fear of being single, and partner choice overload (Thomas et al. 2023).

During swiping, in addition to the algorithm of the app, users try to create “relational filter bubbles” by using filters for partner preferences and examining other profiles to seek clues to find potential partners that are like them (Parisi and Comunello 2021, 73). Parisi and Comunello (2021, 73) describe these relational filter bubbles as “a proxy for a set of mechanisms that seem to strengthen people’s relational homophily, in terms of preferring partners that are “similar” to them, and/or part of their relational networks.” They put the emphasis on the lack of study on how different dating systems may affect relational homophily. Moreover, Sharabi and Dykstra DeVette (2019) argue that the perceived homophily on dating apps creates a common ground for interaction, and they describe it as “participants’ similarities to their partner, including statements that showed agreement or highlighted shared interests, attitudes, or values.” Although users may also seek partners on dating apps according to homophily and taste, dating apps allow them to extend their reach beyond their existing social network (Parisi and Comunello 2021, 86).

The relational homophily (Parisi and Comunello 2020), which posits that people are attracted to those like themselves, remains a significant factor in selecting potential partners. Users are in favor of swiping right to get matched with those who have a similar educational background (Ranzini et al. 2022), personalities (Neyt et al. 2020), and political stances (Chan 2021a).

2.3.3 Conversation

Through practice by matching and chatting, one recognizes the norms that one is expected to abide by in a dating app (Byron and Albury 2017). Byron and Albury (2017) point out that users who are new to the app “cannot ‘lurk’ and observe other

people's interactions to understand communicative norms," unlike other social media platforms. Users may negotiate, reject, and be subject to these norms and develop their own rules due to the lack of moderation on dating apps. Users apply "their perceptions of appropriate or inappropriate communication strategies to develop their guidelines for establishing relationships with others" (Byron and Albury 2017, 227).

Studies show that while women tend to get more matches, men are more likely to take the initiative to start the conversation after getting matched. Men are also more likely to try harder to continue the conversation (Comunello 2021). Studies also demonstrate that women experience harassment and sexual discrimination on dating apps (Pruchniewska 2020; Shaw 2016; Thompson 2018). Heterosexual and non-heterosexual women expressed that men in the pursuit of casual sex act on heterosexist performances of toxic masculinity (Hess and Flores 2018) and unsolicited explicit behavior (Comunello et al. 2021). These unwanted interactions happen through initiation messages, unsolicited pictures, and pickup lines, as well as through pressure for sexuality, anger for rejection, sexual assault threats, image-based harassment, and gender/sexuality-based hate speech by men (Hess and Flores 2018; Lilly 2023; Filice 2024). Women build strategies around avoiding these interactions with men by scrutinizing potential partner profiles and being on guard for cues and clues of inappropriate behavior during conversation (Chan 2018; Gillett 2023; Comunello 2021; Pruchniewska 2020). The negotiated use results in women's invisible gendered digital labor and safety work (Gurcan and Ustunel 2024; Pruchniewska 2020). Neither Tinder's verification through Facebook affordance (Duguay 2017) nor Bumble's giving women the opportunity to initiate conversations (Sobieraj 2018) have been highly effective in preventing abusive behavior. Although it should be noted that these studies examine earlier iterations of Bumble in Western cultural context, which is why this study differs from them. As Pruchniewska (2020) describes women employ safety strategies in various steps of their dating app use and evaluate their match continuously. During the conversation stage, users who signal their mutual interest participate in a "ritual of transition" to move the conversation from dating apps to other social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp (Broeker 2023). Although as described by women, this desire for transition may manifest in

men's practices as an unwelcome tendency to be excessively forward during the initial stages of the matching process (Cöbek 2022).

2.4 Affordances-in-practice in Dating Apps

Communication technologies, in our case dating apps, lie at the intersection of social and technological realms. Although much has been debated before, Science and Technology Studies and communication and media scholars have widely studied the mutual shaping approach to technology and sociality (Lievrouw 2014). Lievrouw employs the mutual shaping approach and proposes the mediation framework “for understanding the mutually constitutive elements of new media technology” (Lievrouw 2014, 45). She explains the mediation framework as composed of three parts:

“1- Artifacts - which enable and constrain people's communicative abilities, and which go through reconfiguration,
2- Practices - which change constantly by the process of remediation of interaction,
3- Social arrangements - which emerge and change about artifacts and practices through reformation” (Lievrouw 2014, 45).

Firstly, as explained in Chapter 2.1, being created, and owned by private corporations, technological artifacts imprint the cultural beliefs of their creators, designers, and tech entrepreneurs (Bergström 2022; Light et al. 2018; Dobson et al. 2018). Based on her empirical findings, Bergström argues that the dating app sector is male dominated in the tech industry; therefore, dating app designs fundamentally manifest men's desires and needs. Designers are only one side of sociality in this mutual shaping. Users and the daily data they pour into the apps play a crucial role in how these platforms and their algorithms continue to be operated, tweaked and changed. (Gillespie 2014; Hutchby 2001). In her proposition of techno-feminism, Wajcman (2004) asserts that technology is “both a source and a consequence of gender relations” (107). To understand the relationship between technology and women, we should investigate women in the tech industry and how they interact with communication technologies daily (Wajcman 2004).

Moreover, entering our lives by the way of “global cultural flows” (Appadurai 1996), dating apps that are created in Western contexts are influenced by their creators’ and owners’ habituses and the societal norms that they were created in (Bergström 2022; Sunam 2017).

As an example of the reformation process mentioned by Lievrouw (2014), the Chinese dating app Momo has undergone a “sanitization” process after the denunciation of the state, both by emphasizing harassment reporting and de-sexualization of the platform through the integration of feeds of users to the app’s interface like Facebook (Chan 2018; Wu and Trottier 2022). Hornet has gone through a similar change in Turkey. Hornet was removed from the Turkish App Store by Apple on August 6, 2021, a court decision with the pressure of the government. While the original app was still blocked, a new app called Hornet Stories was released only for users in Turkey. With the overrule of the Turkish Constitutional Court, Hornet celebrated its win and announced it would return to the Turkish Apple App Store (Addice 2024).

The aforementioned examples illustrate the necessity for an examination of negotiation between dating apps, and their users in terms of their cultural context, the perceptions of society towards them, and the creation of gendered user experiences (Cöbek 2023). This research aims to understand the ways in which negotiations occur between the social norms introduced by apps, in this case Bumble as self-identified feminist dating app, and those brought by young adult women users, with a specific focus on in what ways these negotiations are gendered.

How might we use the mediation framework to examine dating apps as communication technologies? Hutchby’s proposition of the theory of affordances of communication technology has been a viable model (Hutchby 2001). The notion of affordance was named by James Gibson (1979) to describe “the complementarity of the animal and the environment.” Affordances are the culmination of interaction between features of the environment and animals. By applying the affordances theory in communication technology studies, Hutchby offers to establish “a sustained and analytically rigorous

program based on investigation of the nature of ordinary actions in the context of such material enablements and constraints” (Hutchby 2001, 583).

By citing Evans et al. (2017), Pentzold and Bischof explain affordances in three steps: “First, they are found in the interaction of people and technologies, not in objects or features of objects. Second, affordances are not clear-cut outcome characteristics but are instead invitations to action. Third, these actions are not binary but variable.” (Pentzold and Bischof 2019). Technological affordances not only enable and constrain users, but also are shaped by the perception of the users, which can vary from one user to another (Evans et al. 2017). Furthermore, the affordances of an app extend beyond the features it offers its users. Costa’s (2018) study into social media use in Southeastern Turkey illustrates the role of the user in shaping the affordances cannot be underestimated. The users determine their actions in response to the app's invitation, whether through utilizing a specific feature, acceptance, subversion, or disregard and subsequent dismissal of the invitation as ineffective. Therefore, affordances are continually conceived and reimagined through user practices (Costa 2018). Moreover, the company's business strategy also affects how the app is transformed.

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies focusing on the relationship between affordances and gendered experiences on dating apps. Tinder, the most used dating app in the world, and Bumble, a self-identified feminist dating app, have taken much of the attention in these cases (Comunello 2021; Sobieraj and Humphreys 2021; Bivens and Hoque 2018; MacLeod and McArthur 2019; Pruchniewska 2020; Duguay et al. 2020).

From a techno-feminist framework, Bivens and Hoque examine Bumble using a material-semiotic analysis. They show how the affordances of the app control and safety mechanisms that Bumble puts forth are optimized for cis-gendered white women and how these inscribe “an aggressive form of masculinity onto straight male bodies” (Bivens and Hoque 2018, 445). Through an interface analysis of Tinder and Bumble, MacLeod and McArthur describe how gender is reflected in the affordances of the apps in terms of gender options, editing, and visibility on profiles (MacLeod and McArthur

2019). Pruchniewska's study illustrates gendered invisible labor by women on Bumble in various stages of their daily use (Pruchniewska 2020). Sobieraj and Humphrey, from the feminist approach and technological affordances framework, describe how forced empowerment is experienced as pressure and anxiety-inducing rather than liberation by women on Bumble and describe this by utilizing Banet-Weiser's (2018) notion of popular feminism. Comunello et al. (2021) identify that the negotiation of gender scripts happens in dating apps by relying on the affordances of apps by users, not alternative gender scripts. Comunello et. al (2021) explain this as "affordances and constraints of dating apps shape user practices and influence the performance and 'de-inscription' of gender scripts, without directly fostering the adoption of alternative scripts." These studies illustrate that dating app experiences are gendered, though they vary by the cultural context.

Furthermore, it is essential to note that dating apps as mobile technologies have an ever-changing nature. It seems likely that some of the research into affordances and experiences will undergo changes over time. One example of this is the study by MacLeod and McArthur (2019), in which the authors argued that Bumble's self-presentation tools for gender were inefficient. However, Bumble updated these categories over the years to be more exhaustive and beyond the binary of men and women. Moreover, Bumble's recent rebranding in April 2024 introduced additional features to the platform, including the option of opening moves and the ability to send compliments. The capacity of Bumble's most distinctive feature, women-initiated messages, which has been previously examined in studies, may have been affected by these more recent implementations. Moreover, dating applications, which are shaped by the social and cultural influence of Western developers and companies, become a part of our lives through "global cultural flows" (Appadurai 1996). Studying the ways in which young adult women in Turkey interact with these apps influenced by different gender norms and sexuality cultures which is specific to cultural context of Turkey, is crucial. The concept of "affordances in practice" (Costa 2018) is used to explore how these apps impact online dating experiences for young women in Turkey, with a focus on Bumble's current app architecture. Thus, this research is unique in its combination of

uninvestigated iteration of the subject, Bumble, the theoretical framework, chosen methodology, and cultural context.



3.METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research aims to understand the role of app affordances in young adult women's online dating experiences on Bumble in Turkey. A qualitative approach has been adopted using The Walkthrough Analysis (Light et al. 2018) and The Critical App Analysis Technique (CAAT) (Sunam Audry 2024) methods. A walkthrough analysis was conducted to gain insight into Bumble's app architecture and language. Tinder and OkCupid are the most widely used dating apps in metropolitan cities in Turkey (Sunam Audry et al. 2023). Consequently, I included Tinder and OkCupid in the walkthrough analysis stage. During the TÜBİTAK research project "The Analysis of Turkish Youth's Mate Selection Practices via Location-Based Mobile Dating Applications," it became evident that users tend to try multiple dating apps (Sunam Audry et al. 2023). In order to fully understand the potential comparisons and references to other applications that may emerge during the interviews, it was necessary for me to become thoroughly familiar with the most recent iterations of chosen apps. This would allow me to gain a more in-depth knowledge of Bumble's primary competitors within the Turkish dating app industry, as well as the significant differentiating factors that set Bumble apart from them from the user perspective. Because of these reasons, it was essential to examine Tinder and OkCupid compared to Bumble to identify potential points of contrast that might emerge during the critical app analysis stage of the interviews. Following the collection of data through walkthroughs and interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke 2006).

3.2 The Walkthrough Analysis

A preliminary understanding of Bumble was essential to grasping the role of affordances in online dating practices of educated young adult heterosexual and non-heterosexual women between the ages 18 and 30 in Istanbul, Turkey. Given the rapid

evolution of contemporary mobile applications, it was deemed necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the app's most recent version. Light, Burgess, and Duguay (2018) propose the walkthrough method to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the technological aspects of dating applications. The walkthrough method entails navigating the app in a meticulous manner, akin to traversing a city. It commences with the opening of an account and concludes with the deletion of the account while closely engaging with the app's functionalities to gain a comprehensive understanding of how any typical user would interact with the app in their daily lives. Additionally, the walkthrough method incorporates supplementary stages to gain deeper insights into the app's discursive and operational aspects (Appendix A). Consequently, the app's website and blog materials, marketing campaigns, and news articles pertaining to the app were subjected to rigorous examination, along with its financial operations. As previously stated, Tinder and OkCupid were included in this process to ascertain the features and functionality provided by other prominent dating applications and to gain insight into user experiences, motivations, and preferences with respect to these apps. The walkthrough method was employed, and data was collected from Bumble's 5.370.0 version on May 16, 2024.

Given the dynamic nature of applications and the frequent updates introduced by developers, the features and functionality they offer can change over time. Even small changes can have a significant impact on users. Accordingly, this study examines the most recent editions of Bumble, OkCupid, and Tinder, presenting the findings of this analysis.

3.3 The Critical App Analysis

The critical app analysis method was developed during the “The Analysis of Turkish Youth’s Mate Selection Practices via Location Based Mobile Dating Applications” project supported by the Scientific & Technological Research Council of Turkey (Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kurumu; TUBITAK), the Department of Science Fellowships & Grant Programs ARDEB-3501 (grant number 121K687). The objective was to compensate for the shortcomings of the walkthrough method analysis.

While the walkthrough analysis provides insight into the app's structure, it is crucial to recognize that this understanding is from the researcher's perspective and is influenced by prior research and personal bias. Therefore, it would be limiting to rely solely on this approach to comprehend user practices. Moreover, the walkthrough analysis has shortcomings of lack of interaction with other users (Moller and Robards 2019), and affordances in practice (Costa 2018).

Although the walkthrough analysis method offers a systematic way of technical characteristics and symbolic representations of the app, it has limitations. While it was suggested that avoiding interactions with the users of the app would be beneficial in ethical terms (Light et al 2018), it also causes lack of interaction and not being able to analyze some of the technical functions. Moller and Robards (2019) argue that the walkthrough analysis ignores the potential of interacting with the other users, it would also cause difference in the construction of narrative because it relies on the media literacy of the researcher primarily. Furthermore, this can also cause a lack of representation of users.

On the other hand, Costa (2018) points out that affordances are "not concepts that can be separated from their contexts and uses, but rather ongoing representations of users that may change over time and space." Therefore, she suggests the concept of "affordances in practice." The walkthrough technique may prove inadequate for comprehensively understanding platforms. Although Light et al. (2018) recommend avoiding interactions for ethical reasons, which are the potential for disrupting other app users due to the researcher's presence within the app and concerns the types of consent that can be obtained from individuals currently utilizing the app. However, as is the case with many location-based dating apps, especially those that operate for matching purposes, the various possibilities available in the app cannot be experienced or even seen without interacting with other users.

The mutual shaping of technology and sociocultural processes demonstrates that the non-human and human actors involved in this relationship are also continuously influencing and being influenced by one another. From this perspective, it is essential to

understand how the technical possibilities made available in dating apps are actually employed by users through continuous interaction with the app, rather than simply assuming that users will engage with the apps in accordance with the developers' intentions.

Jorgensen (2016) proposes media go-along theory, founded upon theoretical framework of Kusenbach's (2003) go-along, in which the researcher assumes the role of an observer while accompanying participants in their daily environment. While Jorgensen (2016) and Albury (2021) implement media go-along to study the practices of dating app users, Andelsman (2021) uses the walkthrough analysis (Light et al. 2018) and media go-along methods concurrently.

Through the interactive format of interviews, the critical app analysis aims to understand how users employ the technological capabilities that the walkthrough technique fails to illustrate (Sunam 2024). It also implements a media go-along during the interviews conducted with the users (Appendix B). As this research is limited to Bumble, the analytical application analysis questions developed in the research project have been expanded to include additional questions that provide insight into the use of Bumble by women. These include questions on topics such as women-initiated conversation, BFF mode, opening moves, and compliments (Appendix B)

3.4 The Recruitment

Recruiting individuals to discuss their experiences on dating can present certain challenges. While some individuals may be interested in sharing their experiences for research purposes, using audio recordings may be perceived as a potential source of discomfort by others. As previously stated in the literature review, women in highly patriarchal societies like Turkey may face social stigma when disclosing their use of dating apps. A further challenge is that of locating current users, given that individuals utilize dating apps on and off, and may be unaware of recent additions or alterations to the app. This challenge became evident during the pilot interview with a previous user of Bumble. While the pilot interview yielded valuable insights, it is noteworthy that

some of the changes implemented in the app were brought to the interviewee's attention. Given these challenges, I have determined that on-app recruitment would be a more advantageous method for reaching current users.

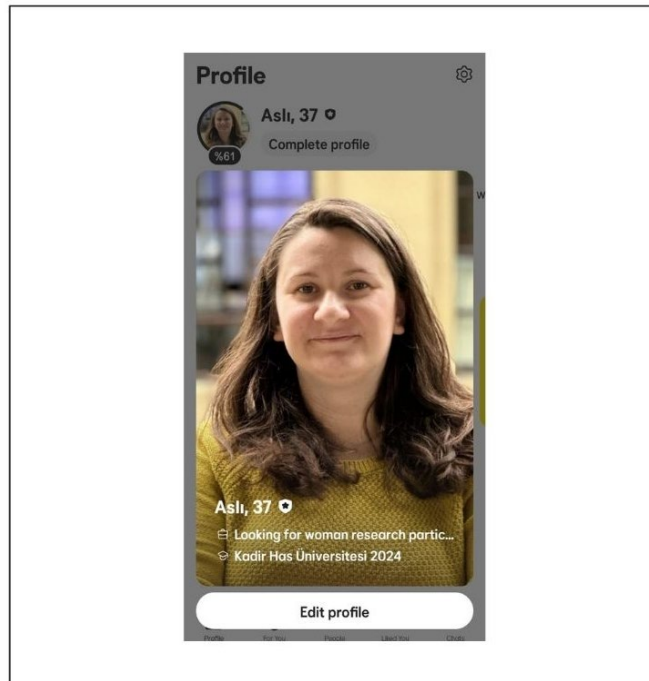


Figure 3.1 My Bumble Profile

I have created an account on Bumble with my personal information: my name, photograph, education, bio, and interests, like any other user. I have indicated that I was searching for participants for my thesis study and information about the topic within the word limit in my bio. To be able to reach both heterosexual and non-heterosexual women who use both date and BFF options on Bumble, I had to change my profile settings of gender and also the gender of the sought partners, from women to men to everyone. A further challenge arose at this juncture, as I was required to alter my gender to male in order to connect with heterosexual women seeking male dating partners. I was thus compelled to surmount the initial message obstacle. Upon matching, I was unable to initiate communication with these women. Given that my profile photo depicted a woman, they were unaware that I could not send messages. To guarantee that they would initiate contact if they were interested in participating, it was also necessary for me to disclose the information that they would have to send me a message first.

As a result of recruiting on a dating app, women participants' concerns stemmed from their previous experiences on the platform. Some of the women expressed concern that this was a case of catfishing. Furthermore, I provided the participants with access to my LinkedIn and Instagram accounts with the intention of fostering trust and establishing credibility after I had already provided them with information about myself and the study. Should they express interest, I have provided my contact information, including email and phone number, and informed them that they may contact me via the platform of their choosing. Some opted to follow and send messages to me on Instagram, while others chose to send WhatsApp messages or emails. The decision to disclose my information and accounts on various platforms was made at the beginning of the recruitment process in response to requests from interested users for my LinkedIn profile and email address. In conclusion, fourteen participants were successfully recruited via the application, with an additional participant being recruited through the friend of one of the study's on-app participants. The participant sample (N=16) consists of heterosexual (N=11) and non-heterosexual (N=5) women between the ages of 18-30 who are university students and white-collar professionals who reside in an urban setting (Appendix C). The urban young female users between the ages of 18 and 30 were identified as the intended sample population, as Bumble is highly popular among this social demographic group (Sunam et al. 2023). Furthermore, Bumble's marketing language appears to be directed towards this demographic as well.

3.5 The Interviews

The interviews were conducted via the online Zoom platform in May and June of 2024. The decision to utilize the Zoom platform and online interviewing was based on three key considerations. Firstly, conducting face-to-face interviews in a metropolitan city like Istanbul can be a time-consuming process in terms of transportation and traffic. Given the demanding schedules of the participants, who were university students and white-collar professionals, there was a possibility that some interviews might have to be rescheduled. The scheduling and rescheduling of interviews was more straightforward for both the participants and me. The second rationale for conducting the interviews online was to facilitate a more comfortable environment for the participants in

recounting their experiences with online dating while simultaneously engaging with the Bumble platform.

It was deemed more sensible to conduct the interviews in the participants' chosen private space, given that some women might feel uncomfortable being seen using a dating app in public (Cöbek 2022). The final rationale for utilizing Zoom was its capacity to record the interview in two distinct formats: video and audio. Furthermore, the audio would be of superior quality on Zoom than in a public space such as a café, thus facilitating transcription.

A total of 824 minutes of interview data in audio format was collected and transcribed using Whisper Ai. I subsequently edited the transcriptions. During the interviews, I compiled a series of field notes comprising recurrent and significant themes and divergent and intriguing observations.

3.5.1 Interview questions

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the chosen dating apps' architecture, the walkthrough analyses were conducted initially from the perspective of the researcher. Based on the insights gained from these analyses, CAAT interview questions were formulated in a format that emulates the structure of walkthrough analyses. Furthermore, the CAAT interviews incorporated media go-alongs. These interviews aim to gain a better understanding of “affordances in practice” (Costa 2018), how the user practices and experiences of young adult women are shaped by their use of Bumble in their daily lives. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, specific questions that targets how Bumble’s distinctive features, such as women-initiated conversations, were employed to understand how they affect participants’ interactions on the app. By the implementation of the media go-alongs during the interviews, participants’ use of Bumble was also observed. (see, Appendix B for interview questions)

As previously indicated, the CAAT interview structure is designed to mirror the walkthrough analysis. The questions are systematically arranged in accordance with the

walkthrough analysis method steps outlined in Appendix A. Following the introductory step; the interviewee is presented with a series of questions intended to provide insight into their perception of the app's objective, positioning, target demographic, and community guidelines during the institutional account analysis stages. The subsequent interview stages are the application registration process, user interface design and functions and features, text content and tone and symbolic representation, exit process from the app, and analysis of unexpected usage scenarios of the app. These stages are designed to better understand the participants' practices and experiences with and within Bumble through questions about the app's interface, processes, and features. These questions are formulated to elucidate how participants perceive the app's architecture, engage with and through Bumble, and how the "affordances in practice" (Costa 2018) are manifested. Moreover, the responses would illuminate whether "imagined affordances" emerge, if so, under what circumstances (Nagy and Neff 2015).

3.6 Coding and Thematic Analysis

I have organized and coded the interview data in Microsoft Excel. In Vivo Coding was employed for the preliminary coding phase, whereby codes were derived from participants' verbal expressions of their perspectives and experiences. In the second coding stage, I identified the recurring and significant themes between codes and applied the most appropriate code to each instance.

Using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2016) allowed me to identify and interpret the most significant themes and patterns from the participants' experiences. These themes were elaborated not only about the recurrent perspectives but also those that are divergent. This qualitative approach provided me to gain insights into user perceptions, behaviors, and motivations, thus offering a more in-depth understanding of how online dating on Bumble is experienced by young adult women in real life.

The primary themes that emerged from the analysis were Bumble's capacity to create a safe space for women, privacy concerns, homophily and taste on Bumble, using Bumble for non-dating, and unexpected usage of affordances. From a qualitative perspective, the overarching themes were derived from the interview data by inductive reasoning.

4.THE WALKTHROUGH ANALYSIS

A walkthrough analysis was conducted as the initial step in this research to gain a comprehensive understanding of Bumble’s architecture, brand identity, and user experience. This analytical approach examines how the app's features, interface, and visual and textual language influence user practices. Furthermore, it allows for identifying social dynamics within the app, providing insights into crucial concerns such as user safety, consent, and privacy. Additionally, it reveals areas where the app may reinforce or challenge social norms and dating motivations and expectations.

Including Tinder and OkCupid (see Appendix D), along with Bumble, in the walkthrough analysis stage allows for a broader understanding of these platforms' various characteristics and nuances. Each app's distinct algorithms, engagement strategies, and interfaces would significantly impact the user’s experiences and practices. This comparative approach not only facilitates a more in-depth investigation of Bumble's distinctive features, such as its women-first messaging policy, but also illuminates the strengths and limitations of these features compared to the user experiences provided by other popular apps.

4.1 Bumble

4.1.1 Website, blog and marketing campaigns

When we enter the Bumble website, we see the emphasis on making the first move, accompanied by photographs of diverse young women. The “We are not just for dating” subtitle also explains Bumble’s different modes: date, BFF, and bizz. From the top, we can move to Buzz, Bumble's blog page. There are articles on love, friendship, wellness, and candid-looking success stories with photographs. We can also learn about the changes happening on Bumble’s interface on this page, such as new gender identity affordances and opening questions. On the About page of Bumble, we can read why Bumble matters, how Bumble works, and what Bumble values.

Bumble's co-founder and former CEO Whitney Wolfe Heard has been a prominent figure in Bumble's "feminist" marketing and identity, we can read her letter in Bumble Buzz about apps aim to empower women in the dating world (Bumble Buzz, n.d.a). Whitney Wolfe Heard has been vocal about why she decided to launch a self-identified feminist dating app, Bumble, after quitting her high-profile job on Tinder accompanied by a sexual harassment case. When launching Bumble in 2014, she emphasized how women are still not making the first move and having to deal with unwanted sexual advances as first messages on dating platforms (Bumble Buzz, n.d.a).

4.1.2 Business strategy

Bumble offers users access to premium features through two distinct packages. The Boost package, available for 19.99 TL per month, offers a multitude of benefits, including unlimited likes, unlimited backtracks, a weekly spotlight feature that enhances visibility, five Super swipes per week, and the ability to extend the usual 24-hour match removal period through the use of extensions. Additionally, the package provides users with unlimited re-matches, which allows them to activate expired matches. In addition to the Boost package, the Premium package, which is available for 42.99 TL, includes the function to view the profiles of users who have expressed interest in the user in question, advanced filtering options, incognito mode, travel mode, and the features included in the Boost package.

It is possible to purchase additional access to the Spotlight and Super swipe features. The price for a single spotlight is 59.99 TL, while a five-spotlight package is available at a cost of 20.00 TL per item. Similarly, a fifteen-spotlight package is offered at a rate of 16.67 TL per unit. The cost for a two-spotlight package is 30.00 TL, with a five-spotlight package available at 24.00 TL and a fifteen-spotlight package at 16.67 TL.

4.1.3 Community guidelines

Community guidelines can be reached both in the profile creation process, under guidelines, and later from the Safety and Wellbeing tab. Kindness, politeness, and respectfulness are emphasized in all options. Under Bumble Community Guidelines (Bumble, n.d.b), there are different sections titled profile guidelines:

1. Directions about how to use profile photos, age, and username
2. Content and conduct guidelines consisting of adult nudity and sexual activity, bullying and abusive content, child sexual exploitation and abuse
3. Commercial and promotional activity, controlled goods and substances, dangerous organizations and individuals, identity-hate based, inauthentic profiles, misinformation, physical and sexual violence, scams and theft, sexual harassment, spam, suicide and self-injury promotion, violent and graphic content, platform manipulation, safety reporting, enforcement philosophy.

Although these guidelines are extensive, how Bumble enforces these is not clear enough for us to understand. Moreover, the guidelines are not immediately apparent to users, rendering them not easily accessible to users.

We can later access the guidelines from the Safety and Wellbeing section, though the content there is much more visualized and appropriate for app use. We can also access the Security and Privacy page to read guidelines in a legal format.

4.1.4 Logging in and profile creation

Upon initiating the application, we are presented with two options for logging in: Facebook or cell phone number. Subsequently, we are prompted to enter our email address, location, and notification permissions. Following this, we must select the desired mode of Bumble, along with the date and bff. We are then allowed the

opportunity to modify this selection. Next, we are asked to indicate our gender identity, using the options of woman, man, and nonbinary. We are also presented with a series of secondary options under the gender tabs, including "cis woman" and "trans man." Following this, we are prompted to indicate our desired match, with the options of men, women, or nonbinary individuals, or to indicate an openness to dating anyone. The subsequent page requests the nature of the desired relationship and prompts us to select one or two options.

Following this, we are directed to pages with detailed options for the profile creation process. At this juncture, users may either complete the registration process or defer this task until later. Once the registration process is complete, the app presents users with a series of warnings about the distinctive features of Bumble. The first warning is that Bumble's first message will originate from women on Bumble. The second warning states that if a user does not exchange messages with their matches within 24 hours, the match will be removed.

Finally, a new page titled "It's Cool to Be Kind" is presented, which informs us that we should be polite and respectful in our interactions with other users on Bumble. This is to ensure that all users have a positive experience. By clicking "Accept," we can agree to adhere to the Bumble guidelines. Alternatively, by clicking "Guidelines," we can read the guidelines in more detail. From there, we are directed to the Bumble community guidelines, which are located on the Bumble website.

4.1.5 Application user experience

Upon opening the application, users are greeted with a tab for individuals seeking a romantic partner. This area comprises three main sections. At the top is the application's logo and two buttons: a backtrack button to return to the previous profile and a filter button.

In the center there is a card system where users can view the profile details in front of them. The card system can be controlled by scrolling up and down, allowing users to

explore the profile in depth. The user must then decide whether to swipe right, indicating a positive interest in the profile, or left, indicating a lack of interest. This action will advance the user to the next profile in the queue. Additionally, a super swipe button and a new compliments button are at the bottom of the profile card. The compliments button allows the user to send three complimentary messages at no cost, while the super swipe button is a paid service.

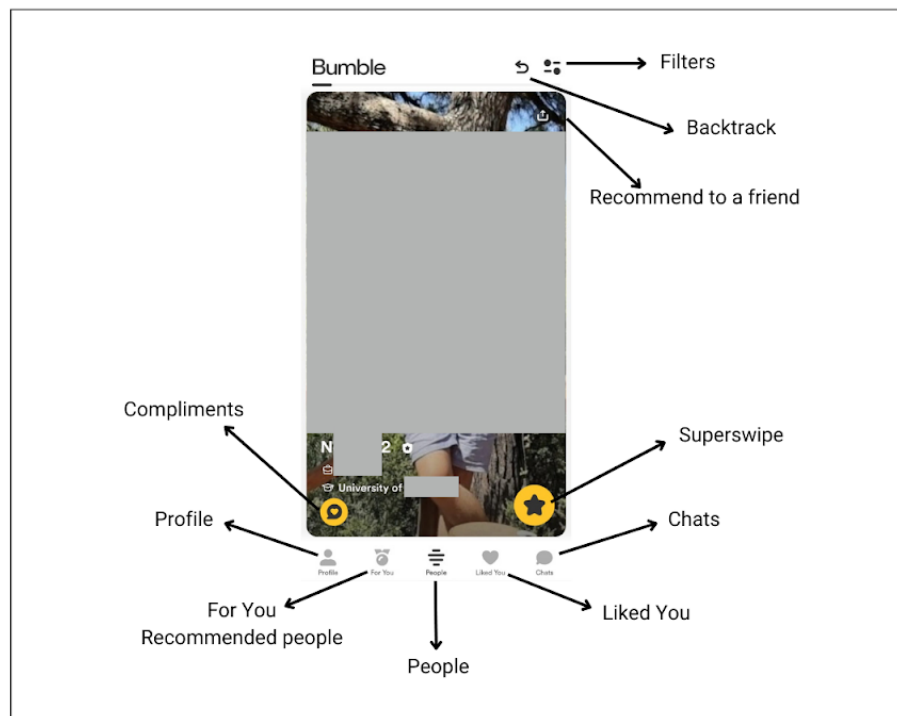


Figure 4.1 The Profile of a Potential Partner on Bumble

From the Filters button, we go to the basic filters, which consist of who you want to date, age, and language, and to the advanced filters, which are premium features. In the Advanced Filters area, users are presented with two options (for verified free accounts) and prompted to indicate whether they would like to view only approved profiles. In addition, there are filters based on physical characteristics, zodiac signs, education, habits, purpose in the app, political views, religious beliefs, and having children, which can be utilized only by premium members.

At the bottom of the page, five buttons are arranged in a vertical line, from left to right. The first button, labeled "Profile," allows users to access their own profile. The second

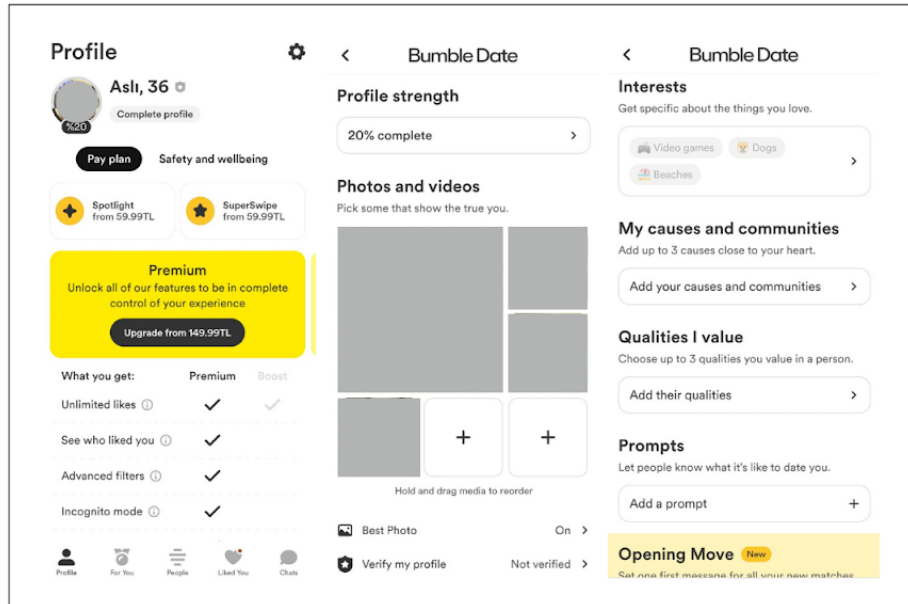


Figure 4.2 The User Profile on Bumble

button, labeled "For You," displays recommended profiles the app suggests. The third button, labeled "People," displays profile cards of other users' potential matches. The third button, labeled "Liked You", allows users to view profiles of individuals who have expressed interest in them, a premium feature. The fourth button, labeled "Chats," allows users to communicate with other users who have been matched with them.

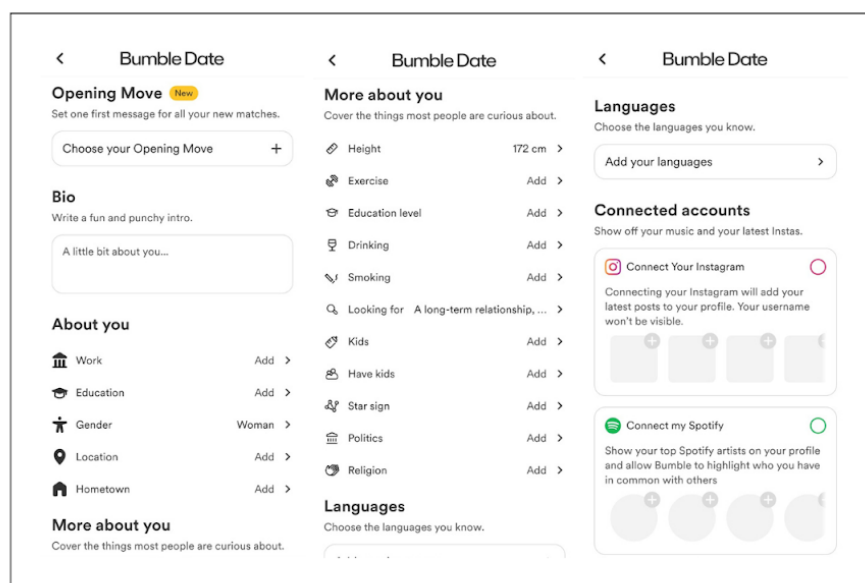


Figure 4.3 Continuation of The User Profile on Bumble

Upon initial access to the profile tab, we are presented with an overview of premium packages as “Pay Plan.” To navigate to our own profile page, we can click on the main profile photo and select "Edit Profile" or click the "Complete Profile" button alternatively. This area allows us to modify the content displayed on our profile in order of photos, videos, profile verification, interests, causes and communities, qualities, prompts, *opening move*, *bio*, *about you*, and *more about you* sections with details, languages, connected Instagram and Spotify accounts.

We can access the “Safety and Wellbeing” section by returning to the main profile tab and clicking the respective button. The section on safety and well-being offers a variety of resources, including guides and helpful materials, on topics such as mental exhaustion, feelings of rejection, harmful behavior, and Bumble to IRL. These resources can be accessed by clicking on each topic. Additionally, a "Get help from Bumble" button is provided for reporting safety concerns in writing, and there is an option to attach a photo directly to the Bumble team. Below this button, we can access external resources on safety and emotional well-being. At the end of this page, we can access Bumble's values and guidelines by clicking on the corresponding button, which directs us to the company's website.

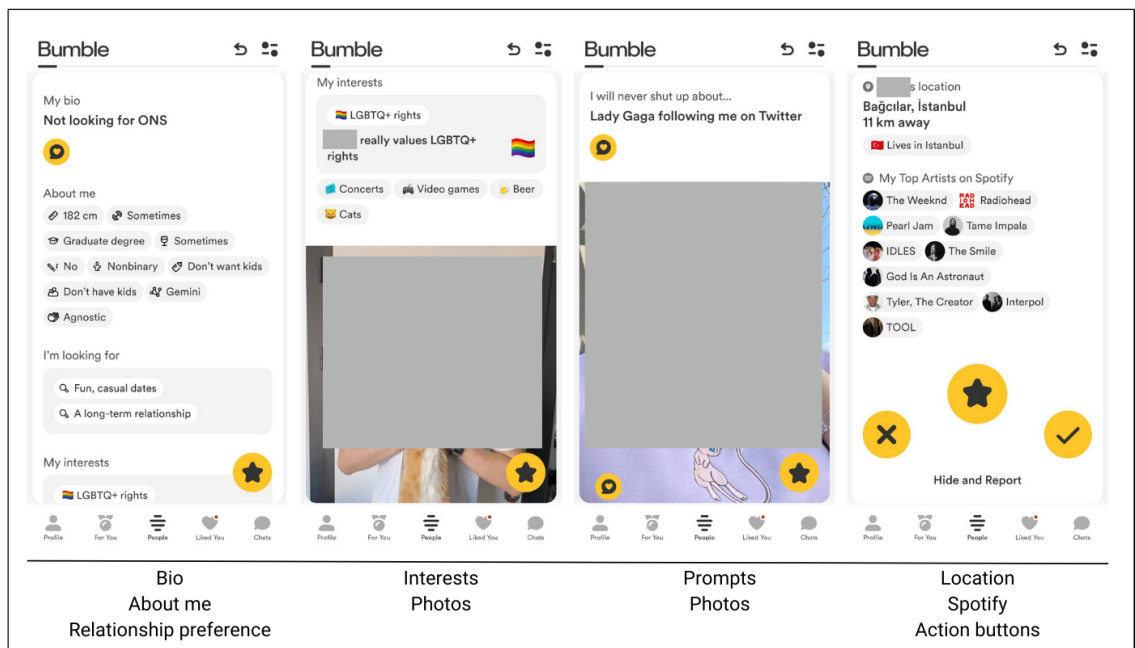


Figure 4.2 The Profile of a Potential Partner in Detail on Bumble

If we swipe through all the available profiles on the People tab, Bumble shows us the option to change the filters.

Upon returning to the people screen, we can navigate through the potential matches' profile by making up-down gestures, eliminating the need to click on any profile area. Additionally, we can send specific compliments by clicking the compliment buttons displayed on photos and prompts. Once the profile has been fully reviewed, we are presented with action buttons, which allow us to take further action. These buttons allow us to perform various tasks, including passing, super-swiping, liking, hiding, reporting, and recommending the profile to a friend.

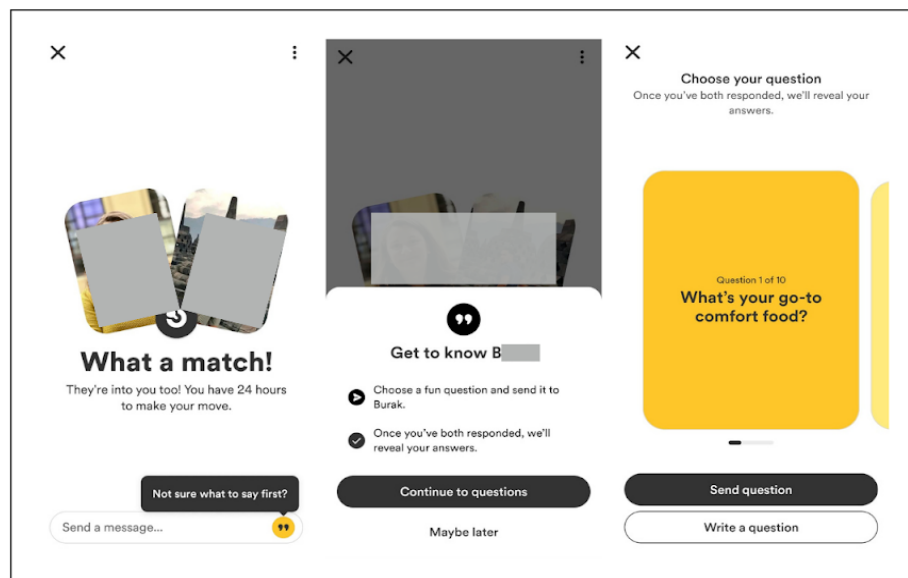


Figure 4.3 Matching Process on Bumble

If we swipe right and get matched, we can move to the Chats tab to start a conversation with the new match. As per the “first message by women” policy of Bumble, we have to send the first message within the 24-hour time limit if we are a woman. This policy is not written on the message page, a pop-up message appears on the screen as a warning to make it known.

As mentioned above, if we are unsure about or uncomfortable with writing a first message, we can send readily available questions or write/ask any question. Although

for nonbinary users and matches with the same gender, there is no first message policy or restriction, women who identify themselves as bisexual or pansexual must send the first message if they are matched with a man.

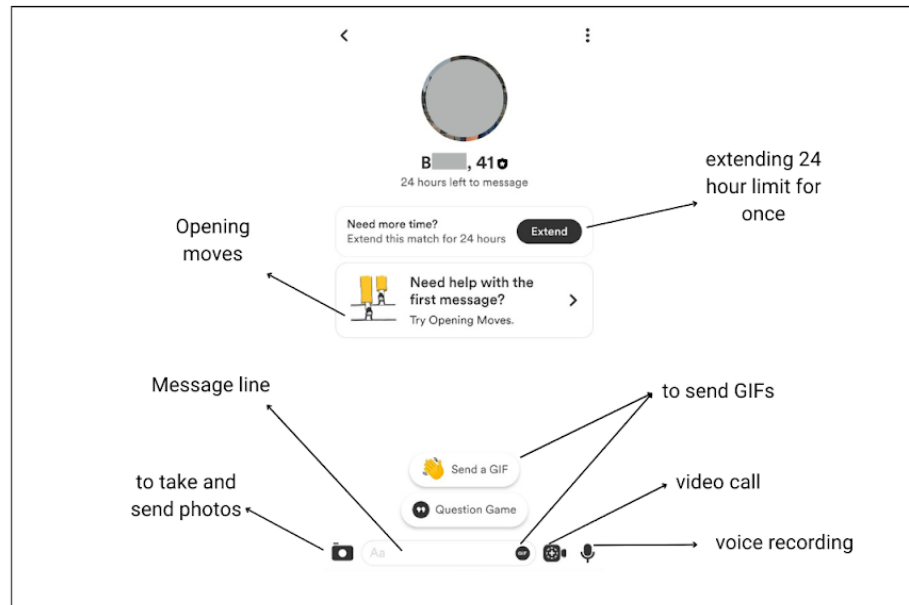


Figure 4.4 The Chat Section on Bumble

We can interact with our matches by sending written messages, voice messages, photographs, questions, and gifs. There is also a video call option if we prefer to use it. If we would like to unmatched or report this profile to Bumble, we must press the 3-dot button on the top right corner to access that page. If women don't send the first message with a 24-hour limit or don't extend the limit for another 24 hours, the match expires. We can remove the expired profile from our Chats tab or rematch if we are a premium member.

We can access the settings page by pressing the button visualized as the gear icon on the top right corner of the Profile tab. There are several settings for our use to adjust the app to our liking, such as mode, to move between Date/BFF mode, snooze, incognito mode and auto-spotlight (premium features), location, travel mode, settings for video autoplay and notifications. Below them, we can access the Contact & FAQ and Security &

Privacy sections. Additionally, we can delete or freeze our account from here. We are asked for the reason for deleting, though process could be completed rather quickly.

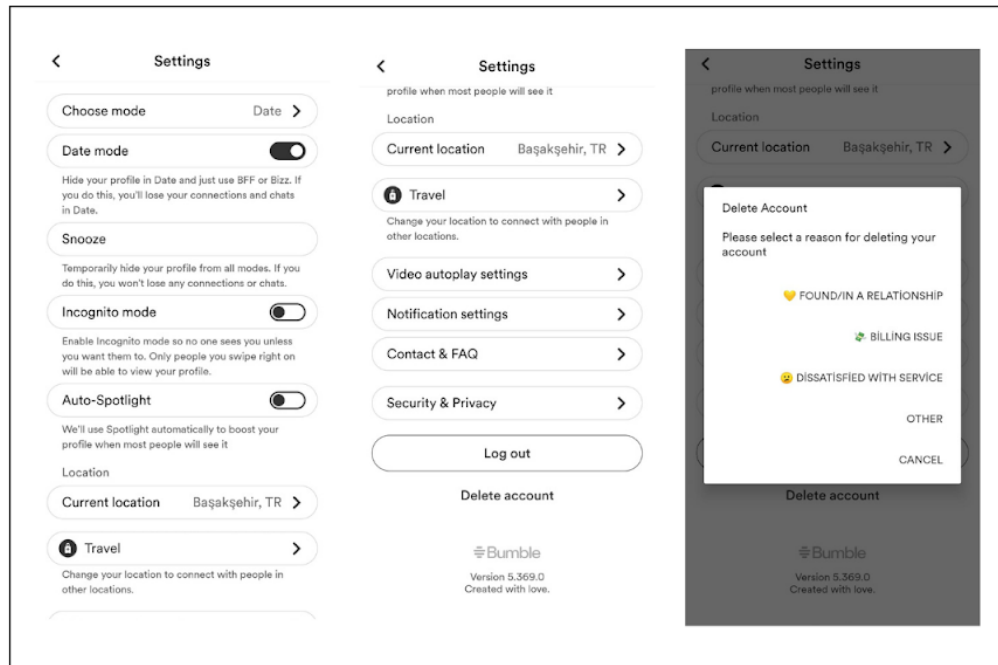


Figure 4.5 The Settings Section on Bumble

4.2 The Summary of the Findings of Tinder and OkCupid Walkthrough Analyses

4.2.1 Tinder

As evidenced on its website and app store pages, Tinder employs its status as the most popular dating platform worldwide as a significant aspect of its marketing strategy. The information regarding the features, global availability, and success of Tinder is presented as slogans throughout the texts on these pages. Furthermore, it is indicated that Tinder does not offer the option for filtering based on height, education, race, or religious beliefs to eliminate the potential discrimination that may arise. Additionally, Tinder is described as a platform that can facilitate a diverse range of romantic relationships, not solely long-term ones.

During the account creation process, users are asked to provide information concerning their name, gender, sexual orientation, and preferred relationship type. Although the list of gender and sexual orientation options is extensive and allows users to select from multiple choices, the preferred relationship choice is limited to one of six options. We are given the option to conceal our gender and sexual orientation from public view on our profile. The user profile is created by providing further information such as education, lifestyle and habits, communication style, and love language. Additionally, a wide range of interests is available for selection.

Tinder employs a swiping motion to facilitate navigation between potential match profiles, a common feature among other dating apps. To view the profile in greater detail, it is necessary to click on the arrow to the right, which appears to be an unintuitive design choice. We can examine further details of the profile by scrolling up and down. Prompts, Instagram, and Spotify information can be examined in addition to the Information mentioned above.

Tinder incorporated features commonly used on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, specifically reaction emojis and liking messages on match and conversation screens. It seems reasonable to assume that these features contribute to a sense of familiarity with Tinder.

Tinder offers an Explore section for users to find like-minded matches with similar interests. Although this section resembles the chat rooms of the late 20th century by design, its purpose is limited to filtering users based on their stated interests. Similarly, the Tinder Security Center has been designed with visual appeal to enhance user engagement and facilitate ease of use.

Although the settings are straightforward to locate, their extensive nature may render them overwhelming for users. Following settings, community guidelines, and safety center, users can log out or delete their accounts accompanied by reasoning for their decision.

4.2.2 OkCupid

OkCupid presents itself as a successful dating app, offering users a unique algorithm and matching process based on compatibility rates, which it claims helps them find the right partner. The tone of the texts emphasizes long-term romantic relationships and OkCupid as a serious dating app. It is important to note that the amount of accessible content on the website differs between English and Turkish versions. Moreover, their blog is not available in Turkish.

During the account creation process, users are required to answer fifteen questions, entering their information about name, gender, preferred gender to meet, date of birth, desired relationship, and desired age range. Upon entering the app to see potential matches, users must enter further personal information such as sexual orientation, physical information, views and beliefs, consumption choices and dietary habits, education, and employment.

Potential match profiles are structured similarly to Bumble and Tinder, minus the Instagram and Spotify hyperlinks. On the other hand, users have liked and sent comments on the given photographs and information on the potential match's profile. Therefore, one may send messages without matching that person first, which I have also experienced during the walkthrough.

As stated above, OkCupid's most distinctive characteristic is its compatibility rates, calculated according to users' responses to the extensive questionnaire. The responses of the potential match to the questions can be reached and examined extensively. However, one may prefer not to answer more questions after the initial compulsory ones. Therefore, a discrepancy is created where you can come across a potential match with a high compatibility rating, although you may have answered ten times more questions. Moreover, the nature of the questions varies significantly; for example, you can answer questions about your political views, thoughts on jealousy, or preferences regarding physical intimacy in public. OkCupid encourages users to answer more questions,

which enhances its gamification significantly and keeps the users on the platform even though they are not swiping or conversing.

OkCupid offers its users an extensive filtering feature that defines their preferences for their ideal match. At first glance, this filter feature is more detailed and user-friendly than Bumble and Tinder counterparts. Additionally, you can see who you have swiped right in the “your likes” section.

While the conversation screen resembles Bumble and Tinder, the settings section differs visually and textually, strengthening OkCupid’s self-positioning as a serious dating app. Although it is not visually appealing, it is clear and accessible. On the other hand, it should be noted that the app’s design feels outdated and clunky.

The account deletion process differs from Bumble and Tinder, with the addition of the security measure for entering password, which makes the process longer and prevents impulsive deletion.

4.3 Reflections on the Walkthrough Analyses

Currently, the dating app market is saturated, and dating apps are targeting different groups and taking different approaches to online dating have proliferated. However, not every dating app is popular at the same level in the market. Moreover, some are not available in app stores in Turkey. To be successful in the dating app market, apps introduce different algorithms, niche features and compelling marketing campaigns. They not only follow trends in the mobile app industry but also, in time, refresh and transform their algorithms, interfaces, and branding according to customer feedback, app analytics, and public discourse to maintain their popularity.

In the first three parts of this section, I have investigated three app architectures, Bumble, Tinder, and OkCupid, using the Walkthrough Analysis method (Light et al. 2018). Although the differences in the interfaces and features can be discerned clearly, the apps' algorithms are mostly kept secret by companies (Gillespie 2014, 24). Tinder and OkCupid operate under the Match Group umbrella, only OkCupid publicly explains

its algorithm between these three apps. The reason for this is straightforward: OkCupid's algorithm and its scientific matching by compatibility percentage are used as the company's main selling point of the app. Its algorithm and matching are what distinguish OkCupid in the dating app market. Although Tinder used the Elo rating system before, it now uses a different and supposedly more complex algorithm (Tinder 2022). For Tinder and Bumble, we can only guess how their algorithm operates.

Tinder, OkCupid, and Bumble differ from each other not only in their algorithms but also in their marketing and interfaces. Firstly, all three target different use motivations through their marketing campaigns and texts on their websites. Most significantly, Bumble emphasizes its feminist self identification by its slogan of "Make the first move". Moreover, while Bumble points out that it is not only for dating but also for finding friends and like-minded people, Tinder leans on romantic relationships of any kind offer. Although Bumble and Tinder offer a variety of relationships, OkCupid signals monogamous long-term relationships in its pitch as "finding the right one for you."

Besides the algorithms, targeted motivations are also integrated into app features. While OkCupid has a compatibility section to examine compatibility questions and rates, Bumble and Tinder have integrated other particular sections. Bumble's integration of BFF mode aligns with the motivations it targets. The availability of BFF mode is one of the most distinguishing features of Bumble between these three apps. On the other hand, while Tinder's motto mostly leans on romantic interactions, they introduced the Explore section in 2021, which is what users were asking for, according to Renate Nyborg, CEO of Tinder (Tinder 2021). He further states that this new section "will be a major step in creating a deeper, multi-dimensional, interactive experience for our members that expands the possibilities of Tinder as a platform." As illustrated in the walkthrough, this new feature does not differ from the other two apps' filtering by interests already available. This feature is integrated into Bumble and OkCupid, although Bumble made it available only for premium users with advanced filtering. Tinder's addition of this new feature shows us the growing significance of mutual interests in online dating

interactions. As with advanced filtering, the three apps offer users various similar and different features when purchasing a premium package.

So, how does Bumble differ significantly from Tinder and OkCupid in its architecture? Which features and characteristics might affect young adult women's decision to use Bumble? Moreover, which possibilities and restrictions are put before women by Bumble that might affect their online dating experiences and practices?

4.3.1 Women-initiated conversations

The most significant feature where Bumble diverges from other apps is women-initiated conversations. Only on Bumble, upon matching, only women can start the conversation in heterosexual matches. Although this feature might still tempt women to choose over other apps initially, other recently integrated features might hinder the first message feature's capabilities. These features are opening moves and compliments. They were introduced with Bumble's rebranding in April 2024. Although opening moves caused an uproar in the online media as Bumble removed women-initiated conversations (Safronova 2024, Murashima 2024, Duffy 2024), compliments were found to be more problematic upon examining and experiencing these features during the walkthrough. With the opening move, whether to use it still depends on the women's choice. However, women cannot opt out of receiving compliments. This feature does not include an option for the user to allow or not to allow compliments. During the walkthrough, I received compliments, which were greetings as attempts to start a conversation. This means that compliments are a way for other users, men, in this case, to overcome the first message obstacle, which would hinder the first message feature capability to block first messages from matches.

Moreover, compliments can be received from those who have not been matched, which could create a possibility to receive unsolicited, unwanted messages. This outcome would undermine Bumble's feminist rhetoric and claims of a safe space for women's online dating. Furthermore, it hinders Bumble's most significant feature, which diverges

it from other dating apps. It was essential to investigate this further during the interviews.

4.3.2 The sexual orientation information

During the walkthroughs, although the gender identity list is extensive, Bumble no longer had a space for sexual orientation information on profiles, which has been included on both Tinder and OkCupid. On its website, Bumble states, “With GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) guidance, people can now share more about their gender identities and sexual orientations, enabling them to better express themselves in ways that best reflect who they are.”(Bumble 2023). GLAAD is a non-profit organization that focuses on LGBTQ advocacy, Bumble’s claim of better self-expression clashes with the non-availability of sexual orientation information on profiles.

Being a researcher with the knowledge of a previous non-heterosexual female user of Bumble, not being able to express my sexual identity during the walkthrough was a significant change for me on the app. However, it should be taken into account that a current non-heterosexual female user might feel safer giving this information to their match during the conversation as well, or they might not be affected by this change at all. This is another aspect that should be delved deeper during interviews, especially with non-heterosexual participants.

4.3.3 The distance filter and premium advanced filters

Filters offered are another aspect of Bumble that differs from Tinder and OkCupid. First, the distance filter, included on both Tinder and OkCupid, is unavailable on Bumble. While Bumble uses users’ geolocation for the People screen, it is not within their capacity to adjust the degree of distance they wish to match. Although it might not be preferred, users could come across profiles from other cities. For example, although I was in Istanbul during the walkthrough, profiles in Eskişehir and Ankara were also

shown to me. These encounters could be bothersome for users or not even noticed before the match, as location information is at the bottom of the profile.

Another aspect of filters taken into account is the advanced filters option. These filters are comprised of personal information details. Advanced filters are available on OkCupid and Tinder, although in different ways. While Tinder integrates them as a different screen, Explore, OkCupid includes them with the other filters. Advanced filters on Bumble can only be used by premium users; this is also divergent from the other two apps. The addition of verified accounts filter into advanced filters as a premium service seems controversial in the context of Bumble's claims of a safe space for online dating.

4.3.4 Blurring of sexually explicit pictures on chat

Women often experience image-based sexual abuse in the form of unsolicited “dick pics” on dating apps (Hayes and Dragiewicz 2018, Waling and Pym 2019). To prevent these unwanted encounters, Bumble has the feature of blurring the sexually explicit pictures during a conversation. Although an unsolicited picture was not received during a walkthrough, this information was retrieved from the texts that Bumble provides as community guides. When such a picture is received, Bumble's AI integration blurs it automatically, warning the content's nature and asking if they would prefer to see it. This feature is also not available on the other two dating apps and would be beneficial for women users to get ahead of such unwanted encounters.

5.CAAT INTERVIEW FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

This chapter explores the themes emerging from the critical app analysis interviews conducted to answer the questions posed by this study, which is informed by the theoretical framework of techno-feminism, mutual shaping of technology and society, and the concept of affordances. In order to understand what Bumble offers to its users, and how its feminist self-identification is integrated in its architecture, firstly, walkthrough analyses were conducted. To explore the affordances that emerge from the negotiation between Bumble and users' practices, critical app analysis interviews were conducted, with questions that informed by the walkthrough analysis. The primary themes that emerged from the thematic analysis are Bumble's capacity to create a safe space for women, the ongoing privacy concerns of young adult women on Bumble, the importance of homophily and taste in online dating in terms of avoiding stigmatization and providing sense of safety, the use of Bumble for non-dating interactions, and the multiplicity of affordances.

The findings revealed that the primary concerns of young adult women using Bumble were their safety and privacy, a result that is consistent with previous studies on Bumble and other dating apps (Pruchniewska 2020; Young and Roberts 2023). How Bumble's brand identity and its premise to create a safe space for women with its unique features, such as women-initiated messages and newly introduced opening moves and compliments, were crucial for young adult women's online dating practices on Bumble are discussed. Furthermore, the importance of homophily and taste in online dating and the use of Bumble for non-dating interactions themes clearly illustrate the negotiation between Bumble's offerings and restraints and the motivations and expectancies of young adult women in using Bumble, and how their practices are shaped, the affordances of Bumble in relation to that. Furthermore, the "imagined affordances" of Bumble (Nagy and Neff 2015) are examined in the context of unexpected utilization of affordances. Therefore, this chapter aims to respond to the second and third main

research questions, the perception Bumble's affordances by young women, and how it influences their mobile dating experiences.

5.1 Bumble's Capacity to Create a Safe Space for Women

The primary objective of Bumble as a dating app is to facilitate the pursuit of romantic relationships. These relationships may span a range of intimacy levels, from brief, casual sexual encounters to long-term relationships. Bumble's self-identification as a feminist app is evident in its marketing campaigns and its reasoning for specific features and policies. These include women-initiated conversations, the blurring of sexually explicit images, and the banning of guns in photographs (Cooney 2018). Furthermore, Bumble declares to have a mission for women's empowerment. Bumble is known for its women-first approach among dating app users. Considering the proliferation of dating apps over the past decade, Bumble's distinctive tone has set it apart from other dating apps, particularly influencing female users to adopt the platform. Despite Bumble's stated mission of women's empowerment in the dating world and relationships, women's online dating experiences on the platform often diverge from this objective.

The most dominant theme during the interviews was women's desire for safety in online dating and Bumble's facilitation. The theme of Bumble's ability to ensure their safety in online dating came up on three fronts: the women-initiated conversations implemented by Bumble, and how to avoid potential harms such as catfishing.

5.1.1 The significance of woman-initiated conversations for women

Bumble's feminist premise differentiates it from other dating apps on the market. It is the only app that allows women users to initiate conversations, thus offering them a unique feature. It could be argued that this is the main selling point of Bumble, which was also reflected in participants' comments on this feature.

Although the participants' motivations for using Bumble differed, they all downloaded and used the app due to the women-initiated conversation feature. A significant number

of them (N=6) were informed about Bumble with an emphasis on this feature by their friends. Moreover, when they were asked to describe Bumble and their thoughts on its brand positioning, they identified women-initiated conversations as Bumble's most distinctive feature.

For some participants, this feature creates the impression that the app is aligned with feminist values. They define the women-initiated conversation feature, which I will continue to address as the first message feature, as an apparatus that creates comfort and safety for women. K8's definition of the first message feature as a "right granted to women" gives an inclination into the daily power struggles women experience in relationships (Gurcan and Ustunel 2023). This characterization of Bumble as a feminist dating app aligns with Bumble's marketing campaigns, which we explored in the walkthrough analysis.

While Bumble uses the wording of 'empowerment of women', participants mainly chose to identify the outcome of this feature as safety or the creation of a safe space. Previous studies have questioned the competence of Bumble's claims regarding women's empowerment (Young and Roberts 2023; Pruchniewska 2020; MacLeod and McArthur 2019; Bivens and Hoque 2018). These studies argue that Bumble cannot succeed in this endeavor, because it cannot create an impact on the societal level. Although Bumble may not have the capability to be the agent of societal change, it is observed that most of the participants feel a sense of control over their safety, as K8 demonstrates.

"I mean, I find it a bit more user-friendly. You know, not everyone can just come up to you and message you like crazy, or there's OkCupid, for example, there's that part, you know, everyone can come up to you and write a lot of things and write whatever they want, even if you don't match at all. Actually, all of a sudden, you can also encounter messages you don't want. But Bumble, as I said, seems to leave a little more control to you, in that sense, a little more like a safety, so I think it has a prioritization in terms of security." K8, 26

K8 feels empowered by sending the first message, not because making the first move makes her feel bolder and socially outgoing towards men, as Bumble claims (Bumble. n.d.a), but because she feels she can control her safety and comfort. K9, a new user of Bumble, attributes the platform's implementation of women-first policies to the experiences of its founder, Whitney Wolfe Heard, in other dating apps.

“It is a plus that a woman with previous experience in online dating apps founded it. Because the disadvantages of other apps have been seen and steps have been taken.” K9, 26

Although K9 began using Bumble due to its female-centric marketing rhetoric, most of the participants' (N=15) decisions were influenced by their prior experiences on other dating apps, particularly Tinder and OkCupid. Some participants indicated that they were disturbed by the sexually explicit first messages from men on Tinder. Others reported feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of intro messages on OkCupid. They described the process of going through the first messages as time-consuming and often distressing. For women, Bumble solves this problem by implementing the 24-hour rule for the expiration of matches. When asked about their thoughts on the 24-hour period they pointed out that this period allows them a chance to reevaluate the match. If they do not wish to interact with that person, it simply disappears after 24 hours. This feature removes the burden for women of unmatching. Furthermore, having the control to initiate the conversation with that match strengthens the feeling of control and safety (Pruchniewska 2020). While women primarily utilize the first message feature as a step of their personal safety strategy, some participants have recounted instances where this feature proved ineffective.

“If I swipe everyone right and have 100 matches a day, how can I find the first message differently for each one? There are people I just write hello to; for example, if there is a detail on their profiles, like they have traveled to 60 countries, that's great for me. I ask something based on that, or is your third photo from there? Or if he is a citizen? But some people unmatch me when I

just write hello, good morning, good evening. Because they expect something different. But my creativity has gone. I'm no longer that creative.” K14, 28

“I realize that if the other person is a jerk, there is nothing I can do. What works best is good morning, how are you in the morning and hello how are you in the evening. If I'm in a funny mood at that moment, if I write nabiyon, and if he responds with nabiyon, it's funny. I like it because our energy matches at least. Or, you know, he made fun of my nabiyon because I wrote it like that. But also, I wrote to two people recently and I wrote nice comments, oh how beautiful your name is and so on, and there was no reply. They waited 24 hours and didn't reply. They didn't unmatched either.” K6, 30

K14 and K6 came across unresponsive matches or men who criticized their initiation of the conversation with a simple greeting. Although their assumption that men want to receive creative first messages might be partly true, we should remember that men can also choose not to respond to them after reevaluating their match. Men might be letting the match expire on its own, not unlike women. Earlier studies show that in other dating apps where men tend to initiate the conversation, they also have encountered the same expectancy of creative first messages from women (Pruchniewska 2020, 2434). The expectation of a first message worthy of responding is not a gendered problem. The problem stems from match overload, where both women and men are overwhelmed by finding something new to say to each profile. Although that is their right to expect, searching every profile to find a conversation starter might not be fruitful, as will be discussed in chapter 5.4.4.

While all participants chose Bumble because of the first message feature, for some, this feature was ineffective in avoiding distress during conversations.

“I opened Bumble, and I thought maybe it would be more proper because the women write there first. On Tinder, because when you match, for example, men start talking dirty right away, it is a direct turn-off. So, I thought maybe it was better. However, people are the same people. The men are the same.” K6, 30

It does not matter to K6 who starts the conversation. She defines the problem as men's attitude towards women on dating apps. She speculates that she came across the same unsavory behavior from men on Bumble as Tinder because of the common assumption of men using multiple dating apps. As Gillett (2018) explains in their study, the violence experienced on dating apps is gendered. As in the case of K6, Bumble's affordance of a safe space for women diverges from that of the other participants mentioned above. Women who share K6's experiences of harassment navigate their conversations on Bumble with a "harm prevention" mindset, as Pruchniewska's study also demonstrates (Pruchniewska 2020). When asked about their thoughts on the first message feature, K13 and K15's views were revealed to be entirely different from those of other participants.

"I don't know; I find it unnecessary at some point, as I said. Because this is already a dating app, if I don't want to talk to that person, I won't swipe right. If we swiped right at the same time, it doesn't really matter who wrote first. I don't know the reason behind this, but to me, it seems a bit unnecessary at some point, as I said. Because I mean, I have been writing to everyone anyway. After that hour, it is up to the other party whether to answer or not." K13, 26

"I think it's a bit sexist. Because men should be able to send (the first message). You know, I'm not in the mindset that men should do everything, but putting such a restriction on men is like putting them in an animal cage and expecting us to feed them. I think it would make more sense if both sides could write." K15, 21

Although K13 is not a new user and received aggressive messages from men on Bumble during conversations, she believes the first message feature is meaningless. The rationale behind K13's decision to deem the first message feature unnecessary is that the app is only effective when a user is engaged in a conversation. She swipes right only if she wants to match and converse with that person; therefore, who starts the conversation is inconsequential to her. On the other hand, K15 criticizes the first message as Bumble

being sexist towards men. Her definition of the first message feature is aligned with what Bivens and Hoque (2018) call ‘an inscription of an aggressive form of masculinity onto straight male bodies.’ in their material-semiotic analysis of Bumble.

Most of the participants (N=11) know what Bergström (2022) defines as ‘the privatization of dating’ in the sense that dating apps belong to private companies. K6 interprets the first message feature as a marketing move to attract female users to the platform, which will cause more men to join the app as paying customers.

“If the application is free, you are the one being sold, and it is not the point that women initiate here. You are trying to sell to men. They are the customer, and we are the product, that's why. Bumble is, of course, initially aimed at women; Tinder's (executive's) ex-boyfriend founded it. I was very excited when I first read it with such an exciting ‘Woman! Woman! Woman!’ thing. It was like that at first, but now, of course it is changing. Everything is changing.” K6, 30

What K6 means by “changing” is Bumble’s recent rebranding and addition of new interaction options, such as opening moves and compliments, which will be discussed further.

The results demonstrate that Bumble's women-initiated conversation feature fosters a sense of temporal safety and comfort for its female users. While this approach is effective in creating a sense of safety and comfort, it is limited to the initial message and can be easily dismantled. Furthermore, the recently implemented compliment feature undermines the effectiveness of women-initiated conversations and calls into question Bumble's claims of facilitating a safe space for women with this unique feature.

5.2 Ongoing Safety and Privacy Concerns of Women on Bumble

Privacy concerns among young adult women on Bumble could be attributed to their individual preferences regarding self-disclosure and the desire for personal security. These factors give rise to what Shaw (2017) refers to as the "negotiated use", such as

not using specific features or disclosing specific information. Although some of the concerns relate to the actions of other users, specifically men, who have exhibited unwanted behavior such as cyberstalking, the question of trust in Bumble also arises regarding its cybersecurity measures and potential data risks (Lutz and Ranzini 2017; Phan et al. 2021).

5.2.1 Safety Work of Women for Avoiding Deception

During the interviews, the participants' commitment to safety work (Gillett 2023) on Bumble to avoid harm, disillusionment, and unwanted experiences became evident from their responses to several questions. While they screen the matches to identify potential red flags during the swiping and before sending the first message, they also used the app's features more subversively (Pruchniewska 2020, 2426).

A significant concern for them is the phenomenon of catfishing, a colloquial term defined as "The action or practice of deceiving someone online by means of a fictional or assumed persona, esp. with the intent to lure a person into a relationship." by Oxford English Dictionary (OED 2024). According to Statista (2023), catfishing is adults' most voiced concern worldwide regarding online dating. One of the features women utilize to avoid catfishing is the video call feature.

"If you're going to talk from somewhere else instead of Bumble, you can at least be sure what that person is with a video chat before you share all your information. He might not be using pictures of himself; he might be catfishing. That's why video call makes sense. Still, you have not given your information to the other person." K1

As proposed by K1, when they were asked if they use the video call feature, some participants indicated that they have been using video calls as a harm prevention tool (Pruchniewska 2020) to verify the other person's authenticity without disclosing any personal contact information, such as their phone number. On the other hand, K9, who

has a video call experience on Bumble, agrees with the possibility of harm prevention but points out a different aspect of the video call feature.

“It's dangerous. I was scared to go on that video call, not knowing what I'd see. Although it makes sense, I don't want to give my number, and I don't want to install Telegram, which will be more anonymous. But on the other hand, I also want to make sure that the other side is the person he declares. Yes, I can justify this feature. But it scares me about what I might come across as a woman.” K9

K9 defines using video calls to avoid catfishing as a noteworthy safety and privacy tactic; however, she expresses how she was distressed by the unpredictable nature of a video call. The transition from asynchronous written conversation to synchronous video chat made her feel she had relinquished control of the conversation to the person across her and opened the door to potential harm. She expresses that she prefers investigating profiles for possible red flags or half-truths. She points out the gamification aspect of analyzing a profile; in a way, this is more appealing to her gamer personality. Another participant has also mentioned that she does not favor using video calls. She prefers meeting face-to-face, as she mentioned several times during the interview.

“I haven't talked to anyone on video. Will they film it? They'll record it or something. I'm not okay with video call. Instead, let's have a coffee. What's going to happen?” K7

K7's apprehension about the possibility of the video call being recorded by the person across them gets past the potential for harm during a face-to-face meeting. This fear illustrates that women are aware of the data they share, not only with the app but also with other individuals, whether in written form or visual. The potential risk of the distribution of their images without their consent and revenge pornography is evident to the women (Gillett 2023). As in the case of K9, K7 explains that she uses another method to avoid catfishing.

“How that person uses Instagram shows a little bit more what kind of person they are, and usually the people who connect Instagram in this are very insta-boy people, and I don't like people who live on Instagram much. That is a criterion for me. But it can also be good, especially if the profile that looks good enough to be fake has an Instagram, it is something, yes, it's a real person. Because they might be using someone else's pictures too.” K7

When K7 was asked about their matching preferences and process, she expressed that she uses the Instagram hyperlink to gain insight into the lifestyle of the potential match, similar to that undertaken by the other participants. More significantly, she uses Instagram as a verification tool for the potential match if the person seems “good enough to be fake” to her. The possibility of an inquiry into the potential match's lifestyle might be why Bumble implemented the Instagram hyperlink on profiles. However, as in the case of K7 and other participants, this addition creates another way of ensuring the prevention of catfishing for women.

Although most participants (N=10) define catfishing as being deceived by someone with an assumed persona, K3 expands the definition by including deception by using older photographs on men's profiles.

“Some put photos of themselves from 8 years ago when they were young, photos of themselves without hair loss, with muscles, without the gained weight. And also, there are those who put one or two photos. Of course, that is a preference, but there are also those who catfish or those who hide themselves a little more. For example, I want to switch to Instagram immediately to look at their profiles to understand their personalities, environment, and preferences with a little stalking. Because I generally don't trust them very much, the profile is not enough.” K3

While talking about potential match profiles, K3 pointed out that she came across a number of people who use older photos on Bumble, which they assume are more attractive. She defines this self-presentation strategy of men as catfishing because she

feels deceived by outdated photos. As all of the participants mentioned, the photo they choose for their profile means how they want to portray themselves. K3 wishes to present ‘an authentic self’ (Duguay 2017); thus, she expects the same behavior from her counterpart. To avoid such instances, she resorts to investigating their Instagram accounts to reach more recent photos.

The phenomenon of catfishing represents a significant safety concern for young adult women on Bumble. Their awareness of the potential for deception and exploitation motivates them to adopt a range of tactics and strategies, which can be characterized as gendered invisible labor (Pruchniewska 2020; Gillett 2023).

5.2.2 Limited self-disclosure of personal information on profiles on bumble

As illustrated in earlier studies (Pruchniewska 2020; Cöbek 2022; Gillett 2023), women are careful about the information they disclose on dating apps and websites. They often avoid sharing too much of their personal information to prevent potential harm.

Statista (2024) states that “the threat of virtual or in-person stalking by someone you connected with on a dating app/website” is one of the main concerns of dating platform users worldwide. For example, when she was asked about her profile creation process, as a teacher, K4 is concerned about the potential harm that can be caused by disclosing her photo and name through an online search, which can lead to the revealing of her workplace. The possibility of disclosure of her workplace without her consent makes her contemplate deleting Bumble.

Significant number of participants (N=13) refuse to use the hyperlink for Instagram on their Bumble profile. Although some deem Instagram as their private space, some express their views on people who use Instagram hyperlinks as “*takipçi kasanlar*”, people who are after gaining followers on Instagram.

“Those who connect Instagram are generally a crowd trying to gain followers. I think Instagram would not have been added if the purpose was to talk, to meet, because people on Instagram now look at each other as followers and fans. That's why I don't even use Instagram.” K15

K15 was one of the participants who pointed out the expository nature of Instagram. She explained that an Instagram hyperlink would not coincide with her goal of using Bumble to meet new people because of this nature.

Women often choose to share their personal information, such as their job, the university they graduated from, or their Instagram, during the conversation, which facilitates a realistic conversation akin to a face-to-face encounter. They prefer to disclose some personal information on their own terms if they choose to do so during a conversation or a face-to-face date. Furthermore, women's reasoning for doing this is to avoid potential harm, such as stalking both online and offline (Aydoğan 2020).

On the other hand, the unavailability of sexual orientation information and the observation of sexual orientation information presented as written in bios on profiles raised significant questions about the sufficiency of self-expression features for non-heterosexuals during the walkthrough analysis. When asked about the removal of sexual orientation information from the profiles by Bumble and whether this affected their practices, non-heterosexual users expressed that it didn't have any particular consequence for them. In alignment with Ferris and Duguay's findings (2020: 490), K10, as a lesbian female user, pointed out that she expresses her sexual orientation through her profile photos, so when other users visit her profile, they can derive her sexual orientation through visual cues from the profile photos. Therefore, she did not need this information written on her profile. Although it should be pointed out that non-heterosexual female participants are a small portion of the sample, the view and experience about the unavailability of sexual orientation information on profiles might differ for other non-heterosexual users. Moreover, Bumble's reasoning for removing this information should be investigated further. It might be done so by GLAAD's (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) guidance, as explained in the walkthrough

analysis chapter, for safety concerns for non-heterosexuals, so the platform does not force them to disclose their sexual orientation information openly.

5.2.3 Concerns regarding data privacy and permissions granted to bumble

Bumble's algorithm depends on the geolocation information of its users, like any other location-based dating app (Veel and Thylstrup 2018; Narin 2018; Aydoğan 2020). Before using the app for swiping, users are asked for their permission to allow Bumble to reach their geolocation. Furthermore, permission to the gallery on the phone is also asked while trying to upload a profile photo, which is an essential element of the app, as demonstrated in the walkthrough analysis.

Although the participants expressed that they grant these permissions, some of them (N=3) exhibit a "negotiated use" (Shaw 2017) by turning off Bumble's access to their location data from phone settings in some circumstances. Even though Bumble clearly asks for their permission to access to their location only while using the app, a hesitation to give "total access" to the app arises. For other participants (N=5), what is worrying is providing Bumble access to their gallery. K15 expresses her concern as:

"Access to photos makes me a little bit nervous. Because it has access to all the photos on my phone. So sometimes there's a photo of me that's kind of private or there's a picture of my cleavage that I'm not going to share on social media. You know, I've taken it, and it's still there. Or, to put it bluntly, I have a nude. I sent it to my boyfriend. I sent it to someone I flirted with. It makes me nervous that the app can access this too." K15

As discussed in the previous chapter, considering many women get exposed to online sexual harassment, such as revenge pornography, during their daily lives (Anderson et al. 2020), K15's fear of getting exposed sexually online without her consent is undeniably justified. K8 puts forth a possible solution to K15's dilemma.

“For example, if there was a pool of only the photos we would upload, and it could only have access to that pool. I would like that, of course. But you know, in general, when we become a member of all platforms, we give permission and continue. But as I said, the phone number part gives me a little more assurance. So instead of signing up via e-mail or Facebook or any other application the phone number makes me feel a little safer.” K8

Although K8 has given Bumble access to reach her gallery like every participant, she expresses that she would have preferred to allow Bumble to have access to a photo folder of her choice, which is a feasible solution that Bumble can implement on their platform. Furthermore, K8 expresses her hesitation about accessing Bumble through Facebook, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

All the participants were aware that Bumble collect their private data, including their geolocation, and they acknowledge that as an inevitable consequence of using such platforms. However, it is illustrated that there is a rising concern for cybersecurity and data privacy on Bumble. The users’ trust in Bumble contingent upon their data literacy and self-disclosure concerns. Their distrust not only arises because they are uninformed about Bumble’s data regulations, but also informed about the data leaks, cyber-attacks, and the instances of selling personal data to third parties on apps (Lutz and Ranzini 2017, Stoicescu 2019).

5.2.4 The need to maintain the facade

Accessing dating apps through Facebook was first implemented by Tinder. This way, when opening a new Tinder account, the user’s authenticity is “being established through one’s Facebook profile” (Duguay 2017). Bumble gives the same opportunity to its users, although none of the participants prefer to use this feature. For example, when they were asked about in which they created their account, K3 and K7 expressed their concern about Facebook option as:

“Facebook makes me nervous. It's like suddenly this Bumble thing will pop up on my profile, and my grandparents will see it. That's why I chose the phone number.” K3

“I think it secures it, but I wasn't sure about Facebook, and I didn't connect any of them. I guess because I was afraid, I'd press something wrong, that it would show up and I wouldn't realize, I don't know, I'd get drunk or something.” K7

Women are concerned that Bumble will share something on their Facebook profile without their consent or that they will allow it without noticing. Principally, women's concerns stem from their older family and acquaintances using Facebook (Sinclair and Grieve 2017; Sheldon et al. 2021) and women's desire to keep their dating app use hidden from these people. The reluctance to use this option can be attributed to a desire to maintain the facade regarding their romantic life and sexual freedom, and their use of dating apps within the context of familial relationships (Özyeğin 2015).

Furthermore, women often hesitate to disclose their Bumble use to some of their friends and coworkers. They are also distressed about coming across these people or their familial acquaintances on Bumble. They fear experiencing social stigma if that happens (Cöbek 2023, Christensen 2018). Their worry stems from two reasons: dating apps' reputation in society as “hook-up apps” (Licoppe 2020) and their disclosure of preferred relationship type as short-term. Some participants get used to this feeling, but some find different solutions. For example, when asked about if they have deleted their account before, K2 explained as:

“I use it when I'm in Istanbul. Honestly, I don't prefer to use it when I'm in Mersin with my family. I delete the profile, but I won't delete it this time. We'll see how it is there.” K2

K2, like some other participants, resorted to deleting their profile while visiting their family in their hometown to maintain the facade. During the interview, K2 expressed

her interest in using premium for the incognito mode feature next time instead of deleting her profile.

The “negotiated use” (Nagy and Neff 2015) in regard to using Bumble for romantic purposes while maintaining façade with family and acquaintances is prevalent. While in earlier studies on Bumble illustrate a concern of self-disclosure to the other users on the app with the utilization of Facebook sign-in option in Wester (Pruchniewska 2020), keeping the dating app use discreet is demonstrated in the studies regarding to Turkey (Cöbek 2022). We can argue that this is a unique outcome of using dating apps in the cultural context of Turkey.

5.3 Homophily and Taste on Bumble

One of the primary themes that emerged from the interviews was the appreciation expressed by women for the profile features on Bumble, which they found helpful for self-expression especially. When they were asked about their profile creation process, they described presenting an image of themselves and their lifestyle, not merely through the means of photographs but also through the depiction of their interests and values. By doing this, they seek to attract partners similar to them (Parisi and Communello 2020, 73). The participants could create their Bumble profiles with a high degree of detail. Furthermore, they found the prompts provided by the app to be an effective tool for facilitating the creation of their profiles. They noted that the prompts, written in a style similar to everyday language, encouraged them to reflect on and articulate aspects of themselves that they had not previously considered.

Although women may choose not to disclose some of their personal information on their profiles, they expect men to disclose more information about themselves, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.2.2. By examining the personal information presented in profiles, they form an impression of the individual and assess the compatibility. Their compatibility is based on shared lifestyle, values, and interests. As discussed in Chapter 5.2.2, users perceived the ability to list their interests as a valuable feature. Bumble has an extensive list of interests from which to choose. For example, for K15, that was one of the parts of the profiles.

“I play flag football, a sport like American football. Well, when I was entering this when I chose American football directly in the app, it was very nice to have the icon of the sport I do to be able to meet people who do this. Because it is actually a very uncommon sport.” K15

Participants shared different views about interests featured on the profiles. For some, choosing five interests from the extensive list provided was not enough; they said they should be able to list more than five. For example, K13 explains:

“For example, people can choose five interests like this. That's too few. Because I don't think anyone has a hobby or only five interests in such a dedicated way. They may like coffee, and also gin and tonique, but it's like they can't choose them at the same time. That's very annoying, and it is a little bit lacking on that part.” K13

K13 explains this further as the interests in the list provided are too descriptive and, therefore, limiting. She also expresses her frustration about being unable to present herself authentically, as in her cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).

“For example, I like to read all types of books. Yes, there is a specific genre that I like, but I like all of them. I don't want to choose that one and create something in people's minds here. If I select the classics and he asks me about a classic that I haven't read, what am I going to do? I feel like if I pick the classics, I'm going to give the impression that I've read all the classics, so, for example, I didn't choose that one. But if it were ‘books’, I'd pick that one and move on.” K13

Like Spotify hyperlinks, K10 suggested that integrating a Goodreads hyperlink option to Bumble profiles would benefit users interested in books. Although some participants did not use Spotify hyperlinks, they all believed that evaluating the potential match based on Spotify information clarifies if they are compatible or not. For example, K11 describes Spotify hyperlinks as:

“It is a litmus test. I like someone near me; there is Spotify there. I definitely go and check it out. I mean, if it is much more extreme than my taste in music or people who always listen to punk or something like that, it is very tiring for me. And I say, oh, I cannot keep up with this person's energy and life.” K11

Additionally, K16 further observes Spotify, stating that "a person is what they listen to." Thus, women are not merely seeking information about what they listen to in common via Spotify, enhancing their impression of the match's character.

Despite the common criticism that dating apps encourage users to make snap judgments based on superficial appearances, most participants (N=12) indicated that profile photographs hold multifaceted meanings. They are not only a source of physical information and attractiveness but also another source of information to create an impression of that person, which they call “the vibe”. Women also point out that users' chosen photograph gives clues about their approach to the app. For example, K15 elaborates on this:

“I have more of a system of elimination. For example, if a woman introduces herself there with a topless or very revealing photo, she objectifies herself. A man putting a topless muscular photo makes me think the same thing. Because, in the end, I am looking for someone who will appeal to my values, our shared values. But there I see a person trying to present himself only with his body.”
K15

Another crucial factor for women regarding lifestyle is information about match's dietary habits and their preferences regarding alcohol consumption and smoking. This information gives women not only if they share the same lifestyle with the match but also have the same values. The information about smoking, alcohol consumption, and dietary preferences facilitates the projection of assumptions regarding the political and religious beliefs of the match if such information was not disclosed on their profile. By

doing so women try to avoid facing social stigma and create a sense of safety and comfort.

Moreover, finding matches that are similar to them turns other users into “familiar strangers” (Milgram 1977), which provides a sense of safety for women. Therefore, we can argue that examining potential matches’ profiles for detailed personal information and interests becomes a part of their safety work for young female users.

5.4 Multiplicity of Affordances in the Case of Bumble

The affordances of Bumble are subject to change over time, as is the case with any other application. The affordances of the app are not just the features it provides for its users. Users play a crucial role in shaping the affordances. They decide how to act on the app's invitation, whether through a feature, by accepting, subverting, or ignoring and deeming them ineffective. Therefore, affordances are imagined and reimaged each time (Nagy and Neff 2015). Moreover, Bumble’s features as artifacts could have multiple meanings for users, and provide users not only planned functions, but also unthought ones by the developers. As Pentzhold and Bischof (2019) state, affordances are “not binary, but variable” (3), and so multiple in nature, and “some seem to repeat previous doings and others take on new or unexpected forms” (8). Furthermore, the company’s business strategy also influences the transformation of the app (Duguay 2020; Gillespie 2015). This chapter illustrates how imagined and reimaged affordances (Nagy and Neff 2015) of Bumble emerge from the unexpected and off-label uses (Duguay 2020).

5.4.1 Overcoming the first message obstacle

In April 2024, Bumble rebranded and implemented new features of opening moves and compliments, which were discussed in the walkthrough analysis. Bumble’s reasoning for the opening moves feature was that they recognized women users’ complaints about the first message being somewhat of a burden sometimes, so they implemented a new option to start the conversation with a set question, such as “What book or film changed the way you think?” (Forristal 2024). The new Bumble CEO, Lidia Jones, expanded their reasoning, “We’re also hearing from women that empowerment today is not only

about control, but it's also about agency.” (Landi 2024). Many news sources reported this change as women not having to make the first move on Bumble (Safronova 2024; Murashima 2024; Duffy 2024).

Although at first sight, the opening moves might seem like taking “the tight granted to women”, participants seemed not bothered by this feature. This new addition did not disturb the participants who preferred the first message feature. Some commented on it to say that it is fun and a helpful way of engaging, while others haven't even noticed the implementation of this feature. Although this new addition is very recent, it may not be clear how it will affect Bumble's women users in time. Furthermore, asking a question, an opening move was described as a strengthening factor of the app's gamification.

Interestingly, when participants were asked about their thoughts on opening moves, they expressed that they were more affected by the other new feature, the compliments. Although opening moves were reported as its implementation caused the first message to become redundant, women still have control over whether to use it. Instead, they recounted instances where men used compliments out of purpose to overcome the obstacle of the first message. For example, K2 and K12 recount their experiences as:

“I don't turn around and write thank you to every compliment anyway; if I am interested, it can happen. But some people do this and, for example, write hello, how are you, or say they would like to match with me. Well, no.” K2

“I used compliment. I think Compliment is a fun feature. I left a compliment when my ex-boyfriend came across me or another ex-boyfriend left me a compliment; it can be enjoyable. Then again, the number of people who use compliments as a direct first message is very high. You know, 3-4 compliments came to me recently. “Hi Başak, are you up for a chat?” I mean... someone wrote “Beşiktaş, Beşiktaş” and left a heart, for example, I never understood that. Most of them are hi.” K12

Women described these instances where men try to increase their visibility to them and get a match as annoying. However, it should be noted that this feature undermines the

first message feature's ability to create a comfort and safety zone for women. Moreover, men employ the feature in a subversive manner, not only to obtain a match but also to confront women who have unmatched them. K11 commented on how this happens by way of intros on OkCupid. Furthermore, now she comes across the same tactic employed by men facilitated by compliments on Bumble.

The subversive use of compliments by men to increase their visibility to women and overcome the barriers of the first message and unmatched should be considered a significant change for the platform that undermines Bumble's claims and ability to provide a safe space for women. Furthermore, women came across men who used other tactics and features for increased visibility, which can be bothersome for some women. These will be discussed in the following two chapters.

5.4.2 Navigating the abundance and scarcity of choices on Bumble

Spotlight feature gives the user the ability to boost their profile for more viability, therefore, increasing their chances of getting additional matches. De Vries (2023) points out the problematic use of visibility boosts by comparing them to the slot machines. He voices two significant concerns about this practice "that it is likely to exploit the impaired autonomy of certain users and that it creates socio-economic injustices." (de Vries 2023, 31).

It has been highlighted by women and addressed in the preceding chapter that men often seek to enhance their visibility to women, although Bumble does, in fact, provide a premium service that facilitates this very objective. For example, K7 commented on the spotlight feature:

"It's like a boost, you know, it shows you more. I haven't used it, and I notice people using it, it feels like being that desperate. I don't find it very appropriate to be sold for a fee. I think it's better if none of them have that feature. Because it's marketing. You know, we said Bumble is a friendly space, and we don't sell products. It's not pleasant to feel that. The person who uses it does not sit in a

very good place in the eyes of the other person, because after 2 days of scrolling, you already can see again that the ones you didn't match before, so that's an issue." K7

K7 stated that the use of the spotlight feature by men is a manifestation of their desperation to secure a match. Furthermore, other participants have identified an additional problematic aspect of this feature as being employed by men who do not adhere to the established rules of conduct on Bumble. It has been suggested that certain males are aware that they will be banned by Bumble in the long term, and thus use the spotlight feature to secure as many matches as possible in the short term.

As previously discussed, women encountered men who employed various features of the app subversively, with the objective of enhancing their visibility. Some participants expressed the assumption that some men engage in this practice in addition to purchasing visibility boosts. However, one such practice is particularly confounding, whereby heterosexual men select the gender designation of 'woman' on their profiles. By doing so they enhance their visibility to the non-heterosexual women. While swiping together during the interview, upon encountering such heterosexual men profiles, K5 as a queer woman expressed her thoughts about this issue:

"I reported men, because they were labeling themselves as women. Yes, it's ridiculous, I mean, a woman who selects woman is not going to like you. What mentality are they in? It's quite disturbing." K5

As someone who selected to everyone, as in men, women and nonbinary people, K5 is disturbed by the heterosexual men who label themselves as 'woman' on Bumble. Furthermore, though she selected to choose everyone at that time, sometimes she may want to restrict this to only see women and nonbinary people. It is assumed that heterosexual men do so to get more matches with bisexual, pansexual and other queer women, but they also appear to lesbian women as well. As K10 states:

“I am very uncomfortable with this, because they never appeal to me. I'm like, why am I seeing this? It's like an ad. Third party ad. Or it's like Bumble saying: “You don't like this, do you? You know, just look at it anyway.” At first, I thought it was caused by high libido, you know, their eyes are rolling, and they are pressing women in everything they see. But it was obviously an effort to exist. I mean, I don't think a heterosexual woman, or a bisexual woman would say, “Oh, I saw this here, it's a man, but it's written as a woman, though I should swipe him right.” It feels very, very sad.” K10

By labeling themselves as women, heterosexual men disrupt non-heterosexual women's online dating experiences. Such incidents give rise to feelings of inconvenience and disturbance among women who seek other women on the Bumble platform. This is consistent with the findings of Ferris and Duguay (2020) regarding their study of lesbian women's experiences on Tinder. Furthermore, as Duguay (2018) states, this also reinforces the perception of scarcity experienced on dating platforms by lesbian women. K10 also described her experience of this scarcity. Given the relative scarcity of women seeking women on Bumble, while talking about their swiping and matching process, K10 described how she employs an alternative strategy when she has exceeded her daily quota of likes but encounters a woman, she finds appealing.

“In Bumble, you can send someone's profile to someone on WhatsApp when their profile is the last one left. If I've run out of likes on a woman I really like, I send that woman to a friend on WhatsApp, or there's a WhatsApp conversation I took notes on, I send it there. After 24 hours I say I'll continue everything from here and I continue from there.” K10

Bumble implemented this feature to share a profile with a friend to their liking, though K10 subverts this feature to overcome the scarcity of women seeking women on Bumble (Edmunds 2017; Bumble Buzz, n.d.b).

The chapter presented the encounters of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual women with heterosexual men who seek to increase their visibility to women, often by using

Bumble's features subversively. Although men are assumed to overcome the abundance of choices, lesbian women propose subversive uses to overcome the scarcity of choices on Bumble. However, it should be noted that users may not always employ app features in such direct subversive ways. An analysis of off-label uses (Duguay 2020) that diverge from this direct approach will be provided in the next chapter.

5.4.3 Using Bumble for non-dating

Bumble's marketing strategy emphasizes positioning the app as a platform that serves a purpose beyond traditional dating. It is advertised as "*Whether you're new to a city or looking to expand your social circle, Bumble BFF is a simplified way to create meaningful friendships*" on Bumble's website (CITE). There are also guidelines on how to make friends, how to deal with not having any friends, and the safest way to make friends online. Importantly, all the content is tailored to women users. This supports K6's comments about the app's marketing being targeted at women because it needs them on the platform to draw more men as paying customers.

When asked about their thoughts on BFF mode, if they tried it or not, most participants (N=11) confirmed they had tried it out of curiosity. Although they found the idea of the BFF mode exciting and valuable, their experiences were not fruitful. They commented on it being practical to meet women, especially if you moved to a new city or want to connect with people with similar interests. While they tried to connect with other women, they were mostly unsuccessful in this endeavor. They have found that other users did not actively use BFF mode. Even though they got a match, often they did not receive an answer from the match. Some women commented that Bumble being a dating app affected this attitude because people are on the app primarily for dating. This assumption is interesting if we think that women's motivation in using dating apps is mainly to meet new people (Sunam Audry et al. 2023). However, they were worried about how other women would react to their messages. After trying BFF mode for a time, McCombs (2018) describes BFF mode as "It's like Instagram but with rejection" which is similar to participants' comments.

BFF mode gives you a mixed pool of people to swipe. The women who also swiped men had significantly different experiences with them. They commented that men were trying to use BFF mode for dating, which is not its purpose. Although they both used BFF mode knowingly, they described men's attitude as "hunting" and not appropriate to the mode. For example, K16 and K9 recount their experiences as:

"I honestly don't think it's convenient for men. I think it's a mode that's open to abuse, I mean, they'll say I marked it by mistake, they'll say I don't know what BFF is, or they'll say we're BFFs anyway, so it's open to abuse in every way."
K16

"I think it's a bit unnecessary. I think it's a good mode if it's used for its purpose. But I mean, someone must sit down and say, look, this is BFF mode." K9

Because of their past experiences, they were sure that most men would not use this mode for its purpose, and they described BFF mode as "open to abuse". Therefore, this mode became redundant for them. The accounts they provide are strikingly similar to those they have previously given concerning the deceptive presentation of preferred relationship types on men's profiles. The difference is by being on the BFF mode, which does not include a relationship type preference on the profiles, men try to increase visibility to women without disclosing their intentions on their profiles.

K15 had a different reasoning for men's behavior, though. K15 supposes that some men are not socially adept or asocial; they are not used to having friendly conversations with women; therefore, when a woman converses with them nicely, they think they are flirted with (Abbey 1982). On the other hand, K10's experience as a lesbian woman differs from other participants' recounts.

"You know, it's weird. She says, 'I'm looking for a friend.'" I say okay, we can meet as friends. You know, in the process after matching, there is something awkward there. Oh, your (sexual) orientation is like this, but I am like this. That's where people have a problem. I think heterosexual women in that BFF

mode get into something like that because they are too heterosexual, you know. You are a lesbian, so, are we sure about this friendship?" K10

K10's experiences may be different from those of other women, but how heterosexual women react to her is similar to the men's attitude that other women described. Although men's approach was more assertive, women's approach was more reserved; both were shaped by the conceptualization of friendship as a binary opposition to dating. One potential explanation for this tendency is platonic relationships between genders has been accepted to be normative recently (McDougall and Hymel 2007; Deresiewicz 2007). This assumption is often reinforced by the socialization processes that shape gender roles and expectations within these societies (Monsour 1997).

The participants did not actively use the BFF mode, because Bumble BFF has proven to be ineffective for them. All participants indicated that they primarily use the dating mode, although not exclusively for the purpose of dating. They use Bumble not just for dating purposes, but also for finding friendships, cultivate self-confidence, and to expand one's range of social skills, such as flirting. For example, K3 describes as:

"When we look at my total use, I mean, I have actually learned a lot from the use of dating apps, although I have suffered a lot, but I have learned a lot, I mean, to learn how to socialize, to learn how to flirt, to understand people's general thoughts, to get to know yourself well. Because there are many situations, it exposes you to many situations. And it's like a simulation, how you can react there. I have even practiced how to talk to a narcissist when talking to someone. In other words, I actually see it as a place of practice to develop defense mechanisms such as how to talk to this kind of person and how to save yourself from this situation." K3

Although some of the participants sought casual sex, short-term relationships, or long-term partners from time to time, when they were asked about the general purpose of Bumble, they explained that they frequently encountered a recently emerged phenomenon known as a "situationship" as the preferred relationship type.

Situationships are “a relationship with someone in which there is a romantic connection, often involving time spent together, affection, and sexual behaviors, but no clarity or label.” (Langlais et al. 2024). They also refer to this as “seeking a lovebuddy”, in which you date, develop intimate emotional bonds, and engage in sexual activities. Although there has been the emergence of the colloquial term “fuckbuddy”, in which people only develop a continuous relationship as sexual partners without an emotional connection, “situationship” and “lovebuddy” are recent developments. K3 elaborates on situationships further:

“It's mostly used in that way, it's a feeling of loneliness and longing for a relationship. These so-called situationships happens a lot. There are a lot of people who say let's talk like lovers, let's do this, let's do that, let's make love, but let's not have anything. I think there are eighty, ninety percent of people here who want to be lovebuddy or want to share a situationship. Even if someone wants a relationship, by using a dating app something degenerates. That is, some of their values get degenerated, or the way they relate, or the way they think is very affected by this.” K3

To K3, because situationships are the prevalent relationship type seen on dating apps nowadays, users get affected by this without knowing. Additionally, women encountered men who indicated on their profiles that they seek a long-term relationship, not necessarily because they desire such a relationship, but because they believe women prefer this type of relationship and, therefore, will swipe right on their profiles. Most participants (N=11) expressed similar opinions on this topic and expressed feelings of being deceived. For example, K15 indicated that this deception on men’s profiles is more prevalent now than two years ago. She continues as:

“They're just looking for people that they can see all the time, that they can have something sexual with. And as good as that is, they don't stop looking. You know, for better and better and better.” K15

Furthermore, while talking about their swiping process and examination of the potential match profiles, some participants commented about the change in the sought relationship type category as in implementing new options, such as *a life partner*, *intimacy without commitment* and *ethical non-monogamy*, and removing the *don't know yet* option. K13 elaborates further as:

“I think there's a new one, wanting intimacy without an emotional connection. It's a bit too disturbing. Intimacy without commitment. That's a bit too much for a dating app. Because I think dating apps are marketed to people a little bit as, you know... a dating app is normally for a date, to start a relationship process, to flirt. But in general, people probably don't use it in this way. Of course, I have started a relationship from these apps before. But in general, I don't think this is the mindset of people there. There's false advertising.

– Do you think the new option, intimacy without commitment, prepares the ground for this a little bit?

Yes, it feels a little bit like that to me. Intimacy without commitment is too much for me. Because what we call intimacy, the intimacy I understand, is a little bit more in the relationship. You know, I feel like it's not just a physical connection; it's an emotional bond. But I don't think it's very possible to do that without commitment.” K13

Lauren Berlant defines intimacy as ‘involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way’ (1998, 282). Although the concept of intimacy is broad, it is most associated with romantic relationships in vernacular usage. Chan (2021) defines the intimacy facilitated on dating apps as “networked intimacy”, and further describes it as:

“Networked intimacy, as I have argued, has a built-in ambivalence where the relational goals people state on their dating app's profile may not always correspond to what they actually want or eventually get, a well-curated profile is necessary but may not be taken seriously, and extensive connectivity to a large pool of potential partners can be both a blessing and a curse.” (Chan 2021b, 5)

This ambivalence Chan (2021) comments on may be why women tend to define their motives as seeking to meet new people rather than pursuing short- or long-term relationships. They tend to gravitate towards open-ended relationships, wherein the possibilities of both continuity and dissolution are present. Furthermore, while most participants did not explicitly state that they were seeking friendships, many (N=10) did acknowledge that their open-ended relationships had indeed evolved into friendships. K11 recounts her experience as:

“So, we play neighbors. I say that I'm having coffee in the evening, come over or something like that. Meanwhile, the other person also understands that we are not going to be lovers or that our relationship will not go to another stage. Since he is the one who understands that I've already become friends with him there.”

K11

While the formation of new friendships happens in different ways, for K10, one of the non-heterosexual participants, Bumble also facilitated her access to the queer community, enabling her to interact with a more significant number of queer individuals than she might have encountered in real life (Pym et al. 2020). She describes her experience as:

“I was very excited, because it was like after my breakup, let's see who's here. Like, okay, we can do it; we can meet new people. So, it was like, “Oh, I didn't see these people at university. Oh, is she bisexual, too? Is she a lesbian, too?”

It was a bit of an enlightening era.” K10

K5 elaborates on why various types of relationships, rather than just romantic ones, are “a hunger for communication” rather than “a hunger for a relationship”, which aligns with the argument that I have made about female experience on dating apps in its entirety. K9 also comments as:

“I mean, not everyone is there for a relationship, in every sense, I mean a sexual relationship, a marital relationship. Not everyone really expects that. For example, I've gotten together and played games. So, people are there just to fulfill a need for sociability. So, I see it a bit more like social media. Just like that. It's like a social media where I don't get distracted by the feed.” K9

From K9's perspective, Bumble is “a simplified social media app” that is closer aligned with other social media platforms, such as Instagram. For example, K7 interprets this as Bumble conveying, “We want people to interact”. In her view, the availability of a non-dating mode renders Bumble “a more humanist app”. Furthermore, some participants commented on the colors used in Bumble's visual identity and interface, noting that they reinforce the somewhat neutral position of the app while simultaneously conveying a sense of invitation.

While women use dating apps with the primary aim of seeking friendships and self-validation, men are more likely to use dating apps to seek sexual partners (Ranzini and Lutz 2017; Sumter et al. 2017; Sunam et al. 2023). The responses of the participants were consistent with the findings of previous studies. In addition to seeking friendship and self-validation, motives such as expanding one's social circle, seeking a queer community, alleviating loneliness, developing strategies for difficult situations, and learning how to flirt were also discussed. When considered in its totality, the female experience on dating apps can be conceptualized as an endeavor to engage in social interaction and to develop a range of social competencies, including the ability to engage in flirtation and to navigate challenging social circumstances.

5.4.4 Empty profiles, unusable filters on Bumble

While men are likelier to swipe left on dating apps, women are more selective about whom they swipe left (Tyson et al. 2016). Although women expressed their reluctance to disclose some of their personal information on their profiles, they preferred to match with men who supplied more information about themselves on their profiles (Pruchniewska 2020). A desire for safety and comfort drives the exhaustive screening of

profiles by women and is not solely motivated by a search for compatibility, as mentioned in chapter 5.1.

During their swiping process, women investigate potential matches' profiles to learn about their lifestyles. They create an impression of that person through their photographs, written bios, political stances, religion, smoking and drinking habits, education, and interests. The information they gathered facilitates the elimination of people with different lifestyles. They eliminate the potential harassers by determining aggressive masculine performances through profile photographs and written bios (Hess and Flores 2018). Furthermore, they aim to avoid social stigma by inquiring about the match's political stance, religion, smoking, and drinking habits.

Women point out that most of the profiles of men they came across are less-than-empty. Women suppose that if the profile they come across contains very little information, then that man has something to hide and, thus, has not disclosed their information to look preferable to match. Therefore, profiles of men with too little information are deemed untrustworthy and eliminated. This screening process of potential matches does not finish with swiping. Still, it continues during the conversation if the match's profile does not have enough information, thus creating the burden of more gendered labor by women (Pruchniewska 2020).

Though it is a premium feature, Bumble's implementation of advanced filters could facilitate women's elimination process. However, the less-than-empty profiles of men on the platform have rendered these filters redundant for women. Some participants speculate that Bumble could prevent this by making it mandatory to fill in more sections of the profiles. These filters' efficient utilization could save women from potential harm, save their time, and remove the burden of more gendered labor done by women.

However, the religious views and political stances advanced filters would not work as they were supposed to because of their insufficiency in defining and encompassing the Turkish context. As K8 supposes, although women won't be able to use religious and political views filters to search potential matches with the desired views, it can be

employed to exclude individuals with views that are not in alignment with the user's preferences.

“Since they don't point to the right place anyway, there would be no point in using it. But maybe it can be used to eliminate conservative or moderate. That's why I would like to have it in the basic filters section; it would be handy.” K8

While it is possible to use religious and political view filters in a subversive manner, the filter system employed by Bumble does not guarantee that individuals who do not meet the characteristics selected in the filters section will not be shown during swiping. As demonstrated in the walkthrough analysis chapter, OkCupid prevents this dilemma by giving the option not to include profiles with unwanted characteristics during swiping. Although OkCupid's filter system is a free feature, this option for filtering further is a premium service. As women are inclined to be determined about the undesirable characteristics of a potential match rather than focusing on the specifications they desire, it is a valuable addition.

“For example, I added English but also got people who don't speak English. I added French because French is a language that interests me. I would like to meet someone who speaks French and improve myself. However, I also come across people who don't speak French as well.” K12

Even if the filter system gets adjusted by Bumble to work more efficiently for users, it is still contingent on the users' honesty in their profiles. For example, K9 comments on this issue as:

“I went directly to advanced filters. I tried to choose the expectation (relationship) to eliminate casuals. But then I gradually realized that it doesn't matter what the profile says. Even if I can use that filter, it doesn't mean I will eliminate people with such expectations. Then I realized that I didn't lose anything. It's all about honesty. If it says casual, he wants casual; if it doesn't say casual, he wants casual.” K9

Women express that most men they have encountered on dating apps tend to lie mainly about their desired relationship type. Women suppose that men do this to get more matches on the platform. So, for example, filtering for long-term relationships has often been inefficient for women.

Although Bumble offers an extensive profile creation process, this is still contingent upon the users' choice. It is often that users, especially men according to participants, choose not to fill their profiles with enough information to create a sufficient impression to match upon. Less-than-empty profiles not only create more gendered invisible labor and safety work for women during the conversation, but also makes Bumble's extensive advance filtering feature redundant.

5.5 Reflections on CAAT findings

This chapter expands upon the preceding discussion regarding the thematic analysis of the findings from the interviews conducted with the assistance of CAAT (Sunam 2024) in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical framework.

A significant theme that emerged from the interviews is women's preference for Bumble when seeking a safe online dating environment, the relationship between Bumble's features and the women's safety practices. As evidenced by earlier studies, young female users employ different tactics and strategies as invisible gendered labor to ensure their safety and privacy while using Bumble (Pruchniewska 2020; Cöbek 2022). It is important to note that the need for safety and privacy is much more heightened and emphasized than in the studies illustrated in the Western context. Moreover, disclosing their app use to their family and acquaintances creates a concern for safety and privacy for young women, which is particular to the Turkish cultural context. This situation is particularly salient in the case of visits to family homes, which are often located in small non-metropolitan cities.

It is evident that women make use of the first message feature offered by Bumble with the intention of establishing a comfortable and safe space for themselves. However, this

measure does not always prove effective in preventing harassment. Bumble asserts that this feature is designed to empower women in the area of romantic relationships and dating (Bumble Buzz, n.d.a; Bumble, n.d.a). For women, this feature is employed as a harm-prevention tool, enabling them to choose who to write to and when to write, and to evaluate potential matches for a second time. A significant number of participants interviewed (N=9) emphasized the significance and necessity of this feature, especially in a country like Turkey, where gender-based violence against women remains pervasive. However, a minority of women (N=2) asserted that this feature is unnecessary and that it reinforces the stereotype of all men as inherently aggressive.

Women employ a range of strategies to ensure their safety, both during the initial matching process and at every phase of their use (Pruchniewska 2020). For women, the issue of privacy and anonymity is of paramount importance. They seek privacy to ensure their safety and comfort, and as a result, they refrain from disclosing certain personal information and their Instagram hyperlink on their profiles (Gillett 2018). Moreover, young female users appreciate certain app features and frequently incorporate them into their invisible safety work on dating apps, such as video calls and Instagram hyperlinks. They do this by either expanding the possibilities offered by a given feature or subverting it, thereby creating "imagined affordances" (Nagy and Neff 2015).

Bumble's features enable the continuation of users' stalking activities on social media, albeit with different motivations for men and women. Disclosure of information can cause distress for women, they have reported instances of men attempting to contact them on other platforms, including Instagram and LinkedIn, by utilizing information obtained from their profiles. On the other hand, women use men's Instagram hyperlinks as a surveillance tool to determine if they are compatible with the potential match, and also as a safety measure, such in the case of video call. While the majority of women who previously used video call (N=5) finds this feature beneficial for their personal safety as well, it also presents a lack of control and can lead to feelings of unease. Additionally, they avoid logging in with Facebook to Bumble, in fear of unconsented share by the apps, and using the app in their hometowns due to concerns about social stigma that could potentially be directed by family members and older acquaintances.

In addition to the Instagram hyperlink, women also examine profiles to form an impression of compatibility based on photos, habits, interests, and Spotify information. This is done both to determine if their values and lifestyles are compatible and as an additional measure to ensure their safety. While height is an important factor for many women, they tend to prioritize social and lifestyle traits over physical attributes when considering potential partners. Although dating apps create the possibility of instantaneous decisions that are reinforced by the act of swiping based on the effect created by the profile (Cöbek 2022), interests and values were the driving force behind swiping right for women on Bumble, forming different types of relationships. The ability for users to list and view extensive profiles, including habits, interests, and values, is an essential aspect of Bumble for women. This allows them to not only find potential partners, but also to form friendships. They tend to be open-minded about the nature of the relationship with the match and refer to their use of the platform as a way to meet new people. Some women believe that this is also a consequence of men's use of Bumble, as they have encountered men who primarily seek situationships, rather than long-term relationships. They also highlight Bumble's new implementation of seeking relationship information as a further contributing factor to this.

Women indicated that certain features of Bumble were no longer relevant for them due to the differing engagement patterns they observed among users, particularly while engaging with heterosexual men. While some features, such as political view information on profiles were deemed redundant due to their lack of inclusivity within the context of Turkey, which impeded their ability to express themselves fully, advanced filtering feature became redundant because of less-than-empty profiles of heterosexual men on Bumble. Therefore, women have chosen to decline these affordances (Souza et al. 2020). Similarly, other features, such as incorrect gender labels, and incorrect use of BFF, have become a source of distress for women due to inappropriate use of these features by heterosexual men on the platform. In addition, women have suggested further additions that Bumble could implement, including an extension of the mandatory profile information a distance filter, new hyperlinks and political view labels. Their accounts also illustrate the importance of the method in

order to understand the affordances derived from the women's experiences (Sunam 2024).

Regarding platform governance, both walkthrough analysis and interview findings demonstrate that Bumble relies on a patchwork model, which is typical for most social media platforms. This model has been described by Duguay, Burgess, and Suzor (2020, 240) as "approaches to governance that focus on formal policies and procedures of content moderation while failing to address substantive cultures of use and the technological mechanisms that sustain them". Despite being extensively defined within the community guidelines, the reporting of inappropriate use or harassment remains contingent upon the actions of the app users. For women, the capacity to have confidence that Bumble will act upon the report and administer a disciplinary measure to the user in question is also crucial for them to use the report function.

Moreover, it should also be noted that pre-existing social norms, including gender roles, influence users' conceptualization of Bumble's culture, especially in the context of inappropriate use and harassment. While they may report instances of heterosexual men who deliberately label themselves as women to gain greater visibility, they may not report instances of men engaging in BFF mode for off-label use, such as dating. Additionally, there are instances of the subverted use of features that may not be considered inappropriate. One such example is using compliments as initial messages by men, which contradicts user expectations (Duguay et al. 2020) and causes distress for women. As this subverted use by men is already prevalent on OkCupid, Bumble should have been aware of the possibility of it occurring on its platform. Failure to do so undermines Bumble's ability to create a safe space for women, albeit to a limited extent, and its ability to distinguish itself from other dating apps.

It is harder to conceptualize harassment while moving to an offline setting for a date facilitated by Bumble. Women often don't attribute offline date experience to their experiences on the app and do not report it. This happens for both reasons: Firstly, aggressive sexual and social behavior displayed by heterosexual men has been experienced by women since their childhood in the Turkish cultural context, and it is

accustomed to and sometimes turns into internalized sexism. Secondly, Bumble might not be addressing this issue clearly enough to be reported in its community guidelines.

Bumble's marketing discourse and its rebranding can be described as post-feminist sensibility par excellence (Gill 2007; Gill 2017). Moreover, implementing opening moves and compliments is another facet of Bumble's postfeminist discourse. The cultural sensibility of postfeminism has been helpful for feminist critical analysis to understand how feminism is entangled with neoliberalism in contemporary culture (Rottenberg 2014). As Gill (2007) explains their simultaneous operation in 3 levels:

First, and most broadly, both appear to be structured by a current of individualism that has replaced almost entirely notions of social and political, or any idea of the individual as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves. Second, it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism. These two parallels suggest then, that postfeminism is not simply a response to feminism but also a sensibility at least partly constituted through pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas. Third, however, is a connection which might imply that the synergy is even more significant: in the popular culture discourses examined here, women are called on the self-manage and self-discipline. To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, regulate every aspect of their conduct, and present their actions as freely chosen. (Gill 2007, 164)

In the contemporary era, postfeminist sensibilities have become pervasive in the media to the extent that they are now a common feature of our everyday lives (Gill 2017). While Bumble signals women's empowerment through choice and control, it encourages women to self-regulate. This self-regulation is evident in women's self-presentations and their conversations with men. While they endeavor to present an authentic self, they simultaneously prioritize restraint to avoid being objectified by men. While authenticity and freedom are essential aspects of genuine self-expression, an inclination towards self-restraint might inadvertently result in self-censorship. These seemingly contradictory notions can lead to feelings of inadequacy when women cannot establish successful connections.

However, my findings suggest that women on Bumble can now see beyond the postfeminist discourses prevalent in the media. Young women perceive Bumble to be unsuccessful in its role as a mediator in fostering romantic relationships rather than attributing this failure to themselves. This can be explained by how Bumble users imagine and reimagine the platform's affordances (Nagy and Neff 2015). As a result of encountering the platform's redundancies and inefficiencies in certain areas, they re-evaluate the potential for Bumble to empower women. Despite the platform's shortcomings in several places, women continue to use Bumble because they enjoy certain features, such as the ability to send the first message. However, this feature is constrained in its capacity to deter potential harm. Consequently, women are once again compelled to regulate their conversations with men and engage in the invisible safety work (Pruchniewska 2020). Thus, Bumble's efficacy is primarily limited to fostering comfort rather than ensuring safety.

Consequently, these findings show us the multiplicity of affordances (Pentzold and Bischof 2019). As Pentzold and Bischof explain affordances by citing Evans et al. (2017) they are “invitations to action” (Pentzold and Bischof 2019). Moreover, affordances vary depending on different user practices (Costa 2018).

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis seeks to understand three main questions by utilizing a theoretical framework of techno-feminism (Wacjman, 2007), the mutual shaping of technology and society (Lievrouw 2014) and the concept of affordances (Hutchby 2001): In what ways has Bumble incorporates its feminist premise into its current app architecture and affordances? How do urban female young adults in Turkey perceive Bumble's affordances? How do the affordances offered by Bumble as a self-identified feminist dating app influence the mobile dating experiences of urban female young adults in Turkey? In order to answer the first research question, this thesis first focused on analyzing the most recent iteration of Bumble after its rebranding in April 2024, as in its marketing and app architecture, from the researcher's perspective by utilizing the Walkthrough Analysis method in Chapter 4. Secondly, informed by findings of the walkthrough analysis, CAAT interviews were conducted, and the collected data was analyzed thematically in order to answer research questions 2 and 3. This entailed an examination of the perceptions, practices, and experiences of the participants with and within Bumble.

Chapter 4 demonstrated the present brand identity, operational structure, and the app architecture of Bumble, with particular attention to the affordances and the integration of its feminist self-identification in policies and app features from the researcher's perspective. While Bumble provides its users with many features that enable them to fully present and express themselves in their profiles and interactions with other users, its primary marketing strategy revolves around self-identifying and facilitating relationships beyond the romantic realm. Moreover, the platform employs features reinforcing this assertion, including women-initiated conversations, blurring sexually explicit images, and BFF mode. Though limited, these features have the potential to create a sense of comfort for women in online dating. Conversely, the recent introduction of opening moves and compliments challenges Bumble's feminist stance, particularly about its feature of women-initiated conversations. Additionally, while Bumble's marketing language positions its platform as a vehicle for female empowerment in the dating sphere, its app interface sometimes contradicts this stance.

This is evidenced by the availability of advanced filters only to premium users and the non-availability of the distance filter, both offered by Tinder and OkCupid freely. The contradictions in the case of new features and the filtering system raised significant questions that had to be investigated further during the CAAT interviews to understand their impact on young female users' experiences fully.

The CAAT interviews' findings, informed by the walkthrough analysis and the answers to the first research question, were presented in Chapter 5 to answer the second and third research questions. This chapter examined how women perceive Bumble and engage in online dating on the platform while negotiating with its inherent affordances. Bumble's feminist positioning, brand identity, and the feature of women-initiated messages collectively create a perception of Bumble as a women-friendly and safe platform for online dating, particularly for young women with less dating experience. As a result, Bumble is tried, used, and recommended to others between women. Therefore, its feminist positioning successfully attracts a significant number of young female users. Furthermore, through their use of Bumble and their experience on the platform, women recognize the inherent limitations of women-initiated conversations in ensuring safety. However, they maintain their continued engagement as users often in an on-and-off manner due to the sense of safety and control that this feature provides. On the other hand, newly implemented features present new challenges for them. While opening moves were more publicized in the marketing campaigns and by the online media, compliments had more effect on their experiences, albeit adversely, according to young female users' experiences. In the experiences of young female users, men repeatedly used compliments to overcome the obstacle of women-initiated conversations. Therefore, this feature undermines Bumble's commitment to feminist empowerment.

It is evident that to guarantee their safety, privacy and anonymity, women employ the features of the app in ways that challenge expected uses, thereby creating "imagined affordances" (Nagy and Neff 2015) as exemplified in their use of video calls and Instagram hyperlinks as steps during their safety work (Pruchniewska 2020). Moreover, young female users employ Bumble's Date mode to establish friendships and seek community, rather than its BFF mode, which was designed with the specific purpose of

facilitating relationships that extend beyond the realm of dating. Furthermore, the affordances of Bumble are contingent upon how women perceive and utilize the platform, as shaped by their cultural context. This is demonstrated by their refusal to utilize the Facebook login option, the exclusion of political information from profiles, and the filtering of such information, as well as the deletion of profiles during visits to their hometowns. Therefore, the "affordances-in-practice" are significantly influenced by the cultural context (Costa 2018).

It is important to note that this research has a small sample of 16 urban young heterosexual and non-heterosexual adult women between 18 and 30. Therefore, it is limited in terms of age group, area of residence, and representation of non-heterosexual users. Moreover, the sample comprises educated young adult women who live in an urban setting, students, and working professionals; therefore, it does not include other young adult women in social demographics such as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). These instances where this research might be lacking create possibilities for future research into Bumble and app affordances.

For future research, it is imperative to delve deeper into the impact of Bumble on societal discourse, particularly within the context of social media platforms like Twitter and Reddit. As Banet-Weiser (2018) asserts, the surge in popular feminism often gives rise to the rise of popular misogyny. Adverse opinions that foster popular misogyny in public forums could affect both the perception of dating apps in society and potential users in terms of creating stigma and prejudice. Moreover, it could cause an increase in online gender-based violence on dating apps. Thus, it is valuable to investigate dating apps further beyond the usage of the app itself.

Moreover, given the prevalence of reports from women regarding their desire for social interaction, it would be intriguing to observe whether an increased prevalence of mobile apps designed for the purpose of facilitating new friendships and connections will emerge in the Turkish app market. At the time of this thesis, only a small number of meeting applications were available in Turkey. These include Meetup and Yubo, each with their unique features. However, there is potential for further applications to be

introduced, each with its own unique target group. Some examples of such applications are Hey! VINA is designed for women, Peanut is for mothers, and Atleto is for sports enthusiasts. An exciting avenue for further investigation would be to consider these types of apps in terms of their affordances.



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APPENDIX A. THE WALKTHROUGH ANALYSIS METHOD STEPS

Table A.1 The Walkthrough Analysis Method Steps

Step 1	Institutional Account Analysis 1	The marketing targets, target audiences and usage scenarios of these technological applications will be taken from the institutional account of the application and analyzed.
Step 2	Institutional Account Analysis 2	The economic analysis of the application will be carried out. The business strategy and income sources of the application will be examined and analyzed in detail.
Step 3	Institutional Account Analysis 3	The application manuals and rules will be examined, and the practices permitted and prohibited by the application will be revealed.
Step 4	Application registration process	Application login and account setup process will be observed and documented by screenshots. After this stage, the group members will log in to the applications they have registered 4 times in a week, on different days and at different time intervals, and will observe and document the functions offered by the applications and the interaction and partner selection possibilities they provide to their users. For example, connecting with Facebook is a compulsory form of identity verification on Tinder. Where this occurs, it is necessary to consider the nature of the connection and what elements (e.g. usernames, passwords, content) of the connected service become actors within the registration process. Other examples of common registration steps include requests for access to a user's personal contacts, photographs or location. If a profile is required, as is the case with some games, the registration and entry process may be as simple as installation or pointing a browser to a URL.
Step 5	User interface arrangement.	Take screen shots that shows how the app guides users through activities via the placement of buttons and menus. For example, some buttons like 'Report' or 'Share' may be smaller or harder to find than others. Describe and analyze your findings.
Step 6	Functions and features.	Take screen shots that shows of groups of arrangements that mandate or enable an activity, including pop up windows, compulsory fields and requests made by the app to link with other user accounts. Describe and analyze your findings.
Step 7	Textual content and tone.	Take screen shots of instructions, this includes text embedded in user interfaces, such as the order of drop-down menu options or the categories available (e.g. sexual identity categories) and describe and analyze their discursive power to shape use.
Step 8	Symbolic representation.	A semiotic approach to examining the look and feel of the app and its likely connotations and cultural associations with respect to the imagined user and ideal scenarios of use. This may involve considerations regarding branding, colour and font choices. Take screen shots of symbolic representations, describe and analyze them.
Step 9	Application Exit Process	At the end of the Walkthrough Application Analysis research process, the group members will exit the application and document this exit process by screenshots and they will describe and analyze their findings.
Step 10	Analysis of the unforeseen possibilities of the applications	The possibilities defined in the institutional accounts of the application will be compared with the data obtained as a result of the analysis of the findings obtained by the Walkthrough Application Analysis method, and the analysis of the unforeseen possibilities of these applications will be revealed.

APPENDIX B. THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

- Can I get to know you? Who are you? How would you describe yourself?
- Which dating apps have you used so far? Are there any apps you have stopped using? Why?
- How long have you been using Bumble? How often do you use it?

Institutional Account Analysis 1-2

- Let's say I am a friend of yours who doesn't know about this application, how would you introduce this application to someone like me who doesn't know about it?
- How does the application position itself in relation to other applications (e.g. more serious, more fun, etc.)?
- Who do you think the application is aimed at?
- What is the general purpose of the application (e.g. for marriage, for dating, for sex, etc.)?

Institutional Account Analysis 3

- What do you think about the community guidelines in the app? Do you think users follow them?
- Have you ever had an unpleasant experience on Bumble and/or had to report a situation? If so, what was your experience like?

The Application Registration Process

- Do you remember how you registered for the application?
- Do you remember what you thought about the process when you first registered for the application (e.g. tedious, detailed, simple, etc.)?

-Did you use other social media accounts such as Facebook when registering for the application?

-Do you remember the permissions you gave the app when you signed up? What do you think about the access permissions you gave the app? How do you think these permissions affected your use of the app?

-Do you know the different modes of Bumble (date and bff), which ones do you use and why?

User interface design and functions and features

-Let's assume that I am a friend of yours who is using Bumble for the first time. Can you tell me how to use it?

-What do you think about the designs in Bumble? What do you think the logos, colors, fonts used in the app say about Bumble?

-What do you think about paid/free subscriptions in Bumble? Are the features offered by paid/free subscriptions sufficient? Do you think the features offered and the price match each other?

-What do you think about the advertisements you see on Bumble?

Text content and tone and symbolic representation

-What means does the application provide for you to present yourself in the profile section? Are these features sufficient to introduce yourself? Do you use other app hyperlinks such as Spotify, Instagram, etc. in the application? What do you think about these hyperlinks?

-Can you enter the match/explore screen of Bumble? Why do you think Bumble brings these people to you? Which filters do you actively use, are these filters sufficient?

-Let's make 1-2 matches together, look at 1-2 profiles. Based on what do you communicate with these profiles?

-Do you think the information in the profiles you come across is sufficient? How effective is the information here in choosing to interact with people?

-What do you think about Bumble's 'women, make the first move' policy?

-Now I would like you to look at the last 3 people you have matched/interacted with on Bumble. How did you match/interact with these people (e.g. information in the profile, common interests, photos)? How do you communicate with these people on the app (video chat, sending voice recordings, messaging).

Exit process from the app

-Have you logged out of Bumble before? In which situations do you log out of Bumble? Have you deleted your Bumble profile before? Do you know how to log out / delete from Bumble? Can we do the steps of deleting your profile together? What do you think about this process?

Analysis of unexpected usage scenarios of the app

-Do you use Bumble for purposes other than dating?

-In general, do you use the capabilities offered by Bumble for other purposes? Do you use any methods to overcome the limitations of the app?

APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Table C.1 Participant Information

Name	Age	Sexual Orientation	Occupation	Have been using Bumble for
K1	27	heterosexual	Graduate student	3 years
K2	30	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	1.5 years
K3	26	bisexual	New graduate	1.5 years
K4	30	heterosexual	White collar professional in public sector	2.5 years
K5	21	queer	Undergraduate student	1 year
K6	30	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	4 years
K7	30	heterosexual	White collar professional in public sector + undergraduate student	2 years
K8	26	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	3.5 years
K9	29	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	1.5 week
K10	24	lesbian	Undergraduate student	4 years
K11	30	heterosexual	Graduate student	3 months
K12	21	bisexual	Undergraduate student	1.5 years
K13	26	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	10 months
K14	28	heterosexual	White collar professional in private sector	2.5 years
K15	21	heterosexual	Undergraduate student	-
K16	27	bi-curious	White collar professional in private sector	-

APPENDIX D. WALKTHROUGH ANALYSIS OF TINDER AND OKCUPID

D.1 Tinder

Website, Blog and Marketing Campaigns

The Tinder website employs the slogan "swipe right" to welcome users. The page also includes several success stories, most of which pertain to couples. However, a portion of these stories present ambiguous gender identities. Upon examining the differences between the Turkish and English versions of the website, it becomes evident that while the stories remain consistent, some of the names have been altered to Turkish, potentially compromising their genuineness and reliability.

Upon accessing the Explore page, we encounter an article outlining why Tinder should be selected as a dating application. The page is further subdivided into the following sections: "Discover your interests," "Use Tinder anywhere," "Safe face-to-face flirting," "Connect with the whole world," and "Verify your Tinder photo." In this manner, the company draws attention to the features of Tinder, including the ability to list interests on one's profile, the app's global availability in 190 countries, the use of video calls as a means of face-to-face interaction to ensure safety, the passport feature, and photo verification. The subheadings also refer to Tinder premium packages and their respective features. Additionally, it is noted that Tinder does not utilize filters based on height, education, race, or religious beliefs, in contrast to Bumble. This is presented as a means of preventing discriminatory practices.

Furthermore, it is highlighted that Tinder has facilitated over 55 billion matches, emphasizing being in contrast with sites such as Hinge and eHarmony, which are geared towards long-term relationships; Tinder offers a vast array of possibilities, regardless of one's preferences. It is noteworthy that Tinder draws comparisons with other dating

apps, mentioning them by name on their website as a marketing strategy. While the images on this page depict individuals of diverse ethnicities and races, it is also notable that most are women.

The information in the iOS App Store and the Android Play Store is identical. Although the app emphasizes the potential for diverse relationships, including open relationships, romantic love, and platonic friendships, it also highlights its popularity in the dating realm, with some referring to it as "the most trusted dating app" and others as "the world's most popular free dating site". Furthermore, the app's inclusivity for all sexual orientations is mentioned in the text.

The information in the iOS App Store and the Android Play Store is identical. Although the app emphasizes the potential for diverse relationships, including open relationships, romantic love, and platonic friendships, it also highlights its popularity in the dating realm, with some referring to it as "the most trusted dating app" and others as "the world's most popular free dating site." Furthermore, the app's inclusivity for all sexual orientations is mentioned in the text.

Business Strategy

Like many other dating applications, Tinder offers users the option to purchase premium packages and tokens that provide additional features, such as (visibility) boosts and super-likes. These purchases can be made on the user's profile page and appear on the messages page and likes page while swiping as ads, but they are presented like a profile.

The Tinder Plus feature offers several advantages, including unlimited likes, unlimited backtrack rights, the ability to use the application in any location with the "Passport" application, the option to limit the personal information that others can see, the ability to restrict who can see your profile, and the ability to turn off advertisements within the application. This package costs 79,99 TL per month, 239,97 TL for six months, and 479,94 TL for twelve months.

In addition to the benefits of the Plus package, those who purchase the Gold package gain access to many new features. These include the ability to view profiles of individuals who have expressed interest in them, the capacity to view an unlimited number of "Top Profiles" in their current location, the opportunity to receive one complimentary boost per month, and the right to obtain five free Super Likes per day. This package costs 159,98 TL per month, 479,94 TL for six months, and 959,88 TL for twelve months.

In addition to the Gold package, the Platinum package allows users to send messages to individuals before a match is made. Furthermore, the profiles of individuals the user has expressed interest in are highlighted on the "Explore" pages. This package costs 279,97 TL per month, 839,91 TL for six months, and 1,679,82 TL for twelve months.

In addition to the previously mentioned packs, the Boost and Superlike features are available for purchase individually in quantities of multiple tokens. The cost of a single boost is 69.99 TL. However, the price is reduced to 56 TL if the user purchases five boosts. Furthermore, the price is reduced to 45 TL if the user purchases ten boosts. In the case of super-like tokens, the unit price for a single super-like is 38.33 TL when purchased as a three-pack. The price per super-like is reduced to 29.99 TL with the purchase of a fifteen-pack and to 15.50 TL with the purchase of a twenty-pack.

Community Guidelines

The first text that appeared during the profile creation process of Tinder is the "Terms" legal text. This text informs users about the conditions Tinder expects from users and the rights granted to users in terms of security, termination, and purchase transactions. A noteworthy element in these texts is the information in the Tinder legal texts about which courts users from which countries can file a lawsuit in any case. It is important to note that to be a Tinder user, you must not have been convicted of any felony, sex offense, or violent crime, although how this rule is enforced is unclear. Moreover, along with the continuation of the text, users are informed that Tinder does not conduct criminal background checks on its members, making this rule redundant.

Community Guidelines, which have an informal language both visually and textually, also appear during the registration process. Some of the topics highlighted in this text are Nudity/Sexual Content, Harassment, Violence and Physical Harm, Hate Speech, Private Information, Message Flooding, Promotion or Solicitation, Prostitution and Human Trafficking, Fraud, Impersonation, Minors under the age of 18, Copyright and Trademark Infringement, Illegal Use, One Person One Account, Third Party Apps. There is “Safety Tips for Dating” as a guideline that addresses the safety concerns of users and tips for dating face-to-face for the first time with the people you meet on Tinder. This text is similar to Community Guidelines in its tone. There are information and tips about meeting in public and easy-to-reach places, and informing family and friends of your date plans, not leaving drinks or personal items unattended, paying attention to sexual health and sexual consent. Information on US-based violence and human rights-based websites and call centers is also given here. The meetup text also includes a separate section on LGBTQ+ Travel, encouraging people to close their profiles in unsafe areas. It should be noted that this feature is typically a premium feature. However, Tinder states that it will not charge for hiding gender identity information in the profile in places that Tinder does not consider safe for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Lastly, Tinder has its Security and Data Policy available to read on the app, which clearly informs users how their data is collected, processed, and kept secure. Tinder also gives its reasoning for data collection to improve user experience and detect fraud and illegal activity on the platform.

Logging in and Profile Creation

Upon initiating the application, we are presented with three options for logging in; Google or Apple (depending on the operating system of your phone), Facebook and mobile phone number. After choosing one of the options above, we are asked to enter our mobile phone number, and we go through verification of it. After that we are presented with a welcome to Tinder page where we must agree to abide by rules to continue.

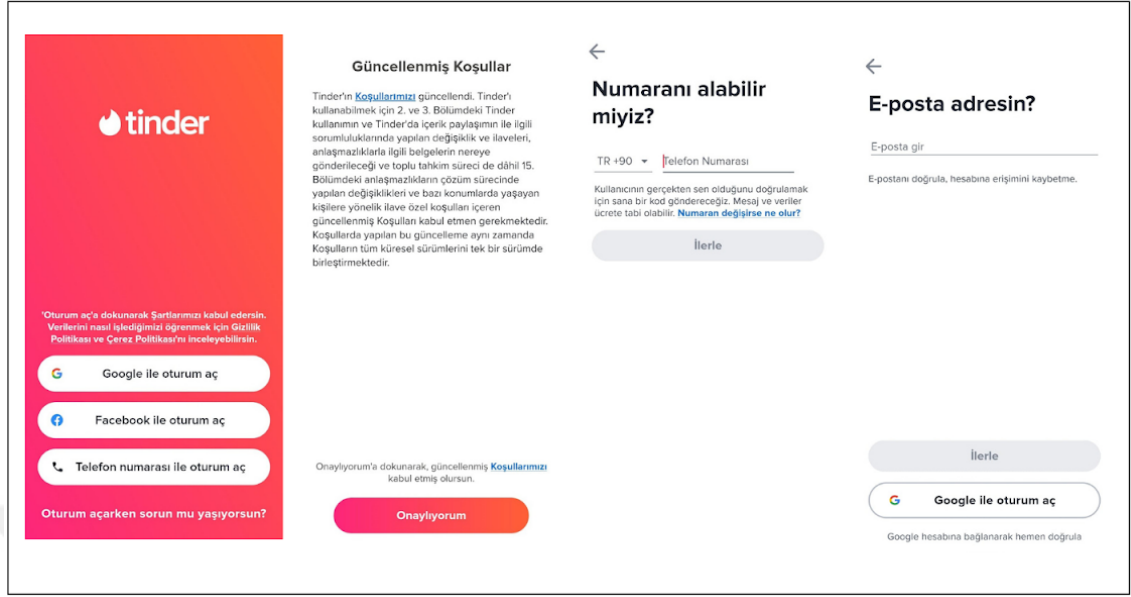


Figure D.1 Tinder Log-in Process

We asked to enter our first name, which will become non-editable after the profile creation process, and we are given a warning about this on this page. After entering our birth date, we are asked for our gender. There are 3 options on this page, such as woman, man and more. Also, we can set our gender not to be shown on our profile on this page. After that we are asked for our sexual orientation, this information can also be hidden on the profile if we prefer. Nine options for sexual orientation are given, including heterosexual, which can be chosen up to three. Upon choosing sexual orientation or passing the page, we are asked for who we would like to see; with the options of women, men, and everyone. The subsequent page requests the nature of the relationship we are seeking. Six options are given, but only one of them can be chosen.

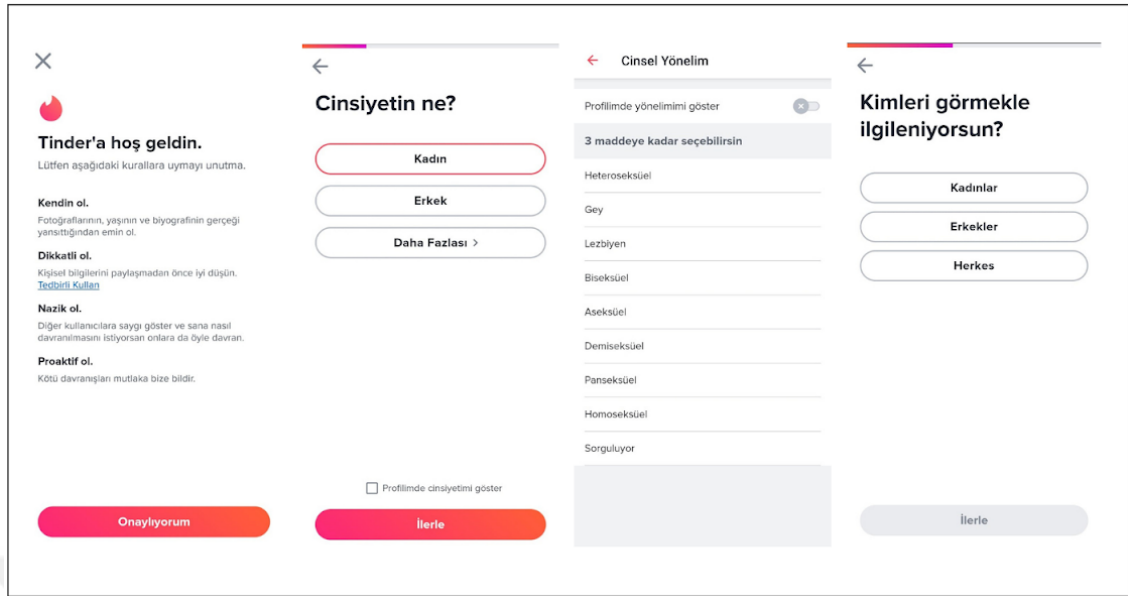


Figure D.2 The Process of Profile Creation on Tinder

After this we are asked for our distance preference, upon setting the difference we move to the profile details in order of our school, lifestyle and habits, other characteristics such as communication style, love language, education, zodiac sign. The last page is Interests, which is an extensive list ranging from different fandoms to drinks. We must note that after the distance preference page, all three detail pages are passable, and this information can be completed later if preferred. After this we are asked to upload at least 2 profile pictures, at most 6 photos can be uploaded. We are also given the information that we should upload at least 4 photos for our profile to stand out. Here we are also asked for photo permission, and subsequently location permission. There is a short information given here why this permission is asked.

Application User Experience

After the profile creation process, we are presented with the landing page which is called Discovery. Discovery is the page where profiles of other users, potential matches, are displayed. This page consists of three main sections. Tinder's logo and name, and buttons for notifications and discovery settings are displayed at the top section. In the middle there is the area where the profile of the potential match and action buttons are located. Down below in the third section there are 5 buttons located which are tools to

move between main sections of Tinder. These are from left to right; Discovery where we can see other users' profiles, Explore which is a hub for people to gather and meet with similar interests and preferences, premium subscriptions, chats and our profile.

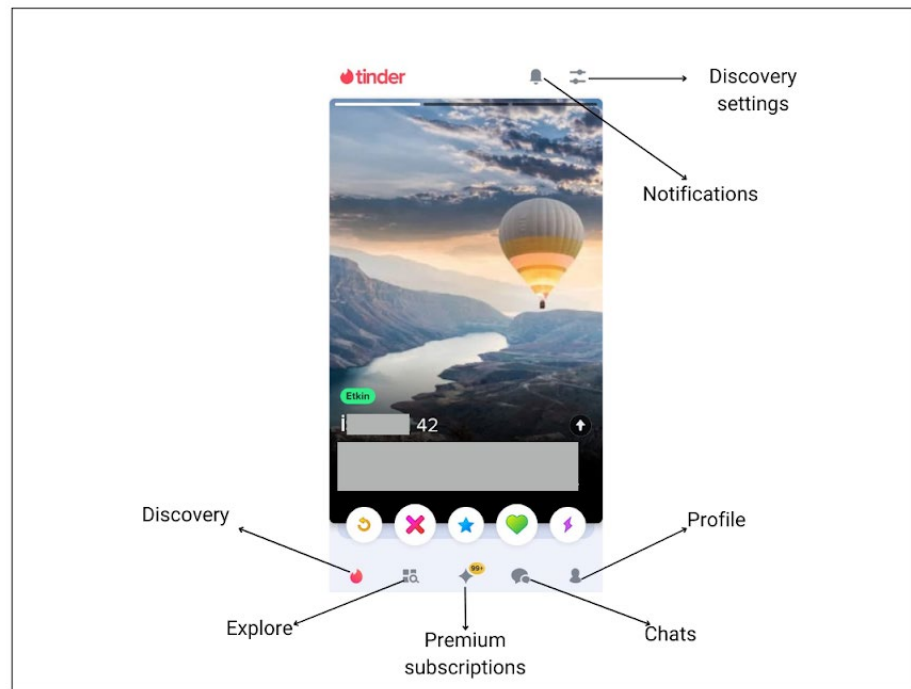


Figure D.3 The Profile of a Potential Partner on Tinder

The profile card system in the middle can be controlled by the motion of swiping right or left, and action buttons. Action buttons are in order of backtrack, nope(reject), super like, like, profile boost. Although four of the buttons are for interacting with the profile in front of us, the profile boost button placed here appears to be an enticement to purchase the premium feature. We must click the small arrow button to examine the profile's details, which is not intuitive and therefore not user-friendly. We can say that this may encourage users not to open the profile for details, but to keep swiping.

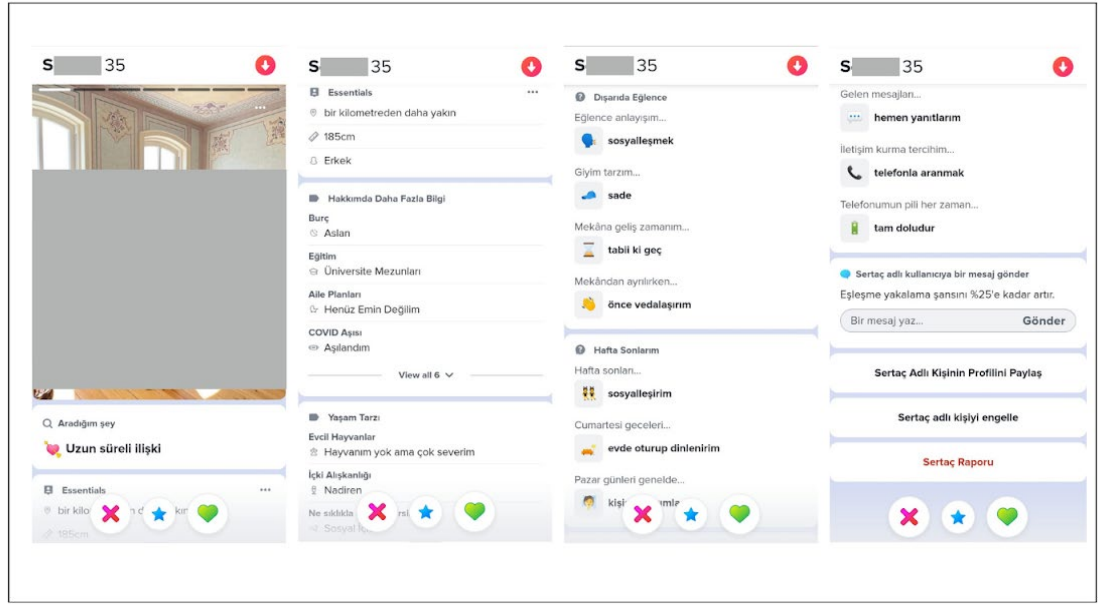


Figure D.4 The Profile of a Potential Partner in Detail on Tinder

Upon opening the profile, we use the scrolling up - down motions to examine further details. While we are moving about up and down in the profile three of the action buttons, reject, super like and like, are ever present on the screen. Profile length depends on the users' given details. The profile sections are in order of about me, essentials as in distance, height and gender, more about me as in zodiac sign, education, communication style etc., lifestyle choices as in drinking habit, pets etc., interests, prompts, and if the accounts are linked Instagram and Spotify details are shown. At the end of the profile page options for sending a message without matching, sharing, blocking or reporting the profile are located.

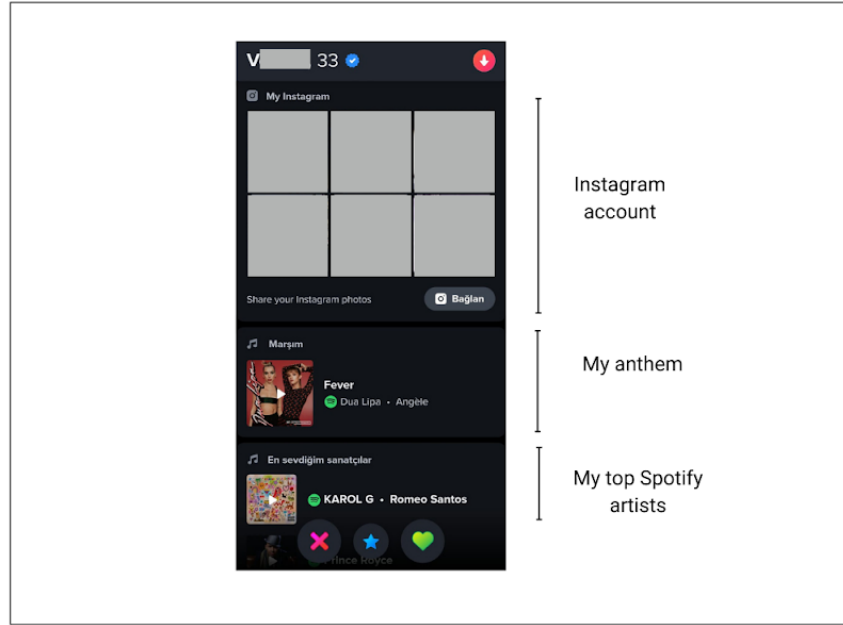


Figure D.5 Continuation of The Profile of a Potential Partner in Detail on Tinder

Upon swiping right, if we are matched with a profile, a new screen will appear with a quick message area accompanied by emojis. We may choose to continue swiping or to move to the page where matches and messages are located. This page consists of two sections where new matches are shown at the top, and messages are shown down vertically.

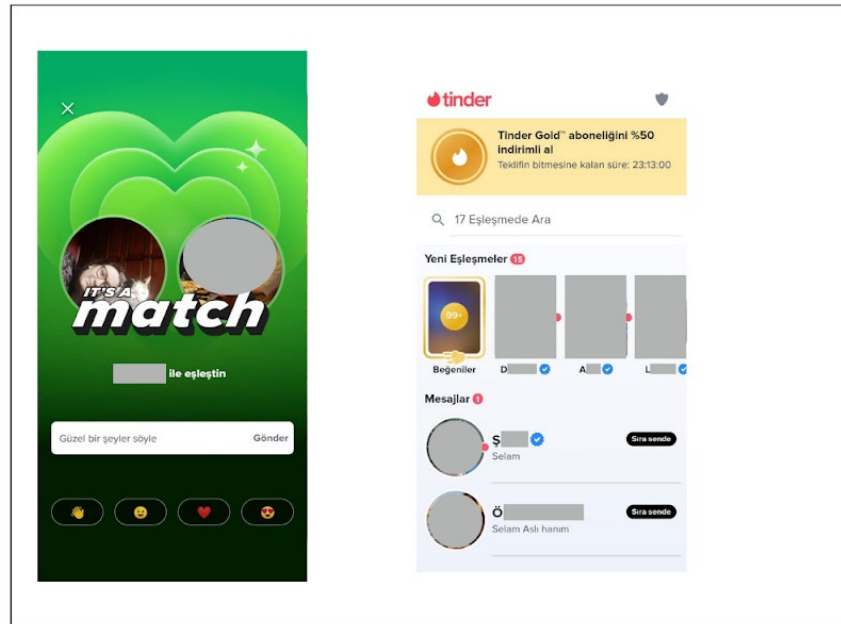


Figure D.6 Matching Process on Tinder

On the message at the top, we can see our match’s photo and name, next to it, video call and report/block button visualized as a shield icon. While in the middle part messages are shown, down below the box for sending gifs or written messages is located. Liking messages are also an available feature similar to Instagram.

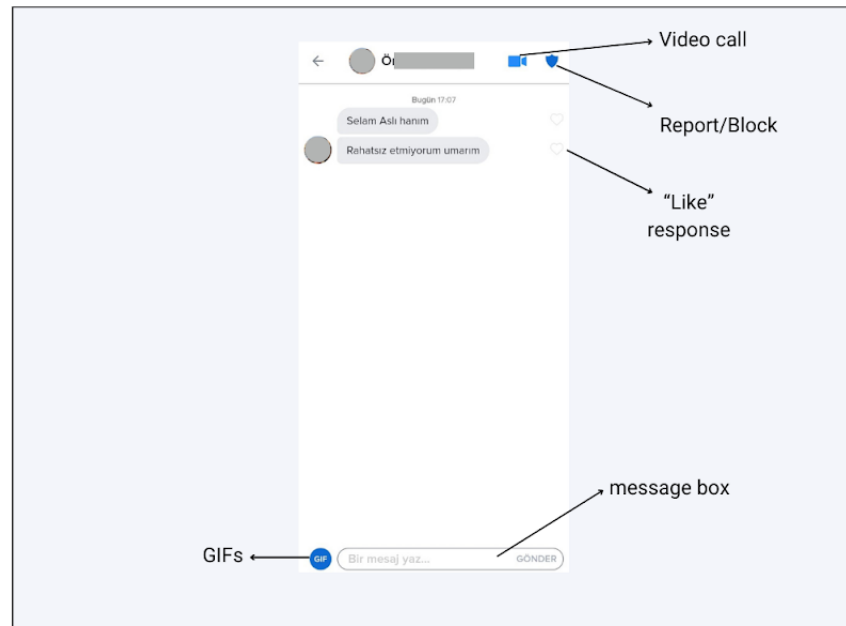


Figure D.7 The Chat Section on Tinder

Upon navigating to the Explore page, a multitude of options are presented accompanied by representative visuals. The groups comprise users who have been selected based on their shared interests displayed on their profiles, such as pet lovers’ group for interests of walking dogs, aquarium or cats.

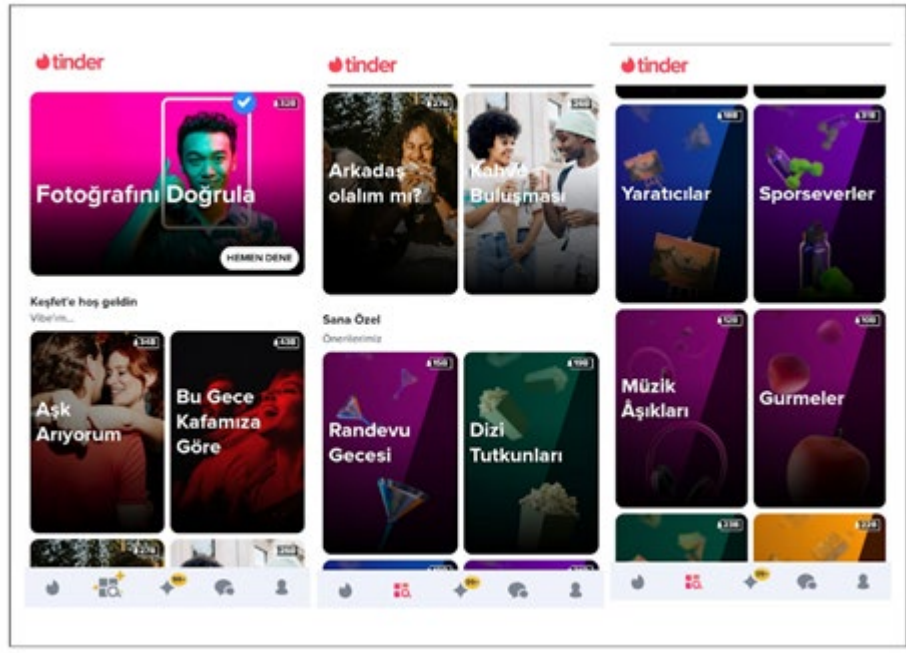


Figure D.8 The Explore Section on Tinder

When we navigate to the Profile page, we are greeted by three sections. The buttons for the security center and app settings are in the top right corner. The profile photo and completion ratio of our profile are displayed below. If our account is not approved, the blue tick next to our name and age will appear transparent. Upon selection, we are expected to take a selfie in two different poses. Accordingly, profiles that send selfies that match the photos in the profile are approved. This process is designed to prevent the creation of spam accounts. The pencil icon allows one to edit the profile. Finally, there is an area where Tinder premium packages are promoted.

Upon entering the "Edit Profile" area, we are greeted by a display of our profile photos. This area allows us to add, delete, and modify the order of our profile photos and videos, as well as upload loops and take new photos. The "Smart Photos" option, located at the bottom of the page, enables users to customize their profile photo display by detecting which photo is most frequently swiped right and displaying it at the top of the list. As one navigates the profile, a series of details are presented. Following the accounts on Instagram and Spotify, one encounters the gender and sexual orientation settings. After them there are two options that are premium features; hide my age and hide my distance.

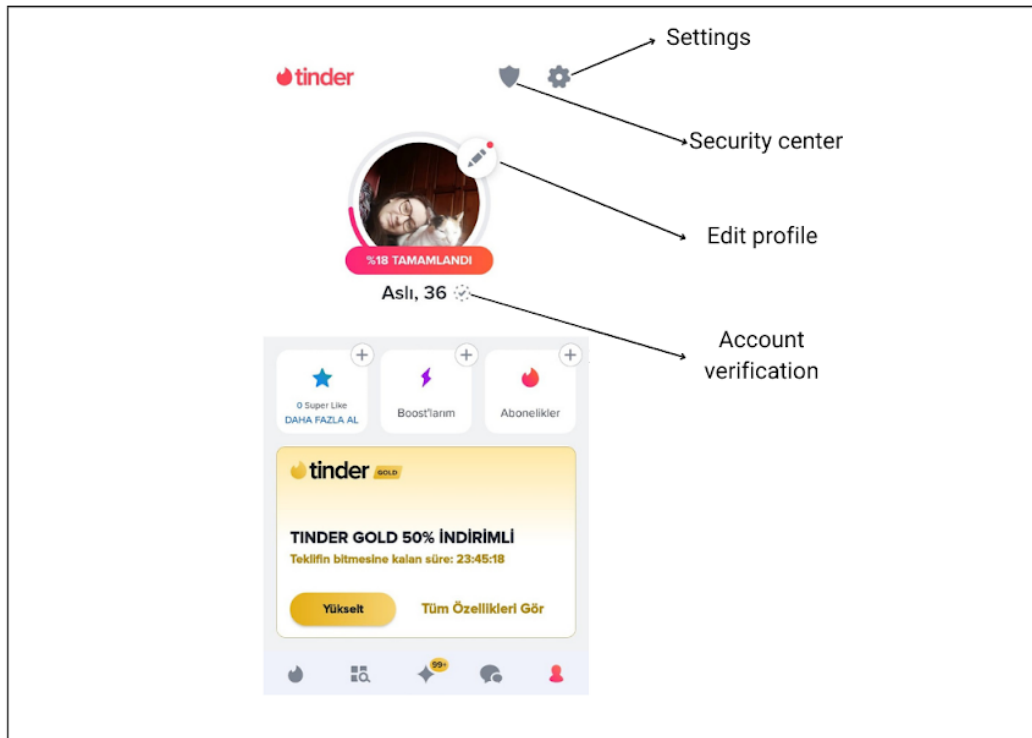


Figure D.9 The User Profile on Tinder

Upon entering the Safety Center, we are greeted by the guide, tools, and resources sections. The guide section includes informative content and tests under the subheadings of safety, harassment, in real life, reporting, consent and travel. Under Tools sections how-to guides are located, such as how to report or remove a match. Finally in the resources section we are directed to Tinder's website through a hyperlink.

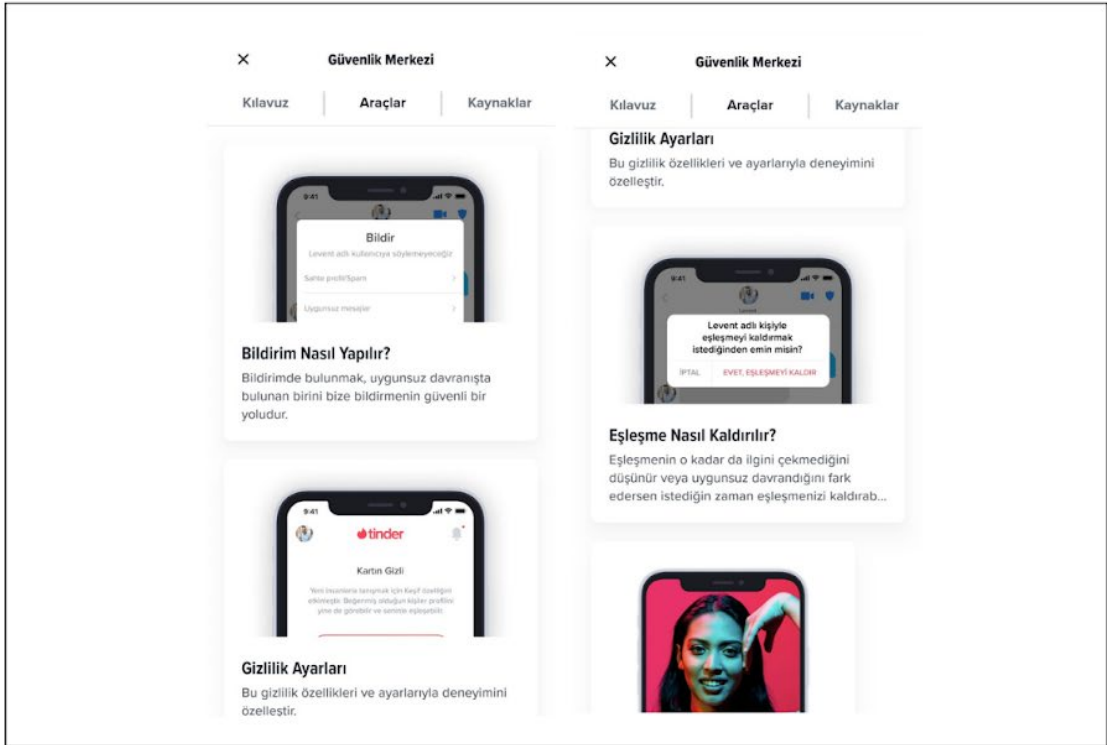
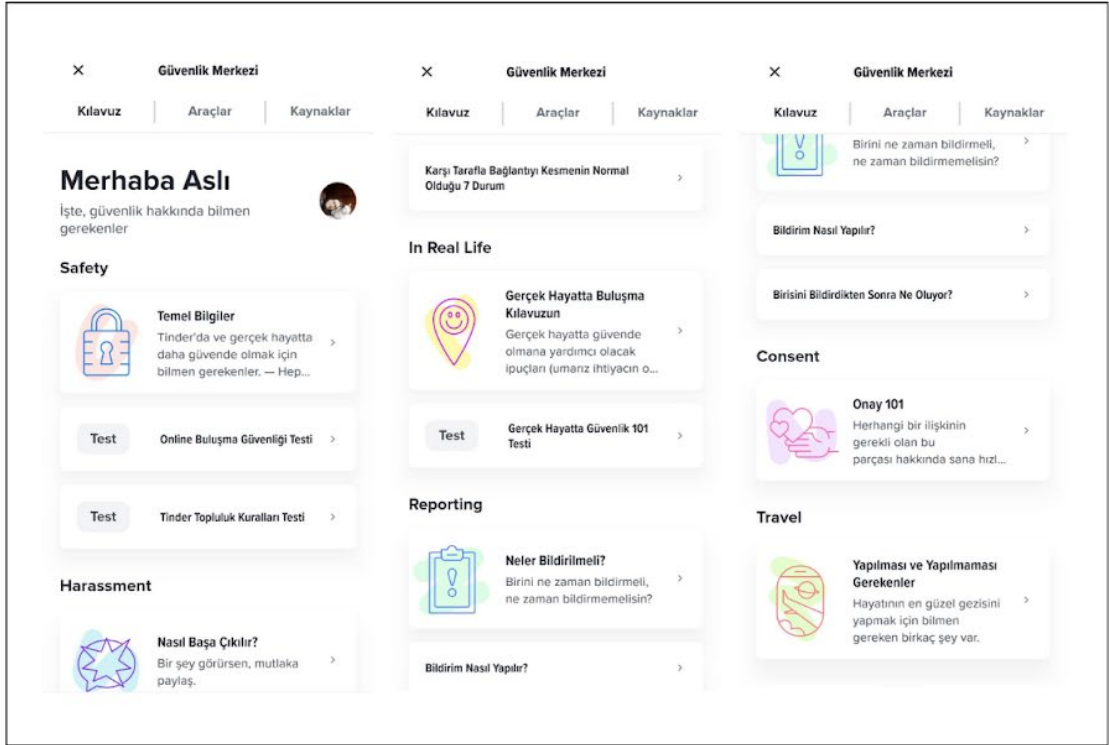


Figure D.10 The Safety Center on Tinder

Upon entering the Settings page, we are initially presented with a series of premium Tinder packages and their respective content, which occupies approximately half of the screen. This is followed by a list of account settings, including location, distance, age, account visibility, notifications, visual mode, and more detailed settings. Some of these settings are available only within Tinder gold or plus packages. After the payment account settings, there is a section where users can access support from Tinder and access the community guidelines and safety center. Subsequently, users are presented with the option to log out and delete their accounts. As in the case of Bumble, Tinder requests that users provide a reason for deleting the app before proceeding with the deletion.

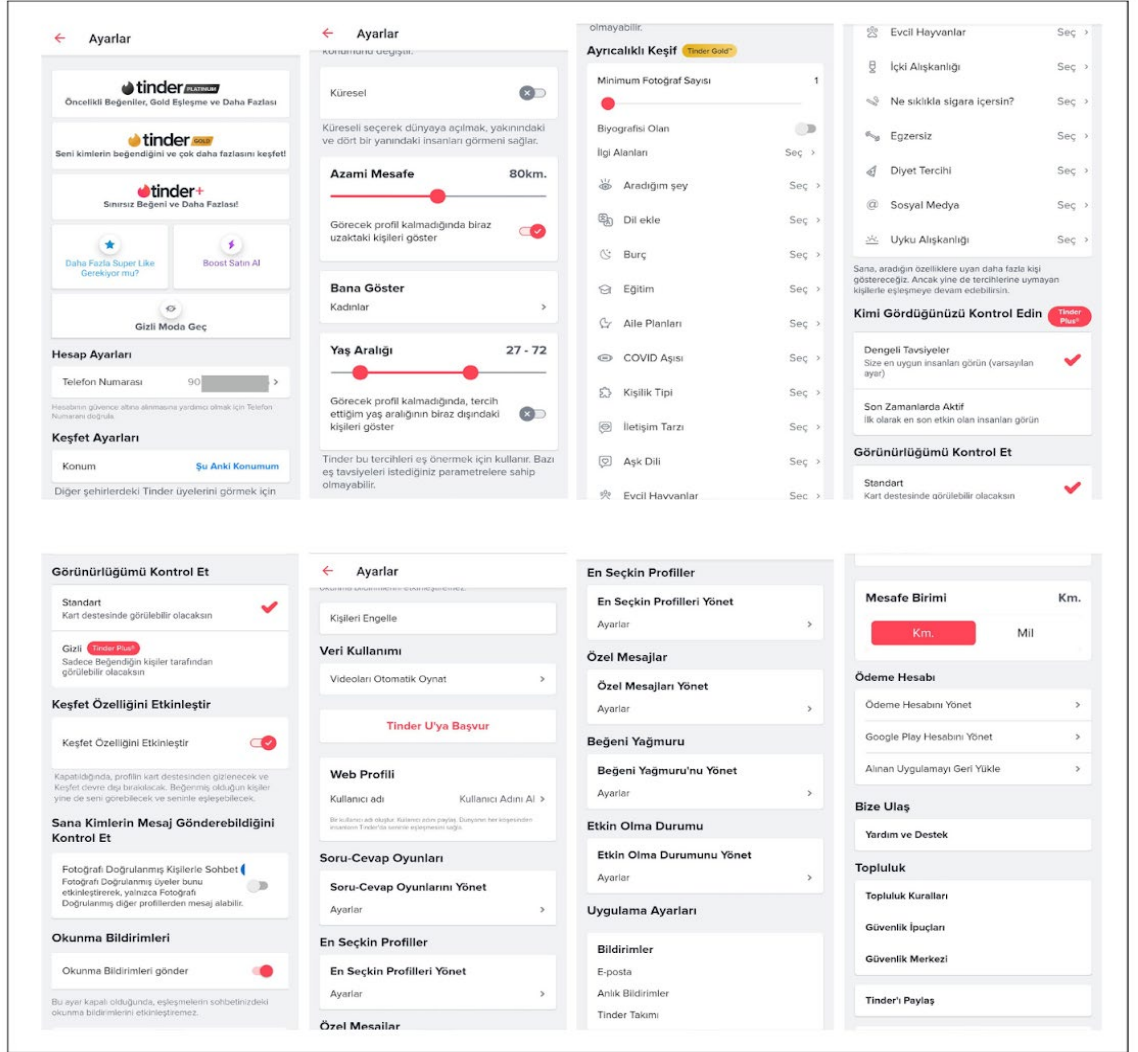


Figure D.11 The Settings Section on Tinder

D.2 OkCupid

Website, Blog and Marketing Campaigns

OKCupid welcomes users on its website with the slogan "Find someone that's just right for you!" It is noteworthy that upon changing the website's language from Turkish to English, the text is transformed into "Dating for every single person." In contrast, the English version of the website refers to the app as a dating platform, and the Turkish version characterizes it as a friendship app. The "About" page of the OkCupid website contains information about the platform's algorithmic workings. It is described as a method of asking questions about matters that are important to the user to help them find a partner with whom they have a high degree of compatibility.

Additionally, there is an emphasis on the fact that the user's identity and their expressed preferences are not relevant to OkCupid, which is similar to the statement made by Tinder. However, the former is more ambiguous in this regard. In addition, under the heading "Proof," it reports that "more than 91 million connections are made each year," that OkCupid is "the most mentioned app in the New York Times marriage section", and that "50,000 dates" take place each week.

Furthermore, the website contains information regarding security measures and the app's community guidelines. By selecting the "Help" option, users can access a page containing information about safety and security, community guidelines, and the legal text of terms and conditions. Once again, the English version of this page differs significantly from the Turkish one. In the English version, users can access additional information and guidelines about various platform aspects, including profiles and photos, paid features and power-ups, account settings, member communication, technical issues, advice, and safety. Moreover, users can also access LGBTQ+ resources by clicking "Find more help." Notably, this information is more obscured than the rest and unavailable in Turkish.

OkCupid also presents a blog similar to Bumble Buzz, which features articles on various dating-related topics and updates about the app. Some examples of these articles include advice on identifying a ghosting situation, findings on prioritizing women's rights among female daters, and post-breakup behaviors. However, it is noteworthy that this blog is only available in English, which may limit its accessibility for Turkish speakers. Furthermore, it is observed that the frequency of blog posts has decreased in the last two years.

Business Strategy

Two premium packages are available for purchase: the Basic and the Premium. The basic package is priced at 55.99 TL per month if purchased monthly; alternatively, the three-month package is priced at 38.32 TL per month, while the six-month package is priced at 28.33 TL per month. The premium package is available for 114.99 TL per month if purchased as a single month, 74.99 TL per month for a three-month package, and 56.66 TL per month for a six-month package. At the time of the completion of the thesis, the basic package appeared to no longer be available.

As a premium feature, OkCupid offers users a variety of services, including unlimited likes, the ability to remove ads, the option to view who has liked your profile, three super-likes per week, the ability to unlock the special notes section, unlimited backtracks, the opportunity to see all the answers to questions that you have not yet answered, and the capacity to filter out individuals who do not align with your preferences. The last one is a unique offering not previously available in other applications, except the notes and questions premium features, which are sections particular to OkCupid.

Additionally, users can purchase enhancements to their profiles, including visibility boosts, the ability to filter out individuals whose preferences do not align with theirs, and a feature indicating when messages have been read. Visibility boost tokens and tokens for the ability to see when messages have been read can be purchased from the profile page. The option to save money is available for users who purchase these tokens

in multiple quantities. A visibility boost token may be purchased for 39.99 TL, with a single token costing 33.99 TL if five tokens are bought and 28.99 TL if ten tokens are purchased. A similar approach is taken with the feature indicating when messages have been read. This feature can be purchased as a 5-pack token with a price of 58.99 TL per token, a 10-pack token costing 39.49 TL per token, and a 25-pack token of 19.49 TL per token.

Community Guidelines

OkCupid's community guidelines can be accessed via the app settings page. It should be noted that this information is only available in English and not in Turkish, which could make it inaccessible to Turkish-speaking users. The app provides comprehensive guidance and informative articles on various aspects of the community rules. The OkCupid platform expects users to treat each other with respect, kindness, and compassion. The platform does not tolerate content that is harmful, hateful, or harassing between users.

Furthermore, sexually explicit messages are considered to be harassment. Users are expected to exercise discretion when sending messages or uploading photos and be mindful that a family member may read their profile. It is emphasized that the app is not intended to be a space where users can share sexual fantasies or engage in discourteous behavior without consequence. Users must adhere to the established community rules and moderation standards, which are not to be reported by other users. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the text has a more formal quality than Tinder regarding visual presentation and tone.

The users can access additional resources to maintain their safety by clicking on the "Safety Tips" link above the Community Guidelines. Rules regarding profile photos are also available for review during the uploading process. This information is presented in a more visually appealing format, which may be more engaging for users. Additionally, an informational text is available during the profile creation process to assist users with

monogamy. Although this information is not translated into Turkish, it is accessible in English.

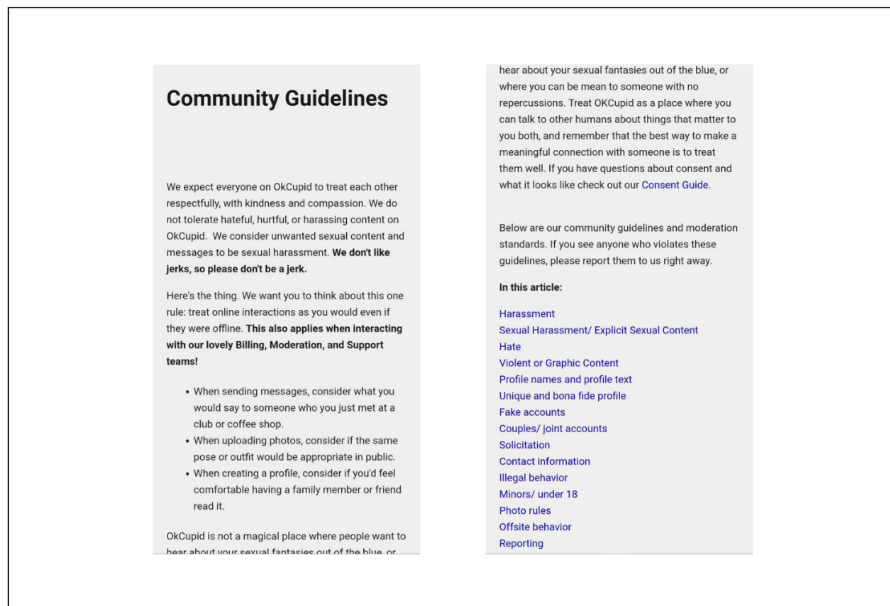


Figure D.12 OkCupid Community Guidelines

Logging in and Profile Creation

Registration entails the creation of an account with the app, which involves providing an email address and password. The next step is to create a profile. This consists of entering information such as your name, gender, preferred gender to meet, date of birth, desired relationship, and desired age range.

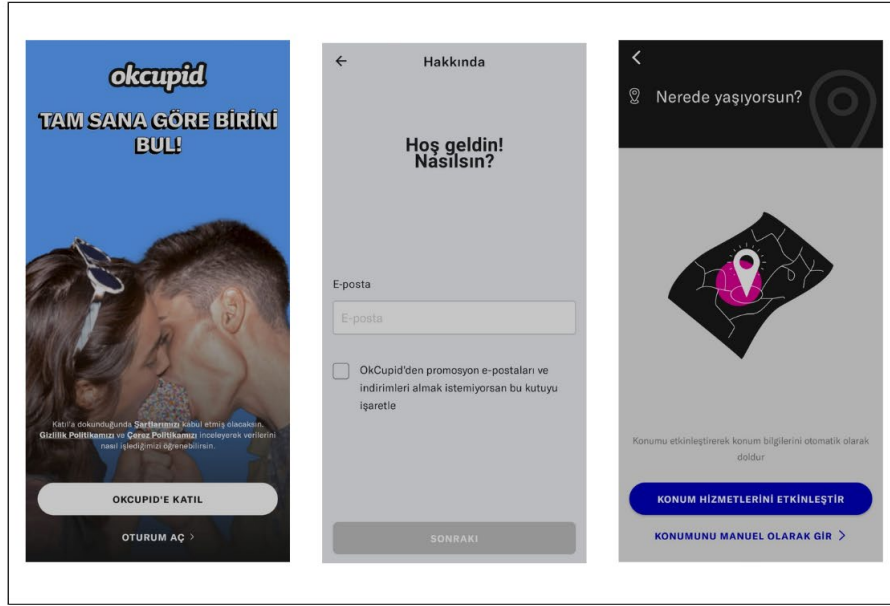


Figure D.13 OkCupid Log-in Process

Additionally, a photo, a short introduction, and responses to fifteen questions are required. The final step is verifying the account by confirming the associated phone number. Users can manually enter their location or allow OkCupid to access their geolocation data.

To set our preferences for the ideal person, further personal information is required to open entering the app. Initially, sexual orientation is queried, with an extensive list of 17 options. Additional information is then requested regarding body type, height, spoken languages, ethnicity, religious belief, political view, education, employment status, zodiac sign, alcohol, tobacco and marijuana consumption, dietary preferences, pets, parental information, and preferences. It should be noted that marijuana use is only asked on OkCupid so far.

Application User Experience

After the user profile creation phase is completed, the app presents us with the card of the potential matches. OkCupid's main screen consists of three parts. At the top of the main screen is the app's logo, backtrack function, and the function of boosting the user's profile.

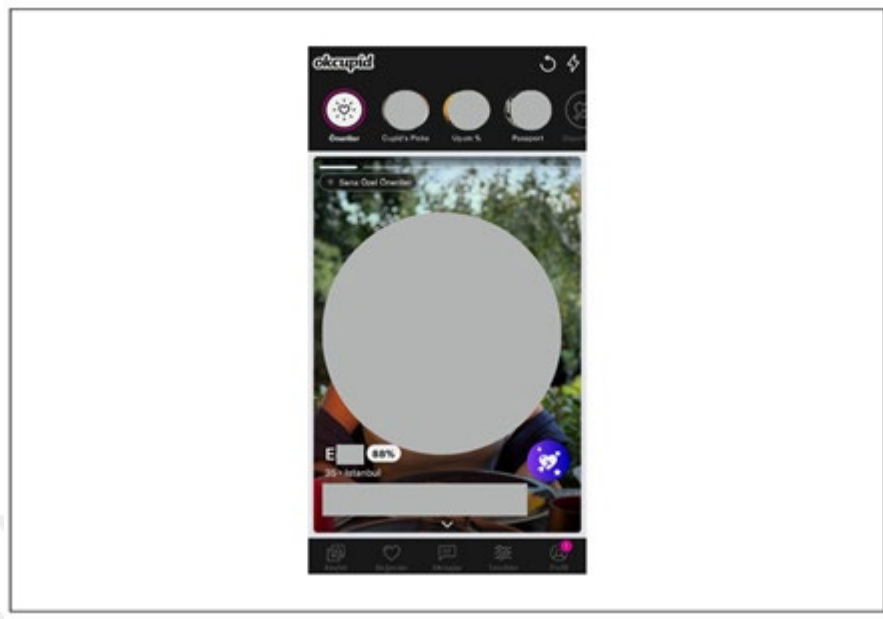


Figure D.14 The Profile of a Potential Partner on OkCupid

Below this section is an area where the other users of the app appear to be swiped. It is presented with left-right clickable user photos, name, match rate, age, location, description, and a super-like icon. The super-like function aims to increase our chances of matching that person. By swiping the profile left or right we reject or match. At the bottom, there are buttons to switch to different screens.

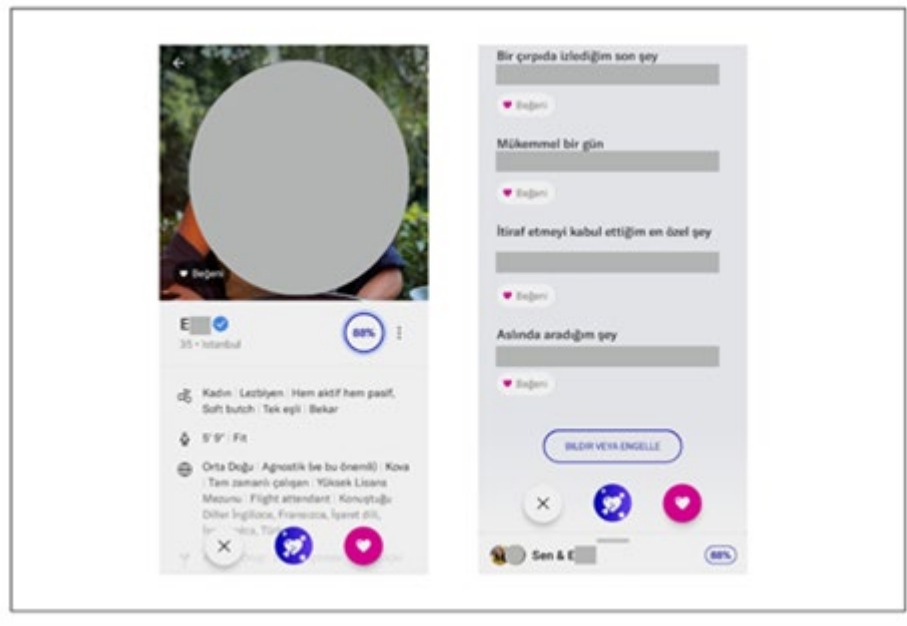


Figure D.15 The Profile of a Potential Partner in Detail on OkCupid

To obtain a comprehensive overview of the user profile in question, it is necessary to click on the section located at the bottom of the card. At the upper portion of the screen, we find an exit button and a photograph of the user. The following information is in the section below: name, age, location, and match rate. As we scroll down to investigate the potential match's profile further, more detailed information about the user becomes available. The first section of the profile contains basic information about the individual, including gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status. Additionally, the pronouns used by the individual to define their gender are specified. The following section contains information regarding the individual's height and weight and details about their background and identity. This includes ethnicity, religious beliefs, zodiac signs, political alignment, employment status, educational background, occupation, and spoken languages.

The section on lifestyle encompasses information regarding dietary habits, tobacco consumption, alcohol consumption, and marijuana use. In writing, the individual provides various information about themselves, including their preferences regarding media consumption, activities, personal confessions, and what they seek regarding relationships. There is also the function to like and comment on posts, photos, or profiles. After the information on the profile screen, the option to report or block the user is at the bottom. Below that, there is the option to reject a potential match, as well

as super-like and like marks that indicate the compatibility between us and the potential match.

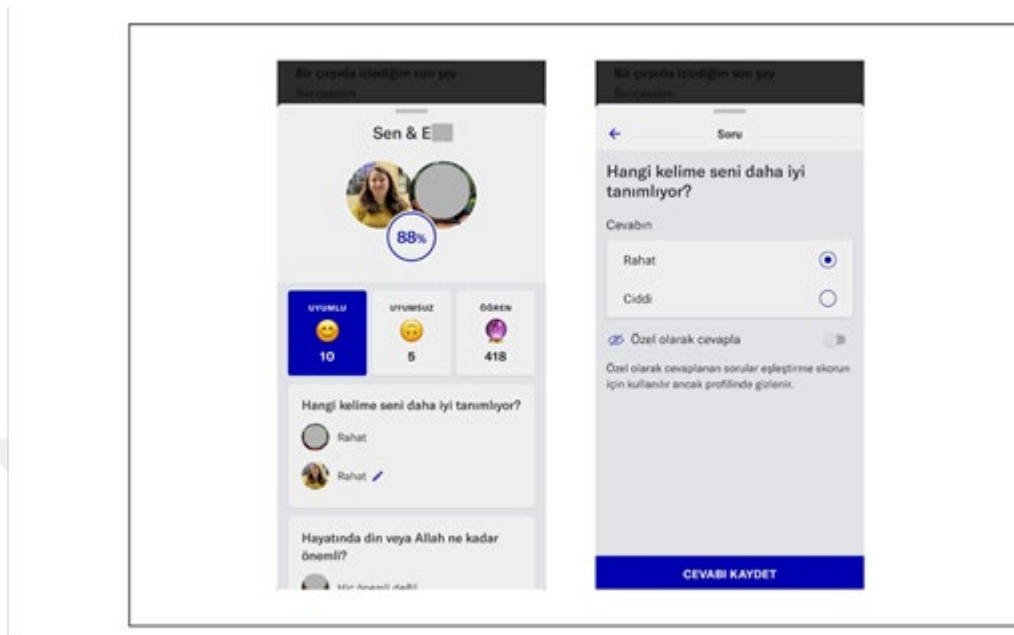


Figure D.16 The Compatibility Section on OkCupid

Selecting the option to view the match rate will open a new tab. The upper portion of the tab displays the names of us and the other user, our respective photographs, and our compatibility ratings. In the center of the page are three clickable boxes containing text, emoji, and numerical values indicating compatibility, incompatibility, and responses. Furthermore, the responses to the questions are presented in a consecutive order, along with the questions and the responses provided by both of us. We are granted the option to modify their response at any time. The original question is displayed again upon clicking on the question we wish to edit. In the tab containing the question, a return button and the question text are located in the upper left. The question is displayed below this, with clickable answer boxes situated beneath it. A privacy option, which enables us to answer the question privately, is located below the answers. The tab also includes a button allowing users to save their answers.

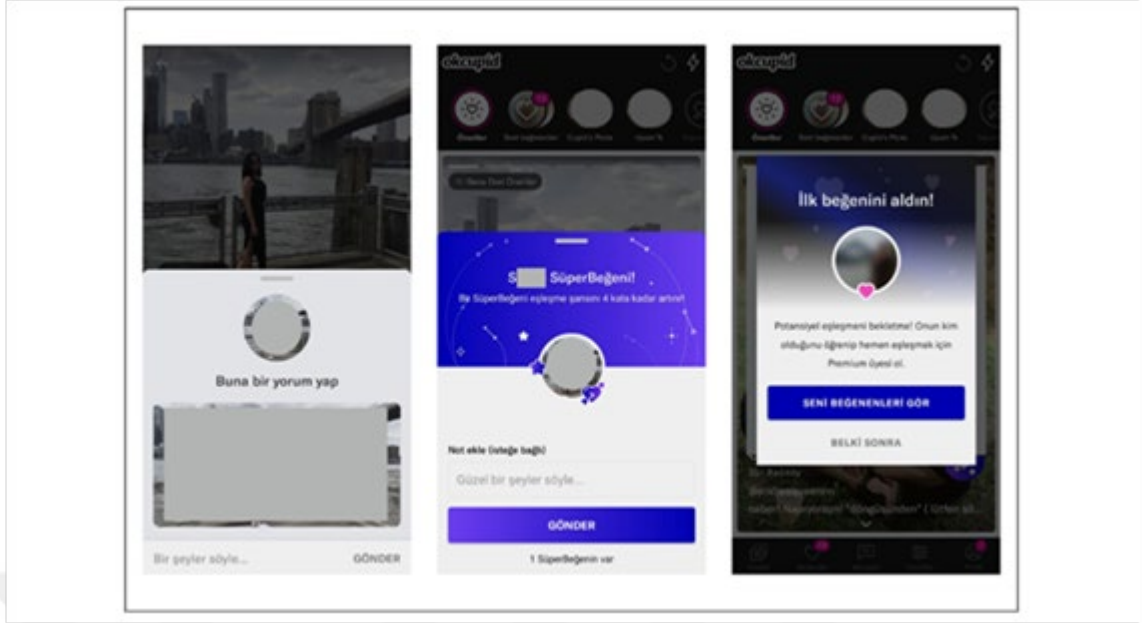


Figure D.17 Comment, Superlike and Like Features on OkCupid

If the user wants to comment on the user they want to match with, a small area will appear on the screen where they can write the comment with the user's profile photo and the photo they want to comment on. When you super-like a user, another tab will appear. The tab shows who are being liked, what the like is for, and the person's photo. At the bottom is an optional field for adding a note. The number of super-likes the user has been also displayed on the screen. When a user's profile is liked, a screen appears informing the user that the first like has been received, which suggests that the user becomes a Premium member to see the potential match. A non-premium user cannot see who liked them.

By selecting the "Preferences" tab located at the bottom of the screen, we are presented with the option of specifying the characteristics we would prefer to see as our "ideal person". At the top of the preferences screen, we are provided with information about this tab. Additionally, the following categories are available for further specification: basic information, appearance, background and identity, lifestyle and family. These categories are accessible via the profile tabs. We are given the option to modify these settings according to our preferences. The application is designed to facilitate the creation of a profile of an "ideal person" based on the user's preferences. Selecting a

specific item within the list of available options will direct us to a new page displaying that item in greater detail.

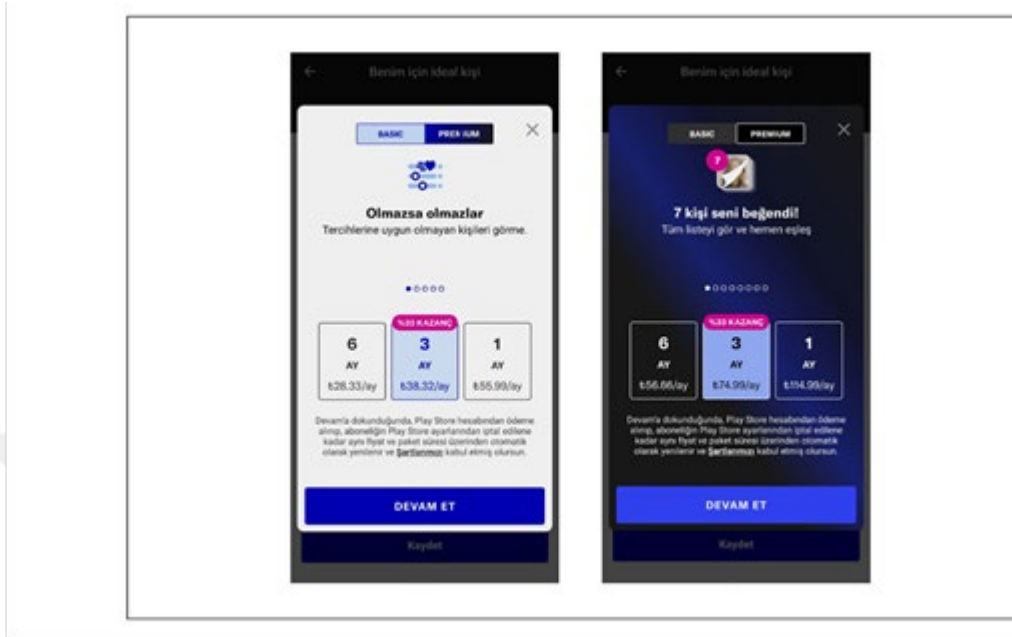


Figure D.18 The Premium Packages on OkCupid

The "likes" screen is divided into three sections: "people who like you," "private notes," and "your likes." The likes screen displays the number of individuals who have expressed interest in us. Upon purchasing premium account status, we can view the list of individuals who have expressed interest in our profile. The private notes section displays the comments and messages that we have received. Furthermore, the "Your Likes" section presents us with a comprehensive list of all the users who have expressed interest in their profile. The profiles are arranged in accordance with the chronological order in which order they were swiped.

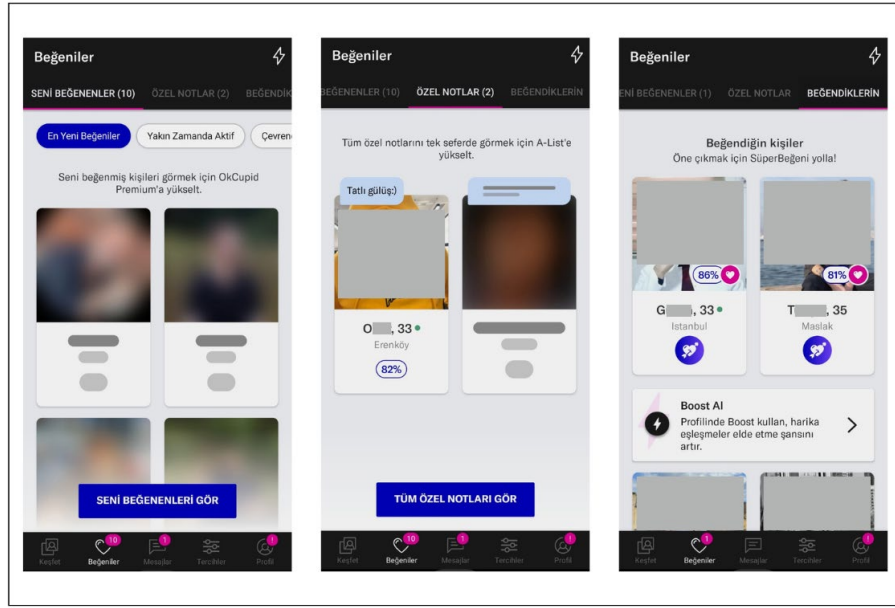


Figure D.19 People Who Like You, Private Notes and Your Likes Sections on OkCupid

Furthermore, we have the option to indicate our interest in a particular profile by sending a super-like, thus distinguishing ourselves from other users who have expressed interest in the same profile.

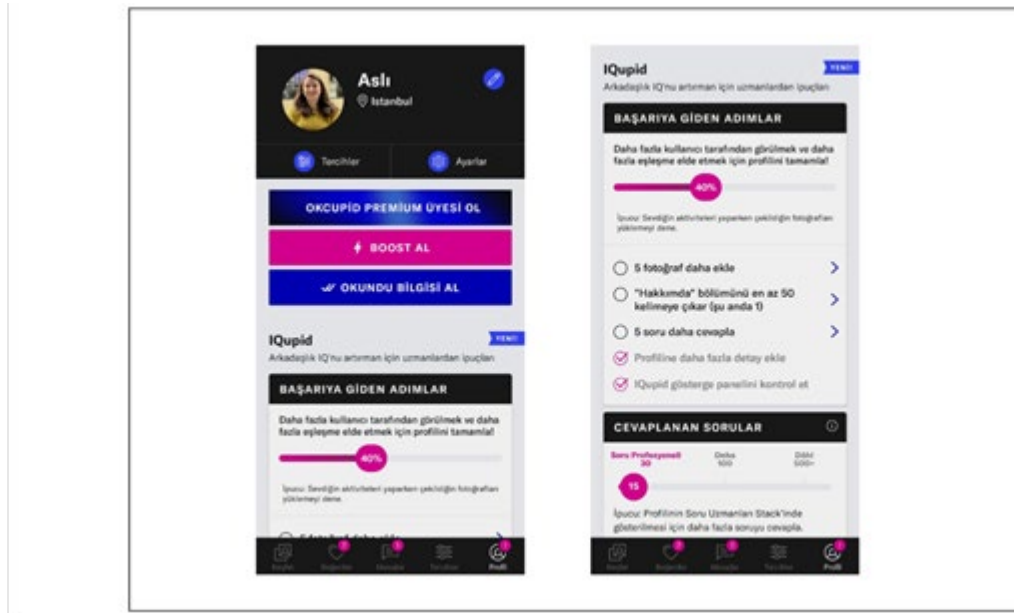


Figure D.20 The Initial User Profile Section

Before accessing the screen displaying our profile, we are directed to an overview screen. This overview screen is comprised of multiple sections. The upper portion of the page displays our photograph, name, and location. Additionally, a button for editing the profile is located on the side. Below this, some buttons allow us to navigate to the screen where we can access our profile, preferences, and settings. If we have not purchased the premium, boost, and read notifications features, we will be able to do so from here. In the center of the screen are five tips on how the IQupid can assist the user in creating a successful profile. Below this tab is a bar graph showing the number of questions the user has answered. The app encourages the user to answer more questions, as the compatibility rate is based on the answers given. Moreover, these questions strengthen the app's gamification.

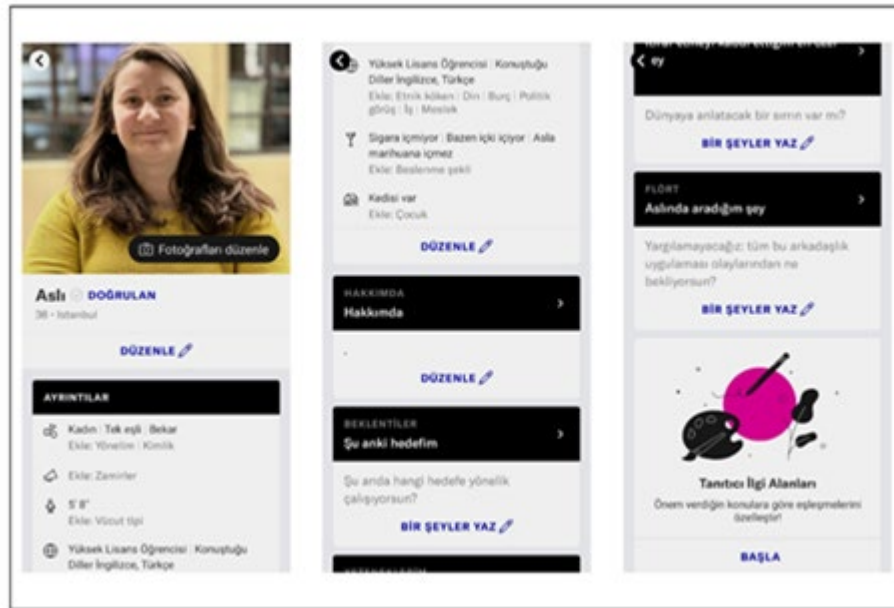


Figure D.21 The User Profile on OkCupid

The profile screen contains our photograph and personal information, including gender, preferred pronouns, height and body type, education, ethnicity, religious belief, political views, zodiac sign, occupation, employment status, and spoken languages. Additionally, users simply need to click the link next to their name to get verified. Subsequently,

information boxes begin with "About Me," followed by selectable prompts that users can answer regarding their hobbies, needs, talents, confessions, and flirting. Below, users can add more boxes about their interests, such as hobbies, values, and lifestyle. The options are very detailed and are presented in vernacular language.

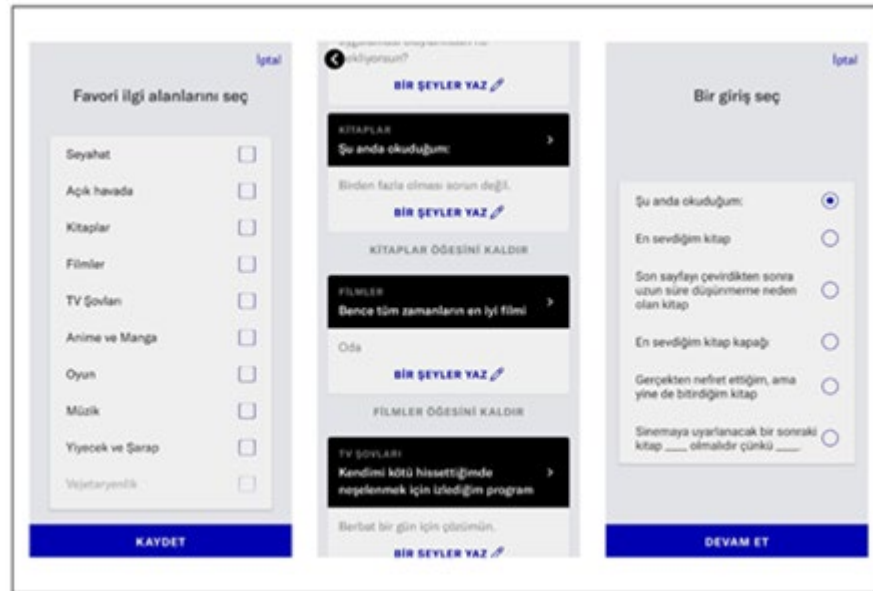


Figure D.22 The User Profile in Detail on OkCupid

Once we have selected a preference, we may either return to the previous screen, located in the top left-hand corner, or proceed to another preference by clicking the "Next" button situated below. In addition, the preference screen includes a "I prefer not to say" feature, which can be accessed from the bottom of the screen.

The Messages screen has a section that displays the names of people the user has matched with and the most recent message. At the top of the screen, there are buttons to switch to three tabs: all messages, the user's queue, and new matches. The screen shows how many people have liked the user and how many possible matches are available. Clicking on the messaged user brings up the options to report the user to OkCupid or unmatch them. If unmatch is selected, the app displays a separate screen that asks the user if you are sure you want to remove the match.

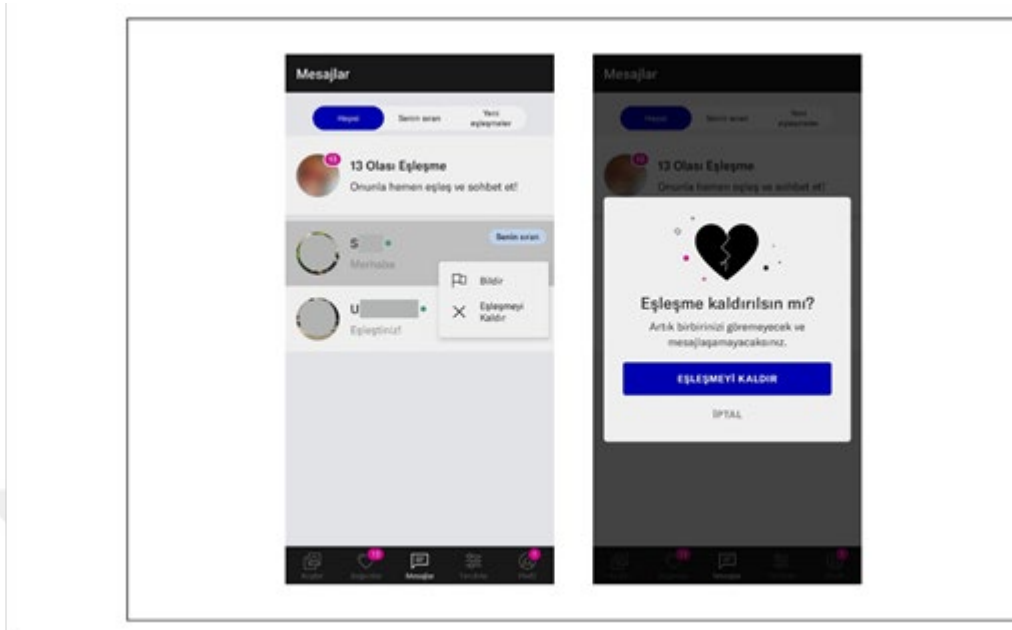


Figure D.23 The Removal of a Match on OkCupid

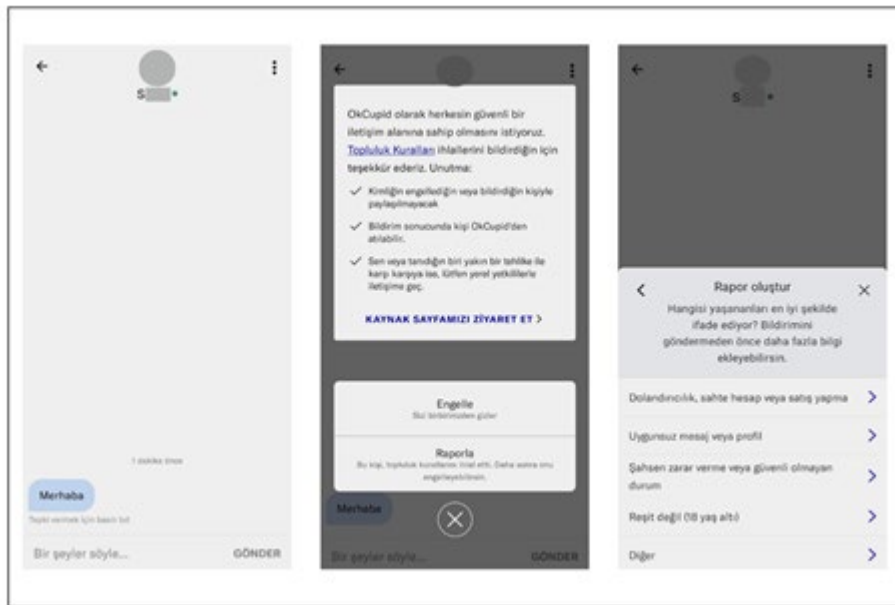


Figure D.24 The Chat Section and Reporting on OkCupid

When the user enters the message screen of the person they want to talk to, they see the messages that have been written. The person's profile, name, and online status appear at the top. Clicking on the three dots to the right will bring up the app's suggestions and

options to block/report the user. When the Report option is clicked, the app presents the user with multiple reasons to choose from. The settings screen presents the user with a series of configurable options. At the top of the screen, the user is presented with the option to become a premium member of the app. Additionally, a separate section is provided for the user to modify various settings, including notifications, privacy preferences, email address, password, phone number, and unit preferences. The third section of the settings screen presents the user with options for assistance, purchases, account deactivation, and logout. The final section comprises a series of informative articles concerning the app itself, as well as the wider Match Group, the privacy preference center, the privacy policy, the terms and conditions, safety tips, and the community guidelines. Upon entering each setting, the user is presented with a series of permissions that the application requests. In the privacy settings, the application provides the user with a detailed explanation of the permissions that have been requested. Additionally, the user has the option to grant or deny all permissions simultaneously by selecting the "Allow or Deny All" button located at the bottom of the screen.

We can delete or freeze our account from the Settings page. OkCupid ask for our reasoning like the other apps that are mentioned, though the process is longer and feels more cumbersome with the addition of entering the password.

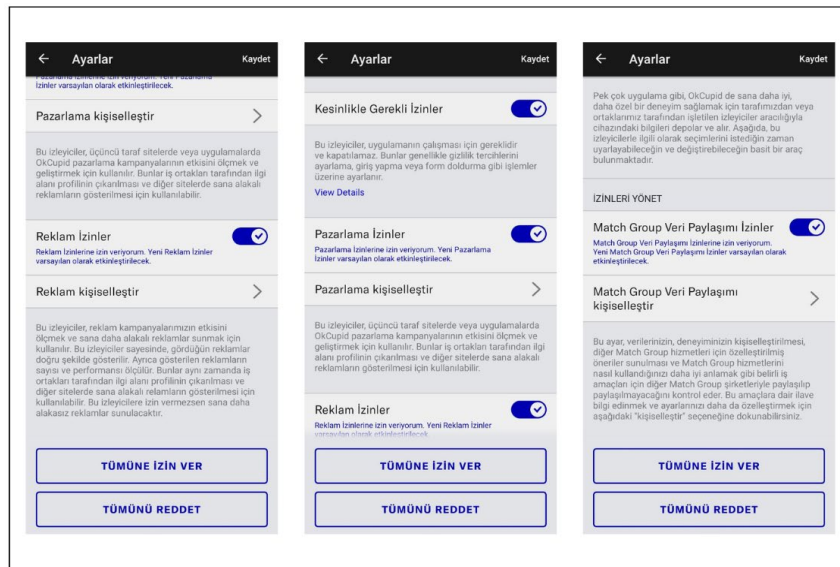


Figure D.25 The Settings Section on OkCupid

CURRICULUM VITAE

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- Bachelor's Degree: Kocaeli University, Interior Architecture - 2014

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Professional Work Experience

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- Architect, TURKMALL, Nov 2010 - Sep 2012