

CHAPTER 3

Platform Accountability in Online Dating: A Critical Analysis of Privacy, Discrimination and Safety Harms in India

By Tavishi and Angelina Dash

Introduction

The expansion of online dating platforms in the Global South brought with it the promise of greater agency for users in societies where romantic desire and sexual autonomy are strictly policed.¹ The last decade alone has witnessed a significant increase in the presence of dating platforms in India, including both global dating platforms like Tinder and Bumble,² as well as homegrown dating platforms like Aisle and Quack Quack.³ Unfortunately, this expansion has been accompanied by user harms such as financial fraud,⁴ casteist abuse,⁵ and sexual harassment,⁶ especially targeting women and members of marginalised communities.⁷ It thus becomes imperative for dating platforms to provide meaningful accountability and effective design interventions towards creating safe, inclusive and equal spaces for online dating. In this essay, we focus on three interlinked categories of user risks: privacy violations, discriminatory practices, and safety threats; and we contextualise these risks to India's unique socio-political and cultural context.⁸ We analyse these risks primarily through secondary literature, supplementing our findings with a case study on two understudied popular homegrown dating platforms,⁹ Aisle¹⁰ and Quack Quack.¹¹ We conclude the essay by reiterating the need for greater accountability for dating platforms, briefly outlining recommendations for transparency in content moderation practices and algorithmic curation.



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Data Privacy

Globally, online dating platforms collect and process highly personal and sensitive user data, which can include personal identifiers and interests, device metadata, precise location data, demographic information like religious and political beliefs, and sometimes biometric and financial data.¹² They often collect additional data through social media integration¹³ and user behaviour like swiping habits and frequency of app use.¹⁴

While access to some of this data can support user experience, many dating platforms share data with third parties for targeted advertising.¹⁵ A Mozilla Foundation study of 25 dating applications popular across North America and Europe found that 80% of them may share or sell user data to third parties for advertising.¹⁶ A 2020 report by the Norwegian Consumer Council found that popular dating platforms like Grindr, Tinder and OKCupid share sensitive personal information, including their users' exact location, sexual orientation, political beliefs, etc., to third parties.¹⁷



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Often, users are unaware of the nature and extent of such data sharing. Many platforms' privacy policies do not clearly disclose data-sharing practices,¹⁸ and these clauses often remain hidden within obscure and dense terms of service. Often, the privacy policies do not mention details of these third parties, and even in the few cases where company names are explicitly provided, users must read the privacy policies of these third parties to truly comprehend how they process their personal data.¹⁹ Studies on privacy policies across platforms and regions have found that users pay little attention to them, and that these policies fail to provide meaningful consent, often on account of complex legalese and information overload.²⁰

In the EU, much of the data collected by dating platforms falls within what the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) recognises under a "special category", requiring explicit consent for collection and processing, as it may heighten risks of discrimination and infringe on fundamental rights of citizens.²¹ In the Indian context, the personal data of users on online dating platforms has been particularly vulnerable in the absence of a data protection law, which, while enacted two years ago,²² has still not been enforced. Further, users in India

are less likely to benefit from additional safeguards accorded to sensitive personal data even after the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023²³ comes into force, given the absence of a separate category of protection for sensitive personal data.^{24,25}

Moreover, India's data protection framework does not specify mechanisms for obtaining granular consent, unlike other major data protection frameworks across the globe,²⁶ forcing users to either share all requested data or entirely forgo services. This becomes all the more relevant as several dating platforms are integrating AI, in addition to complex matching algorithms, within their services in the form of chatbots,²⁷ picture selection tools, and profile or messaging feedback.²⁸ However, the use of personal data for AI features often leads to the sharing of data with third parties. For instance, recently, the European nonprofit noyb filed a complaint with the Austrian Data Protection Authority against Bumble's processing of personal data for its AI Icebreakers feature, which relies on OpenAI's ChatGPT to aid users in starting conversations.²⁹

In the past, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed a petition for information about a data-sharing deal between the Match Group's OkCupid and Clarifai AI that enabled the training of facial recognition software without users' knowledge or consent.³⁰ Without adequate data security safeguards and consent mechanisms, privacy violations through data breaches and illicit data sharing can expose users to risks like identity leaks, surveillance, and reputational harm.³¹ Women and marginalised communities face disproportionate risks from data breaches.

A 2023 study by Cybernews revealed that it was possible³² for hackers to triangulate users' almost real-time locations by retrieving the last known location ID of any OkCupid user.³³ This vulnerability could have exposed women to stalking and sexual violence, and endangered members of the LGBTQIA+ community.³⁴ Dating platforms can also facilitate surveillance of sexuality in jurisdictions where homosexuality is criminalised. For instance, in Cairo, police officers detained a man simply for having downloaded same-sex dating apps on his phone.³⁵ In India, despite the decriminalisation of homosexuality,³⁶ queer individuals continue to face stigma and violence, with queer men reporting assaults, robberies, and blackmail through threats of being outed on platforms like Grindr.³⁷ Further,



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women from marginalised communities can be particularly vulnerable to privacy breaches. In the recent past, pictures of Indian Muslim women, obtained from social media, have been mock auctioned on open-source apps derogatorily named Bulli Bai³⁸ and Sulli Deals.³⁹ These incidents have heightened the apprehension regarding the use of dating platforms amongst Muslim female users, especially given the opacity surrounding their privacy policies and redressal mechanisms.⁴⁰

Case Study: Privacy Practices of Aisle and Quack Quack⁴¹

The following analysis examines the privacy practices of Aisle and Quack Quack on the basis of publicly available information in their privacy policies, terms of use and user interface.



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	Aisle	Quack Quack
Collects sensitive personal data	Yes ⁴²	Yes ⁴³
Explicit user consent for processing sensitive personal data for specific purpose	No ⁴⁴	No ⁴⁵
Explicit consent to collect geolocation data	Yes	Yes ⁴⁶
Allows users to withdraw consent easily	Not Clear ⁴⁷	Not Clear ⁴⁸
Shares data with third parties for advertising	No ⁴⁹	Yes ⁵⁰
Allows users to opt-out of third-party data sharing	No ⁵¹	No ⁵²
Specifies data retention duration	Yes ⁵³	No ⁵⁴
Users can request platform to delete their personal data	Yes ⁵⁵	Not Clear ⁵⁶
Data breach notification policy	No	No
Private Mode Feature allowing the profile to be hidden	Yes, your profile will only be visible to users you like/comment. However, this is a paid premium feature.	No, only certain details like age, location and profession can be hidden, and this option is only available to Quack Quack Plus subscribers as a paid feature.
Features allowing users to monitor how many people their matches have interacted with in the past few days	Yes, the Exclusivity Feature is included as a premium feature to Aisle users. ⁵⁷	

Discrimination

Romantic and sexual desire, although deeply personal, is entrenched in existing power structures and shaped by histories of oppression and exclusion.⁵⁸ With the emergence of online dating platforms, many saw the possibility to transgress existing racial and ethnic boundaries by dating outside of conventional friends and family networks.⁵⁹ However, romantic desire online continues to be mediated by gender, caste, class, race, ethnicity, religion, language, and so on.⁶⁰ In fact, these choices are often normalised and legitimised as personal preferences,⁶¹ and further reinforced by opaque matching algorithms, platform policies and design.

Numerous studies in the Global North have highlighted the prevalence and normalisation of sexual racism⁶² in online dating⁶³ and the resultant hierarchy of desirability⁶⁴ which privileges Whiteness.⁶⁵ This reinforces discrimination and the invisibilisation of racial and ethnic minorities, increasing their vulnerability to racial abuse, and even sexual harassment and physical violence.⁶⁶ Consequently, many global platforms have faced criticism for enabling users to express racial preferences in bios or through ethnicity filters.⁶⁷ Even when users do not engage in explicit filtering, matching algorithms of many prominent dating platforms use collaborative filtering,⁶⁸ which can potentially learn discriminatory racial preferences of users in dating through the feedback loop of user interactions, and amplify existing social norms of homophily.⁶⁹ This can result in the homogenisation of recommendations even for users who do not wish to be restricted by the dominant preferences of their racial group.⁷⁰ Dating platforms often create an illusion of choice, since users are often unaware of the extent to which the profiles presented to them are curated by the hidden logics of the opaque matching algorithms, especially when the recommendations conform to dominant societal expectations. In comparison to the research on discrimination based on racism in online dating in the Global North, there are relatively fewer studies on how discrimination manifests in dating platforms in India. This is especially relevant given that endogamy has been the defining feature of upholding caste-based segregation and discrimination.⁷¹ This is reflected in the persistently low percentages of intercaste⁷² and interreligious marriages.⁷³ Any transgression of caste or religious lines can result in violence, often directed at Dalit and Muslim



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partners,⁷⁴ who are vilified as a threat to the honour of Savarna communities.⁷⁵

While a large percentage of young users have used dating platforms to explore romantic relationships, often in secrecy,⁷⁶ there is limited research on how considerations around caste, class and religion shape their user behaviour. Although there is often an uncomfortable silence surrounding the question of swiping based on caste and religion reported across multiple studies in India,⁷⁷ participants in some studies confided that they would ultimately have to marry according to their parents' will.^{78,79} Some dating platforms have also come under criticism for providing caste filtering.⁸⁰ Even when dating platforms do not provide exclusive caste filtering, users may present their dominant caste identity or preferences in their profile or swipe based on markers that are often proxies for caste and class status in a highly unequal society.⁸¹ The commodification of intimacy on dating platforms means that the construction of user profiles becomes an activity in self-branding using limited avenues for user information like profile pictures, bio, and text messages.⁸² This scarce information often forms the basis for judging the desirability of potential matches. Dhanaraj notes how users may judge caste through markers like "surnames, localities, dialects, jobs of parents, religion, economic status, political and pop culture idols, food choices, ideology, complexion, and others."⁸³ In their study of Grindr in India and South Africa, Philip found that, while these platforms provide important sites for expressing sexual desire in societies where heteronormative patriarchy prevents such expression freely offline, they also result in the commodification of gay identities and a hierarchy between "classy gays" and "poor gays" through class, race and caste markers.⁸⁴ Users both perform affluence, and judge desirability through markers like Western brands in clothing, and trendy locations in profile pictures.⁸⁵

Similarly, studies note how terms like "creeps" and "weirdos" are used for those who use lower-quality images, whose English is unrefined, and who lack aesthetics and premium branding.⁸⁶ Kisana has also noted how fluency and command over the English language and access to Western pop culture are used to police caste boundaries in a society where such cultural capital often signifies intergenerational literacy and access to English medium schooling.⁸⁷ The geolocation feature in many dating platforms further consolidates segregation in a country



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where Dalit and Muslim families live in ghettoised margins across urban cities.⁸⁸

Even when Dalit and Bahujan users match with Savarnas on dating platforms, they often have to face casteist abuse and humiliation,⁸⁹ and face heightened vulnerability to sexual harassment or physical violence. Many report being blocked or unmatched when dominant caste matches discover their identity.⁹⁰ Dalit women, who are often stereotyped as angry, unfeminine, and promiscuous, face heightened safety risks on dating platforms.⁹¹ Paik has drawn parallels between the experiences of marginalisation faced by Black women in the US and Dalit women in India.⁹² She notes that both White and Brahminical systems protected White and upper caste women's honour by restraining them from the public sphere, while sexual access to the bodies of black and lower caste women has been legitimised and institutionalised.⁹³

While users may look at dating platforms as opportunities to exercise autonomy in romantic partnership through “modern ways”, they often still rely on prevalent social norms to make dating decisions.⁹⁴ This user behaviour on platforms, which also feeds into algorithmic curation, together creates a socio-technical system that upholds caste, class, and religious endogamy. Dattani highlights how “endogamous social intimacies” are co-constructed by user behaviour and the algorithmic infrastructure of the platform.⁹⁵



Case Study: Privacy Practices of Aisle and Quack Quack⁴¹

Community Guidelines and Prohibition of caste-based discrimination and casteist hate speech. It is telling that both Aisle and Quack Quack, designed specifically for Indian audiences, do not explicitly prohibit caste-based discrimination and casteist hate speech in their Community Guidelines.

Aisle prohibits, among other things, “threatening, harassing, racially offensive, or illegal material, or any material that infringes or violates another party’s rights”

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in its Community Guidelines and Safety section nestled within the Terms of Service.

Quack Quack goes a little further and prohibits racism, religious discrimination and bigotry.⁹⁶ While broad categories of “discriminatory” and “bigoted” content should include casteist abuse, the lack of explicit prohibition is likely to discourage users from reporting harmful content.

From an analysis of the community guidelines of these two major dating platforms, it appears that although Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi constitute the majority of the country’s population, platforms are designed by and targeted towards only the upper-caste elite.

Safety

Dating platforms pose complex safety risks, including those that go beyond in-app interactions, due to factors like conversations between users transitioning to other platforms or offline interactions. Recently, systemic failures in Match Group’s¹⁰² management of sexual assault reports on its dating platforms in the US have come to light.¹⁰³ The investigation revealed that repeat offenders, including those who were reported for rape and violence, continued to operate on the group’s platforms, easily creating new accounts when older profiles got banned. Another study cautioned against groomers and pedophiles using dating platforms to target single mothers to carry out child sexual abuse.¹⁰⁴

In India, too, concerns about the safety of women and gender minorities on dating platforms are increasingly coming into focus. Women have reported experiencing cyberstalking, doxxing, gendered hate speech, and the unsolicited sharing of explicit images on dating platforms.¹⁰⁵ Users have expressed concerns regarding the practice of ‘catfishing’,¹⁰⁶ and being misled into engaging in casual encounters while intending to pursue a serious relationship on the platform.¹⁰⁷ Women participants in a study reported that men who faced rejection on dating platforms often tracked them down on other social media platforms like Facebook, and harassed them with



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repeated friend requests.¹⁰⁸ Reports of sexual harassment and violence during in-person dates arranged through dating platforms have also come to light.¹⁰⁹ It is likely that many incidents of online and physical sexual harassment go unreported. Studies have reported that women in India often choose not to report instances of sexual violence.¹¹⁰ This is exacerbated by social taboos against dating in Indian society, which can further preclude women and gender minorities from reporting sexual violence, specifically stemming from interactions on dating platforms, to law enforcement.¹¹¹ Women often self-censor their online behaviour, and may eventually withdraw from online dating after repeated experiences of sexual abuse and intrusive messages.¹¹²

While gender-based online harms stem from broader social contexts, it is important to investigate how the design and operation of dating platforms are often inadequate to both prevent and respond to safety incidents. Many platforms provide safety guides, and some, more than others, place the onus of safety on the users.¹¹³ Some platforms have started crisis text lines for users in select jurisdictions,¹¹⁴ and partnered with counselling and support organisations.¹¹⁵ However, these are not uniformly available across all platforms and jurisdictions. Further, reporting mechanisms and content moderation practices of platforms have proven to be insufficient to address safety concerns. Platforms need to streamline reporting mechanisms, reduce response time, and provide more transparency to users on the action taken in response to user complaints.¹¹⁶ Further platforms must be more transparent on how they design their community guidelines and safety guides, and create spaces for more consultation and feedback from users and civil society.

Case Study: Reporting Mechanisms on Aisle and Quack Quack

Quack Quack allows users to report a profile or a conversation on multiple grounds, including inappropriate profile photos or profile content, indecent behaviour via personalised messages, false information (fake age, profile), using multiple accounts or scamming and spamming. Apart from this, Quack



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Quack also provides a blank form for users to submit a ticket on any concern/issue/feedback that directs users to its website.¹¹⁷

Aisle allows users to report a profile on grounds including “Not interested”, “inappropriate photos”, “inappropriate messages”, “feels like spam” or “others.” Aisle also provides an in-app support option, which grants relatively more flexibility in reporting. Here, users can report a safety concern under impersonation, harassment or hacked accounts. Users must enter their registered phone number and other personal details, and have an option to provide relevant information in a textbox and upload attachments. Neither platforms provide users an option to report under categories like “sexual harassment/ assault”, “violence”, “child abuse”, “hate speech”, “identity-based abuse”, “stalking”, etc.¹¹⁸

It does provide the residual “other” category where users can type in a textbox. However, this reporting interface can discourage reporting of sexual harassment, physical abuse or racist, religious, casteist or ethnic abuse, either on the platform or during their offline meetings. This reporting interface falls short of how other dating platforms provide reporting options,¹¹⁹ and the platforms’ own Code of Conduct and Community Guidelines, which prohibit users from threatening or harassing others users, or disseminating material that is discriminatory on the basis of race¹²⁰ or religion.¹²¹ The reporting mechanisms also fall short of the grievance redressal mechanisms mandated under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 (Intermediary Guidelines).¹²² As per the intermediary guidelines, all intermediaries need to implement a grievance redressal mechanism for users to report NCII¹²³ (Non-consensual intimate image abuse)¹²⁴ and “take all reasonable and practicable measures” to remove/disable access to such content within 24 hours.¹²⁵ Both Quack Quack and Aisle do not provide separate reporting mechanisms or an option within the common reporting mechanisms to specifically report NCII content¹²⁶ and ensure expedited redressal of these complaints.¹²⁷

The inadequacy of content moderation practices of dating platforms in accounting for safety concerns is even more pertinent for multicultural jurisdictions like India. This is due to multiple axes of oppression that must be considered when annotating, identifying or actioning harmful content, including caste, religion and gender.¹²⁸ For instance, male gig workers recruited for content moderation may not infer harmful comments that Indian women may face online.¹²⁹ Dating platforms increasingly rely on automated content moderation,¹³⁰ which often fall short in interpreting context-heavy speech, particularly in “low-resourced” languages.^{131 132} Moreover, proactive moderation tools like Bumble’s ‘Are You Sure?’ and Tinder’s ‘Does This Bother You?’¹³³ raise concerns of social surveillance and over-policing of sexual behaviour.¹³⁴ Such features are likely to significantly impact users’ sexual agency in countries like India, where any form of sexual expression outside heteronormative patriarchal morality is strictly policed and sanctioned. Thus, it is important to recognise that the design of safety features, including proactive content moderation, user verification, and collaboration with third parties to detect harm, can also create surveillance and introduce additional safety risks for marginalised communities.¹³⁵

Towards Meaningful Platform Accountability

As global and Indian dating platforms expand their presence, it is important to institute meaningful accountability. Platform design and operation are often divorced from the lived realities of users and inadvertently reinforce heteronormative patriarchal morality and strict adherence to caste endogamy. It is thus important that global dating platforms hire and consult with a diverse set of experts with experience rooted in the local context, while Indian platforms should structure hiring policies to ensure that marginalised castes and minority communities are adequately represented in their leadership and trust and safety teams.

Transparency in content moderation

In spite of repeated calls for more transparency and accountability on platforms’ safety systems, including complaint-handling and content moderation, there has been very little progress.¹³⁶



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Disclosure of Community Guidelines

Major dating platforms publish community guidelines to inform users what speech and behaviour is impermissible on their platforms.¹³⁷ However, these are often buried inside long and incomprehensible Terms of Service documents (see Aisle). Platforms should provide these guidelines in an accessible and understandable format, with an option for users to get more detailed information through examples.¹³⁸ These must be available in regional languages. The Intermediary Guidelines, 2021 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 mandate that platforms make their policies available in the preferred languages of their users (English or any language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution).¹³⁹ We found that neither Aisle nor Quack Quack provided their Community Guidelines, Codes of Conduct or Safety tips in local languages at the time of writing. It is also important that platforms disclose information on how they enforce these community guidelines to ensure user safety, including processes followed internally on receiving user complaints, the use of automated tools to flag certain categories of harmful content, and the linguistic expertise of human content moderators.



Dating platforms must provide easily accessible reporting mechanisms for users¹⁴⁰ who want to report harmful content or behaviour by other users they met through the platform, either on the platform or outside of it.

Accessible Reporting Mechanisms for users

Dating platforms must provide easily accessible reporting mechanisms for users¹⁴⁰ who want to report harmful content or behaviour by other users they met through the platform, either on the platform or outside of it. They must inform complainants of the progress in their report and the action taken. In case they decide not to act, they must provide the complainant with information on the grounds on which such a decision was taken.

It must be noted that, as per the Intermediary Guidelines, all intermediaries, including dating platforms, must “prominently publish” the name and contact details of the Grievance Officer.¹⁴¹ We could not locate this information on both Aisle and Quack Quack.

Periodic Transparency Reporting

Dating Platforms have been the worst offenders in terms of releasing baseline aggregate information on content moderation publicly.¹⁴² While social media platforms and even some ride-hailing platforms (in limited jurisdictions) have released aggregate transparency reports, there is no public information on the number of complaints received by dating platforms, even for serious crimes like sexual harassment and rapes.¹⁴³ In February 2025, Bumble released its first-ever transparency report for the European Union¹⁴⁴ under Digital Services Act obligations.¹⁴⁵ Prominent dating platforms from Match Group (like Hinge, Tinder), and Bumble started sharing redacted versions of their statement of reasons for adverse action on user accounts or content with the publicly available DSA Transparency Database.¹⁴⁶ Australia's Code of Practice for dating services¹⁴⁷ lays down annual transparency reporting obligations for dating platforms and the first transparency reports will be available in the coming months.¹⁴⁸

It is, however, unlikely that global platforms will voluntarily extend transparency reporting to other jurisdictions in the Global South, thus periodic reporting of platform's content moderation actions disaggregated by local languages must be prescribed through legislation. Efficiency of automated tools in different contexts and languages, as well as the language proficiency, qualifications and diversity in the human moderation team, must be disclosed. It is also important that transparency reports include aggregate information on state requests for user data.



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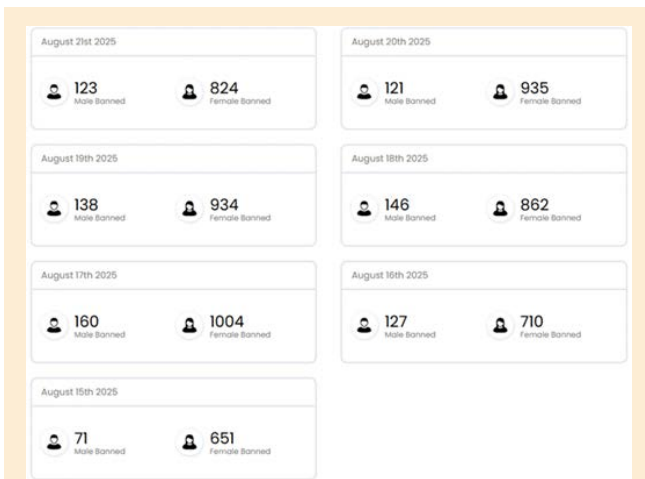


Fig 2: Screenshot of Banned Users on Quack Quack
<<https://www.quackquack.in/securitytips/>>

Quack Quack attempts to provide some aggregate statistics on the number of accounts blocked in the past week based on their code of conduct violations, categorised by gender. However, such information disclosure is not meaningful because it does not categorise account bans on the grounds of violation (for instance, impersonation or hate speech). It also does not provide information on whether actions were taken pursuant to user reports or through self-moderation, including automated means. It is thus difficult to explain why female accounts are blocked around 5 to 10 times more often than male accounts, despite men significantly outnumbering women on dating platforms in India, including Quack Quack.¹⁴⁹ These numbers could be interpreted in many ways: automated moderation tools disproportionately targeting female users, a high prevalence of catfishing accounts reported by male users or even the content moderation prioritising certain harms/reports (*like fake accounts*) over other harms like sexual harassment or hate speech. All in all, no conclusions can be drawn from this limited information, and hence, it is necessary to disclose detailed, meaningful data, even from the platform’s own perspective of gaining user trust.)



Many users in India are registering on a dating platform for the first time, and it would be useful if this basic information is provided in local languages in an accessible and comprehensible manner.

Transparency in matching algorithms

Often, users consider profile recommendations to be neutral and objective; it is thus important, at the very least, to disclose to users basic qualitative information on the matching algorithms deployed by the dating platform and the kind of user data and behavioural signals that feed into the system. Many users in India are registering on a dating platform for the first time, and it would be useful if this basic information is provided in local languages in an accessible and comprehensible manner. However, there is a need for meaningful algorithmic accountability and user empowerment beyond baseline disclosures. Algorithms are complex socio-technical assemblages that are co-constructed by code, training data, and user inputs and interaction.¹⁵⁰ This means that causal explanations for matching recommendations cannot be deciphered conclusively, even by developers and experts.¹⁵¹ One way dating platforms can make algorithmic accountability more meaningful is through collaboration with independent researchers.¹⁵² Another way dating platforms could potentially understand the impact of matching algorithms on diverse users is through submission to independent third-party audits.¹⁵³

These audits would be conducted by expert groups working with victims of sexual harassment and violence, especially those belonging to LGBTQIA+, Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi and religious minority communities. Platforms and academic, civil society and technical researchers must find ways to conduct research and audits without compromising the privacy of users and the security of the data. It is also important that both civil society and dating platforms reflect on who gets access to funding and data to conduct audits and independent studies. Civil society groups in tech policy must reflect on the lack of diversity and prioritise the voice of marginalised communities. Accountability measures must go beyond performative transparency, and users should be empowered to gain more control over the dating choices they make in a safe, secure and inclusive space. It is important that those who experience the most egregious harms from dating platforms lead the way in holding them accountable and designing alternative models to current platform design and economics.



Accountability measures must go beyond performative transparency, and users should be empowered to gain more control over the dating choices they make in a safe, secure and inclusive space.

Endnotes:

1. Benson Rajan, 'Harassment and abuse of Indian women on dating apps: a narrative review of literature on technology-facilitated violence against women and dating app use' (2025) 12 *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 55 <<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-04286-6>> accessed 11 October 2025; Sunaina Arya and Aakash Singh Rathore, 'Introduction: Theorising Dalit Feminism', *Dalit feminist theory* (Routledge India 2019).
2. See 'Tinder Launches India Operations, Appoints Taru Kapoor as India Head' *The Times of India* (6 January 2016). <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech-news/tinder-launches-india-operations-appoints-taru-kapoor-as-india-head/articleshow/50465904.cms>> accessed 22 August 2025; Lata Jha, 'Bumble Heats up India's Dating Scene' (*mint*, 6 December 2018) <<https://www.livemint.com/Consumer/IKWgIRTIYX4QIPqnomWShI/BumbleheatsupIndiasdatingscene.html>> accessed 22 August 2025.
3. According to Grand View Research, India's dating industry generated \$547.9 million in revenue in 2023 and is expected to grow to \$1 billion by 2030. See Rwit Ghosh, 'Where the Heart Is: India's Dating Apps Find Love Outside Metros' (*mint*, 7 August 2025) <<https://www.livemint.com/companies/start-ups/indian-dating-apps-dating-apps-in-india-best-dating-apps-for-tier-2-cities-quackquack-dating-app-aisle-dating-app-11754288856407.html>> accessed 26 August 2025; Uma Kannan, 'Gen-z: Dating Apps Swipe Right' (*The New Indian Express*, 14 May 2023) <<https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2023/May/13/gen-z-dating-apps-swipe-right-2574864.html>> accessed 26 August 2025.
4. Ankita Deshkar, 'Love, Lies, and Loss: How Scammers on Dating Apps Lure Lonely Hearts' *The Indian Express* (2 May 2025) <<https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/tech-news-technology/love-lies-and-loss-how-scammers-on-dating-apps-lure-lonely-hearts-9747168/>> accessed 26 August 2025.
5. T. N. M. Staff, 'Dalit Journalist Subjected to Horrific Harassment for Writing about Casteism in Dating Apps' *The News Minute* (21 May 2024) <<https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/dalit-journalist-subjected-to-horrific-harassment-for-writing-about-casteism-in-dating-apps>> accessed 26 August 2025.
6. Nandita Singh, Simrin Sirur, 'Indian Women Are Getting Assaulted on Tinder Dates and No One Knows How to Stop It' *ThePrint* (18 November 2018) <<https://theprint.in/feature/indian-women-are-getting-assaulted-on-tinder-dates-and-no-one-knows-how-to-stop-it/151022/>> accessed 26 August 2025.
7. Rajan (n 1).
8. Although many of the harms discussed in this essay may be experienced by users of other platforms, like peer-to-peer messaging, the focus of this essay is online dating platforms.

9. Dia Rekhi, 'Desi Dating Apps Go All Out to Court Users in Small Cities - The Economic Times' ET Prime (11 February 2023) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/technology/dating-apps-go-desi-woo-townfolk/article-show/97807114.cms?from=mdr>> accessed 3 September 2025.

10. Aisle is a "high-intent dating app for Indians." It was launched in 2014 (acquired by InfoEdge in 2022) and was positioned as a dating platform for long-term relationships leading to marriage. It positioned itself between matrimonial apps like shaadi.com and casual dating apps like Tinder. It has launched several vernacular dating platforms under its brand, including Arike, Anbe, Neetho and Neene. However, for the purpose of this essay, we focus exclusively on the flagship platform Aisle. According to a report, Aisle has over a million monthly active users (with 50% of the total users on its flagship platform Aisle), and the company claims an overall user base of 16 million. See Pooja Yadav, 'The Info Edge Effect: How Dating App Aisle's Revenue Soared 146% After Acquisition' (Inc42, 10 April 2025) <<https://inc42.com/startups/the-info-edge-effect-how-dating-app-aisles-revenue-soared-146-after-acquisition/>> accessed 27 August 2025.

11. Quack Quack is a dating platform for singles in India that allows users to match anywhere in India (across cities), enables chatting without matching and offers the services of a matchmaker on a premium subscription. The platform has been gaining traction beyond metro cities and claims to have over 35 million active users. See DC Correspondent, 'QuackQuack Hits 35 Million Users, Unveils Key Dating Trends' Deccan Chronicle (18 January 2025) <<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/lifestyle/relationship/quackquack-reaches-35-million-users-revealing-key-trends-in-indias-dating-scene-1854903>> accessed 27 August 2025; Ghosh (n 3).

12. Jen Caltrider, Misha Rykov and Zoë MacDonald, 'Data-Hungry Dating Apps Are Worse Than Ever for Your Privacy' (Mozilla Foundation, 23 April 2024) <<https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/privacynotincluded/articles/data-hungry-dating-apps-are-worse-than-ever-for-your-privacy/>> accessed 7 April 2025.

13. *ibid.*

14. *ibid.*

15. *ibid.*

16. *ibid.*

17. Bobby Allyn, 'Study: Tinder, Grindr And Other Apps Share Sensitive Personal Data With Advertisers' NPR (14 January 2020) <<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/14/796427696/study-grindr-tindr-and-other-apps-share-sensitive-personal-data-with-advertisers>> accessed 20 August 2025.

18. When a 2018 study by Norwegian nonprofit research group Sintef uncovered Grindr's data sharing with two companies Apptimize and Localytics, the dating app's privacy policy did not explicitly stipulate third-party data sharing. Instead, the privacy policy stated, "...if you choose to include information in your profile,

and make your profile public, that information will also become public." See Azeen Ghorayshi and Sri Ray, 'Grindr Is Letting Other Companies See User HIV Status And Location Data' (3 April 2018) <<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/azeenghorayshi/grindr-hiv-status-privacy#.yp0J48W0N>> accessed 20 August 2025; 'SINTEF-9012/Grindr-Privacy-Leaks' <<https://github.com/SINTEF-9012/grindr-privacy-leaks>> accessed 20 August 2025.

19. *ibid.*

20. See Jonathan A Obar and Anne Oeldorf-Hirsch, 'The Biggest Lie on the Internet: Ignoring the Privacy Policies and Terms of Service Policies of Social Networking Services' (2020) 23 *Information, Communication & Society* 128 <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1486870>> accessed 1 September 2025; Rishab Bailey and others, 'Disclosures in Privacy Policies: Does "Notice and Consent" Work?' (Social Science Research Network, 11 December 2018) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3328289>> accessed 1 September 2025.

21. This includes, for instance, information pertaining to sexual orientation, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, and is recognised under Article 9 of the GDPR. Consent under GDPR must be "free, specific, informed and unambiguous." Explicit consent presents a higher threshold and as per the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) guidelines, the term explicit refers to the manner in which the data subject grants consent as an "express statement of consent." See Guidelines (EDPB) 05/2020 on Consent Under Regulation 2016/679 [2020], para 93.

22. 'Digital Personal Data Protection Bill Gets President's Assent' *The Economic Times* (12 August 2023) <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/digital-personal-data-protection-bill-gets-nod-from-president/article-show/102660125.cms?from=mdr>>.

23. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 <<https://www.meiti.gov.in/static/uploads/2024/06/2bf1f0e9f04e6fb4f8fef35e82c42aa5.pdf>>.

24. See Siddharth Sonkar, 'How Dating Apps Exploit India's Loosely Formed Definition of "Personal Information"' (*ThePrint*, 27 March 2022) <<https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/how-dating-apps-exploit-indias-loosely-formed-definition-of-personal-information/889370/>> accessed 27 August 2025.

25. Although there are legitimate criticisms highlighting the limitation of the sensitive personal data approach in privacy law, recognising additional safeguards for such personal data can perhaps ensure a higher degree of user awareness, especially when no alternative frameworks exist. See Daniel J Solove, 'Data Is What Data Does: Regulating Use, Harm, and Risk Instead of Sensitive Data' [2023] *SSRN Electronic Journal* <<https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=4322198>> accessed 1 September 2025; Centre for Communication Gov-

ernance, 'Comments on the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022'(2022) <<https://ccgdelhi.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/ccg-nlu-comments-to-meity-on-the-draft-digital-personal-data-protection-bill-2022-334.pdf>>

26. Centre for Communication Governance, 'Comments on the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules' (2025) <<https://ccgdelhi.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/ccg-nlud-comments-on-the-digital-personal-data-protection-rules-2025-1-742.pdf>>; CCG, 'UNDP Guide- Drafting Data Protection Legislation: A study of regional frameworks' (UNDP 2023), p 46. <<https://ccgdelhi.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/uploads/undp-drafting-data-protection-legislation-march-2023-443.pdf>>.

27. For instance, Tinder recently rolled out a game where users can interact with AI personas and receive scores and feedback to improve their dating skills. See Lauren Forristal, 'Tinder's New AI-Powered Game Assesses Your Flirting Skills' (TechCrunch, 1 April 2025) <<https://techcrunch.com/2025/04/01/tinders-new-ai-powered-game-assesses-your-flirting-skills/>> accessed 1 September 2025. Grindr plans to launch an AI wingman. See Reece Rogers, 'I Took Grindr's AI Wingman for a Spin. Here's a Glimpse of Your Dating Future' Wired <<https://www.wired.com/story/hands-on-with-grindr-ai-wingman/>> accessed 1 September 2025.

28. See Paige Collings, 'Dating Apps Need to Learn How Consent Works' (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 21 July 2025) <<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2025/07/dating-apps-need-learn-how-consent-works>> accessed 27 August 2025; Lauren Forristal, 'Hinge's New AI Feature Determines If Your Prompt Response Is Too Basic' (TechCrunch, 15 January 2025) <<https://techcrunch.com/2025/01/15/hinge-new-ai-feature-determines-if-your-prompt-response-is-too-basic/>> accessed 27 August 2025; Xavier Harding, 'Dating Apps And Your User Privacy – What To Keep In Mind' (Mozilla Foundation, 16 May 2024) <<https://www.mozillafoundation.org/en/blog/dating-app-user-privacy/>> accessed 10 August 2025.

29. Collings (n 28); 'Bumble's AI Icebreakers Are Mainly Breaking EU Law' (noyb, 26 June 2025) <<https://noyb.eu/en/bumbles-ai-icebreakers-are-mainly-breaking-eu-law>> accessed 27 August 2025.

30. Alison Frankel, 'Pssst! Match.Com Does Not Want You to Know about This FTC Case' Reuters (6 July 2022) <<https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/pssst-matchcom-does-not-want-you-know-about-this-ftc-case-2022-07-06/>> accessed 27 August 2025.

31. Joe Tidy, 'Kink and LGBT Dating Apps Exposed 1.5m Private User Images Online' (BBC News, 30 March 2025) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c05m5m5v327o>> accessed 7 April 2025.

32. The study reported that this vulnerability has now been addressed after it was reported to OkCupid.

33. Edvardas Mikalaukas, 'Popular Dating App Leak Puts Millions of Women at Risk' (Cybernews, 6 March 2020) <<https://cybernews.com/security/popular-dating-app-leak-puts-millions-of-women-at-risk/>> accessed 17 August 2025.
34. *ibid.*
35. The police used messages expressing "I like you" as evidence of queerness. See Matt Burgess, 'How Police Abuse Phone Data to Persecute LGBTQ People' Wired (7 March 2022) <<https://www.wired.com/story/lgbtq-phone-data-police/>> accessed 11 October 2025.
36. Krishnadas Rajagopal, 'SC Decriminalises Homosexuality, Says History Owes LGBTQ Community an Apology' The Hindu (6 September 2018) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sc-de-criminalises-homosexuality-says-history-owes-lgbtq-community-an-apology/article61535787.ece>> accessed 3 September 2025.
37. 'Dating App Scam Targets Queer Men' The Times of India (Pune, 2 March 2025) <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/dating-app-scam-targets-queer-men/articleshow/118666385.cms>> accessed 3 September 2025.
38. Ankita Garg, 'What Is Bulli Bai App, What Is Its Link to Sulli Deals, and How GitHub Is Involved: Story in 10 Points' India Today (10 January 2022) <<https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/features/story/what-is-bulli-bai-app-what-is-its-link-to-sulli-deals-and-how-github-is-involved-story-in-10-points-1898365-2022-01-10>> accessed 27 August 2025.
39. Quratulain Rehbar and Pallavi Pundir, 'Muslim Women Were "Auctioned Like Cattle" on a Hate Site' [2021] VICE <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/muslim-women-islamophobia-hate-app-india/>> accessed 7 August 2025.
40. Arbab Ali and Nadeem Sarwar, 'Muzz, the World's Largest Muslim Dating App, Is Struggling in India' (Rest of World, 24 April 2023) <<https://restofworld.org/2023/muzz-dating-app-muzmatch-growth-slows/>> accessed 27 August 2025.
41. It must be noted that both Aisle and Quack Quack will have to alter their privacy policies as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 comes into force, including ensuring free, specific, informed, unconditional and unambiguous consent from the data principal. They will have to establish mechanisms enabling ease of withdrawing consent for processing of personal data, deletion and erasure rights to data principals, and notification protocols on breach of personal data.
42. Aisle collects sensitive personal information, including "interests, philosophy, age, height, religion, ethnicity, place of residence." See Privacy Policy <https://app.aisle.co/mobile/privacy_policy> accessed 11 October 2025.
43. Quack Quack's Privacy Policy notes that "some of the information you

choose to provide us may be considered 'special' or 'sensitive' in certain jurisdictions, for example your racial or ethnic origins, sexual orientation and religious beliefs." It also collects, "information on device sensors such as accelerometers, gyroscopes and compasses." See QuackQuack.in Privacy Policy <<https://www.quackquack.in/privacypolicy/>> accessed 11 October 2025.

44. Aisle takes user consent at the time of registration to process profile information, partner preferences, photographs, work and interests, geolocation, among others. However, it doesn't ask for explicit informed consent for processing specific information (other than geolocation) after registration. It appears that users have to mandatorily grant consent to processing all such information (including sensitive personal information) to be able to create an account on the platform.

45. Quack Quack's Privacy Policy notes that "Some of the information you choose to provide us may be considered 'special' or 'sensitive' in certain jurisdictions... by choosing to provide this information, you consent to our processing of that information." It neither asks for explicit user consent to process sensitive personal information, nor limits the purpose of such processing.

46. It is worth noting that once you grant Quack Quack permission to collect geolocation information, it may continue to collect the information in the background even when you are not using these services (through various means including GPS, Bluetooth and Wifi Connections).

47. The Privacy Policy states that, "you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time for processing your location." This can presumably be done through device access controls. However, withdrawing consent will hamper the platform's functionality as sharing geolocation information is "necessary to see which other users of Aisle are nearby at any given moment." Aisle's Privacy Policy does not elaborate on the process to withdraw consent for processing of other kinds of personal or sensitive personal information.

48. Quack Quack's Privacy Policy mentions three legal bases for processing user data including, "providing services to you", "legitimate interest" and "consent." It appears to cover most data processing under the first two categories, and does not clarify what kind of user data is only processed and collected upon user consent. It is also not clear whether users can withdraw consent for processing of specific pieces of information that the platform may consider necessary to provide services. It just states, "From time to time, we may ask for your consent to use your information for certain specific reasons. You may withdraw your consent at any time by contacting us at the address provided at the end of this Privacy Policy." Further, like Aisle, Quack Quack's privacy policy states that users can deny permission to collect user geolocation (presumably through device access controls).

49. Aisle's Privacy Policy explicitly states, "We do not sell your Personal Data to third parties."

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50. Quack Quack's Privacy Policy states that it may share non-personal information as well as personal information (in hashed, non-human readable format) with "other group products and third parties (notably advertisers) to develop and deliver targeted advertising on our services and on websites or applications of third parties, and to analyze and report on advertising you see."

51. Aisle, like many other platforms, does not provide users granular control to determine how their content is shared and processed by third parties. For instance, the Privacy Policy states that when users upload their pictures, Aisle "may use an external face recognition tool and other techniques to select the best pictures for Your Account." It does not provide more information on these external tools and it appears from both the Privacy Policy and the user interface of the platform, that there is no option for users to deny consent for such processing.

52. Quack Quack shares user information with service providers and partners, other group products and legal authorities. It does not grant users an option to opt out of such data sharing except under very limited (and unclear) circumstances. For instance, as per the Privacy Policy, when sharing user information with group products for the purpose of cross functionality or visibility on new services developed by the group, "we will of course comply with applicable law and, where relevant, notify you of any such opportunity and allow you to agree or to refuse."

53. As per the Privacy Policy, data is retained as long as strictly necessary or allowed by law (whichever is shorter). Personal data may be erased if the user has not logged in for more than five years. On account deletion, personal data is deleted after a three-year safety retention window.

54. The platform retains "personal information only as long as we need it for legitimate business purposes and as permitted by applicable law." It does not specify the duration of such retention.

55. As per the platform's Privacy Policy, users can contact their support team to delete data permanently from their records. It is unclear whether data is still retained for "safety retention window of upto three years following account deletion."

56. On Quack Quack, users can only deactivate their account from the user interface and they need to contact the platform to Suspend/Delete their account. Even on deletion, a user's profile information is only removed from other users' view and their information may continue to appear in certain search results. The platform will also continue to retain the information for "record keeping." It is unclear how users can permanently delete their information from the platform.

57. The Exclusivity feature tracks and allows premium Aisle members to find out how many people their match interacted with in the last 3 days (without

the knowledge of the latter). This is categorised into 'fewer than 5', 'more than 5', or 10, or 20 interactions.

58. See Kenneth James Lay, 'Sexual Racism: A Legacy of Slavery' (1993) 13 *National Black Law Journal* 165 <<https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/natbj13&id=169&div=&collection=>>; Manoj Mitta, 'The Outrage of Marrying Up', *Caste pride: Battles for equality in Hindu India* (Context 2023).

59. Josue Ortega and Philipp Hergovich, 'The Strength of Absent Ties: Social Integration via Online Dating' (arXiv, 14 September 2018) <<http://arxiv.org/abs/1709.10478>> accessed 10 August 2025.

60. Apryl Williams, *Not My Type: Automating Sexual Racism in Online Dating* (Stanford University Press 2024).

61. See Mitchell and Wells for the argument that while it might generally be justifiable to date or not date someone based on attractiveness, maintaining racially exclusive dating pools is not morally defensible. Megan Mitchell and Mark Wells, 'Race, Romantic Attraction, and Dating' (2018) 21 *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 945, <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10677-018-9936-0>> accessed 17 August 2025.

62. Williams defines sexual racism as, "personal racialised reasoning in sexual, intimate, and or romantic partner choice of interest." See Williams (n 60).

63. A study highlights how a majority of male respondents considered racism on dating platforms as problematic but 70% did not consider indicating racial preferences online as a form of racism. See Denton Callander, Christy E Newman and Martin Holt, 'Is Sexual Racism Really Racism? Distinguishing Attitudes Toward Sexual Racism and Generic Racism Among Gay and Bisexual Men' (2015) 44 *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 1991 <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/s10508-015-0487-3>> accessed 17 August 2025.

64. In 2014, OKCupid released data on how men and women across different groups rate attractiveness. It found that Asian, Latino and White men rate Black women as 20%, 18%, and 17% less attractive than other women on their platforms, respectively. By contrast, white men were rated as 18%, 12% and 19% more attractive by Asian, Latina and White women as compared to other men on the platforms. See Blog <<http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/race-attraction-2009-2014/>> in Williams (n 60).

65. Williams (n 60). Also see Wei-Chin Hwang, 'Who Are People Willing to Date? Ethnic and Gender Patterns in Online Dating' (2013) 5 *Race and Social Problems* 28 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-012-9082-6>> accessed 17 August 2025; Gina Potârca and Melinda Mills, 'Racial Preferences in Online Dating across European Countries' (2015) 31 *European Sociological Review* 326 <<https://academic.oup.com/esr/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/esr/jcu093>> accessed 17 August 2025.

66. For instance, Carlson highlights the experiences of Indigenous Australians in navigating online dating, where they routinely encountered racial abuse and violence. See Bronwyn Carlson, 'Love and Hate at the Cultural Interface: Indigenous Australians and Dating Apps' (2020) 56 *Journal of Sociology* 133 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1440783319833181>> accessed 17 August 2025.

67. See, for instance, Chris Stokel-Walker, 'Why Is It OK for Online Daters to Block Whole Ethnic Groups?' *The Observer* (29 September 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/29/wltn-colour-blind-dating-app-racial-discrimination-grindr-tinder-algorithm-racism>> accessed 10 July 2024; 'Grindr Removes "Ethnicity Filter" after Complaints' (1 June 2020) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-52886167>> accessed 18 August 2025; Amy Thomson, Olivia Carville and Nate Lanxon, 'Match Opts to Keep Race Filter for Dating as Other Sites Drop It' *Bloomberg.com* (8 June 2020) <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-08/dating-apps-debate-race-filters-as-empowering-or-discriminating>> accessed 18 August 2025.

68. Collaborative Filtering is used for personalised recommendations where users are recommended items (in this case, potential partners) based on the opinion or behaviour of a community of users who share similar preferences. See J Ben Schafer and others, 'Collaborative Filtering Recommender Systems' in Peter Brusilovsky, Alfred Kobsa and Wolfgang Nejdl (eds), *The Adaptive Web: Methods and Strategies of Web Personalization* (Springer 2007) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-72079-9_9> .

69. Liesel L Sharabi, 'Finding Love on a First Date: Matching Algorithms in Online Dating' [2022] *Harvard Data Science Review* <<https://hdsr.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/i4eb4e8b>> accessed 31 July 2025; Karim Nader, 'Dating through the Filters' (2020) 37 *Social Philosophy and Policy* 237 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/S0265052521000133/type/journal_article> accessed 7 August 2025; Williams (n 60); 'Dating App Algorithms.' (MonsterMatch) <<https://monstermatch.hiddenswitch.com/algorithms>> accessed 18 August 2025.

70. Nader (n 69).

71. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development' (1917).

72. A study examining inter-caste marriages from 1951-2012, using data from the India Human Development Survey 2011-12 (IHDS) notes an inconsequential rise in inter-caste marriage during the time period, with only 4.5% of the women surveyed in the sample having married outside their caste during 2011-12. See Pralip Kumar Narzary and Laishram Ladusingh, 'Discovering the Saga of Inter-Caste Marriage in India' (2019) 54 *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 588 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909619829896>> accessed 22 April 2025.

73. A study examining the data from the National Family Health Survey (NHFS

III 2005-2006), found that only 2.1% of marriages were interreligious. See Kumudin Das and others, 'Dynamics of Inter-Religious and Inter-Caste Marriages in India' [2011] Population Association of America, Washington DC, USA ; As per a survey by Pew Research Centre, nearly all (99%) of respondents stated that they shared the same religion as their spouse. See Pew Research Center, 'Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation' (June 29, 2021) <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2021/06/PF_06.29.21_India.full_report.pdf>.

74. See Shruti Tomar, 'Dalit Man Beaten to Death for Inter-Caste Marriage in Madhya Pradesh Village' (Hindustan Times, 25 August 2025) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/noida-news/dalit-man-beaten-to-death-for-inter-caste-marriage-in-madhya-pradesh-village-101756125601181.html>>; The Hindu Bureau, 'Tirunelveli "Honour" Killing Case: Victim Kavin's Mother, Teachers Express Shock' The Hindu (28 July 2025) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/sc-man-murder-in-tirunelveli-activists-demand-law-to-prevent-honour-killing/article69864758.ece>> accessed 11 October 2025; Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Ahmer Khan, "'They Cut Him into Pieces": India's "Love Jihad" Conspiracy Theory Turns Lethal' The Guardian (21 January 2022) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/21/they-cut-him-into-pieces-indias-love-jihad-conspiracy-theory-turns-lethal>> accessed 11 October 2025.

75. See for instance, Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (Orient Blackswan 2001); David James Strohl, 'Love Jihad in India's Moral Imaginaries: Religion, Kinship, and Citizenship in Late Liberalism' (2019) 27 *Contemporary South Asia* 27; Shewli Kumar and Iswarya Subbiah, 'Crimes in the Name of Honour: A National Shame' (DHRDNet 2022) <<https://www.dhrdnet.org/honour-crimes-research-report/>>.

76. See for instance, Nitya Kuthiala and Keegan McBride, 'How Silicon Valley Developed Digital Dating Platforms Are Transforming Love and Relationship Culture in India' (Social Science Research Network, 15 January 2025) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5097768>> accessed 22 January 2025.

77. Kuthiala and McBride (n 76); Kavita Dattani, 'Data-Bility: Endogamous Social Intimacies on Dating Apps in Mumbai' (2025) 50 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* e12687 <<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/tran.12687>> accessed 9 July 2025 ; Benson Rajan, "'It Follows You Home": Emotional and Psychological Impacts of Dating-App Harassment on Indian Women' (2025) 112 *Women's Studies International Forum* 103129 <<https://www.science-direct.com/science/article/pii/S0277539525000780>> accessed 11 August 2025.

78. The study interviewed 18 participants using Tinder, Bumble or Hinge to understand how Indian users navigate Silicon Valley built digital dating platforms given the conflict between the platform's embedded values and those of their society. See Kuthiala and McBride (n 76).

79. It is thus pertinent to pay attention to Kang's problematisation of intercaste love as a site of power, where intercaste love is seen as a "temporary

exploration for Savarnas until they settle down with more serious partners.” See Akhil Kang, ‘Savarna Citations of Desire: Queer Impossibilities of Inter-Caste Love’ (2023) 133 *Feminist Review* 63 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/01417789221146514>> accessed 8 April 2025.

80. It has been reported that an Australian dating platform for South Asian diaspora called Dil Mil allows filters to match within ‘dominant’ castes but has no options for ‘lower’ caste groups. See ‘Caste Discrimination Continues Its Journey – Now within the Australian Diaspora’ (Dalit Solidarity Network, 11 February 2021) <<https://www.dsnuk.org/2021/02/11/caste-discrimination-continues-its-journey-now-within-the-australian-diaspora/>> accessed 2 September 2025.

81. See Christina Thomas Dhanaraj, ‘Swipe me left, I’m Dalit’ (GenderIT.org, 14 April 2018) <<https://www.genderit.org/articles/swipe-me-left-im-dalit>> ; Deep Mukherjee, ‘Looking for Love and Finding Caste on Dating Apps’ *The Indian Express* (28 October 2023) <<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/dating-apps-love-caste-9003207/>> accessed 11 October 2025.

82. Carolina Bandinelli and Alessandro Gandini, ‘Dating Apps: The Uncertainty of Marketised Love’ (2022) 16 *Cultural Sociology* 423 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/17499755211051559>> accessed 12 August 2025.

83. Dhanaraj (n 81).

84. Shannon Philip, ‘Grindr Wars: Race, Caste, and Class Inequalities on Dating Apps in India and South Africa’ (2024) 26 *Ethnoscripts* <<https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/ethnoscripts/article/view/2329>> accessed 2 April 2025.

85. *ibid.*

86. See Kuthiala and McBride (n 76); Benson Rajan, ‘Fearing the “Known Unknown” Men: A Study on “Red Flags” and Safety Work on Dating Apps in India’ [2025] *Women’s Studies in Communication* 1.

87. Ravikant Kisana, ‘Dating Like a Savarna’ (The Swaddle, 29 April 2023) <<https://www.theswaddle.com/dating-like-a-savarna>> accessed 9 July 2025.

88. Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘Conclusion – “In Their Place?” The Trajectories of Marginalisation of India’s Urban Muslims’ (Columbia University Press ; Hurst Publishers 2012) <<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03415405>> accessed 2 September 2020.

89. See Kisana (n 87); Anonymous, ‘Being Right-Swiped as a Dalit Woman on Dating Apps’ (LiveWire 19 July 2019) <<https://livewire.thewire.in/livewire/dating-dalit-woman-casteism/>>; TNM Staff, ‘Dalit Journalist Subjected to Horrific Harassment for Writing about Casteism in Dating Apps’ (The News Minute, 21 May 2024) <<https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/dalit-journalist-subjected-to-horrific-harassment-for-writing-about-casteism-in-dating-apps>> accessed

9 July 2025.

90. Manisha Mondal, 'Being Dalit on a Dating App. Upper Caste Men Only Want to Argue over Reservation, EWS' (ThePrint, 16 May 2024) <<https://theprint.in/opinion/pov/being-dalit-on-a-dating-app-upper-caste-men-only-want-to-argue-over-reservation-ews/2087897/>> accessed 9 July 2025; Dhanaraj (n 81); Kisana (n 87).

91. Dhanaraj (n 81); Noel Mariam George, 'Beauty, Femininity and the Politics of "Desire"' (12 February 2020) <<https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/beauty-femininity-and-the-politics-of-desire/>> accessed 17 August 2025.

92. Shailaja Paik, 'Building Bridges: Articulating Dalit and African American Women's Solidarity' (2014) 42 *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 74 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/572234>> accessed 12 August 2025.

93. *ibid.*

94. Kuthiala and McBride (n 76).

95. Dattani (n 77).

96. As per its Code of Conduct, "No racist remark or religious persecution; any direct or indirect remarks will trigger the immediate termination of your account." The list of prohibited content also mentions content that "is abusive, insulting or threatening, discriminatory or that promotes or encourages racism, sexism, hatred or bigotry."

97. Users must choose between Vegetarian, Non-vegetarian or Eggetarian.

98. Dolly Kikon, 'Dirty Food: Racism and Casteism in India' (2022) 45 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 278 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1964558>> accessed 29 August 2023.

99. Users must indicate whether they are Non-vegetarian, vegetarian, eggetarian, vegan or pescatarian.

100. Aisle requires users to select from a list containing: Hindu, Spiritual, Muslim, Christian, Atheist, Agnostic, Buddhist, Jewish, Parsi, Sikh, Jain, Bahau or Other.

101. See Yashica Dutt, "'Indian Matchmaking' Exposes the Easy Acceptance of Caste' (The Atlantic, 1 August 2020) <<https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/08/netflix-indian-matchmaking-and-the-shadow-of-caste/614863/>> accessed 2 September 2025.

102. Match Group owns some of the most popular dating platforms, including Tinder, OkCupid, Hinge, Plenty of Fish, etc.

103. This followed an eighteen-month investigation by the Pulitzer Center's AI Accountability Network and the Markup. See Emily Elena Dugdale and Hanisha Harjani, 'Rape under Wraps: How Tinder, Hinge and Their Corporate Owner Chose Profits over Safety' *The Guardian* (13 February 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/13/tinder-hinge-match-investigation>> accessed 7 August 2025.

104. Salter, M., Tyson, D., Woodlock, D., 'Swipe wrong: How sex offenders target single parents on dating apps to exploit their children' in *Searchlight 2025 - Childlight's Flagship Report* (Childlight - Global Child Safety Institute 2025) <<https://www.childlight.org/searchlight/study-d-swipe-wrong-how-sex-offenders-target-single-parents-on-dating-apps-to-exploit-their-children>> accessed 11 October 2025.

105. Singh and Sirur (n 6); Singh Rahul Sunilkumar, 'Majority of Indian Adults Ignorant about Consent in Relationship: Tinder Survey' *Hindustan Times* (5 September 2022) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/technology/indian-adults-ignorant-about-consent-in-relationship-says-tinder-survey-101662369660962.html>> accessed 8 July 2025.

106. Women navigating dating apps in India often express concerns about the authenticity of information men provide, including age, income, and educational background. See Lingutla A, Kumar V (2022) Evolution of Online Dating: Analysis of Dating Preferences, User Psychology and Pain Points in Context to Indian Market. *Int Res J Modernization Eng Technol Sci* 4(11):784-795 <<https://doi.org/10.56726/IRJMETS31248>>.

107. Lingutla and Kumar (n 106).

108. Anita Gurumurthy, Amrita Vasudevan and Nandini Chami, 'Born Digital, Born Free? A Socio-Legal Study on Young Women's Experiences of Online Violence in South India' (*IT for Change* 2019).

109. See Arvind Ojha, 'Delhi Woman Accuses Bumble Date of Rape, Case Filed' *India Today* (New Delhi, 26 October 2023) <<https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/delhi/story/woman-alleges-rape-by-bumble-date-delhi-police-register-case-2453908-2023-10-26>> accessed 2 August 2025; Aakash Ghosh, 'Swipe Right for Trouble: Dating Apps New Playground for Criminals?' *Hindustan Times* (12 April 2025) <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/lucknow-news/swipe-right-for-trouble-dating-apps-new-playground-for-criminals-101744398505973.html>> accessed 3 September 2025.

110. Vignesh Radhakrishnan and Rebecca Rose Varghese, 'No sexual violence survivor contacted a lawyer, only 4.7% took police help in 2019-21' *The Hindu* (16 May 2022) <<https://www.thehindu.com/data/data-no-sexual-violence-survivor-contacted-a-lawyer-only-47-took-police-help-in-2019-21/article65419734.ece>> accessed 11 October 2025.

111. Rajan (n 1).

112. Rajan (n 1).

113. See, for instance, Aisle's safety section nestled in its Terms of Use, which makes it clear that users bear the "sole responsibility for taking all appropriate safety precautions." The section then outlines user responsibility to not post "any defamatory, inaccurate, abusive, obscene, profane, offensive, sexually oriented, threatening, harassing, racially offensive, or illegal material." The safety section notably does not outline the platform's own safety policies. It does not elaborate on reporting/complaint mechanisms available to the user and the process followed by the platform on receiving such complaints. It also does not provide information on the platform's own content moderation initiatives.

114. See for instance, 'Crisis Text Line' <<https://policies.tinder.com/safety-center/tools/crisis-text-line/us/en/#:-:text=Text%20TINDER%20to%20741741%20from,about%20any%20type%20of%20crisis.>> .

115. See for instance, Bloom Trauma Support Program <<https://bumble.com/en-in/help/bloom-for-sexual-assault-survivors--online-trauma-support-program-now-available>> accessed 11 October 2025.

116. See Rajan (n 1).

117. See Contact Us <<https://www.quackquack.in/v2/help/contactus.php>> accessed 11 October 2025.

118. See Catherine RK O'Brien and others, 'Online Dating Platform Safeguards and Self-Protection: How Dating Platforms Characterise, Respond to, and Safeguard Against Harms', Proceedings of the Extended Abstracts of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (ACM 2025) <<https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3706599.3719825>> accessed 27 August 2025.

119. For instance, Bumble allows users to report multiple facets of interaction on their dating platform. This includes content on a user's profile (both images and profile text) which may be hateful, abusive or sexually explicit. This also includes user behaviour through messaging or offline interactions which involve sexual harassment, physical violence, sexual assault and stalking.

120. See Terms of Use <<https://www.aisle.co/termsfuse.html>> accessed 11 October 2025.

121. See Code of Conduct <<https://www.quackquack.in/codeofconduct/>> accessed 11 October 2025.

122. The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 (Intermediary Guidelines 2021) <<https://www.meity.gov.in/static/uploads/2024/02/Information-Technology-Intermediary-Guide->

lines-and-Digital-Media-Ethics-Code-Rules-2021-updated-06.04.2023-pdf> .

123. Intermediary Guidelines 2021, rule 3(2)(c).

124. As per rule 3(2)(b) of the Intermediary Guidelines 2021, all intermediaries must take reasonable measures to remove content that is “prima facie in the nature of any material which exposes the private area of such individual, shows such individual in full or partial nudity or shows or depicts such individual in any sexual act or conduct, or is in the nature of impersonation in an electronic form, including artificially morphed images of such individual” within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint. Although this provision under the Intermediary Guidelines has been rightly criticised for not taking into account the consent of the individual, we highlight this provision in this discussion to bring to light the absence of adequate mechanisms for reporting NCII content (even when mandated under law).

125. Intermediary Guidelines 2021, rule 3(2)(b).

126. While both platforms explicitly prohibit sexual content on their platform, users of dating platforms are still vulnerable to their intimate images being disseminated without their consent by matches on the platform or even through other means. Users should be able to report such content being shared via personal messaging and profiles that have engaged in such conduct outside the platform.

127. While the reporting interface of Quack Quack notes that its content moderation teams will look into all complaints of users within 24 hours, it does not specify a timeline for their resolution. Aisle does not specify a timeline for acknowledgement or resolution on its reporting interface, and instead notes that a member of their support staff will respond “as soon as possible.”

128. Farhana Shahid, Mona Elswah and Aditya Vashistha, ‘Think Outside the Data: Colonial Biases and Systemic Issues in Automated Moderation Pipelines for Low-Resource Languages’ [2025] arXiv preprint arXiv:2501.13836.

129. *ibid.*

130. See, for instance, ‘Safety And Policy Center’ (Tinder) <<https://policies.tinder.com/safety-and-policy/intl/en/>>

131. For instance, innocuous terms could be used to target marginalised communities. The term ‘shuttlecock’ could be used in a derogatory manner against burka-wearing Muslim women. See Shahid et al. (n 128).

132. Rowe, J. 2022. Marginalised languages and the content moderation challenge; Nigatu, H. H.; and Raji, I. D. 2024. “I Searched for a Religious Song in Amharic and Got Sexual Content Instead”: Investigating Online Harm in Low-Resourced Languages on YouTube.

In Proceedings of the 2024 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency, FAccT '24, 141-160. New York, NY, USA: ACM; Gabriel Nicholas and Aliya Bhatia, 'Toward Better Automated Content Moderation in Low-Resource Languages' (2023) 2 Journal of Online Trust and Safety <<https://www.tsjournal.org/index.php/jots/article/view/150>> accessed 2 September 2024.

133. Zahra Stardust, Rosalie Gillett and Kath Albury, 'Surveillance Does Not Equal Safety: Police, Data and Consent on Dating Apps' (2023) 19 Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal 274 <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/17416590221111827>> accessed 27 August 2025.

134. *ibid.*

135. Stardust Et al. (n 133).

136. Spandana Singh, 'Dating Apps Are Even Less Transparent Than Facebook and Google' (New America) <<http://newamerica.org/oti/articles/dating-apps-are-even-less-transparent-than-facebook-and-google/>> accessed 16 August 2025.

137. This is also mandated under rule 3(1)(a) of the Intermediary Guidelines 2021. Further, as per rule 3(1)(c), intermediaries must periodically (at least once a year), inform users that they can remove content or terminate access to accounts upon violation of their rules and regulations, privacy policy or user agreement.

138. For instance, Bumble's Community Guidelines gives an option to users to examine different rules in more detail. See 'Bumble's Community Guidelines' (Bumble) <<https://bumble.com/en-in/guidelines>> On the other hand, Aisle's Community Guidelines club a wide range of harms together without providing adequate explanation. See Aisle, 'Terms of Use' <<https://www.aisle.co/terms-of-use.html>>.

139. As per rule 3(1)(a) of Intermediary Guidelines, 2021, platforms must prominently publish rules and regulations, privacy policies and user agreements in English or any language specified in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution for access or usage of the services by any person in the language of their choice. Also see section 5(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, which mandates data fiduciaries to give data subjects the option to access notice to process personal data in either English or any language specified in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

140. As per rule 3(2)(a) of the Intermediary Guidelines, 2021, all intermediaries must "prominently publish" mechanisms for user complaints. Here, "prominently publish" means clearly visible and accessible on the homescreen or through a link on the homescreen.

141. Intermediary Guidelines 2021, rule 3(2)(a).

142. Singh (n 136).

143. *ibid*; Emily Elena Dugdale and Hanisha Harjani, 'Dating App Cover-Up: How Tinder, Hinge, and Their Corporate Owner Keep Rape Under Wraps – The Markup' (13 February 2025) <<https://themarkup.org/investigations/2025/02/13/dating-app-tinder-hinge-cover-up>> accessed 19 August 2025.

144. 'Digital Services Act: Transparency report' <<https://bumble.com/en-us/help/transparency-report>>

145. Article 15 of the Digital Services Act also lays down mandatory transparency reporting requirements for all intermediaries (except MSMEs that are not VLOPS/VLOSEs).

146. Article 24(5) of the Digital Services Act mandates online platforms to submit "statements of reasons" for their content moderation decisions to the EC to be included in a publicly accessible machine-readable database. See EC, 'Digital Services Act Transparency Database' <<https://transparency.dsa.ec.europa.eu/>> accessed 16 December 2023.

147. Code of Practice 2024 <<https://www.australianonlinedatingcode.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Australian-Voluntary-Code-for-Online-Dating-Services-Code-of-Practice.pdf>> .

148. Similar to the reporting obligations under the DSA, dating platforms must provide aggregate statistics information on the number of accounts terminated, classified by the policy violation. The reports must also provide disaggregated information on the content moderation undertaken by platforms classified by mechanism of detection and enforcement action. They must provide information on the platform's own content moderation initiatives, including the type of measures that impact the availability, visibility and accessibility of user-generated information. The report must also contain information on the use of automated technology (including qualitative description, purpose, accuracy and error rates). Dating platforms must also disclose the training and assistance provided to human content moderators. See Code of Practice 2024, para 8.4.

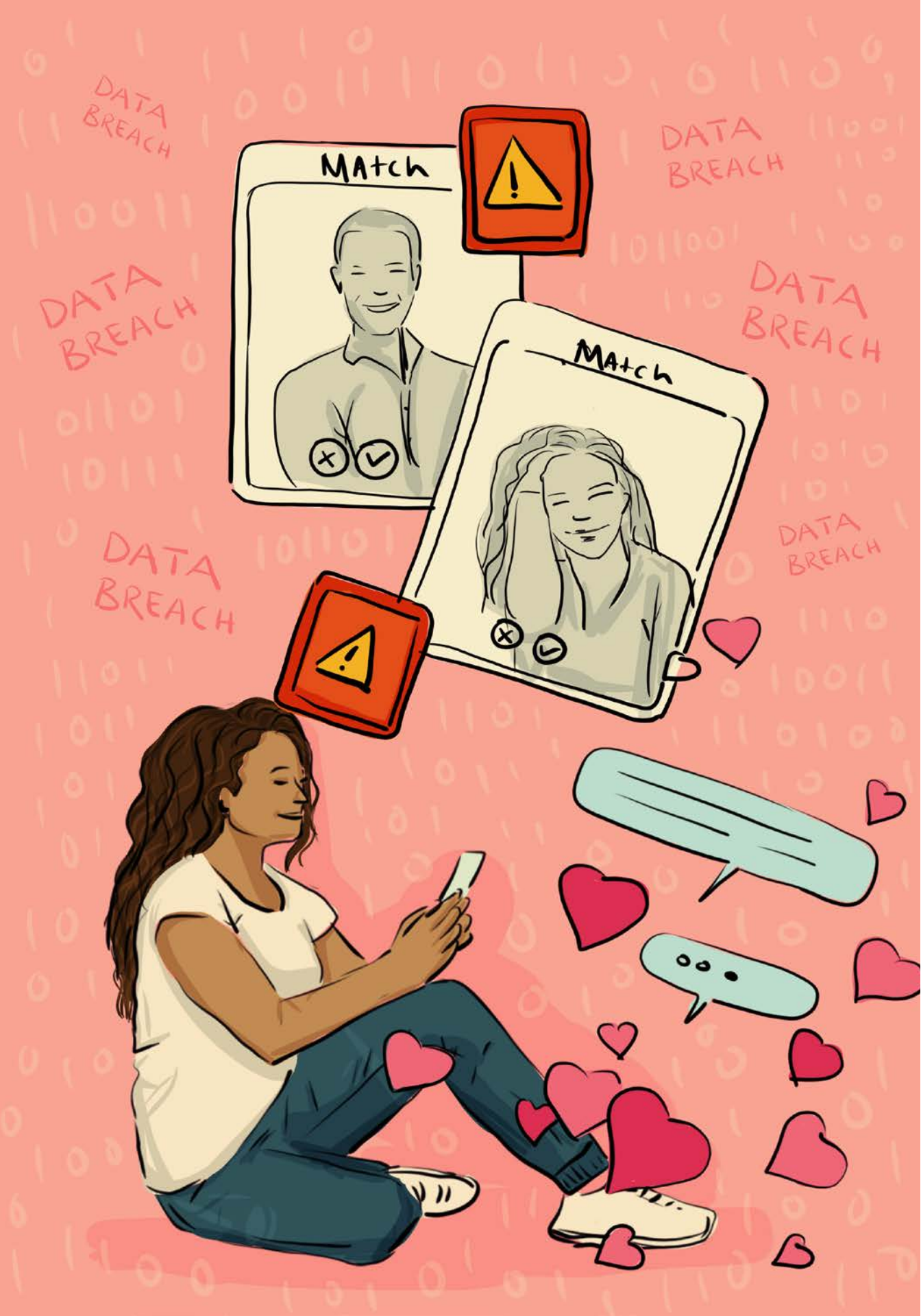
149. 'Dating Apps Move to Friend Zone in Search of Profits' *The Economic Times* (14 November 2024). <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/dating-apps-move-to-friend-zone-in-search-of-profits/articleshow/115287860.cms?from=mdr>> accessed 22 August 2025; My Story of Building India's Leading Dating App, Quack Quack : Ravi Mittal (Directed by Wealth Lessons Club, 2021) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-gJthgOslg>> accessed 2 September 2025.

150. See Mike Ananny and Kate Crawford, 'Seeing without Knowing: Limitations of the Transparency Ideal and Its Application to Algorithmic Accountability' (2018) 20 *New Media & Society* 973 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816676645>> accessed 28 February 2023

151. See *ibid*; Arvind Narayanan, 'Twitter Showed Us Its Algorithm. What Does It Tell Us?' (Knight First Amendment Institute, 10 April 2023) <<http://knightcolumbia.org/blog/twitter-showed-us-its-algorithm-what-does-it-tell-us>> accessed 29 August 2024; Paddy Leerssen, 'The Soap Box as a Black Box: Regulating Transparency in Social Media Recommender Systems' (24 February 2020) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=3544009>> accessed 14 June 2023.

152. Data access for researchers is one of the most significant accountability mechanisms for social media platforms. See Naomi Shiffman and Brandon Silverman, 'The Case for Transparency: How Social Media Platform Data Access Leads to Real-World Change' (Social Science Research Network, 7 May 2025) <<https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=5245757>> accessed 2 September 2025. The Digital Services Act also mandates Very Large Online Search Engines and Very Large Online Platforms to grant data access for vetted researchers. See Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32022R2065>>.

153. Historically, social media platforms have also voluntarily submitted themselves to audits like the GNI Company Assessments See, Global Network Initiative, 'GNI Assessment Toolkit' (October 2021) <<https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AT2021.pdf>> accessed 30 May 2024. For more on Algorithmic audits, see Christian Sandvig and others, 'Auditing Algorithms: Research Methods for Detecting Discrimination on Internet Platforms' (2014) 22 *Data and discrimination: converting critical concerns into productive inquiry* 4349; 'Why We Need to Audit Algorithms and AI from End to End' (Algorithm-Watch, 1 October 2024) <<https://algorithmwatch.org/en/auditing-algorithms-and-ai-from-end-to-end/>> accessed 29 January 2025.



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