

Tinder user stories and mental health – Sentiment and content analysis of app-stores reviews

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received: 28. 11. 2022;

revised: 27. 03. 2025;

accepted: 18. 07. 2025

Summary

Background: Tinder stands out as the most widely used swipe-based dating application in Poland and globally. Studies suggest that it may have adverse effects on the mental health of certain users, such as depression, anxiety, or low self-esteem. This study employs a big data approach to delve into the app's ratings and reviews, aiming to identify potential mental health hazards.

Methods: Using AppFollow, we downloaded Polish-language reviews and ratings for the Tinder application from both App Store and Google Play stores. Sentiment analysis, provided by Common Language Resources & Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN-PL), was utilized to discern emotions expressed in the reviews. Subsequently, reviews with a rating of 1 were manually examined by psychiatrists to identify potential mental health hazards in user experiences.

Results: A total of 9,831 reviews were gathered from Google Play, and 397 from App Store. The average ratings were 2.67 and 2.71, respectively, on a 1-5 scale. Positive sentiment encompassed 7,578 words, while negative sentiment comprised 5,456 words. We pinpointed 16 reviews containing adverse mental health stories associated with Tinder use. Of these, six were linked to depression, six to low self-esteem, two to suicidal content, and two to harassment. Notably, none of these reviews received a response from the manufacturer.

Conclusions: Our findings highlight potential mental health risks for Tinder users. Although the overall prevalence of alarming content was relatively low in our study population, the app's low ratings and the abundance of negative messages in the sentiment analysis suggest that the actual scale of these issues might be more extensive. Further prospective studies at an individual level are warranted.

Keywords: content analysis, mental health, depression, suicide, dating app

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INTRODUCTION

Tinder (Tinder Inc. USA) stands as the preeminent online dating application in Poland. It not only holds a distinguished position among dating apps but also consistently ranks as the most frequently downloaded smartphone application, typically securing the top spot in the lifestyle category on Google Play in Poland (SensorTower, 2022)

Dating apps provide users with the opportunity to connect with potential romantic or sexual partners online, fostering communication before transitioning to real-world interactions (Ciocca et al., 2020). The application's functionality involves the approval or rejection of presented user photos, executed through a swipe-based interface, leading to the categorization of apps like Tinder as Swipe-Based Dating Applications (Holtzhausen et al., 2020).

Despite its international popularity, boasting over 50 million users, there remains a limited understanding of the mental health implications and psychological impact

on Tinder users (Her & Timmermans, 2021; Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Previous research has suggested that users of dating apps often report elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and distress compared to non-users (Holtzhausen et al., 2020). Similarly, studies have indicated a positive association between social anxiety, depression symptoms, and the extent of participants' engagement with dating apps (Her & Timmermans, 2021; Lenton-Brym et al., 2021). Another study found that Tinder users reported lower satisfaction with their bodies and higher levels of body shame compared to control groups (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). However, the causal relationship between the use of dating apps and these outcomes remains unclear (Lenton-Brym et al., 2021).

The present study seeks to investigate and identify potential threats to the mental health of Tinder users. To achieve this, an analysis of Polish-language comments posted on the app was conducted. This screening process aims to lay the groundwork for the development of a suitable measurement tool for future research.

SUBJECT AND METHODS

The Tinder application is exclusively available for download and installation on mobile devices through the Google Play portal (for Android devices) and App Store (for iPhones). Upon downloading from these platforms, users have the opportunity to rate the app on a scale of 1 to 5 stars and provide a brief review or comment. These ratings and reviews, identified by users' nicknames, are publicly accessible on Google Play and App Store. The app's producer has the option to directly respond to each review, with these responses also visible to the public on the respective app store.

To obtain user reviews and analyze ratings, we utilized the mobile app analytic tool, AppFollow (AppFollow, Finland). Our analysis focused specifically on users of the Polish-language version of the Tinder application. Comments posted between January 1, 2018, and September 1, 2021, were downloaded and subsequently analyzed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft, USA).

Initially, the text was analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 24.0.0 (VERBI GmbH, Germany). The "word combinations" tool was used to create an analysis of the most common phrases.

Next, the entire collection of comments underwent semantic analysis, employing Rule-based sentiment analysis for the Polish language, facilitated by Common Language Resources & Technology Infrastructure (CLARIN-PL) (Eder et al., 2017). The sentiment analysis tool is

available online on <https://ws.clarin-pl.eu/sentymet>. This is a phrase- and sentence-level sentiment analysis tool based on Tree-Structured Long Short-Term Memory Networks (Tai et al., 2015). This model enables both binary analysis of results (positive and negative sentiment) and analysis according to the type of expressed emotion (Tai et al., 2015).

Comments bearing a rating of 1 (the lowest) were individually reviewed by the authors, who are clinical psychiatrists, focusing on potential adverse experiences for mental health. The primary emphasis was on entries addressing depression, suicide, self-esteem, harassment, and other relevant topics. Only reviews explicitly linking these phenomena to Tinder application use were included in the final sample, categorized as alarming. Entries referencing mental health without a clear connection to Tinder use were excluded from the final analysis.

RESULTS

In total, there were 9,831 user reviews from Google Play and 397 from App Store, contributing to an average rating of 2.67 on Google Play and 2.71 on App Store (see Figure 1 for app rating statistics). Notably, only a small fraction of these comments (288) included a response from the application producer.

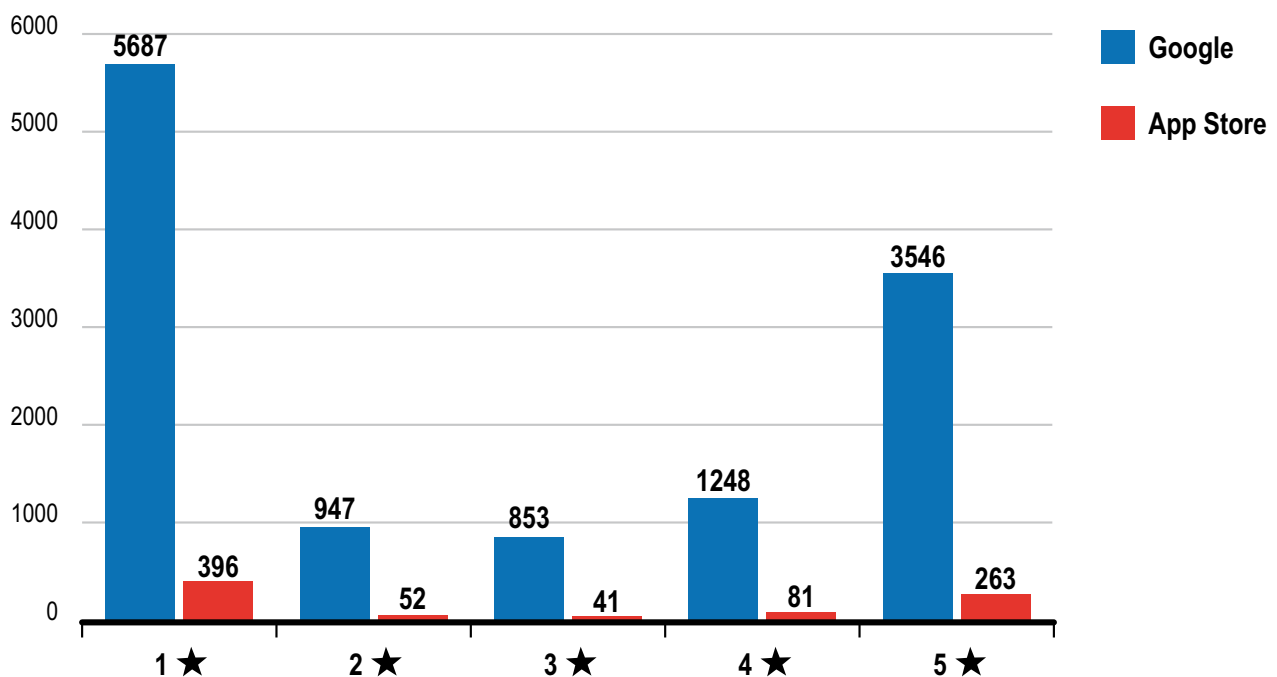


Figure 1. Tinder app ratings.

Table 1. Examples of alarming comments on Tinder.

Alarming comment category	Example in polish (original)	Example in english (translation)
depression	<p><i>Mam zero par, Mam depresję przez tą aplikację, serio. Nie polecam, chyba że jesteś Alfa minimum 8/10.</i></p> <p><i>Zajebista aplikacja, już 2 razy zlamala mi ♥ polecam na jesienną depresję</i></p> <p><i>Chłopaki, nie instalujcie tego gówna, można popaść w depresję, od tych setek dziewczyn, które pomimo matcha albo go usuwają, albo nie odpisują, albo nagle znikają</i></p> <p><i>(...) Jeśli ktoś jest przeciętny albo brzydki, to można dostać najwyższej depresję (dotyczy tylko mężczyzn).</i></p> <p><i>Szkoda słów. Tylko w depresję można wpaść korzystając z tej aplikacji.</i></p> <p><i>Frustracja kompleksy i depresja raj dla masochistów</i></p>	<p>I have zero matches, I'm depressed because of this app, for real. I do not recommend it, unless you are Alpha 8/10 minimum.</p> <p>Fucking awesome application, it broke me twice already ♥ I recommend it for autumn depression</p> <p>Guys, don't install this shit, you can get depressed from those hundreds of girls who, despite match, either remove it, or don't write back, or suddenly disappear</p> <p>(...) If someone is average or ugly, you can only get depression (only men)</p> <p>It's a pity for words. You can only get depressed by using this application.</p> <p>Frustration, complexes and depression a paradise for masochists</p>
low self-esteem	<p><i>Jeżeli pragniesz aby Twoja samoocena ściągnęła dna to aplikacja dla Ciebie! Nic bardziej nie pomaga niż oglądanie setek przepięknych kobiet które mają Cię głęboko gdzieś. (...) kochasz być upokarzany to apka dla Ciebie!</i></p> <p><i>Błędy, znikające pary, wciskanie mikrotransakcji, a oprócz tego łatwo można zepsuć sobie samoocenę, bo ocenianie tylko przez pryzmat wyglądu to drugie imię tej aplikacji. (...)</i></p> <p><i>(...) Ta aplikacja i jej podobne są idealne do obniżenia swojej samooceny. Niestety dziewczyny przebiegają jak w ulęgalkach i walczą ze sobą o zdobycie uwagi kilku procent najlepszych kandydatów.</i></p> <p><i>Niestety ale od tej aplikacji wywraca się w głowach. W magiczny sposób niszczy ona umiejętności obiektywnej samooceny. Myślę, że działa w zły sposób i ciągnie naszą samoocenę w którąś ze stron, a my nawet nie zdajemy sobie sprawy z tego jak bardzo. Jest toksyczna. Nie twierdzę, że dzięki tej aplikacji nikogo nie można poznać czy umówić się na randkę. Można. Ale to wciąż toksyczna aplikacja.</i></p> <p><i>Aplikacja ukrycie obrzydza korzystanie z niej za darmo, faworyzuje płacących a tobie zostawia resztki. Jeżeli ludzie o tym wiedzą to mają bekę z aplikacji, ale zauważyłem, że wiele osób o tym nie wie i często obniża im to samoocenę prowadząc do nieprzyjemnych skutków. (...)</i></p>	<p>If you want your self-esteem to bottom out, this app is for you! Nothing helps more than watching hundreds of beautiful women who don't care about you deeply. (...) If you love to be humiliated, this is the app for you!</p> <p>Errors, disappearing matches, pressing microtransactions, and in addition, you can easily break your self-esteem, because judging only through the prism of appearance is the second name of this application. (...)</p> <p>(...) This app and its like are perfect for lowering your self-esteem. Unfortunately, the girls pick in submissive males and fight each other to gain the attention of a few percent of the best candidates.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this application turns heads. It magically destroys the skills of objective self-assessment. I think it works in the wrong way and pulls our self-esteem one way or another, and we don't even realize how much. It is toxic. I am not saying that thanks to this application it is impossible to meet anyone or arrange a date. You can. But it's still a toxic application.</p> <p>The application stealthy disgusts from using it for free, favors payers and leaves you with scraps. If people know about it, they simply laugh at the app, but I've noticed that many people don't know about it and it often lowers their self-esteem, leading to unpleasant consequences. (...)</p>
suicide and self-harm	<p><i>Depresja, myśli samobójcze, samookaleczanie i obniżona samoocena gwarantowane. Polecam dla masochistów.</i></p> <p><i>To jest mega absurdalne... Piszę sobie z miłą dziewczyną, śmieszkujemy sobie i tak jakos wyszło że napisałem "mam myśli samobójcze" i dostałem bana... Ja kumam że to nie do końca jest coś z czego się śmieje, no ale no kurcze... Odrazu ban za takie coś?! (...)</i></p>	<p>Depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm and lowered self-esteem are guaranteed. I recommend it for masochists.</p> <p>This is absurd ... I write with a nice girl, we make fun of ourselves and somehow it turned out that I wrote "I have thoughts of suicide" and I got a ban ... Ban for something like that right now ?! (...)</p>
harassment	<p><i>Ktoś mówi że mnie zgwałci</i></p> <p><i>Pomocy pedophile</i></p>	<p>Someone says he's gonna rape me</p> <p>Help me! pedophiles</p>

Table 2. Results of semantic analysis of all comments

Sentiment category – emotions	no. of words	Sentiment category – topics	no. of words
Joy (<i>Radość</i>)	8164	Utility (<i>Użyteczność</i>)	6429
Trust (<i>Zaufanie</i>)	3245	Truth (<i>Prawda</i>)	130
Looking forward to something expected (<i>Cieszenie się na coś oczekiwanego</i>)	926	Knowledge (<i>Wiedza</i>)	626
Sadness (<i>Smutek</i>)	6199	Beauty (<i>Piękno</i>)	1533
Anger (<i>Złość</i>)	6242	Happiness (<i>Szczęście</i>)	6328
Fear (<i>Strach</i>)	1607	Uselessness (<i>Nieużyteczność</i>)	6239
Disgust (<i>Wstręt</i>)	2433	Harm (<i>Krzywdą</i>)	4096
Surprise with something unpredictable (<i>Zaskoczenie czymś nieprzewidywalnym</i>)	156	Ignorance (<i>Niewiedza</i>)	1043
		Error (<i>Błąd</i>)	2488
		Ugliness (<i>Brzydota</i>)	501
		Misfortune (<i>Nieszczęście</i>)	4071

light gray – positive sentiment;
 dark gray – negative sentiment
 Italic – polish language (original)

the public visibility of application store comments, it is plausible that many individuals refrain from sharing personal negative experiences. Consequently, the alarming content identified in this sample may only represent the “tip of the iceberg.” The prevalence of negative ratings (2.67 and 2.71 out of 5) and negative emotions (sadness, anger) in the semantic analysis in our data suggests a potentially broader scale of unpleasant or harmful user experiences.

Tinder and mental health

While the article does not comprehensively delve into all psychological and sociological perspectives on dating app hazards, we provide a concise commentary on the alarming content identified.

Research by Lenton-Brym et al. revealed a significant positive correlation between dating app use and social anxiety symptoms and depression in both genders (Lenton-Brym et al., 2021). Although the gender in the app store reviews was not always identifiable, research indicates that men are the majority of dating apps users (Lenton-Brym et al., 2021). On Tinder, the share of users identifying themselves as males is 75% (Business of Apps, 2022). Another study showed that being a dating app user was significantly associated with having psychological distress and depression (Holtzhausen et al., 2020). The authors also identified the relationship between increased

frequency of use and longer duration of use were both associated with greater psychological distress and depression (Holtzhausen et al., 2020).

In our findings, we identified six comments related to depression, making this category, alongside low self-esteem, the most prevalent in our analyzed dataset. The user reviews from our analysis explicitly articulate feelings of depression, with half of them distinctly appearing to be written by male users. For instance, one comment states, “If someone is average or ugly, you can only get depression (only men).” Other comments allude to experiences of rejection, loneliness, or frustration, which could further contribute to heightened distress.

The primary source of detrimental effects on self-esteem stems from the fundamental nature of the application. Tinder users predominantly share their photos for evaluation by others, making physical appearance the basis for public judgment. There is considerable concern that this approach, prevalent in social media at large, may contribute to increased body dissatisfaction, potentially triggering disruptive effects on eating habits (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Kim & Chock, 2015; Lloyd, 2014) or weight control behaviors (Tran et al., 2019). Strubel and Petrie’s research unearthed that Tinder users, when compared to non-users, reported diminished satisfaction with their faces and bodies, experiencing elevated levels of shame regarding their physical appearance (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Notably, Tinder users exhibited a heightened focus on their bodies as sexual objects, a trend

observed across both genders. However, men reported lower levels of self-esteem (Strubel & Petrie, 2017)

Our study similarly identified numerous references to diminished self-esteem and a sense of disappointment with one's appearance (refer to Table 1). Notably, we observed expressions of disappointment from men seeking women, as exemplified by the comment: "If you want your self-esteem to bottom out, this app is for you! Nothing helps more than watching hundreds of beautiful women who don't care about you deeply." Within our sample, users also utilized terms such as "humiliation" or "submissiveness," indirectly alluding to feelings of inferiority. Additionally, in two comments from this subset, users pointed to the micropayment system in the Tinder application as a mechanism that exacerbates feelings of low self-esteem. However, due to the inherent nature of our study, a more precise determination of the impact on users' body perception remains elusive.

Generally, young women frequently encounter online sexual harassment (Anderson & Vogels, 2022; Malherbe et al., 2022). According to a 2017 survey, 20% of them reported experiencing online harassment. Additionally, younger female users are nearly twice as likely as males to disclose instances where someone on a dating site or app insulted them (44% vs. 23%) or threatened physical assault (19% vs. 9%) (Anderson & Vogels, 2022). These phenomena may be exacerbated by the perceived role of Tinder in fostering a "culture of sexual harassment, as well as sexist and chauvinistic behavior," as discussed in feminist articles (Irby, 2018). Our research also highlights the issue of harassment experienced by Tinder users (e.g. "Someone says he's gonna rape me"), although gender-specific information about users was not provided.

As noted in one review ("Help me! pedophiles"), dating apps can serve as platforms where users may potentially encounter pedophiles or other sexual predators (Rosenthal et al., 2022). Although Tinder theoretically restricts usage to individuals older than 17 years, it cannot be ruled out that younger minors might find a way to use the application. Online anonymity allows them to provide inaccurate age information, and numerous media reports suggest that this is indeed occurring (Klausner, 2018; Pilling & Jolly, 2019). However, the scale of this phenomenon has not been thoroughly investigated to date (Rosenthal et al., 2022). Additionally, there is considerable concern about the potential negative effects on the mental health of children and adolescents

There is scant data regarding potential associations between self-harm and suicidal behavior with dating apps. These issues appear to be the most intricate and multifaceted among all the categories examined in the study. The identified reviews do not offer clear information regarding

whether Tinder is in any way responsible for triggering these symptoms (Table 1). However, existing data indicates a connection between technology-facilitated sexual violence, such as sexual harassment on dating apps, and an elevated suicide risk, encompassing suicidal affect, ideation, and behavior (Champion et al., 2021; Malherbe et al., 2023). Another related concern involves the significant rejection experienced on dating apps by individuals with a history of self-harm (Cawley, 2018). The experience of rejection can serve as a risk factor for repeated self-harm or suicidal behavior in vulnerable individuals (Cawley, 2018). In our analyzed dataset, we found one comment explicitly addressing the issue of rejection following the disclosure of suicidal thoughts. The comment, written in the masculine form, reads, "I write with a nice girl, we make fun of ourselves, and somehow it turned out that I wrote 'I have thoughts of suicide' and I got a ban..."

Exploring this aspect is particularly relevant given that men constitute the majority of Tinder users, and men are more prone to die by suicide. In Poland, there were 4,487 male suicides in 2019, with a male-to-female suicide ratio of 7:1 (Kielan et al., 2020).

Estimating the cause-and-effect relationship between the mentioned mental health phenomena and the impact of dating apps is exceedingly challenging. Some evidence suggests that users of these applications may exhibit differences from the general population (Ciocca et al., 2020; Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Studies outlining the characteristics of Tinder users are notably intriguing (Shantharaju et al., 2024). A comprehensive literature review in 2020 reveals that specific personality traits associated with dark personality—namely, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—are more frequently reported among male Tinder users (Ciocca et al., 2020).

LIMITATIONS

This study is solely a content analysis, and as such, it does not mitigate the inherent limitations of this approach. Firstly, it does not identify clinically diagnosed mental health disorders according to ICD-11 or DSM V. While terms used (e.g., depression) are crucial, they remain subjective descriptions of users' feelings, leaving room for potential fabrication or misinformation in some reviews, for various reasons. The reliance on reviews for the study also results in the absence of individual demographic characteristics of the studied population.

Several drawbacks are associated with Semantic Analysis itself. As a computer tool grounded in neural networks, its results will inevitably lack 100% consistency with the

judgment of a human observer. Additionally, a major methodological challenge lies in the tool's inability to capture multiple meanings of certain words (Tai et al., 2015).

A significant limitation of the study lies in the small number of alarming reviews relevant to mental health. Reviews posted in application stores are primarily intended to assess technical functionality and general usefulness, as evident in the sentiment analysis results. Only a fraction of reviews delves into users' feelings and personal impressions that can be linked to mental health issues. Nevertheless, given the high volume of reviews (>9,000), their analysis becomes worthwhile to explore diverse user experiences—both positive and negative. By identifying reported issues within this naturalistic population (posted reviews), we aim to develop a tool addressing the risks and needs of Tinder users in future qualitative and quantitative research

The principal strength of this study lies in the utilization of big data methods and the analysis of a substantial sample of opinions about the application—an endeavor that could prove challenging using alternative methods. This approach facilitates the examination of relatively rare phenomena. Similar research methodologies, leveraging app review analysis, have been employed to assess estimated pedophilic risk on a children's app (Rosenthal et al., 2022)

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings suggest various potential mental health risks for Tinder users. The predominant issues reported revolved around the application's impact on depression, diminished self-esteem, suicidal behavior, and instances

of harassment. Although the overall prevalence of alarming content was not substantial in our sample, the app's consistently low ratings and the prevalence of negative emotions in the sentiment analysis hint at the possibility that the actual scale of these issues might be more extensive. Further prospective studies conducted at an individual level are imperative to gain a deeper understanding of these concerns.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are openly available via the Internet (see methods section). Detailed databases used in this research are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Considerations: Does this study include human subjects? NO

Conflict of interest: Conflict of interest None.

Funding sources: The study was funded by the Medical University of Gdańsk – Young Researcher grant (no 01-0500/08/643) for Przemysław Waszak MD PhD., approval from an ethics committee was not needed.

Authors contributions: Dr. Przemysław Waszak: PW and designed the study, managed the literature searches and analyses and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. PW collected data and created the database. PW contributed to and have approved the final manuscript. PW performed the statistical analysis and prepared the final version of the manuscript. Ms. Ewelina Łuszczak: EŁ designed the study, managed the literature searches and analyses and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. EŁ contributed to and have approved the final manuscript. Prof. Paweł Zagożdżon: PZ supervised the work during the whole study. PZ contributed to and have approved the final manuscript

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