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## Tinder in India: Striking the “Sanskari” Chord

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### Introduction

Tinder launched its operations in India, its first outside the USA appointing Taru Kapoor as the general manager of Tinder. Her main focus is to create a brand name for Tinder in India, however, a major challenge she faces is that of making Tinder a socially acceptable platform not just for its target audience but for the country as a whole, by rooting itself in the Indian culture more meaningfully, thus also changing the perception around the concept of dating in India. It is certainly a tedious task as the culture and traditions have been embedded in the minds of people for millennials now.

Tinder has seen massive success since its inception in India and a surge in the number of subscribers during the pandemic, however, the main issue here remains that even though the company has achieved success and subscribers, it has failed to appeal to the older generation to be accepted as a platform to meet people.

So far the efforts put in to make the app socially acceptable to the people of India through efforts put in by the management have been in vain and the company has failed to change the perception in the minds of the Indian people regarding its services. Therefore to grow even more it needs a strategy that makes it appealing to the older generation too while also remaining relevant to its target audience.

### About the company

Online dating was taken by a storm when a new brand by the name of Tinder, emerged in 2012 with the fresh concept of how dating would look online. Tinder is a geosocial networking application and an online dating site that was founded by Sean Rad and Joe Munoz. Originally the application was known as Matchbox but later due to controversies arising that this name was too similar to the name of popular dating site Match.com, the name was changed to Tinder. It is the flame-themed logo of the brand that has been constant throughout its rebranding.

## Industry Background

Tinder, founded in 2012 and launched in India in 2013 followed a unique strategy as, though platforms similar to it had existed earlier like Match.com and matrimonial websites such as Shaadi.com, Jeevansathi.com, and BharatMatrimony, Tinder targeted specific demographics- mainly the millennials, young adults and urban adults. Further, when it launched on the app store in the later part of 2012 it created an uncontested market space for itself. It also made the little existing competition irrelevant as earlier players had mainly focused on matching people based on their similarities by filling out lengthy questionnaires, thus making the process quite tiresome; however, Tinder revolutionized the online dating industry by seizing the opportunity provided by the penetration of smartphones and using the increased number of hours spent on smartphones by millennials to their advantage.

Even as with years the online dating industry has changed and matured with entrants such as Bumble, Happn, Hinge, Aisle, truly madly, etc. Tinder is the most popular and most downloaded application in the world (with over 6.5 million monthly downloads in May 2021 according to Statista Research Department, 2021) and India too. Today it is present in more than 190 countries and in over 56 languages, its success in today's competitive market can be attributed to its great branding, following trends, and innovation. Many of the strategies Tinder used to rise to the status of an industry leader are being duplicated by its competitors as well as other brands in almost any industry.

## Evolution of Tinder in India

From a prototype developed in a hackathon to a multimedia enterprise that has changed how the world dates, Tinder has always been at the forefront of this wave of change. It was in 2013 that the famous left-right swipe option of the app was developed, with it Tinder became the very first company to create this swipe feature which is now popular with many other companies. This was different from the click feature that was already available to the people in India. This aspect of the app gave it a gamified touch and a look that closely resembled that of a deck of cards.

It was definitely a challenge for Tinder to enter the Indian market where more than 90% of the marriages were arranged, whereas Tinder was all about encouraging people to take a lead role in finding a romantic match for themselves. This sudden change was more acceptable to the millennials and younger generation which made up to half of India's population. Tinder gained massive success right after its launch in India, which was not only unacceptable but also shocking to players such as matrimonial sites present in the industry.

India before this had no platform specifically designed for the purpose of dating and Tinder was all about casual dating and majorly appealed to the urban youth of India. Today India is Tinder's largest market in Asia and second-largest in the world after the US. What made Tinder stand out in the market, even more, was the customer targeting strategy it followed that helped Tinder Garner its success, as it approached and encouraged women to take the lead rather than men who usually make the first move.

It was later in 2015 that the company saw real growth in India. The reason for this success can be attributed to several factors such as a sudden boost in the usage of the internet amongst the younger generation and the new features that the app provided to its users, several of which made the user's interaction on the app easy and fun. In 2016 Tinder took a dive and added on a function where the user could select a different gender (Wikipedia, 2022). It gave LGBTQ+ community a space in India where they could find their romantic interests.

After Tinder merged with Match Group in 2017 (Business Insider, 2021), they launched their exclusive service for people who subscribed to Tinder Gold. This exclusive service resulted in a boost in both revenue and subscriptions for the app. The number of its paid users rose to 2.5 million, and Tinder recorded high share prices that year. In the

following years of 2018 and 2019, the brand stayed afloat and managed to get a rise in both subscribers and revenue, and it was in 2019 that Tinder surpassed Netflix and became the highest-grossing app.

As the COVID pandemic hit the world like a storm, and amidst the chaos, it was Tinder who made its passport feature available free for all its users, no matter if they had a paid subscription or not. There was a rise in its subscribers even in the middle of the pandemic, and there was an increase of about 16% in subscribers.

Now that Tinder had made a stronghold as a dating service app around the world, it launched a range of mobile accessories in 2021 and they were termed Tinder Made (Wikipedia, 2022). The brand also provided some of its users with a pair of testing kits and encouraged safe and responsible behavior on both sides during the pandemic. The brand had always put the safety of their users as their first priority, and keeping this in mind, they introduced a service regarding ID verification around the world. This was done to prevent catfishing or misleading people into relationships using wrong information or pictures.

Since it is the era of digitalization, it has been announced by the company that, similarly to Metaverse, it is creating its own virtual reality platform, which will be called Tinderverse.

## Marketing Mix

### (i) PRODUCT

Tinder made an impact as soon as it entered the market. It became an app loved by all, and this can be certainly credited to the fact that it offered services that can only be termed as great experiences. The famous Swipe function that Tinder provides is not only its patented technology but also gives its users a gamified experience of using the app. It's simple to use and the algorithm of the app presents users with profiles where they can further swipe either "right" to match or swipe "left" to continue looking for other romantic matches.

Furthermore, the app also provided an option of being able to chat with the people on the app by messaging them once two users are matched to each other. Similar to the messaging feature of this app was the video calling function, which allowed two users to virtually meet each other.

Another interesting feature of Tinder was that it lets a person connect their Instagram ID with their Tinder profile. One can easily sign-in on the app by just using Facebook, Google, or an email address. The process is so seamless and easy and makes the overall user experience great.

The app also helps the user with creating an optimum profile that will leave some food for thought for the people seeing their profiles. There are location-based suggestions available when you log into the app. It's up to the user to select what kind of person they wish to look for, and with this thought in mind, the app provides a complete filter search wherein the user can simply state the gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and distance from their location to that of that person.

With constant notifications and alerts, the app makes sure that the user doesn't miss out on anything major, and a user can also block other people if they think they don't wish to interact with them anymore. The new features of the app, namely the Panic button and Traveler Alert, are designed to protect its users when they're in a tough situation.

## (ii) PRICE

Tinder works on a Freemium Business model in India as well as internationally where it offers its basic services free of cost but money is charged for availing all its features and services. For availing of those extra services and features it has three major plans- Plus, Gold and Platinum. It launched its paid service of Tinder Gold in August 2017 in India, initially only introducing it on IOS. It was soon also launched for the Android operating system. Due to which it has become the top-grossing non-gaming app in the world (according to Sensor Tower and App Annie, 2020).

Though India is a price-sensitive market, the market for online matrimonial websites along with dating apps was estimated at around \$13 million in 2018 and is expected to cross \$20 million, according to Statista.

A plan for Tinder Plus costs around Rs 254.24, under Gold costs around Rs 381.43, and Tinder Platinum around Rs 666.66 for a subscription of 6 months (Tinder, 2022).

## (iii) PROMOTION

Though the thought of as a conservative market, Tinder's entry into India was a surprise leading to unprecedented growth in India, making India its largest market in Asia and second-largest after the USA. Initially, when launched in India it heavily depended on word-of-mouth marketing even while coming up with their first digital campaign in India their users provided an excellent source of earned media. Quoting Taru Kapoor, general manager of Tinder India- "We had people using the platform and having a great experience. They in turn recommended us to their friends and that led to us receiving a lot of growth initiatives. So our community members were our best marketers," (Business Insider, 2021)

Another important reason for its growth has been the Cultural Revolution in India brought in by the smartphone penetration in the country which has led to people spending a large amount of their time on their phones especially Gen Z and the Millennials who have been the main target audience for Tinder.

Eventually, Tinder launched campaigns like- "Adulthood Can Wait", "Start Something Epic" and "Start Something Epic Again" for TV and Youtube. With their focus on increasing their subscribers and increasing engagement, they have centered themselves on creating a lot of digital content as their target audience consists of the tech-savvy generation. For the same purpose, and to drive engagement they also launched social media campaigns such as "Swipe Stories" where users share their stories and experiences with a hashtag, they also collaborated with certain influencers like Kenny Sebastian and Kaneez Surka to give a push to this campaign, in another of its campaigns "Single Not Sorry", the brand collaborated with Indian influencers who created personalized content for them.

Tinder's marketing strategy also heavily relied on user experience, timely content marketing where its strategy is to sponsor online content instead of restricting itself only to creating independent content. One is bound to find content sponsored by Tinder or that had been created mainly for its branding of different social media platforms, for instance, a series called "Girls Feed" created by Tinder in collaboration with BuzzFeed India, etc.

Tinder's promotion strategy is also supported by a solid referral program, where users can earn benefits and rewards by recommending it to their friends which leads to the building of brand familiarity and as well as referral customers have a low cost per lead while also being a source of high-quality leads.

Tinder's easy-to-use user interface is also a major marketable feature the app has, as today's generation's thought process is all about instant gratification. Tinder has leveraged this public sentiment and delivered an interface that

works with the simple act of a swipe. This gamified user interface has led to a lot of popularity and likability among its target audience.

With the onset of the pandemic Tinder also had to make a lot of changes in its promotional strategies and evolve with the coming time. They paid attention to the needs of their audiences and came up with innovative new features and promotional strategies to reposition themselves around the changing needs of the customers. Launching campaigns like “In Our Own Way”, developed by BBH India showed how the dating culture is changed with the pandemic and how they are offering unique services to build a human connection in such times was made possible.

Further Tinder India also collaborated with influencers to launch a content-led campaign where they talk about how it is to date in such times.

#### **(iv) PARTNERSHIPS**

Tinder considered expanding its business by forming strategic partnerships with other brands. It partnered with Penguin Random House to help book lovers in Delhi meet up and promote book reading and literature. Penguin Random House India puts it as:

“We’re making books and writers discoverable to a new set of converted and potential readers in the hope that this will also lead to larger conversations and interactions around books and reading.”

To celebrate Valentine’s Day Tinder partnered with Zomato and came up with the ‘Tinderlicious’ collection, advising where to find the best food and ambiance in different cities of Delhi- NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Chandigarh.

It also partnered with Indian entertainment company ‘The Viral Fever’ (TVF) to launch a comedy web series – ‘Eat Pray Swipe’, where its purpose was to change the cultural taboo present in India against dating apps.

Tinder partnered with Spotify to give their users a premium experience of listening to the playlist catering to love. This was not an official partnership between Spotify India and Tinder India, however, Spotify India had taken Tinder’s permission to use its brand name for a particular campaign.

Tinder also collaborated with VistiHealth to provide its members with free mental health resources for June and July in 2021. They provided all their existing and new users, free access to wellness content created by VistiHealth which included fitness videos, meditation, etc. available on the dating app. This initiative was taken to reduce the stress accumulated by its users due to the pandemic.

In 2021 Tinder also partnered with Netflix as the official casting partner for India’s first-ever dating reality show, IRL: In Real Love. As the casting partner, the subscribers of the dating app will get a chance to be on the reality show.

#### **POSITIONING AND PERCEPTION**

Tinder isn’t the only online dating platform available in the Indian market, but its significant growth in the Indian market and continuous growth in the number of its subscribers indicate the success of the company. One of the factors contributing to this success was the company’s positioning strategy. It is a dating app that targets young adults, also popularly known as Gen Z.

India’s rich culture has always been supportive of matchmaking and matchmaking services. When matchmaking came as an online service it received resistance from the Indian Consumer. However, as the socio-cultural fabric of

the country evolved, so did its perception of online matchmaking services. So when Tinder entered the dating market, people took it as a simple dating application. The goal they had in mind was to show the Gen Z users what are many possibilities for them if they wish to meet new people, date them and form a relationship on the app. It is a platform where a person can meet and date people casually, it showcases itself as a judgment-free platform, a place where a person can be their true self.

It was in 2016, the year when the company thought of changing its positioning strategy to fit India's culture. It launched an ad to reposition itself as a brand and Indianise its services, its ad to showcase dating as "Sanskari" was an effort to shed its existing image, in order to appeal to the parents whose kids were using this app. Since India is one of the few countries where children stay with their parents even after growing up, Tinder wanted to position itself as a dating platform that even the parents won't mind. But it is safe to say that the effort was in vain. It confused its users and led them to have differing opinions about the platform. The whole idea was absurd and Tinder failed to set up an image of being an app that could be shown to parents and have their approval of being with.

After gaining massive profits during these past few years, in 2021, the company also launched its Explore section in India in hope of shedding its image as a casual dating app in the digital world, wishing for people to connect with new friends who share their interests and passions. It is a step by tinder to reach beyond the traditional dating stigma.

### **Conclusion**

It is truly a surprise to see a company like Tinder survive in a traditional and conservative country like India, however, Taru Kapoor, Tinder India's general manager confronts a big dilemma in 2022, in making Tinder a socially acceptable medium for her target constituency and the country as a whole.

Even with its innovative and different promotional campaigns and partnerships, it has failed to establish a reputation as a brand that can be socially and culturally approved in India and as something that does not require hiding from the parents. Its collaborations and marketing tactics demonstrate the company's commitment to marketing, promotion, and presenting its services to clients, but even after several efforts, the organization still has a long way to go in altering India's attitude towards dating.

EXHIBIT 1

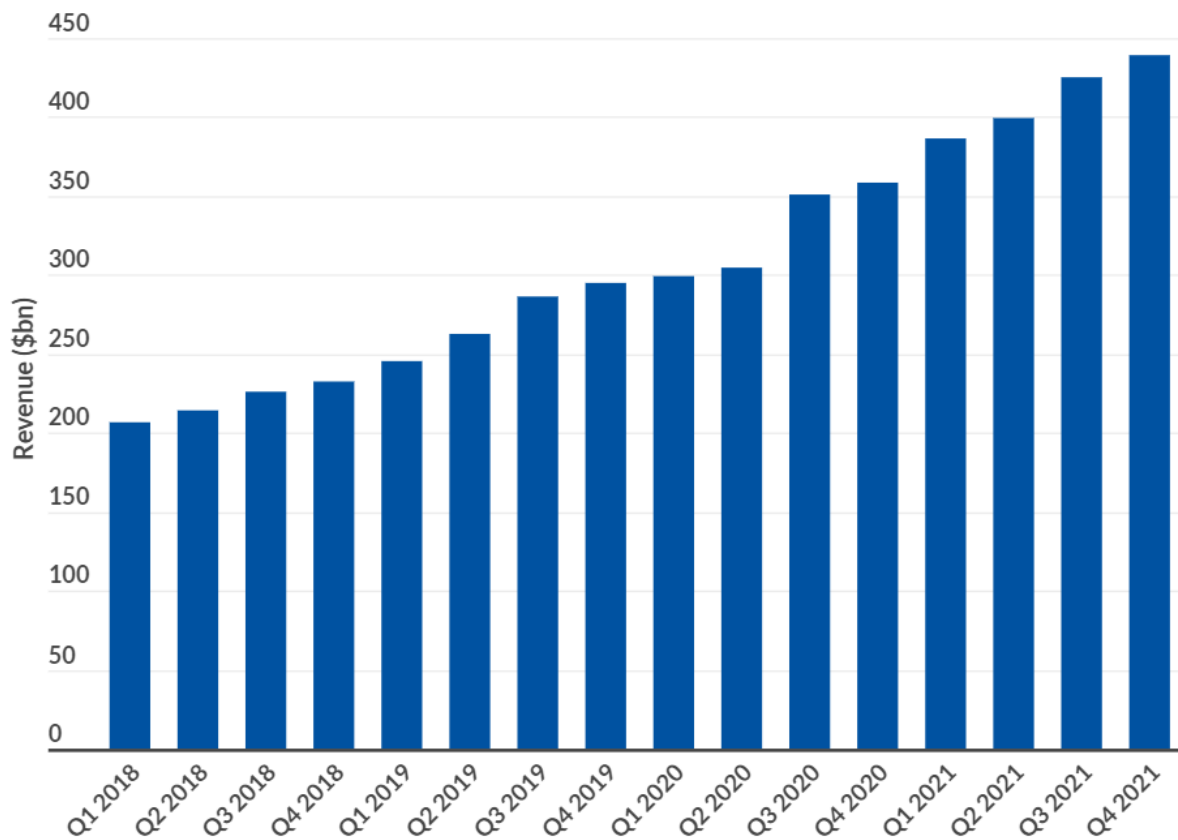
Tinder user penetration

App	Overall	18-24	25-34	35+
Tinder	17	52	31	6
Bumble	15	34	28	6
Match.com	15	19	16	14
eHarmony	10	12	12	9

Source: Civic Science

EXHIBIT 2

Tinder revenue

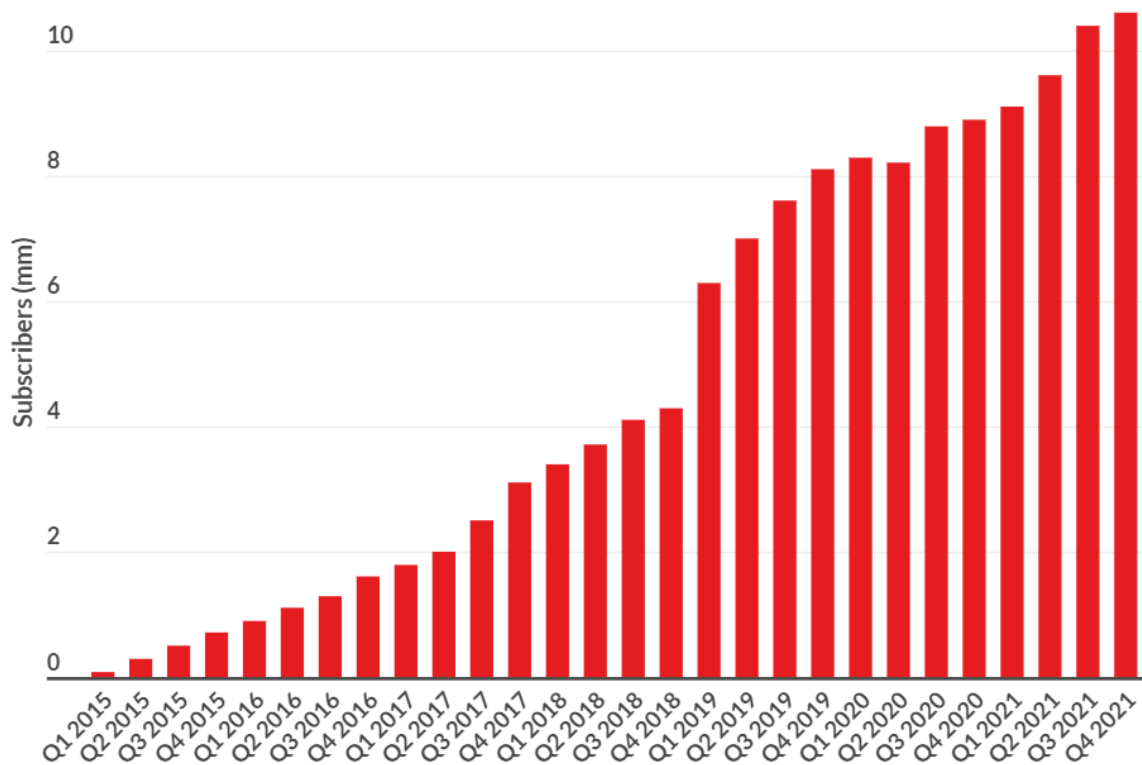


Note: Some values are estimated  
Source: Company data

DOWNLOAD CHART

### EXHIBIT 3

#### Tinder subscribers



Note: Match Group changed its terminology from subscribers to 'payers' in Q1 2019

Source: Company Data

DOWNLOAD CHART

### EXHIBIT 4



#### Tinder annual subscribers

Year	Subscribers
2015	0.3 million
2016	1.1 million
2017	2 million
2018	3.7 million
2019	7 million
2020	8.2 million
2021	9.6 million

Note: Values are taken from Q2 of each respective year



## EXHIBIT 5

**Tinder annual revenue**

Year	Revenue
2015	\$47 million
2016	\$169 million
2017	\$403 million
2018	\$805 million
2019	\$1.15 billion
2020	\$1.4 billion

Source: Company data

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