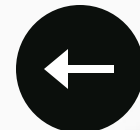


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# What Are You Swiping For?

Exploring User Assessments  
of Algorithms-Based  
Recommendations on  
Online Dating Platforms

Dr Fumi Kurihara  
University of Münster  
ZDI Digital Innovation Talk  
October 21, 2025



# Who Am I?



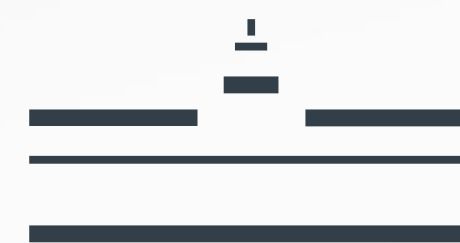
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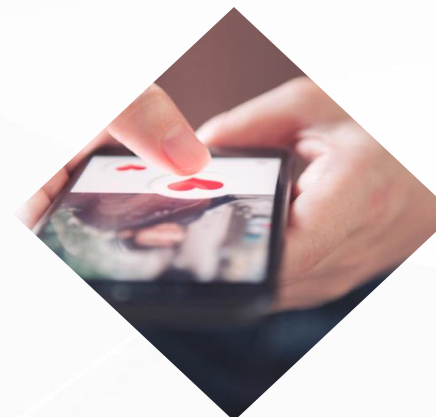


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Translating between humans and human needs

Translating between humans, human needs and technologies



If we are teaching  
machines to understand  
us, shouldn't we first  
understand ourselves?



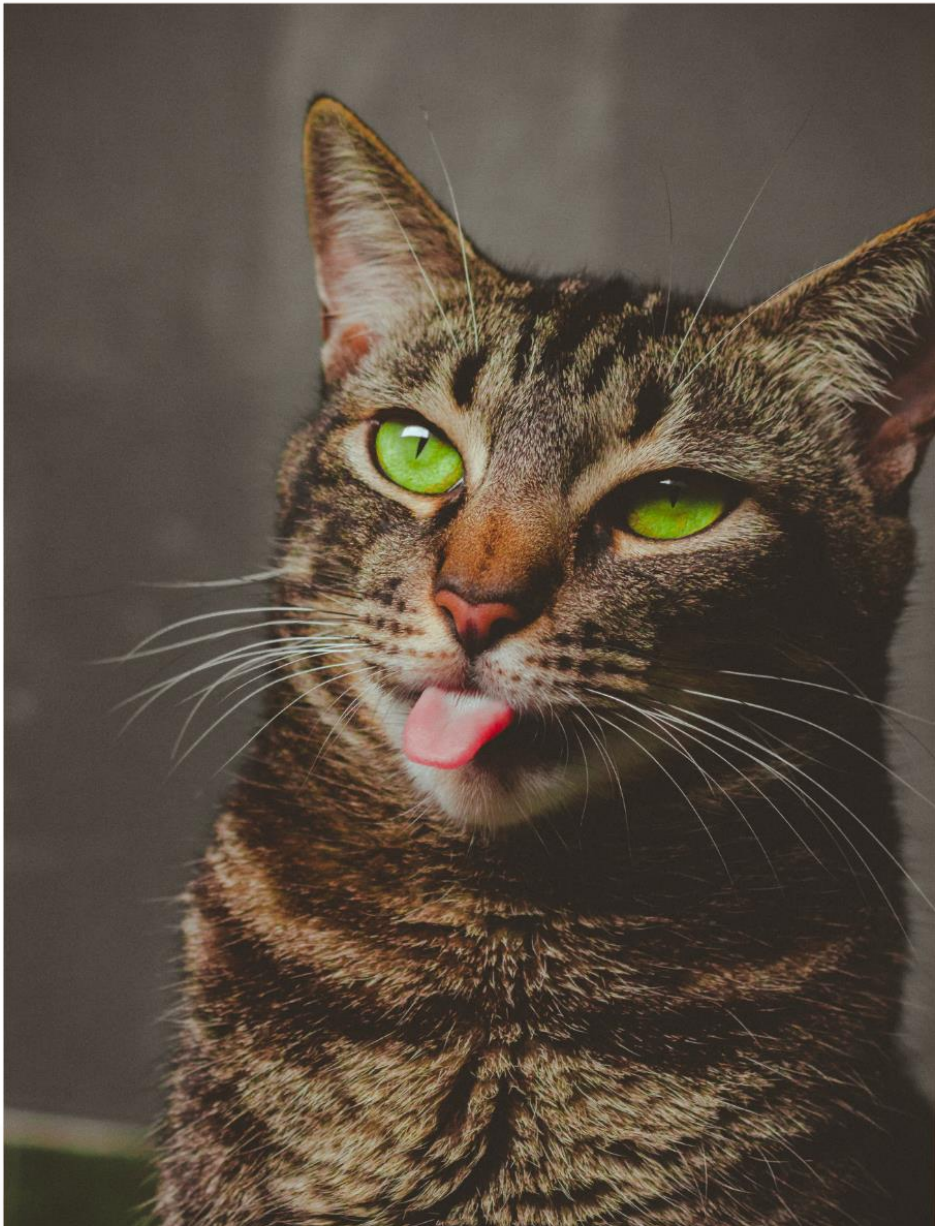
# Why did you like or dislike someone's profile?



**Maverick, 8** ✓  
He/Him  
Celebrity Meowdel

Licking my nose while looking better than you ever will.

- Want someday
- Glamology



**Milo, 6** ✓  
He/Him  
Chief Mischief Officer

Handsome face, zero coordination.

- Not sure
- Never
- Casual



**Mochi, 6** ✓  
He/Him  
Senior Vice President of Relaxation & Existential Napping

Certified couch potato with deep thoughts about life.

- Spotify connected
- Taylor Swift
- Shakira
- Tommy Cash



# Online matching platforms

## – What are they?

### 1-sided



### 2-sided



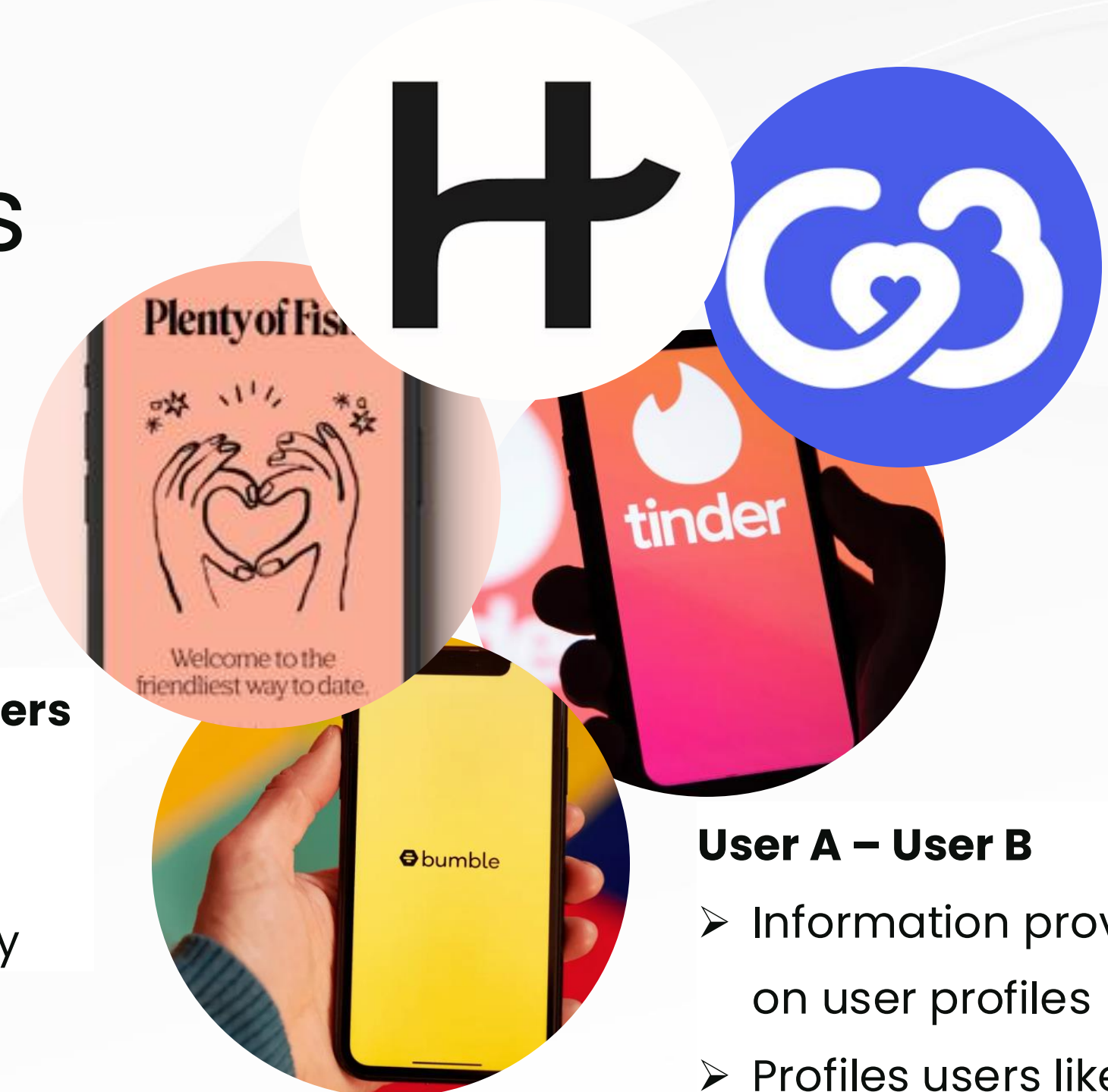
#### Drivers – riders

- Locations
- Ratings
- Availability



#### Freelancers – clients

- Freelancers' skills and ratings
- Project requirements



#### User A – User B

- Information provided on user profiles
- Profiles users like

**User inputs =  
Proxies for user  
preferences**

# What we know...

Two-sided matching platforms have a **mismatch problem**

- Freelancers: Try to improve their scores by varying project types and contract lengths; preserve their scores by engaging with platform clients outside the platforms<sup>1</sup>
- Dating platform users: Adapt their profile content, change their swiping ratio, confuse the algorithms<sup>2</sup>

User assessments of algorithmic outcomes influenced by users' level of trust and awareness of the algorithms<sup>3</sup>



If users have a better understanding of algorithms' functioning, they are more likely to consider outcomes as fair and adjust their behaviour more effectively



What information are users inputting, and which information is most relevant for the algorithms?



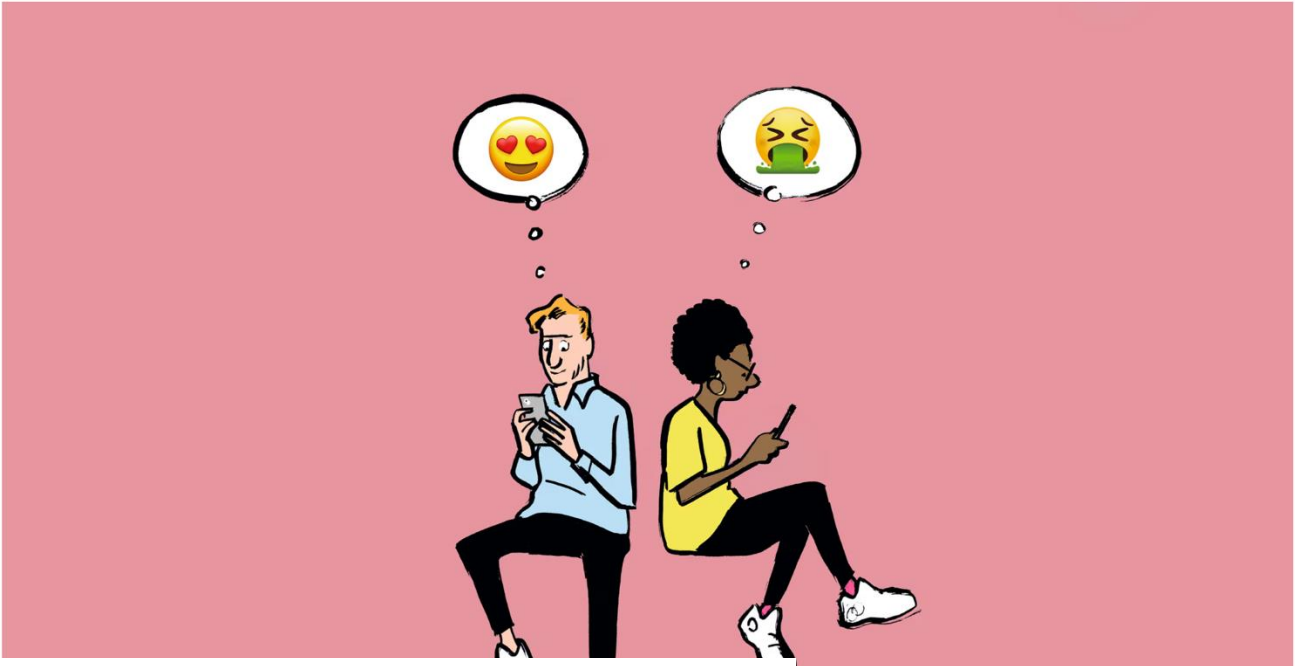


**Robyn Vinter**  
Sat 28 Oct 2023 15:00 CEST

 Share

548

**‘It’s quite soul-destroying’: how we fell out of love with dating apps**



**Why we’ve fallen out of love with**

Business | Swiped out

**Why people have fallen out of love with dating apps**

Tinder and Bumble are struggling as singles refuse to pay up

 Share



ILLUSTRATION: ROSE WONG

 **r/dating\_advice** • 10mo ago  
East-Assistance-1588

**Frustration with Dating Apps – Is Anyone Else Feeling This Way?**

Hey everyone,

I wanted to vent a little about my experience with dating apps. I've noticed that many people are finally connecting with some type of people keep popping up. I find myself asking: Are these apps really designed to help us find love, or are they just a cycle of frustration? I've noticed that many people are finally connecting with some type of people keep popping up. I find myself asking: Are these apps really designed to help us find love, or are they just a cycle of frustration?

I find myself asking: Are these apps really designed to help us find love, or are they just a cycle of frustration?

I've noticed that many people are finally connecting with some type of people keep popping up. I find myself asking: Are these apps really designed to help us find love, or are they just a cycle of frustration?

Has anyone done any research on psychological compatibility? I think a more thoughtful approach would be to focus on finding people who are truly compatible with us, rather than just looking for someone who is 'perfect' on paper.

FINANCIAL TIMES

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“Dating apps get personal to counter fatigue among Gen Z”

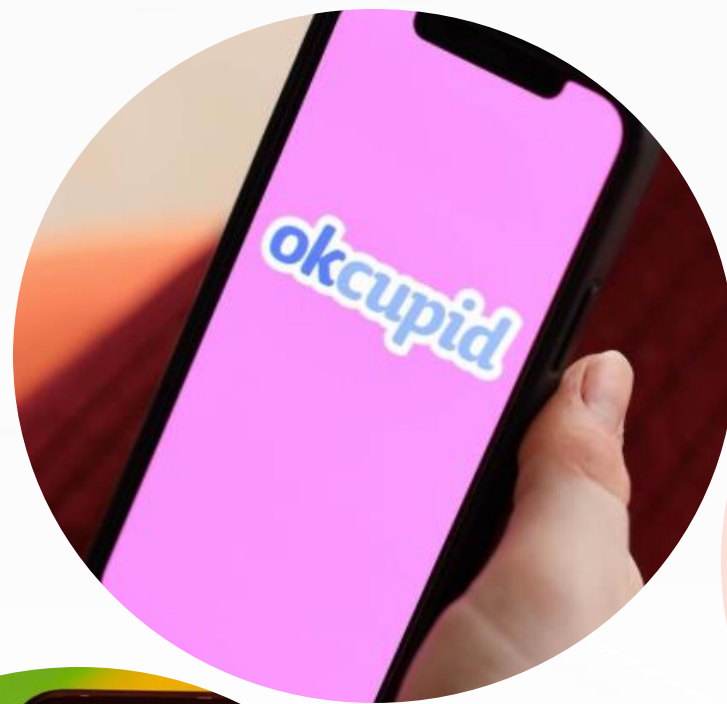
FINANCIAL TIMES

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“How we fell out of love with dating apps”



# Literature on feature-level assessments



- Photos (physical attractiveness) vs. texts (social attractiveness)<sup>1</sup>
- Warranting signals<sup>2</sup>
- Photos & texts play different roles when used in combination<sup>3</sup>

Algorithms consider...

- Information users put on their own profiles
- Users' swiping decisions

Swiping is **proxy** for user preferences which guide the algorithms in generating suitable profiles

## BUT...

- Only look at one or two headshots & employ similar text descriptions for all users
- Third party media absent
- Assume users have common objectives (i.e., looking for romantic partners)<sup>4</sup>



RQ: How do users assess other user profiles on online dating platforms?



# Methodology

## Case Context



Combined market share of 53%<sup>1</sup>

## Data Collection + Analysis

- 80 narrative interviews with users of Tinder and Bumble
- Interviews analysed through interpretive analysis; open coding to identify narratives in which interviewees described their assessments of other user profiles
- Initial categorisation of user assessments based on user motives did not work → Restructured into two assessment patterns

| User profile features visible to other users                                                                                             | Tinder  | Bumble  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Name                                                                                                                                     | X       | X       |
| Age                                                                                                                                      | X       | X       |
| Location (geography)                                                                                                                     | X       | X       |
| Photos (max. allowed)                                                                                                                    | X (9)   | X (6)   |
| Short bio (max. characters)                                                                                                              | X (500) | X (300) |
| Prompts (max. allowed)                                                                                                                   | X       | X (3)   |
| Interests/Tags (max. allowed)                                                                                                            | X (5)   | X (5)   |
| Spotify                                                                                                                                  | X       | X       |
| Instagram handle/Instagram photos                                                                                                        | X       | X       |
| <i>Note: New features have been added since the interviews were conducted. The table lists features available between 2021 and 2022.</i> |         |         |

Algorithms consider following factors of other user profile: age, content and length of bios, photos, location, and ethnicity<sup>2</sup>

# Findings

## Features



Bios, prompts & tags



## Two assessment patterns

### Single-feature



Bios, prompts & tags

### Multi-feature



Bios, prompts & tags



**Levels of “consciousness” vary!**



# Single feature

## **Single-feature + conscious**

Photos: Based on purely primal level

*"It's normally the first two pictures. So, you look at the face, and if you like already whatever you see, it's right [swipe right], and if you don't like it, then it's left. It's like when you pick clothes: either you like it, or you don't." (INT74, 27, male-straight)*

## **Single-feature + conscious**

Photos: Form a deeper sense of person's personality or character through photos

*"I don't know how to describe it. But I think people in photos, even if you don't write anything, by the photos that you take and your facial expression in those photos and stuff, I think your body language shows a lot about a person to a certain extent. So, I think also from there, that's the first criterion. That's something that just you feel like when you watch someone in the street and it freaks you out, or it's someone that you're kind of attracted to and you think you would get along. Of course, first impressions matter to a certain extent, but I think that's quite a strong first filter. Sometimes you don't have to read someone's profile to know that. It's just like... you already know." (INT28, 24, male-straight)*

## **Single-feature + less conscious**

Photos: Unable to specify what exactly they liked in the photos

*"It's about first impressions... it's definitely, I mean, in real life, it's kind of the same: you get a first impression within the same amount of time. So, it's like the second that then you get a kind of feeling of, like, 'Okay, what is that person like?' So it's about that, I guess. And it's not even about similar looks. I think it's more about similar lifestyles? Similar interests? It's really hard to tell." (INT34, 28, male-straight)*

# Multi-feature

## **Multi-feature + conscious**

Photos + Texts: Gain a more comprehensive impression of the person behind profiles

*"I have to say it's the picture [and] the biography, but not necessarily in the sense that everything which is displayed is what I read, but I tried to kind of see between the lines of, 'Who is this person? Does he have friendly eyes?' For me, it's very important to have some charisma and not only go for looks but truly kind of figure out, 'Do I feel something more than just what the profile maybe says?' I also really enjoy a humorous man, so if there's a joke hidden in the profile, that's something I really find attractive." (INT9, 31, female-straight)*

## **Multi-feature + conscious**

Music: Pendulum swinger

*"Their music can play a big role. Not everyone has it. But there are people that I was like, 'Maybe yes, maybe not,' and then they had a lot of music, and I figured... like, there was this guy who had all of the songs, literally, that I liked. And I was like, 'Okay, let's just swipe right.'" (INT43, 27, female-straight)*

## **Multi-feature + less conscious**

Photos + Texts: Unable to specify what

*"To be honest, I don't know. I know that I swipe for people right for the people that I felt like I could have a connection with, but I don't know why exactly. From time to time, it was a funny bio, from time to time it was a funny picture. I don't really know. It's not like I swipe if there is a guy with blue eyes or whatever. It's just really feeling-based on picture-bio combo... It's more on the feeling of the moment... It's not really something that you can describe. It's really like, 'This person looks like I can have a connection with them. I feel like I could like it.' I cannot really describe it." (INT42, 26, female-straight)*



# So What?



**DEVELOPERS**

## **Data ≠ Truth**

A swipe is not a clean preference signal, but a messy human moment.

→ Is achieving “optimal matches” even possible?

## **Time to rethink dating platform identity?**

Business model paradox: success = user loss

Possible redefinition: from matching to understanding the self → Design for reflection?



**USERS**

## **You can't anticipate what others like about you**

Curious users may want to ask their matches what attracted them.

## **Adopt greater mindfulness and intentionality when swiping**

*When do I go on the platforms?  
How am I swiping or messaging?  
Am I consistent in how I behave online?*

Maybe the future of  
matching isn't about finding  
the perfect partners, but  
about understanding  
ourselves.



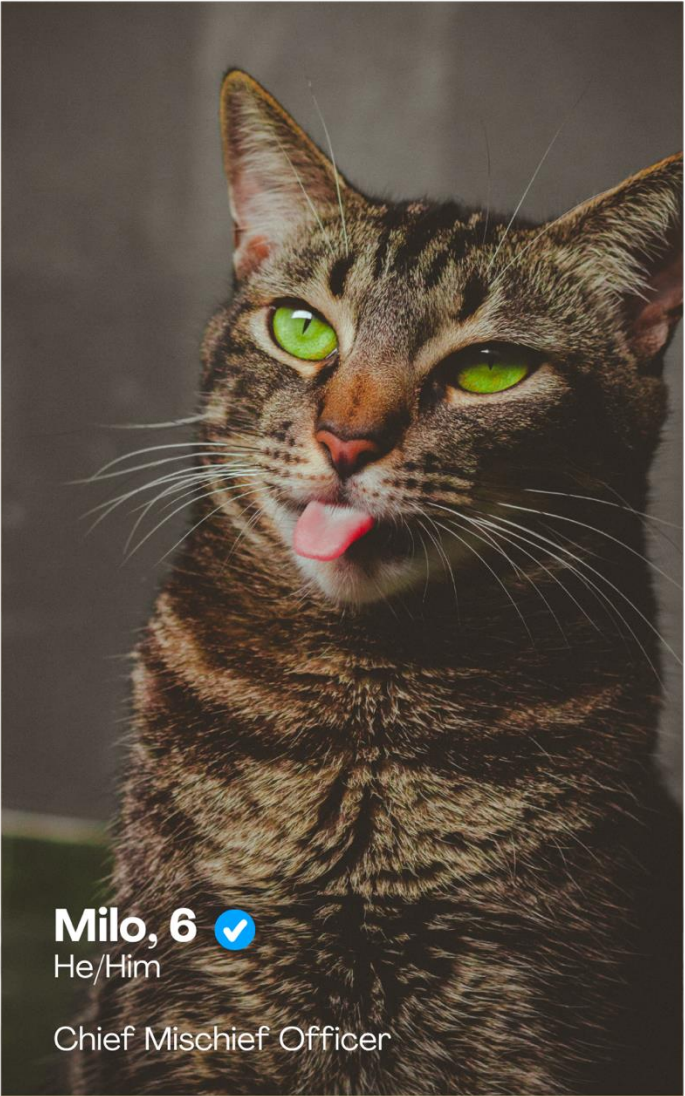


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Senior Vice President of Relaxation & Existential Napping

Certified couch potato with deep thoughts about life.

Spotify connected

  
Taylor Swift

  
Shakira

  
Tommy Cash

Arigato 😊

So...  
What are  
you swiping  
for?

As data scientists...

... how can you design algorithms that accurately *translate* user preferences?

... how can you design systems that don't just predict user behaviour but help people reflect on their behaviour?

... how can you design systems that allow people to understand the implications of their behaviour on algorithmic outcomes?



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