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Russia's Largest Social Network Starts Dating App to Rival Tinder

By Bloomberg

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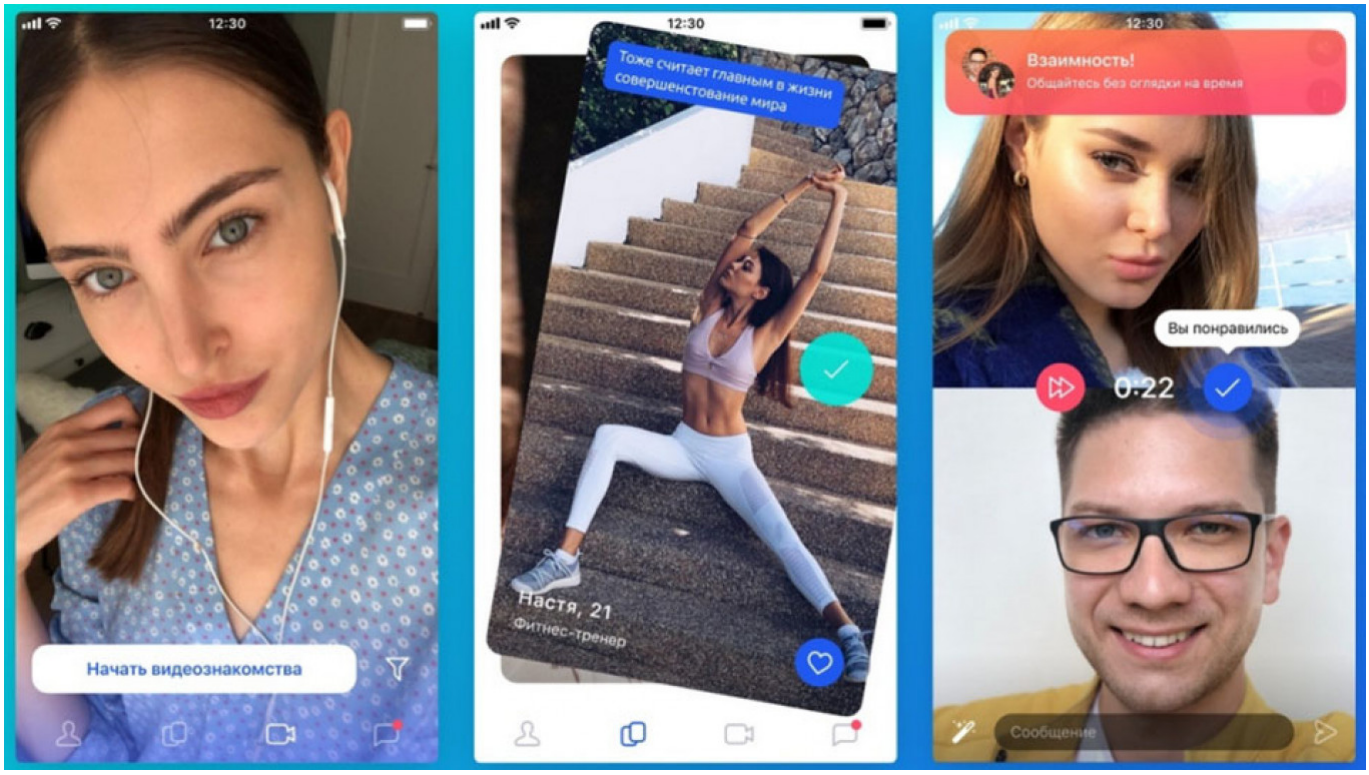

vk.com

VKontakte, Russia's largest social network run by Mail.ru Group Ltd, is starting its own dating app Lovina centered around quick-fire videochats.

The Lovina app offers a videochat to users who liked each others' profiles, or sets a "carousel" of limited-time videochats for random users, in a model similar to speed dating when men and women are rotated across tables to have a several-minute chat, looking for a proper match, according to the project head Vladimir Makhov.

Badoo, Tinder and Mamba are the leading dating apps in Russia, according to AppAnnie data. In June, the Russian communications regulator Roskomnadzor included Tinder's parent Match Group Inc. into its "register of information-dissemination operators." It means that the company must share user data in response to requests from law-enforcement, or risk fines and a possible ban on access to the service in Russia for failing to comply.

VKontakte claims that the video format is more true to life and safer for users, who communicate with a real person rather than a photo that can be doctored or fake. Makhov says his inspiration came from an unsuccessful, three-hour date. "If it were a video-chat, it would've taken a minute to realize what kind of person she was, and I wouldn't have gone on this date," Makhov said.

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Lovina is also using artificial intelligence to protect users from explicit content — say, if it identifies an intimate body part in the videochat, it would block such a user from the app — according to Makhov.

Still, the company says that communication in the app is confidential as it doesn't save the content of videochats. To avoid privacy breaches, Lovina also has a separate user profile from the VKontakte social network. It's a separate app that VKontakte plans to market to its 97 million users in Russia and neighboring countries.

Facebook Inc. is also testing a dating service in several countries. Tinder last year allowed adding GIF-style short videos into user profiles, while Badoo added a optional videochat, according to TechCrunch.

Lovina will be free, with no advertising, and aims to earn on in-app services such as promoting a user's profile or getting access to a list of people who liked your profile for more than 48 hours, known as "love potion."

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