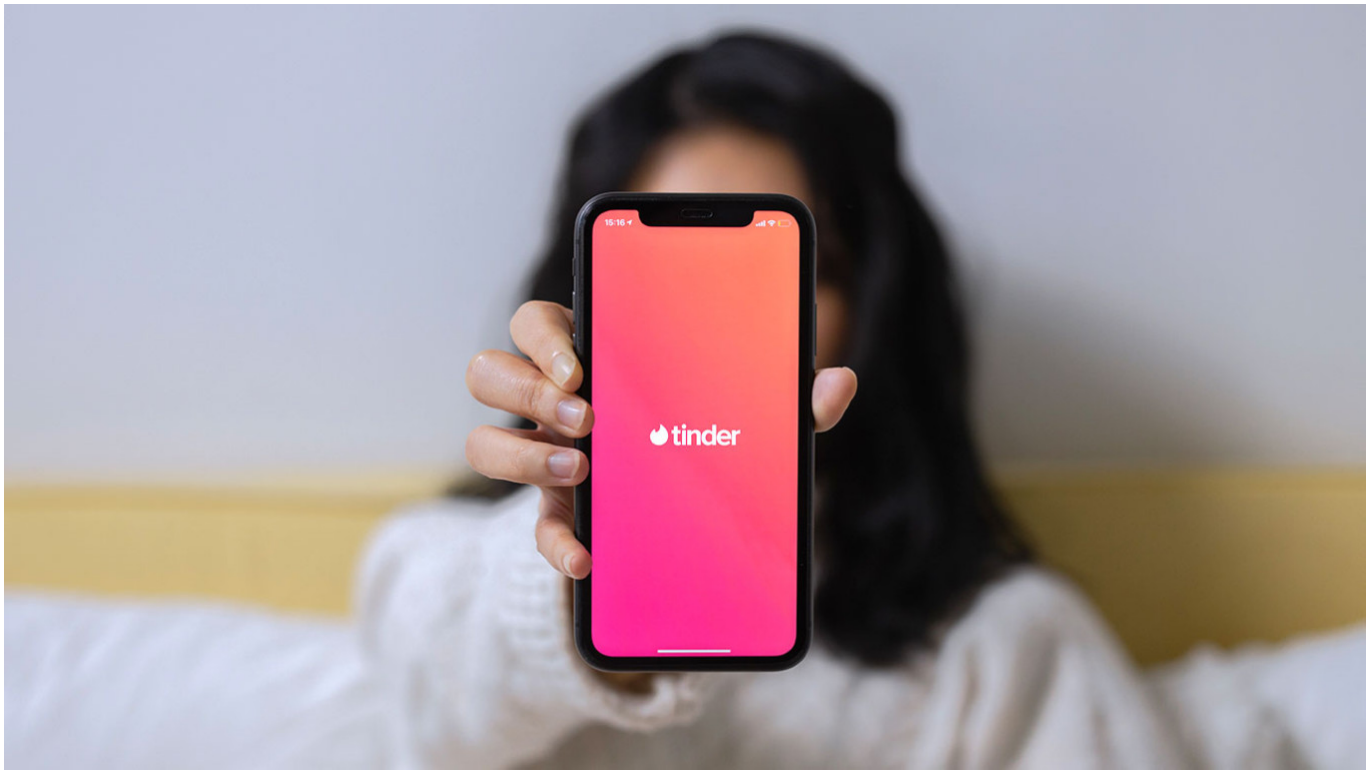
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Tinder Leaves Russia With Memes and Dashed Hopes

By Yelena Bobrova

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Following Bumble and Badoo, the popular dating app Tinder will leave Russia on June 30. Explaining the decision in an annual impact report published on May 1, Tinder's owner Match Group said it was "committed to protecting human rights."

Public reaction: rivals, politicians and Runet users

In the end of May Russian users of Tinder were notified of the shutdown and recommendations were sent to paid subscribers. It's not yet clear if the app will be available through a VPN, since representatives of Match Group didn't provide a detailed explanation.

"Perhaps they will keep the app for people who are already registered, but make it inaccessible to new clients," said Andrei Bronetsky, the CEO of the popular Russian dating service Mamba. He also assumed that Tinder would repeat Badoo's tactic of banning users

physically located in Russia. According to Bronetsky, Tinder now occupies about 25% of the Russian market. He noted that the audience of Mamba grew by 20% in 2022 and expected a further increase.

According to Statista.com, in 2022 3.5 million people had installed the Tinder app in Russia. When the war in Ukraine began, dating app usage dropped, and in March 2023 the research company Mediascope found that the monthly reach of Tinder in Russia was down to 1.1 million adults. According to this indicator, the application closes the top five largest dating services. According to the St. Petersburg media outlet Fontanka.ru, Tinder's yearly revenues had been about $14 million.

When Tinder leaves Russia the most likely outcome is a redistribution of both customers and money, as was the case after the departure of Badoo and Bumble. "The transition of users is facilitated by the fact that dating applications have similar functionality, user scenarios and interfaces," Maxim Khramov, head of LovePlanet.ru, another rival of Tinder, told RBC. At the same time, he noted that global competition helped to maintain a high level of services, and with the departure of Tinder, the Russian market would become more isolated, resembling the state of 15 years ago, when the markets were independent and practically did not overlap.

Meanwhile Russian tech giant VK is developing its own dating app, based on its existing service VK Znakomstva. VK Znakomstva's user base has seen a year-on-year surge of 81% to 22.1 million unique users.

The Match Group's decision to pull Tinder unleashed a huge wave of jokes and memes on the Runet. People joked Russians would have to go back to the old fashion ways of dating — the discotheques, TV shows and advertisements in magazines that were popular among teenagers in the 1990s.

Several politicians also commented, including the vice speaker of the State Duma Vladislav Davankov. "Tinder's withdrawal is not a big loss," he told RIA Novosti news agency. "There are plenty of entertainment dating services. But Russia definitely needs a federal project to fight loneliness."

According to polls cited by Davankov, around 60 million Russians feel lonely and every tenth woman hasn't been married, which causes demographic problems. "We need a normal service for serious dating. With verification to weed out married people, swindlers and those convicted of violent crimes," he said.

Different faces of Russian Tinder

Tinder, which appeared in Russia in 2012, has a mixed reputation. While some users praise its convenience, others criticize it for the strange people who use it, particularly sexual deviants and men looking for one-night stands. Mamba's CEO Andrei Bronetsky notes that the service is more focused on Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities. Popular Russian sex blogger and journalist Maria Arzamasova declared that "there are good guys in Tinder, but you have to dig them out" in her interview with Psychologies magazine.

"I'm not sure you can find the love of your life there", Ruslan, a 35-year-old graphic designer from St. Petersburg, told The Moscow Times. "But it's certainly an endless source for stand-

up comedy. Once I had a date with a lady who stated that she had 33 requirements for her perfect man. But she wanted to keep them secret. I was a bit surprised, but then I met another lady who said she had 330 requirements for a perfect man! Now I wonder if there are even more demanding women. Luckily, I haven't come across any yet."

For David Blake (name changed), a 46-year-old American who lives in Moscow, Tinder was a way to discover the mysterious Russian soul combined with bizarre openness about one's private life. "While I looked through the women on Tinder often enough, I only ended up going out on dates with two of them," David told The Moscow Times. "[With one] we went out for coffee near Paveletskaya in 2019, but there were no real sparks. The other was incredibly interesting, if only because she wasn't completely sane. Her saving grace was that she could talk at length about demographics, a subject that has always fascinated me. It ended up that she was a closet neo-Nazi..."

Even though he thought "Tinder was vastly better in Russia than in the U.S. and Canada...it probably wasn't the best place to meet a long-term partner," Blake said. He is now happily married to a Russian woman he met through a work project.

From a personal perspective

I registered on the app in January 2015 for the first time, but then quickly deleted it after a couple of unsuccessful dates. I came back — everyone looking for relationships goes through these "love and hate" periods with Tinder. I did find love and a serious relationship, although not The One, but I also ended up with plenty of horror stories — or comedies — I shared on social media as a form of therapy. The stories people tell are a great source of information that sociologists could use to understand Russian men and women, their values, communication and self-representation skills — and their absence.

So I am personally sad that Tinder is leaving Russia. Two of my good friends met their husbands through the app and, most importantly, are truly happy. Maybe I'll give it one last try before Tinder leaves. After all, hope springs eternal.

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