


ow Playing: Facebook's Dating App Came Out at the Wrong Time

Facebook's dating service is a chance to meet the catfisher, advertiser or scammer of your dreams - Facebook goes to dating hell!

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Drew Harwell and Elizabeth Dwoskin, The Washington Post

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Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg speaks during the annual F8 summit at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center in San Jose, California on May 1, 2018. Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg announced the world's largest social network will soon include a new dating feature -- while vowing to make privacy protection its top priority in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal. / AFP PHOTO / JOSH EDELSON JOSH EDELSON/AFP/Getty Images Photo: JOSH EDELSON, AFP/Getty Images

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Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg speaks during the annual F8 summit at the San Jose McEnery Convention Center in San Jose, California on May 1, 2018. Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg announced the world's largest ... [more](#)

The love-seeking singles of Facebook's new dating service, privacy experts say, may not be prepared for what they'll encounter: sham profiles, expanded data gathering and a new wave of dating fraud.

Facebook - under fire for viral misinformation, fake accounts and breaches of trust - said this week it will soon offer a new dating service designed to help its users find love, giving the world's largest social network a uniquely intimate vantage point on its users' romantic desires and personal lives.

The service will allow people older than 18 to create a dating profile - separate from their main profile and invisible to their friends - that it shows to potential matches based on **Now Playing: Facebook's Dating App Came Out at the Wrong Time** and mutual friends, company

Using a button - not a swipe, as popularized by popular dating app Tinder - people will then be able to say whether they're "interested" or would rather "pass" on those potential partners, officials said. Matches will be shown the other person's first name, age, current city and photo, though users will also have the option of sharing their work, education and other biographical information. The service will begin testing in a few months.

The company has bigger fish to fry
Media: Fortune

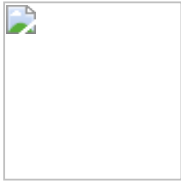
Privacy watchdogs, advertising experts and industry rivals worry the service could expose users more acutely to the worst of the Web - scams, malicious strangers and other problems Facebook already has its hands full with.

"Facebook already knows a lot about you that you tell it, and it collects a lot of information about you beyond that. . . . Now here's this whole other bucket of really sensitive stuff," said Justin Brookman, director of privacy and technology policy at the advocacy group Consumers Union. "How will Facebook police that? Will the thirst for engagement trump t

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The apps and sites of the \$3 billion online-dating industry - which will now need to contend with Facebook as a rival - gather personality and courtship data on their users for matching and marketing purposes. But because Facebook's audience is bigger and more widespread, its ad-targeting platform is more sophisticated and its users' profiles are built on years of detailed information, experts worry the new dating service could present a huge target and amplify the potential for abuse.

Many dating services, including Tinder, Hinge, Coffee Meets Bagel, and the League, enable or require people to log in with Facebook and were able to grow by mining Facebook's social network. But they draw a line between their business - selling subscriptions or upgrades like Tinder's "Super Like" - and Facebook's matchmaking service, which they say will morph to appease the social giant's advertiser clientele.

After inviting developers for years to build novel products like dating apps or music services on top of its social platform, Facebook switched gears and restricted developers' access to friends' data in 2014 and 2015, a move that made it harder for many dating apps to acquire new customers. Some of the dating apps now allege that Facebook is copying their apps, encompassing their features into its main market-dominating powerhouse.

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Facebook officials said the company wanted to bolster its platform as a user-friendly dating destination, adding that they've been interested in the idea for years and began building the service over the last six months. Many people were already using Facebook for dating, officials said, and they wanted to support that in a safe way.

Facebook officials said they are taking safety and privacy issues seriously and moving cautiously into the dating scene. Even as they were planning for Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg to announce the new dating service on stage Tuesday, officials said they were busy thinking about how it might be abused. For instance, people will only be allowed to send a single message as a conversation starter, and they won't be able to send anything but text, as a way of preventing potentially inappropriate photos and links.

Facebook has long fought with the fake profiles - touting photos of beautiful women and hunky men - that scammers use to spark relationships with users, snatch money and disappear. Some worry the dating service could only make that "catfishing" problem worse.

Still, Kevin Lee, the trust and safety architect of the fraud-detection startup Sift Science and a former Facebook spam manager, said the dating service could subject users to a host of new risks, including financial fraud.

Sift's research, Lee said, has found that about 70 percent of the victims of these frauds are women - often older women in developed countries seen by fraudsters as wealthy and more vulnerable due to a divorce, desire to have children or other life event.

Felicia Cravens, a Texan who runs a Facebook page called Unfakery that helps track down fraud accounts, said catfishing and romance scams are a huge problem on the service - and one that the dating feature could easily make worse.

"Facebook could enter this space and take it over relatively quickly, but should they, when we're seeing as many problems as we do?" Cravens said.

"People are scamming people in Macedonia, the Philippines and
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Matchmaking with Facebook's data is older than the site itself: One of Zuckerberg's first projects, FaceMash, scooped up pictures of female Harvard students and let users rate them by hotness. It was a "prank website that I made when I was a sophomore in college," Zuckerberg explained to a lawmaker last month.

The new dating feature, Zuckerberg said this week, "is for building real long-term relationships, not just hookups," and he said it could be life-changing for the more than 200 million Facebook users who list themselves as single. "If we're focused on helping people build meaningful relationships, this is perhaps the most meaningful of all," he said.

The company has for years collected people's relationship status ("Married," "It's Complicated") and used it to help fuel its vast personal-data machine. In 2013, Facebook and Cornell University researchers pulled data on 1.3 million users to try and predict whether couples would break up within 60 days of Facebook-announcing their relationship. (Couples whose mutual friends were closely connected to each other, the researchers said, were more likely to call it quits.)

But the new dating service could give Facebook an entirely new level of visibility into its users' love lives, and privacy experts said they're concerned users won't understand how much information they'll be handing over. Facebook will log interactions on the dating site, keep a record of everyone a user likes or rejects and gather other data necessary for the service to work, officials said.

"Am I going to get matches based on liking 'The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie' when I was 14?" said one 22-year-old law student in California currently using other online-dating apps. Plus, she added, "many women, including me, have had to deal with complete strangers, usually middle-aged men abroad, sending gross messages when you're not their friends." Having a Facebook dating profile, she guessed, wouldn't help.

Company officials said they won't use dating service data to inform ad targeting at the outset. But **How Playing: Facebook's Dating App Came Out at the Wrong Time** Facebook's promise will last. The company's business model depends on the

sharing of often sensitive personal information, and dating data may prove too valuable to ignore.

Mike Herrick, the senior vice president of product and engineering at the ad-analytics firm Urban Airship, said the dating service will allow Facebook to know not just its users' current paramours, but who they're interested in, what they like and how active they are in seeking a match.

That data, he said, will more than make up for any information Facebook might have surrendered after recently severing some ties to third-party data brokers. It will allow the social network to learn "people's wants and desires around dating directly in a much cleaner way than how they were getting that type of data previously," he said.

That level of data intimacy, he added, could have great value to marketers: If you're an advertiser and "you know somebody's dating, they might also be more likely to purchase new clothes or makeup or other products," he said.

Critics are also questioning Facebook's priorities in launching a side service while its challenges with privacy and fake news abound. Sasja Beslik, the head of sustainable investing at the financial-services group Nordea Asset Management, tweeted Wednesday, "Facebook needs 3 years to fix the data and privacy issues, but just found time to launch a dating feature and take on Tinder."

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