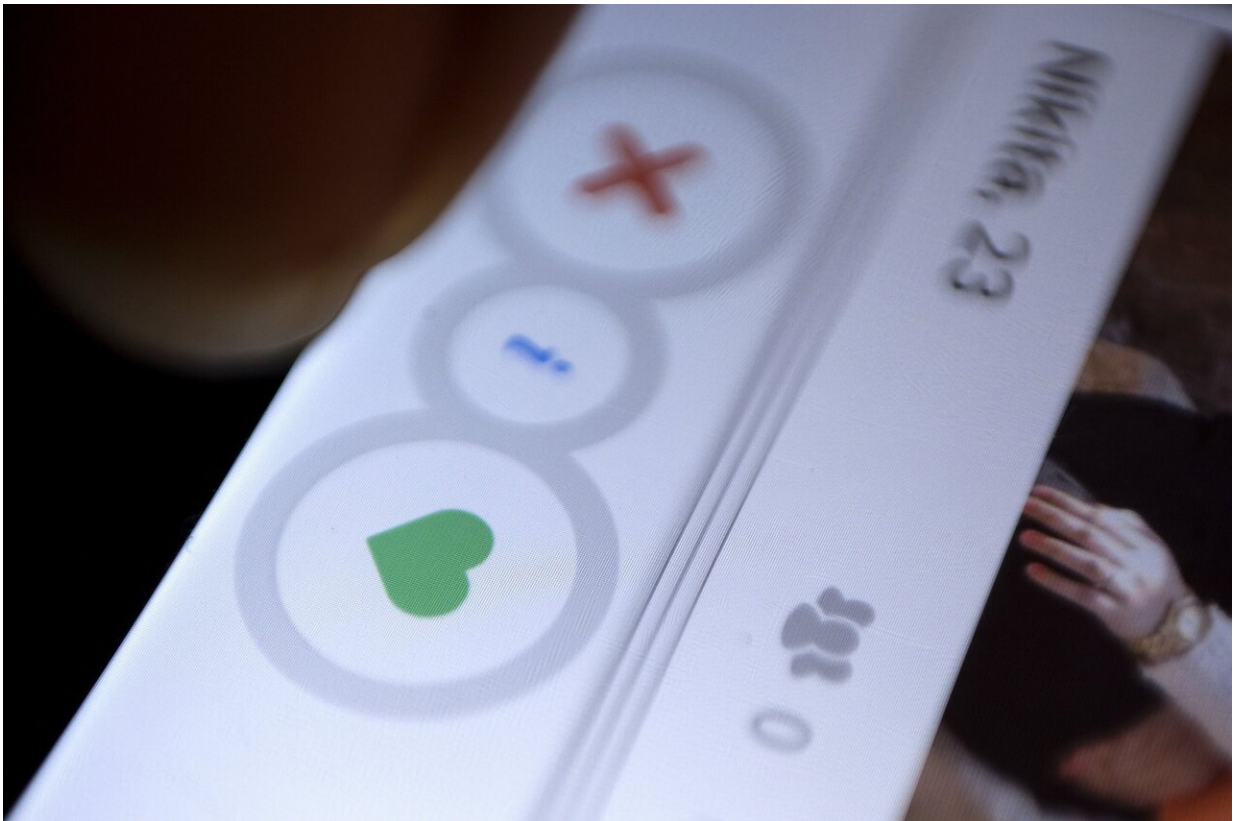


Dating apps face US inquiry over underage use, sex offenders

January 30 2020, by Barbara Ortutay



In this July 5, 2015, file photo, a man uses the dating app Tinder in New Delhi. A House subcommittee is investigating popular dating services such as Tinder and Bumble for allegedly allowing minors and sex offenders to use their services. Bumble, the Meet Group, Grindr and the Match Group, which owns such popular services as Tinder, Match.com and OkCupid, are the current targets of the investigation by the House Oversight and Reform subcommittee on economic and consumer policy. (AP Photo/Tsering Topgyal, File)

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Bumble, Grindr, The Meet Group and the Match Group, which owns such popular services as Tinder, Match.com and OkCupid, are the current targets of the investigation by the U.S. House Oversight and Reform subcommittee on economic and consumer policy.

In separate letters Thursday to the companies, the subcommittee is seeking information on users' ages, procedures for verifying ages, and any complaints about assaults, rape or the use of the services by minors. It is also asking for the services' privacy policies and details on what users see when they review and agree to the policies.

Although the minimum age for using internet services is typically 13 in the U.S., dating services generally require users to be at least 18 because of concerns about sexual predators.

"Our concern about the underage use of dating apps is heightened by reports that many popular free dating apps permit registered sex offenders to use them, while the paid versions of these same apps screen out registered [sex offenders](#)," Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Illinois Democrat who heads the subcommittee, said in a statement. "Protection from sexual predators should not be a luxury confined to paying customers."

Match Group said it uses "every tool possible" to keep minors and bad actors off its services and continues to invest in technology to keep users safe. In an emailed statement, the company said the problem was broader and requires other parties, including app stores that know who their users are, "to do their part as well."

Match added that the national sex offender registry needs to be updated so that perpetrators' digital footprints can be tracked and blocked by social media and dating services.

Grindr and The Meet Group did not immediately respond to messages for comment on Thursday. Bumble did not have an immediate comment.

Besides safety issues, the investigation also seeks to address concerns about data the services request to make matches. Such information may include sexual orientation, [gender identity](#), [political views](#), and drug, alcohol and tobacco use.

The subcommittee cited a report by a Norwegian consumer group this month that found that dating apps including Grindr, OkCupid and Tinder leak personal information to advertising [tech companies](#) in possible violation of European data privacy laws. The Norwegian Consumer Council said it found "serious privacy infringements" in its analysis of how shadowy online ad companies track and profile smartphone users.

Match Group parent company IAC has said it shares information with third parties only when it is "deemed necessary to operate its platform" with third party apps. The company said it considers the practice in line with all European and U.S. regulations.

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Citation: Dating apps face US inquiry over underage use, sex offenders (2020, January 30)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from
<https://techxplore.com/news/2020-01-dating-apps-inquiry-underage-sex.html>

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