

Structure Overview

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Research and Literature Review**
- 3. Design Brief Overview and Design Goals**
- 4. Prototype Development and Iteration**
- 5. How the Prototype Meets the Brief**
- 6. Conclusion**
- 7. Bibliography (not included in word count)**
- 8. App References (not included in word count)**

1. Introduction

The current dating app climate is becoming ever increasingly detrimental to social connections and users' emotional well-being. It has been reported that dating app users face three times the amount of stress as non-users, and this number increases with daily use (Holtzhausen et al., 2020). The goal for this project was to create an alternative app that fosters deeper connections based on film, both as a dating app and a social media app in general.

2. Research and Literature Review

a. Psychological Impact of Dating Apps

It is proven that Swipe Based Dating Apps (SBDAs) and dating apps in general have a negative impact on users' levels of depression, anxiety and distress compared to those who do not use the applications (Holtzhausen et al., 2020). A survey of US adults conducted in 2022 found that 46% of dating app users had a negative experience overall using the platforms, highlighting just how damaging these apps are to hundreds of millions of users worldwide.

Online dating has also been associated with poor body image for users. A systematic review of 45 studies on dating apps found that more than 85% of the relevant studies (19 of 22) found significant negative relationships between dating app use and body image. The studies noted links with problems including body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem (Bowman, 2025). The emphasis on purely visual content on dating apps can cause users to value their appearance more than themselves as a person, processes called self-objectification and self-sexualisation (Femke Konings, Sumter and Vandenbosch, 2024).

b. Gamification and Algorithms

Dating apps have been designed to be incredibly addictive, with gamification elements throughout. The ultimate goal is to match with as many people as possible; this prioritises rapid gratification over the pursuit of meaningful connections. A 2016 study found that almost half of all messages sent on Tinder go unanswered (Zhang and Taha Yasseri, 2016), proving that matching grants the fulfilment that the user wants, the feelings of being valued and desired, and this validation does not require further interaction. These matches are then quantified and stored on the app as measurable proof of the user's romantic and sexual worth, and this is all by design (Bandinelli and Bandinelli, 2021). As stated by Helen Fisher, biological anthropologist and senior research fellow at the Kinsey Institute of Indiana University, "The brain is ready to get addicted, particularly when it comes to love," and these apps are "selling life's greatest prize." (Worthington, 2024).

3. Design Brief Overview and Design Goals

The problems we identified in existing apps were superficiality, visual bias and emotional dissatisfaction. As highlighted in the design brief, existing platforms prioritise fast-paced, appearance-driven interactions with an emphasis on exploiting users to drive sales to premium app features rather than actually promoting meaningful connections. We identified our target audience to be individuals ages 18-35 who are actively seeking genuine, lasting connections rather than casual, short flings. This demographic often reports a high level of dating fatigue as well as negative psychological effects from the use of dating apps. A major goal was to incorporate embodied interactions into the design solutions, encouraging healthy reflection, communication and real-world participation prompted by the app. Ultimately, our designs aspired to nurture healthier digital intimacy and long-term user satisfaction as opposed to existing dating apps.

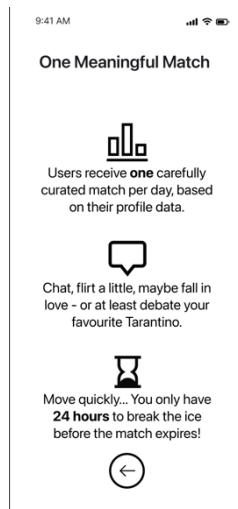
4. Prototype Development and Iteration

This development phase began with in-depth research into literature of the existing problem and competitor analysis of dating apps such as Tinder, Hinge and Bumble.



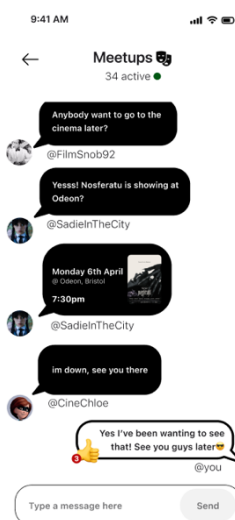
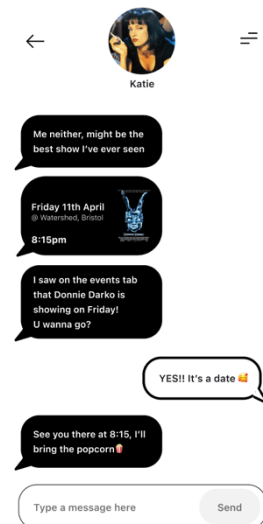
This allowed accurate problem identification and solution analysis, which would be the basis for prototyping the app and, ultimately, the interactions that would take place. Through this research and competitor analysis, the main issue identified was the visual nature of these apps, encouraging superficiality and shallow interactions. This led to the design solution of users within the app being able to choose from a set of 13 iconic film and TV characters based on a variety of different genres e.g. action, sci-fi, and thriller iconic characters. This encourages users to interact

intellectually regarding the shared interests identified by the app's algorithm and allows users to express their personality in way that has no harmful impacts.



CineMate works by matching users based on their shared film and TV interests. This includes - Shared favourite films, TV Shows, Genres, Actors, Directors and Watchlists. Another design solution identified and implemented was the use of One Daily Meaningful Match within the app. This is based on the data listed above, and the match expires after 24 hours, encouraging users to connect. The interaction involving this app mechanic showcases its potential to have meaningful and positive real-world impacts on relationships. The primary user is matched with 'Katie', who shares many of the same

'Favourites' identified by the primary user during the onboarding process. This leads to a genuine interaction via the messaging system within the app where both users agree to meet up to go to the cinema to see a shared favourite film.



The second design solution and interaction is one on the 'Explore' page of the app. This is where app users can come together and join a variety of group chats to discuss films and TV and even plan meetups. The primary app user joins the meetups group chat where a number of members are planning to go to the cinema. The primary user sees that the film is one he is interested in and messages to say he will come too. This solution promotes social engagement not just for dating but friendship too, a major issue in recent times as well.

Unlike conventional swipe-based dating apps, CineMate doesn't start with appearances but with shared experiences - users match based on the emotional resonance of media, like the comfort of a childhood movie or a debate over a favourite series. The app encourages users to engage in real-world, physically situated activities such as attending film screenings and meeting up with users who share their tastes. Both of these points reflect embodied interaction

theory, which argues that our physical and emotional presence within the world shapes how we interact digitally.

5. How the Prototype Meets the Brief

CineMate directly addresses the issues identified in the brief – superficiality, visual bias and emotional dissatisfaction. By shifting the focus from appearance to shared cultural interests, it fosters genuine, meaningful interactions through film and TV preferences, rather than exploitative, addictive and harmful gamification and algorithms.

CineMate encourages users to not only match with other users through the daily match feature but also participate in meaningful discussions in the explore tab, fostering positive connections with like-minded individuals.

6. Conclusion

In an increasingly negative digital dating landscape linked to an array of harmful issues explored in this report, CineMate offers a refreshing, human-centred alternative. Grounded in research, the app reframes digital connection to one of shared interests between users, fostering healthier digital and physical relationships.