

Bumble - The Feminist Dating App

Bumble is a feminist location based dating application intended to find people and friends and build a network online with over 55 million total users. The company was founded in 2014, and is the parent company of Badoo, which is another dating application intended to find new people. Co-founder of Tinder Whitney Wolfe Herd left Tinder after suing Tinder for sexual discrimination, met Andrey Andreev and invested \$10 million and offered to use Badoo's infrastructure for a new dating service while receiving 79% of the stake.

Bumble entered the online dating market in 2014 when Tinder and Grindr were the top leading dating apps. To make a place for themselves in the market, Bumble did a great job at marketing itself as the "feminist dating app", grabbing attention right away. It was a great strategy to differentiate itself from the other "male-centric" apps. Soon the conversation became about women empowerment and women taking matters into their own hands. Defying the dating culture stereotypes of women waiting for men to make the first move. The whole set up of Bumble made other dating apps seem shallow. It highlighted Tinder's "hook-up culture" reputation. It became so that women thought the men who were on Bumble were "better matches" as in they were not "creepy guys" with cheesy pick-up lines. And Bumble didn't just say that it was a feminist app, it definitely introduced features and rules that were never seen in any dating app before (as talked about in the product understanding section).

But a lot has changed since the launch of the app in 2014 and consequently, Bumble needs to make changes to keep up with its "Feminist App" reputation.

What changed?

Bumble has done a great job at changing people's mindsets about online dating. It took a concept that people saw as a way to have quick, meaningless hook-ups and turned it into something you could use to find the right person for yourself. By taking a feminist approach, Bumble added some depth into the online dating experience and made it somewhat less "trashy". The word "Feminism" itself is an alive word and its meaning is forever changing and evolving. The initial wave of feminism started off to fight for women's rights and to get to basic equality and so it was a very aggressive, and completely justified approach. It was about women not having to depend on a man for her needs, to be able to work for herself, to be independent, and act as an equal to be treated as an equal.

Although that kind of feminism may still be needed in today's world, the most recent wave of feminism has shifted from "you are a woman, you need to do all this" to "It's your life, your choice". With the earlier definition of feminism, a woman who decides to become a housewife would probably be looked down upon. But now, with "Choice Feminism", it's about whatever a woman chooses to do for herself. If a woman wants to be a successful businesswoman? She can do it. If she wants to be a housewife? She can. It is her life and she can do what she wants.

This is what Bumble needs to keep up with. With the current design and rules of the app, it's almost as if the founders of Bumble are imposing their idea of Feminism on their users. The founders feel like women should always make the first move, defy dating stereotypes, but what if the user doesn't want that?

Product Understanding

In order to understand the target we created a Bumble account to get a first-hand experience of how the app works and to better understand its rules and conditions. For the purpose of the brief, we created the account as a female so everything in this part of the paper is from a female's perspective.

As soon as the user creates an account, Bumble talks about the "Ladies make the first move" rule (*Appendix A, Image 1*). This also includes telling the user that if they don't make the move within 24 hours of getting a match, the chat will expire.

If the user clicks on the "This does not work for me" option (*Appendix A, Image 1*), a message shows up explaining that if they match with a person of the same gender as them, these rules don't apply (*Appendix A, Image 2*). However, the 24 hours time limit still applies.

The user can then read the Bumble guidelines to better understand the rules of the app. Some of the guidelines include uploading their own real images (*Appendix A, Image 3*). Bumble has a feature which lets users verify their pictures to help prove that their profile is authentic. Other guidelines talk about rules of photos the user can have on their profile such as the user's face should be visible in every photo, no pictures of kids on their own, no pictures in underwear, etc. (*Appendix A, Image 4*). There is even a guideline that discourages the users from copy and pasting the same message and sending it to multiple people (*Appendix A, Image 4*).

Now that the account is set up, the user can begin swiping. Once the user gets a match, the app tells the user that they need to make the first move. After the user makes the move, a message

shows up reminding them of the 24-hour rule (*Appendix A, Image 5*). There is also a note that says "We sent him a reminder too." (*Appendix A, Image 6*).

Some other features include being able to extend the 24-hour limit (*Appendix A, Image 7*) but the user must pay for a premier account to be able to use that. The user can also get a profile back if they accidentally swiped left on it (*Appendix A, Image 8 and 9*).

Survey Results

We carried out a survey to get an idea about what works for Bumble's users and what doesn't work. The main agenda of this research was to find out how Bumble's female users truly feel about the "Ladies make the first move" feature.

In the survey, we started off by asking people if they preferred Bumble over other dating apps (i.e. Tinder etc.) to which 46% and 19% of the participants answer "Yes" or "Somewhat", respectively, and 35% answered "No" (*Appendix B, Data 1*).

The top reasons we got for why participants preferred Bumble were (*Appendix B, Data 2*):

1. Participants think people on Bumble, as compared to other apps, are looking for something more serious.
2. Participants think Bumble is a safer online dating platform
3. Participants find better quality matches on Bumble.

The top reasons for not liking Bumble:

1. Participants don't like being the first one to message
2. Participants have been on Tinder for a longer time and hence are used to it
3. There are more people on Tinder.

The survey then goes on to ask if the users liked the “Ladies make the first move” feature. 28% said, “Yes”, 41% said, “Half and half”, and 31% said, “No” (*Appendix B, Data 3*).

The top reasons for not liking the “Ladies make the first move” feature (*Appendix B, Data 4*):

1. “I do sometimes make the first move but like it when the guy makes the first move too” - 71%
2. “I never like making the first move” - 19%
3. “Anyone can make a move. Depends on the situation” - 10%

The final question asked the participants if they would prefer/still prefer Bumble if the app lets you choose whether you want to be the one to start the conversations or you want to allow men to start conversations? 44% answered, “Yes” and “41%” answered, “I would prefer it more”, (*Appendix B, Data 5*).

Survey Insights

On going through the survey responses individually we found that out of the 35% participants that said they don’t prefer Bumble over Tinder, 89% said that they would prefer Bumble if it wasn’t necessary for women to make the first move. Out of the 19% said that they “somewhat” preferred Bumble over Tinder, 80% said they would prefer Bumble more if the “Ladies make the first move” feature was optional, and the rest 20% said they would prefer it the same amount.

There also seems to be an overlap between two insights. Women prefer Bumble because they believe they get better matches than compared to on Tinder. But them being forced to always be the first one to message is enough of a reason for them to stray away from the app. This

means they do want to use Bumble. They want to have a better online dating experience than what they have on Tinder, but by imposing these rules, Bumble is making them walk away. Practically forcing them to use apps like Tinder, that they don't really want to use but are left with no other option.

Recommendation

Give users the freedom to customize the app so it works the best for them. This way Bumble is still keeping the female users who prefer messaging first, but also preventing users who don't like messaging first from walking away. Cater to everyone's individual needs which will inevitably result in more people using the app.

There might be some questions about what if people react negatively to this change? Since Bumble has already so strongly marketed the women empowerment aspect of the app, will it lose all its credibility by making this change? Will people think it's becoming like any other dating app? No, not if the change is marketed in a specific way.

Make the entire campaign about "Choice Feminism". Acknowledge that feminism is an ever-evolving concept and Bumble is willing to evolve with it, to better serve its users. This further highlights Bumble's philosophy of empowering women by letting them choose for themselves. The app lets the user take control of how they want the app to work. It can be customized according to their specific needs. Women get to decide whether they want to message first or not. If the user usually has a busy schedule, there can be a setting that enables the user to deactivate the "24-hour" rule. It's all about the users' preferences.

How you Bumble: Your choice, Your way

References

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Appendix A

Bumble first-hand experience

Image 1

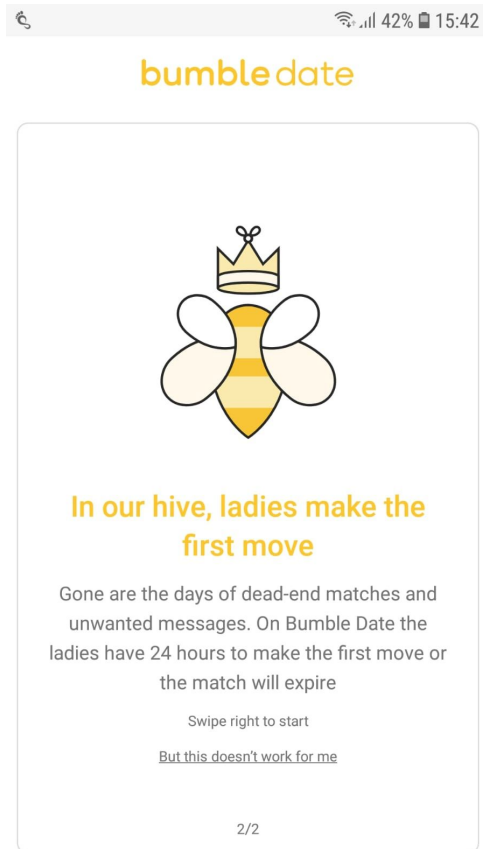


Image 2

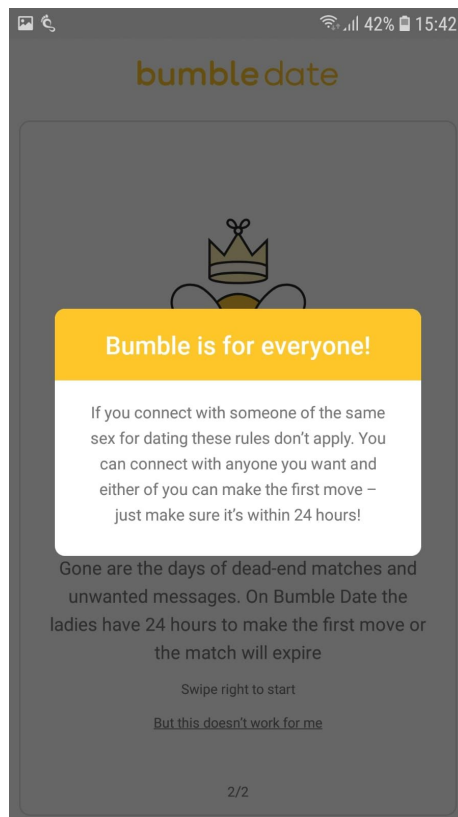


Image 3

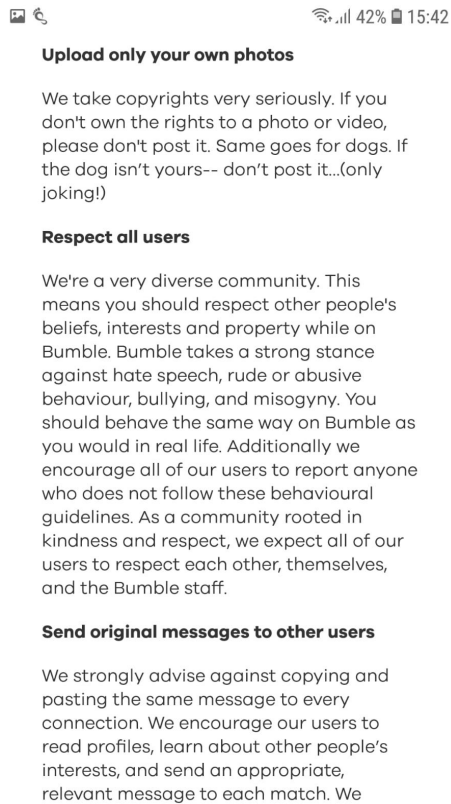


Image 4

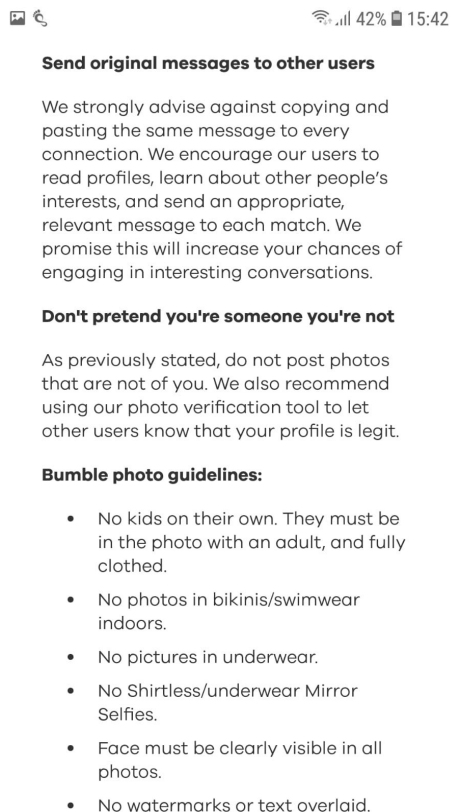


Image 5

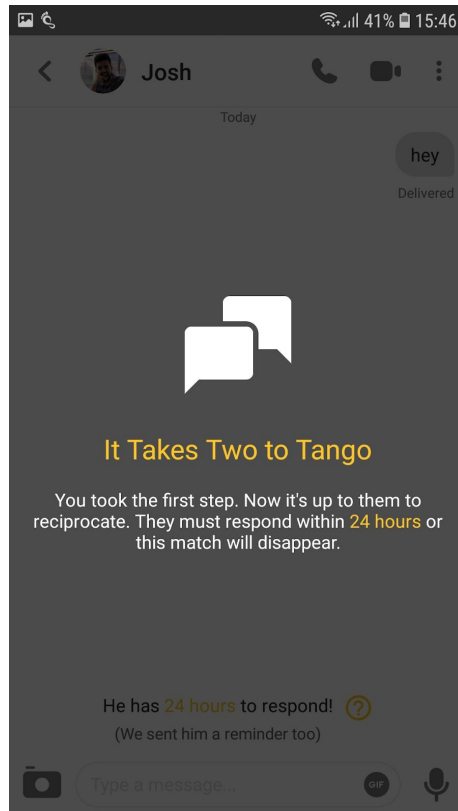


Image 6



Image 7

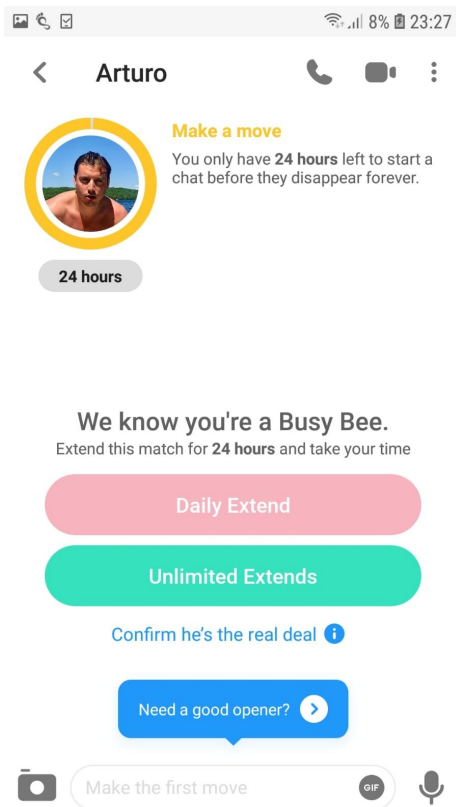


Image 8

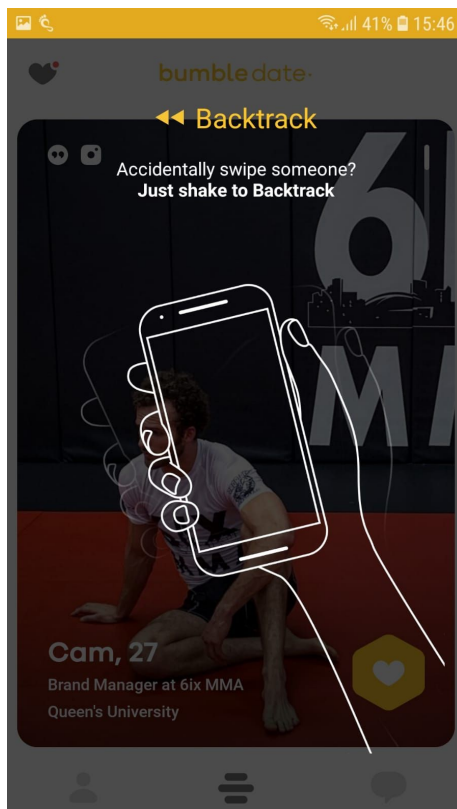
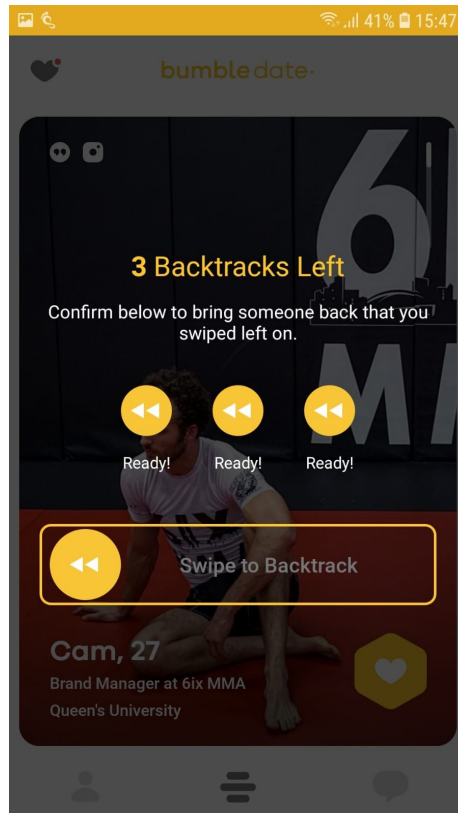


Image 9



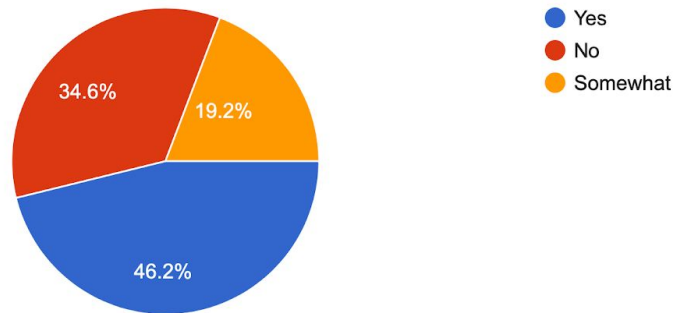
Appendix B

Survey Responses

Data 1

Do you prefer Bumble over Tinder?

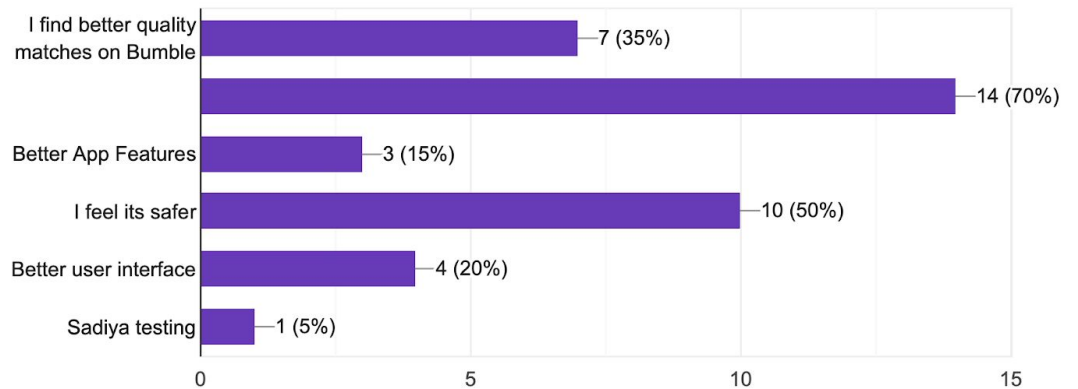
26 responses



Data 2

Reason for your answer

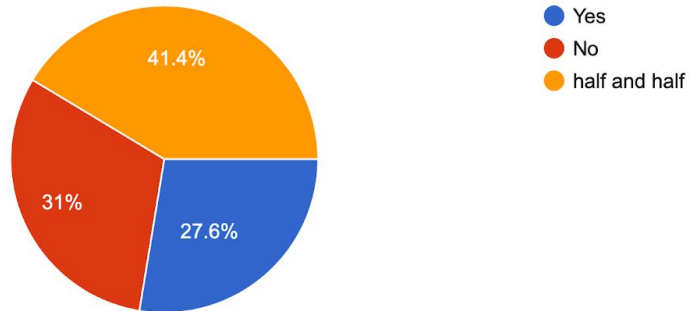
20 responses



Data 3

Do you like that only girl can make the first move?

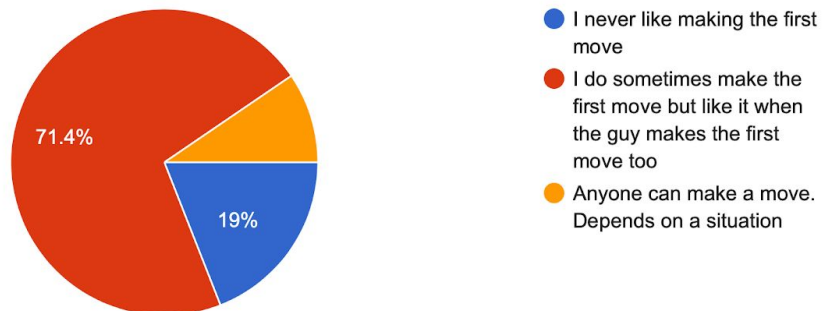
29 responses



Data 4

What are some reasons you don't like the "ladies make the first move" feature?

21 responses



Data 5

Would you prefer/still prefer Bumble if there was a setting that let you choose whether you want to be the one to start the conversations or you want to allow men to start conversations?

29 responses

