
IS INSTAGRAM REALLY A DATING APP?

By Holly Friend

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Art Baby Gallery, New York

‘ With real-life encounters still considered an unreliable means to instigate romance, Instagram makes sense as a more practical tool for match-making. ’

— Holly Friend, junior foresight writer, LS:N Global

‘With the girl I’m seeing now, I just DM’d [direct messaged] her on Instagram after I had seen her around uni a few times,’ revealed an 18-year-old called Jordan in a **recent article by Vice**. Jordan’s contemporary tale of courtship is just one example to suggest that, as well as birthing the concept of the influencer and overhauling industries from beauty to music, Instagram has been quietly disrupting the dating market.

In July, Instagram's success as a dating platform was quantified when photo editor Kelly Rakowski raised nearly £37,600 (\$48,000, €42,000) to turn her Instagram account, [@_personals_](#), into an app in its own right. The account, which connects LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming people, has to date amassed more than 40,000 followers. Mimicking the traditional newspaper dating ad, singletons are required to pitch themselves to Personals without visuals, using only text and a strict character count.

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The result transforms the Instagram grid from a visual archive into a text-based one, teeming with witty and often playful ad captions such as 'Scrabble, anyone?', and 'Gay memes and summer dreams'. Although the revival of the written personal ad may suggest the future of dating is more intelligent than the ruthless, visually driven Tinder vetting process, Personals also publishes the writer's Instagram handle, so interested parties can still explore their curated lifestyles before choosing to send a DM.

The triumph of Personals is credited in part to a **shift away from 'superficial' dating platforms** such as Tinder and Bumble. Experts blame dating app fatigue on the fact that they yield too many options: 'People suffer from cognitive overload and don't know how to deal with all the people on their screen,' says professor Eric Klinenberg, a sociologist at New York University. Alongside this, young people are no longer taking their swipes seriously. A **recent study** found that US college students are turning to dating apps to ease boredom or boost their ego – 91% weren't primarily using them to hook up with partners.

With real-life encounters considered an unreliable, if not rare, means to instigate romance, Instagram makes sense as a more practical tool for match-making. Of course, social media flirtations have been happening for years – the term 'slide into your DMs' has been traced back to 2013, and MySpace and MSN served as predecessors for internet courting. Now, Instagram is taking this mantle. In a New York Times piece titled **Instagram is Now a Dating Platform, Too**, columnist Valeriya Safronova writes: 'Not only does Instagram provide a visually-driven collage of your life, it also offers a subtle way of expressing interest through likes and comments, and connecting in the form of a private chat'.

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The likes of **Vice** and **Refinery29** have also noted how Instagram's two-year-old Stories feature has created a new breed of romantic game play, providing users with insight about who is most frequently tuning into snippets of their daily life.

I find it surprising, given the global reach of Instagram, that its dating potential hasn't been expanded sooner – especially when brands are already playing with the format. In May 2018, fashion label Helmut Lang rolled out a **1990s-inspired campaign** on Instagram featuring single New Yorkers decked out in Helmut Lang clothing. The campaign doubled as a dating service, inviting potential suitors to email the brand or DM the models for a date.

This stunt was a one-off, but I believe it demonstrates the potential for this Netstalgic style of dating. After all, unlike Facebook – which is still in the process of testing its rather contrived Dating feature – Instagram users don't have to pick a relationship status; they are already revealing who they are, their interests, location and personality through the visuals and language they use. Could an aggregated page for Instagram's singletons help to spark interactions based instead on this holistic view of their life, devoid of the labour and shallow nature of wooing a Tinder match? Let's hope this would help us to show a more honest version of ourselves in the hope of attracting a date – rather than clogging our feed further with glossy, identikit Instagrammers.

*For more on Insta-dating, **look out** for our forthcoming microtrend.*