Impact of social media in flirting behaviours of the international gay community

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Abstract

Flirting gets tricky for many individuals, what signals to send? Are they flirty or friendly? Is more common for gay to flirt online or offline? In this research to know the flirting signals of the gay community and the impact of the social media, 18 male participants defined as Cis Gay Males, Singles or less than 2 month on a relationship, ages 18 to 35, from different countries were interviewed.
The findings were that a 100% of the interviewed used social media to meet potential partners, because they readily knew the other one was gay, and when in real life Eye contact, Direct Compliments and Touch were the most used signals to distinguish between friendly and flirty.

Introduction

Flirting (interpreted as the signals we send to show romantic or sexual interest for someone), is often tricky or difficult for many individuals, most of the time because they can't or don't know how to distinguish between the signals to send or that are being sent to them. Adding to this, the gay community has an extra difficulty, having to identify whether the other person of interest, also shares the same sexual orientation or interest. In this context, social media and dating apps, seems to solve or facilitate this process, but no previous research was found about this subject (when looking for information on the subject on repositories such as Pubmed or Cochrane, only 4 results were retrieved using the key words "gay flirting", "gay flirt", "lgbt flirting" and/or "homosexual flirting"). In the other hand, there are experts, studies and books that teach about flirting signals between heterosexual people ie. "Flirtology" by Jean Smith (1) depicts 6 ways that people can tell someone is flirting, those being Eye Contact, Proximity, Touch, Attention, Open body language and Humor, but no such studies or reference exists for Gay flirting, making this research the first or one of the few to adress the subject.
In order to identify both: Flirting signals and the impact of social media in the flirting behaviors of the international gay community, polls were conducted to a sample of cis gay male adults (ages 18 to 45) and a group of them were further interviewed about the signals they use to flirt and the impact social media has had on their romantic and sexual lives and the way they use them.
Reminder: This is a research in progress and further interviews have to be done, anyone interested in participating, please contact me at the email above.

Results

A sample of 41 Cis Male Gay Men from different countries (UK, USA, Belgium, Chile, Brasil, Spain, Argentina and Paraguay) were asked if they have been in a situation in which they asked themselves if someone was flirting (interpreted as romantic or sexual interest for someone) with them or not, 95% recognized to have been in this kind of situation, not being able to read or interpret the signals properly (Fig 1.).

Then a second poll was conducted, asking what methods or places do they choose to meet potential partners and 100% of the interviewed pointed they used Social Media or Dating Apps as a method to meet potential partners, other methods included Bars/Clubs/Saunas and meetings with Friends (Data not shown). When further asking the main and primary method used, 84,6% of the interviewed pointed that they used Social Media and Dating apps as their main or primary method to meet potential partners (Fig 2, a). Here is a difference between countries, as interviewed men from Belgium and UK used bars or clubs as their main or primary choice to meet potential partners, comprising the 15,4% of the interviewed. Among the group that used primarily online approaches the preference between social media apps (Instagram) or date apps (Tinder, Grindr, Bumble, Others) was 69,7% (23) choose Date Apps, and 30,3 % (10) choose Instagram (Fig 2. b)
From this polls, 18 participants were further interviewed about this choices. Men from Chile (8), Argentina (1) and Spain (1) explained that they would choose online because they didn't have to wonder if the other man was gay or sexually/romantically interested in men, as it was assumed in the context. They mentioned this was important, because of the fear of homophobia and agressions if they would flirt with the wrong person. In contrast, men from UK (4), Brasil (2) and Belgium (2) choose to flirt in real life, because it felt more natural and they felt free to flirt in real life (Table 1).
Then people was asked about the signals they used to flirt in real life, and 100% mentioned: Maintained Eye contact (with a smile), Touch and proximity, Direct compliments and Invitations (to kiss, or intimacy) as their most evident signals (Table 2).

Discussion

Social media and dating apps have been entering romantic life of people both positively and negatively, in this study, social media seems to be a facilitator for gay people around the world to feel safer when flirting or looking for a potential partner or romantic interested. Culture seems to have an impact as well, because people from countries such as Belgium, UK or Brasil feel more open to flirt with other men in real life situations. Surprisingly, a great number of gay men and people have had difficulties identifying signs and wouldn't be able to tell if someone is flirting with them. As a counter part, many signals can be perceived as someone being friendly or kind ie. compliments could be easily misunderstood as someone being "friendly" rather than "flirty". When asking the participants for signals that could distinguish them from being friendly, 2 main ways appeared Touch and Direct Invitations, followed by Compliments and Maintained Eye Contact. This signals are in concordance with what was described for Heterosexual people (1), but further studies are necessary.

Conclusions

Most gay men in the international community have been in situations they couldn't tell if someone was flirting with them, and would choose to look for partners using online methods such as social media (Instagram) or dating apps (Tinder, Grindr, Others). There seems to be an association between this and culture, as some poeple would choose online because they can readily tell the othe man is sexually or romantically interested in other men, because of the context, and wouldn't choose real life flirting because of fear of homophobic reactions. In real life, signals for flirting used in the international gay community are: Maintained Eye Contact, Compliments, Touch and Proximity and Invitations.

Methods

Polls: General Polls were done by voting either on Instagram polls, Google or In street short interviews in different cities world wide (Brussels, London, Madrid, Barcelona and Santiago de Chile). Each poll presented 4 options and simple choice was taken as a positive answer. Data was collected and reported as show in results.

Interviews: Between participants of the general polls and people that wanted to participate, interviews were conducted either through zoom or in person to ask more thoroughly about 4 main subjects Gaydar (How to tell when someone is gay), What methods they use to meet potential partners, Flirting signals used by them, and Impact of social media. The criteria of inclusion were: Cis Male defined as Men Sexually or Romantically interested in other Cis Male and Gay, Ages between 18 to 45 years old, Single or Recently in a Relationship (no more than 2 month into the relationship), and to have been living in the country/city for at least 2 years to be considered part of said country.

Participants: Country representation for the polls was: Total: 42, Chile: Chile: 26, UK: 6, Brazil: 2, Belgium: 2, Spain: 2, USA: 2, Argentina: 1, Paraguay: 1. For the interviews: Total: Spain: 1, Brazil: 2, Belgium: 2, UK: 4, Argentina: 1, Chile: 8

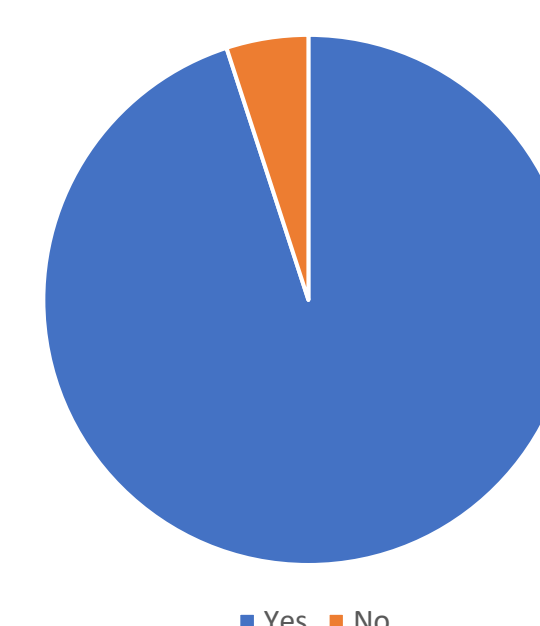Graphics: Graphics were made using Microsoft Excel.

Fig. 1: Identifying Flirting Signs, The graphic shows the answer of 41 cis gay men that identified to have been in situations were they couldn't tell someone was flirting with them (answer Yes in Blue, 40, comprising 95,2%) or weren't in such situation (answer No in Orange, 2, comprising 4,8%).
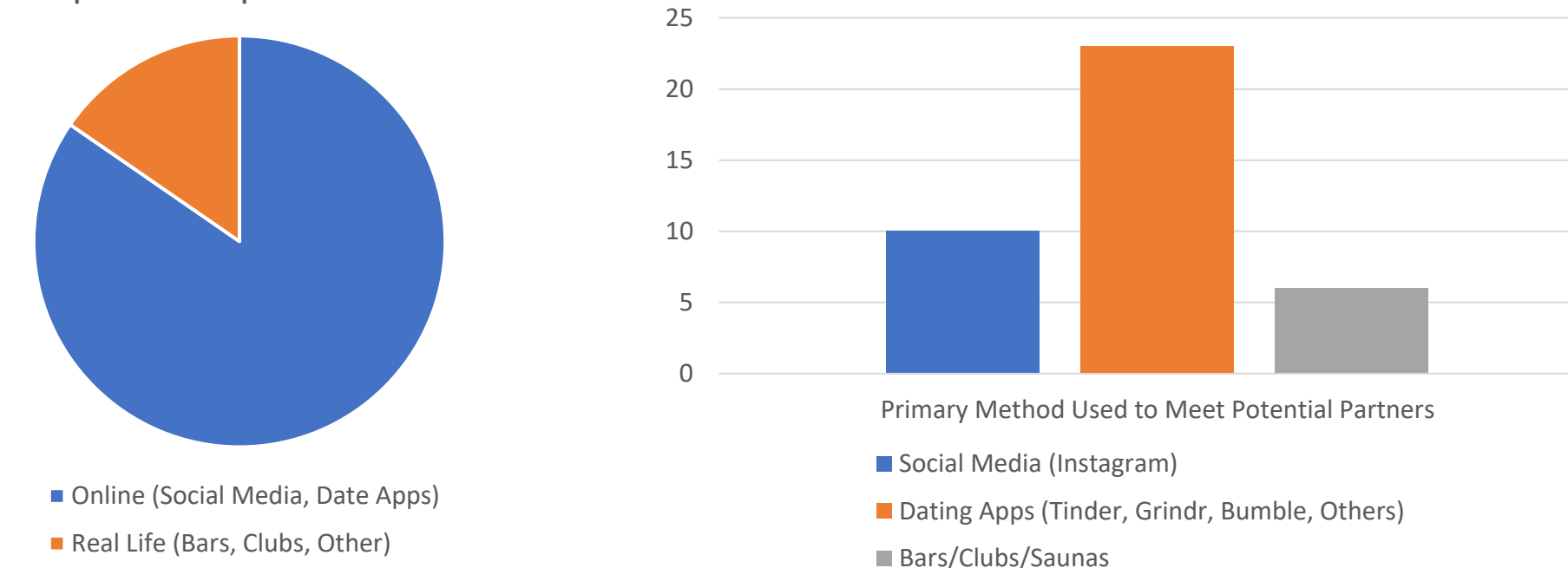

Fig. 2: Main and Primary places used to meet potential partners: a) The graphic shows the primary method used by gay men to meet potential partners, 33 (85%) would choose Online methods such as Social Media or Dating Apps as a Primary Method, while 6 (15%) would choose to flirt or meet potential partners in real life (Bars, Clubs, Other). b) The graphic shows more especifically that 10 (24,6%) would choose Instagram to meet potential partners, 23 (59%) would choose dating apps such as Tinder, Grindr or Bumble, and 6 (15,4%) would choose real life.

Table 1: Reasons for choosing onlineor real life situations

Reasons for choosing Online or Real Life	
To choosing Online	Can assume the interest has the same sex preference, can know the person before
To choosing in Real Life	Feels more natural, works better
Not choosing Online	Feels Unnatural, Can become an eternal chat
Not choosing in real life	Fear of agression and Homophobia, fear of rejection

This table shows some of the reasons pointed by the interviewed to either choose online or real life situations to meet potential partners, and reasons why they didn't choose the other way.

Table 2: Flirting Signals used by Gay Men

Maintained Eye Contact	ie: Maintained stare, or short sights accompanied with a smile
Compliments	ie. You look so handsome
Invitations	ie. We should kiss
Touch and Proximity	ie. Leaning on towards the person, touching arms or back

This table shows the principal flirting signals used by gay men in the international community in real life situations.

Aknowledgments

Finance

Interviews

Do you want to participate in the interviews or know someone that could help me, please reach me at my email: Jorge.cerda.Taiba@gmail.com

References

1. Smith J. (2018). Flirtology: Stop swiping, start flirting and find love. Bantam Press.