

ROMANCING THE PHONE

SEAN RAD, the co-founder of Tinder, wants you to swipe right into the future



I

LIKE HIM/her. And he/she likes me – or at least the pictures that I’ve carefully selected for my profile. We match. We’re just in time to type a shy “hey” and we’ve already planned to go out for drinks – or, a couple of minutes after starting the conversation, the chat disappears because he/she has blocked me. These are two of the most common scenarios when entering the multifaceted universe of online dating.

Before 2012, this universe was pretty much confined to a database of names and faces. When Sean Rad co-founded Tinder six years ago, he elevated the concept with a simple yet crucial feature: the “swipe”. Two years after its initial launch, the service was available almost anywhere in the world and

reached the milestone of one billion matches per day. Today, Tinder is much more than a successful app that originated from a small Californian start-up. Rather, it’s one of the most defining means of human interaction in the digital era.

According to a survey conducted by online dating service Badoo earlier this year, millennials spend, on average, an astonishing 10 hours per week looking for love – or something akin to that – on dating apps. Most of these dating services are modelled on or inspired by Tinder, which has been at forefront of the revolution that has changed what it means to meet someone in the 21st

century.

“Years ago, we came up with this idea: if I like somebody, I can swipe right and like them, but they won’t know that until they also like me back – it removes the element of rejection,” Rad recently remarked during a talk at Rise Hong Kong, a conference that brings together the world’s biggest companies and start-ups. “That was what really revolutionised not just the online dating space, but dating, period. The ‘swipe’ is also such a cool thing to remember and talk about – transforming a very simple concept.”

Rad’s inaugural Asia talk was one of the most anticipated ones at Rise; journalists

and attendees were equally excited to hear the story of one of the most successful and influential tech companies of the decade. But while Rad discussed how he and his partner originally conceptualised and developed their vision, and stressed the importance of thinking globally rather than locally, he primarily focused on the future of the dating world – and how Tinder will evolve and adapt.

As a hypothetical scenario to highlight how artificial intelligence (AI) will play an ever-growing role in every aspect of our lives, Rad related this anecdote: “Hey Sean, there’s a great girl that I think you’re gonna like. You have a lot of friends in common, you both come from a similar cultural background and you’re both free Thursday night. How about coffee?”

In fact, AI was the hot topic at Rise, with entrepreneurs and investors from every sector stressing how it will dramatically change technology in the near future. According to Rad, in short, our phones will become our matchmakers. Much like Siri, which already acts as a personal assistant for billions of people worldwide, dating apps will work similarly. Tinder, Rad believes, has the potential to once again lead the pack to the next chapter.

“Imagine how AI can crucially help create space,” he said towards the end of the talk. “It could know that if I’m with mum and we’re having lunch and I haven’t seen her in a while, maybe that work email shouldn’t even be presented to me. Taking this to the dating context, I think in five years, instead of me swiping on Tinder, I might talk to my phone.”

As Rad is about to end his 20-minute talk on the main stage, he reminds the audience how exciting it is to be an entrepreneur and a millennial living in an era of dramatic and rapid change, and about the new ways we will interact with each other, ourselves and the world around us. Ultimately, Rad talks about feelings – because, as he and Tinder have continually proved over the years, technology has the unstoppable power to mutate the way we express ourselves. #

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