

Marriage à la mode: The hospitality industry's connection to the dating services industry

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The dating services industry has grown strongly over the past five years worldwide, increasing in popularity despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which constrained its growth somewhat over 2020-2021. In the United Kingdom (UK), recent data suggest that dating services industry revenue grew at a compound annual rate of 3.8% over 2017-2022, including 1.3% growth in 2022, and is expected to reach GBP315.1 million in 2023 [1]. In New Zealand, the industry has seen similar steady revenue increases, with an expected annual growth rate of 3.04% and an estimated market volume of USD13.52 million by 2027 [2]. The growth of dating services has also been accelerated by the increasing numbers of people with access to the internet and smartphones. Dating applications and websites have radically transformed the way individuals are dating [3] and are extremely popular amongst individuals of all ages, ethnicities, social backgrounds, etc. [3, 4].

Research shows that each year, dating services contribute billions to the hospitality industry [1], as bars and restaurants have long been places where dating services, such as speed dating events, are hosted. The location and standard of these venues (including those for food and beverage) are used by speed dating event organisers as factors of appeal, as they are critical influences on customers' decisions about venue suitability [5, 6]. Entertainment is another factor connecting the dating and hospitality industries. Indeed, entertainment plays a significant role in the level of customer satisfaction with a hospitality organisation/venue, as customers' experiences rely partly on the quality of entertainment provided by the venues [7, 8]. For dating services, speed dating events are adult entertainment events in which the customer participants are the main actors [3].

However, even though speed dating events are organised in hospitality venues such as bars and restaurants, there is a dearth of research that captures the interactions and interplay between the dating services industry (planning and delivering speed dating events), and the hospitality industry (hosting speed dating events). We therefore conducted a pilot study as a

on the tourism and hospitality sectors.



platform for future research, and examined the connections between the dating and hospitality industries, aiming to conceptualise speed dating as a type of event, and explore speed dating services as an intersection between the dating, hospitality, and events industries. The study collected online feedback and comments on the TripAdvisor platform from 40 speed dating participants who had attended speed dating events organised by DateinaDash (a UK-based speed dating company). Our analysis revealed that the term “venue” was in the top tier of the most frequently mentioned words in the feedback and comments provided by participants in speed dating events.

*A great night out at great **venues** with great value for money. A good way to meet new people in London.*

The pilot study revealed that the venue plays a significant role in the experience of speed daters, and that the key service and event characteristics that mattered most to them were the atmosphere, entertainment, feeling of togetherness, and the planning and organisation.

*I attended the speed dating events which are **great fun!** Relaxed **atmosphere** and good to **meet people** from a variety of backgrounds. If you haven't attended before, give speed dating a try!*

*This was an organised and **well-run event** that was well-attended. The **venue** is a nice pub in Richmond. **Great way to meet people.***

These preliminary findings indicate that the dating services and hospitality industries are interconnected, and that entertainment, service interaction, and the hospitality venues' ambiance are central factors for both the dating and hospitality industries. Nevertheless, future research is needed to investigate further intersectional gaps, and specifically, to examine the synergies between business partners delivering products and services at the intersection between dating and hospitality.

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