

**What Happens Next – 6.27.2021**  
**China's Global Ambitions and Internet Dating**  
**Internet Dating Panel**

Larry Bernstein:

I'll start a question for you and please Susan and Tariq, please join in whenever you want. You mentioned that you thought online dating makes things safer, Susan obviously disagrees. Why do you think there's more safety with online than at the bar?

Brad Schneider:

I don't know if you've ever seen men hitting on women at a bar or men hitting on a man or whatever it is, but men can definitely be aggressive and they don't take rejection well. I've seen this firsthand. And it's much more comfortable to give that rejection, I think, online rather than face to face with somebody that may be less accepting or have an ability to sort of disagree with your rejection. So my sense, at least from the women that I've spoken with, is, it's much comfortable, it's much easier to make people disappear online than if they were bothering you at a bar.

Susan Patton:

It's fair... but that the alternative is a bar. Why is the alternative to online dating going to a bar?

Brad Schneider:

Sorry, I'm getting the New York City perspective. So I think the avenues you discussed are much more organic, but-

Susan Patton:

I'm on 86th Street, I have been for 45 years, I've been on East 86th Street, so I totally get the New York City perspective. No, not a bar, you don't go to a single's bar. That's always been a downscale, unwholesome way to meet anybody. You know that. You know that.

Brad Schneider:

I don't disagree. I don't disagree.

Larry Bernstein:

Tariq, what do you think of some of the concerns about internet dating from my panelists?

Tariq Shaukat:

I think the nature of dating is that you are meeting strangers. In some way, I think the point on, if you can meet somebody who is known to a friend, to a cleric, to someone else, of course, that is likely to be safer than meeting a random stranger in a bar, in a park, on a dating app, any number of different things. I think Brad's point, though, is right, we hear that people are much more comfortable meeting somebody virtually, because then they do have the ability to say,

"No," the rejection is less, there's no chance of something happening with your drink. There's no chance of somebody following you home. Any of those things that does actually happen in the real world, unfortunately, and is problematic. So we do hear a number of things like that.

And there's the psychological safety piece that Brad also, I think, spoke a lot about as well. The dating world, particularly right now is very fraught. And the notion of being ghosted or the level of rejection that exists within the world is emotionally very challenging for a lot of people, both men and women. And there's a lot of safety that comes from being able to control the conversation, in our case for women being able to make the first move, say, "Okay, now we've matched, is this somebody I actually want to talk to in more detail?" Is something that they find both reassuring and leading to a healthier relationship, if they decide they want to continue it moving forward.

Larry Bernstein:

I have a question from my friend, Jeremy Clorfene, he's a psychologist, he wants to know about emotional management. Is it harder online? Because there's just so many more opportunities that you are going to get a higher failure rate? In finance, for example, even if a bet is slightly weighted towards winning versus losing, losing hurts a lot. When you fail so many times online, is that more of an emotional toll? Or, Brad, were you saying that, because there's so many in progress, you can't even remember the people you failed to meet?

Brad Schneider:

Yeah. I think it skews more in that direction. I think the cost of failure, that feeling is not present. Maybe if it's something that's very new to you and no one's responding, but I think for everybody, no matter what your "credentials" are in dating, you're getting ghosted, people are not responding, you're not matching at different periods. And it just becomes part of the way the system works, so I know very few people that get upset about that phase of it. Obviously, if you start meeting a lot of people, that rejection hurts, there's a real cost to that.

Tariq Shaukat:

And I think it's worth keeping in mind that there are sort of two stages to the rejection, if you will. One of them is, does somebody that you've decided you want to match with reciprocate? Because of the double opt-in nature, in many cases, you've swiped right on so many people, you don't remember somebody who didn't actually swipe right on you. And so I think that there is... Versus going to a bar or park, whatever it happens to be, and randomly walking up to someone, you remember every one of those instances, where you don't online, because you're stating an initial interest.

I think the ghosting piece is something that we hear is one of the biggest psychological issues that people deal with in online dating, and I think in dating in general. And that is once you've started the conversation, does someone abruptly end it and end it in a formal way, they just disappear? And we've actually started some programs, because one thing you find is people don't know how to say I'm not interested. And so in many cases, they'll just disappear, unmatched, or something like that. And we've found that when we do what we call, gentle let downs, which are prompts that you can actually just give to say, "Look, this has been fun, but

I'm just not interested in continuing." I'm sure it's more elegant than that, but that, that actually lessens the emotional toll on both sides. So I think there are ways that you can certainly deal with the ghosting issue that happens, but make people feel better and safer about it.

Larry Bernstein:

Susan I agree with you about the desire for women, particularly successful women, to want to start their career and worry about relationships later. And I've been telling my daughter, exactly, to follow your playbook. I've been encouraging her to take accelerate one versus the other. Why do you think women have been choosing this other approach of career first? What's driving that?

Susan Patton:

Oh, I think it's a feminist, the militant feminist rhetoric that is, they hate men, they think that women waste themselves by aspiring to marriage and motherhood. When I was a student back in the '70s, when the women's movement was very loud and relatively new, I remember sitting with my female classmates at Princeton, talking about what we hope for, what we want, what we want to do with our lives when we graduate. And when I would say, "I want to be married and have children." They looked at me like I was a heretic, like I was a betrayer of the sisterhood. And this is pretty powerful stuff, when you're in your late teens or early 20s to have all the women around you sort of hating on you for not aspiring to bigger things than those traditional values.

But I think that that harmful rhetoric persists today. I know many women who feel sort of goaded into pursuing lofty professional goals that they might not otherwise have really chosen, but feeling like, wow, they couldn't bear the assault of their female colleagues who were getting their PhDs and beyond PhDs and becoming these Titans of Industry. It's great. I mean, I have classmates who are indeed Titans of Industry, and almost all of them are also married and have families, and if you ask them, what is the greatest accomplishment in their lives, they'll tell you it's going to be their children, their family. So I think that there has been feminist that's been very, very harmful to young women, and I think that persists.

Larry Bernstein:

The question about dating people at work. That used to be an unbelievably common approach to finding a spouse. My wife worked at Salomon Brothers when I was working there. Why have we decided, as a society, to condemn that approach of spouse discovery? Is that bad public policy? Should we fight against it?

Susan Patton:

I think that office romances, women never fare well in an office romance. Invariably, it's a younger woman who gets involved with an older man, somebody who maybe is their boss or somebody who they look up to, or as a mentor. It's a mistake. You don't get involved with somebody you work with. Women put their professional credibility at risk when they become known as so-and-so's girlfriends, so-and-so's mistress, so-and-so's girl.

It diminishes a woman's professional persona, when she is known... Her dating life doesn't belong in the office, period. It shouldn't be a topic of office conversation. So women should just stay away from that. And, again, I know many people who meet at work, and particularly, if you work at a place like Salomon Brothers, it's huge. I mean, there are thousands of people that work there, I guess, it could go undetected for maybe longer than if you work in a small company. But I think either way, it's hazardous for young women to get involved with anybody at their office.

Larry Bernstein:

Brad, you gave a lot of criteria for who internet dating works for and who it doesn't, do you think that internet dating is best served when you are just trying to get your foot in the door, and then, when you, maybe, have a mindset change that you want to get married, you sort of drop off and look for something else? How do you think of it strategically?

Brad Schneider:

I mean, I don't know that people definitively approach it differently. I mean, I've seen people go from looking for short-term to long-term, and they've used online dating or not I'll use online dating, and that really hasn't changed. I mean, in general, there's a lot written on choice theory, and when you should make a decision on something, which we've actually talked about a lot in the early days of using these services.

I think it penalizes you to wait too late, if you're looking for something long-term. I think it's like going to a diner that has a 1000 things on the menu, the more options you have, the less good you'll about making an individual one. Maybe after you've made it and committed to it, you'll feel better down the road, but it makes it just very hard to choose. I mean, my advice would be to choose sooner than later, because I've seen most people that let it go too long. It's a black hole and they end up just single forever.

Larry Bernstein:

I have a question for Tariq about differences between age cohorts and their use of the app. For example, I have a number of divorced friends in their fifties and sixties who are into relationships. And I said, how did you two meet? And my friend would say, are you kidding? Of course, online dating. How else would we have met otherwise? How common is the online dating cohorts in the fifties and sixties as compared to say teens, twenties and thirties?

Tariq Shaukat:

Well, certainly the majority of, I think probably most dating apps are people in their twenties and thirties because that's where the single population is. But some of the fastest growing cohorts and segments that we have are people in the gen X and boomer segments, if you will. In most cases in those segments, divorced and coming back to find somebody else. So it is definitely common.

I think that there's, I would venture to say zero stigma, if you are 22 years old and using a dating app, there's still a little bit of people in their fifties and sixties who have the lingering stigma of

how this used to be perceived back in the early 2000s or the late nineties or something like that. So it's a little bit of a harder sell.

Typically, they are encouraged by their friends to go online and to try out the dating apps. We have a mode called incognito mode where you can actually go in and get your feet wet if you will, without anyone seeing you. And that's proven to be very popular with divorced people who are just trying to understand what this is all about and how it works. And so you do see more and more of it. I'd say there's probably just a little bit more of that stigma in the early days until someone really gets used to it.

Larry Bernstein:

And what do you see is the future for these dating apps? It seems to have gotten more than a majority of daters are involved in this. Is it tipping, is it completely tipped? What's the pushback?

Tariq Shaukat:

I mean, what we're hearing at least is... So this is Tariq. What we're hearing at least is that people, as I mentioned, they do like some of the elements that are provided by a dating app, right? The idea of video chatting before meeting somebody at a restaurant or at a bar, wherever you're going to meet somebody, is something that they do want to do. To Brad's point, it's hard to get to know somebody through a profile. It's also hard to get to know somebody in a nightclub or in a random encounter in a coffee shop or something like that.

And so the idea of using video chat, using some of the trivia games, things like that to get to know people is something they enjoy. Of course, they want to be able to do it while meeting somebody in person, which you haven't been able to do for the past year. And so a lot of what we're seeing is this kind of hybrid version of you meet somebody online, you continue the conversation online, but you're also meeting with them in person as well. And you're using some of the tools that we and others provide to get to know the person even better than you might otherwise.

Larry Bernstein:

Brad, I want to ask you a question about international versus US dating. In China, for example, there's WhatsApp, is very popular. There apps where you can find out where someone of the opposite sex is located and you can communicate with them and encourage them to join you at a restaurant. How would you contrast what goes on overseas versus what's going on around here?

Brad Schneider:

It's interesting though, the first time I actually saw online dating was when I was in China. I used to go there often for work and I'll never forget the first time I saw WhatsApp, we were at a nightclub in Shanghai and a guy much younger than me pulled out the app and said, watch this. And it shows you basically a list of women. He had selected women and basically how far they were from where we were located. And he then proceeded to send out probably 50 messages

to the 50 closest women. Then the next thing I know, we're at a nightclub with 10 new people we just met, which was mind blowing to me at that point. I was like, what's this WhatsApp? We got to start investing in this thing. And so I think they sort of led the revolution somewhat over in China.

And then I think though the way it's used today is pretty similar internationally versus here. I think the apps that have market share change by region and by country, but one interesting feature that many of added, including Bumble and Tinder and all the others, is the ability to change your location.

So in the past, and friends of mine have also done this in the past, is let's say you're planning to go on a European vacation. You set your location ahead of time to the city that you're going to, you meet three or four people online and you end up meeting maybe one or two in person. And you end up having a very different experience with a local, which is something I highly recommend.

Larry Bernstein:

Susan, what are your thoughts about that?

Susan Patton:

I hate the idea of, again, lining up your canoodling around the world, internationally, from the convenience of your couch. There's something just so unwholesome and scary about that. And there's no way you're going to convince me that truth comes over online dating sites. It doesn't. It just doesn't.

The psychological barriers against posting exactly who you are or how successful you are, how wealthy you are, how whatever you, people are not truthful online. You know that. You know that, everybody knows that.

You enter into this knowing there's a percentage of untruthfulness that you're going to be dealing with. I don't know. The idea of having to set up your international canoodling before you leave. I don't know. Can't you go to an art museum when you get to wherever your destination is and meet somebody nice while you're looking at paintings? Can't you go for a stroll through some, I don't know, historic park or street or whatever, and more organically, more naturally, meet the locals that way? Doesn't that sound better? I think that sounds better.

Larry Bernstein:

Brad, back to you. We talked about truthfulness. Susan was just saying that there's a lot of falsehoods, as you've been in an internet dating world, to what extent is untruthfulness a problem, are there repercussions for lying?

Brad Schneider:

I completely agree. The untruthfulness factor is extremely high, and I think it's something that has more of an impact early on is, you're unfamiliar with it and it's hard for you to spot what is the truth and what is the lie. I like to talk about this a lot, but within internet profiles, there's a lot of inflation.

I mean, one common one is height inflation. And this happened before the internet with male profiles. There's been so much height inflation that no one actually knows what different heights actually mean in real life. There was one point where I was telling the truth about my height and people swore I was taller, and what it came down to was that everyone else was lying and I wasn't. So their metric, it was miscalibrated as a result of that.

But I will say that over time, you do become pretty attuned to the red flags. You've had enough data points of seeing a profile, meeting someone in person and seeing the mismatch to very easily be able to identify, okay, what is this person lying about? When I was doing this aggressively, anything that looked remotely questionable in a given category that I was looking at was a left swipe or someone I would not meet up with because it is a big problem.

Larry Bernstein:

Tariq, I just got an email from Jeff Benjamin. What he says is that, he looked at the research of a book by Stanford professor Paul Oyer. And he mentioned that he did the analysis of the dating sites, and he did find that there was misleading information about the date of a selfie, height, weight, age, et cetera. But the amounts weren't that much. Men lied less than women. I forgot the numbers, but it was like 18 months younger for men and 36 months for women. When you guys over at Bumble look at this stuff and judge it, is it something that you police, you're concerned about, care about, accuracy and profiles, what is Bumble's role in that?

Tariq Shaukat:

I'm not familiar with the book, although Jeff has mentioned it. We have a very activist stance on this, I guess, is probably the best way to say it, so there's an option that we highly encourage and you to get far more likes and that sort of thing to verify your profile. And verifying your profile is using, is actually us determining that you really are, who you say you are in your photo, as an example.

That is something that we definitely encourage, we know results in better matches and in greater confidence in people doing the matches. So there's things like that, that we're putting in place to try and improve the sense of, you are who you say you are.

We also are very active in getting feedback from our users. And if they say, look, I met so-and-so and they're really this and not that, they don't look like their photo, whatever, or they're lying about who they are, or they're in fact, married when they say they're single or things like that, we will ban them from the platform.

We will very actively go ahead and do that. We have a set of terms and conditions that are very clear, and our general sense of it, and this is not how every app in the dating world operates, but it's something that we're very proud of is, we would rather have the safest environment that we can possibly create online, even if it means there'll be fewer users on it, if that means that we actually are able to generate healthier relationships for people. And so that is something that we put a lot of time and a lot of effort into, both listening to our users and getting their feedback on people, as well as giving them tools to kind of ferret out who is actually telling the truth and who is not.

Larry Bernstein:

And how should a single person evaluate which site to go. I know there's, JDate, Tinder, Hinge, and Bumble, what distinguishes these various platforms and what is appropriate for a different type of people?

Tariq Shaukat:

. I was just going to say, they should just use Bumble.

Brad Schneider:

A lot of people just follow where the volume is, and I think that's moved over time. And I think in different age buckets and different geographies, also the type of people is different. So I think most people will try them all out and sort of find the one that's right for them and their age group. I don't think there's one that is better for everybody. I find them very different and over the years, their personalities changed. And it may be that I changed or it may be that the app's changed. It's hard to divide the two up.

Tariq Shaukat:

People do have multiple dating apps on their phone at any given time. The average in our surveys is two, that they're actively using both at the same time, and there's different pools. There's also different functionality. We've actually had, we have religion filters or badges on there, where you can say that you are looking for somebody of a certain religion, as an example, to have some of the features that you might find on a more religiously oriented app. We've actually had some of the clerics in different places recommend how to use Bumble and some of the other dating apps out there to find people in their community that you want to match with. And so there's a lot of functionality built into these, but they all, to Brad's point, have different personalities and cultures and kind of encourage different types of engagement.

Larry Bernstein:

This is going to sound like a crazy question Tariq, but I've seen recent surveys that parents care less about the religion of the potential spouse and more about their political affiliation. Is that something that you filter?

Tariq Shaukat:

You can, as I mentioned, there's 150 different badges that you can select. And we do offer, are you conservative, liberal, or I can't remember what all the choices are, just moderates probably. The third one, we do actually see this as something super important to people on the platform and, again, in the survey. So we saw particularly around the election, super high adoption of these different badges, right? Saying basically not, are you pro Trump or pro Biden, or something like that, but are you conservative or liberal or moderate, or what have you. And the most recent survey, 75% of people say that their intent is to date somebody whose political and social views roughly align, my guess is this is pretty similar to what would happen in real life. You would just find out later, most people don't talk about deep social issues on their first date,



but it is something that we're finding, particularly the younger population is increasingly eager to have as part of that first date conversation.

Larry Bernstein:

Brad, we got another question from Jeff Benjamin. Jeff mentions again from the Paul Oyer book, that he totally agrees with you about thick markets. And so when Oyer got divorced, he started on match.com because at the time they had the thickest markets, but he wasn't meeting peers.

And so even though the JDate market was much smaller, it had more of the people that he thought he had a better chance to match with. And he ended up marrying someone he met on J-Date. How do you think about the filtering process? How to find someone, is it just you, some guy's got 50 conversations going, it's almost, I can't even imagine what percentage of your day is spent on that. How do you do a proper filtering process to find someone who is going to be a potential match?

Brad Schneider:

It's a really tough problem. I really did most of this a couple of years back, but it felt like a part-time job, just the amount of swiping that you had to do, the sort of questions you had to ask. You could figure out a lot, you could sort of narrow down things about, general personality traits, general range of looks and interests, but it was hard to sort of get the exactness, and the only way to deal with that was to meet people in person, unfortunately. But it was overwhelming. I remember years ago I had friends that were hiring consultants that would basically respond to the conversations for them. They would be the man in these conversations. So it was two women basically talking to each other, which, to Susan's point, is even more misleading because it's now a complete fabrication of reality.

Susan Patton:

Yes. But you have that whole Cyrano de Bergerac element to it that makes it so romantic.

Larry Bernstein:

To what extent, Brad, how addictive is this and how does it make you just want the next one?

Brad Schneider:

People's heads are definitely on a swivel. It's a problem to overwhelm people with such choice. And a lot of it's, we talk about deep markets, liquid markets, a lot of that dating liquidity is not real. Because I can put out so much more demand than I can actually satisfy. And so you've always got somebody else matching while you're sitting with somebody in front of you. And I think for males it's especially challenging because I think male mammals are, I think humans are the only mammals where males make sort of any preferences and don't just jump on any opportunity that they have. And so that's sort of a part of being an animal. And I think it confuses men to throw all these options at them, even when most of them are probably not

real. I think it hurts the institution of dating and it's challenging for sort of the long-term relationship.

Larry Bernstein:

I'm going to ask each of you to maybe how to wrap up and summarize your views, maybe end on a note of optimism. Tariq, why don't I start with you? What are you optimistic about as it relates to the internet dating and how would you conclude?

Tariq Shaukat:

Well, I think I'll make two points. I think one is to the point that Brad made earlier. We think, and I think, that internet dating has certainly created a lot of opportunity for people to be less lonely in the world, particularly speaking for myself as a relatively introverted person, I got married well before the current explosion of internet dating, but I can just sort of relate to the idea that it is hard to meet people in the real world. And this is a way, to my point earlier, to both meet potential romantic partners, but also platonic friends and professional, to expand your professional network as well. And so I'm very bullish on the social discovery space, certainly my kids now, who during the pandemic were using Outschool and Discord and things like that, they have friends they've never met in person that they've been invited to virtual birthday parties for it.

I think it's becoming more and more the norm for mobile first, mobile native people. So that's one piece of optimism there. I think the other just much more tactically, is we are seeing real changes in consumer behavior as vaccination rates do go up. And I hope they continue to go up at a very high pace, but it does seem to be the big unlock in people actually coming out and socializing, again, not just with their small pods and bubbles, but in general in the real world.

Larry Bernstein:

Thank you, Susan, do you have a note of optimism?

Susan Patton:

I do. Although it has absolutely nothing to do with dating. My optimism is that the pandemic is over and New York is opening up again. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is open again, a wonderful place to go and meet people, go look at some paintings, meet people who are also looking at paintings. And I'm hopeful that young women start to be savvier, smarter for themselves, more aware of what they really want and capable of saying it without the fear of punishment or cancellation, or ridicule.

Larry Bernstein:

Thank you. Brad, how would you sum it up?

Brad Schneider:

I'm definitely very optimistic on the space. I'll say that any sort of early technological change, any sort of early social change doesn't look the same in its final incarnation as it does in the

beginning. I would say don't be too quick to judge the fact that what we have today have a lot of problems, causes a lot of issues with dating. We're only in the first couple of years of this. If you give it another five, 10, 15, 20 years, I think you're going to see something that is going to work for more and more people. And I think it's certainly here to stay.

Larry Bernstein:

That ends today's session.