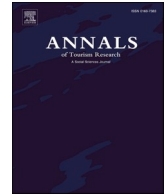




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Annals of Tourism Research

journal homepage: www.journals.elsevier.com/annals-of-tourism-research

Full Length Article

Digital intimacies in motion: Redefining sex in tourism

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ARTICLE INFO

Handling editor: Erdinç Çakmak

Keywords:

Cybersexual
Grindr
Sex as leisure
Digital intimacy
Emotional ambivalence
Queer tourism

ABSTRACT

This paper redefines sex in tourism by introducing cyber-sexual leisure – digitally mediated and emotionally ambivalent erotic engagements that unfold through platforms like Grindr during travel. Drawing on interviews with queer male tourists, we examine how fragmented, gamified, and affectively ambivalent interactions produce symbolic erotic pleasure, even in the absence of physical sex. Moving beyond outcome-oriented and corporeal understandings, sexual experience is conceptualised as a processual continuum encompassing anticipation, interaction, and emotional aftermath. A recursive model is proposed comprising four stages: digital engagement, affective and erotic investment, emotional and/or physical outcomes, and re-engagement or withdrawal. These dynamics are intensified by tourism conditions – mobility, anonymity, novelty, and compressed time – while also shaped by inequalities structuring visibility, desirability, and vulnerability in contemporary tourism.

Introduction

Sex has long been examined in tourism studies through lenses of commodification, deviance, or hedonism (Berdychevsky & Carr, 2020; Hall, 2013). This emphasis has often produced a skewed focus on prostitution and outcome-driven sexual acts, particularly within heterosexual contexts (Carr, 2016). Consequently, broader forms of sexual experience in tourism – especially those characterised by affect, play, and non-commercial interaction – remain comparatively under-theorised. There is thus a need to move beyond conventional notions of sex tourism and further develop the concept of sex as leisure in tourism.

This shift is especially important given the longstanding – yet often overlooked – connections between sex, mobility, and wellbeing, which are increasingly shaped by the rise of digital intimacy (DeLamater & Koepsel, 2017; Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2017). Emerging research in leisure and sexuality highlights how digitally mediated erotic practices can constitute meaningful forms of leisure engagement in their own right, rather than merely functioning as precursors to physical encounters (Kim & Berdychevsky, 2025). However, within tourism contexts, such practices remain underexamined, particularly in terms of their affective and processual dimensions. As mobile dating apps become embedded in the rhythms of travel, sexual experience is increasingly constituted through ongoing interactions across digital and physical domains. The conditions of tourism—novelty, mobility, liminality, and temporal compression (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015)—may further intensify these engagements, shaping how desire is anticipated, negotiated, and sometimes left unrealised.

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Received 4 September 2025; Received in revised form 9 May 2026; Accepted 10 May 2026

Available online 15 May 2026

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Examining these practices in tourism contexts is analytically valuable because mobility, unfamiliarity, and compressed time may amplify affective investment and experimentation, rendering visible dynamics of digitally mediated intimacy that may remain muted or routinised in everyday life. Rather than treating digital interaction as secondary to corporeal sex, this perspective foregrounds how erotic experience unfolds as a processual continuum – encompassing anticipation, interaction, possibility, and outcome – within conditions of mobility.

A queer perspective can expose the heteronormative assumptions underpinning much tourism research, opening space for conceptual approaches that centre diverse, non-heterosexual, and digitally mediated forms of intimacy (Usai et al., 2020). For queer men, mobile technologies such as Grindr have reconfigured how intimacy, desire, and sex are pursued, negotiated, and experienced during travel. However, little is known about how these digital practices operate specifically within tourism (c.f. Vorobjovas-Pinta & Dalla-Fontana, 2019; Katz, 2023; Qiu, Cohen, & Skinner, 2026; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026), particularly in terms of how digital interactions shape affective experience regardless of whether physical encounters occur. This is especially notable given tourism's long-standing recognition as a liminoid space for experimentation, risk-taking, and disinhibition (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Eiser & Ford, 1995).

Drawing on in-depth interviews with queer male tourists, the paper advances the concept of *cyber-sexual leisure* – defined as digitally mediated erotic practices, including messaging, image exchange, and fantasy-driven interaction, that constitute sexually meaningful forms of touristic leisure regardless of whether they culminate in physical sex. While empirically grounded in Grindr use, the concept offers broader insights into how intimacy, desire, and affect are increasingly organised through digital infrastructures in mobility contexts.

The aim of this paper is to examine how queer male tourists use Grindr during travel to engage in digitally mediated erotic practices that are affectively charged, contingent and shaped by tourism's structural and emotional conditions. Rather than positioning digital intimacy in opposition to corporeal encounters, the study conceptualises these practices as part of a broader process through which sexual experience is anticipated, negotiated, and experienced across digital and physical domains. To develop this argument, the paper situates cyber-sexual leisure within existing debates on sex as leisure, digital intimacy and queer affect. It then examines how Grindr mediates erotic and affective engagement during travel and presents empirical findings that illustrate the processual dynamics of digitally mediated sexual experience. In doing so, the paper contributes a more integrated and coherent understanding of sex in tourism as an affective, digitally mediated, and processual form of leisure.

From sex tourism to sex as leisure

The relationship between sex and tourism has traditionally been theorised through the lens of sex tourism, often defined as travel undertaken to seek commercial sexual services (Hall, 2013; Lu et al., 2020). This focus has overshadowed a broader spectrum of sexual experience in tourism, particularly those motivated by pleasure, curiosity, or consensual play. In response, scholars have shifted attention toward sex as leisure, a broader framework that foregrounds mutual consent, pleasure-seeking, and self-actualisation (Berdychevsky & Carr, 2020). It positions sex as a legitimate form of adult leisure within tourism experiences (Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2017).

Yet even within this literature, sex continues to be implicitly framed as outcome-oriented and corporeal, where erotic value is primarily located in physical acts. This tendency reflects what has been critiqued as 'the play of the sexual' (Berdychevsky & Carr, 2020), where the sexual act itself is privileged as the central site of pleasure, often unfolding in liminoid settings associated with tourism (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Carr, 2016). Such a framing risks overlooking the broader experiential processes through which sexual meaning and affect are produced.

Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this bias by foregrounding the affective, symbolic, and relational dimensions of sexual experience, particularly within digitally mediated environments. Studies on sexual non-monogamy and desirability in tourism, for instance, demonstrate how erotic experience is not confined to physical encounters but unfolds through ongoing negotiations of desire, identity, and relational positioning across contexts of mobility (Qiu, Cohen, & Skinner, 2026; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

These perspectives resonate with broader queer and cultural scholarship that critiques instrumental and commodified framings of sexuality, emphasising instead ambivalence, affect, and the instability of desire (Berlant, 2011; Ooi, 2021). Within tourism studies, however, such insights have only begun to be translated into understandings of sex as leisure, particularly in digitally mediated contexts. This gap is especially significant in the digital age, where geo-locative mobile dating applications have transformed how people connect, consume, and experience sexuality (James et al., 2025). In tourism contexts, these transformations are further intensified by mobility, novelty, and temporal compression, which reshape how sexual practices are experienced and organised across digital and physical domains. Despite these advances, existing research has yet to fully conceptualise sexual experience in tourism as a processual phenomenon. Addressing this gap, this paper reconceptualises sex as leisure in tourism as an affectively charged and processual phenomenon, in which digitally mediated interactions – such as chatting, image exchange, and fantasy – form integral components of sexual experience rather than merely preceding corporeal encounters.

Digital intimacy and mobile sexuality in tourism

Grindr, the most widely used geo-locative dating app for men who have sex with men, plays an increasingly prominent role in the mobile experiences of queer male travellers. While originally developed to facilitate casual sex through proximity-based matching, Grindr now operates as a digital infrastructure of intimacy enabling users to access local sexual cultures and engage in a range of erotic and social interactions while travelling (Katz, 2023; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

These platforms structure intimacy through datafied visibility, algorithmic sorting, and affective feedback loops (Lupton, 2020), reorganising how desire is experienced and pursued. Research on queer male tourists reveals how Grindr is used not only to facilitate sex but to navigate affective terrains of desirability, belonging and recognition (Katz, 2025; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026). This resonates with sociological accounts of mediated intimacy, where desire and connection are increasingly organised through platformed emotional economies rather than face-to-face interaction (Illouz, 2007, 2017). For instance, Yang (2023) shows how gay men from Taiwan used tourism and Grindr to escape local hierarchies of erotic capital and reposition themselves within more affirming sexual fields in Thailand, where their socio-cultural and economic privilege was valorised and eroticised. In Tel Aviv, tourists used Grindr to access idealised spaces of sexual freedom shaped by globalised scripts of gay masculinity; local men were often exoticized through the white Western gay gaze that fetishised bearded, hairy and tanned bodies (Katz, 2025).

Yet these platformed forms of intimacy are not experienced evenly. Access to visibility and connection remains structured by intersecting forms of capital – including mobility, language, and bodily aesthetics – which shape users' positioning within digital sexual fields (Roth, 2014; Wu & Trotter, 2022). While tourist status may temporarily enhance desirability, it does not override broader hierarchies of race, masculinity, and platform-mediated filtering (Hammack et al., 2022; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

Beyond arranging physical encounters, Grindr has been shown to offer forms of erotic play, visual stimulation, and emotionally charged digital connection – features deeply reflective of techno-sexuality (Race, 2016; Tziallas, 2015). However, this concept does not specifically address tourism-related phenomena such as geographic mobility (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Dalla-Fontana, 2019; Yang, 2023), the symbolic consumption of place (Edensor, 2008), or the intensified emotional dynamics arising from unfamiliar socio-cultural contexts (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). By contrast, this study situates Grindr explicitly within tourism, conceptualising the platform as an infrastructural mechanism enabling queer male tourists to digitally navigate and access local erotic fields characterised by differing socio-cultural dynamics (Katz, 2023).

Grindr thus emerges as a temporary digital space both shaped by and shaping tourism experiences – facilitating fantasy, voyeurism, playful exploration, and affective stimulation that may or may not culminate in physical sexual encounters, but nonetheless transform tourists' emotional, symbolic, and experiential engagements with place (Katz, 2023). These practices echo queer accounts of relational desire as performative, contingent, and shaped by dominant cultural scripts rather than purely individual choice (Muñoz, 2025). Nevertheless, this form of transient digital intimacy is often entangled with ambivalence. From a media-sociological perspective, such platforms reorganise agency and social relations by structuring when, how, and with whom intimacy becomes possible (Hepp, 2022). Platforms like Grindr offer both recognition and precarity: they allow queer users to craft idealised selves while exposing them to rejection, racialisation, and emotional vulnerability (Mowlabocus, 2020; Shield, 2018). These contradictions mirror broader dynamics of tourism as spaces of disinhibition and heightened affective risk (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015; Eiser & Ford, 1995).

These dynamics underscore the need to reconceptualise sex as leisure in tourism, not merely as a corporeal or outcome-driven activity, but as an affectively charged engagement within digital sexual fields. By explicitly bridging concepts from sex as leisure, techno-sexuality, and queer affect theory within tourism contexts – where geographic mobility, novelty, anonymity, temporal compression, and liminality may distinctly amplify and reshape digitally mediated sexual experiences – this paper proposes cyber-sexual leisure as a novel theoretical construct. Cyber-sexual leisure thus offers new insights into how digitally mediated sexual practices unfold within tourism spaces and reshape queer tourists' emotional and symbolic relationships with transient places, cultures, and social encounters. Rather than positioning digital interaction as secondary to corporeal sex, this perspective suggests that sexual experience unfolds through a continuum of anticipation, interaction, and possibility, in which physical encounters represent one potential outcome among many.

Affective and digitally mediated pleasures

Understanding the experiential dimensions of cyber-sexual leisure requires attention to how affect, embodiment, and place operate within digitally mediated tourism experiences. Place has long been central to tourism theory, not merely as a geographic location but as an affective and symbolic construct shaped through embodied encounters (Crouch, 2000). Scholars have argued that leisure and tourism are not discrete domains but overlapping, emotionally charged processes involving encounters with people, spaces, and cultural imaginaries (Edensor, 2008; Rojek, 1995). For cyber-sexual tourists, however, these encounters are not confined to physical or spatial domains; they also extend into parallel digital terrains. Grindr and similar mobile apps (e.g., Tinder) create a cyber-sexual overlay atop the physical landscape, hybridising touristic experience and enabling users to navigate unfamiliar destinations through erotic interaction, fantasy, and voyeuristic exploration (James et al., 2025; Katz, 2023).

This dynamic invites a deeper theorisation of a gay tourist gaze – not merely as the visual consumption of place and bodies, but as a digitally mediated, affectively charged, and often ambivalent engagement with local sexual cultures. By ambivalence, we refer to the co-presence of pleasure and deflation. Drawing on sexual field theory, this gaze is shaped by global hierarchies of desirability, in which race, masculinities, and bodily aesthetics mediate access to intimacy, visibility, and erotic capital (Green, 2008; Yang, 2023).

Recent scholarship in media and sexuality studies conceptualises smartphones as infrastructures of queer intimacy through which desire, reassurance, and emotional regulation are negotiated across everyday and exceptional contexts (Hakim et al., 2025; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026). The emotional ambivalence of cyber-sexual leisure is further illuminated through queer affect theory, which explores the visceral, pre-conscious, and relational intensities that circulate between bodies, technologies, and environments (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011). Digital self-presentation and desirability management among gay men have been shown to involve sustained affective and aesthetic labour within competitive visual economies (Hakim, 2019). Mobile dating apps like Grindr function as portable infrastructures of intimacy, where desire, mobility, and bodily representation converge. Designed around visual economies and gamified interaction, these apps promote snap judgments, strategic self-presentation, and dopamine-driven scrolling.

On Grindr, this manifests through repetitive swiping, algorithmic proximity sorting, and the pursuit of gratification via likes, taps, and photo exchanges. These mechanisms encourage users to engage in continuous play, driven by anticipation, feedback loops, and competition for digital visibility. Such dynamics reflect a broader cultural shift toward the gamification of desire, in which intimacy is pursued through metrics like distance, aesthetics, and response speed (Miles, 2020; Race, 2016).

On these platforms – where pleasure and invalidation, agency and vulnerability intersect – emotional ambivalence becomes inevitable (Berlant, 2011). Drawing on Berlant's concept of *cruel optimism*, this ambivalence reflects attachments to digital intimacy that are affectively sustaining yet structurally unstable: users remain invested in forms of connection that promise affirmation, excitement, or belonging, even as these same attachments repeatedly produce disappointment, exhaustion, or emotional deflation.

Rather than resolving this ambivalence, users engage in ongoing emotional labour to sustain participation in these environments – curating profiles, managing impression, monitoring responses, and seeking symbolic validation through attention, taps, or flirtation (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026). Emotional labour has been widely theorised within critical sociological and queer scholarship in relation to affect, commodification, and the appropriation of difference (Ooi, 2021). However, rather than mobilising emotional labour as a political-economic category, this paper adopts it as an analytic concept to capture the affective and relational work participants describe in managing visibility, desire, and ongoing ambivalence on digital platforms during travel.

Emotional labour thus becomes central precisely because ambivalence cannot be eliminated; it is the work required to navigate a digital environment structured by simultaneous possibility and precarity. For queer male tourists, this ambivalence is often intensified by the novelty of travel, time scarcity, and a reduced perception of risk in unfamiliar social contexts (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). As such, the navigation of digital intimacy during travel is not solely about pursuing sex or connection, but about managing a complex emotional landscape of anticipation, comparison, rejection, and fantasy. In this way, emotional labour is not a remedy for ambivalence but one of its defining modalities, aligning with Berlant's (2011) argument that ambivalence is sustained, rather than resolved, through everyday affective practices.

It is within this context that cyber-sexual leisure emerges as a core dimension of queer tourist embodiment. As Grindr mediates landscapes of desire and rejection, agency and ambivalence, it reveals how tourism for queer men is not simply a space of sexual liberation or hedonism, but also one of precarious intimacy, emotional volatility, and digitally mediated labour (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026; Shield, 2018). These practices reposition sex in tourism as an affectively mediated and processual form of leisure, rather than an outcome defined solely by physical encounter.

Methodology

This study is grounded in constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, which view social reality as fluid, multiple, and shaped through interpersonal meaning-making (Becker, 1982; Bryman, 2012). These perspectives are well suited to exploring the subjective, embodied, and socially mediated experiences of mobile sexual intimacy among queer male tourists. Given the affective and intimate nature of the topic, this method supports rich, contextually embedded accounts that attend to participants' emotional registers, sensory experiences, and relational complexities (Picken, 2018). While the study was primarily inductive, the interview guide was partly informed by key prior scholarship on mobile queer intimacies and Grindr use (e.g., Katz, 2023, 2025), which helped shape the initial contours of questioning while leaving space for participants' own meanings to emerge. In keeping with the study's inductive orientation, existing theoretical frameworks – such as sexual fields, queer affect, and digital leisure – served as sensitising concepts that informed our interpretive lens without dictating predefined codes or themes. In line with the study's focus, the methodological design is oriented toward capturing the processual and affective dimensions of digitally mediated sexual practices in tourism, rather than documenting physical sexual encounters per se. This paper forms part of a broader research programme, in which related dimensions including embodied and relational encounters (cf. Qiu, Cohen, & Skinner, 2026) and structural inequalities of desirability (cf. Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026) are addressed.

Sampling and recruitment

Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling strategies. Sampling was conducted via the lead researcher's Grindr profile, which functioned as a passive point of contact. A new Grindr profile was created featuring a clear facial photograph of the researcher alongside a research statement. To maintain platform norms and avoid disrupting user expectations, no direct interview invitations were sent. While the sexualised and anonymous nature of Grindr limited initial responses, those received were highly valuable. Individuals who initiated conversation were informed about the study and screened for eligibility prior to interview scheduling. Snowball sampling, which subsequently helped broaden the participant pool, occurred outside the platform, with participants sharing the study with relevant contacts who then approached the researcher directly and were screened using the same criteria.

Eligibility criteria included being over 18, fluent in English, and having used Grindr during at least one travel or tourism experience. Twenty-six participants were interviewed May – August 2024, all residing in London or the South-East of England. This regional focus was guided by both platform-specific and conceptual considerations. Grindr's proximity-based architecture means users predominantly engage with profiles located nearby; therefore, recruitment required establishing a researcher profile within the same geographic region to ensure visibility and response rates. Additionally, London and the South-East are home to relatively open and visible gay cultures, offering a diverse and accessible participant pool familiar with app-based sexual networking. Twelve participants were in relationships of varying degrees of exclusivity, including one couple interviewed separately, and all had used Grindr during travel. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 57. See Table 1 for a summary of key demographics.

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the lead researcher's university. Participation was voluntary and confidential, with informed consent secured prior to interviews. To protect participant safety and anonymity, all interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, lasting 1 to 2 h and video recorded for transcription.

While video interviews offered logistical flexibility and discretion, they also presented several limitations (Bryman, 2012) – including reduced intimacy, spontaneity, and embodied social cues, which are particularly important when exploring sensitive and emotionally charged topics such as sex. To foster rapport, the lead researcher adopted an open and conversational style, drawing on shared familiarity with app-based cultures. This insider status helped create an emotionally sensitive, non-judgmental environment that encouraged openness and mutual recognition (Monterrubio, 2019).

The interviews thus became spaces of shared intimacy – co-constructed through mutual storytelling, humour, and affective resonance. Participants not only shared their frustrations, pleasures, and vulnerabilities, but often reflected on the interview itself as a space of recognition. This dialogic and reflexive approach enabled the generation of rich, emotionally textured insights (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Robards, 2017).

Positionality and reflexivity

The lead researcher is a cis-gender homosexual Chinese man in his late 20s who has used Grindr for casual and romantic encounters, including during periods of travel. His own long-term monogamous relationship began through Grindr in 2023 prior to data collection. This insider positionality allowed for greater rapport, emotional sensitivity, and mutual understanding in the research process (Shield, 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Robards, 2017). While this enhanced access and depth of disclosure, it also required ongoing reflexivity regarding assumptions of shared experience and the ethics of co-presence within sexualised digital spaces.

The two co-authors, positioned as Global North allies without direct experience of Grindr or queer tourism, contributed to the study through methodological design, ethical reflection, and theoretical development. This collaboration is understood as a reflexive co-creation between insider and outsider perspectives, strengthening analytical rigour while preserving the experiential grounding of the data (cf. Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

The lead researcher's visibility on Grindr, while ethically managed, shaped the sample composition and interpersonal dynamics. Participants may have responded selectively, influenced by perceived affinities or distance. Recognising this, reflexive field notes documenting the researcher's affective responses and interpersonal dynamics on Grindr were integrated alongside analytic memos and interview data to support contextual sensitivity and interpretive consistency.

While recruitment was conducted passively and no direct interview invitations were sent via Grindr, the sexualised nature of the platform occasionally produced ambiguous or awkward interactions. In several instances, individuals initially expressed interest in the study but attempted to reframe participation as a sexual encounter, including requests to meet privately prior to or instead of an interview. Such interactions were declined and did not result in participation. These moments underscore the porous boundaries

Table 1
Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Relationship status	Duration of Grindr usage
Alex	46	British	Single	Long-term (10+ years)
Adam	34	British	Single	Long-term (10+ years)
Andrew	34	Malaysian	Relationship	Inconsistent (6 years)
Andy	40	Indian	Single	Long-term (10+ years)
Collin	24	British	Single	Inconsistent (4 years)
Dante	25	Bulgarian	Relationship	Inconsistent (7 years)
Darwin	40+	Indonesian	Relationship	Long-term (10+ years)
Frank	25	British	Single	Inconsistent (7 years)
Gary	29	Uruguayan	Single	Inconsistent (9 years)
George	35	Chinese	Relationship	Long-term (10+ years)
Harry	25	British	Relationship	Short-term (2 weeks)
Jason	25	British	In relationship	Inconsistent (5 years)
John	24	Filipino	Single	Inconsistent (7 years)
Richard	35	Indian	Single	Long-term (8 years)
Tom	30+	Nigerian	Relationship	Long-term (7+ years)
Jack	26	Russian	Relationship	Inconsistent (3–4 years)
Matt	46	British	Relationship	Long-term (10+ years)
Cory	24	British	Relationship	Inconsistent (4 years)
Jim	31	British	Single	Inconsistent (9 months)
Kevin	56	British	Single	Long-term (3+ years)
Desmond	30+	British	Single	Inconsistent (10+ years)
Lewis	30+	Filipino	Single	Inconsistent (10+ years)
Mark	34	American	Single	Long-term (10+ years)
Mike	25	Indian	Single	Inconsistent (10+ years)
Hamish	44	British	Relationship	Inconsistent (10+ years)
Peter	57	Canadian	Relationship	Long-term (10+ years)

between research, desire, and sexual availability within gay app cultures, particularly in tourism contexts characterised by anonymity and erotic expectation. Importantly, these encounters were excluded from the dataset and informed reflexive awareness rather than empirical analysis.

Analytical process

The analytical procedure of this study aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis of interview data. It adopts an experiential perspective, valuing participants' emotions, unspoken thoughts, and actions, particularly their chosen language, as evident in the verbatim transcripts. These transcripts present a version of context-specific reality (Reicher, 2000). This approach is highly adaptable, flexible, and widely used in qualitative content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). To ensure the trustworthiness of data analysis, triangulation was employed between the interview transcripts, extant literature, and the lead researcher's experience as a Grindr user, as well as field observations and notes during data collection (Decrop, 1999).

In thematic analysis, the generation of codes plays a central role in the development of themes. These codes act as the foundation or 'evidence' for thematic construction, although the boundary between codes and themes can at times be fluid (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Two primary approaches to coding are commonly employed: semantic and latent. Semantic coding identifies explicit, surface-level meanings within the data, while latent coding interprets the underlying assumptions, concepts, and unspoken ideas embedded in participants' responses (Terry et al., 2017). In this study, although both approaches were used in tandem, the analysis was primarily inductive and oriented toward latent meanings.

Due to the depth and length of each interview, the lead researcher created a visual mind map for every participant and conducted detailed coding of their narratives. These individual codes were then refined and synthesised into three overarching themes: Grindr as cyber-sexual leisure; negotiating the integration of Grindr and tourism; and ambivalence, risk, and emotional aftermath. These themes form the analytical structure of the findings that follow.

Entering the digital field – Grindr as cyber-sexual leisure

Participants' engagement with Grindr during travel often began not with the intention of arranging physical encounters, but through moments of curiosity, boredom, or habitual checking. Initially, Grindr was experienced as an entry point into a digitally mediated erotic field – offering affective stimulation, fantasy, validation, and playful interaction. Rather than operating solely as a "hookup tool", it was frequently described as a mobile leisure interface that provided immediate, low-effort gratification through browsing, flirting, and visual consumption in new places. This extends 'the play of the sexual' (Berdychevsky & Carr, 2020; Carr, 2016), by showing how desire can be activated through digitally mediated play rather than embodied contact alone.

As you travel around the world, what you see on your Grindr is going to be completely different from another place.

— Cory, 24, British

Across participants, this initial engagement was typically low-commitment and exploratory, oriented toward browsing, curiosity, and momentary interaction rather than immediate physical intent. Browsing became a leisure-like practice – ranging from casual "window shopping" to the anticipation of possible encounters – through which unfamiliar destinations were encountered not only visually but affectively.

Existing work frames Grindr as an affective platform of instant stimulation (Dasgupta, 2024; Tziallas, 2015), yet our data complicate this view by showing how such stimulation is intermittently pursued, strategically suspended, or affectively ambivalent in tourism contexts. Kevin (56, British), for instance, likened browsing to "trying out the local cuisine" while travelling in Asia and North Africa (e.g., Thailand, Morocco). Read through tourism's racialised erotics, the metaphor positions local bodies as consumable cultural offerings, echoing post-colonial tropes of exotic availability (Binnie, 2004). Here, erotic pleasure can coexist with (and be enabled by) asymmetries shaped by race, mobility, and desire (Hammack et al., 2022; Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026), suggesting that entry into the digital field is already structured by broader power relations (Green, 2011; Martin and George, 2014).

It's just nice to immerse yourself in someone else's world for a bit. It's a quick sort of dopamine hit...I feel like a lot of people I know who don't use it daily often download it when they're traveling. I think it comes in very useful for just those instant quick connections.

— Desmond, 30+, British

Desmond's reflection highlights the temporal intensity of this stage: Grindr was often experienced as a mechanism for fleeting "dopamine hits" under compressed travel time. He compared Grindr to Pokémon Go, signalling a gamified logic of searching and collecting, where browsing itself became a form of play. As Collin (24, British) noted, "If I ever change my picture, I get a burst or like an influx of people who hadn't messaged me before," indicating an image-centric economy where presentation becomes sexual capital that triggers algorithmic visibility. In this sense, Grindr operates as a soft-porn interface (Phillips, 2015), where visual eroticism becomes a central mode of leisure engagement intensified by novelty, anonymity, and the spatial dislocation of travel (Bonner-Thompson, 2023).

Participants described Grindr as an additional layer of stimulation during travel – particularly when initial novelty began to wane. Attention from potential sexual interests offered immediate validation and excitement, often without any intention to meet. George

(35, Chinese) similarly emphasised the low-commitment and non-escalatory nature of engagement, noting that “I’ll go through stretches where I’m just chatting... or not even chatting... just browsing... 99% of the time I’m just browsing... lots of people don’t necessarily want to meet up.” At the same time, these moments were frequently described as uneven and often short-lived, with interactions remaining intermittent and not progressing toward physical encounters.

Across these accounts, engagement with Grindr during travel often begins as a form of cyber-sexual leisure: a low-commitment, affectively charged mode of participation structured by browsing, fantasy, and fleeting interaction. This stage is not merely experienced as preparatory to physical encounters, but is often described as a meaningful dimension of touristic experience in its own right. Under conditions of temporal compression, anonymity, and heightened sensory openness, participants remained sensually and affectively engaged even in the absence of embodied contact. As such, entry into the digital field establishes the conditions through which subsequent interactions may be pursued, negotiated, or abandoned.

Navigating and negotiating – integrating Grindr into tourism practice

Following initial entry into the digital erotic field, participants described a second stage characterised by ongoing negotiations of how, when, and to what extent Grindr could be integrated into their tourism practices (Gössling, Cohen and Hibbert, 2018). Rather than reflecting stable user preferences, engagement at this stage appeared highly contingent – shaped by situational constraints, social contexts, and the temporal pressures of travel. Participants described adopting a range of strategies, from immersive and continuous use to intermittent, discreet, or opportunistic engagement.

Since I am travelling on the road...I’ll just open Grindr to put myself on the radar of people. Like just to appear there and then. Basically, I just wait for messages and if I have the time to respond, then I try to respond to any messages that I get.
— Lewis, 30+, Filipino

For Lewis who used it across various trip types – including leisure, visiting friends and family, and business, Grindr functioned less as a direct hook-up tool and more as a low-commitment layer of potentiality. His account suggests a mode of engagement in which connection remains possible without disrupting the rhythm of travel. This layering of sexual cyberspace over tourism activity reflects Blackwell et al.’s (2015) view of Grindr as a privatised space of homonormativity, in which queer men can enter and exit on their own terms. More broadly, this pattern reflects the contextual and user-driven nature of mobile dating use (James et al., 2019), echoing Vorobjovas-Pinta’s (2018) framing of gay tourism as structured around fluid, affective collectives that emerge and dissolve in response to shifting spatial and social conditions.

Hamish (44, British) typically travelled with friends, colleagues or family across a range of contexts (e.g., US, Singapore, domestic travel within the UK):

It’s the simple fact that I was doing things, and I was away with people, and I was preoccupied most of the time. Then by the time I got back to the hotel room or wherever...I was probably drunk by that time to even care. So...it [physical sex] wasn’t high on the list of my priorities.

Here, shared schedules, intoxication, and social presence reassert everyday limits on sexual leisure, positioning Grindr as peripheral rather than central to the travel experience. Physical encounters, in this context, were described as dependent on enabling conditions – most notably solo travel or access to private space – suggesting that sexual leisure during tourism remains contingent rather than freely available.

Even during solo travel, however, participants described how Grindr was not uniformly experienced as a tool for physical sex. Some participants used it strategically, treating it as a time-based, place-specific mechanism to organise encounters when no other plans were in place. Others, by contrast, engaged with Grindr in more fragmented and playful ways, using it for affective stimulation, validation, or fantasy without necessarily seeking embodied contact. This distinction suggests a trade-off between organising embodied sex and preserving the flow of tourism, positioning Grindr as both a facilitator of encounters and a substitute for them.

The conditional nature of Grindr hookups reflects Katz’s (2023) observation that Grindr tourism is often imagined as central but enacted as peripheral. Even among participants open to sexual encounters, the logistics of group travel, shared accommodation, or limited time frequently constrained the extent to which sex could be integrated into tourism activities.

OK, if I’m travelling, I’d rather do it on my own. These are the things I want to do and see and places to go, and I’ll fit the hookup in at this time. So, I can say I’ve done it, but I don’t want to waste my time on it.
— John, 24, Filipino

John’s account frames sex as something to be fitted around tourism rather than central to it, revealing how time scarcity transforms Grindr from a site of exploration into a bounded, instrumental choice. Several participants similarly described tensions between sexual pursuit and other touristic priorities, often leading to selective or limited engagement. While text-based interaction – such as chatting or sexting – remain frequent, particularly during evenings or periods of downtime, in-person meetings were often deprioritised in favour of social activities with travel companions.

This tension between sexual autonomy and social obligation is exemplified in Frank’s (25, British) account of a snowboarding holiday with his brother:

...me and my brother went in this resort, and we decided to split off for a little bit...so while I was by myself, I quickly had a look on Grindr to see if anyone else was in this resort...We ended up basically hooking up there in their hotel room. I had to be quick because I was meant to be meeting my brother. My brother didn't know because, well, I'm just gonna keep it secret. Maybe [otherwise] I would have either spent the night with them or gone for a drink.

— Frank, 25, British

Frank's account underscores how Grindr's temporality – its ability to enable quick, secretive encounters – can be both enabling and restrictive. While the platform allowed him to act on opportunity, the encounter itself remained shaped by external constraints, limiting the possibility of extended interaction or relational development. His reflection suggests that digital sexual encounters during tourism are not only shaped by desire, but also by the need to manage visibility, discretion, and competing commitments.

Across these accounts, Grindr emerges as a layered and unstable space that operates alongside, rather than seamlessly within, tourism practices. Participants' engagement was characterised by continual adjustment – balancing curiosity, desire, time, and social context – through which intimacy could be pursued, deferred, or abandoned. Rather than functioning as a fixed or dominant component of tourism, Grindr appears to be integrated unevenly and situationally, reflecting the contingent and negotiated nature of cyber-sexual leisure under conditions of mobility.

Re-engage or withdraw – ambivalence, emotional and physical aftermath

As participants moved beyond initial browsing and the practical negotiation of Grindr within tourism routines, many described a further stage marked by intensified affective investment and increasingly unstable emotional outcomes. While Grindr could generate excitement, affirmation, and erotic anticipation, these experiences were often accompanied by abrupt shifts into disappointment, depletion, or vulnerability – particularly when digital interaction moved toward embodied encounters. These fluctuations do not simply reflect individual regret; rather, they point to an unstable affective environment in which pleasure and risk are produced together. In tourism contexts, disinhibition and temporal pressure can intensify erotic pursuit while narrowing reflexivity and care (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). They may also heighten the volatility of erotic value itself, as participants move through shifting digital sexual fields where desirability, recognition, and vulnerability are unevenly distributed (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

Kevin (56, British) captured a contradiction at the heart of cyber-sexual leisure on the move: heightened opportunity can narrow ethical attention and emotional reflexivity.

You were travelling somewhere for one or two nights, and you had a hotel room. Then the opportunistic bit of that moment heightens your frustration for trying to get a connection and an arrangement in the timeframe that's available to you. So, your dick is running your brain and you're not actually emotionally taking account of the other person's feelings, circumstances, or situation.

Several participants described how urgency and time scarcity encouraged brusque exchanges and opportunistic decision-making, particularly during solo travel. Geo-locative dating apps like Grindr have increased the ease and immediacy with which queer men can access sex as a leisure activity (Birnholz et al., 2014). By enabling real-time, location-based interactions in semi-public tourist settings (e.g., hotel lobbies, airport lounges, shared accommodations), they blur boundaries between public tourism and private eroticism. Yet, the speed and convenience of these interactions did not necessarily produce ease. Rather, participants' accounts suggest that compressed travel time frequently accelerated erotic escalation while reducing the space for caution, reflection, or emotional attunement. In this sense, tourism did not merely provide more opportunities; it intensified the affective stakes of digitally mediated intimacy.

While anonymity is often framed as empowering in digital sexual cultures, participants' accounts complicate this assumption. In travel contexts, anonymity not only enables exploration but also destabilises trust and accountability, weakening the relational cues that ordinarily regulate intimate interaction. Matt (46, British) observed:

Bizarrely, yeah, when I'm travelling. Yes. When I'm at home, no [I wouldn't put my face picture on Grindr]. Because, well, when I'm travelling...nobody knows...I think the anonymity of it leads it [Grindr] to be a breeding ground for fake profiles – for people to mask who they are, to catfish, definitely (i.e., to pose as someone else).

Participants also described coercion and false identities – risks inherent to fast-paced, anonymous platforms, but heightened by tourism's disinhibition and uncertainty (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015). Some like Andrew avoided in-person meetings, opting instead for sexting or masturbating while viewing others on the app – using digital interaction as a perceived risk-management strategy that nonetheless remained emotionally charged. This selective engagement reflects what Price (2013) terms body centrism, where the eyes – as figurative organs of touch – create or dissolve proximity in cyberspace.

Sometimes I just get really worried about going into some random people's houses, but that's making me feel intense and excited at the same time, because it's just like a one-off thing.

— Andrew, 34, Malaysian

Andrew's account illustrates how cyber-sexual leisure can be sustained precisely through the co-presence of thrill and caution. While mobility offers anonymity, unfamiliar environments can heighten the risks of spontaneous encounters. When combined with opportunistic moments and the novelty of place, tourists may take greater risks than they would at home (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015).

Grindr-facilitated encounters thus sit between intimacy and avoidance. The affective charge of “one-off” possibilities is not reduced by risk; rather, risk may intensify the encounter's erotic force.

These reflections complicate linear models of desire by showing how anticipation and disappointment are co-present and mutually intensifying (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011). Emotional ambivalence here refers to the simultaneous pull of pleasure and pain, hope and deflation – often experienced when moments of connection fall short of their imagined intensity. Grindr's fast, visual, gamified interface amplifies both connection and emotional letdown, and for many participants these fluctuations were intensified in tourism contexts by unfamiliar environments, elevated expectations, and reduced access to emotional support. These dynamics were not only shaped by interactional uncertainty, but also by participants' shifting positions within racialised and embodied hierarchies of desirability. As shown elsewhere in work on volatile desirability, travel can temporarily recalibrate erotic capital while leaving its underlying inequality intact (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026). In this paper, such instability appears not only in who is desired, but in how encounters are emotionally inhabited, anticipated, and remembered.

You've got the dopamine hit, you've got yourself charged, cleaned, ready, psychologically, and then you're just dropped like a hot potato when you left, emotionally feeling completely crap.

— Kevin, 56, British

Some described being socially or emotionally coerced into sex despite misgivings, due to internalised pressure, politeness, or inexperience:

We all have moments where we're like, fuck, I need a fuck tonight, and you get someone around and you're like, oh actually I wish I just watched a movie [in the hotel alone] because actually that was really fucking boring, or regretting [it], and I should have known it, because last time I did it, it was no fun. I find that more often than actual catfish vibes, where I feel like I've really connected with someone and then you meet them, and it's really stale.

— Desmond, 30+, British

Participants described instances of misjudging the suitability of sexual partners in the heat of the moment, often referring to experiences of being either personality catfished or physically catfished. Personality catfishing occurred when an emotional or conversational connection developed during text-based interaction but dissipated in person or during sex. Physical catfishing involved meeting someone whose appearance significantly differed from their profile photos – violating the tourist's anticipation, expectation, and imagination.

Gary's (29, Uruguayan) story exemplifies how the boundaries between erotic thrill and emotional trauma can blur in the context of travel – a dynamic well documented in studies of socially deviant leisure and sex tourism (Holm et al., 2017; Uriely et al., 2011):

Yeah, I wanted to have an experience out of the normal excursions in Morocco. I started talking with a guy [on Grindr] and beforehand I asked him, are you an escort? And he said no, I'm not...He was not the one in the pictures. He was a different person, but I decided to go with him. We had sex, and he locked the door. He didn't let me go out. He said, you see the conditions I'm living in. You're staying in a five-star hotel. Don't you think you should give me some money? Some help? I said no. I'm not going to give you anything. I was able to convince him because he liked me. I was able to get away, but it was a very scary situation.

Here, cyber-sexual leisure emerges as ethically ambivalent: the same conditions that enable mobility, experimentation, and anonymity also produce asymmetries of power that are difficult to anticipate or refuse. Gary's perceived affluence as a foreign visitor became the basis for emotional coercion, blurring erotic connection, opportunism, and structural inequality. This encounter underscores how economic disparity shapes power in complex ways (Saraiva, Santos and Pereira, 2020). While privilege can enable access and safety, it can also render tourists more visible, desirable, and exploitable – especially in digital sexual economies. Such moments show Grindr in tourism is shaped not only by desire but by socio-economic tensions that cut both ways. They also resonate with wider arguments that digital sexual fields are never neutral, but are structured by uneven relations of mobility, value, and recognition (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026).

Gary's experience also reflects how Grindr-facilitated encounters during travel can lead to coercive or unsafe situations – particularly when risk is underestimated due to novelty, desire, or emotional investment. Although intentions may be grounded in leisure or pleasure, participants sometimes proceeded with uncomfortable encounters due to the emotional labour and time invested in digital flirtation. This sense of obligation – despite a lack of attraction – was a recurring theme, illustrating how cyber-sexual engagement in tourism is not simply pleasurable or harmful, but ambivalently situated between validation, coercion, fantasy, and emotional fallout.

Sexual risk-taking in tourism can have physical, emotional, and psychological consequences (Berdychevsky, Gibson and Poria, 2013). In Gary's case, the thrill of transgression led to a threatening situation involving deception and implied extortion. The affective aftermath – marked by fear, regret, or self-blame – illustrates how cyber-sexual leisure can carry not only pleasure, but deep emotional costs.

They were a complete catfish and because it was one of my first experiences using Grindr, I didn't have the confidence to say go away, so I still kind of did things (sex) anyway and then had to say midway through, oh can you actually leave? So awkward, and you have like a 30-minute-long shower afterwards.

— Collin, 24, British

While Andrew's (34, Malaysian) strategy of staying online was a form of self-protection, others, like Collin, recounted how emotional vulnerability could still lead to unwanted encounters – even without clear coercion. These emotionally charged encounters were often marked by ambivalence – simultaneously driven by curiosity, desire, and a sense of obligation, yet followed by discomfort, regret, or disappointment. Although Collin did not specify whether this experience occurred at home or while travelling, it nonetheless reflects a broader pattern of emotional risk and social coercion reported by other participants – particularly in unfamiliar tourism settings.

Several participants described feeling more vulnerable when travelling due to novelty, urgency, and limited support. For inexperienced Grindr users, such conditions could cloud judgment and increase susceptibility to emotional pressure or coercion. The resulting post-sex blues – marked by self-loathing, disappointment, and regret – illustrate how a seemingly leisure-based encounter can become psychologically burdensome. While mobile technologies like Grindr enable sexual leisure, they can also foster predatory dynamics in contexts where boundaries are harder to enforce (James et al., 2019). In tourism settings, these dynamics are often intensified by disinhibition and risk-taking (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015).

These accounts underscore the ambivalence of pleasure in cyber-sexual leisure in tourism – revealing how queer male tourists experience Grindr as a site of both erotic empowerment and emotional exposure. In line with queer affect theory, these encounters show how pleasure is shadowed by the potential for harm, and how digital intimacy in tourism involves layered forms of emotional labour. Crucially, tourism intensifies these affective dynamics: unfamiliar environments, compressed timeframes, and heightened expectations can render tourists especially vulnerable to the emotional fallout of digitally mediated encounters.

A model of cyber-sexual leisure in tourism

Building on the preceding analysis, this paper conceptualises cyber-sexual leisure in tourism as a processual and affectively unstable dynamic rather than a purely outcome-oriented activity. Rather than centring physical sexual encounters as the primary endpoint, participants' accounts indicate that digitally mediated interactions form a meaningful part of sexual leisure, unfolding across anticipation, engagement, and emotional and/or physical outcomes.

Our processual model (Fig. 1) visualises this as a recursive loop of four interconnected stages: (1) digital engagement, (2) affective and erotic investment, (3) emotional and/or physical outcomes (ambivalence), and (4) re-engagement or withdrawal. Movement across these stages is not linear or sequential, but iterative and contingent, with participants shifting between them in response to changing circumstances, emotional responses, and situational constraints.

Within this framework, physical sexual encounters are understood as one possible outcome of intensifying digital interaction rather than its defining objective. As demonstrated in the findings, encounters may be realised, deferred, or remain imagined, and when they do occur, they do not necessarily resolve desire or stabilise emotional experience. Instead, physical intimacy often feeds back into the process, contributing to subsequent ambivalence, satisfaction, disappointment, or renewed engagement.

At the centre of the model, tourism conditions – including mobility, anonymity, novelty, compressed time, and disinhibition – function as affective intensifiers that shape the tempo, intensity, and volatility of cyber-sexual engagement. These conditions appear to accelerate interaction, heighten anticipation, and lower thresholds for risk-taking, while simultaneously constraining the time and

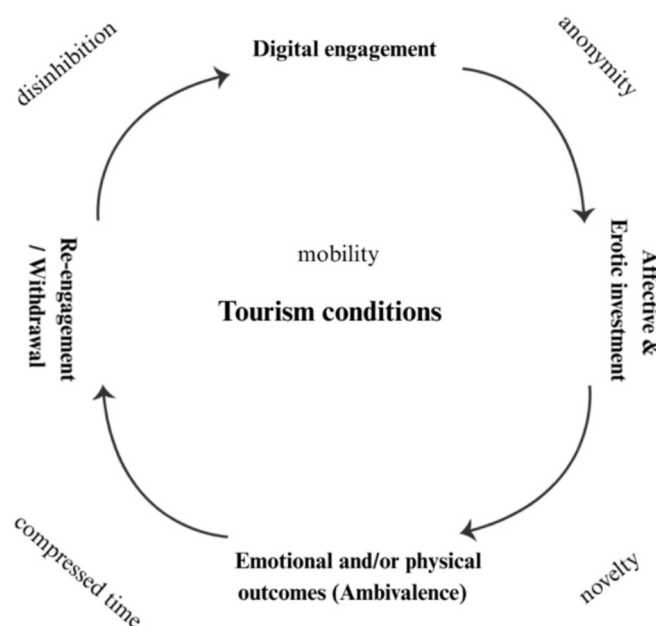


Fig. 1. Processual model of cyber-sexual leisure in tourism.

emotional capacity available for reflection and care. In this sense, tourism does not merely provide a backdrop for digital sexual interaction, but actively reshapes its affective dynamics.

Grindr, within this model, operates not simply as a tool for facilitating encounters, but as a mobile leisure infrastructure through which intimacy is explored, imagined, and sometimes embodied. Engagement frequently occurs during liminoid moments of travel – such as waiting, resting, or periods of solitude – where digital interaction provides stimulation, distraction, or affective reassurance. These practices are not consistently oriented toward physical outcomes, but form part of a broader experiential continuum through which participants navigate desire, connection and self-positioning in unfamiliar environments.

Importantly, this model does not depict a stable or uniformly pleasurable process. Rather, it captures how cyber-sexual leisure in tourism is sustained through cycles of intensification, interruption, and emotional ambivalence. Moments of excitement, validation, fulfilment, disappointment, and withdrawal are not discrete phases but interconnected elements of an ongoing loop, in which both digital and physical encounters shape subsequent engagement.

While the figure foregrounds this recursive process, participants' accounts also indicate that engagement is shaped by broader structural conditions – including racialised desirability, economic disparity, and platformed distribution of visibility – which are unevenly experienced (c.f. Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026). These dynamics are not examined in detail here but are analysed elsewhere (Qiu, Skinner, & Cohen, 2026); in this paper, they are acknowledged as shaping conditions that intersect with the process and influence who is seen, desired, and able to participate on particular terms.

Conclusion

This study reconceptualises sex as leisure in tourism by advancing the notion of cyber-sexual leisure as a digitally mediated, affectively dynamic, and ambivalent practice unfolding through platforms such as Grindr. Drawing on queer male tourists' accounts, the findings demonstrate that sexual engagement in tourism is not confined to physical encounters, but often unfolds through fragmented, symbolic, and gamified forms of digital intimacy, including browsing, sexting, image exchange, and affective flirtation. These practices are not merely preparatory to 'real' sex, but constitute meaningful forms of leisure in their own right.

In doing so, the paper foregrounds the centrality of emotional labour and ambivalence within cyber-sexual encounters. While Grindr enables pleasure, validation, and erotic possibility, it simultaneously produces disappointment, vulnerability, coercion, and emotional depletion. Participants' experiences reveal a persistent tension between agency and exposure, where access to visibility and connection is accompanied by heightened affective risk within transient and unfamiliar tourism contexts.

To capture this dynamic, the study introduced a processual model of cyber-sexual leisure structured around four interconnected stages: digital engagement, affective and erotic investment, emotional and/or physical outcomes, and re-engagement or withdrawal. Rather than a linear progression, this model conceptualises cyber-sexual leisure as a recursive loop shaped by tourism conditions – mobility, anonymity, novelty, compressed time, and disinhibition – which operate as affective intensifiers. These conditions not only expand opportunities for connection but also accelerate interaction, amplify emotional volatility, and lower thresholds for risk-taking, producing a distinctive configuration of digital intimacy in tourism.

The paper makes three interrelated contributions. First, it moves beyond physical, corporeal understandings of sex in tourism to theorise intimacy as digitally mediated, emotionally charged, and symbolically pursued. This extends Carr's (2016) and Berdychevsky and Carr's (2020) call to foreground the 'play of the sexual', positioning non-corporeal practices as legitimate, affectively rich, and central to queer tourist embodiment. Second, it rehumanises the study of sex in tourism by foregrounding the emotional dynamics, ambivalence, and lived complexities that extend beyond physical encounters alone. Rather than reducing sexual experiences to acts or outcomes, the paper shows how desire, anticipation, validation, disappointment, and vulnerability unfold across digitally mediated interactions, revealing sex as an affective and processual dimension of tourism experiences. Third, it situates these dynamics within the temporal and spatial conditions of tourism, demonstrating how mobility, anonymity, novelty, and compressed time may intensify both erotic possibility and emotional volatility. In doing so, the paper advances tourism theory by showing that sex in tourism is shaped not only by physical encounters, but by the unequal digital, affective, and mobile conditions through which intimacy is pursued, negotiated, and remembered.

This study is situated within a UK-based context and reflects the experiences of cisgender queer men using Grindr. Future research should extend this work across diverse geographical and cultural settings, particularly in non-Western and Global South contexts where platform politics, queer visibility, and tourism mobilities may operate differently. Further research is also needed to examine the perspectives of residents or hosts, as well as the experiences of more diverse genders, sexualities, and platforms. In particular, exploring how intersecting identities – including race, class, body type, HIV status, and transgender experiences – shape digital desirability, vulnerability, and sexual agency in tourism remains an important area for critical inquiry.

This study therefore advances a tourism-grounded conceptualisation of cyber-sexual leisure as a central mode of contemporary erotic experience rather than a peripheral or preparatory activity. By showing how intimacy unfolds across digital and physical terrains through cycles of anticipation, encounter, and emotional aftermath, the paper highlights the need for tourism scholarship to more fully engage with the affective and mediated dimensions of sexual life on the move. As digital platforms continue to reshape intimacy, understanding these hybrid spaces – where pleasure and vulnerability, connection and precarity coexist – becomes essential to the- orising tourism in an increasingly platformed world.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

XuDong (Oliver) Qiu: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology,

Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Scott Cohen:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Jonathan Skinner:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Methodology.

Source of funding

Scott Cohen is financed by National Funds provided by FCT- Foundation for Science and Technology through project UID/04020/2025 (CinTurs) with DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/UID/04020/2025>.

Declaration of competing interest

Scott Cohen declares his role as an Associate Editor of Annals of Tourism Research. However, he had no involvement in the peer review of this article and had no access to information regarding its peer review. The authors otherwise declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2026.104206>.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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