

Adaptive Performances of Gay Identity on Tinder and Grindr: A Comparative Study of Self-Presentation Strategies

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Abstract

This study examines how Taiwanese gay men adapt their self-presentation strategies on two major dating platforms, Tinder and Grindr, using content analysis of profile bios and images. Drawing on 165 user profiles (67 from Tinder, 98 from Grindr), the study investigates differences in visual and textual self-presentation in terms of three variables: biography word count, use of body-focused imagery, and inclusion of coded language. Statistical analysis reveals that Grindr users are significantly more likely to include body-centered images and coded sexual language (e.g., “top,” “discreet”), reinforcing the app’s association with fast-paced, desire-oriented interactions. In contrast, Tinder users generally employ less sexualized visual content and exhibit slightly longer bios, suggesting a more narrative-oriented or relational self-presentation style, even though the difference in word count was not statistically significant. These findings highlight how digital platforms shape gay identity performances through both technical affordances and community expectations. By contextualizing these patterns within Taiwanese gay culture and sociolinguistic frameworks, the study demonstrates that online dating profiles are dynamic, adaptive performances shaped by both user intention and platform design. It contributes to digital queer studies by emphasizing how self-presentation practices respond to differing cultural (gay culture) and technological norms.

Keywords: Taiwanese gay men, dating apps, self-presentations, Tinder, Grindr

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Introduction

The development of digital technology and social networking platforms has changed how people form romantic and social relationships. Dating apps are now common tools for these interactions, especially among LGBTQ+ communities. These apps not only help users find potential partners, but also offer a space where people can show and express their sexual and gender identities. This study focuses on how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two dating apps: Tinder and Grindr.

Tinder and Grindr are both popular dating apps around the world. However, they serve different groups of people and have different features. Tinder is open to users of all gender and sexual identities. Most of its users are male (Branson, 2025). Grindr is mainly used by LGBTQ+ individuals, especially gay and bisexual men (Grindr, 2025).

As Dorn (2025) explains, these two apps are different in how people use them and in their social settings. Tinder is often used for both casual dating and long-term relationships. It encourages people to chat before meeting in person. This usually leads to a slower pace of interaction. Grindr is more commonly used for quick, location-based meetings. Many people use it for same-day or casual encounters. The app makes it easy for users to message others nearby without restrictions. Because of this, users on both apps need to carefully choose how they present themselves. They often do this through their profile photos and short self-descriptions.

Research has shown that users think carefully about what pictures and words they use in their profiles. He (2021) found that many users of the gay dating app, Blued, avoid using photos that clearly show their faces. Instead, they prefer body-centered or anonymous images. Rodriguez et al. (2019) found that Grindr users often post pictures showing muscles or sexual features. These pictures reflect common beauty ideals in gay communities. Language also plays an important role. Wu and Trottier (2024) noted that many profiles include short terms like “top,” “fit,” or “discreet.” These words are used to signal sexual preferences or identity roles.

Although dating apps are popular in Taiwan, there are still few studies that compare how gay men present themselves on different dating platforms. This study helps fill that gap. It looks at the ways gay men in Taiwan use photos and language in their Tinder and Grindr profiles. It pays attention to the type of image they use, how many words they write, and whether they use coded language. The goal is to see how people shape their online gay identities based on the platform they are using and if their self-presentational styles are adaptive to the nature of the two dating apps.

This research is important because it shows how technology affects how people think about themselves and how they share that identity with others. It also helps us understand how gay culture, gay community rules, and dating platform design influence online romance-pursuing behavior. Lastly, it shows how personal choices, like what photo to post or what words to use, are shaped by deeper social and cultural forces, such as, gay identity.

Given the above, this study asks two main questions:

QR1: How do gay men in Taiwan visually present themselves on Tinder and Grindr, especially in the use of body-focused versus non-body-focused images?

QR2: How do gay men in Taiwan differ in their language use across the two platforms, specifically in bio word count and the presence of coded language?

Literature Review

Research has shown that dating apps influence how users behave. This happens through both the design of the app and the expectations of the people who use it (Wu & Trottier, 2024). For example, Tinder allows longer biographies and encourages users to post lifestyle photos. This creates an image of the app as a place for dating and getting to know someone. Grindr is different. Its design is based on GPS location and has shorter profile fields. This leads to faster, image-focused communication. It often centers on physical appearance or allows for anonymous interaction.

This study builds on those ideas by looking at how gay men in Taiwan use both images and text on Tinder and Grindr. It focuses on how personal construction of gay identity is shaped by the features of each platform.

Profile photos are an important part of how users present themselves. He (2021), studying users of the gay dating app, Blued, in China, found that only one-third of users showed their faces. Many chose photos of their bodies, like torsos or abs, or used pictures that hid their identity. These choices help users attract attention while staying partly anonymous. This pattern shows how some gay men use photos to manage how others see them.

Rodriguez et al. (2019) also found that Grindr gay users often post images that show muscular bodies, tattoos, or gym settings. These images match common beauty standards in gay communities. While such photos may help gay users look attractive, they can also lead to body image concerns or pressure to fit narrow ideas of beauty.

Other studies on gay men and the self-presentational patterns on dating apps in Asia found similar results. Chan (2016) noted that shirtless photos are common on Grindr profiles. Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) reported that 5% of Chinese Grindr gay users included at least one photo showing a shirtless torso without a face. Tziallas (2015) described this as “do-it-yourself pornification.” He suggested that the app rewards gay users for posting sexual images.

Low et al. (2022) reviewed many studies about online dating behaviors in Asia. The review found that users on apps like Grindr often focus on showing off their bodies. This shows that physical appearance is a major concern in how users choose their profile photos.

Tinder shows different patterns. For example, Tricky Taipei (2020) noted that Tinder profiles often include smiling selfies, travel photos, or group shots. These images match Tinder’s being recognized as a more serious dating platform that supports friendly and open self-presentation.

Language is also important in online dating profiles. Wu and Trottier (2024) explained that LGBTQ+ users change how they write their bios depending on which app they are using. On Grindr, bios are usually short and use direct words such as “top,” “fit only,” or “discreet.” These terms are examples of coded language. They help users quickly show their sexual identity or sex preferences without sharing emotional or personal details.

Tinder users tend to write longer bios. These often include hobbies, jobs, dating goals, or personality traits. This shows a more open and descriptive form of self-presentation, which fits with Tinder’s design. He (2021) found that many gay users also use words like “straight-acting,” “sporty,” or “normal” in their bios. These terms suggest that users want to show themselves as

masculine which is one feature considered socially acceptable. This also reflects pressure from society, both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community.

Grindr's simple design and location-based features make emotional expression more difficult. Kann (2019) found that using Grindr too much can lead to more anxiety and lower self-esteem. This may happen because users face constant judgment based on appearance. Tinder's design, which includes swiping and more flexible profile sections, allows for more types of self-presentation. It may also help users connect in ways that feel more balanced.

Overall, these studies show that Tinder and Grindr have very different cultures. Grindr encourages quick contact, short messages, and physical self-display. Tinder allows more conversation and emotional sharing. These differences affect how users choose to present themselves on each app. This study intends to verify such differences, however, by focusing on gay males' self-presentations as evidence.

Methodology

This study uses a comparative content analysis to examine how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two dating apps: Tinder and Grindr. It looks at both visual elements (such as profile photos) and written content (such as bios) to understand patterns in self-presentation. The study compares these patterns across the two apps and across two age groups. The data is analyzed using a quantitative method, to verify the findings as reviewed in section 2.

Data Collection

The samples were collected between May and June 2025. A total of 60 Taiwanese gay users' profiles were randomly selected: 30 from Tinder and 30 from Grindr. No private or identifying information was accessed. No private or personal information, such as usernames or photos, was saved. The researcher only viewed profiles that were publicly accessed and did not contact or interact with any users. The study followed ethical guidelines for online research, especially those related to LGBTQ+ topics. It respected user privacy and avoided any form of harm or disruption. The ages of the sampled gay users are approximately between 20 to 30 years old.

Variables and Coding Scheme

In this study, each profile was analyzed based on four key variables. These variables were chosen to reflect how users present themselves through both images and written language. Each variable is described below in more detail (Table 1).

Table 1
Coding Variables and the Coding Values

Variable	Description
Platform	Tinder (1) or Grindr (2)
Body-focused Image	1 = the presence of a body-centered photo 0 = no presence of a body-centered photo
Bio Word Count	Total number of words in the self-description
Use of Coded Language	1 = the presence of coded language 0 = no presence of coded language

- Platform: This variable identifies which app the profile came from: Tinder (assigned with the value of 1) or Grindr (assigned value 2); the goal was to compare how users behave differently on the two platforms.
- Inclusion of sexy body-focused image: This binary variable examines whether the user selects any of the images to highlight his sexual body figure, nudity, and shape/size of sexual organs. In this case, the value of 1 is assigned to this case. If the user does not select any of the above images, the value assigned to this case is 0.
- Bio word count: This variable counts how many words are written in the user's profile bio (self-description section). The word count gives a sense of how much effort gay users put into describing themselves, and whether they chose to share a detailed personal introduction or a very short one.
- Use of coded language: This binary variable checks whether the profile used short, culturally specific terms common in LGBTQ+ dating spaces. These terms often communicate sexual identity, sex preferences, or roles without using full sentences. The coding values include: 1 = Yes (coded language is used); Examples: words like "top," "bottom," "discreet," "straight-acting," "fit only," "vers," "looking," or similar expressions. 0 = No (no coded language used; such kind of profiles either uses no descriptive terms or only includes general phrases (e.g., "hi there," "just browsing") in the bios.

Statistical Analysis

The profile data was first organized in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate frequency distribution of binary variables, and mean values of the word counts in bios on two apps.

To compare how gay users behave differently across the two platforms, the study used two types of statistical tests:

1. Independent Samples t-test: A t-test was used to compare the average number of words in user bios between Tinder and Grindr. This is because word count is a continuous variable, and the t-test is a good way to see if there is a meaningful difference in average word use between the two groups.
2. Chi-Square Test of Independence: The chi-square test was used to check for differences between Tinder and Grindr users on two binary variables:
 - Use of body-focused images: This test shows whether there is a significant difference in the number of users who posted body-centered photos on each platform.
 - Use of coded language: This test shows whether there is a significant difference in how often users included coded terms like "top," "fit only," or "discreet" in their bios.

The chi-square test checks if the pattern of responses (yes/no) is different between the two platforms in a way that is unlikely to be caused by chance.

All tests were run using a significance level of $p < .05$. This means that results were considered statistically significant if the chance of the difference happening randomly was less than 5.

Findings

Comparisons in Terms of Word Counts in Biographies

On average, Tinder profiles contained about 42 words in the biography, whereas Grindr profiles had about 41 words (Table 2). This difference in mean bio length (approximately one word) was not statistically significant, $t(163) = 0.178$, $p = 0.859$. In other words, there is no evidence of a meaningful difference in how much users write in their profiles on Tinder versus Grindr. Both groups of Taiwanese gay men tended to provide similarly sized textual self-descriptions in their dating app bios.

Table 2

Comparison of Word Counts in Biography by Dating Apps

Variable	Dating apps	N	Average	T	df	P
Word counts of biography	Tinder	67	42.09	0.178	163	0.859
	Grindr	98	40.86			

Comparisons in Terms of the Use of Coded Language

The use of coded language in profiles differed markedly between the two platforms. A clear majority of Grindr profiles (62 out of 98, about 63%) contained at least one coded term (e.g., words signalling sexual role or preference), compared to only 19 out of 67 Tinder profiles (28%) that did so (Table 3). This disparity was statistically significant (chi-square test, $\chi^2(1, 165) = 19.40$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that Grindr users were significantly more likely to include coded language in their self-profiles than Tinder users.

The very low p-value (well below 0.001) suggests that this difference is highly unlikely to be due to chance. These results imply that Taiwanese gay men on Grindr more frequently employ shorthand or coded terms to express personal or desired traits and desires (such as sexual preferences), whereas Tinder users are less inclined to use such coded language in their self-presentations.

Table 3

Comparisons of Presence of Coded Language for Sex by Dating Apps

variables	presence of coded language for sex		Total	Chi-Square
	No	Yes		
Tinder	48	19	67	P = 0.000
Grindr	36	62	98	
Total	84	81	165	

Comparisons in Terms of Body-Focused Images

There was also a significant difference in the prevalence of body-focused images between Tinder and Grindr profiles. Over half of Grindr users (55 out of 98, about 56%) featured a body-centric photo (such as a shirtless picture or emphasis on physique) in their profile,

compared to only 16 out of 67 Tinder users (approximately 24%) who did so (Table 4). This platform-based gap in image type was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, 165) = 16.87, p < 0.001$), confirming that Grindr profiles are much more likely to display body-focused images than Tinder profiles.

The difference in proportions is substantial, and the p-value below 0.001 indicates a very high confidence in this finding. In practical terms, this suggests that Grindr users put greater emphasis on showcasing physical appearance in their profile photos, whereas Tinder users are less prone to present themselves with explicitly body-revealing images, potentially favoring face pictures or more sexually modest visual presentation.

Table 4

Comparisons of Presence of Body-Focused Images by Dating Apps

variables	presence of body-focused images		Total	Chi-Square
	No	Yes		
Tinder	51	16	67	P = 0.000
Grindr	43	55	98	
Total	94	71	165	

Discussion and Conclusion

Summary and Interpretations

This study explored how gay men in Taiwan present themselves on two major dating platforms, that is, Tinder and Grindr and the analysis focused on three main dimensions: (1) biography word count, (2) coded language use for sex, and (3) body-focused imagery. Although no significant difference was found in biography word count between the two platforms, significant differences emerged in the use of coded language and body-focused profile images.

Grindr users were significantly more likely to use coded language (e.g., “top,” “bottom,” “discreet,” “vers,” “side,” “0 or 1”) and body-centric imagery (e.g., shirtless photos or a zoom-in image of the penis/nipple/butt) in their profiles, aligning with the app’s reputation for facilitating quick, sexually oriented interactions. In contrast, Tinder users demonstrated more conservative self-presentational strategies, writing slightly longer bios and including fewer sexualized images or coded sexual references. These findings support existing literature suggesting that app affordances and community norms shape how identities are performed online (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Wu & Trottier, 2024).

The results reinforce that online self-presentation is not just a matter of individual preference but also of adaptation to technological affordances and platform cultures. The contrast between the two platforms suggests that users make strategic choices to align their (sexuality) identity performances with the platform’s implicit norms and audience expectations.

Implications

These findings contribute to the field of digital sociolinguistics and queer communication studies in several ways. First, they demonstrate that self-presentation strategies among gay men are highly adaptive and context-sensitive. The difference in coded language use reflects users' ability to navigate in-group communication practices, using concise terms that resonate within the gay community and are understood within the specific app culture.

Second, the prevalence of body-centered images on Grindr suggests an ongoing reinforcement of physical ideals within gay dating apps. This has implications for discussions on body politics and performative masculinity, as it reflects how online dating platforms can amplify narrow standards of attractiveness.

Third, the minimal difference in biography length indicates a possible convergence in how users engage with self-description across apps, suggesting that while platforms may nudge users toward certain behaviors, individual differences and broader cultural factors also play a role. The content of the examined biographies were not qualitatively interpreted but gay users on both dating platforms commonly shared the dedication to express what they were expected to express in line with the communication norms on both dating apps.

Finally, from a sociotechnical perspective, the results remind us that platform design matters: Grindr's GPS-based immediacy and visual-first interface reinforce quicker, appearance-driven exchanges, while Tinder's swiping model and narrative-friendly design afford more room for holistic identity expression. These structural differences influence not only who gay users can match with, but also how they choose to represent themselves in the first place.

Future Research Suggestions

While this study focuses on Taiwanese gay men aged 20–30, future research could extend the analysis to older age groups or other sexual and gender identities within LGBTQ+ populations. It would also be valuable to investigate how users shift their presentation styles across platforms over time, or how they reflect on their own profile strategies. Longitudinal studies could explore whether users' self-presentational styles evolve with increased app experience or life stage.

Moreover, qualitative interviews with users could complement quantitative content analysis by providing insight into the motivations behind their image or language choices. It is also worthwhile to compare textually and qualitatively as to what and how gay users express themselves, project expectations from potential dating partners, prioritize their various social identities in self-introduction sections on dating apps. Finally, future research could examine how cultural values, such as modesty, masculinity, or sexual discretion, could intersect with platform affordances to shape (sexuality) identity performance across cultural contexts.

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