# Feeld’s rise as ‘vanilla tourists’ reshape a kink dating app’s identity



The dating landscape is undergoing a noteworthy transformation, with alternative platforms like Feeld attracting a new wave of users traditionally uninterested in non-monogamous relationships. Often referred to as “vanilla tourists,” these individuals are arriving at Feeld seeking more conventional dating experiences, marking a significant shift for an app originally built to cater to those exploring ethical non-monogamy and kink. Feeld’s user base has burgeoned over recent years, with a reported growth of 30% per year since 2022, as the app gains traction amidst declining numbers for other dating platforms.

Ana Kirova, Feeld’s chief executive, has expressed a mix of optimism and concern about this influx. While she acknowledges that broadening the app’s audience was never a primary goal, Kirova suggests that accommodating newcomers could pose challenges for existing members. “Every time someone tells me about this vanilla people being on the app, I just ask: ‘What’s the problem with vanilla?’” she stated. This inquiry reflects a nuanced perspective on the diversity of dating preferences, posing the question of why there should be a hierarchical distinction between “vanilla” and more alternative experiences.

Feeld distinguishes itself from other dating apps through its unique browsing experience, allowing users to explore profiles without gamified swiping mechanisms or predictive algorithms. Kirova criticises traditional matchmaking algorithms for constraining user experiences, akin to “shopping for granola,” where choices are overly simplified. This approach has resulted in a community that, while not devoid of issues like ghosting or “benching”—where one person keeps their options open while ignoring other matches—fosters a more respectful atmosphere compared to other popular dating platforms.

However, the app still grapples with safety concerns endemic to the digital dating landscape. The rise of complex romance scams targets users, and Kirova notes that Feeld employs artificial intelligence to combat fake profiles, signalling an industry-wide battle with authenticity and safety. “There are big companies that are investing in scammers,” she explained, drawing parallels between her platform and a shadowy underbelly rife with deceit.

Culturally, Feeld is tapping into a shifting landscape regarding relationships and sexuality, particularly among younger generations. Increasing openness surrounding diverse identities and sexual orientations stands in distinct contrast to older, more static perspectives that limit sexual exploration. Kirova has observed a marked interest among women over 40, whose user numbers have risen by 16% in the last year. This change reflects broader cultural dialogues challenging outdated perceptions of female sexuality, creating space for diverse expressions and relationships.

The growing interest from Generation Z users is another testament to Feeld’s adaptability. Younger individuals are frequently seeking not just romantic connections but friendships and community support. This multi-faceted dating experience aligns with a departure from conventional dating models that emphasise quick hookups or linear progressions from dating to marriage.

As the app continues to capture the attention of vanilla tourists and alternative relationship enthusiasts alike, it must navigate the delicate balance of catering to its original mission while embracing a broader demographic. The challenge lies in ensuring that all users, whether they identify as vanilla or otherwise, feel welcomed and understood within a space that seeks to celebrate diversity rather than dilute it. As Kirova aptly puts it, “We don’t yuck anyone’s yum,” suggesting that the richness of human desire encompasses all flavours—even those considered mainstream.

Ultimately, Feeld’s expansion into more conventional territory mirrors a larger societal shift towards inclusivity in expressions of love and attraction. As the lines between vanilla and alternative dating continue to blur, platforms like Feeld will remain pivotal in shaping conversations around modern relationships, identity, and sexuality.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists), [[3]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/64681/1/is-feeld-too-vanilla-now-kink-dating-apps-relationships), [[4]](https://www.globaldatinginsights.com/featured/feeld-reputation-leads-to-huge-vanilla-user-growth/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/sep/08/throuples-dating-app-feeld-nearly-doubles-turnover-to-395m), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/09/why-is-dating-app-feeld-so-popular-fetishes-and-throuples-are-only-part-of-the-story)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/64681/1/is-feeld-too-vanilla-now-kink-dating-apps-relationships), [[4]](https://www.globaldatinginsights.com/featured/feeld-reputation-leads-to-huge-vanilla-user-growth/), [[6]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/feeld-dating-app-2024)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists), [[3]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/64681/1/is-feeld-too-vanilla-now-kink-dating-apps-relationships), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/09/why-is-dating-app-feeld-so-popular-fetishes-and-throuples-are-only-part-of-the-story)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/sep/08/throuples-dating-app-feeld-nearly-doubles-turnover-to-395m), [[7]](https://www.fastcompany.com/91167998/smaller-dating-apps-giving-hinge-and-bumble-run-for-the-money)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/64681/1/is-feeld-too-vanilla-now-kink-dating-apps-relationships), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/09/why-is-dating-app-feeld-so-popular-fetishes-and-throuples-are-only-part-of-the-story), [[6]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/feeld-dating-app-2024)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists), [[4]](https://www.globaldatinginsights.com/featured/feeld-reputation-leads-to-huge-vanilla-user-growth/), [[7]](https://www.fastcompany.com/91167998/smaller-dating-apps-giving-hinge-and-bumble-run-for-the-money)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2025/jun/01/unconventional-dating-app-feeld-reports-surge-in-vanilla-tourists> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/sep/08/throuples-dating-app-feeld-nearly-doubles-turnover-to-395m> - Feeld, a dating app catering to alternative relationships, reported a significant financial growth, with revenues nearly doubling to £39.5 million in 2023. The company, founded by an entrepreneur couple in an open relationship, has expanded its global reach, with the majority of its income now derived from overseas users. This surge in popularity reflects a broader interest in non-traditional relationship structures such as polyamory and kink, aligning with Feeld's mission to elevate the human experience of sexuality and relationships.
3. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/64681/1/is-feeld-too-vanilla-now-kink-dating-apps-relationships> - Feeld, initially launched as a niche platform for ethical non-monogamy and kink, is experiencing a shift as more users seeking conventional dating join the app. This influx of 'vanilla tourists' has led to concerns among long-time users about the platform's evolving identity. The article explores the challenges Feeld faces in balancing its original mission with its growing mainstream appeal, highlighting the tension between maintaining a space for alternative relationships and accommodating a broader audience.
4. <https://www.globaldatinginsights.com/featured/feeld-reputation-leads-to-huge-vanilla-user-growth/> - Feeld, known for its focus on diverse sexualities and relationships, is witnessing a surge in new users, including those seeking conventional dating experiences. While this growth indicates the app's expanding popularity, some long-standing users express concerns that the platform is becoming too 'vanilla.' The article discusses the implications of this trend, considering the balance Feeld must strike between its original mission and the evolving dynamics of its user base.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/09/why-is-dating-app-feeld-so-popular-fetishes-and-throuples-are-only-part-of-the-story> - Feeld, a dating app catering to alternative relationships, has experienced significant growth, with revenues nearly doubling to £39.5 million in 2023. The article examines the factors contributing to Feeld's popularity, including its inclusive approach to various relationship models and its mission to elevate the human experience of sexuality and relationships. It also discusses the challenges the app faces in maintaining its original identity amidst mainstream success.
6. <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/feeld-dating-app-2024> - Feeld, a dating app known for its focus on alternative relationships, is experiencing a surge in users seeking conventional dating experiences. This influx of 'vanilla tourists' has led to concerns among long-time users about the platform's evolving identity. The article explores the challenges Feeld faces in balancing its original mission with its growing mainstream appeal, highlighting the tension between maintaining a space for alternative relationships and accommodating a broader audience.
7. <https://www.fastcompany.com/91167998/smaller-dating-apps-giving-hinge-and-bumble-run-for-the-money> - Feeld, a dating app catering to open-minded couples and singles, has seen significant growth, with an average user increase of 30% year-over-year since 2022. The app's flexibility and inclusive approach have contributed to its popularity, particularly among Gen Z users. The article discusses how Feeld's unique features and user-focused design have enabled it to compete with larger dating platforms, offering a more tailored experience for those seeking alternative relationship models.