

The Hong Kong consumers' perceptions of Boys' Love dramas
and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community



An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Communication Management
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การรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคชาวฮ่องกงที่มีต่อละครแนว Boys' Love และทัศนคติที่มีต่อประเทศไทยและชุมชนเกย์



สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาโทสาขาสถาปัตยกรรมศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

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ชุง ยาน ชาน : การรับรู้ของผู้บริโภคชาวฮ่องกงที่มีต่อละครแนว Boys' Love และทัศนคติที่มีต่อประเทศไทย และชุมชนเกย์. (The Hong Kong consumers' perceptions of Boys' Love dramas and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ศศ. ดร.กฤษณะ พันธุ์เพ็ง

การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจการรับรู้และทัศนคติของผู้บริโภคชาวฮ่องกงที่มีต่อละครแนว Boys' Love (BL) ประเทศไทย และชุมชนเกย์ การดำเนินการวิจัยใช้วิธีการเชิงคุณภาพพร้อมกับการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับผู้บริโภคชาวฮ่องกงทั้งหมด 12 ราย พวกเขาอายุระหว่าง 18-30 ปี ผลลัพธ์แสดงให้เห็นว่าแพลตฟอร์มการสตรีมแบบ Over-the-top (OTT) และกลุ่มอ้างอิงมีส่วนสนับสนุนการเผยแพร่และการทำให้ละครไทย BL เป็นที่รู้จักในตลาดฮ่องกง องค์ประกอบด้านสุนทรียะ นักแสดง โครงเรื่อง และวัฒนธรรมไทยเป็นองค์ประกอบที่ดึงดูดให้ผู้ชมดูละครไทย BL อย่างต่อเนื่อง การบริโภคของพวกเขาพบทำให้พบความแตกต่างระหว่างละคร BL ของไทยกับการผลิตของประเทศอื่นในด้านโครงเรื่องและโลกของตัวละคร นอกจากนี้ พวกเขายังได้รับรู้มุมมองเชิงบวกที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความสัมพันธ์แบบรักร่วมเพศผ่านละครแนว Boys' Love (BL) ของประเทศไทย ผู้เข้าร่วมมีความเชื่อที่ดีเกี่ยวกับประเทศไทยและละคร BL ในแง่สังคมสำหรับทุกคนและความหลากหลายทางเพศ ผู้เข้าร่วมแสดงความตั้งใจในการเดินทางมายังประเทศไทย พวกเขายังรู้สึกเชื่อมโยงในเชิงอารมณ์ความรู้สึกกับโครงเรื่องโรแมนติกและความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างนักแสดงนำชาย ยิ่งไปกว่านั้นผู้เข้าร่วมได้เปิดเผยความเชื่อที่ดีและความรู้สึกเชิงบวกต่อชุมชนเกย์



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This research aimed to explore Hong Kong consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward Thai Boys' Love (BL) dramas, Thailand, and the gay community. To conduct the research, a qualitative approach is used with the instrument of in-depth interviews. A total of twelve Hong Kong consumers participated in this study. They are aged between 18-30 years old. The results depicted that Over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms and reference groups contributed to the distribution and exposure of Thai BL dramas in the Hong Kong market. Aesthetic elements, actors, storyline, and Thailand culture are the elements that attract participants to watch Thai BL dramas continually. With their consumption, they found differentiation between Thai BL dramas and other countries' production based on storyline and story setting. Besides, they receive positive messages related to homosexual relationships through Thai BL dramas. Participants owned favorable beliefs regarding Thailand and Thai BL drama in terms of inclusion and gender diversity. Traveling intention is shown by the participants to Thailand. They also connected emotionally with the romantic plots and the cooperation between leading male roles. Moreover, participants revealed favorable beliefs and positive feelings toward the gay community.



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Significance of the study

The presence of BL, short for Boys' Love dramas, is a unique drama genre that depicts homoerotic relationships between male characters and has increased significantly in recent years among a diverse audience worldwide, especially in China and other south-east Asian countries (Shi, 2020). While the acceptance of romance dramas highlights homosexuality content increasing, the attitudes of mass society towards people within the gay community might also vary. Thai BL dramas will be significantly discussed in this paper in relation to the Thai government's determination to promote tourism through the upheld Thai BL dramas.

BL is a phenomenon of Asian dramas originating from yaoi, the Japan-originating form of homoerotic fiction (Kwon, 2021). The genre emerged in the 1970s and has since gained widespread acceptance. The community of BL readers flourished long before the culture came to the small screen as the topic of boys' love is a famous genre in Japanese manga (Baudinette, 2019). While yaoi was first published as manga, it is now seen in various media, including anime, webcomics, TV episodes, movies, and video games. Asian countries like Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Thailand are

renowned for producing BL dramas and building a solid fanbase of BL dramas (Kwon, 2021). A typical BL series will include 30-minute episodes that follow the narrative of two boys in a high school or university context. With shows like "The Untamed" or workplace dramas like "HIStory 3: Trapped," BL series from China or Taiwan have stretched the genre further into fantasy and dramas.

Among all Asian countries, Thailand immediately gained critical attention from academics and media analysts because of its rising BL culture (Zhang & Dedman, 2021). In the year 2021, approximately 20 BL series were produced in Thailand alone. BL dramas are known in Thailand as the Y series, which derives from the Japanese word "Yaoi". Bolstered by the openness of the LGBT community, Thai BL films and series have been well-received in the local market. They are seen as promising export products, attracting lucrative revenue streams and expanding into other markets (Bangkok Post, 2022). As a reference to Korea using KPOP to infiltrate their cultures into other countries, the government and politicians of Thailand grasp that opportunity while using their soft power through entertainment media and the creative industry to promote Thailand tourism. Following this objective, Thailand has begun campaigns to attract international tourists, notably Japanese visitors. One of the reasons for them to visit Thailand belongs to the trend of popular series, movies, and

reality shows produced originated in Thailand. For example, a tour to follow in the footsteps of Mew-Gulf, two leading roles of a famous Thai BL series “TharnType the series”, has been planned on June 2022 and created heated discussion among Japanese fans. Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) aims to sell 1,000 vacation packages to Japanese visitors in 2022, follow in the footsteps of the BL or Y Series in Thailand, and expand to at least 5,000 in 2023(Royal Thai Government, 2022).

Indeed, Japan is not the only country that celebrates the production of Thai BL dramas, and the Chinese audience is another group of supporters. Begin with the first BL drama, “Lovesick the series” translated and introduced to China, by Tianfu Thai dramas (later CFan Group), in 2014, the genre of BL dramas became famous among Chinese audiences immediately (Shi, 2020). After that, the dissemination of Thai BL dramas shifted from solely on television to online platforms to fulfill the demand of the Chinese audience. With an upturn of Thai BL dramas in Chinese online platforms, more audiences are interested in visiting Thailand according to the BL shooting scenes. According to Kanokkittika Kritwutikon, director of the TAT Chengdu office, the latest BL series, “I Told Sunset About You” aided in driving tourists to Phuket, which is the shooting site of the series (Bangkok Post, 2022). However, tourism promotion using Thai BL content cannot be as blatant as in other markets due to the

Chinese government's restrictive policy and cultural position towards the LGBT population. Hong Kong, the special administrative region in China, is not affected by the relative restriction from China and has also shown a strong interest in the Thai BL industry in recent years.

Recently, “2Gether the series”, produced by GMMTV Thailand, exploded its popularity on social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Weibo, in 2021. According to streaming service LINE TV, “2Gether” surpassed 100 million views on their platform by April 2020, becoming one of their most popular shows that year. Besides, the first episode of “2Gether” has garnered over 28 million views on YouTube. TVB, a Hong Kong free and biggest broadcast station, even brought the broadcasting right to these dramas, which is the first time topics related to the gay community remained sensitive there. “2Gether” then became a trend on various social media platforms in Hong Kong, with an increasing audience overtly shown to be fans of Thai BL dramas online. This phenomenon is worth studying as the content related to homosexuality was too sensitive to be broadcasted on television in the past. If they included any plots or homosexual characters in the dramas, those plots might be presenting it negatively or stigmatizing those gay characters. And they could never be the protagonists of the dramas. However, in the same year, another free broadcasting

station, ViuTV, in Hong Kong started to produce and broadcast a local BL drama, *Ossan's love*. This is the first local BL TV series production in Hong Kong. And it had received great success as the promotion and advertising regarding this series were overtly being seen on the billboard, television, poster, and different online media platforms. The popularity of BL dramas in Hong Kong tends to rise.

On the other hand, the popularity and success of Thai BL dramas in Asia is a fascinating phenomenon since LGBTQ+ topics (including gay people and the gay community) are still considerable controversy in Asia due to conventional thoughts or religious ideas (Cheng, Henry & Kim, 2021). Overtly showing queer romantic relationships in the mainstream media might relate to the changing cultural norms and peoples' attitudes towards the gay community.

LGBTQ+ initiative urges equal rights for people with different sexual orientations in society. According to the studies done in Hong Kong (Loper, Lau & Lau, 2014; LaCoursiere, 2020), 60% of the respondents said they agreed that there should be legal protection against discrimination against people of different sexual orientations in Hong Kong in both 2013 and 2020. However, protections for the gay community in schools, the workforce, and marriage remain limited nowadays and still belong to the minority group (International Labour Organization, 2015). Equality is

included in the Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance ("HK Bill of Rights"). In accordance with Article 25 of the Basic Law, "all Hong Kong residents shall be equal before the law." The HK Bill of Rights, specifically article 22 under section 8, forbids all forms of discrimination and ensures that everyone is equally protected from such practices based on race, sex, language, religion, political beliefs or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth or another status. While, members of the LGBTQ+ community do not always get equal rights since the HK Bill of Rights does not expressly prohibit sexual orientation discrimination.

In Hong Kong, there is limited research done on the topic of the genre 'BL', and some people criticize that BL dramas bring stereotypes to the public instead of understandings of the gay community. Considering the sign of changing public attitudes toward homosexuality and the popularity of BL dramas in Hong Kong, this study will explore the perceptions of Hong Kong audiences toward Thai BL dramas and their attitudes toward the gay community and Thailand. Besides, as the Thailand government is now aiming at utilizing BL dramas as soft power to promote Thai tourism and penetrate the Thai culture into other countries, this study would also tend to explore the Hong Kong audience's attitudes toward this policy. Since the BL

dramas always focus mainly on the two male leading roles, the public attitude research would also focus primarily on the gay community in Hong Kong instead of the whole LGBTQ+ community. The complexity of the LGBTQ+ community may not be represented thoroughly inside the BL dramas at the moment. This research will choose to target the relationship between the gay community and BL dramas only.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To explore the Hong Kong consumer's perceptions toward Thailand's BL dramas.
2. To explore the Hong Kong consumers' attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community base on their consumption of Thai BL drama.

1.3 Research questions

1. What are Hong Kong consumer's perceptions toward Thailand's BL dramas?
2. What are Hong Kong consumers' attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community base on their consumption of Thai BL drama?

1.4 Scope of the study

This research is based on qualitative approaches. In-depth interviews will be used as a research instrument to examine 12 respondents to explore their perceptions

toward Thailand's BL dramas as Thailand's soft power to attract tourists and the Hong Kong consumer's attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community regarding their consumption of Thai BL dramas. The samples of this study will be Hong Kong citizens of all gender, aged between 18 to 30, who have watched the BL series "2gether the series", "I told sunset about you", and "A tale of thousand stars" which were produced by Thailand. Therefore, the purposive sampling method would be adopted to maintain the selective criteria. The in-depth interview was conducted in early November to collect the required data.

1.5 Operational definitions of variables

Perceptions are three-stage: exposure, attention, and interpretation. This is an active process in that we intentionally turn the stimuli around us in society into something that makes sense to us and gives interpretation to it (Solomon, 2020).

Attitude is the consumer's overall evaluation of the Thai Boys' Love (BL) dramas and their attitudes toward the gay community. Attitude is looked at from the tripartite view of attitude. This study measures attitude based on the respondent's cognitive, affective, and conative information. Attitude is the favorable or unfavorable

evaluative reaction toward something or someone, shown in one's beliefs, feelings, or intended actions (Myers & Twenge, 2022).

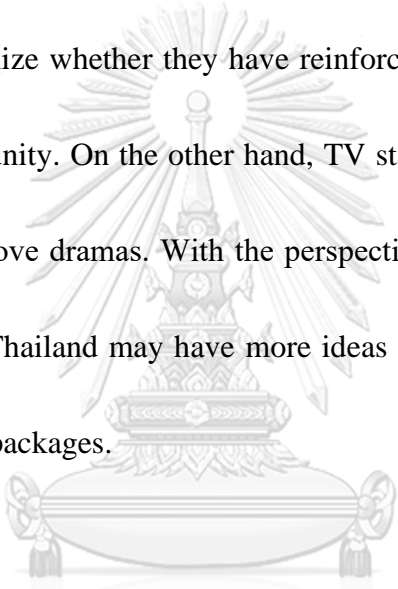
Boys' love (BL) dramas are a genre of homoerotic media that focuses on the romantic and sexual relationship between two male characters. In this study, the BL dramas used to focus on Thai production. Three Thai BL series were selected, "2Gether the series", "I told sunset about you", and "A tale of thousands stars".

The gay community describes the group of people whose enduring physical, romantic, or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (The center, 2022).

1.6 Expected benefits from the study

1. Academically, the results from this study can extend the body of knowledge of people's perceptions and attitudes toward Thai boys' love (BL) dramas and the gay community in recent years as BL dramas have been a hot topic that still needs further studies with different facets. This study will provide the perspectives of the Hong Kong audience toward the Thai entertainment industry, which have yet to be uncovered.

2. Practically, the findings from the study can generate evidence of the audience's perceptions toward the Thai BL dramas, which have been used as a tool to promote Thai tourism in recent years, and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community. This can aid Thai TV drama producers and broadcasting agents in considering the presentation of homosexual characters in the dramas carefully. It could help them recognize whether they have reinforced stereotypes and stigmatized the homosexual community. On the other hand, TV stations could choose whether to broadcast more boys' love dramas. With the perspectives from outside Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand may have more ideas on utilizing the BL industry in the tourism promotion packages.



CHAPTER 2
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Literature Review

In this chapter, the study of previous literature and research will be done to understand the concepts that will be used in this research. Definition and critical evaluation will be included in this part. Concepts of consumer perceptions, attitudes, over-the-top (OTT) platforms and boys' love (OTT) dramas will be discussed accordingly.

2.1 Perception

Perception is a process in which we give meaning to raw sensations. The conscious reception, selection, processing, and interpretation of information by our brain via all senses are referred to as perception (Franz, Kaletka, Pelka & Sarcina, 2009). What is perceived is also described by the term perception. The process of perception is in a three-stage that includes exposure, attention, and finally, interpretation (Solomon, 2020). This is an active process in that we intentionally turn the stimuli around us in society into something that makes sense to us and gives interpretation to it. We do not passively receive and process information as we do have cognition. Each interprets things and situations differently according to an individual's bias, experience, and needs (Solomon, 2020).

Begin with the process of exposure. It is related to the sensory stimuli that our sensory receptors receive (Solomon, 2020). Sensory stimuli are composed of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Moreover, sensory receptors are the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin. In our daily life, we are exposed to several external stimuli. However, only some stimuli can get into the range of our sensory receptors. Most of the time, we would focus on some stimuli that get our attention and interest and be unaware of other stimuli. We cannot perceive due to those stimuli being below our

sensory threshold. The sensory threshold is whether the stimulus is powerful enough to intentionally influence a person's consciousness (Solomon, 2020).

Attention is the second stage of the process of perception. The degree to which processing activity is directed to a certain stimulus is referred to as attention (Solomon, 2020). The allocation of our attention is varied as it might depend on the recipients or the characteristics of the stimuli. Nowadays, we are living in a world where information is everywhere. Sensory overload is common to every media consumer (Solomon, 2020). Data from Solomon (2020) claimed that consumers in their twenties switch media outlets around 27 times every nonworking hour. Producers of TV dramas must be creative enough and have enough knowledge regarding the preferences and needs of their audience to catch their eyes and attention.

Nonetheless, the capacity of the human brain is limited. We are unable to pay attention to every single element. Perceptual selection is the way we do to prevent us suffering from being overwhelmed by information infused (Solomon, 2020). The consumer would be more likely to be aware of specific stimuli aligned with their needs, which is perceptual vigilance (Solomon, 2020). Thus, we could choose which stimuli we give respond to and which we do not give respond to, and this is perceptual defense (Solomon, 2020). If a stimulus threatens us in any manner, we may ignore it

or misrepresent its meaning to make it more acceptable. After all, when consumers are exposed to and keep paying attention to the same stimuli continuously, those stimuli will become more familiar and cause people to no longer pay attention to them. It is the adaptation. Solomon (2020) summarized four factors leading to adaptation: intensity, discrimination, exposure, and relevance. Firstly, the intensity of stimuli would affect the senses, and the least intense stimuli, like soft sounds, would cause the least sensory impact on the consumer. Secondly, discrimination means the simplest the stimuli to be, the required attention and response would be the least in detail. Thirdly, when consumers are experiencing exposure to a similar stimulus for a while, they would get used to those stimuli. Lastly, the relevance of stimuli to the receiver would affect their effectiveness. When the stimuli are not essential enough, they fail to catch people's attention.

Interpretation is the final stage of the process of perception. This is a process in that we have to appoint meanings and interpretations to the stimuli which have caught our attention (Solomon, 2020). Nevertheless, different people would have various interpretations of similar stimuli since it is a step in which we must use our subjective thoughts to explain the objective situation. Socialization is the crucial element that differs in every individual's ability to interpret. Every individual is

undergoing socialization with different cultural backgrounds, which makes sensory perception culturally specific (Solomon, 2020). Therefore, people with different racial backgrounds and who speak other languages could vary their interpretation of the same stimuli they received. In terms of socialization, it is critical to understand how consumers interact with culturally dictated societal norms and adapt to societal developments (Marshell, 2010).

A schema is a set of beliefs held in our minds. Schema is the element that alters us in assigning meanings to stimuli (Solomon, 2020). Identifying and invoking the appropriate schema is critical in making choices since it sets the criteria consumers will use to assess the message and consumption.

2.2 Attitude

Allport (1935) described “attitude” as the most unique and essential idea in American social psychology. Attitude is one of the mentioned concepts used frequently in several academic areas. Gagné and Briggs' (1974) definition of an attitude as an internal condition that influences an individual's choice of action toward some object, person, or event emphasizes that attitudes cannot be observed directly but should be inferred from behavior. In Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) words, an

attitude is an acquired predisposition to respond consistently favorably or unfavorably to a particular item. The declaration of an evaluative judgment about an item is an attitude (Maio & Haddock, 2010). This means an attitude relates to how we feel about something and frequently influences our actions. An attitude might differ in two significant ways when seen as an evaluative assessment. First, attitudes differ in their valence or direction. Second, the intensity of attitudes varies. Besides, the concept of beliefs, or assertions that individuals believe to be accurate, is another notion strongly connected to attitudes (Severin & Tankard, 2014). Attitudes are crucial as they impact how we see the world, what we believe, and what we do.

Attitude is not innate. It needs to be learned. Lutz (1980) stated that we discover our sentiments of favorability or unfavorability through knowledge about the attitude object or direct experience with the object. An attitude object could be anything that can be assessed on a favorability scale. Some attitude objects (e.g., liberalism) are abstract, whereas others are tangible (e.g., a red Corvette car). Attitude objects might include one's self (e.g., self-esteem) and other persons (e.g., a specific politician), as well as social policy concerns (e.g., capital penalty) and social groups (e.g., people from Canada) (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Therefore, through contact with different attitudes toward objects directly or indirectly, attitudes toward those objects

would be formed. However, this also means external communication tools could modify attitudes.

The favorable or unfavorable attitude of the consumers would be consistent with their behavior. Lutz (1980) stated that attitudes, the remnants of positive or negative emotions, govern a wide range of apparent behaviors that an individual may express towards an attitudinal. Once a person holds a negative attitude toward any attitude object, such as a particular product, this person would choose not to consume that product. Attitudes are enduring systems of positive or negative appraisals, feelings, emotions, and behavioral or behavioral tendencies associated with social objects (Krech, Crutchfield, & Ballachey, 1962).

Attitude is unobservable, and nobody could ever see what attitude is like.

Attitudes are hypothetical constructs and cannot be directly verified (Lutz, 1980). The existence of attitudes is postulated by theories that attempt to explain behavior.

Attitudes as constructs are useful theoretical tools as long as people behave as if they actually have them. That is, even though attitude is held to a covert nature that is not overt behavior, it can be used to predict the overt behavior of individuals. A set of theories has been constructed throughout the years to explain how attitude helps with behavior prediction.

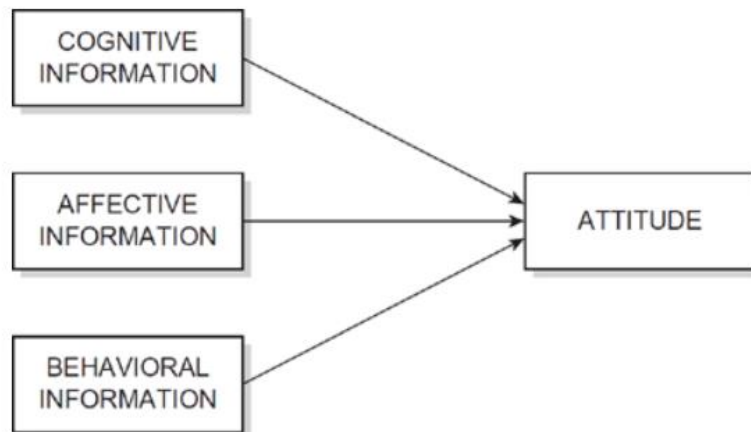
A functional theory of attitudes has been developed to explain how attitudes drive social behavior (Solomon, 2020). This theory assumes that the existence of attitudes is due to they are serving a purpose for the individual. Six functions are suggested in this theory, utilitarian function, value-expressive function, ego-defensive function, knowledge function, consistency function, and uniqueness function (Katz, 1960; Ostrom, 1994; Aiken, 2002; Solomon,2020). The utilitarian function is concerned with obtaining rewards and avoiding punishment. Simply because a thing causes us pleasure or pain, some attitudes about it emerge. In terms of value-expressive function, the consumption of a particular product should be tied to expressing one's self-image, personal values, or identity. When an object could fit one's personality, the consumer would be more willing to buy it and form a positive attitude. The ego-defense function is the development of a mood to deal with emotional issues. Sometimes the formation of attitudes is to protect ourselves from threats. Attitudes serve as a framework for organizing knowledge about the world, which is the knowledge function. Consistency function is that attitude forms to maintain one's personality that considers oneself to be constant. The last function of uniqueness is an attitude developed to differentiate oneself from others in a social group.

To study the concept of attitude, scholars developed two main theoretical orientations. The tripartite view of attitude and the unidimensionality view of attitude are two directions.

The tripartite view of the attitude

The tripartite view of attitude has a long history, and several scholars have devoted their ideas and knowledge to constructing this model. In this view, the underlying components of attitude are cognition, affect, and conation (Lutz, 1980). According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), attitudes are propensities to judge something favorably or unfavorably, usually shown in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. The premise behind the tripartite model of attitudes is that latent variables evoke three modes of manifestations: a person's cognitive, emotive, and behavioral reactions to an attitude object (Kaiser & Wilson, 2019). It is anticipated that the attitude object will shape the latent attitude. This tripartite model of attitude is indeed developed to measure the individual's explicit attitude by combining cognitive response, affective response, and behavioral response. While this approach also stresses how knowing, feeling, and doing are interconnected.

Figure 2.1: The tripartite model of attitudes



Source: Maio, G. R., & Haddock, G. (2010). The three witches of attitudes. In *The psychology of attitudes and attitude change* (pp. 24-44). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446214299.n2>

Cognitive is the first component of the tripartite view of attitude. The beliefs, thoughts, and attributes we attach to an object are referred to as the cognitive component of attitudes (Maio, & Haddock, 2010). The idea of cognition is what the person perceives to be true about the attitude object. In many situations, a person's attitude may predominantly depend on the favorable and unfavorable qualities they identify with an object. When an individual associates directly or indirectly with the relevant source, they would gain knowledge and information from it, which turns out to be the cognition a person developed. This set of knowledge and information an individual obtained would also be the belief this person holds on to the related objects.

The second component of this model is affection. The term "affect" has historically been used to refer to both good and negative emotions one may have for an attitude object (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960). The feelings or emotions connected to an attitude object are referred to as the affective component of attitudes (Solomon, 2020). Multiple factors affect attitudes, including affective reactions. Feelings that are sparked in response to an attitude object are a significant way that feelings influence attitudes. When a person associates with an attitude object, some degree of emotion or feeling is elicited. Furthermore, the feeling consumer holds with a particular object is the attitude. If the consumer owns a positive attitude toward the object, it equates that he or she holds a positive attitude toward the object.

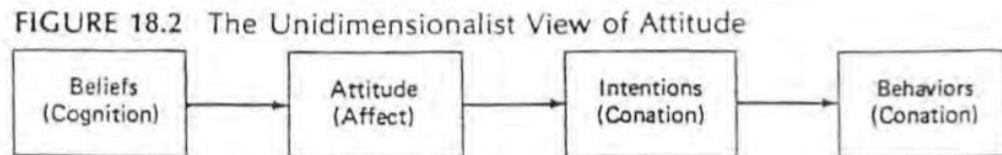
The last component of this model is behavior or the conation. The activities he or she does toward the thing, or in certain situations, at least his or her intentions to take action are referred to as behavior. Behavior has been described as overt activities and responses to the attitude object. It also alludes to earlier actions or encounters involving an attitude object. In Bem's (1972) self-perception theory, people may infer their attitudes by considering how they have acted in the past toward the attitude object since they do not always have access to their ideas on various items (Maio, & Haddock, 2010).

However, this tripartite view of attitude has been criticized by different scholars in the past. Lutz (1980) stated that the tripartite model is indeed a well-established concept, but it needs more empirical studies and investigation support. The failure to measure all those three components of attitude: cognition, affection, and behavior, is the major criticism regarding this measurement model. In comparison, some research found that the concept of attitudes with solely behavioral roots has received less attention in the study than attitudes with major affective or cognitive underpinnings (Fabrigar, MacDonald & Wegener, 2005).

The Unidimensionalist View of Attitude

As the criticism of the tripartite view of attitude increases from time to time, more scholars support the unidimensionalist view of attitude. When using unidimensional scaling, such as Likert scales, in research evaluating attitudes, unidimensionality has been regularly and increasingly accepted (Samra, 2014). The concept of unidimensionalist view of the attitude model is based on the same components of the tripartite model of cognition, affection, and conation. While beliefs replaced the term cognition, conation became intentions and behaviors (see figure 2.2). Nevertheless, under the unidimensionalist view of attitude, attitude measurement is no longer the combination of three elements but only consists of affection (Lutz, 1980).

Figure 2.2: The unidimensionalist view of attitude



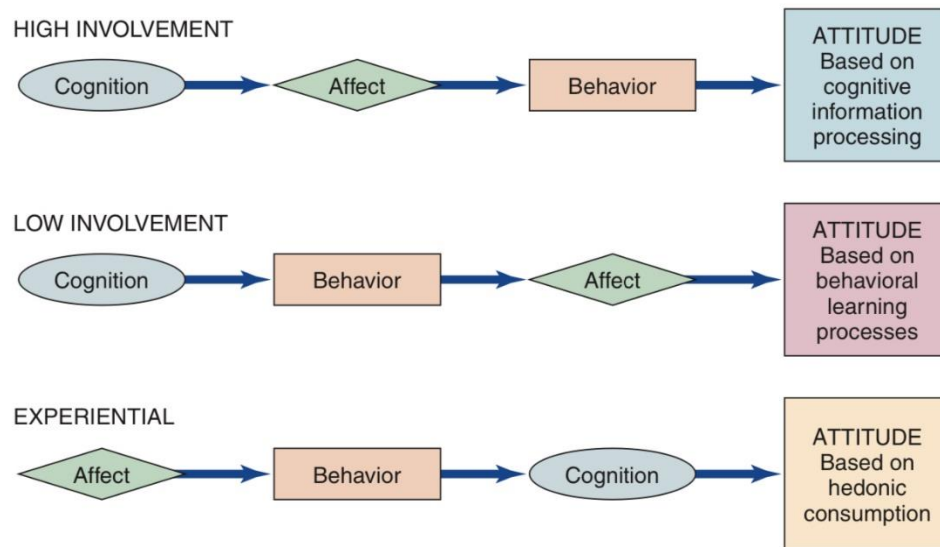
Source: Lutz, R. J. (1980). The role of attitude theory in marketing. University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Marketing Studies.

Ostrom (1968) asserted that this evaluative dimension, notably the judgments of favorability or unfavorability, may only reflect the emotional component of the tripartite paradigm. Other beliefs and behavioral aspects are understood as antecedents or outcomes of attitude rather than as components of attitude as such (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Besides the approach of consistency among the three components proposed by the tripartite view, the unidimensionalist view attached importance to the casual relationship among the components. Beliefs are the knowledge consumer obtained from attitude objects that cause attitude formation. After the attitude is formed, this would lead to the consumer's intention to decide whether or not to consume the attitude objects. On the other hand, a number of hierarchy-of-effect models have been developed consistent with the casual flow as the unidimensionalist view of the attitude model.

The three hierarchy-of-effect models are the high-involvement hierarchy, the low-involvement hierarchy, and the experiential hierarchy (see figure 2.3). The high-involvement hierarchy of effects model assumes consumers form attitudes after they intentionally obtain and evaluate the knowledge regarding the attitude object. After that, they would engage in appropriate behavior. The low-involvement hierarchy of effects model assumes that the formation of attitude is based on the limited knowledge consumers gained and appears after the consumption process. For the experiential hierarchy of effects model, consumers' behavior and knowledge would only happen after their emotional reaction. Attitude formation in this model is based on hedonic motivation, such as the packaging or advertising would vary one's attitude (Solomon, 2020).

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Figure 2.3: The hierarchy-of-effect models UNIVERSITY



Source: Solomon, M. R. (2020). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, and being*. Pearson.

2.2.1 Attitude toward BL dramas

Among all the studies on analyzing the content of or related to BL dramas, only a few studied the audience's attitude toward BL dramas. In Supamane, Bhovichitra, and Yang's (2020) research, they explored the attitudes of loyal fans, at an early working age, towards BL dramas. An in-depth study was conducted in Thailand to uncover loyal BL fans' watching experiences and attitudes toward both BL dramas and homosexuality. The target audience all agreed that homosexuality is as normal as heterosexuality in modern Thailand society. People are being more open-minded than before. Moreover, for the session exploring their attitude toward the

homosexual relationship between the male characters in BL dramas, all sample members show positive attitudes. Male respondents claimed to share a similar personality and reactions with the male characters in BL dramas, making them fond of the actors. The excellent chemistry between male actors turned most respondents into loyal fans and made them feel pleas while watching the BL series. Also, in this study, some respondents indicated that BL dramas would shape people's attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community in certain aspects, while some claimed BL dramas would create misunderstanding among the older generation.

To understand how young female Chinese fans manage gender, sexuality, and identity by reading Chinese BL fiction, Zhang (2016) conducted a qualitative study in China. The results are pretty different from the previous one in that the consumption of BL work did not contribute to creating a relatively positive attitude towards homosexuality in reality. Respondents considered that they maintained negative attitudes and perceptions of the gay community due to social media and internet reinforcement. Besides, some of them owned a supportive attitude toward the male character within BL work only. If the gay person was their family member, they might be as supportive as towards the BL. Lastly, some respondents argued that same-sex love and male characters in BL are being beautified that could not match with

real-life homosexual people. Overall, there are mainstream stereotypes in Chinese society that BL could negatively impact their perceptions.

Research is being done in Malaysia to focus only on the attitudes of homosexual audiences toward BL dramas (Jerome, Hadzmy & Hie, 2022). A consumption pattern was found that the materials that respondents consumed the most were BL dramas produced in Thailand and Taiwan. The work of Thailand included “TharnType the series”, “2gether the series”, “Fish upon the sky”, and “Lovely writer”. The results of this study represented two themes of attitudes of the audience. First, the gay male characters in the BL materials consumed by the participants only expressed their identity as gay men in a limited way. They can see themselves in dramas regarding only the development of romantic relationships. Second, BL dramas were being criticized for not revealing the real-life problems homosexual group of people would meet in Malaysia as it is challenging to open up about their sexual orientation there. The fantasy of the romantic theme could barely acknowledge the serious LGBTQ+ issues, such as AIDS/HIV (Jerome, Hadzmy & Hie, 2022). The above studies revealed that audiences, under different contexts and backgrounds, would have various attitudes developed towards both BL dramas and homosexuality.

2.2.2 Attitude toward the gay community in Hong Kong

The field of LGBTQ+ matters is always a famous research topic in western countries. However, there are limited studies regarding public attitudes toward the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities with a background in Hong Kong. Hong Kong is an intriguing case study in terms of social attitudes toward LGBTQ+ equality and acceptance. After 156 years of British colonial administration, this special administrative region of China presents a sociopolitical environment filled with Chinese and Western cultural elements (Yeo & Chu, 2018). Under the "one country, two systems" constitutional principle of its Basic Law, the territory's mini-constitution, Hong Kong has a high degree of autonomy, including several freedoms and rights. This historical background differentiated Hong Kong from any other city in mainland China in many aspects. However, with that special mixed cultural background, there is little help in accepting sexual minority groups in Hong Kong society. Hong Kong's current laws specifically ban discrimination on the basis of sex, disability, family status, and race, but not on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or intersex status. LGBTQ+ people in Hong Kong have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation or sexual identity in areas such as education, employment, and access to services (Suen et al., 2016).

A reason has been suggested to explain why the development of the protection law for sexual minorities in Hong Kong is relatively slow. Chan (2008) indicated that together with the “primacy of Confucianism aligned with Christianity”, both the colonial and Hong Kong governments utilized these mixed cultures to stonewall any social policies related to sexual minorities. The idea of “filial piety,” or devotion to family, is key to Confucius's thought (National Geographic, 2022). For Confucian principles, the family was the most critical group, and loyalty to the family could only strengthen the community around it. This is a philosophy and belief system from ancient China, which is deeply rooted in our culture, affecting the development and construction of our society a lot, especially in social settings and social systems. While Christianity holds a different thought toward homosexuality, the previous generation opposed homosexual activity. As a result, the notion of Christianity brought in by the British added to the traditional Confucian belief that LGBTQ+ matters were taboo in the past.

Over the last decades, the visibility of gays and lesbians in Hong Kong has grown dramatically (Lau, Lau & Loper, 2014). Since the decriminalization of male homosexual acts in 1991, Hong Kong’s LGBTQ+ movement has progressed gradually (To, 2004). In 2005, Gays and lesbians gathered in Hong Kong for the

annual International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO) marches. There have also been yearly Pride Parades since 2008. These events have inspired gays and lesbians to "come out" rather than hide their sexual orientation (Wong, 2007). During this period, tolerance toward gay and lesbian is enhanced. In recent years, an increasing number of gays and lesbians in Hong Kong have come out, including celebrities such as music sensations Denise Ho and Anthony Wong and Hong Kong's first openly gay legislator, Raymond Chan (Lau, Lau & Loper, 2014). Since then, a growing number of local Hong Kong researchers have conveyed their interest in conducting a set of studies based on homosexuality topics.

In Hon, et al. (2005)'s study, they surveyed to investigate Chinese medical students' attitudes toward and personal experiences with homosexuality. The American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality as a diagnostic category in 1973 and removed it from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980 (Hon, et al., 2005). It is believed that there is a revolutionary change in the understanding of the homosexual community. Thus, this study employed 780 medical students to complete the questionnaire with a total of 16 questions. Among 627 students who returned the questionnaire, 86% reported that they would accept their friends as homosexuals. Two-thirds said homosexual and heterosexual couples should

have similar legal rights in marriage, but fewer than half (46%) believed they should have equal legal rights in adopting children. One-fourth of students believed homosexuality was a psychiatric illness that required treatment. They concluded that the attitudes and experiences of the five classes of medical students do not differ considerably, while religious beliefs and gender may impact these attitudes.

In 2006, the Hong Kong Home Affairs Bureau released a report on the topic of public attitudes toward homosexuals. The survey structure included public awareness of homosexuality, attitudes towards homosexuality, public acceptance of homosexuals in different contexts and situations, discrimination faced by homosexuals, and ways to address the problem of discrimination faced by homosexuals. 2068 Hong Kong residents had completed the survey, and 2040 respondents were enumerated. The result showed that 61.1% of people had the same viewpoint on the link between homosexuality and promiscuity. 47% of respondents thought gays were mentally normal persons. Homosexuality, according to 38.9% of respondents, defies communal morals.

Another research on the attitudes toward lesbian and gay men among Hong Kong Chinese social work students was conducted by Kwok, Wu & Shardlow (2013). Their study used a Chinese version of Herek's attitudes toward lesbians and gay men

scale (ATLG) to measure students' attitudes toward lesbian and gay men. They first summarized some significant findings from the previous studies. First, in a study by Snively and colleagues, there is a consistently negative attitude toward lesbian and gay men from the samples of social workers. Second, respondents' acceptance of lesbians and gay men is rising in North America, Europe, and certain Asia-Pacific nations, but not in East Asian countries. Third, inconsistent findings have been discovered about variations in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men among social work students based on demographic categories. Last, it was stated that almost all research was undertaken in non-Chinese societies. However, their study concluded that social work students in Hong Kong had a favorable attitude toward homosexuals. Also, in their senior year of study, older students who self-identified as non-Christian had prior voluntary service experience and had taken sexual diversity courses showed more favorable sentiments.

In recent years, Yeo & Chu (2018) conducted another research to examine Hong Kong people's attitudes toward social acceptance, discrimination protection, and marriage equality for homosexuals. A total of 1008 Hong Kong adults finished the survey. It is found that there are 52.29% positive attitudes toward the social acceptance of homosexuals. 50.72% favorable attitude toward discrimination

protection. And only 32.79% of people had a favorable attitude toward same-sex marriage. Having more homosexual/bisexual friends or coworkers increased support for social acceptability and discrimination protection, but not for same-sex marriage.

Even though different researchers and topics would utilize the survey distinctively with various scales, the results showed that public attitude toward gay and lesbian is relatively positive in several aspects. Nevertheless, it is clear that discrimination regarding the sexual behavior of homosexuals is still existing. More studies need to be done in the future to know how or what to do to eliminate negative stereotypes and discriminatory behavior toward homosexuals.

2.3 Over-the-top (OTT) Platforms

Over-the-top (OTT) services have recently altered consumers' watching behavior through technology innovation and personal adaptations affecting traditional TV viewing. OTT programming material is "content streamed over the internet to a device where it may be seen, such as a television, mobile phone, or tablet" (Yousaf, Mishra, Taheri & Kesgin, 2021). Besides, OTT platforms are also being stated as digital streaming services that deliver selected content to clients through the web (Sahu, Gaur & Singh, 2021). As with the significant development of digital technology, global media consumption in digital formats has expanded substantially

(Sahu, Gaur & Singh, 2021). There is a significant shift from linear TV and cable/satellite to OTT services. This trend is frequently linked to the fact that OTT platforms provide customers with digital media services at any time and from any location, as well as flexibility, accessibility, high quality, and affordability (Malthouse, Maslowska & Franks, 2018). Digital consumers may now enjoy media material and videos of their selection in a rather convenient way.

The development and evolution of OTT platforms are claimed to start in the 1970s. According to Bury and Li (2013), Sony Corporation pioneered the affluence of digital video watching in the 1970s with its ephemeral product, the Betamax VCR (video cassette recorder). In the late 1990s, the digital video viewing proclivity was diffused and steadily proliferated in the digital US market, and DVR (Digital Video Recording) arose as a trend among its consumers (Greenberg, 2010). In the 21st century, Sahu, Gaur, and Singh (2021) have summarized a three-stage evolution of the transformation of internet consumer behavior and the prominence of online video streaming and download services. Initially, internet content was only produced as promotional tools for conventional television. Thus, original online content, such as short movies or webisodes, was produced to promote the programs broadcasted on traditional television and aim for live feedback. Eventually, original web dramas and

movies in a complete length were produced and streamed through the internet since the internet content in the previous step became famous among internet consumers.

Nowadays, OTT platforms like Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime Video are not merely providing their original production online but also providing space for streaming conventional television content. However, there are differentiations between OTT platforms and conventional television in terms of operations and production. OTT platforms provide their customers with self-governed means of personalized and customized online material based on their tastes and choices. Media producers were also given unlimited freedom in terms of content creation and streaming of their cosmopolitan and sophisticated shows, which were personalized to match customer expectations (Steiner & Xu, 2018). In addition, membership and subscription strategies were established to make the material unique and to deliver a customized and adjustable OTT experience to its consumers (Chen, 2018).

With the development and the noticeable increase in the audience segments of OTT platforms, numerical studies have been done regarding the consuming behavior of OTT platforms. According to the Boston Consulting Group's study 'Entertainment Goes Online,' revenues from OTT platforms grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of more than 40% from 2007 to 2017 and are predicted to expand by 20%

from 2017 to 2023 (Samtani & Jindal, 2018). This might locate the changing consumer habits of the audiences and the competitiveness of OTT platforms compared to conventional television services. At the same time, a study by Bouwman et al. (2014) demonstrates that watching Mobile TV has a significant association with active viewing behavior. A study by Kim and Kim (2020) stated that recommendation, lack of self-control, and lack of consumption are associated to the consumption of OTT streaming platforms.

Hybridization and glocalization are the terms used to describe the phenomenon of cultural globalization (Straubhaar, 2007). While under the force of globalization, local cultures have been disseminated to other countries through television and several OTT platforms. Hybridization and glocalization are the terms used to describe the phenomenon of cultural globalization (Straubhaar, 2007). This process is not producing global homogenization but means accepting some elements of foreign cultures and becoming a rather complex hybrid culture. Straubhaar (2007) explained two phenomena between 2002 and 2006. During this period, television dramas from South Korea were exported to East Asian countries, while the United States production was exported to most European, African, and Latin American

countries. In recent years, boys' love(BL) has become another fascinating phenomenon under the theme of cultural globalization.

2.3.1 Uses and Gratification theory

To study the consumption behavior of internet users regarding OTT platforms, several pieces of research using the uses and gratification theory. The Uses and Gratification theory discusses how media affects individuals and how people utilize it to meet their needs (Ruggiero, 2000). While the underlying assumption of this theory is that the audience was an active participant in the media exchange.

Uses and gratification theory is used to discover the functions of mass communication toward the audience(Severin & Tankard, 2014). Thus, five psychological and social functions of mass media have been summed up by Katz, Gurevitch, and Haas(Severin & Tankard, 2014). First is the cognitive need that consumers utilize media to obtain knowledge and information. Second, affective needs, which consumers utilize media for favorable emotional and aesthetic experiences. Third, personal integrative needs, which consumers aimed at strengthening personal status and credibility. Forth, social integrative needs, which consumers aim to enhance their connection with family members and friends. Last, tension release needs and consumers tended to use media to help them get rid of the

pressure they gained from real life. In terms of this theory, the consumer of mass media is the one in charge and in control instead of passively receiving messages.

However, no matter whether audiences and consumers are the passive or active ones using mass media, the media indeed plays a role in altering audiences' attitudinal structure (Berger, 2013). In the studies discussed above, researchers found a positive relationship between the exposure of homosexual characters on television and people's attitudes or acceptance toward homosexuality. However, this does not mean that the exposure held all the responsibility caused the attitudinal change or formation.

2.4 Boys' Love (BL) dramas

Boys' love (BL) was originally Japanese queer popular culture. Under the phenomenon of globalization, BL has become a transnational genre that earns enormous attention on television worldwide. In the 1970s, BL developed in Japan as 'shojo manga' (girl's comics) (Baudinette, 2019). Welker (in Baudinette, 2019) claimed that BL is the work of important female auteurs who attempt to examine the essence of female sexuality via the love of attractive young boys in fantastical circumstances. Throughout the later part of the twentieth century, BL grew increasingly popular and marketed and is now not limited to comics, with BL anime,

television serials, books, and video games filling Japan's popular culture sector. Iwabuchi (in Baudinette, 2019) gave out one of the reasons why BL, as one of the Japanese popular cultures, has recently become a globalized form of media within East and South East Asia due to its potential to present different visions of modern development.

To classify the work of BL in Japan, there are four points. Firstly, Even its concentration on homoerotic relationships between men. BL's primary audience is claimed to be heterosexual women. Those heterosexual women who fall into BL are known as *fujoshi*, meaning "rotten girls," who enjoy losing themselves in the supposedly "pure fantasy" of the romance between two male characters (Galbraith, 2015). Secondly, Female characters are often villains or small supporting characters with minimal effect on the plot (McLelland, in Baudinette, 2019). The main focal point of BL dramas is the romantic relationships between male characters. However, the characters frequently emphasize that they are spiritually drawn to one another and instead identify as 'gay' within the plots. Thirdly, there is a standard style for the male characters inside BL dramas. Most of them need to be 'beautiful' teenagers who possess masculinity that is 'soft' or 'androgynous' (McLelland & Welker, in Baudinette, 2019). Lastly, within the context of BL, the romantic relationship between

two male characters should contain *seme* and *uke* (McLelland & Welker, in Baudinette, 2019). *Seme* is the attacker who acts as the penetration partner during sexual behavior, while *uke* is the receiver which acts as the penetrated partner. However, when BL comes to other countries and merges with different cultures, the essentials to classify what BL is would be changed. Such as, they would erase the setting of the age of the main male characters within BL or withhold the explicit sex scenes not to let people see BL as pornographic (Pagliassotti, 2009).

Supamane, Bhovichitra, and Yang (2020) stated in their study that the mainstream media, including television, the internet, and movies, are essential sources of information on homosexuality in terms of gender identity and gender expression. It has the capacity to affect and control the attitude of the audience. They may also serve as a bridge between homosexuality's freedom, image, and acceptance. Like most other countries, Thai television dramas only included male and female characters in the past. Sexual diversity was ignored in mass media.

Until the 1990s, BL culture, also named yaoi culture, appeared in Thailand as comics with Thai translation focusing on the intimate relationship between male characters. Entering the internet era in the 2000s, Thai authorities saw the mainstream content of BL comics as “obscene,” which remained an urban subculture (Prasannam,

2019). BL manga in the early 2000s could only consume secretly as it was labeled as *sue lamok* (obscene media). When the time came to the late 2000s, the government's surveillance procedures were unable to halt the internet success of the yaoi culture. In a short period, the popularity spread to mainstream media, mainly through television series and blockbuster films. In 2014, Thailand finally broadcasted the first complete Thai BL series on Channel 9, which was run by the Mass Communication Organization of Thailand (MCOT) (Baudinette, 2019; Prasannam, 2019). This BL series is "Lovesick, The series". The popularity of this drama allows it to continue with the second season in 2015. After that, 47 BL dramas being broadcasted between 2015 and 2019 (Baudinette, 2019). BL dramas have become an important part of current Thai popular culture.

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties 45 years ago, China and Thailand have maintained cordial relations with close interactions in economic, political, and cultural sectors (Shi, 2020). The dissemination of Thai TV dramas in China is not always a rising trend. The first Thai dramas introduced in China were at the year of 2003 and achieved a peak in 2009. Then, the spread of Thai dramas there met a downturn until 2014. The year 2014 is known to be the year of the first official Thai BL dramas disseminated into the Chinese market. Together with the restriction on

Korean TV dramas in China, there is a boom for Thai BL dramas to develop in the Chinese market. Nowadays, the Thai government's dissemination of Thai BL dramas is seen as necessary to infiltrate Thai culture and boost Thai tourism. At the same time, this drama genre is debating whether it could represent the gay community in society.

Limited studies explored the relationship between Thai BL dramas and people's acceptance of homosexuality published in English versions. Supamane, Bhovichitra, and Yang (2020) discussed that many external factors affect people's attitudes toward homosexuality. They also concluded that mass media could largely influence and promote social movements by shaping people's mentality. The context and the storyline of TV dramas would carry out particular messages that have an impact on the audience's attitude, beliefs and ideas formation. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is controversial because some researchers claim to have no contribution of BL dramas to the real gay community (Ni, 2021; Wang, 2020). Wang (2020), in his study, suggested that BL dramas are just the enjoyment of the marginal, and the storyline of BL dramas contains imagination of happy love life that is not connected to the real life of the homosexual group. A study from Ni (2021) found that through analyzing the Chinese audiences' comments online, audiences who saw themselves as *Fujoshi* (rotten girls or obsessive fans of BL) would focus more on the virtual image

of boys' love, not the reality of the gay group. While Yang (2018) holds an optimistic opinion that BL TV series could contribute to eliminating prejudice towards the gay community. She believed that BL dramas has the ability to introduce the gay community to mainstream society without unequal stereotypes. With the wide spread of Thai BL dramas in Asian society, those dramas might have specific effects on the attitudes construction of the audience, which is worth studying. Additionally, further discussion is needed on improving the content of BL dramas to be helpful and relevant to the gay community's acceptance.

Media Effect(Television) on Homosexuality

As discussed above, television is still commonly used in a number of countries, and some other studies found that television is acting as an agent of social change (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Bond & Compton, 2015; McLaughlin & Rodriguez, 2017; Sink & Mastro, 2018). Calzo and Ward (2009) investigated the links between media consumption and college students' acceptance of homosexuality through the use of cultivation theory. They employed 1,761 undergraduates from the Midwestern United States to complete the surveys. According to the Cultivation Theory, the most dominating media, television, cultivates or reinforces particular attitudes and ideas in its viewers (Berger, 2013). In Calzo and Ward's (2009) study, they assumed that

frequent, regular media consumption would enable viewers to cultivate ideas about homosexuality that are consistent with those depicted in the media. This means that if negative stereotypes are prevalent in the media, repeated exposure may make individuals less tolerant, causing them to accept bad depictions. Heavy television watchers sometimes feel that the world they see on television is the actual world, leading to various errors. As a result, specific media genres have been associated with consumers' attitudes toward homosexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009). There are some results: white women who had previously seen more prime-time programs were more likely to indicate acceptable attitudes toward homosexuality, black women who watched more sitcoms reported being less tolerant, and men who watched more soap operas, daytime talk shows, and prime-time television in high school were more tolerant of homosexuality.

Bond and Compton (2015) employed a total of 342 participants from a Midwestern university in the United States to explore the association between heterosexuals' support for homosexual equality and their exposure to gay characters on television. The parasocial contact hypothesis is grounded in this research. This hypothesis expects that television viewers will build impressions and relationships with television characters that are comparable to those formed with real-life people

(Bond & Compton, 2015). In turn, the stereotyping, bias, and discrimination will be decreased through exposure to social minorities on television, just as face-to-face intergroup contact. The result of this study is that there do have a positive relationship, while the relationship owned by racial minority groups is more remarkable than among white participants.

McLaughlin and Rodriguez's (2017) study linked up two ideas: exposure to homosexual characters on television would lead to higher acceptance, and homosexual characters on television serve to reinforce negative stereotypes by the concept of stereotyped identification. Stereotyped identification is built on the theory of mediated intergroup contact, which indicates that through imitating intergroup contact, exposure to minority television characters might reduce social distance and boost acceptance of different social groups (McLaughlin & Rodriguez, 2017). Emotional and cognitive immersion is required for identification. Therefore empathy would be roused as people would look at the world through the characters' eyes. The findings support the hypothesis that identification plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between exposure to homosexual television characters and higher acceptance of homosexuals (McLaughlin & Rodriguez, 2017). Indeed, participants' connection with television characters was the sole link between exposure and

increasing acceptance. On the other hand, the idea behind stereotyped identification is that as identification grows, so will preconceptions about homosexuality (McLaughlin & Rodriguez, 2017). The reason is that television viewers cognitively adopt the perspectives of television characters, the more stereotypical or exaggerated these characters are, the more embedded these preconceptions should acquire in a viewer's mind.

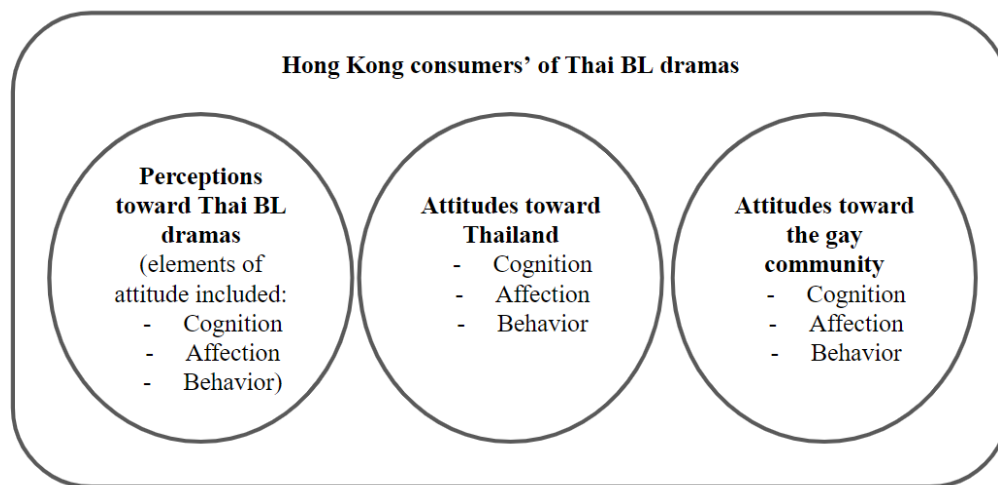
Sink and Mastro's(2018) research also utilized the theory of mediated intergroup contact to discuss their obtained results. This study aimed to investigate the association between exposure to television shows featuring homosexual male protagonists and homonegativity in a diverse adult population(Sink & Mastro, 2018). Their findings support their assumption that the amount of media interaction with a minority group considerably impacts the prosocial effects connected with vicarious contact.

Media exposure through television does have a certain relationship with the acceptance of homosexuality in society. However, the studies discussed above are from a western country background.

2.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 2.4 for this study. The target sample of this research is focusing on Hong Kong BL audience between 18-30 years old. Consumers' perceptions toward Thai BL dramas and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community will be explored. Precisely, audiences' perceptions toward the Thai BL dramas as a soft power to infiltrate Thai culture and promote Thai tourism is one of the main objectives of this study.

Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework



CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The research is based on qualitative approaches. Using the qualitative research method, the aim is to explore the audience's perceptions and attitudes toward the

consumption of boys' love dramas, Thailand and the gay community. In-depth interviews were chosen as a research instrument to understand participants' perceptions and attitudes. This chapter explains in detail the research sample and sampling method, research tool, measurement scale of the variables, and data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Sample and Sampling Method

The research employed a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews will be conducted with 12 selected respondents to generate information regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward Thai BL dramas, Thailand, and the gay community. The sample of this study is Hong Kong people who have watched Thai BL dramas. Therefore, the sample requirements are:

- Respondents must be Hong Kong citizens of all gender aged between 18-30 years old.
- Respondents must have watched the selected Thai BL dramas, which are “2Gether the series”, “I told sunset about you”, and “A tale of thousands stars”.

To meet the above conditions, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to choose a sample from the population since this sort of sampling was particularly effective in scenarios and allowed for rapid access to a targeted sample (Crossman,

2019). It is dependent on persons with specific features who have been able to help with pertinent studies.

The interviews were conducted in early November 2022. Each of the interviews lasts for around 40-60 minutes. The language used for the interview is Cantonese as it is the official language in Hong Kong so that participants could express their feeling more appropriately. All interviews took place through online meeting platforms, such as Zoom meetings, WhatsApp video call,s and Telegram video calls. During the Covid-19 pandemic period, real-life face-to-face meetings might be unavailable and improper, while the facial mask would hide respondents' facial expressions. While conducting online meetings, respondents could choose to stay in any venue that generates a relaxing atmosphere. Participants are encouraged to share their knowledge, feelings, and opinions on Thai BL dramas through the probing technique. Confidentiality is needed to be assured with all participants. There will be three procedures for the interviews.

Procedure for pre-interview

1. Identifying and recruiting BL drama audiences in Hong Kong from the researcher's personal network.

2. Noting down the participants' information such as name, contact number, or social media account.
 3. Contact the participants and inform them about the research project, and set up an appointment for the interview.
 4. Contact the participants to confirm the appointment one day before the appointment day.
 5. All the questions were reviewed to have a clear understanding of the topic.
- Appropriate equipment was prepared for the interview, including a computer that works for meeting and recording purposes, a mobile phone, a notebook, and a pen.

Procedure during the interview

1. Informing the participants about the objective of the research and asking for permission to record the interview.
2. Making the participants feel comfortable so that he/she feels free to share their stories.
3. Taking notes and observing nonverbal signs such as facial expressions and body language during the interview..
4. Closing the interview and thank the participants.

Procedure for post-interview

1. The interview statements were carefully checked and transcribed, translating the content of the interviews into English.
2. Making notes, highlighting the essential sections of the interview statements, and using the data for interpretation.

3.2 Research instrument

This research study employed a semi-structured questionnaire guideline that all questions are open-ended. Some questions are set and structured, while during the in-depth interviews, follow-up questions would include getting a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives. The questions about attitudes are based on the tripartite view that looks at the audience's cognitive, affective, and behavioral information (Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960).

The questions guideline is based on and developed from the existing research studies from Jerome, Hadzmy, and Hie (2022), Zhang (2016), and Supamanee, Bhovichitra, and Yang (2020). Interview questions include demographic characteristics, BL dramas consumption experience, and motives, perceptions and attitudes toward the BL dramas content, attitudes toward the use of BL dramas as a

soft power to promote Thai tourism, the attitudes of the gay community, and the audience's opinion on the production of BL dramas from Thailand.

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

The researcher carefully transcribed and reviewed the interview statements after gathering the data. The data had to be then translated into English. The data had to be translated into English. To comprehend the world through the eyes of each participant, this method enabled the researcher to comprehend the world through their eyes. Finally, comparable topics and categories are presented. Each topic emerged from the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's.

3.4 Validity and reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the semi-structured questions for the interviews are developed and based on previous studies (Zhang, 2016; Supamane, Bhovichitra & Yang, 2020; Jerome, Hadzmy & Hie, 2022). Besides, during the interviews, the researcher must actively involve participants in determining if the interpretations are accurate representations of them (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

CHAPTER 4

Findings and Discussion

In the following chapter, research data will be analysed in accordance with the concepts discussed in the previous chapters. The discussion starts with the demographic profiles of the research samples and, thus, consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward Thai BL dramas, Thailand, and also the gay community.

4.1 Demographic Profile

Figure 4.1: Demographic profile of interviewees

No. of Interviewees	Gender	Age	Education level	Occupation	Religion
1	Female	26	Master Degree	Student	N/A
2	Female	25	Bachelor Degree	Primary School Student Tutor	N/A
3	Female	25	Higher Diploma	Part-time Catering Worker	N/A
4	Female	30	Bachelor Degree	Accountant/ Personal Tutor	N/A
5	Female	26	Bachelor Degree	Art Director	N/A
6	Female	18	Higher Diploma	Student	Christian
7	Male	29	Bachelor Degree	Freelancer/ Student	N/A
8	Female	22	Bachelor Degree	Hospital Administrative Officer	Christian

9	Female	24	Bachelor Degree	Bank Officer	N/A
10	Female	29	Bachelor Degree	Social Service Organization Officer	N/A
11	Female	27	Bachelor Degree	Nurse	N/A
12	Female	30	Master Degree	Accountant	Catholic

In-depth interviews are conducted as one of the instruments of qualitative research during late October and early November. A total of twelve Hong Kong audiences are selected to participate in the interview sessions (See figure 4.1). All of the interviewees at least watched three of the famous Thai BL dramas, “2gether the series”, “I told sunset about you” and “A tale of thousand stars”. There are eleven female interviewees and one male interviewee. The average interview time is between 40 to 60 minutes. The age of the interviewees is between 18 to 30. For the education level, two of them hold Master's Degrees, two of them hold a higher diploma, and eight of them hold bachelor's degrees. Three out of twelve interviewees have religions, two of them are Christian, and the last one is Catholic. Four interviewees claimed they did not know anything or had not had many ideas about homosexuality before getting to know BL dramas. They also do not sure if they have any friends belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The rest of the eight interviewees considered themselves to

understand the gay community to a certain extent and six of them claimed to have friends belonging to the homosexual community. Their knowledge was obtained from the school, friends, and TV programs. Moreover, before getting to know the Thai BL dramas, only two had read or watched BL production produced by other countries. Those BL productions included Japanese BL manga and Taiwanese and Chinese-produced BL dramas. Based on the interview results, key findings can be summarized into critical points below.

4.2 Consumption Perception and Experience of Thai BL Drama

Referring to the first objective of this study, Hong Kong consumers' perceptions of Thai BL dramas are retrieved from interviewees' responses. The discussion would follow the three-stage process of perceptions. Hong Kong consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward Thai BL dramas are relatively positive. Favorable perceptions could generate loyalty, reputation, and word-of-mouth. In the following discussion and findings, interviewees expressed their feelings and thoughts regarding Thai BL dramas.

Exposure

Over-the-top (OTT) platforms are essential to the distribution of Thai BL dramas

Based on the three-stage process of forming perceptions, the first stage is exposure to the stimuli. Exposure is a process in which we receive stimuli through our sensory organs. Among all those external stimuli getting in contact with a person, this person would unconsciously select the incentives she is most interested in (Solomon, 2020). Thus, we would pay attention and give different meanings to it. According to the research sample of this study, seven interviewees have been exposed to the Thai BL drama “2Gether the series” through Netflix, one of the famous OTT platforms.

The term “Over-the-top” (OTT) refers to any streaming service offering internet content. OTT streaming services work similarly to a television network that broadcasts audiences’ favorite programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer habits and audience behavior were altered. With social distancing restrictions, people spent more time at home, and the subscription to OTT streaming service platforms increased remarkably (OMD Hong Kong, 2020). Netflix, myTV super, and VIU are the leading OTT platforms in Hong Kong, and they have increased in penetration and viewing time from 2019 to 2021. According to the Omnicom Media Group (2020), NETFLIX's penetration and viewing time are increasing across the spectrum, a number of 26% audience have subscribed to OTT platforms in the past 6 months due to COVID-19 and increased interest in foreign content. As of May 2021, Netflix has

shared 82% of respondents among the eleven leading platforms in Hong Kong (Statista, 2022). The consumption of Netflix was being increased. On the other hand, “2Gether the series” is a Thai BL comedy-dramas that premiered on GMM 25 and LINE TV in 2020. Thus, it is available from streaming on Netflix in some regions. From the responses of seven interviewees, Netflix is where they access the Thai BL dramas for the first time. Since “2Gether the series” was shown to rank as top 1 on Netflix after its appearance, it raised the interviewees' attention. They were unfamiliar with Thai-producing dramas, especially the Boys' Love genre. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic provided consumers with more spare time at home for media consumption. In addition to this Thai BL series appeared in a prominent position within the Netflix website platform, so it had a higher chance of being chosen.

“It’s a coincidence that I saw the “2gether the series” on Netflix. This drama is in the recommendation column. Since I have never watched any Thai dramas before and it seems the actors of “2gether” are quite handsome, I ended up starting to watch this series.”

- *Female, 26, Master Degree Student*

“In 2020 through Netflix. I subscribe to Netflix because I’m a fan of American or British dramas and movies. But one day, “2gether the

series” popped up in the recommendation column. It caught my attention.”

- *Female, 30, Accountant/ Personal tutor*

Apart from Netflix, other OTT streaming service platforms, like ‘myTV super’, ‘Line TV’ and ‘gagaoolala’, were mentioned. MyTV super is a local Hong Kong OTT streaming platform owned by Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). “2Gether the series” also premiered on myTV super platform, which caught Hong Kong people’s attention and interest. Later, they actively searched for more Thai BL dramas and related information on other video streaming platforms. According to the participants of this project, OTT streaming platforms are vital for reaching new audiences in Hong Kong. Moreover, the online video platform “YouTube” is commonly used by interviewees to search for new BL dramas from the Thai entertainment company they knew. The company GMMTV is well-known among my interviewees as they knew that the first BL drama, “2Gether the series” they watched, was produced by GMMTV. Therefore, some interviewees claimed they intended to search for dramas on GMMTV’s official Youtube channel. From the research, OTT platforms are responsible partly for the distribution and exposure of Thai BL dramas in the Hong Kong market.

“...Some fans in the fans group told us that they knew “2gether the series” through TVB’s myTV super platform. Both of us were surprised that BL could be displayed on Hong Kong television.”

- *Female, 30, Accountant*

“...I don’t know if you know the website ‘gagoolala’, there’s got all the LGBTQ+ dramas..”

- *Male, 29, University student*

Social Group influence

Five interviewees revealed that they received recommendations from friends on choosing which TV program. Friend is a reference group that influences individuals in decision-making. Reference groups impact consumer behavior by instilling goals in the person and assisting him in selecting the product that best suits his lifestyle (Solomon, 2020). Close friends affect interviewees by imparting information about Thai BL dramas. Even interviewees were unfamiliar with Thai dramas and BL genre dramas, they trusted their friends, and their attitudes changed by that. Besides, some interviewees joined the Thai BL dramas fans group on telegram and Instagram. If they want to be a member of the group, they would have to conform to the group's norms. Interviewees would like to show that they are in the group. They

would follow the reference group's suggestions to search for the same dramas. Watching "2gether the series" and "Tharntype the series" is a way interviewees use to comply with the group, and they expressed their trust to their friends as they claimed that 'the drama must be funny to watch if they would recommend to me' and 'I want to join their discussion'. It shows their conformity and trust.

On the other hand, it also belongs to word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. Positive or negative verbal communication between groups or individuals is referred to as word-of-mouth communication. WOM, on the other hand, provides a trustworthy message that promotes consumer decision-making (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Interviewees' reference groups should own positive perceptions of Thai BL dramas so that they intend to share them with friends. The strategy of WOM communication would be another way that helps the distribution of Thai BL dramas and is responsible for influencing consumers' decision-making.

"Two or three years ago that my friend introduced "2Gether the series" to me.

I'm not a big fan of watching TV or dramas. However, during covid, I could

barely work, and I tried to watch the "2Gether the series"."

- *Female, 26, Art director*

“My friend recommended “2Gether the series” to me around two years ago. If they would recommend me, it should be funny enough to watch.”

- *Female, 18, Higher diploma student*

Statements by interviewees indicated that word-of-mouth communication through close friends is relatively reliable. The participant, who is not a fan of TV dramas, trusted her friends and accepted her suggestions. Besides, social pressure is also applied during the fans' group discussion.

Attention

Attention is the second stage of perception forming in consumers' minds. After receiving the external stimuli of the Thai BL dramas through OTT platforms and friends, consumers would put their attention on the information that could fulfill their needs. According to the response from interviewees, they found Thai BL dramas are alluring to them in terms of the appearance of actors, actors' acting, storyline, and the cultural elements presented within the drama scenes.

Aesthetic element

The physical appeal of the actors is one of the elements that attract interviewees to Thai BL dramas and grab consumers' attention to the drama. Over

half of the interviewees stated that the reason they were willing to watch “2gether the series” is due to the physical appeal of the two actors, Vachirawait Chivaaree (Bright) and Metawain Opas-iamkajorn (Win), who was shown on the cover of the dramas selection column. BL dramas are a type of drama focusing on the romantic relationship between two male characters. In Thailand’s production of BL dramas, they cast young males with good figures and good-looking faces as the leading roles. Interviewees appreciated that among all those BL drama productions, they could always find some new handsome actors inside. Appealing actors could not just attract new audiences but also reserve regular audiences. For most interviewees, the first element they recalled from their memory was the handsome actors. The comment of the interviewees is stated below.

“..Then, I realized their actors (Bright and Win) are quite attractive, so I started to search for other Thai BL dramas...”

- *Female, 25, Primary school student tutor*

Actors and storyline

Apart from appealing appearance, actors’ acting skills are also essential to the audience. Response from the interviewees stated that they appreciated some Thai actors with excellent acting skills. BL dramas are about romantic relationships, and

promising acting skills could create an emotional attachment in the audience. An example of “I told sunset about you” the series is given by an interviewee. Two actors, Putthipong Assaratanakul (Billkin) and Krit Amnuaydechkorn (PP), were praised for their affecting actions in the dramas. The chemistry between the two leading roles would affect the audience’s emotions. However, another interviewee also claimed that not every Thai BL actor could play their role well. Bad acting skills worsen the impression of the whole drama series.

“I like “I told sunset about you” the most. The whole drama is so perfect that the script is on point. No one dialogue is useless..., Billkin and PP are so good at acting, and I can see the chemistry between the actors. ”

- *Female, 26, Art director*

On the other hand, the themes and storyline of the Thai BL dramas also grab the attention of the consumers. Interviewees enjoyed the Thai BL dramas with the sweet and relaxed storyline and story settings, according to their responses. The school setting is the most commonly used story background of Thai BL drama production. Based on this setting, the story revolves around young university boys. As commented by interviewees, most of them enjoyed the fresh and lively plots that Thai BL dramas gave to them. As they decoded, the relationship between students

represents pure and frisky. There are fewer tragic scenes. Interviewees also referred to Thai BL dramas as romantic comedies. Thai BL dramas not only showed a love story but also included amusing scenes. Watching Thai BL dramas would be relaxing entertainment for Hong Kong audiences. Two interviewees revealed that they have no interest in the ghost-related themes of Thai BL dramas as it does not fulfill their need to be relaxed through consuming the dramas. They showed an emotional connection with the delightful romantic relationship that happened between youngsters.

“I like the school settings among all. Because the story happened in school would be less complicated. I like the pure and fresh atmosphere between young boys and students. There’s not much baddy. Easy and relax.”

- *Female, 25, Catering part-time worker*

Reflecting Thailand culture

A new impression of Thailand is introduced to the Hong Kong audience through exposure to Thai BL dramas. The filming of “I told sunset about you” took place mainly in Phuket, one of the cities in Southern Thailand, which impressed the audience with the magnificent scenes. In this drama, traditional southern Thai culture is shown with the historical buildings in Phuket’s old town, the traditional dessert ‘Oh-aew’, and the merged Chinese and Thai cultural elements. These were unknown

to most interviewees as the perception of Phuket to Hong Kong tourists would be sunshine and beaches. Watching Thai BL dramas is not only for entertainment but expanding audiences' knowledge of Thailand. Before Thai BL dramas were introduced into Hong Kong, the way Hong Kong audiences knew about Thailand was through travel websites or a few TV programs. Thai BL dramas now serve as a medium to transmit Thailand's local cultures. Interviewees claimed they are now getting familiar with Thailand's language and food cultures. Such as, they would understand what 'P' and Nong' mean in calling people. Some interviewees admitted that after they watched the Thai BL dramas, they intended to search for more information about Thailand on the internet.

“...They showed the local southern Thai culture through their scripted character names, scenes of Phuket, and also the southern Thai dialects...”

- *Female, 26, Art director*

Uses and gratification theory could be applied to explain interviewees' decision-making on focusing on Thai BL dramas. The idea of uses and gratification theory is concerned with explaining audiences' motives and associated actions (Luo, 2002). Based on the assumption of this theory, interviewees are actively involved in the media usage of Thai BL dramas. They selected to consume the dramas that could

satisfy their needs. Three sets of needs are satisfied when they choose to watch Thai BL dramas. They are cognitive needs, affective needs, and tension release needs. Firstly, interviewees gained knowledge regarding the cultures of Thailand with the presentation of BL dramas which belongs to the cognitive needs. Moreover, they consume Thai BL dramas to fulfill their affective and tension-release needs. As per interviewees' statements, they enjoy the aesthetic elements and the favorable emotional connection with the characters, such as handsome actors and actors' acting. Thus, they prefer the comedy and relaxed types of BL dramas after work, showing their intention to reduce stress from work and daily life. In conclusion, information acquisition, escape, and emotional release would be the possible motivations for the interviewees to consume Thai BL dramas.

Interpretation

The last stage of perception forming is interpretation. Interpretation is a process in which consumers give meaning to their experience through the processes of exposure and attention. People might interpret the same situation differently according to their previous knowledge, experience, or belief. From the interviewees' consumption and interpretation, Thai BL dramas differ from those of other countries and carry positive messages to the audiences.

Differentiation

BL genre of dramas is not owned and possessed solely by one individual country. Countries like Japan, Korea, and Taiwan also have productions. To compare the BL productions among those countries, Thailand's BL work has differentiation from others. Firstly, Thai BL drama production shows its inclusiveness by not just restricting only male homosexual relationships in the plots. Thai BL dramas would also display characters with different sexuality, such as lesbian and transgender characters. Besides, in the interviewees' experience, Thai BL's plot writing and creation are rather audacious. Compared to Japan and Hong Kong's BL drama productions stated by interviewees, their plot and scene design might seem comparably conservative. Sexual and intimate scenes would be allowed in the dramas that would be seen as a way to complete the story between a couple. Nevertheless, interviewees also revealed that excessive sex scenes might affect new audiences' perceptions of the Thai BL dramas/ entertainment industry and Thailand. Excessive sex scenes would be seen as making no sense to the plots and perceived as pornography which is not appropriate in the promotion of Thai BL dramas and culture.

“ I have watched several BL dramas produced by other countries, like the ones from Taiwan and Japan. Even though they are all about boy love, the relationship of the two male characters inside the stories still needs to be hidden from their friends. Those stories seem to remain stereotypes of gay people and tell the audience that gay relationships are still unusual. But Thai BL dramas are rather normalizing the relationship between people with different sexuality. Besides, Thai BL dramas include not only gay couples but also other LGBTQ+ communities, e.g., lesbian and transgender characters. Thai dramas are more inclusive and reflect reality.”

- *Female, 25, primary school student tutor*

Interviewees also compared the Thai BL dramas genre to the other drama genres. The Korean wave is another popular pop culture among the younger generation. Korean dramas are extensively seen on television, OTT platforms, and social media. Some interviewees mentioned that the Thai BL dramas storyline goes with a swing and straightforward, while Korean romantic dramas take a slow tempo to present the story. Thai BL dramas are also different from the other types of Thai romantic dramas in terms of storyline. A few interviewees admitted that their perception of Thai dramas is relatively campy and cliché, while the BL genre is

simple and light. The presence of the Thai BL genre provided more options to the Hong Kong audience while it has favorable perceptions of the Hong Kong audience.

“To compare, the plots and contents of the Japanese one are rather dull and tasteless. While Korean dramas are really not my cup of tea with a slow tempo of contents.”

- *Female, 26, Art director*

“I tried to watch some Thai dramas before, like “The fallen leaf”, only for its special story setting. But still, feel like it's too campy. Or I don't like they always talk about the family conflicts or disputes between couples and mistresses.”

- *Female, 24, Bank officer*

Message

Message decoded from the Thai BL dramas is according to interviewees' personal values, situation, and previous knowledge. Statement from interviewees indicated that the plots of Thai BL dramas production provide lessons and remind the audience of the social issues related to the LGBTQ+ community. Overall, Thai BL work presents a positive image in interviewees' replies. Homosexual characters have been seen multiple times in Hong Kong's TV dramas. Stereotypes are constructed

accordingly, such as gay people are feminine. Producers and audiences might label them as unusual.

In contrast, Thai BL dramas are different from these TV dramas. Relationships between homosexuality are normalized as in other romantic dramas. It reminded the audience to rethink the current rules and rights of sexual minorities in society nowadays. Personal conflicts or family conflicts regarding sexual orientation are a typical plot in Thai BL dramas which alerted interviewees that their misbehavior might cause one another emotional damage. Messages in Thai BL dramas interpreted by interviewees are positive. Interviewees are also showing their understanding and consent to those messages. Besides, the message they received is not only about the gay community but also encourages audiences to be brave and confident. They believed that Thai BL dramas present encouraging content.

“They clearly showed that love is without boundaries, no matter what gender or sexuality you are, or who you are, everyone deserves love. Even if the person you love has the same sex as you, it is also as normal as everyone.

Love a person is not love their gender.”

- *Female, 26, Master student*

4.3 Attitudes toward Thai BL drama and Thailand

To discuss consumers' attitudes toward Thai BL drama and Thailand, this part will look into three components, which are cognition, affection, and conation. Cognition is about consumers' belief in the objects. Affection is favorable or unfavorable feelings regarding objects. Conation is the intention or behavior regarding the objects. Results showed that consumers have favorable attitudes toward Thai BL drama and Thailand.

Penetrate Thailand's culture and advertise its tourism through BL dramas

As discussed above, interviewees see the presentation and distribution of Thai BL dramas as a way to disseminate positive messages to the audiences. They owned favorable beliefs regards Thai BL drama in terms of inclusion and being able to reflect reality. In addition, they believed that watching Thai BL dramas is a way to loosen up with the enjoyable storyline and actors. Other than that, through continuous consumption, interviewees claimed also to consider the drama as reflecting the society of Thailand.

Gender diversity is seen as a distinct culture of Thailand. Thai BL dramas represent gender diversity as it includes characters with different sexualities, claimed by interviewees. Since interviewees had few thoughts regarding Thailand as a country emphasizing tourism, they linked the Thai BL dramas to the reality of society in

Thailand. Interviewees stated that ‘transgender’ is a common perception when conversing with friends about Thailand. In addition, they see Thai BL dramas as a medium to support the rights of the gay community in society. Conclusively, through Thai BL dramas, they constructed a new perception and impression of Thailand that it is a country that is open-minded, a country that welcomes the idea of gender diversity.

The favorable belief in Thailand is also being shown.

“Thailand, in my mind, was all about temples and Buddhist culture, but now I’m surprised by their well-developed entertainment industry. And I want to try the Thai style BBQ the characters had in the dramas.”

- *Female, 27, Nurse*

Regarding the behavior component, interviewees talked about their engagement with Thai BL dramas and Thailand. Interviewees have shown interest in visiting Thailand since they consume Thai BL dramas and think Thailand’s entertainment industry development and BL drama production is beneficial to their tourism. Among the twelve interviewees, ten revealed they would have thought of traveling to Thailand and could be divided into two types. The first type is the fans who would only prefer to travel to Thailand for their favorite BL drama actors. Two interviewees indicated that they are not interested in Thailand’s culture as

their former perceptions towards Thailand were ‘loyal to Buddhist religion’, ‘lots of ghost stories’, and ‘place for massages’. Thailand, in those interviewees’ eyes, is less appealing than other countries for traveling and vacationing. Participating in celebrities’ fan events and concerts or visiting the drama shooting scenes would be the only activity that attracts them to Thailand. The second type is attracted by both the Thailand culture and Thai celebrities. Former impressions towards Thailand included ‘dangerous’, ‘sincere to their religion’, ‘sunny beach’, and ‘good at horror movie production’. However, influenced by Thai BL dramas, interviewees claimed to have a more favorable impression of Thailand. They realized the society of Thailand is less messy and dangerous than they thought. They are interested in activities related to celebrities and exploring the local cultures of food and place. Phuket is shown to be the most wanted-to-visit place among the interviewees. Besides, Thai popular music is being promoted through Thai BL dramas. Singers or Bands of ‘Billkin’, ‘Mew Suppasit’, ‘Getsunova’ and ‘Jeff Satur’ are mentioned as their songs, or the singer himself was involved in BL dramas. Hong Kong consumers are attracted not just by Thai celebrities but also by the unique cultural elements of Thailand.

“I will just travel for the actors only, like attending their concerts or fan meeting events. I don’t have much interest in their Buddhist culture.”

- *Female, 18, Higher diploma student*

“Umm, honestly no if on purpose as vacations. But yes if to visit their shooting scene taking place.”

- *Female, 22, Hospital administrative officer*

Online fan communities are forming in Hong Kong for Thai BL dramas. Three interviewees have their own pages on Instagram to share information about Thai BL dramas and Thai actors. Four interviewees joined the fans group on Telegram. At the same time, all of them have followed several online fan pages, which are owned by both local and foreign fans. Fan culture is produced by a person or group's excessive adoration and pursuit of an item due to their virtual or actual existence, leading to cultural consumption and the subsequent excessive consumption of their favorite object or unpaid labor time (Liu, 2022). With the development of the Internet, fan groups have expanded, and they have established a kind of relationship network (Liu, 2022). In the fans group, they are not just sharing news regarding the celebrities they are obsessed with. They also exchange experience and lists the place

they should visit in Thailand. Thai BL dramas do contribute to Thailand's tourism to a certain extent. The statement of interviewee stated as follows:

“...just like Kpop, Kpop drove the whole South Korean tourism industry in the past years. Thai BL dramas could be similar to that. I saw some comments online that those fans of BL dramas said they really want to visit Thailand for those BL stars and also to visit the places that are shown inside the dramas.”

- *Female, 26, Master degree student*

For the affection component, as discussed above, they showed an emotional connection with the romantic plots and the cooperation between leading male roles. Since they are attracted by the BL drama productions and demonstrated intentions to travel to Thailand, they support the idea of utilizing Thai BL productions to promote Thai tourism. Six interviewees stated that this strategy could bring the younger generations to Thailand. They have this idea because they thought the younger generation was more open-minded and obsessed with pop culture than the older generation. Also, the younger generation is accessing advanced technology and the internet more easily, and they have a higher chance to get to know about Thai pop culture and BL dramas.

To conclude, using the functional theory of attitudes, two functions of attitudes could be discussed, the utilitarian function and the knowledge function of attitudes. The utilitarian function is about reward and punishment. As a result of this study, participants knew that the consumption of Thai BL dramas could bring a favorable mood to them, so they chose to continue to watch and follow new BL dramas. A few of them have their own pages on Instagram to share their happiness about watching Thai BL dramas, while most of them choose to follow fan pages to receive information. Another function is the knowledge function. The consumer uses their gained information or knowledge to make decisions. Interviewees showed their will to support Thai BL dramas continuously. They decided to be more familiar with the society of Thailand through media consumption. Media consumption included searching and exchanging information actively online and the consumption of Thai BL dramas.

4.4 Attitudes toward the Gay Community

Being supportive of the gay community

Research has suggested that the exposure of the BL genre with a positive portrayal of gay people would enhance society's acceptance of gay people (Pagliassotti, 2008). While critics also claimed that there is an association between BL

production exposure and pro-gay attitudes, they are not sure whether exposure to BL production gives rise to pro-gay attitudes or vice-versa (Zsila & Dometrovics, 2017). The interviewees' statements in this project could not give a concrete answer on the cause and effect. However, it can still see that the exposure of Thai BL dramas with positive portrayals of gay couples could somehow help to develop positive attitudes towards the gay community.

“If I have not watched any BL stuff, I don't see it as possible in our community. But now I just see them as normal as everybody else now, and it seems more people are standing up to support the gay community on social media.”

- *Female, 26, Master student*

Together with the cognition and affection components, interviewees revealed favorable beliefs and positive feelings toward the gay community. In the interviews, all interviewees showed a positive attitude toward gay people and the gay community.

Among twelve participants, four people claimed not to have many ideas related to the gay community before getting to know BL dramas. Therefore, they owned neutral attitudes toward this community. After watching Thai BL dramas, they revealed to have more knowledge regarding gay people and being more supportive of the community. The remaining eight interviewees have a particular concept of the gay

community through school, friends, or television. However, two of them claimed to have changed their perceptions toward gay people after the consumption of Thai BL dramas. Two interviewees out of twelve revealed that their family members had positive attitudes due to exposure to BL dramas.

Stereotypes of gay people have been discussed above in the part of messages interviewees decoded from the Thai BL dramas. Previously other types of romantic dramas, especially in Hong Kong, posed by interviewees, created a negative image of gay people in society. Gay characters are displayed as unusual and lacking in masculinity. With the consumption of Thai BL dramas, stereotypes in their mind were eased. Besides, in the classification of Japanese BL, *seme* and *uke* should be contained in the romantic relationship between two male characters (McLelland & Welker, in Baudinette, 2019). *Seme* would be seen as the side representing masculine, and *uke* is seen to be the side representing feminine. This misinterpretation is also erased from the Thai BL dramas that interviewees have watched. Interviewees stated that they understand there are no fixed characters between male couples.

Moreover, two interviewees claimed that sharing Thai BL dramas with their families changed their perceptions and attitudes toward BL dramas and the gay community. Even though this phenomenon belongs to minority comments of

interviewees, these findings are worth more research in the future. The mother and husband of the interviewees held negative perceptions and attitudes toward gay people as they saw them as weird and unacceptable. However, the interviewees claimed it “forced” them to watch the Thai BL dramas together. BL dramas had been exposed to the husband and the mother constantly. As a result, the mother is shown to accept the dramas and the ideas. While even the husband is still not a fan of Thai BL dramas, he showed more acceptance and understanding of the dramas and gay people. The two interviewees' actions could be seen as the behavioral component of their attitudes. They intend to share the idea of BL with their families.

In this part of the discussion, the value-expressive function of attitudes could be applied. This function communicates the consumer's self-concept or values. Consumer values influence behavior, judgment, and subsequent behaviors. Interviewees themselves are not opposed to the BL culture or the gay community, so they would keep maintaining their consumption of Thai BL dramas. Through their sharing online or offline, they express their values to others.

4.5 Consumer Opinions

For better production in the coming future, interviewees have provided their viewpoints on the benefits of Thai BL dramas. There are three aspects based on the

production and development of Thai BL dramas. Firstly, the actor is seen as one of the crucial elements of BL dramas which should provide emotional appeal and connection to the audience. In order to promote Thai BL dramas in the future, the interviewee indicated that the drama director should cast actors with better acting skills or provide a standard acting class to actors. One interviewee used an example of the series 'Vice versa' to explain the idea. Leading roles are responsible for creating emotional contagion in the audience. However, the two actors of this drama failed to do so, as interviewees claimed to perceive lacking passion and emotion from the dramas.

Secondly, five interviewees mentioned that those cultural elements are preferred to be shown in Thai BL dramas. The exposure of Phuket Island in the drama "I told sunset about you" has successfully been promoted to the Hong Kong audience since they had described in detail the merged Chinese and Thai cultures. Besides, as discussed above, fans of BL dramas or Fans of BL dramas actors would exchange knowledge on online fans groups or fans pages, and attractions appearing on Thai BL dramas would catch consumers' attention and thus be discussed in the fans groups. This would benefit the distribution and promotion of Thai BL dramas to former fans and even new audiences.

Lastly, interviewees revealed that even Thai BL dramas are already doing good in portraying gay people. However, two interviewees stated that the differentiation between two male characters as *seme* and *uke* ('top' and 'bottom') should be erased from the dramas. As Thai BL dramas are getting more audiences in Hong Kong, the dramas would have the ability to impact how the audience thinks of the gay community group of people. At the same time, a part of the interviewees in this project claimed to have changed their perceptions towards gay people and provided some real-life examples of attitudinal changes of their relatives toward gay people. In addition, one interviewee suggested that including more real-life struggles of homosexuals in the plots of BL dramas would help better understand the gay community's situation.

Apart from the suggestions on the part of the production, there are suggestions on promoting and advertising the Thai BL dramas and actors. For the advertising of the dramas, entertainment companies usually post information on social media, yet advertising information is mainly in the Thai language that audiences need help to follow. For fan events like fan meetings and concerts, all details are kept in Thai. Interviewees have revealed their interest in participating in the fan events of

celebrities they knew from the Thai BL dramas. Therefore, they urged for English information and details so they could also participate in those events.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

This chapter will summarize the data analysis and discussion based on in-depth interviews. The practical implications of this research are also described through data analysis. Finally, the limitations of this study are discussed, as well as future research directions.

5.1 Conclusion

This study has recruited Hong Kong consumers of Thai Boys' Love (BL) dramas aged between 18 and 30. In-depth interviews are one of the qualitative research instruments to explore the insight of BL dramas consumers from Hong Kong. The interviews were conducted in early November 2022. A total of twelve samples have been made. Interviews are conducted with a semi-structured questionnaire, while all the questions are open-ended. The semi-structured questionnaire consists of six parts, demographics of the participants, consumer perceptions toward Thai BL dramas

and the utilization of BL dramas to promote Thai tourism, their attitudes toward the gay community, and their opinions on the improvement of Thai BL dramas production. The result of this study will be summed up as follow.

Demographics

Demographic information included ages, educational levels, occupations, and religious backgrounds. Among the twelve participants, there are eleven female interviewees and one male interviewee. For the education level, two of them hold Master's Degrees, two of them hold a higher diploma, and eight of them hold bachelor's degrees. Nine interviewees have no religious background, two are Christian, and one is Catholic. They have diverse occupations that vary from student to a director. Eight interviewees claimed to have prior knowledge of the gay community, while the rest four interviewees claimed to have not many ideas about the gay community.

Consumption perception and attitudes of Thai BL dramas and Thailand

Participants showed positive attitudes and perceptions toward Thai BL dramas and Thailand. Favorable perceptions generate loyalty, reputation, and word-of-mouth. Consumer perceptions involve the process of exposure, attention, and interpretation.

This is about how audiences interpret the information they collect through the consumption of Thai BL dramas. It included audiences' opinions, feelings, and beliefs about BL dramas and, thus, toward Thailand.

The result shows that Hong Kong consumers access Thai BL dramas for the first time through the recommendations of the Over-the-top (OTT) streaming platform, which is Netflix, and friends' recommendations. Besides, to search for more Thai BL dramas with Chinese subtitles, video platforms and other OTT streaming platforms like Youtube, Bilibili, Gimy video, LineTV, and Gagaoolala are used by participants. Besides, the result also shows that word-of-mouth marketing is crucial as the social group influences consumer behavior. Reference groups of participants influence their decision-making by exerting pressures and existing norms. Close friends and the fans group on Telegram and Instagram are the participants' primary and secondary informal reference groups. Conformity is needed when interviewees participate in these groups. As a result, WOM marketing strategy and reference groups contributed to the distribution Thai BL dramas in Hong Kong.

The physical appeal of Thai BL drama actors is vital to the audience. Audiences prefer handsome actors to cast for the leading roles as attractive actors easily attract them before deciding whether to watch one series of dramas. Young

handsome actors are the representation of Thai BL dramas. Besides, participants have favorable emotional attachments with the couple (CP) in Thai BL dramas, and the plots of BL dramas should be sweet, relaxed, and fun. The chemistry between the leading roles drives audiences' emotions that participants are looking for actors who could show excellent acting skills and be devoted to the roles. Watching Thai BL dramas is a relaxation entertainment for consumers. Thai BL dramas are mainly containing less complicated and miserable plots. Cultural elements presented through dramas would grab consumers' attention and raise interest in Thailand. Research participants prefer Thai BL dramas to other countries' productions due to the openness they perceive of Thailand and Thai production compared to other countries like Japan. Thailand's production is comparably straightforward and has a quick tempo. Thai BL dramas promote positive messages regarding supporting the LGBTQ+ community. The plots of those BL dramas also remind the audience of their behavior in society, not to behave undesirably to cause emotional damage to one another. Therefore, Thai BL dramas are impacting consumers' perceptions regarding the image of Thailand at the same time where it is to be seen as a country embracing gender diversity.

The findings revealed there is an opportunity that Thai BL dramas can penetrate Thailand's pop culture to the world and advertise tourism. Participants acknowledged their intention to travel to Thailand while discussing their perceptions of Thailand's tourism. Thai BL dramas act as a medium to introduce Thailand to the audience. New impressions and images regarding Thailand are formed due to exposure to Thai BL dramas. Two types of consumers were found in this research. The first type is the fans who would only prefer to travel to Thailand for their favorite BL drama actors. The second type of consumer is attracted by both the Thailand culture and Thai celebrities. Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) could consider using famous Thai BL drama actors as ambassadors to promote tourism or Thai attractions with BL dramas.

Attitudes toward the gay community

According to cultivation theory, long-term media exposure impacts how media consumers view the world and conduct themselves. While limited research also stated there are controversies regarding whether the consumption of BL TV series could contribute to eliminating prejudice towards the gay community. There is also research confirming the association between BL production exposure and pro-gay attitudes. The findings from this research could partly align with the above result. Participants

were shown to be supportive of the gay community after they consumed Thai BL dramas. A few of them stated they had adjusted their knowledge of gay people through exposure to Thai BL dramas. Consequently, it can be concluded that these findings could partly support the concept that the BL TV series could contribute to eliminating prejudice towards the gay community. More studies need to be done to unveil the big picture.

Uses and gratification theory and functional theory of attitudes are used in the discussion to explain their consumption behavior and decision-making. The respondents' motives for watching Thai BL dramas include information gathering, escapism, and emotional release. Utilitarian, knowledge and value-expressive functions of attitudes are able to be found in this study as interviewees would like to continue to support Thai BL drama for favorable moods, information, and self-value expression.

Opinions from consumers

Opinions regarding the production of Thai BL dramas could be summarized into three aspects. First, to better create emotional contagion with the audience, casting actors with better acting skills is needed. Second, cultural elements are welcomed and could be presented in detail. Third, it is unnecessary to reinforce the

concept of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ between a gay couple. Lastly, regarding promoting and advertising Thai BL dramas and actors-fan events, foreign audiences would feel appreciated if an English translation was provided.

5.2 Limitation of the Research

The purpose of this study was to do preliminary research into the insight of Hong Kong consumers regarding Thai BL dramas related to Thai tourism and how they think of the gay community. However, this study has some limitations and must be improved in the future.

Firstly, there are limited prior research studies on this topic regarding the perceptions of Thai BL dramas, utilization of BL dramas on Thailand’s tourism, and whether it impacts people’s attitudinal change toward the gay community. Besides, the target audience in this research is Hong Kong consumers aged between 18 and 30, as the targeted consumers stated in other studies should be teenagers. However, there is lacking a concrete age range for BL dramas fans. There is lacking their prior knowledge of the gay community in detail. Quantitative research is needed to be done to fill in the gap. In addition, this study focused only on the relationship between BL drama exposure and attitudes toward the gay community. More relevant studies need to be done in the future.

5.3 Direction for Future Research

For further research, several aspects could be developed. For those who would like to extend on the findings of the related topics, suggestions are as follow.

During the literature review, media consumption is considered to hold a significant responsibility for shaping the audience's attitude, beliefs, and ideas formation. Therefore, follow-up research, such as the experimental method and questionnaire survey method of quantitative research, could be done for a comprehensive picture. The samples and results concluded from this study are not enough to represent the overall population of Thai BL dramas consumers.

Moreover, further study could be conducted through quantitative research focusing on the relationship between exposure to Thai BL dramas and their intention to travel to Thailand since this study supports the utilization of Thai BL dramas in tourism promotion. Furthermore, the fan study of Thai BL dramas could be further investigated while combining other concepts and disciplines, such as fan economy and brand endorsement.

5.4 Practical Implications

According to the insights of the participants, they are attracted to Phuket Island as the shooting of “I told sunset about you”. TAT could cooperate with Thai BL dramas to introduce other parts of Thailand since participants revealed their intention to visit Thailand. The more attractions are introduced, the more discussion will be made between fans. Besides, as participants indicated, fans would exchange traveling and celebrity information on fan pages and fan groups. Moreover, they are interested in visiting Thai BL dramas' shooting scenes. TAT or traveling industry practitioners could create a ‘Thai BL dramas shooting scenes’ map that already helped the fans list out the must-go shooting scenes all around Thailand. At the same time, invite famous BL actors as ambassadors for the promotions and advertising.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-structured questionnaire

The Hong Kong consumers' perceptions of Boys Love dramas and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community.

This research project is conducted in partial requirement of a professional project enrolled by a student of M.A. Strategic Communication Management from the Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University. This semi-structured questionnaire aims to understand Hong Kong consumers' perceptions of Thai BL dramas and their attitudes toward Thailand and the gay community. The importance is to discover Hong Kong consumers' experience and knowledge of Thai BL dramas, their perceptions of Thai BL dramas as soft power utilized by Thailand, and their attitudes toward the gay community.

The interview section will take approximately 40-50 minutes. Participants must provide answers based on their situation, beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge. Participants have the consent to give out answers as accurately as possible. All data collected through the interviewees will be kept confidential. The collected data will only be analyzed for educational purposes. No personal data will be published without consent.

(English Version)

Demographics

1. What is your occupation?
2. Do you have any religions?

3. Do you have any knowledge related to male homosexuals before consuming Thai BL dramas?
4. Do you know anyone who is gay in your social circle?

BL dramas consumption experience/ motives

5. How do you know Thai BL dramas?
6. How long have you watched the Thai BL dramas?
7. What makes you watch Thai BL dramas?

Perceptions toward Thai BL dramas

8. What are your perceptions of Thai BL dramas? How do you feel?
9. What do you think about the relationship between the male characters in the series “2Gether”, “I told sunset about you”, and “A tale of thousands stars”?
10. What elements of Thai BL dramas attract you?
11. What messages did you receive from the Thai BL dramas?
12. Would you recommend Thai BL dramas to your family or friends?
13. Will you continue to watch the Thai BL series in the future?

The utilization of BL dramas to promote Thai tourism

14. Do you think BL dramas are an effective tool to promote Thai tourism? Why?
15. Have you ever considered visiting Thailand after watching the Thai BL dramas?

Attitudes of the gay community

16. What do you think about the relationship between males? Do you support the gay community?

17. Do boys' love series change your attitudes toward the romantic relationship between males comparing before and after you watched BL dramas?

Opinions on Thai BL dramas production

18. Is there any improvement in the Thai BL production?

1. How can they improve to impact society's acceptance of the gay community?
2. Do you have any suggestions for Thailand to utilize BL dramas to promote tourism?

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured questionnaire

(訪問題目-繁體中文版本)

香港觀眾對泰國 BL 劇集的看法，以及對泰國與同性戀群組的態度

你好，本人為泰國朱拉隆功大學傳媒藝術學院的研究生。現正進行一份研究項目關於香港觀眾對泰國 BL 劇集的看法，以及對泰國與同性戀群組的態度。該研究需要邀請香港觀眾進行一對一訪談，旨在了解香港觀眾對泰國 BL 劇集的認識及看法，以及對於泰國以 BL 劇推廣旅遊業的態度。另外，更想了解香港觀眾對同性戀群組的看法。訪談需時 30 分鐘至 50 分鐘。所收集的數據及資料將保密，並只會用作教育目的。

受訪者背景

1. 您的職業是?
2. 您有沒有宗教信仰?
3. 接觸泰國 BL 劇前對男同性戀者有沒有相關的認識?
4. 身邊有沒有朋友為男同性戀者?

觀看泰國 BL 劇之經驗及目的

5. 您如何得知泰國 BL 劇?
6. 第一次接觸泰國 BL 劇是甚麼時候?

7. 觀看泰國 BL 劇的目的是?

對泰國 BL 劇的認識/看法

8. 您對泰國 BL 劇有甚麼感受和認識?

9. 就 “2Gether the series”、 “I told sunset about you”和 “A tale of thousands stars”

三部泰國 BL 劇集而言，您對劇集內男主角間的親密關係有何看法?

10. 泰國 BL 劇有哪些原素吸引您觀看?

11. 泰國 BL 劇對你而言在表達甚麼信息?

12. 您會否推介泰國 BL 劇給您的朋友或屋企人?

13. 您未來會否繼續觀看及支持泰國 BL 劇?

以泰國 BL 劇推廣旅遊業的看法

14. 您認為泰國 BL 劇能否帶動泰國旅遊業?

15. 觀看泰國 BL 劇後，會否想到泰國旅遊?

對男同性戀團體的態度

16. 您對於現實中男同性戀者的愛情有何感受?您是否支持男同性戀團體?

17. 觀看泰國 BL 劇有否改變您對男同性戀者的認識和看法?

個人意見

18. 您認為泰國 BL 劇的創作上有沒有需要改善的地方?

1. 影響大眾對男同性戀者的印象方面

2. 推廣泰國方面



APPENDIX C

Summarization of interviewees' responses

Demographics

1. What is your occupation?

Twelve interviewees have varied occupations. Three of them are currently students at University attending higher diploma, bachelor, and master courses, respectively. The occupations of other interviewees included tutors, part-time catering worker, accountants, art director, hospital administrative officer, bank officer, social service organization officer, and nurse.

2. Do you have any religions?

Among twelve interviewees, only three of them revealed to have religious. A student studying a higher diploma course and a hospital administrative officer is claimed to be Christian. While an accountant is claimed to be a Catholic.

3. Do you know about male homosexuals before consuming Thai BL dramas?

Four interviewees claimed they did not know anything or had not had many ideas about homosexuality before getting to know BL dramas. They also do not sure if they have any friends belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

Responses from them included phrases of "I have not many ideas" and "I

don't think so". The rest of the eight interviewees considered themselves to understand the gay community to a certain extent. Their knowledge was obtained from school, friends, and TV programs. Moreover, before getting to know the Thai BL dramas, only two had read or watched BL production produced by other countries. Those BL productions included Japanese BL manga and Taiwanese and Chinese-produced BL dramas.

4. Do you know anyone who is gay in your social circle?

Six interviewees claimed to have friends or colleagues belonging to the homosexual community.

BL dramas consumption experience/ motives

5. How do you know Thai BL dramas?

Seven interviewees mentioned Netflix while answering this question, and five said recommendations from friends. Most of them found "2Gether the series" on Netflix's recommendation function or got recommendations from friends for the "2Gether the series" and "Tharntype the series". Phrases from interviewees include

- *"It's a coincidence that I saw the "2Gether the series" on Netflix. This drama is in the recommendation column." (Female, 26, Master student)*

- *“My University friend recommended I watch the “2Gether the series” in late 2020...” (Female, 25, Primary school student tutor)*
- *“I subscribe to Netflix cuz I’m a fan of American or British dramas and movies. But one day, “2Gether the series” popped up in the recommendation column...” (Female, 30, Accountants/ Personal tutor)*

Most of them did not know that the “2Gether the series” is a BL drama before watching it on Netflix. After they watched it, they found this drama genre produced by Thailand quite interesting, and the actors caught their attention. Eleven of them revealed it was the first time they got to know Thai-produced BL dramas. Among them, it is the first time ten interviewees watching BL genre dramas.

6. How long have you watched the Thai BL dramas?

One interviewee knew Thai drama ten years ago and knew the BL genre for a long time but started to watch Thai BL drama after the broadcasting of “2Gether the series”. Another interviewee claimed to start watching Thai BL dramas in 2018 and kept searching for new ones after that. The rest of the interviewees began to watch Thai BL dramas in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 period.

- *“In 2020 around August, I guess, I saw the “2Gether the series” on Netflix. As this drama is a high ranking and I was just bored at that time, I clicked it open and let it run. I watched Thai BL drama starting from that.” (Female, 25, Part-time catering worker)*
- *“I knew Thai drama around ten years ago but wasn’t interested in it... Suddenly, one day I saw “2Gether” on Netflix and realized that it is a Thai BL drama. I tried to take a look.” (Male, 29, University student)*
- *“This year. I found “2Gether” on Netflix,.. ” (Female, 29, Social service organization officer)*

7. What makes you watch Thai BL dramas?

There are several reasons or motivations that encourage interviewees to keep watching Thai BL dramas. Interviewees mentioned that they had a novel feeling while watching BL dramas talking about LGBTQ+ topics. Interviewees also mentioned handsome actors, funny plots, and remarkable story settings. Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviewees spent more time at home under all those social restrictions or quarantine policies. Interviewees choose to search Thai BL dramas to fill up their time.

- *“I know nothing of BL before and am unfamiliar with the LGBTQ+ in Hong Kong. Therefore when I come into contact with Thai drama, especially the BL series, I have a great interest in it, like I’m getting to know a new world. Besides, we all know that even though same-sex marriage is not legalized in Thailand, their people seem open-minded about discussing LGBT topics or expressing their sexuality. Based on their culture (from my understanding), I think they could do a good job on BL dramas (production). But their handsome actors also attract me a lot.” (Female, 26, Master student)*
- *“There are two reasons I can say. Firstly, some plots are quite funny like comedy. And second, I really like the actors. They are so handsome.” (Female, 25, Primary school student tutor)*
- *“During COVID-19, I cannot work for a while, so I just sit at home and am addicted to Thai BL drama. BL couples are so adorable. And their story is so short that I can finish watching it quickly.” (Female, 25, Part-time catering worker)*
- *“I tried to watch some Thai dramas before, like “The fallen leaf”, only for its special story setting. But still, I feel like it's too campy. Or I*

don't like they always talk about the family conflicts or disputes between couples and mistresses. And there is lacking local BL production in Hong Kong. At that time, Thai BL could fulfill my interest in watching something sweet and light but still provide special story settings.” (Female, 24, Bank officer)

Perceptions toward Thai BL dramas

8. What are your perceptions of Thai BL dramas? How do you feel?

Interviewees claimed to feel happiness while watching Thai BL dramas.

Firstly, some interviewees enjoyed the chemistry between male actors in the dramas, which could deliver the emotions of the gay character. Besides, they agreed that most plots and settings of Thai BL dramas are relaxing types suitable to watch after work. However, the plots could also remind consumers of the social issues of LGBTQ+ or the conflicts gay people meet in reality.

Some interviewees revealed they are surprised by Thai BL dramas production as their previous perceptions of Thailand were relatively different. For example, Thailand is good at producing ghost-related thriller movies or dramas, but other genres are not a strength of Thailand. Two interviewees also mentioned that Thai BL dramas are beyond their understanding of the BL

genre from the old time. They said the BL production, in their understanding of the old time, is only focused on the sexual scenes and maybe stereotyping gay people. Yet, as with the Thai BL dramas they had watched, the story carried a positive message and normalized gay relationships.

- “The first thing that comes to my mind is why Thailand is so good at producing BL drama, but they still haven’t passed the same-sex marriage. Before knowing Thai BL drama, I didn’t think they could have had excellent productions. My friends all agree that Thailand is only good at producing horror movies. But now I realize their TV production is not as bad as everybody thought. But yes, there is space for improvement.” (Female, 27, Nurse)*
- “Thai BL drama is sweet, not complicated, and has many different themes. I like the wide variety of Thai BL dramas I can choose. In the old time in Hong Kong, people might see BL as foulness or something strange. Cuz they would see BL as full of sexual scenes that shouldn’t be discussed overtly in society. However, Thailand presents it in another way that tells people it’s a common romantic drama.” (Male, 29, Freelancer/ University student)*

- *“Thai BL drama does a good job. They know what the audience would like to see on screen. They caught the audience’s hearts. They could show a pure romance between the young boys, but also the conflicts deep in their minds. It suits our generation well.” (Female, 26, Art director)*

9. What do you think about the relationship between the male characters in the series “2Gether”, “I told sunset about you”, and “A tale of thousands stars”?

All interviewees found the portrayals of the relationship between characters in the three series acceptable and tended to support gay couples in reality.

Besides, those who have never watched BL production readily accept the storyline and portrayals in these three series. One interviewee pointed out that the story and illustrations of the relationship between the two male characters in “I told sunset about you” could really tell the audience the struggles of gay people in our society.

- *“I really support all kinds of these relationships. There’s no reason to restrict who we love.” (Female, 26, Art director)*

- *“The portrayals of their relationship are quite aesthetic, and I think it’s quite easy to accept even for those who never knew what BL is.”*

(Female, 18, Higher diploma student)

10. What elements of Thai BL dramas attract you?

According to interviewees, actors, storylines, music, cultural element, and story settings were mentioned. Most of them appreciate the handsome actors, surgery, and simple storylines. Some interviewees admitted that they are interested in Thai pop music and singers after watching Thai BL dramas. Such as Billkin and PP (the actors in the series “I told sunset about you”). Through Thai BL dramas, interviewees have changed their perceptions toward Thailand. Since they were unfamiliar with Thailand, Thai BL dramas helped interviewees get to know more. The comedy setting of most Thai BL dramas caught their attention, and also the university setting of Thai BL dramas made interviewees feel more relatable.

- *“First, actors. Second, storyline and settings. Last, music. I love to watch the very sugary story.” (Female, 24, Bank officer)*
- *“Firstly, it’s the actors, as I said. Secondly, I like the school settings among all. Cuz the story happened in school would be less complicated.*

I like the pure and fresh atmosphere between young boys and students.

There's not much baddy. Easy and relaxed.” (Female, 25, Part-time catering worker)

11. What messages did you receive from the Thai BL dramas?

All interviewees said to receive positive messages from the Thai BL dramas.

The most frequent answer is related to “supporting gay people and gay relationships”. While the second most common answer is related to “being brave and being yourselves”. They agreed that there are no differences between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Not just the dramas, people have to support and accept homosexuality in reality.

- *“For me, I can feel that they are telling people to be brave, to chase their love, no matter who they are. Everybody has the freedom to love. Love is not only restricted to one boy and one girl. But same-sex people could also be together. Maybe for Thai audiences, they might see everything of this as normal, but in Hong Kong, it's an important message that society needs now.” (Female, 25, Primary school student tutor)*

12. Would you recommend Thai BL dramas to your family or friends?

All interviewees would recommend Thai BL dramas to their friends. However, only a few would introduce BL drama to their family. They thought their parents would not accept the gay topic and only the younger generation could understand it. Two of the twelve interviewees successfully introduced Thai BL drama to their mother and husband. On the other hand, interviewees would discuss new Thai BL dramas with friends they met on different fan groups on Instagram or Telegram.

- *“Yes, I force my husband to watch with me. He feels weird at first. but now he’s willing to travel to Thailand with me for the Thai stars events. He’s totally fine with gay people now.” (Female, 30, Accountant)*
- *“Yes, if they have an interest. Because I always share BL drama-related stories on Instagram and I stick the pictures of them on my desk, while my friends are interested and ask me about them, I would like to share them with them.” (Female, 30, Social service organization officer)*

13. Will you continue to watch the Thai BL series in the future?

All interviewees would continue to support Thai BL dramas in the future.

Reasons include “the story of Thai BL dramas is fun enough to watch while

boring”, “my friends kept recommending new Thai BL dramas”, and “I’m open to any type of dramas”. However, a few of them revealed they would only watch the BL drama their friends recommend to them or if the story setting could catch their attention.

The utilization of BL dramas to promote Thai tourism

14. Are BL dramas an effective tool to promote Thai tourism? Why?

A few interviewees claimed to be unsure about that, but they still thought that maybe the younger generation like them would be the primary audience of Thai BL dramas and show more interest in traveling to Thailand. The rest of the interviewees all support the idea of utilizing BL drama to promote Thailand’s tourism. One interviewee used the population of KPOP in Korea as an analogy to describe the Thai BL drama culture. While others give their real-life situation of how Thailand’s BL dramas penetrate their cultures into their lives. By joining the fan groups, they started to search for more attractions in Thailand. Some interviewees also revealed their plans to visit Thailand in the following months. Moreover, one interviewee revealed that the promotion of BL dramas in Thailand shows their supportiveness toward the

LGBTQ+ community and does help them construct a rather positive image internationally.

- *“I think it would be possible, like the friend I told you about, she really wants to visit Thailand after then. TV drama is indeed a great medium to introduce their cultures to the world at the moment.” (Female, 25, Part-time catering worker)*
- *“I think they could attract a portion of the younger generation who are willing to spend money on their favorite artists. Since I also joined some fans group on telegram and followed some fan pages on Instagram, I gained some friends here. We would have a date out on sharing the updated news of our favorite BL couples time by time.” (Female, 18, Higher diploma student)*
- *“I think they will succeed. Just like the KPOP in Korea. They use dance and music, and Thailand uses drama and couples. TV drama could penetrate culture easily.” (Female, 29, Social service organization officer)*
- *“After getting to know Thai BL dramas, could I say Thailand could be one of the representations of LGBTQ+ pride supporters in Asia? I*

*have more positive thoughts about Thailand now.” (Female, 26,
Master student)*

15. Have you ever considered visiting Thailand after watching the Thai BL dramas?

Ten interviewees admitted they had thought of visiting Thailand after watching Thai BL dramas. Two interviewees claimed to have no intention to visit Thailand. The reasons for those who want to visit Thailand include their changing perceptions and attitudes toward Thailand, and they became fans of some Thai actors. Previously, they saw Thailand as a country famous for beaches, hot weather, ghost, and Buddhist culture and showed no interest in traveling to Thailand. Some of them even believed that Thailand was dangerous for criminals and guns due to the previous news they received from the internet. However, a new image of Thailand is presented through Thai BL dramas to audiences. As Thai BL dramas became famous in Hong Kong, they claimed to follow several fan pages and join fan groups to discuss dramas and Thailand. They tended to explore Thailand on their own. As a result, some interviewees said they would like to travel to Thailand for celebrity fan events, while most others would also like to travel to Thailand to explore the cultures.

A few interviewees use “I told sunset about you” as an example that they are interested in Phuket's views through the drama's introduction.

- *“Before I became a fan of Thai BL, I didn’t have a good impression of Thailand. Through all the news and social media, they seem to have had an unstable political environment throughout these years. They could use guns on the street. Society seems to be dangerous for travel with lots of criminal cases. Besides, their traffic is terrible that many people can’t drive well. But now, I know more about their culture; people are not as atrocious as I saw in the news and online comments.”*
(Female, 26, Art director)

Attitudes of the gay community

16. What do you think about the relationship between males? Do you support the gay community?

All interviewees support the gay community according to their interview results. They revealed that they see gay people as ordinary, nothing special, and the same as them. They see homosexuality as nothing different from heterosexuality.

- *“I would say when we love a person, it is all about the personality or anything about this person, not their sex.” (Female, 27, Nurse)*

17. Do boys’ love series change your attitudes toward the romantic relationship between males comparing before and after you watched BL dramas?

Most of the interviewees claimed to have no attitudinal change after watching Thai BL dramas. But interviewees said Thai BL dramas erase stereotypes of gay people and make the audience understand more the conflicts of being homosexual in our society. One interviewee said that Thai BL drama introduced the world of homosexuality to her and made her realize that their relationships are as normal as ours. Two interviewees claimed their family changed their attitudes toward the gay community after being introduced to Thai BL dramas.

- *“If I have not watched any BL stuff, I don’t see it as possible in our community. But now I see them as normal as everybody else, and it seems more people are standing up to support the gay community on social media.” (Female, 26, Master student)*

Opinions on Thai BL dramas production

18. Is there any improvement in the Thai BL production?

1. How can they improve to impact society's acceptance of the gay community?
2. Do you have any suggestions for Thailand to utilize BL dramas to promote tourism?

Opinions given by interviewees were related to the chosen actors as leading roles, the arrangement of cultural elements within the plots, and the portrayals of gay characters.

- *“Should include more cultural elements or Thailand attractions. But please don't shoot like a traveling program. Fans must follow what they saw on TV. Also, it would be better to include what kind of difficulties gay people would face in the drama. It can reflect reality and also make the drama more interesting.” (Female, 27, Nurse)*
- *“They should include more scenes to elaborate on the difficulties between gay couples to reflect the reality. Their story now revealed only the surface of their relationship.” (Female, 30, Accountant)*
- *“First, they should cast better actors who can understand the characters well. Use “Vice versa” as an example, I don't like this drama because I can't feel the love and passion between the two*

leading roles. Well-trained actors should be more devoted to their roles which could create emotional contagion to the audience.”

(Female, 30, Accountants/ Personal tutor)

There were comments about promoting Thai BL dramas that the entertainment companies should focus more on the international market.

- *“I think they are doing good at the moment. Actors are good enough for appearance and actings. And the storyline or settings are fitting my preference. But if Thailand wants to promote BL drama to attract travelers, they should hold more big events and promote it internationally. Events like concerts or fanmeet could also be great opportunities.” (Female, 25, Part-time catering workers)*

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